

Location and Legitimacy in Women's Studies:
New Perspectives on Race and Gender in the American
Academy

by

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My sincerest thanks to the family, friends, and mentors who have never let me settle for a world full of injustices.

INTRODUCTION

Though my formal work on this thesis began almost exactly a year ago, it originated long before I submitted a formal proposal. Throughout my life, I have been fascinated by the ways in which systems of oppression operate in people's lives, and how they can be dismantled. With that awareness, I have long been attuned to issues of systemic oppression, including those based on gender and race. Though it has taken me a long time and much reading to put words to what I think about the world and the injustices that populate it, I know that the journey that this work concludes began before I read my first avowedly feminist text or when, in junior high, I began to identify as a feminist.

Some of my earliest feminist moments took place in libraries and bookstores, as I devoured what I would later learn were some of the central texts of mainstream second wave feminist movement. Books by authors like Betty Freidan and Sylvia Plath constructed the base for my feminist knowledge, and I supplemented with more recent anthologies. For profoundly raced and classed reasons that I wouldn't understand until later, Freidan's work resonated powerfully with me, even though I was quite different than the women about whom she wrote. I certainly did not feel pressures to get hitched, make babies, or join the PTA. But I did feel stifled by the expectations others seemed to have of me. I felt that I should shut up, sit down, and make myself as small (both literally and figuratively) as possible. So in a search for words to describe my own nameless problem, I read about Roe v. Wade, witchcraft, paganism and ecofeminism. I even read Camille Paglia's *Sexual Personae*, and felt the

whole time that I was reading it that some of those feminists whose work I'd been reading would not be very pleased with me if they knew what I was up to.

It was only during my senior year of high school that my understanding of feminism in the United States began to deepen, to gain texture. The process did not happen instantaneously; in fact, this thesis is just one more step in a series of attempts to gain a more nuanced understanding of both feminism and sexist oppression. But slowly, I began to understand that even though yes, phenomena such as the existence of sexual violence against women did affect women all over the globe and from all different backgrounds, an understanding of sexist oppression and feminism based strictly on a sense of universal or global sisterhood was fundamentally flawed. With the help of three generous, caring, and most importantly, brutally honest older guides, I began to unpack some of my own identities and the expectations that I had of feminist movement. In short, I began to open my eyes to my own whiteness and, significantly, its impact on my experience of sexism and on the brand of feminism with which I had come to identify. With the help of mentors who aided me in rendering my own class and race privileges visible, I began to comprehend the ways in which feminist identifications were influenced by a myriad of factors beyond assigned gender.

I wish that I could say that one day, all on my own, it occurred to me that all of the books that I had been reading were geared towards a specific, small, and relatively privileged segment of the population. I wish that I, in all of my white skin and class privilege, had been able to read race and class into texts whose white authors

ignored, either consciously or unconsciously, those things that mark people of my race and class privilege as oppressors. But, needless to say, my path to racial self-awareness and to understanding the racial dynamics of how feminism is presented was far more convoluted than a single “aha!” moment. Similar to my initial foray into feminism, my journey to a deeper understanding of the significance of the texts that I had been reading (both in terms of their strengths and their weaknesses) came only through repeated confrontations, disagreements, and a whole lot of reading. My coming to terms with the realities of the feminism that I had learned about in high school and, more importantly, the privileges that allowed me to uncritically absorb the texts that I read, without any awareness of the voices that they attempted to marginalize or silence, has required countless of these conversations. My decision to declare the African American Studies major in my junior year of college, in spite of my concerns that I would be just another white person taking up space in a black studies classroom, and my later decision to write a thesis in both the Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and African American Studies programs has been a product of the more fruitful of these encounters. As I have had the privilege of meeting other anti-racist, feminist people who have been able to guide me towards readings, conferences, or films that could further my knowledge about the intersections of race and sex, and of their corresponding oppressions, I have learned to read myself into the books that I read, and to critically examine the ways in which an all too often elitist conception of feminist movement has been created and preserved.

That said, the goals that I have for this thesis are profoundly linked to my own experience of feminist and anti-racist awakening. It is an effort to put words to my process of deconstructing a specific and limited feminist narrative, and to create one more text that addresses the central role that race has played in feminism's countless stages. Furthermore, I aim to analyze the ways in which diverse groups of feminists have fought for changes in feminist histories and the canon that forms the basis of the academic study of women, gender, and sexuality. I attempt to read race into the very texts that have sought to ignore it and that have attempted to render it insignificant to women's studies discourse. Only through analyzing the realities of race (and, quite often, racism) in the mainstream women's movement in the United States from the 1960s until present, and by questioning the ways that race is presented in the women's studies classroom, can my generation of anti-racist feminist activists and scholars continue the work done by those race-conscious feminists who came before us. Though racism and ignorance remain significant issues in contemporary (or third wave) feminist organizing, the successes of second wave feminists who confronted the racism of much of the white women's movement have inspired many of us to continue to challenge the assumption of whiteness that is still present in much of women's studies discourse, and to try to honor their legacy by continued anti-racist work.

Methodology and Positionality

My methodological approach to this work is, simply put, a loose interpretation of a Foucauldian archaeology. Though Foucauldian scholars Scheurich and McKenzie

warn against a literal understanding of the term “archaeology,” writing that “Foucault’s archaeological method...is *not* directly related to the academic discipline of archaeology,” and that “it is not even particularly useful to be reminded of the iconic picture of the archaeologist using a brush to uncover old bones or artifacts embedded in dirt,” I find the concept of unearthing rather useful in understanding my methods (2005: 845). Through archival research and an extensive literature review, I have attempted to expose information regarding the role of race in American feminisms from the 1960s until present in hopes that these sources may aid in establishing a more nuanced understanding of mainstream feminism’s evolution over the years. As someone who grew up considering myself a feminist in spite of my extremely limited exposure to the theory produced by anyone other than a small number of well-known white feminists, I find the concept of unearthing existing knowledge central to my analysis. Rather than reproducing the white liberal feminist idea that black women and other women of color were not, in fact, involved in second wave feminist movement or in the production of feminist theory before the late 1980s or 1990s, I understand the absence of black and Third World feminist thought as a result of those relatively privileged white feminists who did not see a broadening of academia as their work to do. In short, an archaeological stance has allowed me to try to see the racial homogeneity of much of women’s studies discourse not as a result of a lack of black and Third World feminist theorizing, but rather as a result of the many attempts to bury these women’s work. Through

archaeology, I hope that these truths, and the brilliant theories that outline them, can be more deeply understood.

Foucault's location of knowledge in two separate structures, *savoir* and *connaissance*, has also been crucial to my methodological understanding. *Savoir*, according to Foucault's theory of archaeology, "includes formal knowledge such as 'philosophical ideas' but also 'institutions, commercial practices, and police activity,' whereas *connaissance* includes only formal bodies of knowledge such as 'scientific books, philosophical theories, and religious justifications' (Scheurich and McKenzie, 2005: 846). In short, *savoir* is broad cultural knowledge, whereas *connaissance* is the knowledge that exists within and is perpetuated by formal (often academic) structures. By understanding the broader cultural context in which 1960s and 1970s second wave feminism blossomed, I have examined the *savoir*, or implicit knowledge, of the times. I have tried to utilize an understanding of *savoir* in order to humanize the participants in second wave feminist movement, and to understand the cultural context that dictated their actions. By examining the impact that the feminist movements of the sixties and seventies have had on the beginnings and directions of feminist theory and of the field of women's studies, I have traced the connections between *savoir* and *connaissance* throughout this period. In short, I examine the impact of *savoir* and the "rip-roaring political culture that characterized the sixties and the seventies" on *connaissance* and the growing recognition of gender as a legitimate focus of academic investigation (Baumgardner and Richards, 2000: 48).

Positionality and ownership of my own identities is another central method that I have tried to employ throughout this work. This decision carries with it the risk of employing what black feminist literary critic Ann duCille refers to as the “dangerous [though] popular [strategy] among white readers of ‘black texts,’ who feel compelled to supplement their criticism with exposés of their former racism (or sexism) in a kind of I-once-was-blind-but-now-I-see way” (1996: 103-104). In writing, I have found that there is a fine line between the self-aggrandizement of these supposedly progressive white feminists who label themselves anti-racist and then ironically re-center their whiteness (and themselves) within their works and the necessary location of white authors’ white skin privilege within their writing. While I have tried to bring my whiteness and my feminist identity to all aspects of my work, I have simultaneously attempted to avoid this masked reaffirmation of whiteness in what I write. That said, positioning my whiteness and my class affiliation, as well as my other identities, within my writing has, I hope, created a space in which the reader can critically read my work with an understanding of at least some of my biases. An understanding of my whiteness may, perhaps, call to the reader’s attention my potential for a “residual investment in the universalist ideal” that has been such a common thread in white feminist histories (Clawson, 2008: 5). Keeping my whiteness in mind as I write forces me to confront tendencies such as this one and to challenge myself to understand the feminists about whom I write not just as white or black, but as individuals whose racial identification has profoundly influenced their realities within the world.

A Note on Terms

A wave model of feminism

My decision to utilize a wave model of feminist movement in the United States in spite of the countless problems with this model is twofold: first of all, it is for what contemporary white feminists Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards refer to as “the sake of historical convenience” (2000: 69). In a relatively short work, I have found that the ability to use fewer words rather than many to describe a historical epoch is necessary. Having more than one phrase with which to describe this period of feminist organizing has helped to reduce repetition: “second wave” has been able to stand in for lengthy descriptive phrases regarding the largely white, mainstream feminist organizing in the sixties and seventies in the United States. Utilizing the term has given me another way of describing the period. Secondly, and more significantly, I have chosen to use the term “second wave” because of the way that other histories of feminist movement in the sixties and seventies have used it. While second wave technically refers to the full scope of feminist organizing in those years, it has, in many ways, taken on a life of its own. “Second wave” as a concept has come to occupy a specific place in feminist histories, whether the era is endowed with positive or negative characteristics.

The often unspoken assumptions that people have about the true meaning of second wave feminism have been most significant to this work in those instances in which contemporary feminists question the women who participated in feminism’s second

wave. In many of these works, the second wave and its participants are invoked with some degree of distaste (or at least irony): it seems as if contemporary feminists (especially those who are white) use a universal and simplistic analysis of second wave feminists in order to distinguish themselves from their racist, generally class-unaware, and self-absorbed foremothers. Even works that claim to interrogate the wave model, such as *Manifesta*, unwittingly uphold a dichotomy of ignorant second wave feminists versus far more enlightened, progressive, and radical third wave feminists. In spite of the authors' attempts to recognize the connections between second wave feminism and their own feminist movement, their dismissal of second wave feminists as Susan Brownmiller, who they describe as "leaping over [any recognition of] the Third Wave altogether [by insisting] that young feminists existed—but 'not in [Third Wave's] generation," sets up a dichotomy between feminists of two eras (Baumgardner and Richards, 2000: 49). Referring to Susan Brownmiller as a "second waver" rather than as a participant in second wave feminist movement historically fixes Brownmiller's feminism and offers a glib dismissal of her ability to understand the sites of contemporary feminism (Baumgardner and Richards, 2000: 49). In spite of their declared goal of "attempt[ing] to open people's eyes to the power of everyday feminism," Baumgardner and Richards unwittingly establish a historical dichotomy that women of color studies professor Grace Chang writes is constructed "to mean that such problems, and 'those bad white feminists,' [are] quite literally a thing of the past" (Chang, 2007: 63). By pitting so-called second wavers against the supposedly

enlightened members of the third wave, contemporary feminist writers have simplified feminist movement and its long, complex history, in order to be understood as, on some level, feminisms' saviors: those who have come to save the movement from prudish, racist, and doctrinaire second wave forces and to recreate feminism as young, hip, and entirely informed.

None of this is to say that my use of wave terminology is not fundamentally risky, for while it is widely employed, an understanding of feminism as firmly located within three distinct waves is profoundly flawed. These cursory understandings accomplish several things. First, they dismiss the continuity of sexist oppression throughout each of these eras. By distinguishing the first wave, which was concerned largely with women's suffrage, from the second and third wave movements, advocates of a strict wave model necessarily ignore the role that women's voting rights have played in more recent feminist movement. While first wave feminists may have been the pioneers who fought for women's right to vote, more complex issues surrounding voting rights have been central to second and third wave feminism. Second wave feminism, which was profoundly influenced by the Civil Rights Movement, was furthered by feminists who, after working in the segregated South, necessarily knew about the role that voting rights played in the lives of Southern black women. After their experiences with Civil Rights organizing, even the most privileged white northern feminists in the sixties and seventies had to see at least some continuities between the work of suffragists like Elizabeth Cady

Stanton and Susan B. Anthony and the work that Civil Rights workers were doing in the South in the 1950s and 1960s.

Furthermore, some theorists have argued that wave models of feminisms serve to erase alternative feminist histories and to limit the definition of feminist movement. By recognizing specific time periods in which feminist practice was a significant part of life in the United States, feminist scholars often see wave terminology and wave models as contributing to a misunderstanding of feminist movement in which only upper- or middle-class, white feminist histories are presented as significant.

Locating the beginnings of organized feminism in the United States in 1848, when the Seneca Falls Conference was held, and when white women's suffrage became a major concern for many white feminists, dismisses the complex and meaningful feminist work that had been conducted by women of all races leading up to those years. The significance of the feminist resistance of female slaves and other black women throughout American history is significantly diminished when historians and feminist scholars locate the beginning of resistance to sexist oppression in 1848. Additionally, many of those historians who write about the feminist practices of the white women's suffragists often fail to recognize the role that racism played in these so-called feminists' rhetoric. White women's appeals to white men regarding their right to vote often relied on their understanding that it was preposterous for white women to be oppressed in a way that even black men were not. Well-known white suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton succinctly explained racist white women's

objection to the enfranchisement of black men when white women could still not vote, writing,

“We can not make [white] men see that [white] women feel the humiliation of their petty distinctions of sex, precisely as the black man feels those of color. It is no palliation of our wrongs to say that we are not socially ostracized as he [the black man] is, so long as we are politically ostracized as he is not” (as quoted in Newman, 1999: 56).

Strict adherents to a wave model of feminist organizing have largely overlooked the racist undertones of many suffragists in the so-called first wave, and have seen the role that race played in the fight for suffrage as secondary to the feminist aims of activists like Stanton. The fact that this period of feminist organizing, complete with all its racism, is often considered more significant and more legitimately feminist than the organizing that had been done by women prior to the 1850s presents one of the central problems with static definitions of the first, second, and third waves of feminism in the United States.

It is with these flaws in mind that I choose to utilize at least some of the language of a wave model of feminist organizing, in hopes that it challenges readers to complicate their understandings of feminist histories. In spite of its flaws, the wave model is widely recognized, and when people speak about second wave feminism, it almost always carries more meaning than its simplest definition would. Because of its place in feminist discourse and out of a simple desire to be concise, I have chosen to employ terms like second and (sometimes) third wave. While I find it absolutely necessary to confront the shortcomings of a wave framework, being able to speak to feminist histories in the words that they so often use has been instrumental in

crafting this work, and I believe that it is only through interrogating wave based theories of feminist history that I can truly complicate how we think of feminist movement in the United States as a whole and, more specifically, in the women's studies classroom.

"Women of Color" as a term

I repeatedly use the term "women of color," "feminists of color," and "Third World feminists" throughout my work. These are terms that I consider necessary evils: incredibly useful but undoubtedly problematic, especially when left unquestioned. I choose to use them because many of the works that are central to this text, including those written by white women and by those women who I describe as feminists of color, have utilized these phrases. *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, and *Colonize This!: Young Women of Color on Today's Feminism*, edited by Daisy Hernández and Bushra Rehman, both of which have the term "women of color" in their titles, have both been central to my growth as a feminist, my understanding of whiteness, and my desire to embark on this project. But in spite of the use of the term by radical and widely respected feminist theorists, it has been important for me to understand the problematic nature of a term that in many ways normalizes whiteness. In her analysis of the terms "Third World women" and "women of color," Indian feminist Chandra Mohanty stresses that "just as Western women or white women cannot be defined as coherent interest groups, Third World women also do not constitute any automatic unitary group" (2003: 49). The assumption that "women of color" can be

a meaningful term to describe large and incredibly diverse groups of women implies that all women who are not white share the same experiences and the same outlooks on life. It is only when the term is understood as an active identification—as the choice to identify with a movement of other women of color or to consciously include one’s racial identity in the term—that phrases like “women of color” take on an empowering meaning. Mohanty further explains that terms like “women of color” and “Third World women” can be useful in political and social activism, and that they can “designate... a political constituency, [if] not a biological or even sociological one” (2003: 49). These terms provide women who identify with them “a viable oppositional alliance” based not on shared racial identifications, but rather “a common context of struggle” (Mohanty, 2003: 49). When understood as empowering and voluntary organizations, phrases such as these allow groups of women to form their own constituencies and to establish voluntary bonds with other feminists fighting for the same recognition.

Women’s studies and black studies

Women’s studies and black studies have both been known (and are still known) by a wide variety of different names. Different departments and programs have decided to use different terminology in naming themselves, and in cases in which I am writing about a specific department, I use the title that the department currently uses or, if I am talking about a program or department that has changed its name, that which it used during the period about which I write. I have chosen to use black studies as my overarching term for programs that study black life in the United

States because it is one of the more all-encompassing terms: African American studies, Africana studies, and other program or department names are all more specific terms that focus their area of study beyond black studies programs.¹ I use women's studies as my overarching term for programs and departments that study gender in the United States, unless the program is known by a different name, in which case I use that. I choose to use women's studies as my default term because that is the language that most programs and departments, and the foundations that supported them, used in the 1970s and 1980s.

Chapter Summary

The first chapter of this thesis offers an in depth analysis of the role that race played both in the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s and how race (specifically, blackness and whiteness) has been conceptualized in the discourse that has emerged surrounding the history of feminist movement in the second wave. The chapter has two main goals: to write black women's involvement in second wave feminism back into the liberal conception of race in second wave movement, and to understand the ways in which white women's racism influenced understandings of black women's involvement. By examining the different forms that black and white feminist organizing took, and how it was understood by different communities, I try to give the reader a more nuanced understanding of the meaning of feminist activism in these two communities. Different conceptions of positionality,

¹ For more information on black studies terminology see Rojas, *From Black Power to Black Studies* and Rooks, *White Money/Black Power*.

vocabulary, and separatism have established black and white feminisms as organizationally distinct, and historical interpretations of the success and meaning of these brands of feminist organizing have influenced the ways in which the second wave of American feminism is remembered.

Chapter two addresses the ways in which women's studies has played a central role in the production of supposedly legitimate understandings of what constitutes feminist movement and what role race played in the second wave. The creation of women's studies programs and departments can play a useful role in understanding how gender has been constructed as a legitimate lens for analysis, and a deeper analysis of how the programs evolved can demonstrate what knowledges were constructed as acceptable in the formal academy and in the United States as a whole. Throughout the chapter, I address the tensions between women's studies' struggle for institutional legitimacy as programs tried to stay progressive and true to their liberatory aims: how women's studies scholars strove to ensure a place for women's studies in the American academy, but how they were forced to make certain concessions to conservative forces within colleges and universities. The chapter serves to complicate analyses that privilege academic knowledge above all others and those that reject women's studies programs and departments as self-serving, conservative and reactionary.

The final chapter offers insights into the ways in which more contemporary feminists, active in the late 1990s and early years of the 21st century, have reconceptualized the production academic knowledge and have envisioned a new

space for women's studies within the academy. Through a case study of a group of Wesleyan University students who presented their women's studies program with a series of criticisms and suggestions for a more inclusive gender studies program, in which race and queer identities would be central to the feminist analysis used in courses, I examine how black feminist praxis can provide a new vision for the study of gendered oppression in the academy. An analysis of the successes and failures of the Wesleyan women's studies program, and the way in which the program responded to students' demands, provides a concrete context in which to examine the role of race in the contemporary women's studies classroom.

Finally, I offer a self-reflexive analysis of what the process of writing this work has meant to me as a white person and as a student of gender and African American studies. While my own identity has profoundly influenced everything that I have written in this thesis, my conclusion is the space in which I actively process how my own identity has informed my interest in this topic and how I approached my analysis. I conclude the work with an understanding that while it can only be only one small part of a much larger social movement towards an analysis of race and racism in feminist movement and women's studies, it is only through a series of seemingly insignificant confrontations with racism that will, over time, establish race as playing a fundamental role in the ways that sexist oppression operates in the United States.

CHAPTER ONE:
**RACE, CONFLICT, AND CROSS-RACIAL ALLIANCES IN SECOND WAVE
FEMINIST MOVEMENT**

Roots of Second Wave Feminism

Feminist movement is, in its most basic definition, the organized response to unequal socio-cultural factors that are designed to disadvantage women. Though sexist actions and value systems have been perpetrated and justified in countless ways, they serve one fundamental purpose: to define woman as a cultural 'other,' as a non-citizen, as less than human. But just as systems of sexist oppression adapt to the cultural and social realities of the spaces in which they exist, feminist responses to sexism and misogyny are constantly evolving to meet the current challenges that women face. The women's movements of the 1960s and 1970s, commonly known as the second wave of American feminism, did not exist in isolation, nor were they a simple continuation of prior feminist organizing. Neither did they mirror exactly the models of feminist organizing that had come before, such as the fight for women's suffrage. Previous models of feminist organizing and all of their strengths and weaknesses did, however, dramatically influence second wave feminism. The complex role that history played in second wave feminist movement meant from the beginning that it would be a complex, multi-faceted social movement influenced by previous movements towards the same end and by the specific realities of the time in which it flourished.

The organized feminist movement that emerged in the United States in the late 1960s and 1970s in what is now called the second wave of American feminism is part of a long history of feminist organizers responding tactically to women's experiences of sexist oppression. Social movement and feminist historians have posited a multitude of different explanations for the surge of feminist organizing in certain communities in the United States during these years, and no one explanation has been able to capture the full spectrum of factors that influenced the emergence of second wave feminist movement. Historians have examined the Victorian ethos that controlled so much of life in the post-war 1950s, the role of civil rights, anti-war and black power movements on women's understandings of systemic oppressions, and other social, historical and cultural factors that might have influenced the growth of organized feminist movement. The purpose of this thesis, however, is not to determine the defining factor that led to a flowering of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s. Instead, I choose to explore the differential impacts of these various factors on diverse populations of feminists. Rather than examining why feminist movement played such a significant role in the culture of the 1960s and 1970s, I examine what role women's activism played in these years. By using archival research to unearth those histories that have been marginalized in many women's studies programs, I aim to provide the reader with a more nuanced analysis of feminist organizing in the second wave, and to examine the impacts of second wave organizing on the realities of women's studies programs today. Through my analyses of the differential impacts of feminist movement on women of different racial and class identifications and of

how people from these distinct communities, identities, and backgrounds understand feminism, I aim to deconstruct feminist hierarchies and try to understand feminism as a flexible, ever-changing social phenomenon that can (and should) be understood as something that must necessarily be tailored to fit the specific needs of the community in which it grows.

Women organizing for their rights in the second wave were responding to the myriad of sexist oppressions that they faced in the United States in the 20th century. Though I will later explore how widespread sexist oppression differentially affected women from different backgrounds, it is important to recognize the harsh realities of institutional sexism in these years. Well-known and widely read analyses, such as Betty Freidan's seminal work *The Feminine Mystique*, explicitly outline the realities of life in the 1950s for a specific group of American women, namely, white, middle class "homemakers." In her first book, Freidan worked to define the phenomenon that she called "the problem that has no name": the expectation that the sole role of the suburban white woman "was to seek fulfillment as wives and mothers," and that their worth could be understood solely through the birthing and rearing of well adjusted, productive children (Freidan, 1963: 15). Freidan traced expectations of white femininity through the ages, finding that even as more women entered the workforce, the feminine mystique did not relax its hold on them. White, suburban women who worked generally came from similar circumstances and worked similar jobs. They were "married women who held part-time jobs, selling or secretarial, to put their husbands through school, their sons through college, or to help pay the

mortgage” (Freidan, 1963: 17). In short, any woman who worked did so to finance the American dream: she was “married at sixteen, she managed her household with the help of a full-time maid, worked with the campfire Girls, the PTA, did charity fund raising, and sang in the choir. She cooked, sewed clothes for her four children, entertained 1,500 guests a year, and exercised on a trampoline ‘to keep her size 12 figure” (Evans, 1980: 5). Once she could do this, “she had everything that women ever dreamed of” (Freidan, 1963: 18). Madge Piercy’s poem “Growing Up Female in the ‘50s” succinctly recollects the cultural expectations of some women and girls during this period. She strings together expectation after expectation, demonstrating constant demands of femininity: “Don’t cross your legs; you skirt’s/ too short, your sweater too tight./ Don’t laugh so loud... Laugh at his/ jokes, don’t contradict, don’t/ act so smart” (Piercy, 2008a: 409). Femininity, in Piercy’s experience, means being told to “Keep your head down, don’t/stand out. Nice girls don’t./ Nice girls never ask for it./ Nice girls die with clean under/ wear. Nice girls do it only/ after a gold ring and then/ they close their eyes” (Piercy, 2008a: 409). While it is essential to complicate the work of these early white feminists and to understand their experiences of sexism as specific to their social locations, it is similarly necessary to recollect the sexist realities to which they were reacting.

By delineating the specific impacts of the same events (in this case, being female in the 1950s) for feminists from different backgrounds, such as black and white feminists, we can explore the roots of many of the tensions that are still present in feminist organizing today. In analyzing feminists’ accounts of their experiences in

the 1960s political activist scene, I hope to further expose why black and white feminist movements emerged as organizationally distinct and had different goals, methodologies, and locations. Unlike analyses that aim for an impossible utopian reconciliation between black and white feminists, I hope that this analysis will, by examining the inner dynamics of the feminist factions and the feminist coalitions of the second wave, add yet another layer of depth and complexity to the conversation. Social movement historians have amassed a huge collection of work on the sociohistorical factors that catalyzed the emergence of large-scale feminist organizations in the second wave, and many scholars, including white feminists Winifred Breines, Benita Roth, and Mary Ann Clawson, have described the 1960s as a golden age of leftist organizing in the United States. The war in Vietnam, increasing popular awareness of (and anger about) racism and other social ills, and frustration with governmental corruption all contributed to a thriving community of leftist organizers and activists. Protests and demonstrations occurred all over the United States, on college campus and in Washington, D.C. Many folks who came of age or were present for the political activism of the 1960s credit the atmosphere of the time with their political and/or social awakenings, and feminist activists are no exception. For feminists of a multitude of racial and ethnic backgrounds, many factors aligned in the 1960s to influence their move towards an explicitly feminist consciousness. Though different women cited different events or trends in their own awakenings, the influences of the social shifts of the 1960s played an unquestionably significant role in the rise of second wave feminist movement in the

United States. White feminist Maren Lockwood Carden's location of her feminist awakening in a general frustration with the "practical, social, and psychological restraints placed upon the woman who wants to step outside the traditional role" (Carden, 1974: 14) is profoundly different than, for example, black feminist Barbara Emerson's confrontations with sexism within the Civil Rights Movement (Emerson, 1998: 61). But both of these feminists were reacting to their lived experiences of being women in the 1950s and 1960s in the United States. The sometimes subtle differences between white and black feminists' entrances into feminist movement can provide crucial insight into the ways in which feminist movements have developed and continue to grow.

Leftist Social Movements and The Evolution of Second Wave Feminism

The Civil Rights Movement is frequently cited by second wave feminists of all races as one of the defining factors that led to their participation in organized feminist movement. Though the impacts of Civil Rights on black and white feminists were obviously and necessarily different, many women from a variety of backgrounds came into their own during these years. Spurred by both positive and negative experiences in the movement during the mid-1960s these women became some of the first members of feminist organizations during these years. For many black feminists, especially those living in the South, the Civil Rights years represented a continuation of the work that they had been doing all their lives. While their efforts to fight the racist and sexist structures that were established as a means to oppress and silence them were by no means new, it was not uncommon for black women

active in the Civil Rights Movement to write about the energy that they gained from being part of such a large scale movement. Black Civil Rights activist Barbara Emerson located the significance of her experience in Civil Rights organizing not in a new experience of fighting the oppressions that she faced, instead writing that her “autonomy and liberation and self-determination came from being part of a group, [where] the focus was more communal” (Emerson, 1998: 61). Civil Rights organizing provided a different, though still significant, experience for young white activists. For many of these northern white women, the Civil Rights Movement provided direct exposure to the harsh realities of racist oppression. Though these women had without question grown up and lived around overt racism for their entire lives, the shock of how racism manifested in the deep south still horrified them in a way that racism in the north did not. White women often locate their experiences working in the segregated south as the first time that they had been exposed to a way of thinking about systemic oppressions, and their exposure to grassroots organizing fostered a belief in their own capabilities as activists.

The impacts of the Civil Rights Movement on white women’s feminist development are varied and plentiful. While a certain degree of their increased attentiveness to gender came from drawing parallels between the racist oppression that they were fighting against and the sexist oppression that they themselves had experienced, many white women locate sexism on the part of white men in the Civil Rights Movement as their reason for coming to identify as feminists. Though many of the white women active in the Civil Rights Movement were on some level resigned to

the sexism that they encountered in their everyday lives, their experiences of sexism within the supposedly radical circles of the New Left frequently worked to awaken female activists to the negative impacts of sexism on their lives. As radical white women found themselves continually stuck in uncreative, unfulfilling, and unappreciated jobs behind the scenes, supposedly for the “good of the movement,” their frustrations with movement men began to crystallize. While white feminists did express anger and frustration with American society as a whole, many of those women involved in the Civil Rights Movement “acted on the basis of concrete complains about being stymied in the fulfillment of their activist potential” (Roth, 2004: 32). Blatantly sexist comments made by male civil rights leaders, black and white alike, alerted many white women to the truly systemic reality of the sexist oppressions that they faced: even in the so-called radical communities of which they were a part, women were relegated to supporting roles stuffing envelopes, preparing meals, and fulfilling the sexual desires of movement men.

Over the course of the Civil Rights Movement, dynamics began to shift, and many of the gendered tensions that are now associated with the era began to solidify. As liberal white northerners made their way to the south to help fight segregation, the Civil Rights Movement lost much of its initial vision. The changing demographics of the movement meant that “the southern community base that had fostered women’s participation became less important to the Civil Rights Movement” than the highly publicized involvement of white youth from the north (Roth, 2004: 82). While white northerners were able to help with much of the anti-racist cause, their involvement

and the highly visible role that they played in the movement diminished the grassroots emphasis that characterized its early years. As the movement became more high visibility, the large numbers of black women who were involved continued on in their initial role as community organizers, but they were rendered largely invisible as black men and white northerners took center stage as the public voices of the movement (Roth, 2004: 81). During these years of change, tensions between black and white Civil Rights workers became more intense. Liberal white women who were participating in the Civil Rights Movement largely because of their genuine commitment to ending racism were sensitive to some black women's assertion that white folks, including white women, were monopolizing the movement. Black women often spoke of the resentment that they felt towards white women who entered their communities and immediately made themselves at home. Cross-racial sexual relationships both furthered these tensions and provided an easy scapegoat for other frustrations and resentments. Though black and white women were similarly marginalized within the movement in that they all did "an inordinate amount of typing, coffee making, [and] housework," tensions arose surrounding the fact that the "hundreds of middle-class white women [who] went South to work with the Movement" quite often had the ulterior motive of "having affairs with black men" (Wallace, 1990: 6). While it goes without saying that much good came out of the Civil Rights Movement, and that its role in the establishment of mainstream second wave feminism is unquestionable, its legacies were not entirely positive. Questions that would divide feminists for years to come first surfaced as

black and white activists brought their often-conflicting identities and experiences of oppression to Civil Rights organizing.

The movement away from the non-violent organizing of the early- and mid-1960s, symbolized by the work of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and the work of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and towards the revolutionary Black Power Movement redefined the role that women occupied in anti-racist organizing and in society at large. The more militant rhetoric of Black Power, and its vocal affirmations of black masculinity, shaped the ways in which black and white women were talked about and how people in the Black Power Movement interacted with them. It was during the early years of Black Power that black feminist Michele Wallace began to notice that “Black men often could not separate their interest in white women from their hostility toward black women” (Wallace, 1990: 10). Black men’s interest in white women, in spite of their talk of “beautiful black Queens of the Nile and beautiful full lips and black skin and big asses,” was linked not to an appreciation of their white partners’ intelligence, skill, or wit (Wallace, 1990: 11). Rather, “black men argued that white women gave them money, didn’t put them down, *made them feel like men*” (italics mine, Wallace, 1990: 10). While white and black women experienced the impacts of the masculinism of the Black Power Movement differently, both were impacted by Black Power leaders’ actions. Black women were either idolized as “African queens” or degraded with flippant phrases like “I can’t stand that black bitch” (Wallace, 1990: 10). White women were

acceptable to black men as long as they aspired to the highest standard of white femininity, were submissive, and lived to serve their hypermasculine black partners. With women cast as little more than sexual partners, and often unsatisfactory ones at that, male Black Power leaders used sexist rhetoric to try to gain respect and authority. Women's roles in radical social movements were effectively erased within the discourse of Black Power. After all, as radical civil rights leader Stokely Carmichael said, "The only position of women in SNCC is prone" (Wallace, 1990: 7). Regardless of her talent and commitment to the cause, no woman of any race would be able to further Black Power movement.

The anti-war movement provided a model and a space for fledgling feminist groups. Furthermore, it served to attract many women who were not otherwise drawn to organized feminist movement to a gender-based understanding of war and aggression. Activists, artists, and theorists began to draw parallels between violence perpetuated by men against women and violence enacted by so-called First World nations on the Third World. Artist Nancy Spero worked throughout the mid- to late-1960s to create what she called the *War Series*: pieces of artwork "concerning the Vietnam War and the 'convergence of state violence with male sexual aggression'" (DuPlessis and Snitow, 1998: 498). The parallels that anti-war feminists were able to draw between some women's personal experiences of violence and the American invasion of Vietnam were compelling enough to bring even very ambivalent women to organized feminist movement. Barbara Epstein, for example, was hesitant to identify with feminism, a movement which she thought "seemed...to impose a set of

rules about what one could say about one's feelings and experience" (1998:127). But though her introduction to feminist anti-war activists, who linked their experiences of sexism within leftist movements to the very violence that they were fighting on the large scale, Epstein was drawn to a feminist organizing in the sense that it was "an effort to raise the issue of gender equality in the swirling chaos that seemed to surround us" (1998: 144). The ability to locate an element of sexist oppression in the colonialist actions of the United States, as well as the experiences of sexism within the anti-war movement, served to give many leftist women both an understanding of and a motivation to join formal feminist organizations.

The Significance of Race in the Emergence of Second Wave Feminism

Black and white feminist organizing has not been identical because black and white women's experiences of sexism in the United States are not, nor have they ever been, the same. Since the time that the first white women came to North America and since black women were first abducted from their homes on the African continent and forcibly brought here, race has played a fundamentally significant role in how women experience sexist oppression. While sexism is a daily reality that truly diminishes the freedoms of women around the world, the form and severity of gender oppression have always been moderated by racial identity. In the case of white and black women, the systemic devaluation of their identities has always been more complicated than being a question of simple, cut and dry sexism. The different circumstances under which black and white women lived in the early years of the United States played a significant role in shaping the forms of sexist oppression that

they would face over the years to come, and, consequently, their lived experiences of womanhood.

In spite of their many privileges, white women in the United States have, since the establishment of the country, been victims of a widespread system of sexist oppression. White women organizing in the second wave responded to a legacy of disrespect, unequal treatment, and violence that had been well documented for many years. As these young second wave feminists began to organize with other women against a variety of social ills, many of which had received attention from the Civil Rights and New Left Movements of the 1960s, they brought an understanding of their identities as women in the United States that was, in many ways, a reaction to the stifling expectations that they had faced over their lifetimes. As these young white women researched the history of white womanhood in the United States, they began to draw parallels and make connections. Rather than locating their experiences of sexism in families, schools, and workplaces as specific to the 1960s, they began to see that the standards to which they were held were closely related to those that their ancestors had experienced (Henry, 2004: 55). Oftentimes, white second wave feminists traced their gendered oppression to Enlightenment philosophies of natural rights which, according to popular feminist writer Estelle B. Freedman, logically progressed into conceptions of “natural sex,” in which women’s biology predisposed them to a life spent in the domestic sphere (2002: 64). These white feminists began to note that femininity, specifically the expectations of femininity that I argue are inextricably tied to whiteness, had for

many years been associated with weakness, unintelligence, and hyper-emotionality. They turned to the writings of the women's suffragists of the 1800s and 1900s to understand how women had been politically disenfranchised and rendered lesser citizens. They read writers like Betty Friedan who, in her 1963 book *The Feminine Mystique*, put words to the dissatisfactions that many middle- or upper-class white women experienced in their domestic lives. Though these economically privileged white women may not have had to contend with many of the hardships that members of other marginalized groups in the United States faced, oppressive expectations regarding their chastity, assumed submissiveness, and contentment to have and rear children played a crucial role in the formation of formal second wave feminist movement in the U.S., specifically as it related to white women.

The sexist archetypes against which black women revolted in the second wave looked very different than those that white feminists sought to combat. Black women did not just have to confront the realities of being black in addition to being female; rather, they faced the even harsher realities of being both black and female. Just as the realities of white womanhood were defined decades before historians locate the beginning of the second wave, conceptions of archetypal black womanhood dated back to the arrival of African women in the United States during the early years of the transatlantic slave trade. Unlike white women, who were often considered too weak or emotional to perform the same work as white men, black women were held to the same standards that slave men were held. But in addition to hours of grueling work in the fields alongside their husbands and sons, slave

women faced the added expectations of maintaining the domestic sphere. Though the female slave had “been wrested from passive, ‘feminine experience by the sheer force of things—literally by forced labor,’” she was expected to remain the “center of domestic life” (Davis, 1998: 123). While white feminists came to see gendered confinement to the private sphere inherently sexist, black women’s role in the private sphere played a different role in slave communities, where the realities of home life were much more complicated. Angela Davis writes that for American slaves, the domestic sphere was “the only life at all removed from the arena of exploitations, and thus as an important source of survival” (Davis, 1998: 123). As the keeper of the home, “the black woman could play a pivotal role in nurturing the thrust towards freedom” (Davis, 1998: 123).

The relative influence experienced by black women on slave plantations dramatically shaped the stereotypes that formed about them and, consequently, the modes of sexist and racist control that they faced. Both white men and white women were deeply invested in the oppression of all slaves based on their race, and white men were equally invested in the oppression of slave women based on their gender. Because of the interactions between race and gender, the forms of sexist oppression that slave women experienced were different than those experienced by white women, and the forms of racism that they experienced were distinct from those to which black men were subjected. White male slave masters, thoroughly invested in the perpetuation of both sexism and racism, were committed to using racist and sexist systems of domination to attempt to further disenfranchise slave women. By

using sexual violence such as rape as a means of dominating slave women, the white slave master worked to create a profoundly raced and gendered system of oppression: through sexual violence, he “could endeavor to re-establish her femaleness by reducing her to the level of her *biological* being. Aspiring with his sexual assaults to establish her as a female *animal*, he would be striving to destroy her proclivities towards resistance” (Davis, 1998: 123). White women, whose white female descendants would begin to claim universal sisterhood in later feminist movements, were equally invested in the oppression of female slaves. As Deborah Gray White writes in *Ar’n’t I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South*, “the white woman’s sense of herself as a woman—her self-esteem and perceived superiority—depended on the racism that debased black women” (1999: 6). The interdependence between black and white women resulted in a form of cruelty specific to white female slaveholders, who sought to distance themselves from the slaves upon whose degradation their femininity rested. Though White strives to recognize the experiences of sexism faced by black and white women, the truth of the time becomes dramatically clear: the sexism that white women faced, predicated on “silence and submissiveness... [and] a notion of femininity that made piety, delicacy, morality, weakness, and dependency the reserve of white women alone,” was decidedly less brutal than that faced by black women, who had to contend with sexual violence, “endless toil [and] the sale of their children” (White 1999: 5-6).

One of the critical differences between black and white women’s organizing in the second wave was their approach to organizing for reproductive rights. White

women's call for safe, accessible, and affordable abortion services was one of the central themes to their movement, and the work that many committed white women did in the 1970s and 1980s to ensure these rights was remarkable. But contrary to what many white feminist histories of the reproductive rights movement argue, reproductive rights organizing was not simply a matter of a specific class of white women winning a battle on behalf of all the women of the world (Roberts, 1997: 6). Rather, reproductive justice movements and the tactics used by the women working towards their sexual and reproductive liberation were unquestionably influenced by the modes of sexist oppression and reproductive control that organizers had experienced. Though both white and black women organizing in the 1970s had experienced rape, lack of access to safe and legal abortion, and other gendered inequalities as modes of sexist social control, the legacies of slavery and the continuation of systemic racism meant that women from these groups experienced sexual and reproductive oppressions differently. Many of these differences originated in the slave era. For female slaves, rape by white masters represented not only the ultimate sexual control, but also a form of economic control, through which black women's bodies were used as a means of producing more free labor (see Angela Davis' "JoAnne Little: The Dialectics of Rape" in James, 1998). The influence of race on the value ascribed to women and the impacts that is had on their treatment in slave systems would forever influence the ways in which black and white women would be conceived of and treated. The different rationalizations and affects of sexual violence and rape on white and black

women during the period of legalized slavery demonstrate just one of the many ways in which sexuality and, later, the organized fight for reproductive and sexual justice were differently interpreted and experienced by women of different races.

Furthermore, the differential value ascribed to children of different races in the United States shaped understandings of contraception and abortion in black and white communities. As Dorothy Roberts, a well-known black reproductive rights advocate has written, “race completely changes the significance of birth control to the story of women’s reproductive freedom” (1997: 56). Tensions between black and white reproductive rights organizers arose from the different experiences that black and white women have had regarding reproductive control. White women were denied the right to birth control and abortion in large part because of the previously described stereotypes commonly held about them: white women are considered irrational beings who have no ability to make informed decisions about their bodies. Perhaps more importantly, white women were considered biologically destined to have and rear babies, both justifications for why they had historically been (and should continue to be) relegated to a strictly domestic sphere. While there is no debating the fact that this control of white women’s reproductive lives was a sexist system of control designed to oppress women on account of their gender, it is dramatically different than the type of control experienced by black women, whose reproductive systems had been colonized by white male slaveholders and who had become the site of the most vile sexist and racist terrorism imaginable. Through sexual violence and the testing of medical

equipment, procedures, and fertility and/or birth control medications, black women have experienced a specific and violent form of sexist reproductive control and abuse. The differential impacts of reproductive control on black and white women, and the dramatically different justifications that were given for that control, meant that black and white feminists organizing for reproductive justice did so for different reasons and in different ways. White feminists' lack of awareness of their participation in a system that ignored the nuances of black women's experiences of reproductive control and their ignorance about the differences in popular understandings of black and white womanhood demonstrate not only the role of racism in shaping women's experiences of sexism but is also the root of many of the race-based tensions that would later define much of second wave feminist movement (see Dorothy Roberts' *Killing the Black Body* for a more in depth analysis).

Racial difference played an equally significant role in shaping feminist responses to questions of the role of women in the workplace. Issues surrounding women's rights to work outside the home, to equal pay for that work, and to respect and protection from sexual harassment in the workplace were some of the most widely publicized aims of mainstream second wave feminist movement. Increased popular awareness about underrepresentation of women in the paid work sector, especially in highly paid jobs or those accompanied by significant amounts of prestige or cultural capital, was one of the many factors that drew young women towards formal feminist movement. Concerns about the devaluation of so-called "women's work

[and] the invisibility of women's labor [were central to] feminist critiques of work and family" (Freedman, 2002: 123). Books like *The Feminine Mystique* and others wrote of a largely undocumented phenomenon: the depression, dissatisfaction, and wasted potential of white, middle- and upper class suburban housewives who, because of the social expectations that they faced, were effectively banned from the public work sector in the interest of the preservation of white femininity. But like the forms of sexism that prevailed in the slave era, sexism in the workplace relied on the differential oppression of black and white women. Black women, whose families had rarely experienced the luxury of deciding that a mother or wife should not work, were not considered weak, fragile, or incapable of succeeding in the world outside of the home. Because of systemic racism and sexism that limited the education and economic opportunities for black women's advancement in many professions, a huge number of black women found themselves working in the homes of middle- and upper-class white women who were disenchanted with the ideals of femininity to which they were held. Like those black women whose labor under slavery allowed for the sexist conception of white women as fundamentally weak, the disillusionment that white women expressed with their domestic life was predicated on the oppression and labor of black women.

Just as black and white women faced different brands of sexist oppression and responded with different models of feminist organizing, the backlashes that they faced in their home communities took on dramatically different forms. As dreams of an ideal cross-racial alliance began to wane after the end of the formalized Civil

Rights Movement, black and white liberals and radicals began to express different visions for how their progressive social movements would manifest. Similarly, more conservative forces within black and white communities responded with different criticisms of feminist movement, and black and white feminist movements progressed in different directions.

Though black women's experiences of sexism in the Civil Rights Movement have not been as widely acknowledged as those of white women, their experiences of sexist oppression within supposedly progressive communities played a large role in the development of black feminist organizations in the second wave. Just as white women began to encounter and challenge a gendered division of labor within the movement, black women began to fight similar (though more explicitly racially based) battles. The 1965 release of Daniel Patrick Moynihan's "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action," the rise of Black Power rhetoric, and the simultaneous decline of Civil Rights discourse shifted the way in which black women experienced sexist oppression. While the sexism that these women experienced had always been informed by race, a new affirmation of black masculinity in the years immediately following the publication of the Moynihan Report changed the type of sexism that they experienced within New Left Movements. White women's continued ignorance of the conditions faced by black women colored black women's experiences in the women's and feminist organizations that grew within mixed race and mixed gender leftist groups. White women's increasing appeals to a sense of sisterhood and a shared experience of

sexist oppression further alienated black women from predominantly white feminist groups. In short, black women's experiences of race and gender in Civil Rights and other leftist organizations not only shaped their feminist and anti-racist consciousnesses, but also called to their attention the need for specific black feminist organizations.

One of the central issues that shaped and differentiated black feminist organizing was the prevalence of the black matriarchy theory, popularized by Daniel Patrick Moynihan in his 1965 report. Published by the U.S. Department of Labor, the so-called Moynihan Report located all problems in black communities not in the negative impacts of white supremacy, but in the role of the black woman in black families. His location of black poverty in black women's supposedly unnatural strength and self-sufficiency indicated the strength of sexism among white males, and showed white men's investment in applying stifling gender roles to black as well as white women. By describing black family structure as "a matriarchal structure which, because it is so out of line with the rest of American society, seriously retards the group as a whole, and imposes a crushing burden on the Negro male," Moynihan makes several oppressive assumptions about the black family (Wallace, 1990: 109). First of all, his categorization of the black family as matriarchal removes all blame for black poverty and joblessness from white America. Secondly, Moynihan upholds an unattainable standard of femininity for all women, black and white. He uses the very expectation of female silence against which white feminists were rebelling to outline the black family's path to financial

and familial stability (hooks, 1989: 6). Instead of challenging the systemic state violence against black communities and individuals, or the social and economic structures that limited black people's access to education and economic opportunity, Moynihan engages in what in what Robin D. G. Kelley cleverly refers to as conservative white America's version of the black tradition of "the dozens," or the art of "master[ing] the absurd metaphor" (Kelley, 1997: 2). Moynihan's analysis of the state of the black family in America had, however, "taken the 'dozens to another level": while the absurd hyperbolicism and irrationality of his argument mirrored the dozens, the use of reports like his as a justification for further systemic racism turned a playful rhetorical exercise into a vitriolic assault on blacks in America (Kelley, 1997: 2).

The negative effects of Moynihan's report reached far beyond its primarily white audience. His location of all problems in black society in black womanhood (or, perhaps, in black women's lack of supposedly "womanly" characteristics) changed the dynamics between black men and women. While Moynihan admitted that "not every instance of social pathology afflicting the Negro community can be traced to the weakness of family structure," he did insist that "once or twice removed, it [the black family] will be found to be the principal source of most of the aberrant, inadequate, or anti-social behavior [that] now serves to perpetuate the cycle of poverty and deprivation" (Wallace, 1990: 109). According to Moynihan, even though black matriarchy may not be the clear cause of all of the conditions faced by the black community, black men could rest assured that if they just looked hard enough,

they would find that black women were at the root of their problems. The authority that white America (and the United States government) granted to Moynihan as a social scientist helped to establish his report as fundamental to the analysis of the conditions of the black community. But Michele Wallace argues that Moynihan's analysis did not present a new theory. It simply provided "authoritative support for something a lot of black men wanted to believe anyway: that the black women had substantial advantages over the black man educationally, financially, and in employment" (Wallace, 1990: 110). Just as Moynihan had played on white understandings of femininity in order to cast black family structure as aberrant, he targeted black men's experiences of white racism and inequality to misdirect their anger not at white America, but at black women. The suggestion that the existence of "a 'strong black woman' precluded the existence of a strong black man or, indeed, any black 'man' at all," appealed to the sexism so deeply embedded in the origin myths of the United States and gave black men a chance at a piece of the American dream (Wallace, 1990: 31).

Black women had to contend not only with their stigmatization and discrimination by white men and women, but also with the troubles that they have faced within various black communities. Many of the negative situations that black women faced were related to the publication of the Moynihan report, and the reaction of some black men to it. Furthermore, the Black Nationalist Movement also placed a value on interpretations of the past and on tradition that incorrectly located true blackness in the reduction of a woman's role to procreation and other forms of reproductive

labor. Black women have written extensively about their experiences of this newfound pressure to be stereotypically hyperfeminine and, in many cases, to live up to the overtly sexist stereotypes that had been used to construct submissive white femininity in *contrast* to racist and sexist understandings of black womanhood (or, quite often, androgynous or even supposedly masculine conceptions of black women). Ironically, the sexism that black women experienced in the Civil Rights Movement and in the years that followed it did not represent a continuation of the same types of sexism that they had faced for centuries. Rather, supposedly leftist or radical men in the movement began to hold black women to roles that had previously been reserved for white women only. Theorist bell hooks writes that “the dismissal of black female voices that advocate feminist politics has intensified with the resurgence of narrow nationalist thinking that either invests in supporting the maintenance of patriarchal gender role [*sic*] or insists that embracing an Afrocentric worldview will necessarily return black females and males to an idyllic location where gender hierarchies do not exist” (1989: 100). In this analysis, hooks accurately locates two very different experiences of sexism that black women faced in a single central issue: a dismissal of gender as central to black women’s experiences of race. By attempting to confine black women to a supposedly feminine sphere or by dismissing the significance of gender hierarchies in black women’s experiences in their home communities, those who perpetuated what hooks refers to as the “nationalist voice” continued to try to oppress black women

based on their gender, even as they espoused radical politics dedicated to liberating black people from the racism of the United States.

Racial Tensions, Feminist Responses, and the Search for Sisterhood

As black and white women sought to counter their shared (though distinct) experiences of sexist oppression in the United States, many tensions arose between the groups. One factor that greatly contributed to these tensions was white women's push for the recognition of a universal sisterhood and, as a precursor to that sisterhood, a universally shared experience of sexist oppression. This push stemmed both from ignorance of black women's experiences and from white women's race-specific experiences of sexism in their home communities and in the New Left. As white feminist veterans of the New Left slowly shifted their focus away from the politics that had first brought them together and began to focus on the role of gender oppression in their experiences, they did not sufficiently question the models of organizing that they had previously espoused: rather than beginning to recognize difference and diversity as a rallying point, these women worked to construct a one dimensional concept of womanhood, largely based on their own experiences of gender dynamics in the New Left, into which they could force all women (Roth, 2004: 68). This erasure of difference, so common in liberal white discourse, played a central role in early second wave feminist understandings of race. Much like the race-blind discourse that would later characterize debates surrounding affirmative action, these second wave feminists saw race as a taboo subject for American liberals.

White feminists who argued for a universal experience of womanhood, even across racial identification, shared a fundamental flaw: their inability to locate their own whiteness as a significant social marker, and one that informed their own experiences of womanhood and sexism. This invisibility of whiteness, paired with the hyper visibility of blackness in the years following the Civil Rights Movement, meant that mixed-race feminist organizations that did not specifically address race were operating on a white understanding of sexist oppression and of womanhood. The successful erasure of whiteness, and the establishment of white as normal, natural, and American, meant that for many white women, any feminist group that was not a, explicitly black feminist group was, in short, a white one. Rather than furthering an overtly racist agenda, large numbers of second wave white feminists were what Naomi Wolf would later label Well Meaning White People (or WMWP): white feminists who were genuinely interested in forming feminist alliances across race, but who were ill equipped or unwilling to challenge their understandings of race and the role that it necessarily would play in feminist organizing (1995: 37).

When second wave feminists of color confronted white women on their racism and the extent to which they allowed it to inform their understanding of feminist movement, white feminists' reactions were generally defensive. As doris davenport explains in her essay "The Pathology of Racism," calling someone racist is "like saying someone has a slimey and incurable disease" (1983: 85). davenport continues, writing that if someone were to call her racist, and if she were a well-meaning white person, she would likely "be reactionary and rake out [her] health

department/liberal credentials, to prove [she] was clean” (1983: 85). For white feminists who came to the women’s movement because of their involvement in anti-racist organizing in the south during the Civil Rights years, an accusation of racism was particularly painful. Ellen Pence, a well-known white, anti-racist feminist, explained that having grown up in a house with an overtly racist father, it was easy for her to begin to identify with the Civil Rights Movement and with Third World Liberation Movements in general. Pence recounts how when black women and other feminists of color tried to address white racism, she “mentally inserted the word ‘male’: ‘white male privileges’” (1982: 5). The author’s disgust with overt racism and her desire to fight against it, combined with the all-too-common phenomenon of white people being completely unable to recognize their race, meant that she was able to convince herself that she was not the person about whose racism feminists of color spoke. In this sense, Pence’s experience as a white second wave feminist was all too common: her intentions blurred her ability to see the effect that she had on real people in real interactions.

Because of many white feminists’ simultaneous inability to see themselves as racist and their genuine desire to end both racism and sexism, many predominantly white feminist organizations began to invite black women to join them in their cause. Unfortunately, these well-intentioned invitations to black women to join feminist movement betrayed several flaws in white feminists’ understandings of feminist movement. First, it indicated that many white feminists could not conceptualize a feminist movement that looked different than the one in which they participated.

While black women had been active in the fight to end their own oppression since they first arrived in the United States, white feminists often seemed to think that they had something new to share with black feminists. Secondly, white feminists' attempts to connect with black women came across as superficial and fake, causing many black feminists to see white feminists' attempts to "enlist the support of Black women only [as a means] to lend credibility to an essentially middle-class, white movement" (Wallace, 1982: 10). In this sense, white women's appeals to black women to participate in a movement primarily concerned with the impacts of sexism on white women resulted in an involuntary commodification of black women and other women of color's bodies in order to prove the significance of feminist movement to other New Left organizations.

Many white second wave feminists' attempts bring black women and other women of color into feminist organizations that had been formed by white women and with white women's needs in mind was not an explicitly racist action; rather, it betrays many white women's ignorance of the way in which race interacts with gender to inform women's experiences of sexist oppression. White women's inattentiveness to the differences between black and white women's experiences of gender led some white women to attempt to universalize a truly diverse set of experiences. For large numbers of white feminists, the only way to gain credibility for their movement was to stress the inherent similarity between all women and the universality of sexist oppression—in other words, to universalize all women's experiences of sexism, regardless of race, ethnicity, class, nationality, or any other mediating factor that

affected lived experience. In her analysis of the emergence of distinct black and white feminist movements in the second wave, Winifred Brienes locates the racial tensions between women in feminist movement in the initial divisions that emerged between the two groups during their involvement in SNCC. Brienes writes that the tensions stemmed more from white women's ignorance than from any form of hostile racism, and that in many cases, white feminists problematic actions "can be viewed as an overture to black women [and an attempt] to express...their sadness at being excluded by Blacks" (2006: 48). As the Civil Rights Movement and the emergent feminist movement continued on, and as relationships between black and white women became even more strained, white women "began appealing to gender commonalities and the early SNCC organizational model [in order] to repair their weakening relationships with black SNCC sisters" (Brienes, 2006: 48). White women's growing understanding of systemic gender-based oppression and their relative ignorance about race combined to produce a "universalist notion that all women experienced similar oppression," a viewpoint that "ironically...stemmed from both an unfamiliarity with and an insensitivity to differences between black women and themselves and the powerful desire to include all women" (Brienes, 2006: 116).

White women's attempt to draw analogies between the oppression of (white) women and the oppression of black people represents one of the most significant and fundamental flaws of white feminists' understanding of racial politics in the second wave. Rather than looking at shared experiences of oppression as a means to

work to combat systemic inequalities, white women often chose instead to co-opt and appropriate stories and experiences of racist oppression. The “woman as black analogy” persisted throughout much mainstream feminist organizing in the 1960s and 1970s, and ranged from crude linkages between experiences of racism and sexism to violent analogies such as Judith Brown used in her “Toward a Female Liberation Movement,” published in 1968: when referring to white women’s dependence on white men, she wrote, “Our analysis should be that it is the destiny of most women—no less the radical—to become, finally, some man’s nigger” (as quoted in Roth, 2004: 190). She continues, “[M]uch of our slavery is subtle... When I realized how we’ve been used and abused, the plight of black people seemed very clear. We are over half of the population and have more at stake in an American revolution than most groups in the country (women have a lower prevailing income than blacks!)” (as quoted in Roth, 2004: 190). In this statement, Brown attempts to legitimize theorizing about sexism not in its own right, but by comparing it to theorizing about racism. By failing to directly address experiences of sexism, she unintentionally weakens her own argument, and never speaks to her own lived experiences of gender-based oppression. More significantly, she harshly appropriates the experiences of violence and oppression that black people in the United States have faced, and attempts to erase the specific horrors of slavery and racist violence by examining them only in comparison to white women’s oppressions. By conflating her experience of oppression and the oppressions faced by black people, Brown simultaneously discredited the very real effects of sexism in

the lives of all women and minimized the role that racism has played in United States history and on the lives of countless black people since the first African slaves were forcibly brought to the Americas.

While the majority of white feminists did not make comparisons as rash and unsupported as those made by Judith Brown, analogies between the experiences of racism against black people and the experiences of sexism against white women were a common means of legitimizing the study of sexism. In large part because white men involved in the radical left were, at least superficially, more inclined to address issues of racism than those of sexism, white women used analogies between race and sex (and their respective systems of oppression) to try to attract the attention of the primary target of their activism: white men. In a well-intentioned effort to call attention to the widespread nature and effects of sexism on all women, white feminist Ellen Willis reminded readers, "...Women are not just a special interest group with sectarian concerns. We are half the human race" (as quoted in Roth, 2004: 193). In spite of the fact that sexism looks very different to women from different communities, Willis tried to base her universal analysis on the concept that "Femaleness, like blackness, is a biological fact, a fundamental condition" (as quoted in Roth, 2004: 193). In this instance, she uses the now outdated concept of biological determinism (for both black people of all genders and women) as a means of granting significance to the category of woman and, thus, to the universal experience of sexism. Willis continues, writing, "Like racism, male supremacy permeates [*sic*] all strata of society. And it is even more deeply entrenched...Male

supremacy is the oldest form of domination and the most resistant to change” (as quoted in Roth, 2004: 193). Though there are many flaws in Willis’ analysis, her most significant error occurs when she falls victim to the all-too-common tactic of ranking oppressions and, after establishing the legitimacy of feminist movement by conflating sexism and racism, arguing that sexism is the more ancient, more entrenched, more real of the two oppressions.

The racial homogeneity of mainstream feminist organizing was not lost on all white feminists. Many were aware of the whiteness of their organizations and, more importantly, were dissatisfied with the lack of diverse viewpoints and voices represented within them. Few of these predominantly white groups, however, succeeded in moving their groups away from a homogenous, single-issue model of organizing. As Benita Roth writes, the problem in white feminist networks was not an overt adherence “to the idea of a universalist sisterhood *in order* to exclude women of color” (2004: 195, italics mine). Instead, she posits that white women’s insistence that women of color join their organizations points to a general misunderstanding of the experiences of racism and sexism that women of color faced (Roth, 2004: 195). In these instances, ignorance rather than malice was largely responsible for the failed coalitions between black and white women. An inability to recognize sexism that looked different than that experienced by white women and an excessively rigid definition of legitimate feminist organizing blinded well-meaning white women to the plight of other women, and stymied their often genuine desires to organize across racial lines. White feminist responses to their

own racism were often shallow and ineffective. White feminist Naomi Wolf describes white feminist responses to their own racism as “a kind of equally stylized ‘personal’ (but actually quite impersonal) breast-beating: ‘I was so *hurt* and *troubled* when I began to understand that our black sisters feel marginalized in this organization” (1995: 44).

Differences in white feminists’ intentions did not, however, diminish the negative effects of their often-benevolent racism. Even some of the white feminists most sympathetic of feminists of color’s theories and organizations were unable or unwilling to examine the role of their own whiteness in the world of feminist organizing. Even as white women began to realize that they could learn something from women of color’s organizational strategies, more often than not they continued to cling to their white skin privilege. White women’s growing interest in women of color’s organizing, after years of tacit rejection of the existence of feminist of color groups, only furthered tensions between white women and feminists of color. In her personal recollections of involvement in second wave feminist organizing, Benita Roth remembers how she and other white feminists became increasingly influenced by “the vision of liberation...that these writers [of color] offered” (2004: xi). But even as white women came to recognize at least some of the intellectual prowess of black feminists, they remained painfully uninterested in or unwilling to focus on their own racism. While a small number of white feminists recognized that racism truly was (and is) a white issue (see, for example, Pence, 1982 and Segrest, 1994), the vast majority placed the responsibility for black women’s negative experiences

in the mainstream women's movement on black women themselves. The simultaneous existence of stark examples of ignorance and racism in much of white-dominated feminist movement and an increasing interest in (if not an understanding of) works produced by feminists of color lay the foundation for a disturbing trend in feminist circles: appropriation and tokenization of women of color without true respect or mutuality on the part of white feminists. In spite of some white women's desires for cross-racial sisterhood, their benevolent racism allowed them no hope for true connection and many cross-racial alliances were superficial at best and were, at worst, intensely damaging to the future of the movement.

Because of frustration with attempts at cross-racial feminist organizing and a commitment to the long tradition of expressly black feminist organizing in the United States, black feminist groups like the Combahee River Collective began to form. Combahee began meeting in 1974 as a black, lesbian, socialist feminist organization based out of Boston. After experiencing frustration with white racism in feminist organizations and with the National Black Feminist Organization, whose stance they considered "bourgeoisie-feminist...and [lacking] a clear political focus," Collective members committed themselves to creating a new type of black feminist organization (1983: 216). Its members described themselves as "committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression," since "the synthesis of these oppressions create...the conditions of [their] lives" (1983: 210). While the authors of the statement locate their group's genesis as being

fundamentally “in connection with the second wave of the American women’s movement beginning in the late 1960s,” they write that their group’s “origins [were] in the historical reality of Afro-American women’s continuous life-and-death struggle for survival and liberation” (1983: 210-211). But the Combahee River Collective’s understanding of black feminism and their role in its history did not stop with a political statement about the organization’s aims. In 1979, when a series of murders in the Boston area resulted in the deaths of thirteen women, twelve black and one white, Combahee wrote pamphlets and organized rallies and press hearings to address the violence that was plaguing Boston. They challenged the city’s police, who maintained “that most of the [murdered] women were prostitutes, whose cases were not linked” and the black male activists who saw the murders as racially based, but who lacked a gendered lens of analysis (Roth, 2006: 158-160). Over the course of the Collective’s existence, it remained committed to the production of an applicable black feminist theory that paid homage to the black feminists who had come before and who pushed black and white feminists alike to create a movement that could be even more radically inclusive.

Combahee’s relationship to white feminist organizations is significant in demonstrating a positive model of cross-racial organizing. In their Collective Statement, published in 1977, Collective members described their experiences of organizing with white feminists, saying that after years of work with white women, they believed that “eliminating racism in the white women’s movement is by definition work for white women to do” (1983: 218). But having confronted white

women's racism time and time, again, Collective members knew that more often than not, white feminists would counter their assertion by denying their implication in racist systems of oppression and appealing to a rhetoric of universal or global sisterhood. For these reasons, Combahee also stressed that though they did not see white racism as their problem, their organization would "continue to speak to and demand accountability on this issue" until white women had vowed to dedicate themselves to overtly anti-racist movement (1983: 218). During the movement that Combahee organized in 1979 in response to the Boston murders, "[w]hite women positioned themselves as allies, organizing a support group," a decision that Combahee members "deeply appreciated since the white women recognized that he people whose communities were affected should be the leaders" (Roth, 2006: 160). The Collective's decision to continually engage white feminists and to address their privilege meant that those white feminists who recognized their own ignorance regarding issues of race and racism could confidently play a supporting role to the Collective. The organization's separatist stance provided them with a space free of white racism, but it did not in any way lead to a dismissal of the problems that white racism caused in women's movement. Rather, Combahee members saw their organization as a necessary space in which they could determine the most effective strategies to challenge systems of oppression in the world at large.

The separatist strategy employed by the Combahee River Collective and other feminist of color organizations was both personally and tactically based. Black women required a space free of racism, especially from those white women with

whom they possessed a supposedly shared experience of gender based oppression, in order to provide them a much-needed psychological break from the conflicts that they faced in many circles. But black feminists' concerns were not only personal. These women also needed a space in which they could most effectively organize against the multitude of oppressions that they faced. The latter move was a tactical decision based on an understanding that groups dedicated to fighting the oppressions that they themselves faced would be more effective in their activism. As the Combahee River Collective wrote in "A Black Feminist Statement," first published in April 1977, there was a strong understanding in many feminist circles that "the most profound and potentially radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else's oppression" (1982: 16). By focusing on the concept of black women being the only people who can be fully committed to fighting for black women, these black feminist theorists and others established the field of standpoint feminism. Though standpoint feminism is often talked about as one specific type of organizing, it actually took many forms. While it was initially conceived of as a way to establish spaces for women of color that could be free of racism and, perhaps more significantly, spaces that would free them from having to explain systemic racism to their white "sisters," standpoint feminism also paved the way for white women to safely explore their own racism with other white women. This brand of feminist organizing served many purposes, and was used by feminists of all colors both to further cross-racial feminist organizing and, at times, to work through the issues that had for so long plagued the movement.

While standpoint feminism successfully created many spaces in which feminists of all races could effectively organize, many white feminists misunderstood the aims of this movement. Feminists of color advocated for standpoint feminism in large part because they no longer wanted to have to educate often-reluctant white women about their experiences of racism. This was not to say, however, that black feminists did not see anti-racism work as an integral component of feminist organizing. Rather, black feminists hoped that those white women whose ignorance of matters of race manifested as benevolent racism would organize on their own to self-educate about racism in the United States and its implications on women's movements in general. In some cases, this hope manifested in the creation of anti-racist feminist consciousness raising groups for white women. In many instances, however, it resulted in a widespread inattention on the part of white feminists to matters of race in feminist movement. While black feminists' refusal to educate white women at the expense of their own feminist organizing in no way granted white feminists the right to ignore racism either within or outside of mainstream feminist movement, white women's indoctrination into a white supremacist society and the resulting invisibility of whiteness meant that few white women recognized their own race when it was not cast in opposition to the blackness of other feminists (hooks, 1998: 38). In her essay "Towards a Black Feminist Criticism," Barbara Smith notes that while overt racism in the women's movement is highly problematic, she is even more terrified by "the realization that so many of the [white] women who will read this have not yet noticed us [black women] missing either from their reading

matter, their politics, or their lives” (1982: 158). The sheer invisibility of black women in so much of widely recognized second wave feminist organizing and the “inevitable ‘reverential silence’” that surrounded black women’s comments about racism in mixed race feminist groups resulted in the need for black feminist only spaces, but the white privilege that necessitated these groups rendered the rationale for their existence impossible for most white women to understand (Carroll, 1982: 122).

Some white feminists did not, however, see black feminists’ and other feminists of color’s needs for (sometimes) separate spaces for organizing as contradictory to their radical goals. A small minority of white feminists in the second wave, especially in the later years when the negative impacts of white women’s racism were unquestionable, viewed anti-racist organizing as central to their understanding of feminism. As Barbara Smith reflected in her 1982 piece “Racism and Women’s Studies,” “In my six years of being an avowed Black feminist, I have seen much change in how white women take responsibility for their racism” (1982: 48). Smith, who was one of the first and most vocal black second wave feminists to call attention to the negative impacts of white feminists’ racism, wrote that she had hope for the future, saying that “the formation of consciousness-raising groups to deal solely with this issue [of white skin privilege], study groups, and community meetings and workshops... [signaled] the beginning of real and equal coalitions between Third World and white women” (1982: 48). The establishment of separate spaces for white women to address issues of their own race privilege without the

fear of being seen as overtly racist represents one of the most significant triumphs of standpoint feminism for white women. Different from so-called women's only spaces or lesbian separatism, many of the groups that were created in the name of standpoint feminism successfully created spaces for white women to confront their own racism without putting unnecessary pressure on feminists of color to teach them about systems of oppression. By recognizing that racism affected both feminists of color and white feminists (though not in the same way and not equally), some white feminists were able to recognize that "racism causes us to be less human" and to form separate groups through which they could, as Ellen Pence wrote, "work towards humanizing ourselves" (1982: 47).

Another fundamental difference between black and white feminist organizing was the role of feminist or women's separatism in racially homogenous groups. From the beginning of organized black feminist movement in the second wave, most black feminists were avowedly against a truly separatist stance. Many white women, on the other hand, saw female and/or lesbian separatism as the most radical possible stance against (hetero)patriarchy. Benita Roth explains white feminists' move to separatism as beginning with their conceptualization of "leftist men as just 'men,' with access to privilege based on their gender" (2004: 69). Roth cites Vivian Estrellachild's observation that "the hip man like his straight counterpart is nothing more, nothing less, than a predator...The source of our oppression is *all men*, no exceptions for bells and beads" as an example of mainstream white feminists' understanding of sexist oppression as absolutely linked to assigned sex (2004: 69).

Separatist politics like those espoused by many white feminists were notably less popular in black feminist communities. Rather than argue for the creation of spaces entirely free of men, the Combahee River Collective wrote that in spite of having problems with sexism in the black community, black men were necessarily a significant part of black women's lives. Without glamorizing or idealizing gender relations in the black community, or stressing the primacy of racism in a grander hierarchy of oppressions, the members of the Combahee River Collective artfully stated their opposition to sexism by all men, without demonizing men as peripheral to their lives or to feminist movement. This move is especially significant in that Combahee was a lesbian organization: by recognizing the possibility of feminist men, especially in a context free of romantic desire, Combahee members articulate the significance of bonds between black men and black women, outside of sexual or romantic involvement. Though sexism and heterosexism were arguably as prevalent in black communities as they were in white ones, black women approached issues of separatism differently. Their desire to organize with black men, and their commitment to working with them to end patriarchy and sexist oppression, stemmed largely from the fact that shared experiences of racism necessitated the cooperation of black men and women.

Many black women located their rejection of women's separatism in the experiences of racist oppression that they shared with black men. Simply put, "Black feminists...faced both gender and racial oppression in American society...making their links to activist men, unlike those of white women's liberationists, inescapable"

(Roth, 2004: 75). Though black women were no less critical of patriarchal attitudes and actions in their home communities than their white counterparts, their experiences of racism bound them inextricably to black men. Black feminist groups wrote extensively about the necessity of educating sexist black men and opening their eyes to their own sexism, not because black men were any less sexist than white men, but because black women's survival as black people depended on their support. And while blackness *combined* with womanness created the realities of black women's lives, many black feminists were quick to point out that there were times when blackness alone was enough to put them in danger. As Barbara Smith wrote in 1998, "Having a 'safe space' within the lesbian community where concerned white lesbians might treat me as if I were human is all well and good, but it won't help at all when I am in my car and get pulled over by a cop who decides to crack my head open because I am black" (1998: 100). For these reasons, feminist groups like the Combahee River Collective stressed that while they, like white advocates of separatism, possessed a "great deal of criticism and loathing for what men have been socialized to be in this society...we do not have the misguided notion that it is their maleness, per se—i.e., their biological maleness—that makes them what they are" (1982: 17).

One poignant example of the work that black women were willing to do in order to educate black men about the impacts of sexism on black women's lives can be found in Angela Davis' introduction to her well-known piece, "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves." Davis dedicates the piece to George

Jackson, a black freedom fighter whose writings, at times, betray a stark misunderstanding and disrespect for black women. But in spite of Jackson's misogynistic comments, Davis writes that she "loved and respected him in every way" (James, 1998: 111). She continues, "As I came to know and love him, I saw him developing an acute sensitivity to the real problems facing black women and thus refining his ability to distinguish these from their mythical transpositions...He wanted to appeal to other black men, still similarly disoriented, to likewise correct themselves through self-criticism" (James, 1998: 111-112). Because of the functional experiences of racism that connected black women's struggle to that of black men, many black feminists like Angela Davis were able to see beyond the sexism of their co-revolutionaries, and to work with them to fight both the sexism and the racism that they saw oppressing them all. During the countless years that black men and women had been struggling together against racism, beginning on slave plantations and continuing onto the streets of the United States in the 21st century, a certain bond formed that most black feminists would not break in the interest of separatism. Though black feminists did not say that organizing with black men was easy (in fact, they wrote extensively about heterosexism and sexism in black communities), separatism from black men was not an option for black women as separatism from white men was for white women.

Because feminist separatism was generally seen as an impossibility for black feminists and other feminists of color, women in the movement began to develop innovative new models for organizing both among themselves and with the support

and cooperation of white feminists and black men. By realizing that their position in the white supremacist capitalist patriarchy of the United States was even more complex than the positions of those people directly affected by fewer systems of oppression, black women began to piece together networks through which they could ensure that all sides of their identities and their activism could be supported. Black feminists made tactical choices about when they would work primarily within the black community, primarily within feminist circles, or, at times, when they would get a much needed break and meet independently of white people and men of all races. Because few black women enjoyed the class privilege that many white feminists did, they found ways to be creative in their feminism. These feminists carved out feminist spaces not only at women's centers or in consciousness raising groups, but also at home, in church, or at work. In their essay "U.S. Latinas: Active at the Intersections of Gender, Nationality, Race, and Class," Edna Acosta-Belen and Christine E. Bose describe their alienation from white feminists at large feminist conferences. But they explain that at night, after a feminist conference in which their needs as women of color were not directly addressed, Latinas, black women, and other feminists of color "would hold [their] own conferences *within* conferences" in their hotel rooms, after the formal conference programming had long ended (2000: 207). Feminists of color from all backgrounds were able to find at least some space in which their experiences of sexist and racist oppression would be recognized, and in which they could create vital support networks with other feminists of color.

Over time, the primacy of standpoint feminism in a wide range of feminist circles developed into a large-scale emphasis on the concept of organizing one's own. Though standpoint feminism and organizing one's own often allowed black and white feminists to place an emphasis on personal experience and lived reality, both fundamentals of much of feminist thought, these practices and their inherent drawbacks rapidly became, in the words of Benita Roth, "hegemonic" (2004: 200). Though an individual focus was often useful to feminist organizations, the unquestioning value that many feminists ascribed to standpoint organizing often provided an involuntary excuse for white feminists to not examine their implication in white racism. Such an understanding was based on a misinterpretation of the initial call for identity-based organizing and organizing one's own. For example, in their collective statement, members of the Combahee River Collective did not call for separatism between black and white feminists. Rather, their demand for independence and identity-based organizing was misconstrued by many white feminists, especially those who did not understand women of color's experiences of racism in the women's movement, and these misunderstandings resulted in difficulties surrounding cross-racial and cross-class feminist organizing in the second wave. Rather than serving strictly as a means of allowing black women to organize in keeping with their specific needs, organizing one's own quickly became an unquestioned assumption in much of feminist movement (Roth: 2004, 201). The power behind organizing one's own stemmed not from the inherent legitimacy of people describing their own experiences of oppression (white women's theorizing

about women of color's experience was and is often wrongly considered more legitimate than theory written by women of color themselves), but rather from the fact that it was able to direct every aspect of political practice (Roth, 2004: 201). In this way, Benita Roth argues that rather than credibility stemming from fighting a common enemy, credibility in the women's movement stemmed from "having the proper boundary" (in this case based on racial/ethnic identification) (Roth, 2004: 202). Among radical women, organizing one's own became the only strategy for them to use. While there were certainly benefits to black women being able to organize without having to speak to white women's racism all the time, this practice often created a self-fulfilling prophecy, in which "letting Black women alone and continuing a monist focus on gender oppression made white feminist organizations uncomfortable places for feminists of color" (Roth, 2004: 196).

The differences between black and white women's experiences of sexist oppression and many white feminists' inattentiveness or disinterest in the realities of racist oppression in the United States made cross-racial feminist organizing during the second wave immensely difficult. While there are certainly some isolated examples of white feminists who fully invested themselves in anti-racist movement and efforts to end sexist oppression against all women, they were outnumbered and overshadowed by a much larger group of white feminists whose brand of feminism demonstrated an investment in white skin privilege that outweighed their desire to end sexism in all its forms. Alice Walker's statement that "in America, white women who are truly feminist—for whom racism is inherently an impossibility, as long as

some Black people can also be conceived of as women—are largely outnumbered by *average* American white women for whom racism, inasmuch as it assures white privilege, is an accepted way of life” informed most of white feminist organizing (1982: 41). Though a black feminist tradition dictated that anti-racist movement be a fundamental component of any feminist activism, white women’s investment in their own way of life, a life which was profoundly influenced by white racism and white skin privilege, colored what aspects of second wave feminist organizing were widely recognized and which have been historically remembered. As I will demonstrate in the next chapter, the legacy of white racism in second wave feminist movement and the disrespect for and disinterest in much of black women’s second wave feminist theorizing profoundly influenced the further institutionalization of feminist theory in the field of women’s studies, and created a trend in mainstream American feminist movement that would limit the scope of the movement for years to come.

CHAPTER TWO: ELITISM, INCLUSION, AND THE CREATION OF A WOMEN'S STUDIES CANON

Though it is possible to trace academic interest in womanhood and femininity back decades before second wave feminist movement, most feminist historians and social movement scholars locate the formal beginning of women's studies programs in 1970, with the creation of the women's studies program at San Diego State University (Boxer, 2000: 230). In the 1969-70 academic year, at least 17 women's studies courses had been created and taught in American colleges and universities; by December of 1970 the number had increased to at least 100. From then on, the growth of both women's studies course listings and formal women's studies majors, programs, and departments was exponential: by December 1971 there were over 600 women's studies courses that were being taught in institutions of higher education. Two years later, there were over 2,000. And the growth of women's studies course listings did not stop there. Ten years after the first women's studies courses were taught at major colleges and universities, there were at least 20,000 different course offerings available to students of the discipline. Furthermore, these new programs did not exist as mere aspects of other academic programs or departments in the social sciences and humanities. Though the formation of a freestanding women's studies infrastructure lagged behind the creation of individual courses, the rapid growth of women's studies programs was just as

impressive as the growth of course offerings. In 1973, just three years after the formation of the first women's studies program at San Diego State, there were 80 programs at colleges and universities across the country. By 1980, the number had jumped to 350. Furthermore, women's studies publications in journals and as full-length books mirrored the increase in academic programs. Over twelve academic journals specific to the field, including *Women's Studies Quarterly*, *Women's Studies News*, *Women's Studies International Quarterly*, and *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, were founded in these early years. Presses like the Feminist Press, which were dedicated specifically to publishing academic work by women's studies scholars, were also established (all statistics from Stimpson, 1986: 4-5).

This establishment of academic women's studies programs in American colleges and universities can easily be cited as one of the most significant triumphs of the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s. While the recognition of grassroots activism was crucial to feminist models of organizing, women's studies classes, programs, and departments fulfilled a necessary and important role in raising awareness about and increasing interest in American feminist movement. The involvement of the Ford Foundation, one of the most influential and widely recognized philanthropic organizations in the nation, helped draw popular attention to the young field of women's studies and to alert the public to the changing face of the American academy. Though academic standing was generally not understood to be the only way to legitimize feminist organizing, second wave feminists, many of

them white, were in no way in denial about the positive role that academic legitimacy could play in widening the reach and impact of feminist movement. Although it has long been closed off to many, the American university system has historically played a significant role in influencing the direction of social movements. But in spite of the influential nature of the academy, the establishment of academic women's studies programs was not a universally positive event for the future of feminist organizing in the United States. Rather, the incorporation of feminism into the academy pulled an arguably radical social movement in a new direction: not only would the academization of feminist studies change the face of the women's movement, but feminist activism would be influenced dramatically by the knowledge produced within the women's studies classroom. Very quickly, concerns surfaced about the impact that institutionalization was having and would continue to have on feminist movement and the field of women's studies, and by the beginning of the 1970s, some of the major tensions that would mark the field had begun to solidify.

Developing a New Field of Study

Though there were a large number of factors that initially catalyzed the movement for the establishment of academic women's studies courses and programs, women's studies scholar Catharine Stimpson has isolated the following three main goals for courses and departments: "teaching the subject of women properly; ending sex discrimination in education on all levels, from pre-kindergarten to postdoctoral study; and integrating feminist activism with feminist thought" (1986: 12). Since

second wave feminists frequently referred to feminism as a “teaching movement” [that used] an oral tradition—conversation and consciousness-raising groups—and the written world—newspapers, poems, or books—to reveal the world and women in a new light,” it logically followed that one of the major pursuits of women’s studies would be the creation of a formal body of feminist texts (Stimpson, 1986: 12). These works and the emphasis on the production of feminist literature necessarily linked grassroots feminist movement and academic women’s studies. This step offered a degree of legitimacy to the field that grassroots feminists had not traditionally enjoyed, and the decision to develop a space for what early women’s studies practitioner Florence Howe dubbed “the proper study of womankind” within the academy arguably provided a significant opportunity for feminist thought and action to expand its depth and reach (2007: 70). While academic women’s studies was not a replacement for grassroots movement, it aimed to broaden the reach of feminist thought.

Those feminist scholars responsible for creating the first women’s studies syllabi looked to a variety of fields for guidance. One such field was black studies (a field which has been and continues to be known by many names, including African American Studies, Afro-American Studies, Africana Studies, and African Diaspora Studies). In the years immediately before the creation of the San Diego State women’s studies program, black studies programs had changed the face of the academy in the United States by melding activism and intellectual pursuits arguably more than any other academic discipline in existence. As Catharine Stimpson wrote

in 1986, “the black power movement believed that a revolution by the oppressed must be preceded by a transformation of consciousness in order to succeed...Black studies, like women’s studies after it, sought, first, to reclaim the past and, second, to analyze the causes of oppression” (1986: 11). The approach taken by those scholars and students organizing for the establishment of recognized black studies departments provided a new model for academic reform. But in spite of black studies’ radical beginnings, it soon began to feel the pressures of assimilation. In order to establish a firm grounding within the American academy, and to ensure its future existence, scholars in the field made concessions to the formal academic structure. The difficulties they faced in navigating the necessary “accommodation and compromise within the system of American higher education” loosely anticipated some of the issues that women’s studies programs would soon face (Rojas, 2007: 2). The task of embedding a discipline that was borne directly out of radical student protest and weighty demands necessarily required a fundamental change to the American academy, and the direction of black studies clearly demonstrates the tensions that existed between activism and academia.

Another similarity between women’s studies and black studies programs is the extremely significant role that funding sources, specifically the Ford Foundation, have played on development of the fields. Both fields received crucial seed money from Ford: black studies beginning in 1968 and women’s studies beginning in 1972 (Rojas, 2007: 221). In spite of active dissent from the United States Congress and other influential political and philanthropic groups, Ford chose to fund the creation

of black studies programs as a “means to desegregate and integrate the student bodies, faculties, and curricula of colleges and universities in ways that would ... free [them] from ‘separate but equal’ racial educational systems” (Rooks, 2006: 1).

Differences in the Ford Foundation’s greater goals for women’s studies and black studies, however, served to shape the disciplines in different ways. Ford’s use of black studies as a means of desegregating the American academy was fundamentally different than its goals for women’s studies, which were more focused on the institutionalization of a new academic discipline. Only two years after it began funding individual scholars’ women’s studies research, Ford began to “shift its emphasis to institutional, rather than individual support. The goal was to create research centers and thereby to develop an institutional base to support feminist scholarship” (Proietto, 1999: 274). Black studies, on the other hand, saw far less funding dedicated to the integration of the field into the mainstream academy: while “the enactment of Black studies fit nicely with the dominant problem-solving paradigms [of the 1960s]...changing racial demographics [and] struggles over the direction, necessity, and viability of affirmative action programs...have severely strained the intellectual coherence, cultural significance, and institutional stability of those programs founded in the late 1960s” (Rooks, 2007: 29). Though women’s studies was able to look to black studies in its early years as an example of a socially progressive academic discipline borne out of radical activism, differences in funding sources and larger social pressures shifted the way that the programs evolved and dictated much of the direction of their progress.

Navigating Academia and Searching for Home

As with other interdisciplinary and/or overtly political academic departments, early women's studies programs struggled to establish a solid institutional identity while remaining flexible and open to possibilities for change. As participants in young and still malleable programs, faculty and staff affiliated with the first women's studies programs recognized that flexibility was crucial to the success of their courses and departments, both in terms of working towards institutional legitimacy and recognition and in terms of being able to educate their target population in a potentially liberatory way. Though program flexibility and institutional recognition do not exist in strict opposition, this tension did prove to be one of the central factors that plagued women's studies and related interdisciplinary fields from the late 1960s onwards. In order to function in a traditional academic setting, there are certain requirements that academic departments must meet. In short, there are relatively well-defined sets of guidelines to which women's studies programs were, and continue to be, held. The livelihoods of the professors in the departments, the futures of the students who choose to take classes or major in the fields, and the greater appeal of the programs all depend on at least some degree of institutional legitimacy, which is all too often at odds with the radical concepts set forth by early feminist scholars. Practical concerns such as tenor, salary, and the ability to publish always inform academics' decisions.

Due to these pressures, some women's studies scholars chose to opt out of the strictly academic life, instead founding or working at independent women's centers

or other community based hybrid academic-activist spaces in which they felt their need for applied feminist practice was better met. These centers, though sometimes affiliated with a college or university, were “more flexible than academic departments, [and could] house freelance scholars or fellowship programs, as well as regular faculty members. The centers [could] experiment with new ideas, collaborate on research, and run pilot programs that serve as models to be adopted elsewhere” (Stimpson, 1986: 26). Feminists of all racial identifications joined the movement to found independent women’s centers where community women could meet and organize around feminist goals. Many of these centers offered classes in feminist theory and other traditionally academic subjects as a means of expanding the reach of feminist theory to those outside of the academy. Furthermore, women’s centers could operate without any of the constraints that shaped the direction of academic women’s studies programs. Courses at independent women’s studies centers could be far more creative and practical than those within the academy, where the brand new field of women’s studies was under constant pressure to legitimize its existence. Unlike the strictly theoretical courses taught at many universities, women’s centers were able to offer classes in self-help and self-care. Comprising what Adrienne Rich referred to as a “university-without-walls,” women’s centers joined with a broader network of feminist organizations, including “self-help clinics, arts centers, rape crisis centers, abortion centers, [and] bookstores” (as quoted in Stimpson, 1986: 28). These women’s centers took interdisciplinary and multi-faceted approaches to practicing feminism. By joining

forces with other progressive social groups, women's centers tried to support feminists across race, class, gender identity and expression, and location.

Still other feminists and women's studies practitioners questioned the fundamental possibility of the coexistence of feminist thought and action and the traditional academy. Feminist poet Adrienne Rich worried that "the universities and the intellectual establishment intend to keep women's experience as far as possible invisible, and women's studies a barely subsidized, condescendingly tolerated ghetto" (as quoted in Boxer, 1998: 38). Not only was women's studies something that would be hidden from non-women's studies students, but its inclusion within the often inaccessible academy meant that large numbers of American women and men would not have access to the theory produced in the field. Many of these feminists understood intellectual inquiry into the location of women in society as inextricably tied to grassroots feminist movement and viewed an entrance into the academy as a step that would sever all ties between the movements. Some radical feminists argued that the "system and structure" of the American university could never fit with their movement's goals. Others wondered if a women's studies program "could...work authentically—i.e., preserve the goals of the women's studies movement or would it be co-opted into the establishment, and establishment that had once excluded women?" (Stimpson, 1986: 28).

For those feminists who chose to enter the academy, the obvious interest in academic women's studies programs lent their discipline an impressive degree of influence in its early years. Even in spite of the structural opposition to women's

studies, large numbers of people, professors and students alike, flocked to the field. Because feminist theorists had to draw together a composite literature from history, literature, social movement studies, and some of the social sciences, these new courses began to dramatically influence a variety of academic fields, including psychology, anthropology, education, political science, and law (Stimpson, 1986: 5). Women's studies professors began to establish their own pedagogies, and more often than not they tried to mesh their experiences of feminist movement with their knowledge of formal academic structures. Though the task faced by feminist scholars was daunting, they managed to create multiple formats for teaching women's studies. A shared "conviction that women's studies was an 'educational strategy' that might bring about a 'breakthrough in consciousness and knowledge' that could transform individuals, institutions, relationships, and societies" served as inspiration for women's studies pioneers like Marilyn Jacoby Boxer and Catharine Stimpson (Boxer, 1998: 26). Women in the academy began organizing for more institutional recognition and respect. Professors in a wide range of disciplines began to form feminist organizations (including the glibly named "Up from the Genitals: Sexism in the Historical Profession") dedicated to the support of women in the fields (Boxer, 1998: 26). These organizations oftentimes emphasized the integration of women's studies methods and objectives in other fields of inquiry (Stimpson, 1986: 5). Moved to action by their experiences in the classroom, some students began to form feminist organizations on campuses that specifically addressed the role of female students in the academy. The momentum that propelled women's studies

forward, even in spite of the structural opposition to the field, demonstrated to feminist academics that gender-based social science was a realm of great interest to students in the American academy.

But in spite of all of the momentum behind young women's studies programs, opposition to the growing field proved to be vocal and widespread. Many critics of new women's studies programs opposed them not because of an overt dismissal of feminist movement, but rather because of a concern for the direction in which the American academy was moving. Since women's studies in American colleges and universities can be understood "as one culmination of the protest movements of the 1950s and 1960s—civil rights, the New Left, student activism more generally, black power, and, of course, the women's movement," it is not difficult to trace opposition to the field to a general wariness about radical or progressive social change (Stimpson, 1986: 10). Negative reactions to the growing institutional recognition of women's studies programs and even the existence of isolated women's studies courses were not necessarily a direct response to feminist movement; rather, they were often part of a more general trend in which conservative forces questioned the entrance of the liberal political ideals of the sixties and seventies into the formal academy. In a series of efforts to preserve the existing model of the academy in the United States—a system which was originally "driven by the need to produce educated young [white] men for the (mostly Protestant) ministry"—these more conservative academics and professionals lashed out at any discipline which would shift the pedagogical or formal aims of the American academy (Poston, 2007: 17).

Though the university remained a largely conservative social institution, some women's studies detractors viewed the field's emergence as a sign that "for the first time in American history, colleges and universities were transformed...into institutions of mass education [that were] dedicated to providing access and social justice" (Stimpson, 1986: 16). For those conservative elements that opposed the changes taking place in American society and in the academy, young women's studies programs proved an easy target.

For many feminist scholars, creating a free standing field of women's studies, complete with institutional legitimacy and support, was a crucial step in ensuring that their feminist labor would continue to inform American life. By embedding their theory within the formal academy, these pro-institutionalization feminists hoped that the feminism of the 1970s, unlike some other social movements before it, would remain vibrant and active for years to come. The calls for distinct departments (rather than for women's studies as a general lens within academic inquiry) were "practical as well as theoretical," and were often based on the rationalization that "funding agencies understand 'department'—and the decision-making power it confers" (Boxer, 1998: 38). Feminist academics had witnessed the widespread popular opposition to second wave feminist movement and were beginning to see similar reticence in the academy (Stimpson, 1986: 9). The momentum behind feminist movement and the clear interest in women's studies programming in the academy had brought the shifting tides of American culture into the ivory tower, and many conservative academics were not pleased. Pedagogical

shifts propelled by the connections between women's studies and feminist activism continued the movement begun by those who agitated for black studies to break down the strict divisions between the academic and non-academic realm (Rojas, 2007: 1). Not only was feminist movement changing the face of American society as a whole, but it was also beginning to change the American university. Conservative forces, interested in preserving the status quo, made sure that "women's studies scholars were not welcomed [into the academy] in the early years. Many were denied tenure, and their work was valued and labeled polemical and faddist" (Guy-Sheftall, 1995: viii). The reality of sexism in the United States meant that many "students and faculty, long accustomed to the cultural devaluation of women, considered women and gender unworthy of inquiry" (Stimpson, 1986: 48). Some members of the academy found this "new scholarship about women [to be] 'overwhelming, threatening, too far out'... Still others called women's studies too ideological or political, a subverter of academic standards, intellectual merit, and objectivity" (Stimpson, 1986: 48). Well aware of both the libratory potential of women's studies in the academy and of the strength of opposition to it, many feminist academics, such as former San Diego State Women's Studies chair Marilyn Jacoby Boxer, devoted themselves fully to establishing free standing women's studies programs and departments in hopes that the legacy of the feminist movement of the early 1970s would have the institutional support to carry on. As women's studies scholars encountered negative responses to the field, they developed plans to ensure its continued existence. Those women's studies

practitioners who worked to solidify the field's existence did not, however, always agree on the best course of action. Some took a different approach to the further institutionalization of women's studies, choosing to focus not on the creation of independent departments but rather on the inclusion of feminist principles and inquiry in academic programs and departments throughout the academy. In the words of Gerda Lerner, the "all encompassing challenge" faced by women's studies "cannot be approached by a narrow disciplinary focus" (Boxer, 1998: 37). The long tradition of American feminists working with members of other progressive social movements meant that many feminists in the academy did not expect women's studies to exist independently from other programs such as peace studies, black studies, or other area studies programs. In an effort to establish the core values of feminist theory in all aspects of the academy, these feminist scholars saw widespread inclusion of feminist texts in various disciplines as the best means to counter experiences of "marginality, which [would mean]—and in some institutional settings still means—powerlessness" (Stanton and Stewart, 1998: 2). These feminists saw the incorporation of feminist praxis into all disciplines as the only way that all students would be exposed to feminist studies. As Florence Howe wrote in 1982, it is only through incorporating women's studies into all areas of academic inquiry that feminist scholars would reach their ultimate goal "of transforming the established male-biased curriculum" (as quoted in Guy-Sheftall, 1995: 7).

Questions regarding women's studies' location in the academy and the most effective way to engage students in feminist inquiry divided early women's studies professors. While all women's studies practitioners worked to gain recognition of gender as a true site of academic and intellectual inquiry, they clashed over the manner in which its study should be incorporated into college and university curricula. Disagreements about the primacy of gender were central: should women's studies focus only on gender, sexism, and femininity? Or should these factors be included in a field dedicated to the broader study of women's experiences? Some feminists argued that while it was important to recognize difference between women, the study of gender should be the common thread running through women's studies programming. Other more radical feminists, however, often argued that women's studies would only be truly feminist if it began to "refuse primacy to either race, class, gender, or ethnicity, demanding instead a recognition of their matrix-like interaction" (Guy-Sheftall, 1995: 5). These feminists wrote that sexism could only be understood through a deeper analysis of the ways in which it impacted the lives of different types of women, and that any field dedicated to the study of women must simultaneously be consciously anti-racist and anti-classist. Because women's experiences of oppression in the academy or in the United States as a whole were not a result of gender alone, feminists like Johnella Butler stressed the necessity of other factors in gender studies and the field's cooperation with other anti-oppressive intellectual endeavors. Other more centrist feminists, worried that women's studies would never be recognized in the formal academy, saw a

singular (and more academically traditional) emphasis on gender the only way to gain respect.

Women's Studies and the Search for Academic Legitimacy

Incorporating women's studies into the academic mainstream required the creation of a relatively static definition of the discipline. As is evidenced through the process of narrowing women's studies to focus almost entirely on gender at the expense of other areas of inquiry, such as race and class, much of this over-specificity and inattention to relating systems of oppression stemmed from the already tenuous location of the field within the formal academy. Unfortunately, this solidification required a degree of departure from early feminist principles of flexibility and location-specific response to sexist oppression.

Centrist trends in women's studies became increasingly apparent as programs and departments began to formulate and offer required courses in feminist theory and/or feminist history. These courses worked to establish a set of universal expectations for the new field by creating required courses for majors, minors, and concentrations in women's studies. By isolating what certain professors thought to be the central texts of American feminist movement, women's studies practitioners and university administrators believed that they could help legitimize the field and gain it more respect with a broader audience. But as one might expect, these new courses did not reflect the entire scope of feminist activism. Rather, they isolated a small number of supposedly seminal texts. Not surprisingly, many of the texts

deemed worthy of inclusion in feminist theory courses were those that fit the general profile of inaccessible academic writing and were, as Beverly Guy-Sheftall reflected in 1995, “limited for the most part to the writings of white women” that adhered to strict academic form (1995: 8). The study of theory was one of the top priorities for many women’s studies programs because the creation of a cohesive body of feminist theory was thought to “have a...permanent impact on the curriculum” and on the institutionalization of the discipline (Guy-Sheftall, 1995: 8). Though it is unlikely that these syllabi emerged as a conscious manifestation of the racism of white professors (in fact, the majority of women’s studies professors believed in, if not practiced, anti-racist values), the foundational texts of courses in feminist theory and women’s history perpetuated the racial, political, and social hierarchies long established in the American academy.

As core women’s studies courses became more established, radical feminist theorists, including many well-known black feminists and other feminists of color, began to express concern about the increasing elitism of women’s studies and other identity-based academic programs. While the affirmation of the theoretical as a liberatory project for many marginalized group members remained central to black feminist thought, black feminist theorists began to notice a disturbing trend in which those feminists who had entered the academy began to use inaccessible theory as a means of legitimization in their professional lives. Confronted by countless pressures from university administrators, students, and other forces, feminists began to allow theory to become, in the words of Barbara Christian, a

“commodity” (Henderson, 2007: 40). Black feminist theorists, well aware of the pressures that black women faced in the tenuous fields of black studies and women’s studies, tried not to demonize their peers for their failure to embrace libratory pedagogy and accessible theory while simultaneously recognizing that academic elitism and a commodification of the intellectual were fundamentally at odds with feminist and anti-racist visions. In large part due to their lack of tenure, their relatively low wages, and their job insecurity in academic settings, many professors teaching in new disciplines allowed aims of tenure and stability to supersede their genuine commitment to libratory pedagogy. In *Talking Back*, bell hooks writes:

“Feminist theory is rapidly becoming another sphere of academic elitism, wherein work that is linguistically convoluted, which draws on other such works, is deemed more intellectually sophisticated, in fact is deemed more theoretical (since the stereotype of theory is that it is synonymous with that which is difficult to comprehend, linguistically convoluted) than work which is more accessible. *Each time this happens, the radical, subversive potential of feminist scholarship and feminist theory in particular is undermined*” (emphasis mine) (1989: 36).

Even as countless feminists drew attention to the counterrevolutionary forces that demanded these forms of academic inaccessibility, the pressures of the American academy pulled many women’s studies professors away from their roots in grassroots feminist movement and towards academic elitism.

Required courses in feminist were only one of the manifestations of the growing elitism and racial tensions that accompanied women’s studies’ search for intellectual and academic legitimacy. Though women’s studies scholars’

perspectives on the state of the field did not break down neatly along racial lines, black women's and other women of color's experiences of racism both within the academy and feminist movement as a whole influenced their desire (or lack thereof) to enter into the ivory tower. Questions about the basic value of an institution as sexist, racist, and elitist as the American academy in the 1970s were central to many black feminists' ideas about women's studies, whereas many white feminists' questions centered on the relative worth of shifting women's studies curricula, not with whether or not feminist movement should be institutionalized at all. Many women's studies practitioners feared that academic institutions would only "work to reinforce and perpetuate the status quo" of overt racism and or well-intentioned, liberal rhetoric of color-blindness (hooks, 1989: 51). Black feminist theorist bell hooks cautioned black professors that "rather than become accomplices in the perpetuation of racist domination, [those professors] who value academic freedom must continually work to establish spheres of learning in institutions where intellectual practice is not informed by white supremacy" (1989: 65). Theorists like hooks wrote of their experiences of racism and white supremacy in academia as a way of reminding black and radically anti-racist scholars that opposition to white supremacy in a site like the American academy was (and remains) a full time job. Though many more moderate advocates of women's studies could envision their goals being fully incorporated into the academy, many feminists of color saw the need for a freestanding, anti-racist, feminist, and generally radical programs of study as far more important than the institutionalization of women's studies into

the existing academic framework. As bell hooks wrote, if radical feminists could not incorporate their work into the academy in a liberatory way, they would “betray the radical traditions that enabled us to enter these institutions and act in a manner that will uphold and support our exclusion in the future” (1989: 65). She continues, stressing that “it is our collective responsibility both to ourselves as black people and to the academic communities in which we participate and to which we belong, to assume a primary role in establishing and maintaining academic and social spaces wherein the principles of education as the practice of freedom are promoted” (1989: 65).

Race, Mainstreaming, and the Future of a Field

In the midst of women’s studies’ early success and the simultaneous increase in vocal opposition to the establishment of the field, some academic feminists took their push for institutional recognition one step further and began to advocate for what came to be known as the ‘mainstreaming’ of women’s studies. In her 1986 report to the Ford Foundation, one of the largest monetary supporters of fledgling women’s studies programs, Catharine Stimpson stressed the need for mainstreaming women’s studies, a discipline that she referred to as “an intellectual and social movement that has changed what people think and teach about women” (1986: 1). Stimpson described the mainstreaming process as “the effort to integrate the subject of women and the substance of women’s studies into the curriculum,” an action which would result in “the full inclusion of women’s studies materials in all research, scholarship, and teaching” in the American academy (1986: 51). From the

beginning, mainstreaming proved to be a contentious issue. After witnessing the dramatic success and rapid proliferation of early women's studies programs, many feminist scholars felt that for women's studies to achieve its full potential, its teachings must be incorporated into more established academic disciplines, ranging from the humanities to the hard sciences. Others, who questioned whether the American academy would truly support such a progressive field, saw mainstreaming as the only way to ensure that women's studies courses would remain available to a wide range of students. Still others stressed that women's studies could not exist under the same standards and expectations that more traditional fields did, saying that if women's studies programs were mainstreamed into historically sexist, conservative institutions, the field would lose any liberatory potential that it initially possessed.

Disillusionment with the academy and a deep understanding of its role in perpetuating inequities in American society led these feminists to see mainstreaming initiatives as explicitly counterrevolutionary. As black feminist Johnella Butler wrote, "mainstreaming will only allow for the continuation of the present reality [in education]... and will reassert its same bigoted, biased norms to silence all the voices that were beginning to form questions" (1984: 137). She questioned the value of "mainstreaming into the existing curriculum," an action which would only support "the proliferation of the sickness of the dream deferred" (1984: 137) She continued, "The mainstream is very sick, and rightfully near death. We must be about ultimately replacing it through transformation" (1984: 135). Like

many before them, feminists such as Butler questioned the possibility for the coexistence of the sexist, racist, and generally conservative academy and fields that grew out of radical and transformative social movements.

In spite of vocal opposition, the mainstreaming project slowly became a reality, and as it did, disturbing trends began to emerge. Though some feminists held on to the hope that women's studies could remain radical within the academy, most were beginning to recognize that the incorporation of the discipline into traditionally academic locations would necessarily shape the goals and realities of women's studies courses and programs. Though many women's studies practitioners worked hard to maintain their ties to grassroots feminist movement, the generally conservative influence of the academy drew many women's studies programs away from their initial visions. Questions of pedagogy, hierarchy, and the role of activism in women's studies programs began to plague the field as more conservative forces stressed the need to evaluate women's studies programs in the same way as other departments (Stimpson, 1986: 28). Academic institutions found that they had no precedent for models of non-hierarchical evaluation, and often could not compare the type of work done in a progressive women's studies classroom, with its emphasis on praxis and participation, to that conducted in other academic spaces. Ideological tensions grew as it became apparent that women's studies courses would not, in fact, fit clearly into the existing framework of the academy. Soon after women's studies courses were incorporated into academic institutions, feminist scholars began to see a change in the field and in those who taught women's studies

courses. As bell hooks lamented in 2000, "The class-based academization of American feminism created the context for its deradicalization and for the takeover of gender studies by opportunistic women and men who were simply not interested in radically changing society" (2000: 105).

Unsurprisingly, women's studies practitioners who advocated a relatively centrist, "traditional" approach to the field found a home in the American academy far more easily than radical feminists. Those who were comfortable with women's studies' loose mirroring of existing disciplinary structures were generally those who felt most comfortable with the basic framework of the academy. The most palatable iteration of women's studies, and thus the one that entered the academy in women's studies' early years, was that which focused primarily on a "color, class, and nation specific" woman: one who was white, middle- or upper-class, and from the so-called First World (Stanton and Stewart, 1998: 5). Those feminists who were comfortable with the academy and with that concept of woman (and of women's studies) that was acceptable in these early years enjoyed much greater acceptance in the young field. By agreeing to support much of existing university structure, such as a staunch hierarchy that located professors over students, these professors gained the support of other academics, but only through their loss of contact with grassroots feminist values of anti-authoritarianism, collectivism, and a rejection of hierarchy (Stimpson, 1986: 29). These scholars made countless concessions to the formal structure of the academy, and were often required to use their new standing to silence more radical colleagues. Though these newly accepted professors might have silently supported

their more progressive colleagues, their newfound status required participation in a series of unspoken traditions of silencing.

In her book *Talking Back*, progressive feminist theorist bell hooks reflects on how mainstream colleagues have reacted negatively to her radically accessible pedagogy. Though hooks writes the way she does not because of an inability to write in a characteristically inaccessible “academic” fashion, but because she thinks that “combining personal with critical analysis and theoretical perspectives can engage listeners who might otherwise feel estranged, alienated,” many colleagues have questioned her style (1989: 77). In spite of hooks’ motivations, she writes that her style of prose is “often considered by academics and/or intellectuals (irrespective of their political inclinations) to be a sign of intellectual weakness or even anti-intellectualism” (1989: 77). Though it is important to recognize that all women’s studies scholars are already trained in a disciplinary model, and are “thus never ‘outside of,’ the disciplines” or the authority associated with academia, all scholars have the choice to uphold or attempt to dismantle the elitism of the traditional academy (Hesse-Biber, 2002: 58). Though often understandable, the concessions of professors of women’s studies to elitist academic traditions often allowed the field to “become a place where revolutionary feminist thought and feminist activism are submerged or made secondary to the goals of academic careerism” (hooks, 1989: 51).

hooks’ experiences of opposition within the academy point to a much broader phenomenon: the systematic privileging of certain feminist knowledges over others.

Because of systemic racism in the United States and the conservative realities of the American academy, radical black women's voices were significantly less acceptable than those of more moderate white theorists. Black feminist theorists' emphasis on accessibility in no way conflicted with their commitment to the production of a unique black feminist theory. Rather, their commitment both to theory and accessibility meant that black feminist theory, as well as some radical white feminist theory, approached the theoretical on new terms. In her influential essay "Race for Theory," Black feminist literary critic Barbara Christian writes, "when Theory is not rooted in practice, it becomes prescriptive, exclusive, elitist" (Henderson, 2007: 46). She writes that black folks have always been engaged in the production of theoretical knowledge, and that the connections of their theory to their daily experiences are precisely what make their theories useful. By theorizing, black people and members of other oppressed or marginalized groups have been able "to survive with such spiritedness the assault on our bodies, social institutions, countries, our very humanity" (Christian, 2007: 41). Though many debates that have centered on the inaccessibility of the theoretical have emerged with an anti-theoretical, anti-intellectual bias, theorists like hooks and Christian artfully recognize the value of all types of theory. Rather than demonizing so-called 'high theory' as fundamentally elitist, many black feminist theorists chose instead to affirm the production of knowledge both within and outside of the academy, while stressing the need for a more accessible feminist theory with the potential for more widespread social impact.

Misunderstandings of black feminist thought and of the role of theory in black women's studies are responsible for much of the marginalization of black women's voices in the women's studies classroom. Because black feminists have long focused on the necessity of an accessible theory, and because they have stressed that theory need not be located in the academy, arguing instead that all black women have theorized as a means of survival, a large number of white feminists misinterpret this as an anti-theoretical, pro-experiential stance. Barbara Christian was one of the first theorists to gain widespread attention for the claim that "people of color have always theorized—but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic" (Christian, 2007: 41). Unfortunately, Christian's thesis is frequently misunderstood and is misused as evidence that black women's writing is significant only when it is experiential, that fiction and autobiography are acceptable venues for black women's self-expression, but that traditionally academic writing is not. bell hooks expresses qualms with Christian's understanding of the forms that black women's theorizing has taken, and writes that Christian's essay has unfortunately contributed to the phenomenon that in many women's studies classes, the issue of not reading sufficient work by black authors is addressed by the inclusion of "work that is taken to represent 'real life' experience or fictional portrayals of concrete reality" written by black women next to traditionally theoretical texts written by white women (hooks, 1989: 37). hooks writes that "such attempts reinforce racism and elitism by identifying writings by working-class women and women of color as 'experiential' while the writing of white women represents 'theory'" (1989: 37).

Though this trend in women's studies classrooms is generally not a result of conscious racism or elitism on the part of white women's studies professors, their misunderstanding of black feminists' theoretical models counters everything set forth by black women's studies scholars and represents a gross misrepresentation of the role of black feminisms in the academy.

Because of many white feminists' inability to locate feminist movement in sites outside of the white community, black women's involvement in the women's movement was often marginalized within white discourse generally and the women's studies classroom specifically. Largely in response to some white feminists' assertion that black women dismissed feminism as a white movement, but also because of black women's long history of feminist activism, many black feminists called for universal involvement of black women in feminist movement. They did not ask that black women join large-scale, predominantly white feminist groups. Rather, black feminists' location of feminist movement in a variety of sites and in a wide range of forms meant that the call for black women to identify as feminists (or womanists, black feminists, or other pro-women identifications) and to work towards feminist aims grew out of an understanding that black feminist movement would necessarily take a diverse range of forms. Within this conception of black feminism as an ever changing and diverse movement, black feminists were able to call for a wide-ranging movement and to stress the significant role of feminist movement in the lives of all black women. Without seeming condescending or doctrinaire, black womanist writer Alice Walker appealed to black women's

feminist sensibilities, writing, “to the extent that Black women dissociate themselves from the women’s movement, they abandon their responsibilities to women throughout the world. This is a serious abdication from and misuse of radical Black herstorical tradition” (1982: 42). She continues by evoking the names of radical Black women throughout history: “Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Well, and Fannie Lou Hamer would not have liked [black women’s apathy]. Nor do I” (Walker, 1982: 42). By stressing the obligation of all women, specifically black women, to espouse feminist ideals and to work towards gender equality, black feminists like Walker furthered an understanding of feminist organizing as the only logical response to sexist oppression. As Toni Cade Bambara wrote, black women should embrace the women’s movement for three reasons: “One, we are at war. Two, the natural response to oppression, ignorance, evil and mystification is wide-awake resistance. Three, the natural response to stress and crisis is not breakdown and capitulation, but transformation and renewal” (as quoted in Templeton, 2004: 259).

The controversy surrounding mainstreaming women’s studies programs played a central role in the intensification of divisions between black and white feminists in the later years of the second wave. Needless to say, people’s stances on mainstreaming did not break down cleanly along racial lines. However, there does seem to be a distinct correlation between women’s racial and/or ethnic identification and their experiences within feminist movement. Consequently, racial identification was bound to play a significant role in women’s experiences within

the academic outgrowth of this social movement. White women did not necessarily support the mainstreaming project because they were white; rather, they supported it because the mainstreaming of women's studies would provide further institutionalization for women's studies *as it existed*. Those feminists who saw academic feminist thought as inherently unrepresentative of their experiences and concerns were often those who questioned the necessity, worth, and practicality of the mainstreaming project. Though the field was still new when these disagreements first surfaced, the academic study of feminism had already inherited many of the tensions that existed in non-academic feminist organizing. The friction between upper- or middle-class white feminists and working-class feminists, black feminists, and other further marginalized members of the women's movement in the second wave had carried over into the academic discipline and those feminists who had been (relatively) privileged in feminist organizing had maintained their (relative) privileges within the academy. Many of the same leftist connections that gave white feminists the proverbial leg up in their initial days of second wave feminist organizing, connections that granted them access to class privilege and to a well-established radical infrastructure on the left, played a huge role in the respect that women's studies practitioners would receive in academic settings (Roth, 2004: 59). It follows, then, that the women who had little or no access to markers of academic legitimacy would be the first to speak to the problems that may have arisen during a mainstreaming project. It was, in short, these feminists that recognized so-called "traditional" academic disciplines as "racist, genocidal [and]

acquisitive” and questioned the decision to incorporate women’s studies into an academic tradition that Johnella Butler called an “insult to human potential” (Butler, 1984: 135).

Much like the well-intentioned yet ineffective and insensitive overtures that white feminists made to black women in the early days of second wave feminist activism, the initial efforts made by women’s studies departments to represent and include the voices of feminists of color were superficial and included no concrete plans for structural change. Rather, women’s studies programs subscribed to what has come to be known as an “add-and-stir” model of inclusion, in which a small number of marginalized voices were introduced in response to progressive intellectuals’ “insisting that the experiences, roles, and contributions of African-American, Latina, and American Indian women become part of its curriculum” (Guy-Sheftall, 1995: vi). Unfortunately, the changes in women’s studies programs did not truly address the concerns set forth by radical feminists and feminists of color. In spite of some feminists’ “insistence on recognizing differences among women and of the intersections of race, sex, and class, [many programs clung to] hierarchical structures within women’s studies and feminist scholarship (bell hooks as quoted in Guy-Sheftall, 1995: 9). Instead, hooks wrote, “[m]ost programs continue to focus central attention of white women, as though they represent all women, subordinating discussions of black women and other nonwhite groups” (as quoted in Guy-Sheftall, 1995: 9). In hooks’ analysis, token inclusion of the perspectives of feminists of color in women’s studies classes was in a sense more problematic than

their total absence. Superficial inclusion of marginalized voices in courses focusing on feminist movements allowed white feminists to assuage their guilt and to continue to conceive of their programs as radical. As Barbara Christian writes, "...as a way of clearing themselves [white feminists] do acknowledge that women of color, for example, do exist, then go on to do what they were going to do anyway, which is to invent a theory that has little relevance for us" (2007: 47). Add-and-stir models of inclusion created an illusion of diversity within women's studies programs that was all too often untrue. White feminists had, yet again, allowed guilt and good intentions to get in the way of a true feminist politics that embraced difference and diversity.

Even established women's studies programs have struggled with the true inclusion of marginalized voices within their curricula. Though programs and departments have come a long way from the early popularity of the add-and-stir model, women of color have more recently written about the often problematic use of black feminist theory and other writing by marginalized feminists in women's studies classrooms. Many of these issues center on the question of what constitutes theoretical knowledge and on misunderstandings of the significance of theory to black feminist thought. These issues manifest in several ways, including the use of black feminist theory as part of a distinct "unit" (or sometimes a single day) in the class that is dedicated to theory produced by women of color. Other well-meaning but uninformed professors will include works by black feminists and other women of color, but often, the overwhelming majority of these works are fictional or

autobiographical. The structure of mainstream second wave feminist organizing and of the American academy worked together to ensure that black women's voices would not be fully incorporated into even the supposedly radical field of women's studies. Institutional pressures on the field and a general wariness about women's studies as a legitimate field of study further marginalized black women's voices and theories from the women's studies classroom, and limited the potential of the field to achieve its liberatory aims.

CHAPTER THREE: CRITIQUING WOMEN'S STUDIES FROM WITHIN

Feminist critics of established women's studies programs faced the difficult task of criticizing the racism and elitism of their curricula while simultaneously acknowledging that women's studies as a discipline was often not considered academically rigorous or even legitimate. Professors and students of women's studies were highly aware of the institutional obstacles that programs still faced: lack of funding, lack of control in hiring practices, and disrespect from high-level administrators, to name just a few. But institutional biases against the potentially transformative field of women's studies did not make up for the racism and ignorance of so many of the people involved in programs and departments. Ignorance of queer issues, class issues, matters of race, and other complicating factors served to weaken programs' theoretical and practical strength. At the same time, however, critics were generally aware that they were attacking programs that were already treading on thin ice. In this way, feminist critics of women's studies programs had to work to simultaneously affirm the necessity of the discipline while challenging programs and departments to focus on a wider array of issues than the concerns of an elite and relatively privileged few.

The Current State of Women's Studies in the United States

In the years after the relative success of the mainstreaming of academic women's studies programs, academic feminist studies programs and departments faced the

difficult task of reconciling their activist roots with their newfound position within the American academy. Tensions between the need to present at least a semi-unified front and the historic significance of internal critique and open dialogue to feminist movement pulled women's studies programs in profoundly different directions. Though academic feminists and their students benefitted from the mainstreaming project in that they received increased institutional legitimacy, the foundational principles of feminist praxis required that dissent and disagreement be welcomed within these young women's studies programs and departments. The tensions that arose between academic and strictly activist identified feminists, as well as that that surfaced within those communities of feminists that were working to establish a home in the American academy, have solidly embedded themselves within the discourse of women's studies programs, and have served to inform the reality of women's studies programs across the country and around the world.

As was demonstrated in the preceding chapter, women's studies programs have historically been and often continue to be relatively low priorities for many colleges and universities in the United States. Even after the early interest in women's studies and the relative success of the so-called mainstreaming project, women's studies programs are still relegated to the margins of the formal academy, and students and scholars of the field are frequently thought to be participating in a less rigorous intellectual pursuit than those academics working in other areas. There are unfortunate similarities between the programs that Catharine Stimpson and others described in the 1970s and 1980s and those that we see now: just as early

women's studies programs' circumstances were tenuous at best, current academics in the field face similar fears. The problems that women's studies programs encountered in the early years have persisted, and even now "when funding is cut, the budgets of women's studies centers are often among the first to be reduced. Even when universities are financially secure, their support for women's research centers can be grudging and sparse" (Stimpson, 1986: 25). Though women's studies has gained a substantial foothold in American intellectual life, these gains have been largely without the support of established academic voices. The changes that feminist theory and practice have made to American college and university system have often been dismissed: as Beverly Guy-Sheftall pointed out in 1995, even though women's studies has significantly changed the face of the academy, it "has not been credited sufficiently for its contributions to higher education" (1995: 4). Funding disparities, a lack of departmental autonomy, and a more general attitude of disrespect towards women's studies in the academy today demonstrates that in spite of the field's successes and strides towards recognition and institutional legitimacy, the field is not treated with the same respect as more "established" (and less progressive) areas of inquiry. Just as its beginnings as a largely white, largely middle class field have colored the realities of women's studies since the field's inception, the discipline's emergence from a social movement has meant that, even in spite of some academics' best efforts, women's studies will always be inextricably linked to grassroots feminist movement.

In spite of women's studies' rapid growth, the field still contends with structural roadblocks that have resulted both from a sexist disinterest in women's issues in the academy and from some women's studies programs' radical challenges to 'traditional' (or hierarchical) pedagogy. Almost 40 years after the creation of the women's studies program at San Diego State, women's studies departments' position in the academy remains tenuous. In a 2007 report to the National Center for Research on Women (NCRW), the National Opinion Research Center (NORC), based out of the University of Chicago, found that "faculty who hold full appointments in other departments and are recognized as 'affiliates' or 'associates' in women's studies...constitute the largest faculty group" in the field (NORC, 2007: 21). In fact, almost 80% of professors of women's studies hold full appointments in other departments. With the vast majority of women's studies professors also working in other departments, the intellectual and practical resources of the field are spread thin. Furthermore, only 44% of women's studies programs in American colleges and universities offer a freestanding undergraduate major (NORC, 2007: 11). Though there remains a clear demand for courses focusing on issues of sex and gender, the majority of American women's studies programs do not have the resources or institutional support to offer a full major to their students. By limiting the freedom of women's studies departments to have staffs of full women's studies appointments and, more often than not, by denying students the ability to receive an undergraduate degree in women's studies, colleges and universities have institutionalized women's studies' location on the periphery.

Internal Critique, Challenges from Within, and the Radical Potential of Women's Studies

Even in spite of women's studies' less than favorable position in the American academy, internal critique of women's studies programs and departments has remained central to feminist visions of women's studies pedagogy. Beginning in the early years of the second wave, grassroots feminists consistently stressed the importance of establishing non-hierarchical feminist organizations in which all members could share their voices. In order to maintain this possibility, these early second wave feminists wrote of the need for constant reevaluation of their organizations' strengths and weaknesses. Though it has been challenging for women's studies to remain true to these initial visions, many feminist scholars working both within and outside of the academy have continued to stress the need to adhere to self-reflexive forms of analysis. Contemporary feminist theorist bell hooks has written extensively about the necessity of internal critique, even when it makes others uncomfortable. She writes of the frustration that often accompanied her attempts at critique and the ways in which people reacted to them, remembering times in which her challenges to women's studies have served to "anger a listener and lead to assertive and sometimes hostile verbal confrontation" (2000: 66). But in spite of their difficulty, hooks stresses that even those encounters that feel "uncomfortable, negative, and unproductive" at the time are quite often the very ones that later result in "greater clarity and growth on [her] part and on the part of the listener" (2000: 66). hooks urges relatively privileged women's studies

professors and students to see dissent as a space to grow, and to not allow themselves to become complacent with women's studies' location in the academy. Without discomfort, she writes, "we may never experience any revolutionary change, any transformation, individually or collectively" (2000: 66-67). In order for women's studies to remain true to its feminist values it, in the words of Michelle Rowley, "must not, indeed cannot, come to rest and, as such, self-critique remains critical...to the project of doing justice" (2007: 153).

Though feminist scholarship holds that dissent and disagreement are crucial to women's studies programs, the institutional antagonism that women's studies programs have faced has played a significant role in women's studies' programs de-emphasis on internal critique. Because of this trend, it is often those feminists who feel they have no other option but to critique who fully embody feminist values of reflexivity and critical analysis. Feminists of color, including bell hooks, M. Jacqui Alexander, and Cherríe Moraga, among many, many others, are far more likely to critically engage women's studies programs and demand accountability for their omissions than their white feminist counterparts. Their personal investment in representation has meant that these feminists embody true feminist praxis, and are willing, like hooks, to confront others regarding their (mis)representations of feminist theory and women's movement generally.

The tension between continued institutional antagonism towards women's studies programs and the need for feminist internal critique has played a major role in the direction that contemporary women's studies programs have taken. Because of the

centrality of critique and change to grassroots feminist movement and to the academic discipline, professors of women's studies continue to push programs and departments to change and grow. Many of the most committed women's studies scholars, those who have dedicated their entire lives to the field, are often the most vocal proponents of changing the field for the better. Feminists of color, queer feminist, working class feminists, and others whose identities would have once rendered (and all too often, continue to render) them outsiders to much of mainstream feminist movement, including established women's studies programs, are the primary advocates for these contemporary shifts, and they have pushed their departments and programs to stay malleable. A number of these feminists have traced their demand for accountability back to early second wave feminists. In her essay detailing her experiences with second wave feminism, Rosalyn Baxandall demonstrates the connections between consciousness raising (CR) models of feminist movement and contemporary challenges to women's studies curricula. She locates CR as tied to a large-scale movement to "'tell it like it is,' and 'speak truth to power,'" much like contemporary feminist do to women's studies programs (2007: 414). By understanding CR groups as part of a legacy of "women 'speaking bitterness to recall pain' in order to gain collective strength to change their lives" and not simply as self-congratulatory support groups for white women, Baxandall and others have complicated the history of CR and other second wave forms of feminist praxis in order to link these methods to methods used by contemporary feminists in academia and in broader social movements (Baxandall, 2007: 414).

Those feminist theorists who have challenged a linear understanding of U.S. feminist movement since the 1960s have provided another example of how internal critique can entirely reframe feminist history. These scholars have stressed the ways in which organizationally distinct feminist groups have influenced each other in complex and overlapping ways, and have challenged the existence of a single form of feminism at any given time. Rather, they stress that different communities of women have found unique forms of feminist organizing more helpful to their specific circumstances, and that the significance of feminist theory stems not from its production, but from its application. In her analysis of the emergence of multiple feminist movements in the second wave, historian Benita Roth stresses woman of color centered feminist movements did not emerge as a simple response to the racism of much of white feminist organizing. Her analysis provides a more nuanced understanding of the second wave as it simultaneously challenges a linear model of the evolution of feminist movement. This strategy allows Roth to give credit where credit is due. Furthermore, her analysis of the simultaneous emergence of black, white, and Chicana feminist organizations illustrates the ways in which each of these movements was able to inform the others. Her understanding illustrates that white feminist models, while initially a reaction to the sexism experienced by white women, were constantly challenged by black and Chicana feminist organizations that presented white women with new and different images of sexist oppression. Analyses like these have dramatically shaped the face of feminist theory and history, and have allowed women's studies classrooms to be more representative of the

many faces of feminist organizing. The power of critiques like Roth's leaves little question as to the significance of dissent for women's studies.

Contemporary Critiques of Women's Studies Curricula

The concerns that many contemporary feminists have voiced with today's women's studies programs are not new to feminist inquiry. Though the words used to express concerns about race, ethnicity, gender expression and identity, socioeconomic class, and other social markers have changed over the years, the concepts have always been present in feminist movement and women's studies. While I have tried to demonstrate that second wave feminist organizing was not simply a matter of bourgeoisie white women forming a movement for their own sake, my goal in doing that was to demonstrate the wealth of under-studied feminist activism that working class women, queer women, black women, and other women of color were doing during the sixties and seventies. It is still important to understand that a great deal of the widely recognized feminist work that was produced during the second wave was written by a small group of white women who, relative to the majority of the population, enjoyed significant race- and class-based privilege and who, as such, were unable to speak to the majority of women's experiences. The narrow definition of feminist movement employed by some members of the second wave (generally those with unrecognized privilege whose racial and class identifications are rendered invisible in much of American culture) can be seen in current women's studies discourse and in the work that women of color, queer folks, and other marginalized individuals have had to do to include their voices within the women's

studies canon. These feminist scholars, spurred on largely by their own experiences of marginalization, have perhaps ironically become those who embody feminist theory, who practice it to its fullest and who push women's studies towards the fulfillment of its true potential.

The vast majority of critiques of contemporary women's studies discourse stem from the construction of a hegemonic (though profoundly raced and classed) conception of female experience. As I have outlined in the previous chapters, this white, middle- or upper class conception of femininity is indeed prevalent in much of American society. Ideals of female weakness, passivity, and hyper-emotionality do permeate much of our culture. Susan Brownmiller's book *Femininity* outlines her process of indoctrination into middle class white expectations of womanhood:

Did my loving, anxious mother, who dressed me in white organdy pinafores and Mary Janes and who cried hot tears when I got them dirty, give me my first instruction? Of course. Did my doting aunts and uncles with their gifts of pretty dolls and miniature tea sets add to my education? Of course. But even without appropriate toys and clothes, lessons in the art of being feminine lay all around me and I absorbed them all: the fairy tales that were read to me at night, the brightly colored advertisements I pored over in magazines before I learned to decipher to words, the movies I saw, the comic books I hoarded, the radio soap operas I happily followed whenever I had to stay in bed with a cold" (1984: 14-15).

There is no question that Brownmiller's experience of gendered indoctrination was oppressive, nor that it limited her ability to self-define as she wished. It is the assumption that this experience of sexist oppression is the only true reality for American women and girls that must be problematized in order to produce a more just feminist movement and a more responsible women's studies. Brownmiller's

references to her childhood experience demonstrates a profoundly class and race based understanding of femininity that, because it is her truth, is a meaningful component of the body of feminist works taught in women's studies courses. But as it is not all women's truth, women's studies courses must be sure to include works like *Femininity* alongside other, perhaps more widely representative, texts.

Many related issues in current debate about women's studies focus on unsuccessful attempts to address the above need for the inclusion of a diverse range of voices.

Very few women's studies programs have attempted to maintain course listings and overarching visions that actively avoid discussions of race, class, or queerness.

Instead, it is their ineffective and often half-hearted attempts to address these issues that have come under fire from feminist scholars and activists who are working specifically on these areas of study. The practice of merely tacking on a few readings by working class women, queer women, or women of color to a course syllabus is a common, though intensely problematic, means of employing an "add and stir" model of feminism, in which underrepresented understandings of feminist movement are added into the curriculum as an afterthought and are then superficially mixed in to the rest of the course readings. This model, in addition to marginalizing issues confronted by feminists of color and other generally underrepresented feminists, operates on the assumption that "the (White) curriculum [taught in many women's studies classrooms] applies to and draws from all people" equally (Alcantara et al., 2002: 21). This assumption of whiteness unless otherwise marked, as well as the obviously half-hearted attempt of many women's studies professors to tack on

works by those feminists not in possession of white skin or class based privileges to the end of a course syllabus, indicates the way in which women's studies courses pay lip service to feminists of color and other marginalized feminists while remaining profoundly invested in the preservation of racist and classist systems of oppression.

As contemporary women's studies courses have begun to face increasing pressure to address issues that affect all women, not just middle- or upper class white women, black feminist concepts of intersectionality have come to shape scholarly inquiry in the field. While some of the use of intersectionality has been painfully superficial, the theory that was set forth by Kimberlé Crenshaw and popularized by other black feminists such as Patricia Hill Collins brought this concept to the center of women's studies. Though intersectionality can be applied to countless iterations of women's identities, it is most often used as a means of understanding black women's and other women of color's experiences in the United States as both female and of a racial identification other than white. More recently, it has been seen as a way to understand the realities and progression of second wave feminist movement, as what Patricia Hill Collins calls "a heuristic device...[that] references the ability of social phenomena such as race, class, and gender to mutually construct one another" (as quoted in Ringrose, 2007: 264). Kimberlé Crenshaw, commonly considered the mother of the theory of intersectionality, describes "an intersectional analysis [as one that] argues that racial and sexual subordination are mutually reinforcing, that black women are commonly marginalized by a politics of race alone or a politics of

gender alone, and that a political response to each form of subordination must at the same time be a political response to both” (as quoted in Ringrose, 2007: 264).

Intersectional analyses and a more general increased recognition of the contributions of black feminists in the United States have resulted in a shift in women’s studies curriculum. Though programs still face backlash and antagonism from conservative factions, their new recognition of black feminist theories (such as that of intersectionality) have given many women’s studies scholars hope of a new day for the field.

Unfortunately, the use of a language of intersectionality is often employed without a true understanding of the “matrix-like interaction” of systems of oppression (Guy-Sheftall, 1995: 5). Many feminists of color and other radical feminists have written about the use of intersectional language to (thinly) veil additive models of oppression. While analyses that take only gender into account are fundamentally flawed, those that claim to recognize multiple sites of oppression while subtly endorsing the primacy of gender as a means of understanding manage to appear politically correct while simultaneously upholding the very oppressive systems that discourses of intersectionality aim to dismantle. By paying superficial attention to intersectional frameworks, scholars who engage in this practice not only dismiss the significance of intersectionality but they also lessen the significance of one of the most significant and influential theories of contemporary feminism. Scholars who engage in this lip service without changing their actual pedagogies operate on the assumption that black women’s issues can remain “a parenthetical remark in a

chapter which supposedly includes them” (Carroll, 1982: 123). Constance M. Carroll’s experiences of liberal and/or politically correct efforts to address black women’s issues within works that focus almost entirely on those faced by white women do not take into account her assertion that “*Black women are different from white women*” and that because of this difference, women’s studies as a discipline must address black women’s issues specifically (1983: 123).

Much like the well-intentioned efforts of second wave white feminists to establish cross-racial alliances, these new discussions of intersectionality in the classroom have been widely criticized as superficial and insufficient, and as betraying a basic inability to understand the role that race plays in American society. In spite of many professors’ genuine recognition of the significance of intersectional theory on women’s studies as a field, classroom dynamics and the legacy of racism and Eurocentrism in women’s studies courses shapes the discussion of these groundbreaking theories. As Patricia Hill Collins wrote in 1998, “intersectionality is being used in feminist educational spaces, in ways that water down the approach and relativize, individualize and liberalize issues of oppression and power” (as quoted in Ringrose, 2007: 265). Rather than truly grappling with concepts of privilege, power, and oppression as realities that differentially shape the lives of women around the globe, many women’s studies courses have adopted a language of intersectionality without genuinely acknowledging its implications or internalizing its messages. In her essay about teaching women of color studies, Grace Chang reflects on “how much easier it is for white American students to

recognize the oppression of women of color and Third World women by U.S.-based and multinational corporations, white men, and men of color than to acknowledge the toxicity of colonial feminism, racism in U.S.-based white feminism, or racism in general” (2007: 57). Though these students are able to understand intersectionality theoretically, they are unable to see it as something that implicates them in the support of systems of oppression. To the extent that intersectionality can remain a theory, it is welcomed into women’s studies classrooms as evidence of the inclusivity of the field. But when it requires personal examination of one’s own participation in systems of oppression, an understanding of intersectionality is often rejected.

Furthermore, the ways in which racism in the women’s movement is addressed in women’s studies classrooms has often contributed to the creation of a false dichotomy between the old days, when white women didn’t understand the role that race played in feminist movement, and now, when feminists and women’s studies professors and students have achieved a higher level of understanding or enlightenment. Writing about her experiences teaching women’s studies in racially mixed classrooms, Grace Chang describes one of her students’ observation that “many of the [white] students interpreted the presentation of ‘problems in feminism’ outlined within a historical framework to mean that such problems, and ‘those bad white feminists,’ were quite literally a thing of the past” (2007: 63). By positioning ignorance and racism firmly within the second wave, feminist scholars have perhaps involuntarily blinded their students (and often themselves) to the

continued challenges faced by women's studies. Much like the benevolent racism displayed by second wave feminists who lamented the fact that women of color just were not joining their feminist organizations, contemporary feminists often stress that it isn't their fault that women of color might feel wary of women's studies courses. Rather than thinking that women of color might feel attacked, ignored, or disrespected in the women's studies classroom, this new generation of single issue feminists speak of the inclusiveness of contemporary women's studies curricula—the fact that they read feminists of color, employ a language of intersectionality, and occasionally speak of international feminist issues—as evidence that women of color's lack of participation in their women's studies departments is some issue beyond their control. The often-superficial inclusion of topics related to women of color issues in women's studies courses is all too frequently used to solidify the supposed divide between the racist white feminists of yesteryear and the enlightened, progressive white feminists of today: while feminists of color (as well as working class, Third World, and other marginalized feminists) remain peripheral to much of mainstream feminist discourse, the inclusion of works by a few women of color in course syllabi give many white women's studies students and professors a sense of progressive inclusion that distances them from mainstream feminism's troubled past.

Responses to Critique and the Changing Face of Women's Studies

The dramatic changes in women's studies curricula in the late 1990s and the early years of the 21st century represented both the continuation and the re-envisioning

of the feminist principles set forth by those dissident feminists who had been active throughout the second wave. A new generation of radical, anti-racist feminists who referred to themselves by the inclusive term Third World feminists emerged. Third World feminists, both those who hailed from nations of the “global South” and those who were members of racially marginalized groups within the United States and Europe (and those who worked with them in solidarity), further expanded upon the goals and achievements of radical second wave feminists, and pushed activism and academia to new levels of nuanced analysis and radical inclusion. Feminists such as M. Jacqui Alexander have used this new model of feminist organizing and theorizing to further open up the movement, drawing feminist connections between all creatures of the Earth. In her essay “Remembering *This Bridge Called My Back*,” Alexander links her contemporary feminist activism to that of Cherríe Moraga, Sonia Sanchez, Adrienne Rich, and others. She describes the spiritual connections that exist between all feminists from all places, literal and figurative, while simultaneously recognizing all people’s implication in systems of oppression:

“It seems crucial that we come to terms with, and engage, that confluence of the local and the global in order not to view the transnational as merely a theoretical option. The fact is that our standard of living here, indeed our very survival, is based on the raw exploitation of working-class women, white, black, and Third World in all parts of the world. *Our hands are not clean*” (2005: 264).

Alexander’s assertion that all people are implicated in those systems that serve to oppress others deconstructs binaric thinking and forces readers to question their space in the world. By stressing the strengths and weaknesses of all people, Third

World feminists like Alexander challenge their audiences to further complicate feminist histories.

New opportunities for anti-racist activism by white people opened up new ways in which white feminists could relate to feminists of color. Books like Mab Segrest's *Memoir of a Race Traitor*, published in 1994, Becky Thompson's *A Promise and a Way of Life*, published in 2001, and Inga Muscio's *Autobiography of a Blue Eyed Devil*, published in 2005, have all proved useful for many white women searching for ways in which to fight against racism. Their publication over ten years illustrates a white feminist commitment to anti-racist activism that is in no way faddist. In large part thanks to the ever-growing canon of anti-racist feminist texts geared towards white readers, some white feminists have been able to move beyond an ignorant benevolence towards feminists of color and into meaningful coalition. By rendering privilege visible, many contemporary feminists have been able to avoid the trap that prevented so many well-meaning, white second wave feminists from effectively joining in anti-racist movements. The concepts explored by these three anti-racist feminists are not, however, new. Rather, they have successfully implemented the very concepts set forth by anti-racist white feminists from the second wave and before. Much like the emergence of book-length works on the specificities of woman of color feminisms has increased many women's self identification as feminists of color, longer and more well-publicized works on white anti-racist feminist movement have drawn larger number of white women to the cause. Concepts that were once included in occasional anthologies can reach larger audiences in more

targeted books and articles. Though Mab Segrest's work should not be read as a direct continuation of white feminists like Ellen Pence's writing in the 1980s, acknowledging the connections between these activists can lend even more authority to anti-racist feminist movement.

One of the most basic steps toward coalition building and solidarity-based models of cross-racial feminist organizing is the dismantling of universal understandings of sexist oppression. Much like feminists of color in the second wave, contemporary anti-racist feminists have become increasingly committed to questioning the concept of a universal experience of sexism. Third World feminist Chandra Mohanty has located the flaws with these static and reductionist understandings of sexism in the fact that they are "based...on the assumption that the categories of race and class have to be invisible for gender to be visible" (2003: 107). Mohanty stresses that "claiming universality of gender oppression is not the same as arguing for the universal rights of women based on the particularities of our experiences," and pushes feminists to recognize the differences between these two theoretical models (Mohanty 2003: 107). Much like the members of the Combahee River Collective argued in 1979, when they were campaigning against the murders of women of color in the Boston area, more contemporary feminists like Mohanty stress the significance of specificity of experience in effective feminist organizing. While Combahee members welcomed any and all support that they could get from white women and others indirectly affected by the murders, they demanded that their supporters acknowledge the difference that their situations made. Through models

of Third World feminist solidarity and diverse feminist movements, theorists like Mohanty have continued Combahee's legacy by pushing for recognition of position in feminist organizing.

Like Mohanty, many other contemporary feminists have argued that a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which race and class inform experiences of sexist oppression will not, as detractors have argued, unnecessarily complicate an already fragile feminist movement. Rather, these anti-racist feminist theorists and activists stress the idea that only through a more complex and pointed feminist analysis can the movement be sustained. Instead of understanding feminist movement as fundamentally about gender, and viewing race and class identifications as mere moderators of gendered experience, black and Third World feminists have argued that feminist movement and women's studies should be equally concerned with race and class, as well as gender, as the systems that create the realities of women's lives. Much like second wave black feminists argued, Chandra Mohanty writes that "the challenges posed by black and Third World feminists [to white mainstream feminism] can point the way toward a more precise, transformative feminist politics based on the specificity of our historical and cultural locations and our common contexts of struggle" (2003: 107). Her analysis of the role that multiple intersecting identities can and should play in feminist movement and academic feminisms references earlier feminist activists, including Angela Davis, who radicalized "feminism through a class and antiracist analysis and [who offered] new constructions for black female identity and politics" (James,

1998: 15). By locating contemporary Third World models of feminist organizing in the historic fight for women of color's rights (and for the rights of other marginalized women), these theorists pay homage to the feminist movements out of which they have grown, and challenge a compartmentalized understanding of feminist movements.

While many contemporary theorists have found comfort in the development of new feminist terms, still others have rejected the necessity of naming social and political activism as feminist at all. Though the title necessarily labels the works within the anthology as feminist, several of the essays in *The Fire This Time: Young Activists and The New Feminism*, edited by Vivien Labaton and Dawn Lundy Martin, challenge the usefulness of feminist identification. The editors look for new sites of feminist movement, such as the anti-prison movement, the creation of independent media centers, and anti-capitalist movements, for contemporary locations of women's activism. Robin Templeton's essay "She Who Believes in Freedom: Young Women Defy the Prison Industrial Complex" provides an excellent example of this trend. In the author's interview with Harmony Goldberg, the director of the School of Unity and Liberation, a youth political education center dedicated to fighting rising incarceration rates, Templeton asks Goldberg if the political education and organizing taking place at the school can be considered feminist, even as they are not expressly dedicated to women's issues. Goldberg responds that the leadership of the movement is decidedly feminist since it is comprised mainly of young women, but that "traditional feminist issues...have not been on the same level of priority for

me as building a movement against racial and class oppression” (2004: 264). By including an analysis of the fight against the prison industrial complex in a book about “the new feminism,” the editors challenge the very definition of feminism, and work to expand the definition beyond the supposedly traditional issues of reproductive rights, equal pay for equal work, and how to transcend the glass ceiling (Templeton, 2004: 264). Goldberg’s emphasis on concrete social and political change and her labeling of her organization as feminist, even though its mission does not fit with what she calls “traditional feminist goals,” demonstrate the rich diversity of contemporary movements to end sexist oppression, open up the definition of feminism, and provide activists with a space in which they can challenge the very label.

Contemporary Critiques: A Case Study of Wesleyan University

In the fall of 2002, eight Wesleyan University students, with the support of several women’s studies faculty members, most notably their adviser Gina Ulysse, came together to form a student-led course called Women’s Studies 419, or the Women’s Studies Forum.² The final project of this student forum was an influential manuscript entitled, “Envisioning a More Inclusive Women’s Studies Program: Feminist Praxis and the Documentation of 419.” These students’ analysis of the dynamics present in the Wesleyan women’s studies program offers considerable insight into the state of the discipline at the beginning of the 21st century. Even more importantly, their engagement with an academic department and their obvious

² The course will be referred to simply as 419.

investment in the educational process provides an excellent example of the ways in which feminist praxis and intellectual engagement can shape a discipline. The tumultuous process of reshaping the core course of the women's studies program, Women's Studies 101, demonstrates tactics for change and the backlash faced by these young feminists. By outlining their experiences of confrontation with women's studies faculty and staff, the tactics that they used for change, and their visions for a more inclusive program, these students present the reader with a crucial vision of the libratory potential of women's studies.

Rather than conceptualize their work as something new to women's studies, the students of 419 chose instead to focus on continuity and the ways in which they had been influenced by previous generations of feminist scholars and activists. This decision was a conscious nod to the black feminists of the 1970s and 1980s who described their work as a mere continuation of the feminist work done by their mothers and grandmothers (Hull and Smith, 1982: xvii). The location of their work within this continuum of theorizing by women throughout history firmly situates 419's work within the context of radical feminist movement. The decision to locate themselves within this legacy accomplished three main things: first, it granted these young feminists a degree of credibility, since their activism could be understood as part of an established social movement; second, it affirmed the work of previous feminists and made their suggestions for change less threatening and more grounded; and finally, it served as a tactical choice that provided them with models of feminist change that were likely to work within the academy. The use of existing

feminist models allowed the forum participants to situate their work within a long legacy of feminist change, and to draw strength from those who had fought similar battles before them.

By repeatedly referencing the work of the feminists who laid the groundwork for Wesleyan's women's studies program specifically, the participants in 419 explicitly recognized the struggles that had occurred in order to give them the opportunity to be studying women's studies at Wesleyan. In her notes on her interview with Professor Jill Morawski, 419 participant Brittany Allen affirmed the difficulties that early women's studies professors at Wesleyan faced, writing, "Women's Studies is built on the blood of women that did extra work," under which she notes that women's studies professors were often (and continue to be) overworked in all areas of life (2002: 177). Though these students are writing and theorizing in a time when many pop sociologists and journalists are arguing that we live in a "post feminist world" (see, for example, Peter Marks' 1997 review in the *New York Times*), the authors' location of themselves "within Third Wave feminism" forces the reader to acknowledge their participation in a long, complex history of American feminist organizing (Alcantara et al., 2002: 6). An early reference to the old second wave slogan "the personal is the political" further grounds 419's critique in feminist history (Alcantara et al., 2002: 6). Though the forum members at times distance themselves from some models of earlier feminist organizing, stressing that they aim to be "more holistic in mission" than early women's studies programs, and that they are interested in "looking through the lens that encompasses gender, sexuality,

class, race, ability, and nation all at once,” they also write that they employ traditional feminist practices while using the core feminist methods of “collectivity, consciousness-raising, and self-critique as methods of engaging with feminist practice” (Alcantara et al., 2002: 6). This juxtaposition of the methods established in the second wave with the goals of the 1990s and early 2000s effectively legitimizes third wave feminism as a logical response not only to sexist oppression but also earlier feminist models. Even as they use the wave model of feminist organizing to describe the eras about which they write, these students blur the lines between epochs and, again, stress continuity over segmentation.

But in spite of 419’s affirmation of certain aspects of earlier feminist models, they remind readers that “the struggles we face [in the 21st century] are different than those of previous years” and that these new struggles call for a different model of organizing (Alcantara et al., 2002: 12). Subtly referencing the relative success of the mainstreaming project, these young theorists write that it is now time to change the face of women’s studies, beyond the noble goal of establishing gender equity at Wesleyan, and towards establishing “a more grounded and intersectional approach that considers oppression and how it functions in its myriad forms” (Alcantara et al., 2002: 12). This new conceptualization of feminism’s goals meant the forum participants’ suggestions for the Wesleyan women’s studies program focused not just on the inclusion of theory by feminists of color, but on a model that would help students develop a lens through which they could critique a multitude of oppressive social structures and how they interacted with sexist oppression. The group’s initial

list of goals included the following six concepts: the inclusion of practical as well as theoretical work, the introduction of the black feminist concept of intersectionality early in the course in order to allow it to permeate all units, the inclusion of structured group work as a means of giving less outspoken students a place to speak, the organization of the course by theme or issue, the implementation of a transnational frame, and an increase in the number of writings by people of color. The suggestions were designed to recognize the significance of past feminist work and to push the field of women's studies to live up to its theoretical aims of inclusion and celebration of difference.

The members of 419 used a variety of tactics to push the women's studies program to change its focus and to be more inclusive of a greater number of women. First of all, the forum participants decided to focus on one class, Women's Studies 101, as their primary site of change. Because WMST 101 was one of only three required courses for the women's studies major, and because all of the forum participants had at one point been enrolled in the course, it was a logical place to start.

Furthermore, forum members saw the suggestions that they had for WMST 101 as ideas that could benefit all courses in the women's studies program. The forum's emphasis on internal critique, both of the department and of the forum itself, was central to their model of change. In their papers for the course, participants reflected on their own racial identifications and on their experiences within the women's studies classroom at Wesleyan. By putting their privileges on the table, participants challenged the erasure of privilege that they saw as fundamental to

their experiences in WMST 101, and provided a more radical, open, and generally effective model of change in women's studies. They were, in short, practicing what they preached. Members of the forum worked hard to establish connections with a wide range of members of the women's studies department: students, faculty, administrators, and staff. They conceptualized the women's studies program as a community in which all participants shared responsibility for making the program the best it could be. The organization of a women's studies retreat, open to faculty, students, and staff, is just one example of these efforts at community building. Finally, forum members used new tactics to destabilize the pedagogical models that had long been employed in women's studies. Their conceptions of the significance of space and location allowed them to dramatically reframe the conversation surrounding women's studies, and to move beyond a framework in which only academic written word is privileged.

The decision to focus on WMST 101 as the primary location of change in the women's studies program was both practical and tactical. Certainly, some of the reason for this decision was based on the limited time that forum members had to compile their suggestions. However, the choice was more significant than that: by isolating the most basic core course of the women's studies major as a possible location for change, the forum members worked to realize the potential of women's studies majors and students to shape their own experience of the theory produced in the Wesleyan women's studies classroom. By presenting significant theoretical and practical concepts that help students move towards a deeper anti-racist

feminist consciousness in the WMST 101 classroom, forum participants placed ownership and responsibility on women's studies students. The inclusion of a language of intersectionality and a deep analysis of the ways in which class, race, sexuality, gender, queer identities, and other meaningful social markers inform the realities of women's studies and feminist movement more generally was designed to allow students to continually push themselves to locate these identities in all the work that they would go on to do, both in women's studies and in other programs and departments.

Throughout this chapter, I have followed the thread of internal critique and how it operates within women's studies courses and departments. The members of 419 provide the reader with an impressive model of how internal critique of programs and self-critique of one's own biases can positively shape the discipline of women's studies. The authors' critical engagement with Wesleyan's women's studies department (and the positive outcomes that would come out of their activism) clearly demonstrate the way that internal critique of institutions can be productive, even within the formal establishment of the American academy. But the critique that forum members engaged in regarding their own group and the dynamics present between them was even more meaningful. The forum participants' inclusion of their papers that they wrote for the forum allows the reader to get a glimpse of their own processes of self identification and critique: the juxtaposition of the authors' initial experiences in the WMST 101 classroom and their retrospective understanding of the space that they took up in that classroom stresses the possibility for feminist

and anti-racist growth. 419 participant Brittany Allen opens her paper by writing about her initial experiences in WMST 101, saying that “When [she] took Introduction to Women’s Studies as a sophomore, [she] loved the class; it was challenging, interesting, and completely new” (Alcantara et al., 2002: 92). But Allen then acknowledges that thanks to the benefit of hindsight, she has since become “acutely aware (though probably never aware enough) of silencing, voice, and representation, and the problematic issues that had been skirted in 101” (Alcantara et al., 2002: 92). Allen shares with readers her initial experience as well as her later stance on WMST 101, and opens up a space for self-criticism and growth.

When viewed along side other papers that forum participants produced, the role of Allen’s whiteness become unquestionably apparent: her initial experience was a good one, and only with time did she learn that much of the material read in WMST 101 (and the way that it was presented) was problematic. This reaction exists in clear opposition to other forum participants’ experiences. Joanne Alcantara, for example, writes that she “found...that being part of this class and engaging in the curriculum was not an empowering experience” (Alcantara et al., 2002: 87). Because of her previous work in feminist of color communities, and because of her own identification as a woman of color, Alcantara never felt that the WMST 101 classroom was an empowering (or even particularly educational) space. Iris Jacob’s experience in the class was equally negative, and after three class meetings, she dropped the course. Jacob writes about her inability to pay attention during the first class meeting because she “was too busy looking around the room... [where she]

saw three other Black females and one Latina” (Alcantara et al., 2002: 102). After seeing what percentage of the students in the class were white women, Jacob “leaned back in [her] chair and realized how alone, angry, unintelligent and silenced [she] would feel for the next semester” (Alcantara et al., 2002: 201). It was shortly after this realization that she decided to drop the course.

The honesty that all of the 419 students clearly demonstrate in their papers, in which participants own up to their privileges and are brutally honest about their experiences of silencing and oppression, demonstrate the radical potential of self-reflexivity and internal critique. The students’ ability to write and speak openly about their experiences in the Wesleyan women’s studies classroom and major rejects a hierarchical system in which the student is a passive recipient of knowledge, and gives the reader of an example of students demanding that they be full participants in their education. The forum participants’ request that a malleable syllabus be implemented in the WMST 101 classroom further demonstrates how they pushed for the establishment of a student-centered classroom. Rather than support a static (read, legitimate) syllabus, forum participants stressed that the acquisition and use of feminist frameworks of knowledge necessitated a reading list and course schedule that changed with its students’ needs. 419’s members fought for “the institutionalization of a curriculum and pedagogical review that is responsive to students’ changing needs throughout the year” (Alcantara et al., 2002: 22). Rather than shifting the focus or practice of women’s studies to fit with the traditional vision of the elite academy, the members of 419 push for a new kind of

mainstreaming: that of more organic feminist movement in which the location and experience of students informs the pace and trajectory of the class.

Though 419's primary focus was on outlining changes to the WMST 101 curriculum, their vision for the program included suggestions for change to the department's structure more generally. Even as they outlined the significance of changing the core WMST 101 curriculum, the members of 419 wrote, "One of the most pressing issues at this time, outside of the 101 curriculum but not unrelated to it, is the disconnection between faculty and students within the program," stressing that "most major programmatic decisions are made by the core faculty in meetings which discourage student attendance and participation" (Alcantara et al., 2002: 14). These concerns with transparency and shared participation in the women's studies program indicated both a departure from initial visions for the program and a disaffiliation with the second wave feminist values espoused in consciousness raising and women's study groups. During the early years of Wesleyan women's studies, one professor told a reporter for the *Wesleyan Hermes* that "what makes Women's Studies different from other academic disciplines...is the degree of personal involvement in what is being studied...There's a different relationship between professors and students" (as quoted in Alcantara et al., 2002: 34). 419's exposure of the hierarchical and otherwise problematic models of intellectual engagement in the Wesleyan women's studies classroom dismisses the myth that feminism is easy, and shows that like those feminists who struggled to establish the

field in the first place, contemporary women's studies students must engage in constant struggle to redefine the women's studies curriculum.

CONCLUSION

Over the course of a year of writing, I have spoken with a wide range of people about my work. A common response among my liberal or radical white peers is that it is good that I'm taking the time to study how race can be addressed in the women's studies classroom, since women of color have for so long been absent from feminist movement and from the production of feminist writing. The implicit assumption that my peers are making is that because they have not read work by feminists of color that was produced before the 1980s and 1990s, it must not have existed. Their lack of exposure to works by feminists of color transforms their understanding of women of color's alienation from much of white feminist movement into a flawed understanding in which women of color were so turned off by the white feminists who pioneered contemporary feminist movement, that they never joined in. While I strongly believe that it is necessary for students to take ownership over their own learning, the frequency of this reaction has demonstrated to me one of the central flaws of women's studies curricula: even as women's studies courses attempt to expand their scope and to teach work by women of color and other further marginalized people, they continue to try to fit the work produced by feminists of color into an existing framework of institutional and intellectual legitimacy that cannot contain (and cannot do justice to) a truly diverse set of readings. After hearing this reaction again and again, I have come to realize that only a more radical re-envisioning of the women's studies classroom will allow contemporary white feminists to avoid the mistakes of our predecessors and our

contemporaries who still refuse to broaden their understanding or interpretation of feminist work.

Through a historical analysis of the progression of contemporary feminist movement, from the rumblings of women's dissent in the Civil Rights Movement to current critiques of established women's studies programs, I have traced tensions that are central to an academic analysis of feminist organizing: the role that diversity plays in women's movements and women's studies (or as Kimberlé Crenshaw writes, "what difference really makes"), what "sisterhood" means, and how to confront our wildly varied experiences of sexist oppression specifically and of womanhood more generally (2003: 45). By attempting to uncover experiences of feminist organizing that have not been recognized by or incorporated into the mainstream women's studies canon, I have aimed to complicate feminist histories that present feminist movement, and its academic arm, as set in stone and as originating from a single historical moment. While I have, at various times, been guilty of both an unquestioning affirmation of Feminism with a capital F and of an uninformed (and unappreciative) dismissal of mainstream feminist movement as something reserved only for the most clueless and oppressive of white women, this project has demonstrated to me the treacherous ground that American feminists, especially those within the academy, have been forced to tread. I have found that the more I expose myself to the complexities of feminist histories, the more I empathize with feminists on all sides of the debate.

Throughout this thesis, I have presented many of the problems that organized feminist movement and women's studies programs and departments have encountered, and I hope to have shared with the reader at least a few possible (and certainly partial) solutions. The work accomplished by women of color who pioneered new areas of knowledge, including as women of color studies and Third World feminist studies, and that of white feminists who humbly though vocally rejected their legacy of racist oppression, have opened up new doors for contemporary feminists and women's studies scholars. Those feminists who took the time to, as Alice Walker puts it, "write all the things that [they] should have been able to read" have taken the first step to creation a new women's studies canon: one comprised not only of contemporary writings but also of historic texts that speak to the legacy of women's resilience and spirit in the face of grave oppression (Collins, 1990: 13).

In its own way, this piece is my attempt to write what I wish I could have read in women's studies courses, an effort to take my own process of learning into my own hands. It has been an exercise in feminist process, in archival research, and in accepting the fact that no one, not even I, can produce a perfect, unproblematic work. Though I do not claim to have experienced anything like feminists organizing in the second wave or in the early years of women's studies did, my struggle with the anxiety of writing myself, my whiteness, into my work, has been profoundly illuminating, and has given me some sense of the fallibility of authors who write about such volatile and often dangerous subjects. My own uneasiness with the idea

of producing a static piece of writing has forced me to understand the necessity of revisiting and reanalyzing feminist works, and of meeting feminist scholars halfway between our reality and theirs. I do not finish this project with a sense that feminists should be forgiven for their racism, classism, or other flaws. But upon its conclusion, I am left with what I consider to be a deeper understanding of the tensions within women's studies and feminist movement, and a more mature understanding of various factors that have influenced women's studies' curricular trajectory. After reading so many accounts of women who challenged systems of oppression in all their forms and who understood feminism in its truest sense, I am left with a profound sense of hope that if my generation of feminists can build on the work that has already been done, feminism's (and women's studies') transformative power can be realized.

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