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**Mainstream Feminism, White
Supremacy, and Anti-Racist Feminisms**

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Report

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Abstract

Mainstream Feminism, White Supremacy, and Anti-Racist Feminisms

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Abstract: The history of the women's movement is one of great gains, as well as missed opportunities, due to the domination of the movement by those women with the most privilege. This report discusses the challenge faced by the mainstream women's movement to overcome racism and prejudice while trying to remain relevant to many different women. I discuss white supremacy within the mainstream women's movement as well as scholarship on anti-racist feminism, with a focus on women of Color feminisms and critical whiteness studies. Following Kimberlé Crenshaw and Chandra Mohanty, I argue that the issues of the most marginalized women should be central to the women's movement's projects of feminist liberation. While the constraints to women's liberation will continue to pose challenges through the commodification and domestication of radical politics by liberalism and the neoliberal academy, feminism continues to hold possibilities for women fighting to overcome oppression.

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PREFACE

The reason racism is a feminist issue is easily explained by the inherent definition of feminism. Feminism is the political theory and practice to free all women: women of color, working-class women, poor women, physically challenged women, lesbians, old women, as well as white economically privileged heterosexual women. Anything less than this is not feminism, but merely female self-aggrandizement.

-- Barbara Smith

The history of the mainstream women's movement is replete with examples of its failure to incorporate an analysis of race- and class-based oppression into a praxis of women's liberation. White feminism, also known as single-issue feminism, is notorious for failing to account for the experiences of women of Color while claiming to advocate for the equality of all women.¹ Instead, an essentialized version of "woman," reflecting the standpoint of privileged, middle-class white women, tends to dominate mainstream feminist discourse. Despite some progress towards a shared understanding of the multiplicity of oppressions within the mainstream

¹ Following Aída Hurtado, I will write people of Color or women of Color to refer to persons or women racialized as non-white in the U.S. "Black" and "Color" will be capitalized because they refer to a variety of specific ethnicities. "On the other hand, white is left in lowercase letters because it refers not to one ethnic group or to specified ethnic groups but to many." I will not change the capitalization used by other authors. See footnotes 1 and 4 in "Relating to Privilege: Seduction and Rejection in the Subordination of White Women and Women of Color." *Signs*, vol. 14, no. 4, 1989, pp. 833-834, doi:10.1086/494546.

women's movement, as well as the presence of women of Color speaking on their own behalf, the articulation of explicitly anti-racist policies remains a challenge. This report will focus exclusively on anti-racism as it intersects with feminism. I will show how women of Color have advocated for themselves throughout the history of the women's movement and highlight the critiques and suggestions they have provided, particularly in relation to the context of the academy and the neoliberal political environment. Lastly, the report will discuss contemporary challenges and opportunities for anti-racist feminisms to facilitate alliances. I will argue that the struggles of the most marginalized women need to be central to the project of feminism if the women's movement is to effect the liberation of all women.

The 2017 Women's March on Washington and its associated sister marches (henceforth referred to as WMW) serve as a microcosmic illustration of the need to center marginalized women within the mainstream. During the 12 weeks between the march's conception, immediately following the election of Donald Trump to the U.S. Presidency until the day of the march itself on January 21st, the planning and execution of the event illustrated many problematic dynamics that have been repeated throughout the history of the mainstream women's movement (Lemieux; Mosthof). Women of Color were brought onto the leadership team only when it was obvious that an all-white planning team projected white supremacist racial exclusion (Lemieux; Stockman). After calls to change the name from Million Women's March to something that was not appropriated from Black women's political labor, the name was changed to the Women's March on Washington, which was also appropriative of the Civil Rights era March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom (Booker; Dejean; Walters). Towards the end of the planning period, the published unity principles (also known as the policy platform) was lauded as radically feminist (Vagianos; Kelly). The march itself did not always mirror the

expansiveness of those principles, as I will explain below. Attempts to make the WMW a space explicitly welcome to women of Color alienated some white women. Those women withdrew their involvement, suggesting they felt that a space where white women were encouraged to check their privilege and to read the writing of women of Color was therefore not welcome to white women (Stockman).

Coincidental with women's empowerment at the WMW marches, attendees also saw cultural appropriation as white women carried signs using African-American Vernacular English or otherwise featuring cultural aspects associated with Blackness (Wortham). There were, for example, white women holding posters with phrases such as "ladies, let's get in formation," which references a song by Beyoncé, "equal pay for equal *twerk*," and "it's lit," alongside a drawing of a burning bra (Mejia; Prokop; Laub). Appropriating the creative and intellectual labor of women of Color, white feminists structurally support white supremacy.² Such appropriation is also a factor of neoliberal anti-Blackness whereby pop culture swallows up the bodies of women of Color. Further, despite the inclusion of transwomen within the policy platform and as speakers, many of the WMW attendees around the country insisted on gender essentialism (Mosthof). From pink pussy hats and signs depicting vulva as beautiful flowers, the message was clear that womanhood is still equated with possessing a very specific set of genitalia.

It is important to begin examining white supremacy within the women's movement by providing some definitions for concepts that are often misunderstood or given contradicting definitions. Early definitions of racism focused solely on interpersonal prejudice, but now we understand racism as inextricably interconnected to social systems of power. Sociologist Edward

² While many associate white supremacy with neo-nazis or the KKK, I will refer to white supremacy as related to a system wherein whiteness is valued above non-whiteness, institutionally, culturally, and interpersonally. I will refer to white supremacists as people who espouse overtly racist beliefs.

Bonilla Silva explains that there are multiple schools of thought on the subject of defining racism— the institutionalist, internal colonialist, and the racial formation perspectives, but that they all have limitations. Instead, he argues for an alternative framework of racialized social systems to provide an understanding of racial phenomena (467, 469). Beverley Daniels Tatum, a psychologist, administrator, and educator known as a race specialist, explains that antiracist trainers often share a common definition of racism as prejudice plus power. However, she explains that this definition has little resonance with her white students and so she prefers David Wellman’s definition that explains racism as a ‘system of advantage based on race’ (127). Anti-racism is a praxis combining theory with action seeking to undo racialized prejudice, discrimination, and oppression, at the individual, institutional, and cultural levels. Anti-racism addresses the social constitutedness of race and sees racism as an institutional and systemic dynamic that also influences interpersonal relationships and life circumstances. Race, like gender, is part of a socially constructed hierarchy that is unfixed, historical, and fluid (Omi and Winant; West and Zimmerman). Whiteness is defined by feminist and sociologist Ruth Frankenberg as “a location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second, it is a “standpoint”, a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others and at society. Third “whiteness” refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed” (1).

Philosopher Linda Martín Alcoff argues that race discourse should encompass multiple *racisms* because the treatment of different groups is often related to their specific, localized context (122). Andrea Smith, co-founder of anti-violence organization INCITE!, explains that there are three main pillars of white supremacy within the U.S. She explains that anti-Blackness “anchors” capitalism, the genocide of Indigenous peoples supports settler colonialism, and orientalism upholds war (56-57). Racial projects of minoritization serve to uphold the United

States' systemic white supremacy. Within this report, I focus heavily on Black women's responses to racism and sexism but this is not intended to promote a false Black and white binary perspective of race and racism. Alcoff explains that it can be difficult to critique this popular misunderstanding of U.S. race relations because of our context of overwhelming anti-Blackness. However, not only does the binary fail to incorporate racialized communities that fall outside of the Black or white dichotomy, it is also necessary to understand the many different ways that racism is manifested in order to address anti-Blackness (121).

Chapter 1: Feminism and White Supremacy

White supremacy, which bestows racial privilege on those who are identified as “white,” is a pervasive system of oppression that manifests itself within the women’s movement in overt and covert ways. This section will discuss the relationship between privilege and white supremacy as well as how white supremacy manifests itself within feminism.

White feminism can be defined as single-issue feminism, where gender oppression is understood as the most harmful type of oppression experienced by women. Some single-issue feminists go so far as to claim that patriarchy is the primary system of oppression from which all other forms of oppression are derived. White feminism’s single-lens analysis, which only considers gender disjointedly from other aspects of women’s identity, cannot account for the lives of those who are impacted by multiple systems of oppression, such as racism, ableism, and classism, within a matrix of multiple, interacting forms of domination (Collins). There are many branches of feminism that allow for a number of feminist lenses with which to view the world – Chicana feminism, Womanism, Black feminism, socialist feminism, and ecofeminism to name a few. However, despite these many options, mainstream feminism continues to be dominated by single-issue (white) feminism, which has as its primary goal equality with men, in terms of equal access to jobs and equal pay for those labors. The ‘lean-in’ brand of white feminism exemplifies this equality idea (Hess). However, as bell hooks in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984) argues, this goal begs the question to which men women want to be equal:

Since men are not equals in white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal class structure, which men do women want to be equal to? Do women share a common vision of what equality means? Implicit in this simplistic definition of women’s liberation is a

dismissal of race and class as factors that, in conjunction with sexism, determine the extent to which an individual will be discriminated against, exploited, or oppressed. (18)

Often within mainstream feminism, race and class *are* dismissed as factors as white feminists try to impose ideas about “sisterhood” and women’s liberation. For women with socioeconomic privilege, it appears that as long as (some) women have opportunities to participate on equal footing with men in the white, supremacist, patriarchal, capitalist economy, there is little more to be achieved. Those left outside of this narrow definition of feminism, however, have created their own feminisms that respond to their lived experiences.

The research and scholarship that forms the body of critical whiteness studies can be helpful to the mainstream feminist movement. Privilege discourse is one of the most common and powerful ways that people today are taught to understand the power dynamics behind patriarchy and racism. Peggy McIntosh, who is the founder of the National SEED Project (Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity) and former associate director of the Wellesley Centers for Women, is well known for her essays on white privilege and male privilege. Reflecting on the oppressiveness of privilege, McIntosh wrote: “After I realized the extent to which men work from a base of unacknowledged privilege, I understood that much of their oppressiveness was unconscious. Then I remembered the frequent charges from women of Color that white women whom they encounter are oppressive.” The power dynamics and difficulty forming alliances between white women and women of Color are shaped by this privilege.

Zeus Leonardo, who is a professor of education and critical social theorist at UC Berkeley, explains that it is necessary to move beyond conversations about white privilege to provide equal attention to white supremacy. He argues that while white supremacy is the

structure that permits white privilege, the realization of one's racial privilege (as a white person) does little to challenge this structure. Furthermore, unidirectional conceptions of white privilege that focus on invisible benefits downplay the violence of white domination, where underlying the whole system is the "active role of whites who take resources from people of Color all over the world, appropriate their labor, and construct policies that deny minorities' full participation in society" (138). The price of white privilege, in other words, is paid for by the oppression of people of Color. White people are often protected from knowledge of the ways in which they are benefited by oppression through the distance of globalization as well as the everyday segregation between differently colored communities in the U.S. Thus not only are many white people unaware of their racial privilege, many would also wholly deny the pervasiveness and urgency of white supremacy.

Thus the notion of privilege has become quite controversial for many people who believe the term is used as an insult; anti-racism is interpreted by conservatives as "anti-white."³ Some go so far as to say that white people are the victims of reverse-racism. They see "privilege" as an affront to hard-working Americans who accuse anti-racists of trying to make them feel "guilty" of being born white – their only crime. However, understanding that one benefits from a particular form of privilege does not mean that your life is without difficulty nor is it an attack upon one's character. The internalization of white supremacist values and internalized beliefs in racial superiority can lead some with privilege to deny the history and power dynamics that benefit them. Such reformulations of privilege and anti-racism serve as a defense mechanism for people to maintain their power and privilege rather than to strive for changes toward a more

³ See for example: Roberts, Paul C. "Political Correctness often Means Reverse Racism." *Human Events*, 1999, pp. 22.

equitable society. Furthermore, researchers from Stanford University have found that white people often exaggerate hardships in their lives in order to deflect accusations of racial privilege (Phillips and Lowery). White people who are provided evidence of racial privilege will concoct various reasons (hardships) for why the concept of privilege does not apply to them, while simultaneously acknowledging the role that privilege plays in maintaining hierarchy within the greater society. Those white people who see themselves as benefiting less from white privilege because of hardships are often unsupportive of policies intended to increase racial equity, such as affirmative action (Phillips and Lowery 12-13).

Such defensiveness can be understood as a symptom of white fragility, a concept popularized by a 2011 article from Whiteness Studies scholar, Robin DiAngelo. She explains white fragility as “a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves” that white people use to avoid taking responsibility for racial privilege (54). When white people are confronted with information about structures of racial domination from which they benefit, they may be overcome with negative affect that produces immobilization such as guilt, helplessness, anger, and sadness. These overwhelming emotional responses may be unintended, “normal” and “natural,” but can have the effect of disrupting attempts at working towards racial justice. DiAngelo quotes social work educator Rich Vodde to explain the significance of behaviors of white fragility: “If privilege is defined as a legitimization of one’s entitlement to resources, it can also be defined as permission to escape or avoid any challenges to this entitlement” (65). This can result in, for example, inequitable wealth accumulation that goes unquestioned when taxes are manipulated to maintain austerity measures that hurt people of Color and women and poor children the most.

Alcoff (2006) describes conditions that encourage involvement in overt white supremacy: a lack of critical education around the social, political, and historical factors that are creating current conditions, coupled with a failing economy, and economic competition with upwardly mobile people of Color. For white people experiencing downward mobility or even simply perceiving it as a likely threat, (overt) white supremacy may provide a sense of community and a bolstering of their ego (221). This response is particularly relevant to the contemporary moment as we see a rise in far-right, alt-right, and white nationalist groups. As such groups claim to fight against an impending “white genocide,” white women are privileged as the carriers of a white future. It is for their benefit, and their children’s benefit, that white men (claim to) advocate.

HISTORY OF WHITE SUPREMACY WITHIN MAINSTREAM FEMINISM

In *Women, Race, and Class*, Angela Davis provides an analysis of how racism and classism permeated the history of the women's movement. It is revealed that those women deemed important enough for the historical record – progressive, middle-class white women – initially got involved with social activism through the abolition movement. For example, Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, viewed as some of the founders of the white women's movement, attended an otherwise all-male World Anti-Slavery Convention in 1840 where they experienced exclusion as women (46-47). Women abolitionists were excluded, silenced, and ridiculed at anti-slavery gatherings. Davis quotes abolitionist Angelina Grimké who argued for women's rights with the following question: “What then can woman do for the slave, when she herself is under the feet of man and shamed into silence?” (43). Davis explains that many abolitionist women became interested in the plight of enslaved African-Americans by understanding themselves as also enslaved – through the institution of marriage. Thus despite lacking the social position of the enslaved-as-chattel or similar abuse from whips and chains, they found common purpose, in that presumably shared status, to fight against the institution of slavery (Davis 33). It was through their anti-slavery activism that they became attuned to the ways in which women of their own social class were suppressed by sexism.

Many white women were often unsupportive of Black women having a voice in the same public spaces. The New York Female Anti-Slavery Society excluded Black women. The Seneca Falls Convention, where women's rights is said to have been born, also lacked an invitation for Black women (Davis 58). Despite their exclusion, some Black women made their mark on history. At a women's rights convention in 1851, Sojourner Truth famously asked “Ain't I a woman?” as she deconstructed the white, male-supremacist argument that women lack the

intellectual capacity to vote. Truth argued convincingly against the men's arguments that women need too much assistance to be able to vote - she didn't need any pedestal, help over a puddle, or into a carriage. Although many white women in attendance did not want Truth to speak, there were benefits for all women for Truth to point out the inconsistencies and hypocrisies of the white supremacist patriarchy. (White) women were subjugated by a culture that put them on a pedestal, but Truth's speech revealed that it was culture, not nature, that understood women to be helpless and fragile (Davis 60-64).

While Truth argued for suffrage on behalf of *all* women, others held on to an ideal of suffrage as an exclusive right for some. *One Woman One Vote: Rediscovering the Women's Suffrage Movement*, edited by Marjorie Wheeler, discusses how, prior to passage of the 19th amendment, white women leaders struggled to decide on their strategy and tactics: Should they promote Black men's suffrage or fight it in favor of white women getting the vote first? (61-72). Should they allow Black women into their organizations or would that upset the white southern women? (13). Should they symbolically or directly appeal to white supremacy in order to support their primary vision of winning the vote? (344). Some suffragists were then concerned with possibility of non-white women gaining the franchise (Wheeler 109). Feminist icon Susan B. Anthony set the tone for the mainstream feminist movement as she made it clear to reporters that she was only interested in a single-issue feminism that addressed the narrow concerns of women like herself: "I have but one question: that of equality between the sexes. That of the races has no place on our platform" (Banks and Thomas 34). In 1913, the Woman Suffrage Procession explicitly excluded Black women's organizations from the front of the march (Green).

It is not only suffragists who, despite their racism, continue to be upheld as feminist icons. We do not have a model for reconciling the toxicity of our heroines. Margaret Sanger, for

example, is heralded as the mother of birth control but was a strong proponent of the eugenics movement (Davis 213-215). It is too easily forgotten that while she may have advanced reproductive rights for white women, she was also a white supremacist. The eugenics movement, population control movement, and other forms of white supremacy effectively “sanitized” or sterilized many women of Color such that at one point ¼ of Native women were sterilized. Puerto Rican women, years after the fact, knew widely of “la operación” (García). These operations occurred without the women’s consent, without knowledge, and without regard for anything but the predominance of the “white race.” Mainstream reproductive rights activists often promote the “right to choose,” but many women of Color were denied such a choice. This history is not integrated into the political platform of the contemporary mainstream reproductive rights movement.

The second wave of feminism is said to have been sparked by Betty Friedan’s 1963 monograph *The Feminine Mystique*. In Friedan’s text, she focuses on the plight of the middle-class housewife whose boredom about household drudgery is taken as *the* pinnacle of gender exploitation. While she mostly fails to involve women of Color in her discussion, she brings them into the conversation when it is convenient to her argument. She quotes some of Sojourner Truth’s 1851 speech, for example, and then moves on to discussing working-class white women who also contradicted the “image of empty gentility” (157). Friedan also mentions foot binding in China, suggesting to readers that American housewives were similarly immobilized (164). There are very few other mentions of women of Color and it seems that Friedan wrote her book without considering non-white women as a part of her audience. In “Black Feminist Thought

and Difference in the Third Wave: The Identity Politics of Postmodern Feminism and Colorblind Ideology,” Ingrid Banks and Stacey Floyd Thomas point out that second wave feminism, although supported by Black women, did not advocate significantly for women who were not privileged by race and class or “for women outside of Friedan’s canon of women’s oppression” (35).

While explaining how the three waves of mainstream feminism provide insight into the institution of white feminism, Banks and Thomas reinforce the necessity to analyze race from a women’s and gender studies perspective and to analyze gender from a racial justice perspective. The authors explain that the women’s movement, while mostly advocating for white women, emulated the strategic direction of people of Color movements: As the Black power movement pushed for the inclusion of Ethnic Studies programs at universities, the women’s movement also fought for Women’s Studies programs, prioritizing “academic legitimacy” rather than a political agenda (35). “The term ‘third wave’ was used first by women of color in the late 1980s to position themselves outside of the second wave” (36). Popular culture, however, states that the third wave of feminism resulted from a desire for a younger generation of feminists to distinguish themselves from the second wave, effectively pushing out attention to racial difference in favor of colorblind generational difference. Banks and Thomas reveal the contradictory and problematic impacts of the third wave, critiquing the post-modernism of the academy:

Whereas the social impetus and the very terminology of third wave feminism finds itself related almost exclusively to Black women’s exigencies... it still has been institutionally acknowledged as a predominantly white feminist agenda. Thus, the legitimacy given to third wave feminism does not record Black women

as its progenitors but rather it perpetuates exclusion of women of color by denying their political platforms and privileging the institutionalized academic discourse of post-modernism. The postmodern discursive ‘project’ prevalent in third wave feminism is now divorced from the liberationist objectives that gave rise to it (36-37).

With the shift to academic feminism, and away from political organizing, there is an opportunity and a responsibility for feminists with the most privilege to evaluate how the prioritization of “academic legitimacy” has impacted *all* women, in particular, those who have limited access to such spaces. The ways in which academic feminism has posed new challenges along with new opportunities will be discussed more thoroughly below (p.24ff.).

Chapter 2: Woman of Color Feminisms

Many scholars of the mainstream women's movement recognize today that feminism has often been exclusionary and discriminatory throughout its history. The historiography focuses disproportionately on white women's activism and perspectives despite the fact that women of Color also lifted their voices early on.

Black feminist scholar Beverly Guy-Sheftall challenged this trend of neglect with her 1995 collection, *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*. Although Black women's participation in the women's movement often went unrecognized, *Words of Fire* highlights the contributions of Black feminist thought from as early as the 1830's, including essays from lesser-known but equally important women, such as Anna Julia Cooper and Elise Johnson McDougald. The women in Guy-Sheftall's collection repeatedly pointed out the contradictions of a society structured by racism and sexism while providing testament to the degradation of Black women and the Black community as a whole. For example, Claudia Jones exposed the hypocrisy of official State proclamations of "love and reverence" for all mothers, showing that these values did not extend to the treatment of Black women who were punished for defending themselves and their families against white supremacist violence (109).

While each author is situated in her own specific context, as a collection of essays, they all point to ways to improve the basic conditions of the Black community and Black women. Although Black women have a long tradition of anti-racist feminism, they are either not seen as the leaders who will lift up the Black race, a position reserved for Black men, or they are seen as supplemental contributors to feminism in comparison to white women. Guy-Sheftall's anthology focuses the problems faced by Black women and the ways in which they overcome the "triple-jeopardy" (race, sex and class) that often characterizes their lived experiences. Many of the

Black feminists in the collection argue that racial oppression must be prioritized in order to also combat sex-based oppression for Black women.

The first chapter of Guy-Sheftall's anthology, "Beginnings: In Defense of Our Race and Sex, 1831-1900," is aptly titled in that much of the energy of these authors' work is spent defending the dignity and humanity of the Black community in language that sounds religiously inspired. Before they could even make the argument for equality, these authors had to make the case that African Americans were people with the same demand for dignity and value as white people. The second chapter goes beyond defensiveness and establishes how Black feminist formed the foundation of Civil Rights: rather than defending Black Womanhood, these authors are now "Defining Black Womanhood." An essay by Harlem Renaissance poet, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, called "The Negro Woman and the Ballot" is notable for recognizing that in the early years of post-19th amendment having voting rights, while important, could not immediately fix the problems of oppression. The third chapter, "Civil Rights and Women's Liberation: Racial/Sexual Politics in the Angry Decades," seeks to foreground the role of Black women during this era. The defensiveness of the earlier readings is replaced by assertiveness and strong advocacy for revolution and liberation. As a whole, this collection contributes to a fuller understanding of the history of the women's movement and the Black civil rights movement, their commonalities and discontinuities, and the ways in which Black women have historically fought for the liberation of their communities.

Many women of Color scholars point out that people of Color have always theorized despite the frequent denigration of the intellectual capacity of non-white people. Feminist critic Barbara Christian, for example, wrote in 1987 that treating the literature of people of Color as "minority discourse" is problematic and minoritizing, "For many of us have never conceived of

ourselves only as somebody's other" (54). Patricia Hill Collins in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. (2000) also brings attention to the theorizing that has always been present among communities often framed as non-intellectuals within the Eurocentric theoretical marketplace. Her text is concerned with knowledge production and challenging the incomplete frameworks for what constitutes intellectualism within dominant understandings. Collins engages the contradictions of the 'matrix of domination,' which she defines as the "overall organization of hierarchical power relations for any society" (229). She explains that these power relations are organized by overlapping and intersecting systems of oppression such that each group identifies whichever system of oppression they are most comfortable with and may ignore the ways in which they may have power over another group along a different axis. Although one of Collins' tasks within the book is to show how Black women's intellectual capacities and contributions have been historically degraded within the matrix of domination, she also discusses ways that Black women can be empowered to provide theoretical and analytical material important for pursuing social justice.

Women of Color are affected by both sexism and racism, as well as other forms of "difference," such as ableism or classism. As long as the systems of oppression and privilege are firmly in place, the power structures create comfort and ignorance for the privileged and, simultaneously, surveillance and dominance over exploited and repressed communities. The Combahee River Collective's 1977 "Black Feminist Statement" shows that Black women and other "Third World" women, as well as working-class women, have always been involved in the women's movement, "but both outside reactionary forces and racism and elitism within the movement itself have served to obscure our participation" (272). This declaration of the Collective's politics and expression of the multiple forms of oppression faced by Black lesbian

women continues to be influential. They identified their positionality as a locus of power stating: “We believe that the most profound and potentially most radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else's oppression” (273-4). This runs counter to mainstream feminism where single-issue feminists claim to work on behalf of all women but are really only focused on their own experience of oppression. As the structures of oppressions are interlinked, a movement concerned with justice and human rights, such as feminism, should work to dismantle those systems of patriarchy, capitalism, and white supremacy, and not leave that work to the most marginalized women whose participation is often ignored by the mainstream.

Women of Color have taken leadership on anti-racist feminisms by asserting their own theories and experiences and inserting themselves into the discourse of gender justice. Kimberlé Crenshaw famously developed a theory of intersectionality to provide for a comprehensive understanding of the ways that multiple, intersecting systems of oppression and privilege structure the experiences of different communities. Describing the damage done by single-issue feminism, Crenshaw wrote in 1989, “This adoption of a single-issue framework for discrimination not only marginalizes Black women within the very movements that claim them as part of their constituency but it also makes the illusive [sic] goal of ending racism and patriarchy even more difficult to attain” (152). Unlike white women who have claimed that the(ir) primary source of disenfranchisement is gender, intersectional feminists understand that race, class, sexuality, and other identities impact the ways women experience their gender differentially from the essentialized womanhood of mainstream (white) feminism. However, it is also important to recognize the specificity of intersectionality.

In 2015, Kimberlé Crenshaw wrote “Why Intersectionality Can’t Wait” to reclaim intersectionality from its overly-broad usage within mainstream feminism and to refocus the

theory on the socioeconomic well-being of Black women. “Because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated” (Crenshaw). Her article reminds us of the reason she developed intersectionality theory and why she reclaims its original intent – exposing intersectional erasure - Black women’s needs were not being met because there was no legal framework to provide recourse for the compound oppressions faced by Black women. And now, as intersectionality is within the mainstream of the feminist movement, Black women are still subjected to intersectional erasure as they experience inequitable health outcomes, and increased vulnerability to violence.

Black feminist poet and essayist Audre Lorde reminds mainstream white feminists of the distinct endangerments faced by women of Color: “surely you know that for nonwhite women in this country, there is an 80 percent fatality rate from breast cancer; three times the number of unnecessary eventrations [sic], hysterectomies and sterilizations as for white women; three times as many chances of being raped, murdered, or assaulted as exist for white women.” (70). In a similar vein, Andrea Smith wrote in *Conquest*, published in 2005, that violence against women of Color cannot be analyzed through a single lens of patriarchy as it “serves as a tool of racism and colonialism” (1). Women of Color are systematically made vulnerable and the mainstream anti-violence movement often fails to adequately respond to such violence. The context for this gendered violence includes a neoliberal socioeconomic system of governance, poverty within communities of Color that are hyper-surveilled and subject to increasing police brutality, policies that allow police officers to commit violent crimes with impunity, policies that support violent

gentrification of poor communities of Color, and policies that support the ongoing genocide of indigenous communities.

While writing with Native women at the center of her analysis, Andrea Smith's words are applicable to many other women of Color. She presents the idea that the colonizer has always used sexual violence as a tool of conquest. Smith writes: "where colonizers used sexual violence to eliminate Native populations, slave owners used rape to reproduce an exploitable labor force" (16). The effects of state-sponsored programs of colonization remain and are visible with the disproportionate levels of violence in Native and Black communities, for example, in the extent to which Native communities are affected by the prison system. Citing a 1996 study, Smith writes that "Native people are per capita the most arrested, most incarcerated, and most victimized by police brutality of any ethnic group in the country" (139). Neither Black nor Native communities are likely to reach out to the "carceral state authorities" when dealing with male violence against women. Thus, while privileged communities may expect for policing institutions to serve them, entire communities of Color are left with little state-sanctioned means to pursue justice and maintain order.

In *Arrested Justice: Black Women, Violence, and America's Prison Nation* (2012), Beth Richie discusses the buildup of the carceral state as it impacts Black women. With the recent increase in media coverage of police brutality against Black people, and Black men in particular, Black women are expected to provide a buffer from society's racism. Richie identifies this dynamic as the "trap of loyalty" whereby Black women are expected to maintain unwavering loyalty to men who perpetrate gendered violence because the mass incarceration and brutalization of Black men is given precedence over and beyond whatever Black women experience. Thus, if a Black woman is in an abusive relationship with a Black man, she may be

seen as a traitor if she tries to advocate for herself. According to this “trap,” Black women are privileged relative to Black men, even as Black women are incarcerated at higher rates than ever. Richie explains that women who are incarcerated are vulnerable to violence from within state institutions, from both inmates and officers alike. Richie writes that “beyond the overt harm caused by state agencies and people who represent them, attention to the violence ... frames a way to capture the harm caused by those governmental and other public agencies that are officially authorized to offer services, monitor behavior, and maintain social order, but fail to protect Black women in vulnerable communities” (139). Unfortunately, this particular form of state violence against Black women is furthered by the lack of data and research that would allow conditions to be made public whereby community stakeholders and policymakers could consider changes.

Beth Richie explains that prior to the 1960’s, gendered violence was rarely talked about publicly. Then, similarly to the mainstream feminist movement, the mainstream anti-violence movement mirrored the concerns of those with the most privilege: and white, middle-class women dominated the discourse. The mainstream anti-violence movement, which focuses on white middle-class women, fails to protect Black women. Richie talks specifically about how the anti-violence movement won the mainstream but lost its ability to effect radical change. One of the things that contributed to the dilution of the anti-violence movement was the promotion of the idea that every woman is equally vulnerable to sexual assault, without regard to factors such as race, sexuality, or socioeconomic status. While this “every woman” idea helped to make it easier to talk about sexual violence with less negative stigma than in previous generations, it also created a normative conceptualization of the innocent victim. Since Black women are most often

seen as non-normative, they cannot be seen as an innocent victim and therefore they do not experience justice equal to white women.

In addition to the privileging of dominant interests by the anti-violence movement, another way that that movement has been weakened in its ability to provide service to vulnerable women is through cooptation by the state. Richie names the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) which was seen as a major legislative accomplishment by the mainstream anti-violence movement. VAWA provided training and guidelines for police officers and mandated that they take tangible action as opposed to treating it as a private matter unsuited to the legal sphere. However, VAWA also had very negative effects for communities of Color, including increased policing and incarceration through mandatory arrest laws (85-86). Richie also points out that the mainstream anti-violence movement was coopted by the state through funding that reinforces the relationship to carceral feminism.

The conditions by which the anti-violence movement has been taken over include the privileging of the interests of the elite in order to appeal to the mainstream, receiving funding for services, and influencing legislation, as well as the movement away from the local leadership of women, who are personally invested in ending women's oppression towards specialized professionals in a bureaucratic industry. Adding to this discussion, Andrea Smith explains that the nonprofit industrial complex is part of the reason why the mainstream movement is incapable of effecting the types of changes that would attack the underlying reasons for male violence against women. The phrase "nonprofit industrial complex" refers to the shift from community-based grassroots organization to the professionalization of social justice work whose accountability is to the government and funders, rather than to the community being served.

As bell hooks notes, integration and legal rulings against racist systems do not always benefit communities of Color. Sometimes Black communities thrive under care from

their own communities rather than being made to engage with a dominant white community hooks argues that prior to the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education ruling, there were benefits of being in an all-black school.

Despite the clear disadvantages posed by the disingenuous 1896 Plessy vs. Ferguson “separate but equal” schools, where black schools were clearly disadvantaged in comparison with white schools, the students did not have to face interpersonal racism in school. Black teachers sincerely cared for their Black students, and as hooks argues, this created a sacred space. Today, despite legal provisions against public discrimination, there are many ways communities of Color can still be discriminated against.

POLITICS AND ACADEMIC FEMINISMS

The women's movement has always been a political endeavor. As the quality and character of the political context changes, the responses to oppression must also change. One such response to change involved the women's movement's embrace of the academy. There are various external factors that dampen feminist efforts towards liberation. Feminists have to choose to incorporate or fight the oppressive systems that from which they wish to be liberated. According to a 2015 survey for Vox news, only 18% of those polled identify themselves as a feminist although 85% believe in women's equality. Many people who hold anti-patriarchal beliefs clearly do not find themselves aligned with the women's movement. Not only is feminism associated with white women, but it is also commonly perceived as an academic domain in a way that is interpreted as exclusionary to non-academics or people without high levels of education. Much feminist scholarship is not readily accessible to the general public or to the women with whom it claims to be concerned. Ruth-Ellen Joeres, Professor of Women Studies, wrote in 1997 in "The Paradox of A Feminist Academic Journal" that feminism's "entrenchment within the academy will perforce limit its desired impact on the non-academic world, which increasingly (or recurrently) suspects the academy of elitist isolation, of using pointy-headed jargon, and of utter impracticability" (442). Barbara Christian also argues against such 'elitist isolation,' writing that theory should have a direct relationship to action, which is not the norm within the academy (53).

Joy James, political philosopher and humanities professor, adds her own critique in *Seeking the Beloved Community: A Feminist Race Reader*: "The academic mind-set mirrors white supremacy: 'the idea of white supremacy emerges partly because of the powers within the structure of modern discourse - powers to produce and prohibit, develop and delimit, forms of rationality, scientificity, and objectivity which set perimeters and draw boundaries for

intelligibility, availability, and legitimacy of certain ideas” (6). It is not that an academic pursuit of feminist scholarship is unjust in and of itself. Within the academy lies opportunities for interaction with like-minded feminist freedom seekers, engagement with liberatory scholarship, and the means for dissemination of expression. However, those same possibilities also exist for anti-feminist, reactionary, and oppressive scholarship, which is not to say that the academy is then politically neutral, but that critiques of oppressive systems must be encouraged, observed, and respected.

As the academic and political spheres of society intertwine, James explores the differences between liberal, radical, and revolutionary politics in *Shadowboxing: Representations of Black Feminist Politics*. She defines radical politics as being about identifying and addressing the root causes of oppressive systems and revolutionary politics as being about overturning oppressive societal structures. James critiques liberalism for being reformist: while radical politics and revolutionary politics want to fight the system, liberalism wants to make it more comfortable, ignoring the root causes of societal problems and finding accommodations for injustice and oppression. James argues that the “corporate left” functions as a movement to “mainstream” radical and revolutionary political activism through cause-based conferences, the nonprofit sector, and the academy. She notes that there is a lack of democratic practices in these professionalized spaces as well as any accountability to disenfranchised communities.

Furthermore, James explains that the corporate left appropriates radical and revolutionary Black politics, framing such ideologies as too extreme. This phenomenon is achieved by the moderating of such ideologies while simultaneously popularizing radical and revolutionary Black women’s images, such as Angela Davis, such that more people are familiar with her afro hairstyle than her politics. With commodified and domesticated radical and revolutionary

messaging, the corporate left appears to have more potential for effecting change than they really have while preventing examination and altering of the root structures of oppression. James' analysis of Black feminist politics provides an understanding of some of the obstacles antiracism faces as a political movement. This is relevant to many moments of the mainstream women's movement where class, sexuality, and race were marginalized as distractions from the "bigger problem" of sexism. These distinctions were maligned as identity politics, a distraction from the apparently more important power dynamics. Thus, the overall impact of this historical maligning of Black feminist thought is that it is relegated to the sidelines of Black (male) and (white) feminist activist scholarship.

As Audre Lorde suggests: "In a society where the good is defined in terms of profit rather than in terms of human need, there must always be some group of people who, through systematized oppression, can be made to feel surplus, to occupy the place of the dehumanized inferior" (114). When profit is the driving force, the dynamics of power and privilege versus disadvantage and oppression are going to be maintained despite injustice. Or, through liberalism, the injustice will be ameliorated, made more tolerable, but the underlying systems and institutions that perpetuate that oppression go unexamined and therefore unreformed.

Linda Martín Alcoff argues in "An Epistemology for the Next Revolution" (2011) that "universal knowledge claims about knowledge itself need, at minimum, a deep reflexivity about their own cultural and social location" (68) because lived experience influences what is valuable as knowledge. Furthermore, Alcoff argues that epistemological authority should be given "to those whose lives and experiences are marginalized by the dialectic of intelligible possibilities," in other words, the poor and (racialized, gendered) others whose cultural and social location are a source of oppression (68). She argues that "the dialectic of intelligible possibilities" is in fact a limitation of what is conceivable and knowable according to dominant ways of thinking, and that

the knowledge gained from surviving oppression, although currently not seen as such, actually holds potential for going beyond our current limitations. Echoes of this sentiment reverberate in a 2013 article entitled “Transnational Feminist Crossings: On Neoliberal and Radical Critique,” where Chandra Mohanty, postcolonial and transnational feminist theorist, challenges neoliberal academic feminism to be held accountable to activist communities and to accord “epistemic privilege to the most marginalized communities of women” whom she argues, hold emancipatory, or insurgent knowledges (987). I agree. Those with the experiential knowledge of oppression should be recognized as having an epistemic advantage with regards to what is required for liberation, regardless of Eurocentric markers of epistemic mastery, such as credentials or job titles.

Mohanty argues that feminist scholarship and theory is misunderstood, co-opted, appropriated, domesticated, and depoliticized within the neoliberal academy (970). Which is not to say that the academic study of feminism automatically makes it counter-revolutionary. However, “If feminist scholars are to preserve their commitments to gender, race, and sexual justice (the heart of radical, systemic, intersectional, antiracist feminist projects), they/we must attend closely to notions of diversity that embrace generic conceptions of difference that are flattened, privatized, and shorn of a critique of power” (973). These critiques help explain why Kimberlé Crenshaw has recently needed to reclaim intersectionality for its original purpose.. Mohanty provides an overarching critique of neoliberalism within the academy and NGOs. “Neoliberalism in the early twenty-first century is marked by market-based practices on the one hand (the privatization, commodification, and proliferation of difference) and authoritarian, national-security-driven penal state practices on the other” (Mohanty 970). She points out processes of domestication, commodification, privatization, etc. that are hegemonic tools of colonization that work to disempower collective/community activist projects of feminist

emancipation/liberation. Mohanty engages systemic analyses of domination and exploitation: “...if all experience is merely individual, and the social is always collapsed into the personal, feminist critique and radical theory appear irrelevant -- unless they confront these discursive shifts” (971).

Chapter 3: Challenges and Opportunities for the Women's Movement

In *The Meaning of Freedom: And Other Difficult Dialogues*, Angela Davis, explains that “[f]eminist intellectual, political, and institutional practices cannot be adequately practiced if the politics of gender are conceptualized (overtly or implicitly) as superseding or transcending the politics of race, sexuality, social class, nation, and disability” (190). Again, the mainstream women’s movement must situate gender oppression within other social organizing structures. By this point, it should be clear that the attitudes, behaviors, and ignorance begotten by privilege can make it difficult to form the alliances capable of effecting change. Clearly, the ways in which white women work towards anti-racism needs to be rethought.

Australian Indigenous studies scholar Odette Kelada states that in order to transform the movement towards anti-racist feminism, mainstream (white) feminism must “shift its very framework of assumed knowledges and power positions, even as it articulates experiences of oppression.” However, since most educational institutions actively and passively work to allow white people to be unaware of racist societal structures, white women experience epistemological ignorance and are ill-prepared for intersectionality. There is a long history of white feminists producing work mired in Anglocentrism and imperialism due to their privilege. Thus, some feminist theorists believe that white women may be incapable of overcoming the ignorance produced by privilege that prevents anti-racist theorization.

Feminist theorist Adale Sholock promotes a methodology of epistemic uncertainty for “the privileged” to more effectively engage in anti-racist work. Sholock discusses the continual critiques towards the solipsism, racism, and imperialism of white feminism, and asserts that it is okay, and in fact helpful, to be aware of one’s limitations and to accept them while continuing to do antiracist work:

It is likely that the desire for epistemic confidence and mastery among white Western feminists is related to the epistemological entitlements that underwrite normative whiteness... Accordingly, a methodology of the privileged should not resolve the self-doubt of white anti-racists but rather strategically deploy epistemic uncertainty as a treasonous act against the cognitive privileges that support white Western hegemonies (708-9).

She argues that acknowledgment of one's limitations to "master" the race question as a white person should not dissuade from engagement with racial issues.

Faulty epistemic confidence is supported by a western educational system immersed in white supremacist patriarchal capitalism. There is pressure towards mastery, of being an expert. The academy can thusly produce white feminists that have epistemological blank spots around race. This means that they have not gained knowledge about systemic racism either experientially/ personally, procedurally, or propositionally. Schools don't typically teach about race formally. People of Color, however, are most often acutely aware of racial inequality, having profound experiential knowledge of racism. On the other hand, the system of white privilege/white supremacy creates white people who are "ignorant of social realities such as racism and white privilege and yet simultaneously confident in their thinking" (Shollock 712). White privilege provides a type of barrier to knowledge for white people about the ways in which they benefit from or are complacent with white supremacy.

The works of women of Color feminists are absolutely essential for white anti-racist feminists who lack epistemic privilege related to racism and for the women's movement to remain relevant. Shollock discusses postcolonial and third world feminist theorist Chela Sandoval's argument for a "methodology of the oppressed" based on the idea that oppressed

peoples develop “survival tactics and epistemic strategies of resistance” that more privileged people often lack. She also invokes Gloria Anzaldúa’s theory of ‘mestiza consciousness’ which “describes the efforts of the oppressed to produce knowledge and engage in revolutionary action amid situations that are discomfoting, conflicted, and indeterminate” (711). For feminists who may for whatever reason be unaware of women of Color scholars and theorists, Sholock shows that they are missing essential insights necessary for anti-racist feminist movements and transnational solidarity. It is important for white feminists to do the work of anti-racism, not depending on people of Color to educate them, and there are plenty of resources for finding women-of-Color-produced narratives, theory, and creative works.

Gary Lemons, Professor of English who writes about teaching as a pro-feminist man promotes Black feminism as liberatory for all. He writes: “For some white students who have never really explored white identity, white supremacy, and white privilege, black feminism opens the possibility for radical self-transformation not only toward the attainment of anti-racist consciousness, but the conviction of political activism that calls for an end to white supremacy” (Lemons 231-2). Black feminism, and by extension, women of Color feminisms provide an important intervention for all feminists to enact an anti-racist praxis.

Sociologists and other scholars are working to understand how the education system can be utilized to teach anti-racism to the general population. However, I question the capability of a neoliberal education system designed to provide workers, maintain national wealth accumulation, and uphold the status quo to reform itself from within. Furthermore, it is possible to be highly educated about the dynamics of oppression without taking responsibility for one’s participation. William Aal, a white, anti-racist organizer critiques anti-racist scholarship within the academy as well as liberal white anti-racism.: “We have seen how white people, especially

those who are better educated are very good at using antiracist language to allow themselves to feel good about themselves without actually having to change” (305). However, this is not to say that education has no liberatory potential as counter-hegemonic spaces often exist within oppressive institutions.

Sociologist Pamela Perry and anthropologist Alexis Shotwell argue in a 2009 article that “...the most salient catalyst of change [is] the constellation of tacit, affective, and propositional knowledges into a relational understanding of race, racism, and antiracist practice” (42). In other words, they argue that antiracist education should be personally experiential, attend to emotions, and be taught formally. An effective anti-racist reeducation would need to acknowledge that there are different ways of learning and understanding and would integrate those different forms into a deeper understanding of the workings of racism. Relationships with people of Color are shown to have an impact on the development of white anti-racist identity but there can also be interpretations of interracial relationships that lead white people to develop color-blind ideologies or even anger towards people of Color (44-5). Although the impact of relationships with people of Color is often shown to provide white people with increased insight into the experiences of racialized “others” and build empathy, this does not take into consideration what people of Color may or may not gain from such interactions. This insight is important to understanding, not only the ways in which people of privilege are consistently centered, but also for understanding power dynamics that influence interracial relationships among feminists.

In an article written in 2000, Jacqueline Johnson, a sociology professor at Adelphi University, writing with legal scholar Sharon Rush and social theorist Joe Feagin, provides multiple steps by which society can, through multiple generations, attain a utopian, non-racist society where the concept of racial categorization would lose its meaning and utility. While the

term “utopian” signals that such an egalitarian society is unrealistic, the phrase “non-racist” means that when race is no longer a hierarchy, there will be no need for anti-racism. The authors dispute popular understandings of the natural progressiveness of youth - while overt racism is much less acceptable contemporarily, there are many more subtle expressions of racism. Thus the authors promote a reeducation for all of society in all of the places where learning takes place - in the media, religious centers, and families, as well as schools. This reeducation would also entail reintegration, since there has been a trend towards resegregation despite civil rights era integration efforts.

Feminist organizations are also important centers for the women’s movement. They are also spaces opportune for anti-racist praxis. Sarita Srivastava, scholar of social movements and feminist theory, shows that feminist organizations have difficulty recognizing their own participation in racist structures of organizing. These difficulties continue despite opportunities for education and exposure to women of Color feminisms. As Srivastava’s research on feminist organizations shows, “[a]s some white feminists move toward new ideals of antiracist feminism, they often move toward deeper self-examination rather than toward organizational change” (31). However, while radical self-transformation is an important step towards anti-racism, individual changes do not necessarily lead to larger cultural, systemic, and institutional changes. Structures that uphold racism within feminist organizations, including one’s own participation, need to be acknowledged and addressed. Srivastava’s research shows that the negative influence of “white fragility” is especially common and problematic within majority white feminist organizations that are working towards anti-racism. These types of issues prevent white women and women of Color from forming alliances which can be employed to build power and concentrate strength to fight oppression.

In philosopher Shannon Sullivan's 2012 *philoSOPHIA* article "On the Need for a New Ethos of White Antiracism" she argues that "white people are part of the problem, not the solution, when it comes to ending white domination" (23). White women may continue to perpetuate racism by attempting to distance themselves from the acknowledgement of their participation and complicity in systems of racism. They may seek out friendships with people of color, believing that they must have nonwhite people's trust before they can fight white racism. Sullivan argues in *Good White People: The Problem with Middle-Class White Anti-Racism* (2014) that such distancing strategies serve as an attempt to deny responsibility for white people to do their part to end racism. Instead, she argues that white people need to "get their own houses in order" rather than engaging in what she calls "another harmful manifestation of ... white people's toxic quest for racial redemption and freedom from self-hatred through relationships with people of color" (158). This is especially relevant for white women who have been stereotyped within Eurocentric understandings to be more spiritual or more religious or more compassionate and kind than men, and who may get involved with anti-racism looking for redemption for their racism. It makes sense that white women would be drawn to anti-racism when they are socialized to want to be good people, but being a good person has little to do with creating shared power amongst oppressed communities and changing institutions that oppress.

Sullivan adds that "People of color don't need white people to save them, and they don't need to use up their energy and resources trying to save white people in return" (158). Sullivan offers a strategy to address the problems of whiteness at their core, that is, within white people. She promotes a transformation of whiteness that is nurtured by love and care, a position from where she believes it may even be possible to transform avowed white supremacists away from their hatred and aims of domination and violence. However, while this concept is positioned in

contrast to white-guilt as well as in contrast to a white supremacist conception of love, white anti-racist feminists need to find a way to take action, to harness this energy of love to challenge the structures of white supremacy. These critiques and suggestions are invaluable to white feminists seeking to enter into alliances with feminists of Color.

Frank Wilderson, professor of Drama and African American studies, is also helpful for understanding that within the feminist movement cross-racial alliances may be plagued by what he calls, antagonisms, which cannot be cured by making friends with each other (3, 5). The characterization of difference as unsolvable antagonisms suggests that the chasm between white women and women of Color cannot be bridged by calls for sisterhood, but a deeper understanding may help provide a foundation to improve the material conditions for oppressed women. One obvious and simple place to start might be for white feminists to stop calling themselves slaves. Meryl Streep caused outrage in 2015 when she wore a shirt emblazoned with the quote “I’d rather be a rebel than a slave.” Despite the historicity of the quote, which was used to promote the film *Suffragette*, starring Streep, the incident was seen as a white woman’s erasure of the enslavement of Black women, men, and children, and a reminder of the white supremacy utilized by women suffragists (Abad-Santos). Similar to the early abolitionists turned suffragists, through to the second wave and beyond, this comparison of white women to slaves continues without any regard to the descendants of actual slaves. In *Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (2010) Wilderson explains that to be a slave is a structural positionality associated specifically with anti-Blackness; it is thus grossly inappropriate for white women who feel like second-class citizens to invoke slavery (10-11, 14).

INTERCONNECTIONS

White, single-issue feminism may seem rational in that those who do not experience life at the intersections of oppression are ill-suited to address it. It may make sense to advocate for yourself instead of trying to interfere in the business of a group to which you do not belong, a possible justification for some feminists' lack of understanding for intersectionality. There are many people, however, who choose to work as allies with others across difference and privilege. It is important to ask and identify what impetus people of privilege might have to turn against their self-interests (power & privilege) and work towards justice? I'm sure there are various reasons, among them a desire to see a more equitable world, a less violent world, etc. but it can be difficult for seemingly disparate communities to see the interconnections between themselves and others. Especially when one's positionality, particularly race, class, and geographic privilege, is characterized by the ability to retain ignorance of the quotidian violence that is seemingly endemic to many minoritized communities within and outside of the United States.

Decolonial feminist theorist Laura E. Perez in "Crooked Lines" (2014) writes about the Mayan spiritual philosophy of In Lak'ech as well as the concept of "interbeing," from Zen Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh, conveying an understanding of the interconnectedness that we have with one another. Dominant society promotes a sense of individualism that works to separate individuals from each other and from ourselves, fragmenting our identities into comfortably commodified pieces such that expression of holistic personhood is discouraged and suppressed. Perez writes: "The antidote to the *susto* (spirit fright/ psychic loss) of culturally induced mind-body-spirit fragmentation is in the pilgrimage to the Self within self, to Nature

within one's own unique nature" (28). This quotation suggests to me that it is necessary to work on one's holistic personal integration and to live honestly. Understanding that the pressures of dominant society discourage expression of our full range of emotions or the cultivation of spirituality outside of the segregated private sphere, ~~our mind from our body and from our souls,~~ it is also a concern that this fragmentation leads to separation from each other.

Chicana feminist Alejandra Elenes similarly explains that "[Spiritual interconnectedness]...is antithetical to ideologies that claim there are essential and hierarchal differences that justify the subjugation, exploitation, and abuse of racially different people" (46). It makes sense that when people see each other as "different," they find it easier to treat those "others" as lesser. "This form of spirituality requires recognizing and valuing ourselves first and foremost as human beings. Also, we must understand and respect our relationships and 'radical interconnections' to other people, plants, animals and Mother Earth" (Elenes 59). This means that government economies and natural ecologies cannot be considered separately from systems of oppression like racism and sexism.

Jacqui Alexander, professor emeritus of women and gender studies at the University of Toronto, provides a theory of interconnection that allows for comprehensiveness, wholeness, and depth in *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (2005). She discusses how privilege works to separate people from the struggles of the exploited, opening with "On Living the Privileges of Empire" that describes how "first world" lifestyles are most often untouched by the atrocities that occur around the "other" side of the globe. Within this system of imperialist-derived privilege, those living within the 'Empire' are meant to be comfortable, complacent, unquestioning, and disconnected from far-away (or racially segregated) places. Nevertheless, Alexander shows that it is possible to cultivate an

awareness and a sense of connection to those living very different lives. She writes: “I did not awake this morning to the deafening noise of sirens or the rocketing sound of nonstop bombs. I did not awake to the missiles that fall like rain from the sky, exploding on contact with land, staking out huge craters within the earth, collapsing people into buildings, trees into rubble, men into women, hands into feet, children into dust...” (1). Despite the distance and the manufactured sense of incongruity, Alexander explains that there is a spiritual interconnection to the struggles and people who are fighting oppression and exploitation everywhere: “As human beings, we have a sacred connection to one another, and this is why enforced separations wreak havoc on our Souls” (282). This sense of connection disrupts the dichotomy between privilege and poverty, north and south, academic and community that would otherwise be obscured. Underscoring the importance of interconnection, Alexander states that “there is no other work but the work of creating and re-creating ourselves within the context of community” (283).

From these interventions in to the forces of fragmentation, it follows that we are all connected through the ecosystem, and globalized streams of information, labor and wealth. Although it may seem that we live worlds apart from others, we are connected metaphysically, politically, socially, economically, and legislatively through empire, law, trade, migration, and nature. However, it seems that over the last few decades and especially since President Obama was elected, more and more people are quick to jump on the post-racial bandwagon and claim “colorblindness,” claiming that we *are* all connected, but in a way that ignores systems of oppression, making it easier to evade responsibility for their benefitting from racial disparity. Spiritual understandings of interconnection do not erase the very real and significant material differences between the races and genders.

CONCLUSION

While the Women's March on Washington tried to be inclusive and diverse, and the mainstream women's movement often tries as well, there is a lack of reconciliation of the movement's racist history. Pantsuit Nation, a major sponsor of the March and the network where organizers first connected, told everyone to wear white as they cast their ballots for Hillary Clinton on November 8th, 2016. Clinton did so herself when she accepted the nomination for President earlier that year, paying homage to suffragists such as the ones previously mentioned. This fashion statement showed Pantsuit Nation and Clinton to be conveniently forgetting that white supremacy was deliberately employed as the suffragettes fought to establish themselves in a political system rooted in Native genocide and African enslavement (Friedman). In "Why I Do Not Support the Women's March on Washington," Brittany T. Oliver explains: "The white pantsuit worn on Election Day was made possible by white women suffragists who stepped on the backs of my ancestors."

The controversy and criticism of the Women's March on Washington showed that many feminists are not learning from history. If mainstream feminism continues to be dominated by the concerns of the most privileged women, it will suffer from superficial frivolity. This critique is not new. One of the pieces in Guy-Sheftall's collection, "The Black Movement and Women's Liberation," written by Linda La Rue, a member of the Third World Women's Alliance, seems to respond directly to the mainstream's Friedan-esque type of feminism that focuses on women with privilege: "Is there any logical comparison between the oppression of the black woman on welfare who has difficulty feeding her children and the discontent of the suburban mother who has the luxury to protest the washing of the dishes on which her family's full meal was

consumed?” (173). Laurie Penny echoes this sentiment in her book *Unspeakable Things: Sex, Lies and Revolution*:

The feminism that sells is the sort of feminism that can appeal to almost everybody while challenging nobody, feminism that soothes, that speaks for and to the middle class, aspirational feminism that speaks of shoes and shopping and sugar-free snacks and does not talk about poor women, queer women, ugly women, transsexual women, sex workers, single parents, or anybody else who fails to fit the mould.

This quote appears in an article entitled “‘Feminism Lite’ is Letting Down the Women Who Need it the Most” by Antony Loewenstein and is a reminder to all feminists that though we all have our different concerns, those of the most privileged should not steer the agenda for feminist liberation.

Why are we still dealing with racism and sexism today after so much theory and scholarship has been produced to make people aware of such problems? There is a plethora of information regarding the interlinking of oppression across lines of race, gender, and sexuality. The history of the mainstream feminist movement can be understood as white feminist domination in three waves. Women of Color feminists and scholars have provided extensive intellectual and emotional labor to support the uplift of all genders, sexualities, social classes, and races yet racism and white supremacy continue to permeate mainstream U.S. institutions, systems of governance, and interpersonal/community relations. Despite the work of many scholars, activists, intellectuals, and community members, there seems to be insurmountable barriers to achieving a common understanding around oppression. Privileged groups do not recognize the injustice behind their access to power and resources. Inequity continues along historic structures of identity to maintain the subjugation of particular groups in order to secure

the power of privileged groups.

This report is meant to provide ample evidence for the centering of women of Color and other marginalized women within the mainstream feminist movement. Kimberlé Crenshaw created intersectionality theory in 1989 with the idea that Black women's positionality is best able to challenge all forms of discrimination because they experience a compounded discrimination on behalf of, at the very least, their race and gender (145). Crenshaw wrote in her original treatise on intersectionality: "when they enter, we all enter" (167). The meaning of this quote is made clear by the Combahee River Collective, organized on the basis of their scorned differences as Black women who wrote: "If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression" (276). Likewise, Chandra Mohanty asks: "How would academic feminist projects be changed if we were accountable to activist/academic communities...?" Her intervention is to "recommit to insurgent knowledges...antiracist, [and] anti-imperialist feminisms" (987).

As shown by those women who decided to stay home January 21st, there are many woman-positive, anti-patriarchal women who do not identify with the feminist movement for a variety of reasons, not to mention the specifically anti-feminist and post-feminist men and women who seem to see nothing wrong with current dynamics of gender-based violence and disparity. This is not a matter of personal preference or identification, but can be understood as the result of mainstream feminism's exclusionary practices and failure to influence a wider understanding of the ways in which the multiplicity of various oppressions impact women differently. In order to shed its exclusivist image as an elitist, white and academic movement, the cooptation and commodification of radical feminism needs to be acknowledged and reversed. Mainstream single-issue feminism must expand itself to acknowledge that heteropatriarchal

oppression works in conjunction with white supremacy and neo-imperialist capitalism. If feminism's liberatory aim of creating equity for all women is to be achieved or even taken seriously, feminists must enact a praxis of deep inclusivity that counters the power dynamics of positionality between different women. This means conscientiously and intentionally centering and amplifying the voices of the most marginalized: women of Color, including Black and Indigenous women, transwomen, poor women, and disabled women.

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