

Feminism, Black and White

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Feminism, Black Feminism and White Feminism have often been talked about and discussed. Here in this article, I am trying to explore the relation and contradictions between them. Socio-cultural aspects that led to the White Feminist Movement, Black Women's non-alliance to it and consequently the Black Feminist Movement and its perspective.

What does feminism mean? :

In the US the contemporary Feminist Movement has popularly been identified with the movement defined by white, middle-class, college-educated women. Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) is often cited as the first book of what is called the "second wave" of feminism. It was a work around which many white women of this socio-economic class rallied as it expressed their frustrations at being excluded from the positions of privilege and power occupied by white males in American society. It also hit a nerve with women who were rankled by sexism within their families or personal lives. To vastly oversimplify, the goal of feminism became to eliminate sexist oppression imposed by the patriarchal society which, it was thought, would end discrimination against women on the job, in the home and in all areas of women's lives. Equality of opportunity was the objective, and sexism was the enemy. This often got translated into "men are the enemy," which made many women uneasy and men defensive. In effect, the women's movement seemed to interpret equality of opportunity to mean the achievement of parity -or better - with white, middle- or-upper-class men. For a number of reasons, black women did not see this as addressing their concerns.

One of the basic issues that divides feminists is whether they consider the goal to be reform of the present social system or its revolution. And it is on this point that black feminists and the mainstream of the white feminist movement have diverged. Frances Beal (1970), in her essay "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female," is only one of the many black feminists who has criticized the women's movement for its limited focus. She says, "Any white group that does not have an anti-imperialist and anti-racist ideology has absolutely nothing in common with the Black Women's struggle" (page-98). Black women and men, along with other minority groups, understand that equal opportunity with white male power elites is not only out of reach for the majority of the population but also is not going to alter an oppressive system in any significant way.

Brought to the American continent as slaves in the 17th century, African women were deprived of every basic human right in order to serve the plantation economy of the American South. Even their reproductive, sexual and material prerogatives were appropriated for the benefit of their white masters.

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