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Retrieved on April 29th, 2009 from www.nefac.net
Published in *The Northeastern Anarchist* Issue #4,
Spring/Summer 2002. This article has been edited for space.
To read full text, see "Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate
Politics" by bell hooks; published by South End Press.

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Class difference and the way in which it divides women was an issue women in the feminist movement talked about long before race. In the mostly white circles of a newly formed women's liberation movement the most glaring separation between women was that of class. White working-class women recognized that class hierarchies were present in the movement. Conflict arose between the reformist vision of women's liberation which basically demanded equal rights for women within the existing class structure, and more radical and/or revolutionary models, which called for a fundamental change in the existing structure so that models of mutuality and equality could replace the old paradigms. However, as the feminist movement progressed and privileged groups of well-educated white women began to achieve equal access to class power with their male counterparts, feminist class struggle was born.

From the onset of the movement women from privileged classes were able to make their concerns "the" issue that should be focused on in part because they were the group of women who received public attention. They attracted mass media. The issues that were most relevant to working women were never highlighted by mainstream mass media. Betty Friedan's The

Feminist Mystique identified "the problem that has no name" as the dissatisfaction females felt about being confined and subordinated in the home as housewives. While this issue was presented as a crisis for women, it really was only a crisis for a small group of well-educated white women. While they were complaining about the dangers of confinement in the home a huge majority of women in the nation were in the workforce. And many of these working women, who put in long hours for low wages while still doing all the work in the domestic household would have seen the right to stay home as "freedom".

It was not gender discrimination or sexist oppression that kept privileged women of all races from working outside the home, it was the fact that the jobs that would have been available to them would have been the same low-paying unskilled labor open to all working women. Elite groups of highly educated females stayed at home rather than do the type of work large numbers of lower-middle class and working class women were doing. Occasionally, a few of these women defied convention and worked outside the home performing tasks way below their educational skills and facing resistance from husbands and family. It was this resistance that turned the issue of their working outside the home into an issue of gender discrimination and made opposing patriarchy and seeking equal rights with men of their class the political platform that chose feminism rather than class struggle.

From the onset, reformist white women with class priviledge were well aware that the power and freedom they wanted was the freedom they perceived men of their class enjoying. Their resistance to patriarchal male domination in the domestic household provided them with a connection they could use to unite across class with other women who were weary of male domination. But only privileged women had the luxury to imagine working outside the home would actually provide them with an income which would enable them to be economically self-sufficient. Working class women

Given the changing realities of class in our nation, widening gaps between the rich and poor, and the continued feminization of poverty, we desperately need a mass-based radical feminist movement that can build on the strength of the past, including the positive gains generated by reforms, while offering meaningful interrogation of existing feminist theory that was simply wrongminded while offering us new strategies. Significantly, a visionary movement would ground its work in the concrete conditions of the working class and poor women.

liberation." At the end of the day class power proved to be more important than feminism. And this collusion helped de-stablize the feminist movement.

When women acquired greater class status and power without conducting themselves differently from males feminist politics were undermined. Lots of women felt betrayed. Middle- and lower-middle class women who were suddenly compelled by the ethos of feminism to enter the workforce did not feel liberated once they faced the hard truth that working outside the home did not mean work in the home would be equally shared with male partners. No-fault divorce proved to be more economically beneficial to men than women. As many black women/women of color saw white women from privileged classes benefiting economically more than other groups from reformist feminist gains, from gender being tacked on to racial affirmative action, it simply reaffirmed their fear that feminism was really about increasing white power. The most profound betrayal of feminist issues has been the lack of mass-based feminist protest challenging the government's assault on single mothers and the dismantling of the welfare system. Privileged women, many of whom call themselves feminists, have simply turned away from the "feminization of poverty".

The only genuine hope of feminist liberation lies with a vision of social change which challenges class elitism. Western women have gained class power and greater gender inequality because a global white supremacist patriarchy enslaves and/or subordinates masses of third world women. In this country, the combined forces of a booming prison industry and workfare-oriented welfare in conjuction with conservative immigration policy create and condone the conditions for indentured slavery. Ending welfare will create a new underclass of women and children to be abused and exploited by the existing structures of domination.

already knew that the wages they received would not liberate them.

Reformist efforts on the part of privileged groups of women to change the workforce so that women workers would be paid more and face less gender-based discrimination and harrassment on the job had positive impact on the lives of all women. And these gains are important. Yet the fact that privileged women gained in class power while masses of women still do not receive wage equity with men is an indication of the way in which class interests superceded feminist efforts to change the workforce so that women would receive equal pay for equal work.

Lesbian feminist thinkers were among the first activists to raise the issue of class in the feminst movement, expressing their viewpoints in an accessible language. They were a group of women who had not imagined they could depend on husbands to support them. And they were often much more aware than their straight counterparts of the difficulties all women would face in the workforce. In the early 1970s, anthologies like Class and Feminism, edited by Charlotte Bunch and Nancy Myron, published work written by women from diverse backgrounds who were confronting the issue in feminist circles. Each essay emphasized the fact that class was not simply a question of money. In The Last Straw, Rita Mae Brown (who was not a famous writer at the time) clearly stated:

"Class is much more than Marx's definition of relationship to the means of production. Class involves your behavior, your basic assumptions, how you are taught to behave, what you expect from yourself and from others, your concept of a future, how you understand problems and solve them, how you think, feel, act."

These women who entered feminist groups, made up of diverse classes, were among the first to see that the vision of a politically based sisterhood where all females would unite to-

gether to fight patriarchy could not emerge until the issue of class was confronted.

Placing class on feminist agendas opened up the space where the intersections of class and race were made apparent. Within the institutionalized race, sex, class social system in our society black females were clearly at the bottom of the economic totem pole. Initially well-educated white women from working class backgrounds were more visible than black females of all classes in the feminist movement. They were a minority within the movement, but theirs was the voice of experience. They knew better than their priviledged class comrades of any race the costs of resisting race, class and gender domination. They knew what it was like to struggle to change one's economic situation. Between them and their privileged-class comrades there were ongoing conflicts over appropriate behavior, over the issues that would be presented as fundamental feminist concerns. Within the feminst movement women from privileged class backgrounds who had never before been involved in leftist freedom fighting learned the concrete politics of class struggle, confronting challenges made by less privileged women, and also learning in the process assertiveness skills and constructive ways to cope with conflict. Despite constructive intervention, many privileged white women continued to act as though feminism belonged to them, as though they were in charge.

Mainstream patriarchy reinforced the idea that the concerns of women from privileged class groups were the only ones worthy of receiving attention. Feminist reform aimed to gain social equality for women within the existing structure. Privileged women wanted equality with men of their class. Despite sexism among their class they would not have wanted to have the lot of working class men. Feminist efforts to grant women social equality with men of their class neatly coincided with white supremacist-capitalist-patriarchal fears that white power would diminish if non-white people gained equal

access to economic power and priviledge. Supporting what in effect became white power-reformist-feminism enabled the mainstream white supremacist patriarchy to bolster its power while simultaneously undermining the radical politics of feminism.

Only revolutionary feminist thinkers expressed outrage at this co-optation of the feminist movement. Our critique and outrage gained a hearing in the alternative press. In her collection of essays, The Coming of Black Genocide, radical white activist Mary Barfoot boldly stated:

"There are white women, hurt and angry, who believed that the '70s women's movement meant sisterhood, and who feel betrayed by escalator women. By women who went back home to patriarchy. But the women's movement never left the father Dick's side. There was no war. And there was no liberation. We got a share of the genocide profits and we love it. We are Sisters of Patriarchy, and true supporters of national and class oppression, Patriarchy in its highest form is Euro-imperialism on a worldscale. If we're Dick's sister and want what he has gotten, then in the end we support that system that he got it all from."

Indeed, many more feminist women found and find it easier to consider divesting of white supremacist thinking than of their class elitism.

As privileged women gained greater access to economic power with men of their class, feminist discussions of class were no longer commonplace. Instead, all women were encouraged to see the economic gains of affluent females as a positive sign for all women. In actuality, these gains rarely changed the lot of poor and working class women. And since privileged men did not become equal caretakers in the domestic household, the freedom of privileged-class women of all races has required the sustained subordination of working class and poor women. In the 1990s, collusion with the existing social structure was the price of "women's