

The problem of African-American feminism

Women of color confront sexism and racism

Anita J. Jenious
Assistant Director
Opportunity Development Center

Race and sex are not mutually exclusive categories for women of color. One cannot choose on any given day to be more female than black or vice versa. African-American women are keenly aware of their color and gender at all times, not because they choose to be, but because society does not allow otherwise. White women may be oblivious to how race and gender impact our daily interactions with others. For some women, the impact may not be as significant because they rarely have to think of race, but when one is black and female, the impact can be somewhat inconvenient.

It can be inconvenient because there are few venues which allow women of color to address both issues simultaneously. Time and energy must be divided between the elimination of gender discrimination on one day and racial discrimination on another.

It seems as if a choice must be made to determine which is the greater of the two oppressions, racism or sexism. It is an impossible task. Often in attempts to build a diverse group of people to fight one or the other of these oppressions, established groups neglect issues of concern to women of color. Perhaps this neglect is why some women of color, believing that the feminist movement has intentionally excluded them, shy away from identifying themselves as feminists, and look for some other term to describe themselves.

Womanist is the preferred description of some women of color. Noted author Alice Walker, for example, is fond of the term. For some women of color the term black feminist has some racist implications. They feel that since

a qualifying adjective must come before it, the word feminist must refer only to white women when it stands alone.

Other women of color, like Patricia Hill Collins, suggest that a definition of black feminism which avoids any racist implications is possible. In her book, *Black Feminist Thought*, Collins suggests that the ideas of black women intellectuals can be used to form a working definition of black feminism, which she describes as "a process of self-conscious struggle that empowers women and men to actualize a humanist vision of community."

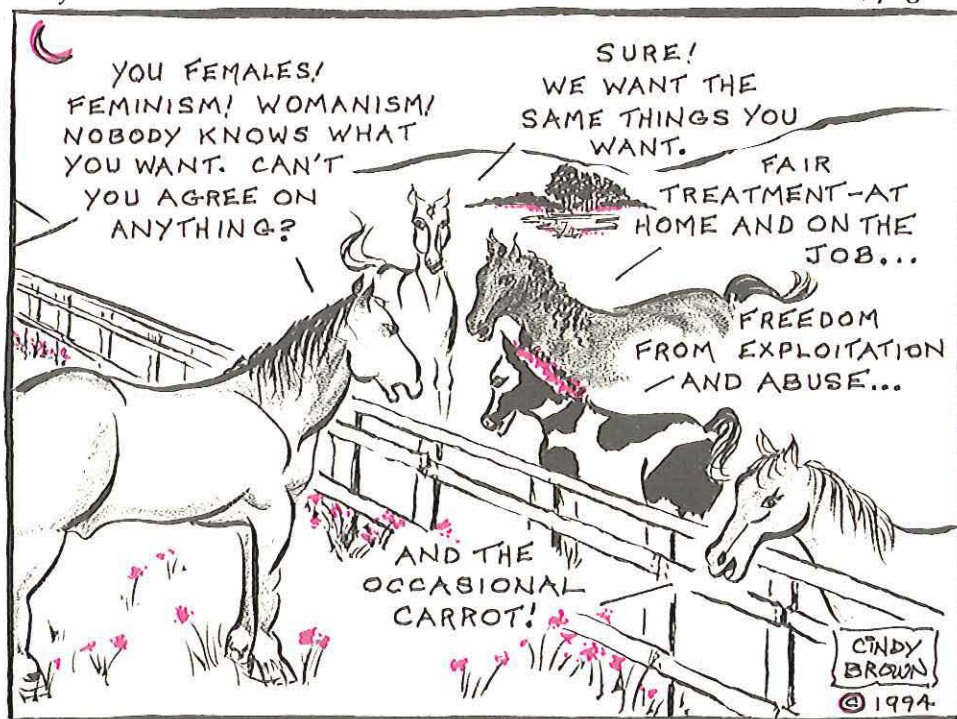
Her definition is intriguing because all persons, not just black women, can use it to devise their own three-prong strategy for combating all isms (racism, sexism, ageism, etc...) and for building networks and alliances which benefit everyone. What Collins describes as "a

process of self-conscious struggle" is the first step. This may simply be a personal self-assessment.

In other words, we can scan our thoughts and actions to determine our own prejudices and biases. This could indeed be a struggle because none of us likes to admit to any predetermined notions about others.

However, until we learn to evaluate each person on the basis of his or her individual merits, while also recognizing that we all have personal likes and dislikes which may impact our decisions, we will never be able to proceed to the second step, empowering women and men.

As people who occasionally encounter difficulties because of their gender and race, women of color are aware that we inflict injustices upon each other —see *AFRICAN-AMERICAN*, page 5



“NEWS QUOTES”

Yale's St. Judy: she scaled the Ivy

Judith Rodin, formerly known as "St. Judy" at Yale where she was provost but had been passed over for president, will take office as president of the University of Pennsylvania July 1, the first woman to lead an Ivy League school.

A Penn alumna, Rodin received the unanimous backing of the 16-member executive committee of the school's Board of Trustees.

Rodin had been chair of Yale's psychology department and dean of its graduate school of arts and sciences. Thomas Crew, chair of Yale's psychology department, commented, "Clearly, what is Penn's tremendous gain is Yale's loss."

Breaking into the presidency of an Ivy League school is expected to have a

trickle effect for women to assume presidencies at other schools.

Although almost 12% of the country's colleges and universities are led by women, only a few are big-name schools, including Nannerl Keohane at Duke, W. Ann Reynolds at New York's CUNY system, Judith Albino at the University of Colorado system, and Katharine Lyall at the University of Wisconsin system.

Credited with paving the way for Penn to consider a woman president is interim president Claire Fagin, former nursing department chair, who returns to teaching.

Women in Higher Education
January 1994

Studies show low-fat diets help reduce the risk of lung cancer

Now there's yet another reason to cut back on fatty foods. A recent study has shown that the risk of developing lung cancer is up to five times as high in nonsmoking women whose diets are heavy in saturated fats as in those women who avoid cigarettes and eat leaner foods. Saturated fats are found in meats, dairy products, tropical oils, and hydrogenated vegetable oils. Although most cases of lung cancer are attributable to smoking, as many as 20% of women who get the disease are nonsmokers, and for them dietary factors may be especially important.

A National Cancer Institute investigator compared the diets of 600 women who were diagnosed with lung cancer with those of 1,400 healthy women. The participants were white nonsmokers living in Missouri who were between the ages of 30 and 84. Women who derived over 40% of their total calories from fat were at the highest risk for lung cancer, said epidemiologist Michael Alavanja at an American Cancer Society meeting in San Diego. Nonsmoking women who limited fat to under 30% of their energy intake had the lowest risk. Reducing saturated fat consumption appeared to have the strongest protective effect against the disease.

Previous studies have suggested that eating plenty of fruits and vegetables might reduce the risk for lung cancer, but in this investigation women on high- and low-fat diets consumed similar amount of fruits and vegetables, said Dr. Alavanja. When it comes to

prevention, eating more fruits and vegetables without trimming saturated fat may have little benefit.

A low-fat diet may also help to prevent lung cancer in men. A study published last year in *Epidemiology* found that both men and women who ate lots of fatty foods were at an increased risk for the disease.

Harvard Health Letter
January 1994

Women scientists lagging in industry jobs

Women working as scientists and engineers are making little progress in breaking into industry, and a federal research council says companies are largely to blame.

The National Research Council, an arm of the National Academy of Sciences, convened a conference a year ago to determine why women make up 45% of the work force but only 12% of the scientists and engineers working in industry.

A report issued by a Research Council committee last week said that women must contend with sexist attitudes and unequal pay and that companies are doing little to help them juggle a career and family.

"I thought surely things were getting better, but when I saw the statistics I was amazed," said Dr. Betsy Ancker-Johnson, a retired vice president at the General Motors Corporation and an engineer who helped prepare the report.

"The message is for companies to take advantage of the talent that's available," she said. "But also for women: don't forget you're going to work your tail off."

Women tend to choose careers in life sciences, behavioral sciences and social sciences, fields in which industry plays a fairly small part, the report acknowledged. In 1989, 75% of science degrees awarded to women were in those fields, as against 46% for men.

New York Times
January 18, 1994

Editor's Note: Visiting Professor Suzanne Lenhart from the University of Tennessee at Knoxville will lead a colloquium on women in science in 118 Sarratt on February 10. See calendar, page 3, for more information.



Women's VU

Published monthly September through June at the Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center, Vanderbilt University, Franklin Building, West Side Row. Mailing address: Box 1513 Station B, Nashville, TN 37235.

Nancy A. Ransom, director

Judith Tefft Helfer, assistant director for programs and editor, *Women's VU*

Andrew Grogan, assistant editor, layout and design

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Pages 4 and 5 photos by Rebecca Fischer

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Calendar of
Events

Margaret
Cuninggim
Women's
Center



February 2 (Wednesday)

Gender Study Group, 5:00 to 6:00 p.m., Cuninggim Center. Spaces are available for new members. Text required. Women who are interested in joining the group should speak with Nancy Ransom, 322-4843. Also meets February 16.

February 8 (Tuesday)

Lunchtime Book Review. Teresa A. Goddu, assistant professor of English, reviews *Jazz* by Toni Morrison. 12:15 to 1:15 p.m., Cuninggim Center.

February 9 (Wednesday)

Writers Workshop, 5:15 to 7:15 p.m., Cuninggim Center. New members welcome. Also meets February 23.

February 10 (Thursday)

"Women in Science: The Changing Frontier." A colloquium led by Suzanne Lenhart, professor of mathematics at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville. 12:15 p.m. to 1:30 p.m., 118 Sarratt.

February 11 (Friday)

Brown Bag Lunch for New Staff and Faculty. The second Friday of each month throughout the year is designated as a time for guests to meet the Cuninggim Center staff and learn about activities and programs. Men as well as women are invited to bring a lunch from 12:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m. Hot and cold beverages will be provided.

February 14 (Monday)

Book Group discusses *Waiting to Exhale* by Terry McMillan. Facilitator is Cindy Lehmbeck. New members welcome. 5:15 to 6:15 p.m., Cuninggim Women's Center.

February 15 (Tuesday)

What's It Like To Be A Woman In Law School? A panel of women law students discusses law school and law as a career with women considering law school. 4:30 p.m. to 6:00 p.m., Cuninggim Center.

February 16 (Wednesday)

How Russian Women are Meeting Today's Revolution. Nancy A. Ransom, director of the Cuninggim Center, reports with slides from a visit in October with university women and community activists in Minsk, Moscow, and St. Petersburg. 4:30 to 5:30 p.m. Kennedy Center, Peabody Campus, room 410.

February 17 (Thursday)

So You Think You'd Like To Go To Medical School? A panel of women medical students discusses medical school and medicine as a career for women considering medical school. 4:30 p.m. to 6:00 p.m., Furman 109.

February 21 (Monday)

Dissertation Writers Group I meets from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m., Cuninggim Center.

February 22 (Tuesday)

Lunchtime Book Review. Renita J. Weems, assistant professor of Hebrew Bible, reviews *A Troubling in my Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering*, edited by Emilie Townes. 12:15 to 1:15 p.m., Cuninggim Center.

Challenging Some Myths About Childbirth led by Penelope F. Wright, RNC, MSN. Program addresses sources of fear associated with childbirth and birth as depicted in popular culture. Videotaped vignettes of actual births are shown. Reservations required and are limited to first twenty persons. 4:30 p.m. to 6:00 p.m., Cuninggim Center. Men and women are invited to attend.

February 28 (Monday)

Dissertation Writers Group II meets from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m., Cuninggim Center. For more information call 322-4843

Desk Reference provides valuable information

Franck and Brownstone compile an impressive women's reference book

The Women's Desk Reference (Viking, 1993) is by Irene Franck and David Brownstone, who have written many books on a wide variety of topics. This is the first reference work to include a full range of subjects of interest to women of all ages, whether or not they are feminists.

The topics are arranged in alphabetical order; some have just a few lines devoted to them, while others are quite lengthy. For example, there are thirty-eight pages on pregnancy. Among the many other subjects included are adoption, witches, politics, divorce, single parents, women's rights, and cosmetics. There are biographies of notable women and articles on health issues of all types. A section at the back of the volume includes a list of important works written by women, and statistics on the world's women and on women in politics and in the workplace.

When Women Were Priests: Women's Leadership in the Early Church and the Scandal of their Subordination in the Rise of Christianity (HarperSanFrancisco, 1993) is by Karen Jo Torjesen, chair of women's studies and religion at Claremont Graduate School. Recent studies have shown that women participated in the priesthood in the Christian church for over a thousand years. Women played important roles as priests, bishops, and prophets, particularly in the first three centuries of Christianity.

At that time women were influential in the home but not in public life. Originally Christian congregations met in private homes, where women frequently led the services. As congregations began to meet in public buildings

Barbara Clarke,
Women's Center
librarian



in the fourth century, women's leadership became more controversial, and men began to insist that women play subordinate roles. From the fourth to the twelfth centuries fewer women held church offices.

Male historians have ignored women's leading roles in the early church, and most people today know little about this aspect of history. The writer illustrates how discrimination against women continues. In denominations which reject women clergy "a woman, unlike a man, is perceived from her sexual nature."

Torjesen shows "why and how women, once leaders in the Jesus movement and in the early church, were marginalized and scapegoated as Christianity became the state religion."

ligion."

The Women Outside: Meanings and Myths of Homelessness (University of California Press, 1992) is by Stephanie Golden, who spent years working with homeless women. Golden concentrates on single homeless women in New York; some of them had been married and some had children but their children were no longer with them. Homeless women accompanied by children usually receive better treatment than do "single" women without homes.

Society looks at homeless men and women differently. "A homeless woman creates discomfort because she cannot be categorized. Women are so entirely defined in terms of whom they belong to that no category exists for a woman without family or home."

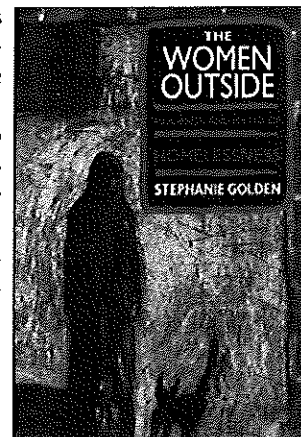
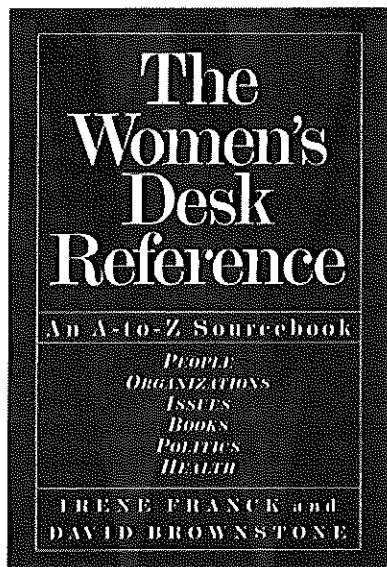
Many of the writer's observations are based on her experiences as a volunteer at a women's shelter established by five nuns in 1977. Women who visited this shelter were treated with respect and kindness. In contrast, at the larger city-run shelters, women were often treated inhumanly; frequently they were harassed and sometimes raped by male guards.

Golden aims to make the homeless "no longer seem so frightening, so degenerate, so alien." She shows that three main factors lead to homelessness in women. One is the loss of relationships, especially in those who were brought up to be dependent. The other two factors are the loss of employment and housing. The lack of affordable housing in big cities is also a major factor. About thirty-five to forty percent of homeless women appear to be mentally ill, and some have been released from mental health facilities. Some of those without homes are drug addicts.

The writer shows also that homeless women have existed throughout history. She states that "it is difficult to look at homeless women clearly because, I think, their condition reveals so nakedly our long-standing ambivalence toward women outside society; we turn away in order to preserve a reassuring distinction between them and us."

A new volume by Marjorie Spruill Wheeler is *New Women of the New South: The Leaders of the Woman Suffrage Movement in the Southern States* (Oxford University Press, 1993). By the 1890s a strong woman suffrage movement had emerged in the South and the leaders tended to be women from the elite. Wheeler concentrates on the roles

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PHYSICAL FITNESS ♀ REST ♀ SOCIAL SUPPORT ♀ GOOD DIET ♀ SELF CARE ♀ FUN ♀



MEDICAL CARE ♀ SPIRITUALITY ♀ AWARENESS ♀ LOVE ♀ INTELLECTUAL INTERESTS

Women may avoid surgery with recent technological advances

Over the past two decades, a number of medical devices have been developed that impact on women's health care. Among them are instruments that permit examination of internal organs at close range without large surgical incisions. This technology helps reduce hospital time, convalescence, and expense. Three of these devices are the laparoscope, the colposcope, and the hysteroscope.

Laparoscopy is a procedure that allows the pelvic organs to be visualized. Under general or local anesthesia, a small incision is made under the umbilicus where carbon dioxide gas is pumped into the abdomen to separate the organs. The lighted tube of the laparoscope is then passed into the pelvis.

This procedure can diagnose conditions such as ovarian cysts, ectopic pregnancy, or scarred Fallopian tubes. If the laser is used in conjunction with the laparoscope, it can treat endometriosis or adhesions. Newer techniques have been developed that allow the ovaries and small fibroids to be removed through the laparoscope. Laparoscopy is also used as a method of surgical sterilization.

Before the widespread use of the colposcope, a woman with an abnormal Pap smear would have to undergo multiple, random biopsies of the cervix to get an accurate diagnosis. Now, the colposcope is used to precisely define the areas where the abnormal cells are coming from and, again in conjunction with the laser, these areas can be treated. With a speculum in the vagina, the cervix is wiped with a vinegar solution. Under the magnification of the colposcope, abnormal areas take on a whitened appearance. If biopsies are necessary, they can be done at this time.

In the past, abnormal uterine bleeding frequently necessitated a D&C. With the advent of the hysteroscope, this is no longer true. After a local anesthetic

Beth Colvin Huff,
RN, MSN



is injected, a lighted fiberoptic tube is passed through the cervix into the uterus to allow visualization of the uterine lining.

Polyps (benign growths) and fibroids that cannot be palpated on pelvic exam can often be seen through the hysteroscope. If an area of abnormality is identified, it may be biopsied.

If your health care provider has recommended one of these procedures for you, make sure you understand why it is necessary and discuss other available options. ■

African-American womanists confront race and sex

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because of our differences.

Being aware, however, is not enough. After examining our prejudices and biases we must set them aside so as not to limit each other because of the differences. Empowering people, regardless of gender, gives each of us the freedom to realize our full potential. It allows us to work and produce at our highest capacities. If we are able to remove the barriers which impede each other's talents, we might be able to reach the third level, a community which values every individual for who he or she is.

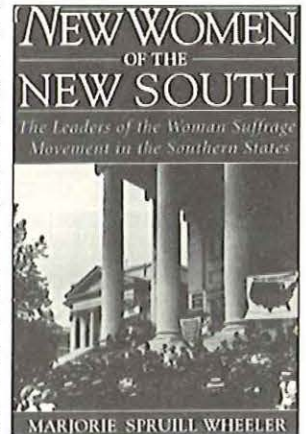
Collins' description of black feminism with its idea of a humanist vision of community is similar to the concept of valuing diversity. In this sense, her definition is timely not just for women of color, but for all people. No community and no society can afford to let prejudice exclude anyone. Talent knows

Library

—from previous page

played by eleven white southern women.

Many of these women were indignant that black men had been given the vote while white women had not. Most were upset at the restrictions placed on women and campaigned for reform of the laws affecting women and children. Many Southerners hated the idea of woman suffrage, partly because it had originally been associated with the antislavery movement. Many southern men and women wished to preserve the traditional subservient role of women.



Wheeler traces the careers of the eleven suffragists after 1920, when the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified. Most remained activists and several successfully ran for office.

A recent addition to our videotape collection is *Straight Talk on Menopause* by Judith Reichman. ■

The following volumes in the Women's Center Library include information on this and related topics:

African-American womanists confront race and sex

no race, gender, religion. Ability comes in all shapes, colors, and creeds.

If we exclude or support those who exclude others because of their differences, who will be left to support us when they try to omit us?

It is a frightening thought, but one which we will not have to answer if we adopt a philosophy that supports and encourages both sexes, all races, and all people.

The following volumes in the Women's Center Library include information on this and related topics:

- Caraway, Nancie. *Segregated Sisterhood: Racism and the Politics of American Feminism*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge, 1991.
- hooks, bell. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. Boston: South End Press, 1984.
- Joseph, Gloria I. and Jill Lewis. *Common Differences: Conflicts in Black and White Feminist Perspectives*. Boston: South End Press, 1981.

Announcements

PLANNED PARENTHOOD

Planned Parenthood of Middle Tennessee is committed to providing comprehensive reproductive health care services; to advocating public policies which guarantee access to these services; to providing human sexuality education; and to promoting the advancement of rewarding volunteer activities to accomplish their mission. If you want to be involved, call Shelby Tabeling at 353-0755.

CONFERENCES

From May 16 to 28, 200 of the nation's most outstanding college students will gather in Washington, D. C. for the tenth annual **Women As Leaders Seminar** sponsored by Sears, Roebuck, and Co. and the Washington Center for Internships and Academic Seminars. Applications must be received by February 15. For more information, call Laura Hudson, Director of Academic Seminars for the Washington Center, at (202) 336-7576.

Attending to Early Modern Women, a symposium sponsored by the Univer-

sity of Maryland's Center for Renaissance and Baroque Studies, will be held April 21-23 at the University of Maryland. For more information, call (301) 405-6830 or FAX (301) 314-9148.

The **Southeastern Women's Studies Association** will hold its 18th annual conference, "Constructing The 21st Century: Women and/in the World," April 8-10 at East Carolina University in Greenville, North Carolina. For more information call the Virginia Commonwealth University Women's Studies Program at (804) 367-6641.

The **1994 National Association of Women in Education Conference**, "Women of Influence: Creating New Paradigms and Enacting Change," will be held March 1-5 in Washington, D. C. Speakers will include Margaret J. Wheatley and L. Lee Knefelkamp. For more information, call (202) 659-9330 or FAX (202) 457-0946.

CALL FOR PAPERS

The **Fourth Women's Policy Research Conference**, titled "Innovations in State and Local Government: New Directions for Women," will be held June 3-4 and

is currently accepting papers and suggestions for panels and roundtables. For more information, call Lucia Fort, 1994 Conference Coordinator, at (202) 785-0393.

GROUP MEETINGS

Consciousness Raising, CR, is an informal and intimate medium for the discussion of a myriad of issues with the end result being a heightened consciousness of societal issues. Historically targeted at women, the group embraces both women and men in the need to address a variety of perspectives. Students who seek a time and a place to discuss issues to develop a blueprint for their own empowerment are invited to participate. That time and place is each Tuesday at the Women's Center at 7:30 p.m. CR is sponsored by Students for Women's Concerns.

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

Home Games

February 6
February 20

Florida
Arkansas



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Women's VU

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■ A yearly subscription to off-campus addresses is \$5.00. Please make checks payable to Vanderbilt University.

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Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center

Vanderbilt University
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