Spring 2022

Carving Out Space: Black Feminist Theory

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20 May 2022

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Synthesis Essay

Conceptually speaking, intersectionality seems simple. Human beings are marginalized by systems of government and social structures based on identifying characteristics: race, class, gender, sexuality, etc. Intersectionality is the recognition that some people are marginalized by *multiple* of these characteristics. Originally coined by Kimberle Crenshaw—a legal scholar—in 1989, the word intersectionality was initially conceived as a term to describe the unique discrimination that Black women face, which is greater than the mere sum of its parts (anti-Black racism, and sexism).[1] It can seem simple to characterize Black Feminist theory simply as the intersection between the Black Liberation and Feminist schools of thought, a recognition that some people are both oppressed based on being Black *and* based on gender. The study of this intersection is, by necessity, also the tracing of several modes of oppression through U.S. history, most prominently race, gender, and class, though often also including sexuality. To better understand this term and the branches of gender and racial theory this encompasses, a sample of six related works, written between the years 1981 and 1993 (though one book's second edition, published in 2009, was used for the purpose of this essay) have been surveyed for their similarities and differences in mapping the relationship between Black women and the mainstream feminist movement in the United States.

In addition to accounting for so many intersections, studying Black women's liberation can also be difficult because it is in part the study of *exclusion* from the historical narrative. In *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment,* Patricia Collins navigates this difficulty by first establishing her definition of Black Feminist Thought as a social phenomenon before moving on to identify the main themes of Black Feminist Thought:

[1] Kimberle Crenshaw, *University of Chicago Legal Forum,* pg. 144

sexuality, work, family and motherhood, stereotypes, and activism, and ends her book by looking towards international and political applications and outcomes of Black Feminist thought. By contrast, in Angela Davis's *Women, Race, & Class,* Davis begins her story of gendered and racialized oppression with a discussion of chattel slavery and traces Black women through various bids for equity through the late 20th century (the book's original publication was in 1990). Collins aimed to write *Black Feminist Thought* in as accessible a format as possible, primarily concerned with the testimony of actual women and able to be consumed by women of varied backgrounds. As such, she utilizes letters, autobiographies, interviews, and artworks which allow her to directly quote the varied experiences of Black women. To capture the commonalities and differences between Black women, Collins commits to highlighting several other intersections of marginalization including homosexuality and homophobia in the Black community, to illustrate which Collins employs an anthology of coming-out stories from Black lesbians. This emphasis on oral history and testimony over statistics and political histories is consistent with Collins' stated mission of ensuring that the women she is writing about can both read her book and effectively participate in the discourse. In this way, the form and function of her book are in harmony, utilizing primary sources that Black women are likely to have encountered on a day-to-day basis; the music of Salt N Pepa, or the films of Spike Lee.

In addition to her primary source base, Collins has placed herself in conversation with the works of notable scholars on the topic; Kimberlé Crenshaw, Audre Lorde, Alice Walker, and Angela Davis are among the list of sources Collins is engaging with. It's not all noted Black American feminists, though; Collins also converses with French philosopher Michel Foucault on topics ranging from incarceration to sex and acknowledges the systemic exclusion of Black women from White Feminist spaces at the hands of women like Nancy Chodorow and Carol

Gilligan, of the late 20th Century. Additionally, we see Collins place herself in conversation with other authors who have utilized a more statistics, data-driven primary source base, as Amott and Matthaei do in *Race, Gender, and Work* (1991), to acknowledge that style of scholarship on the issue. By engaging this breadth of secondary sources, Collins is able to connect the wide range of approaches to this topic under the guidance of thought leaders like Davis.

By utilizing oral history and testimony and prioritizing the scholarship of other Black woman intellectuals, Collins is participating in social history and, more specifically, history from below which was popularized in the late 60s and early 70s. Rather than examining the experiences of Black women's oppressors, Collins focuses on the realities of everyday life as a Black woman in the United States, and how that unifying experience has produced, by necessity, a unique school of feminist scholarship. As John Tosh describes in *The Pursuit of History,* history from below "concentrates on the unorganized and the marginal who have been least visible in the historical record."[2]

While the use of testimony is aligned with Collins' purpose (producing accessible, authentic, bottom-up history), her limited variety in primary sources leaves something to be desired from a historical perspective. Archival writings from further back in history, rather than simply scholarship, could have aided in strengthening her argument. Additionally, though she engages with secondary sources which dissect data and statistics, she doesn't bring her own historical or sociological perspective to that kind of primary source.

Angela Davis, who is cited by almost every book captured in this project (hers is also the earliest published, in 1981), adds the dimension of economics to *Women, Race & Class.* By structuring the book chronologically and beginning with the gendered issues surrounding

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[2] John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History,* 6th ed. (Routledge, 2015), p. 71.

discussions of slavery in the United States, Davis is able to capture all three dimensions of her book from the very first page, even without an orienting introduction. The hyper-sexualization and masculinization of Black women, which permeate the following monographs (both implicitly and explicitly) can be traced to these origin points. "'Woman' became synonymous in the prevailing propaganda with 'mother' and 'housewife,' and both 'mother' and 'housewife' bore the fatal mark of inferiority. But among Black female slaves, this vocabulary was nowhere to be found."[3] From chattel slavery, Davis looks towards abolition, and its intersection with early bids for women's liberation, as illustrated through Frederick Douglass's advocacy of women, Harriet Beecher Stowe's complicated abolitionist efforts in *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* and Prudence Crandall's efforts to educate Black girls, to name a few examples.[4]

This intersection, of abolition and early organization for women's rights, also highlights an early example of the attempted exclusion of women of color from the mainstream women's movement, in the case of Sojourner Truth. As Davis points out, Sojourner's iconic "Ain't I a Woman?" speech is among one of the most frequently quoted from this era of the women's movement, but the platform to give it did not come without resistance from white people both allied with and against the women's rights movement.[5] Davis traces this pattern of exclusion as well as the clash and separation of the Black liberation and women's movements throughout the late 19th and early 20th century, utilizing economic theory and quoting Karl Marx throughout, as she parses out the limitations of Black people (especially women) largely in the employment of domestic service.[6] Davis's description of Susan B. Anthony's "public indifference towards

[3] Angela Davis, Women, Race & Class, pg. 12.
[4] Angela Davis, *Gender, Race & Class,* pg. 34.
[5] Angela Davis, *Gender, Race & Class,* pg. 63.
[6] Angela Davis, *Gender, Race & Class,* pg. 88.

racism," as emblematic of a systemic bias that permeated the country at the turn of the century and infected the women's suffrage movement is further illustrated by her assertions of the implicit connections between white supremacy and capitalism, which feed one another and grow in tandem. Davis points out, "Had Anthony seriously reflected on the findings of her friend Ida B. Wells, she might have realized that a noncommittal stand on racism implied that lynchings and mass murders by the thousands could be considered a neutral issue."[7]

The remainder of Davis's book is dedicated to more modern issues: Black stereotypes in sex and sexuality, birth control and reproductive health, and the approaching obsolescence of housework, which she describes as being a fluid social phenomenon that is subject to change the same way economic systems rise and fall. It's unsurprising, based on her approach to discussing class largely through the framework presented by Marx and Frederick Engels, that Davis also includes a chapter on Communist women, presenting the lives of several female Communists and their experiences utilizing their socio-political space for the liberation of Black folks.[8] Davis ties these threads together, in the end, by linking the struggle of the working woman with the struggle for socialism.

Similar to the theoretical threads that Davis wove regarding Prudence Crandall's investment in Black women's education as an act of solidarity, bell hooks is fascinated with the inequity within the feminist struggle in *Feminist Theory: from margin to center.* This is done from a chronological perspective, as Patricia Collins took in *Black Feminist Theory,* but the point of origin for hooks's analysis is instead with the women's liberation movement. Throughout the book, hooks is dedicated to complicating simple narratives surrounding the feminist movement

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[7] Angela Davis, *Gender, Race & Class,* pg. 119.

[8] Angel Davis, *Gender, Race & Class,* pg. 152.

and the relationships between the marginalized and empowered, dedicating a chapter to recontextualizing sexism not as a removal of women's power, but rather as suppression or exploitation of it.[9] "The idea of 'common oppression' was a false and corrupt platform disguising and mystifying the true nature of women's varied and complex social reality," hooks writes. "Women are divided by sexist attitudes, racism, class privilege, and a host of other prejudices."[10]

To illustrate this, hooks first introduces the readers to the concept at the center of the book: the institutional oppression of Black women by White women, specifically in feminist spaces. From there, hooks describes the feminist movement as both much more simple and much more complicated than it has been framed in the mainstream before moving to discuss intra-gender and inter-gender solidarity, the aforementioned section on the nature of power, the nature of work, education as a tool for liberation in the feminist movement, and discussions of violence, parenting, sexual oppression, and the concept of a feminist revolution. In this final section, hooks outlines the necessity to create a shared ideology of gender liberation, which can only exist "if the experiences of people on the margin who suffer sexist oppression and other forms of group oppression are understood, addressed, and incorporated."[11] This highlights hooks's understanding of how intersectionality (and the mainstream women's liberation movement's ignorance of intersectionality) have created disillusionment among those who cannot align themselves with the ideology that a small group of women made essential to the fabric of the cause.

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[9] bell hooks, *Feminist Theory,* pg. 93.
[10] bell hooks, *Feminist Theory,* pg. 44.
[11] bell hooks, *Feminist Theory,* pg. 161.

Additionally, hooks encourages readers to think more deeply about Betty Friedan's landmark book, *The Feminine Mystique,* which heavily influenced the women's movement of the late 20th century. Though the books were published over 20 years apart (Freidan's in 1963, and hooks's in 1984), *The Feminine Mystique* was, and still is, so ubiquitous in the women's liberation conversation that it has had far-reaching conscious and subconscious effects on the image of modern feminism. As hooks points out, Freidan's book is centered around White, middle-class women's liberation, as evidenced by the fact that many women had already entered the workforce by the time of its publishing, though they were potentially not Friedan's friends and neighbors, limiting her perspective on the issue. Along with Friedan, hooks utilizes and critiques the perspectives of Aime Cesaire, Barbara Ehrenreich, Franz Fanon, Paulo Freire, Toni Morrison, and Adrienne Rich, among many others.

Similar to hooks's critiques of the White, middle-class revolution bolstered by Friedan's writing, Ruth Frankenburg aims to use her perspective as a White woman to curate various understandings of the intersection between race and gender from other White women as an investigation of the so-called "race-neutral" mainstream feminist movement. Rather than purely collecting and discussing the testimony of other women, as Collins, Davis, and hooks do, Frankenburg interviewed several white women of varied ages, classes, and regional groups over the course of three years (between 1984 and 1987). She divided these women into three groups: "White women who, I imagined, might be more than usually conscious of gender as a system of domination; white women I knew to be more than usually connected to communities of color (and thus possibly more conscious of racial domination); and white women about whom I had no preconceptions other than their gender and race."[12] Frankenburg makes it clear from the onset of

[12] Ruth Frankenburg, *White Women, Race Matters* pg. 245.

her book that White women (and White people more generally) in the United States have a tendency to see themselves as race-neutral or devoid of race, but that she believes this is far from the truth, and that their race should not only be considered but is often central to their both their interactions with one another and the way they navigate so-called racially neutral spaces (like the historically purposefully un-racialized mainstream feminist movement). Frankenburg values the "personal" in this endeavor, remaining transparent about her positionality as a white woman herself, and is aware, even at the time of writing, that this book is a product of its social and political context; the 1980s and 1990s in the United States.

Though the "personal" approach largely manifests in the testimony of the women interviewed for the book and in the personal development and research on the topic of race Frankenburg underwent, the author doesn't abandon non-personal methods to parse out this social issue. Early on, Frankenburg employs the use of historical research on racial categorization by Michael Omi and Howard Winant[13], later turns to social psychologist Ann Oakley and "feminist oral historian" Sherna Gluck for insight to interview methods[14], and later still quotes Peggy Pascoe for an understanding of interracial marriage in the western U.S.[15]. This breadth of secondary sources and various experts pair well with her use of testimony and various primary sources. Like others in her field, Frankenburg's focus on testimony and the personal also limits her primary source base to almost exclusively the writings of women, specifically essay anthologies and prison notebooks, as well as, of course, the interviews she conducted.

Frankenburg, as a White woman in conversation with a scholarly subject that has been pioneered by Black women, is participating in social history and history from below (as

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[13] Ruth Frankenburg, *White Women, Race Matters,* pg. 11.
[14] Ruth Frankenburg, *White Women, Race Matters,* pg. 31.
[15] Ruth Frankenburg, *White Women, Race Matters,* pg. 76.

evidenced by her emphasis on testimony and oral history), while taking a critical lens to the historical myth of universality or racial neutrality of feminism as is often perpetuated by other white women. This is in line with John Tosh's assertion that history from below "contests the passivity to which ordinary people have been consigned by so many historians."[16] By investigating the role White women have had in the subjugation of women of color, Frankenburg reinserts historical agency into a commonly sanitized narrative.

While Frankenburg, Collins, hooks, and Davis investigated the issue using similar sources, placing the testimony of women in conversation with scholarly works on these multi-dimensional concepts, one aspect that's missing from this source set, and therefore a blind spot of this historiographical overview up to this point is data-based evidence. To represent this different source base, I turned to *Race, Gender, and Work: A Multicultural Economic History of Women in the United States* by Teresa Amott and Julie Matthaei. Amott and Matthaei's main primary sources are the United States Census data sets from 1960 to 1980, though they use Census data from as far back as 1870. In utilizing this data, they paid special attention to occupational data, labor force participation rates (by gender), median incomes (by gender), "general social and economic characteristics by racial-ethnic group," and data about female-headed households (specifically their frequency and how they fared economically).

Like Davis, Amott and Matthaei add the dimension of class to their exploration of the topic, stating that their book functions to, "attempt the difficult task of tracing women's work lives through the dynamic and complicated process which economists have called capitalist development."[17] This task, clearly difficult enough for a singular ethnic or racial group, is that

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[16] John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History,* pg. 71.

[17] Amott and Matthei, *Race, Gender, and Work,* pg. 3.

much more complicated when adding in the dimension of multiculturalism that they're dedicated to exploring throughout the book. In attempting to discuss women's history through the lens of economic history, Amott and Matthaei's book also becomes necessarily quite complex and multidisciplinary, having to contend with the nuances of three major historical dynamics at once, and of course the intersections between the two. They attempt this through an anti-racist and feminist lens, stating, "we believe that it is not nature but society which is responsible for gender, race, and class hierarchies," so they are therefore looking "to society's part, not to biology, for an understanding of the forces for continuity and change."[18]

The structure of the book takes the form of an hourglass; they begin and end with the broad structures at play and spend the middle sections of the book parsing out the difference between racial and ethnic groups. The first section is dedicated to outlining the conceptual framework they aim to work within regarding intersections of race, gender, and economics. The second section, broadly labeled "histories of women's works" is chopped into chapters dedicated to Native American women, Chicanas, European American women, African American women, Asian American women, and Puerto Rican women. These groups strike me as being at times extremely broad (like Asian American) and other times quite specific (in the case of Puerto Rican women), which seems to be at least in part in response to the cultural and social positionality of the authors, who are collecting this data at the end of the 20th century. The third and final section is dedicated to a once-again unifying and thematic exploration titled "Transforming Women's Works" which is divided by topic rather than ethnic or racial group.

The utility of this structure cannot be discounted, as it allows for Amott and Matthaei to introduce unifying concepts, allowing them to present readers with the lens through which the

[18] Amott and Matthei, *Race, Gender, and Work,* pg. 5.

later chapters are to be read: "Women throughout the United States have not experienced a common oppression as women. The processes of gender, race-ethnicity, and class—intrinsically connected—have been central forces in determining and differentiating women's work lives in U.S. history."[19] This allows readers to comfortably navigate the "profiles" of the six race-ethnicity groups they've decided to detail the social and economic histories of, including the overview of Black women's work in the United States, beginning with chattel slavery, and ending in modernity (at the time of publishing). The section is defined by a heralding of the resilience of Black women who have, for centuries, "stood at the intersection of race, class, and gender oppression, but they were rarely cowed by the burden of these injustices."[20]

Like their contemporaries, Amott and Matthaei also consult the writings of pioneering female thought leaders, including bell hooks and Angela Davis, as well as Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, and Barbara Ehrenreich. Additionally, their set of experts includes famous theorists in economics like Robert Cherry, and race, like W.E.B. Du Bois. This attention to several dimensions of the historical narrative of feminism brings Amott and Matthaei into several schools of historical thought, including labor history, economic history, and history from below. According to John Tosh, labor history has historically been characterized by "a strong institutional bias," in contrast to history from below's focus on unorganized and less historically visible historical actors.[21] This contrast is reflected in the source base Amott and Matthaei use to tackle the topic; both historical approaches are present in this undertaking, employing the use of Marxist theory, multiethnic feminist theory, and labor statistics to capture this complexity.

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[19] Amott and Matthei, *Race, Gender, and Work,* pg. 27.

[20] Amott and Matthei, *Race, Gender, and Work,* pg. 142.

[21] John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History,* pg. 71.

Like Amott and Matthaei, the editors of *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies* were interested in covering a lot of ground in their landmark book. Including contributions from Alice Walker, the Combahee River Collective, and Beverly Smith, among nearly two dozen others, this book isn't a monograph, but deserves its place in this historiographical conversation for its ubiquitous nature in the field of study. Published in 1982, only a year after Davis's *Women, Race & Class,* this collection of essays is sorted into eight thematic sections, with each essay written as a mixture of personal testimony and social critique. These categories are: "Searching for Sisterhood: Black Feminism," "Roadblocks and Bridges: Confronting Racism," "Dispelling the Myths: Black Women and the Social Sciences," "Creative Survival: Preserving Body, Mind, and Spirit," "'Necessary Bread': Black Women's Literature," "Bibliographies and Bibliographic Essays," and "Doing the Work: Selected Course Syllabi."

The first section of the book, dedicated to making explicit the unique positionality that Black women have in women's liberation, provides an illuminating quote by the Combahee River Collective: "We believe that politics under patriarchy is as pervasive in Black women's lives as are the politics of class and race. We also often find it difficult to separate race from class from sex oppression because in our lives they are most often experienced simultaneously. We know that there is such a thing as racial-sexual oppression, which is neither solely racial or solely sexual, e.g., the history of rape of Black women by white men as a weapon of political repression."[22] This definition sets the tone for the several more personal essays throughout the book, which include the perspectives of women from all sorts of varied experiences.

[22] Combahee River Collective, *But Some of Us Are Brave,* pg. 16.

One such woman is Ellen Pence who, as a White woman, evokes a similar thematic thread to that explored in Frankenburg's set of testimonies when she describes the epiphany she experienced surrounding her complicity in racist structures. "I began talking to a Black friend of mine, Ella Gross, about how sick I was getting of the whole issue. Ella, in her normal blunt, direct way, told me that I was sick of it because I didn't want to past adjusting my behavior to recognizing my racism. In the many, many hours I spent talking to Ella, I began to see how white women ignored the need to reexamine the traditional white rigid methods of decision making, priority setting, and implementing decisions. Our idea of including women of color was to send out notices. We never came to the business table as equals."[23]

This book ends on a similar note to hooks's *Feminist Theory:* with action. Though in hooks's work, the action is in the form of an intentional restructuring of the feminist ideology to be more inclusive, the action here is more reflective, the evidence of action already taken by the contributers of the book. Not only are several bibliographies and bibliographic essays featured, which provide readers with what are essentially annotated guides to further research into Black female artists and historical actors of all types, but there are also several course syllabi regarding the Black woman experience that were taught in actual colleges and universities from the mid-1970s to the time of the book's publication. These courses are split into two types: interdisciplinary/Social Studies, and Literature. The inclusion of these materials lay the groundwork for readers to not only do further personal inquiry but to model potential social inquiry, whether that's a book club based on a bibliographic essay or preparing a course inspired by the syllabi included. This speaks to the collective nature of the book, not only an assortment of essays but also a curation of resources for community good. These aspects, I think, speak to

[23] Ellen Pence, *But Some of Us Are Brave,* pg. 14,

the Combahee River Collective's notion of generational kinship in the advancement of Black women's liberation: "Contemporary Black feminism is the outgrowth of the countless generations of personal sacrifice, militancy, and work by our mothers and sisters."[24]

The connections between these works are a fascinating study unto itself, characterized in this case by Kimberle Crenshaw's evoking of the title of *But Some of Us Are Brave* in the very first sentences of the article in which she lays out intersectionality. She explains that the title itself illustrates the issue of treating race and gender as mutually exclusive issues and goes on to explain that this mode of thinking in terms of discrimination has particularly harmful effects on Black women.[25] On the very first page of her book, bell hooks critiques Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* as a jumping-off point to discuss the framing of the entire feminist movement, saying, "She made her plight and the plight of white women like herself synonymous with a condition affecting all American women. In so doing, she deflected attention away from her classism, her racism, her sexist attitudes towards the masses of American women."[26] Amott and Matthaei, too, evoke Freidan's book when discussing European American women, saying: "The book sold millions of copies, and within a year a new organization, the National Organization of Women, was formed with a mostly white, affluent membership with Freidan at its head."[27]

It is this book, *The Feminine Mystique,* which, of all the books and authors mentioned throughout this essay, is mentioned by name in the New York Social Studies Framework, a jumping-off point to discuss the modern women's movement of the late 20th century. The second

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[24] Combahee River Collective, *But Some of Us Are Brave,* pg. 14.
[25] Kimberle Crenshaw, *University of Chicago Legal Forum,* pg. 139.
[26] bell hooks, *Feminist Theory,* pg. 2.
[27] Amott and Matthei, *Race, Gender, and Work,* pg. 133.

on the women's movement is, of course, written as being separate from the Civil Rights Movement, and these two issues are the last explicit mentions of social change for marginalized populations in the framework.

Primary Documents

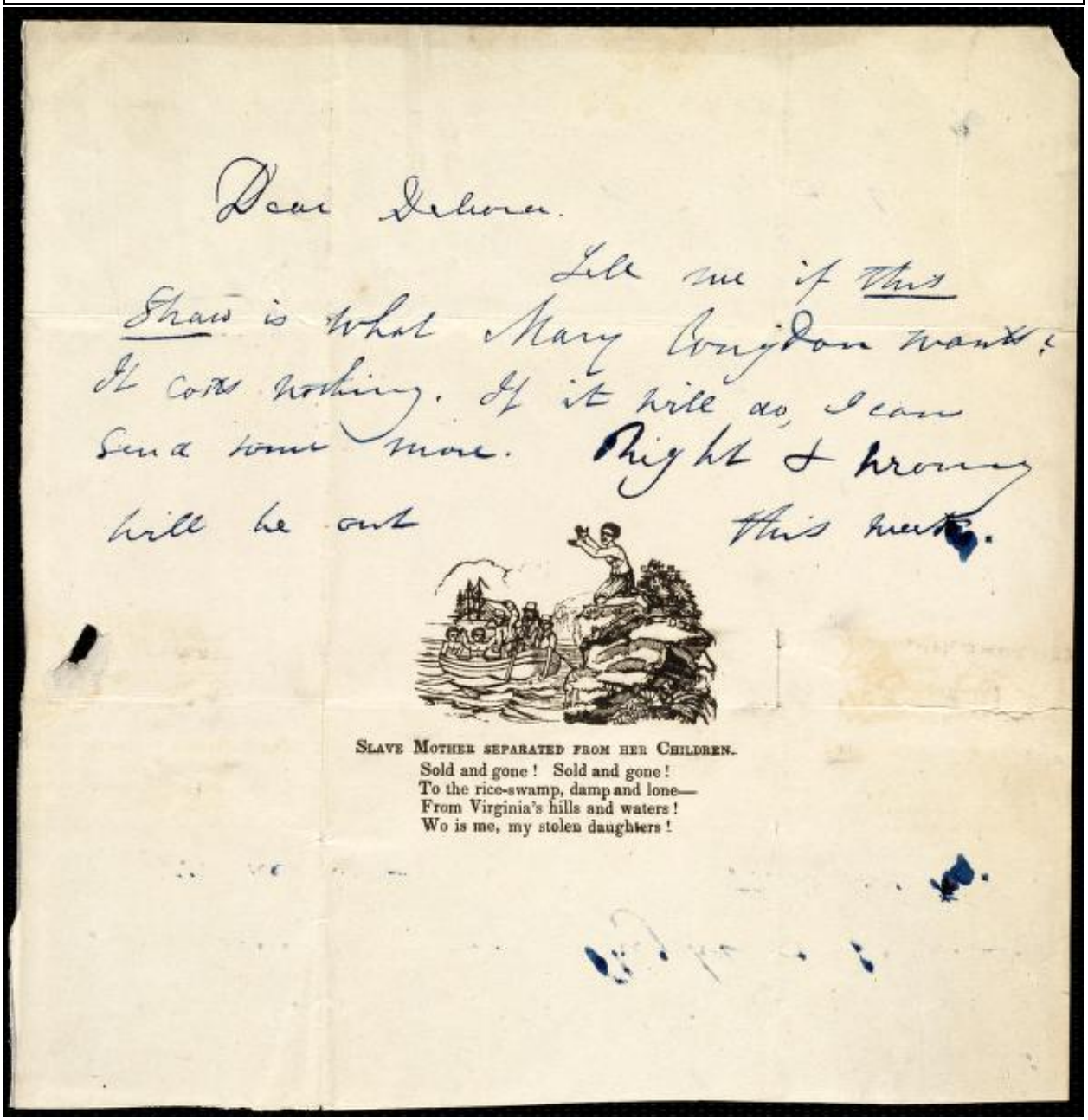
Document 1:

Citizens watch as the Georgia Senate votes on the Equal Rights Amendment, January 21, 1980. The Equal Rights Amendment was written by Alice Paul in 1923 and was designed to guarantee the "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex," according to Section 1 of the ERA.

Deal, Steve, "Supporters and opposition observe as the Georgia Senate votes on ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment, Atlanta, Georgia, January 21, 1980," Digital Public Library of America, http://dp.la/item/d601783a14fd40e52eb82450d1a7ef89.

Document 2:

A letter by abolitionist and leader of the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society, Maria Weston Chapman, 1839. In it, she mentioned "Right and Wrong," which was The Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society's annual report, documenting their stances against slavery as well as the inequality of the sexes.



Dear Debora.

Tell me if this Straw is what Mary Congdon wants? It costs nothing. If it will do, I can send home more. Right & Wrong will be out this week.

SLAVE MOTHER SEPARATED FROM HER CHILDREN.

Sold and gone! Sold and gone!
To the rice-swamp, damp and lone—
From Virginia's hills and waters!
Wo is me, my stolen daughters!

Transcript:
Dear Debora,
Tell me if this straw is what Mary Congdon wants? It costs nothing. If it will do, I can send home more. Right & Wrong will be out this week.

[Below Image]
Slave Mother Separated From Her Children
Sold and gone! Sold and gone!
To the rice-swamp, damp and lone–
From Virginia's hills and waters!
Wo is me, my stolen daughters!

Chapman, Maria Weston, "[Letter to] Dear Debora[h] [manuscript]," Digital Public Library of America, http://dp.la/item/51d3720b27bf24315420794befee1bc9.

Document 3:

A photograph from the first staged production of Lorraine Hansberry's play, A Raisin in the Sun, in 1959. Hansberry's play is about a Black family's move from Chicago's South Side to an all-white neighborhood called Clybourne Park, and their experiences with discrimination, and assimilation, and is based on Hansberry's real-life experiences with housing discrimination decades earlier.

"A Raisin in the Sun [1959], original cast," Digital Public Library of America, https://dp.la/primary-source-sets/a-raisin-in-the-sun-by-lorraine-hansberry/sources/29

Document 4 [modified]:

Correspondence between Prudence Crandall and William Lloyd Garrison regarding the teaching of African American girls. William Lloyd Garrison was an abolitionist and suffragist, famous for founding the anti-slavery newspaper, The Liberator, in 1831.

"Prudence Crandall to W. L. Garrison.
Canterbury, Jan. 18th, 1833.

Mr. Garrison:
I am to you, sir, I presume, an entire stranger, and you are indeed so to me save through the medium of the public print. I am, sir, through the blessing of divine Providence, permitted to be the Principal of the Canterbury (Conn.) Female Boarding School. [...] In 1831 I purchased a large dwelling-house in [Providence, RI], and opened the school above mentioned. [...]
Now I will tell you why I write you, and the object is this: I wish to know your opinion respecting changing white scholars for colored ones. I have been for some months past determined if possible during the remaining part of my life to benefit the people of color. I do not dare tell any one of my neighbors anything about the contemplated change in my school, and I beg of you, sir, that you will not expose it to any one; for if it was known, I have no reason to expect but it would ruin my present school.
Will you be so kind as to write by the next mail and give me your opinion on the subject; and if you consider it possible to obtain 20 or 25 young ladies of color to enter this school for the term of one year at the rate of $25 per quarter, including board, washing, and tuition. [...]

Yours, with the greatest respect, Prudence
Crandall."

Garrison, Wendell Phillips, excerpt from "Prudence Crandall," Digital Public Library of America, http://dp.la/item/d9b1a6ced94cccf8d74af9c4ec01cf00.

Document 5:

This is a photograph of the sculpture Lift Every Voice and Sing, sculpted by artist Augusta Savage as a commission for the 1939 World's Fair in New York. Savage was associated with the Harlem Renaissance, and the title of her piece was inspired by the song of the same name, written by James Weldon Johnson and Rosamond Johnson.

"Art - Sculpture - Harp (Augusta Savage) - Harp," Digital Public Library of America, https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/5e66b3e8-8baa-d471-e040-e00a180654d7

Document 6 [excerpted]:

An excerpt from *A Woman's Life Work: Including Thirty Years' Service On the Underground Railroad and in The War* by Laura S. Haviland, 1888. Haviland was an abolitionist and suffragist who hid Black Americans fleeing enslavement in her home in Michigan during the 1830s as part of the Underground Railroad.

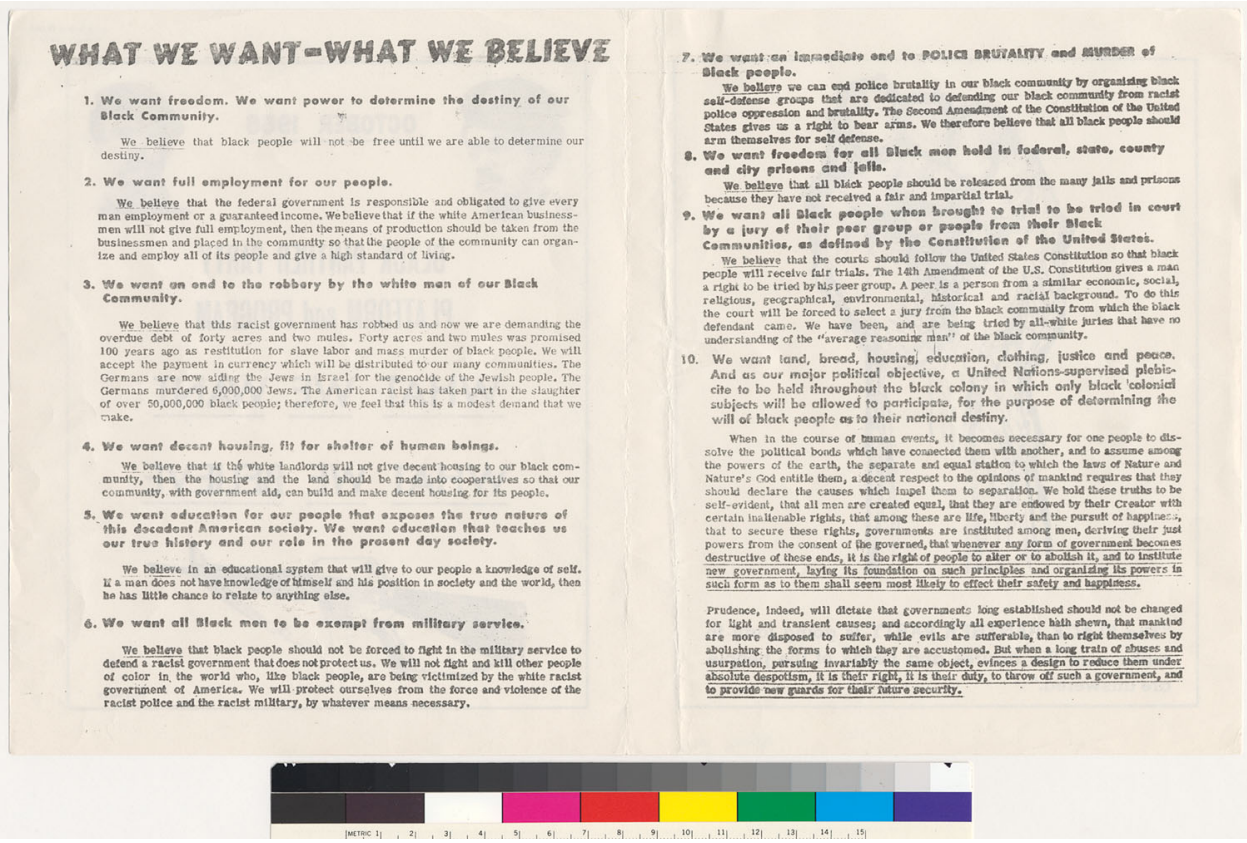
Transcript:

With my hands on her shoulders, my tears mingled with hers. In broken sentences, she referred to the separation of her husband when he was sold and taken down the river.
I left her, with a heavy heart, yet strong hope that her young master (as she called him) would be defeated.
At twilight, I called to assist in getting them ready to jump into the carriage that our friend William Fuller would drive to the door within fifteen minutes; and being ready, we were in the carriage turning the first corner within a minute, and left them in [the] charge of an underground railway agent, who took them on his train as soon as their clothing and pocket-money were forwarded to them, to the great relief of many anxious hearts.

Citation: Haviland, Laura S., excerpt from "A woman's life work: including thirty years' service on the underground railroad and in the war," Digital Public Library of America, http://dp.la/item/9908c22de72cde66488f86c81fb928d9.

Document 7:

The Black Panther Party's platform and program from its founding in October of 1966, in Oakland, CA. The Party was founded by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale and came to be known for their Free Breakfast for Children programs and community health clinics, as well as their armed citizens' patrols.



WHAT WE WANT–WHAT WE BELIEVE

1. We want freedom. We want power to determine the destiny of our Black Community.

We believe that black people will not be free until we are able to determine our destiny.

2. We want full employment for our people.

We believe that the federal government is responsible and obligated to give every man employment or a guaranteed income. We believe that if the white American businessmen will not give full employment, then the means of production should be taken from the businessmen and placed in the community so that the people of the community can organize and employ all of its people and give a high standard of living.

3. We want an end to the robbery by the white man of our Black Community.

We believe that this racist government has robbed us and now we are demanding the overdue debt of forty acres and two mules. Forty acres and two mules was promised 100 years ago as restitution for slave labor and mass murder of black people. We will accept the payment in currency which will be distributed to our many communities. The Germans are now aiding the Jews in Israel for the genocide of the Jewish people. The Germans murdered 6,000,000 Jews. The American racist has taken part in the slaughter of over 50,000,000 black people; therefore, we feel that this is a modest demand that we make.

4. We want decent housing, fit for shelter of human beings.

We believe that if the white landlords will not give decent housing to our black community, then the housing and the land should be made into cooperatives so that our community, with government aid, can build and make decent housing for its people.

5. We want education for our people that exposes the true nature of this decadent American society. We want education that teaches us our true history and our role in the present day society.

We believe in an educational system that will give to our people a knowledge of self. If a man does not have knowledge of himself and his position in society and the world, then he has little chance to relate to anything else.

6. We want all Black men to be exempt from military service.

We believe that black people should not be forced to fight in the military service to defend a racist government that does not protect us. We will not fight and kill other people of color in the world who, like black people, are being victimized by the white racist government of America. We will protect ourselves from the force and violence of the racist police and the racist military, by whatever means necessary.

7. We want an immediate end to POLICE BRUTALITY and MURDER of Black people.

We believe we can end police brutality in our black community by organizing black self-defense groups that are dedicated to defending our black community from racist police oppression and brutality. The Second Amendment of the Constitution of the United States gives us a right to bear arms. We therefore believe that all black people should arm themselves for self defense.

8. We want freedom for all Black men held in federal, state, county and city prisons and jails.

We believe that all black people should be released from the many jails and prisons because they have not received a fair and impartial trial.

9. We want all Black people when brought to trial to be tried in court by a jury of their peer group or people from their Black Communities, as defined by the Constitution of the United States.

We believe that the courts should follow the United States Constitution so that black people will receive fair trials. The 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution gives a man a right to be tried by his peer group. A peer is a person from a similar economic, social, religious, geographical, environmental, historical and racial background. To do this the court will be forced to select a jury from the black community from which the black defendant came. We have been, and are being tried by all-white juries that have no understanding of the "average reasoning man" of the black community.

10. We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace. And as our major political objective, a United Nations-supervised plebiscite to be held throughout the black colony in which only black colonial subjects will be allowed to participate, for the purpose of determining the will of black people as to their national destiny.

When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bonds which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of Nature and Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to separation. We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.

Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpation, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such a government, and to provide new guards for their future security.

"Black Panther Party Platform and Program," Digital Public Library of America, http://dp.la/item/8180a9e971c46037acff946e1be41e56.

Document 8 [modified]:

An excerpt from a letter from Representative Shirley Chisolm to Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee Don Edwards regarding the hearings on the Equal Rights Amendment, which Edwards was overseeing. Chisolm was the first Black woman elected to the United States Congress and represented New York's 12th Congressional district in Brooklyn from 1969 to 1983.

Transcript:

"Dear Don:

As you know, I am deeply concerned about the hearing currently being held by your subcommittee on the Equal Rights Amendment Force on the Status of Women Report. In the past we haven't even been able to have a hearing on these issues and now group after group is coming in to me and the other women of Congress, and I am sure to you, to express their concern over the fact that they have not been able to testify and were only able to file testimony. I, myself, wished to testify on the opening day of the hearings, but so many witnesses were scheduled and it was taking so long to get through the witness list that I decided to just file my statement.

I know that it is tedious and often boring to sit and listen to many, many statements on the same issues but it is equally important to realize the sensitivity of this issue. Many of these people who are asking to testify, especially the younger women have never had an opportunity to express their views before. And when the Committee indicates that they don't have time to hear them, the results are sometimes explosive… as for example the case of the group of women from George Washington [University]. […]

Your record in the field of Civil Rights has been exemplary. I hope you can use your position on the Judiciary Committee to help create more understanding of and sympathy for the civil rights of women.

Cordially,
Shirley Chisholm
Congresswoman"

Letter from Representative Shirley Chisholm to Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee Don Edwards; 4/14/1971; Legislative Bill Files of the Committee on the Judiciary for the 92nd Congress; Committee Papers, 1813 - 2011; Records of the U.S. House of Representatives, Record Group 233; National Archives Building, Washington, DC. [Online Version, https://docsteach.org/documents/document/chisholm-edwards, April 26, 2022]

Document 9:

An excerpt from a letter from Ruth Bader Ginsburg to Congressman Don Edwards urging him to support the Equal Rights Amendment and not think of the Women's Equality Act of 1971 as a substitute for it. Ginsberg was the second woman (and first Jewish woman) to serve on the Supreme Court of the United States, and served on the court from 1993 until her death in 2020.

Transcript:

"Dear Congressman Edwards:

I wish to urge your support and cooperation in expediting passage of the Equal Rights Amendment (H.J. Res. 208).

In this critical area of human rights it is regrettable that the United States has delayed assertion of a pace-setting role. Reporting on developments in his country, Sweden's Prime Minister stated during his stay in Washington last year:
"Public opinion is nowadays so well informed that if a politician today should declare that women ought to have a different role than men [in economic and social life] he would be regarded to be of the Stone Age."

He emphasized that equal rights entailed emancipation of the man as much as the woman. Address by Mr. Olof Palme, the Women's National Democratic Club, Washington, D.C., June 8, 1970.

Although the Women's Equality Act of 1971 is a desirable supplement, it is not a substitute for the statement of basic rights represented by the Equal Rights Amendment.

I very much hope that you will do all that you can to assure that in this nation every person will be given equal opportunity to develop his or her individual talents. Application of this fundamental principle to women is long overdue.

Sincerely,
Ruth Bader Ginsburg
Professor of Law"

Letter from Law Professor Ruth Bader Ginsburg in Support of the Equal Rights Amendment; 4/15/1971; Legislative Files of the Committee on the Judiciary for the 92nd Congress; Committee Papers, 1813 - 2011; Records of the U.S. House of Representatives, Record Group 233; National Archives Building, Washington, DC. [Online Version, https://docsteach.org/documents/document/rbg-equal-rights-amendment, April 26, 2022]

Document 10 [adapted]:

An excerpt from a statement from the civil case *Renault Robinson and the Afro American Patrolmen's League v. James B. Conlisk, et al.* This is a civil case in which Renault Robinson and the Afro American Police League brought a suit against Chicago Police Superintendent (Conlisk), the City of Chicago, individual members of the Police Board, and the Police Review Board of the City of Chicago on September 9, 1970, alleging discriminatory practices in hiring, assigning, disciplining, and promoting African Americans, women and Latinos. The court sided with the plaintiffs and then appealed to the Supreme Court, which also ruled in favor of the Afro-American Patrolmen's League.

Transcript:

The Afro-American Patrolmen's League has sought a meeting with the superintendent of Chicago's [Police] Department, James Conlisk, regarding the explosive situation in the Black Community that has reached a critical point. This explosive situation has been developed by the current demands of Black to confront a construction industry that has systematically discriminated against the hiring of Blacks. The demands are not simply for jobs, but for the right to control the thitherto sinister pattern of hiring in the construction trades. If Black cannot participate in the construction of their communities, who shall?

[…] The arrest of Rev. Jesse Jackson has, of course, raised grave concern in the Black Community. We, as Black policemen, are attempting to humanize and bridge the gap between the two drifting societies [Black and White]. We want to build a new world with a foundation based on Social Justice as stated in our Declaration of Independence: "All men are created equal and are endowed with certain inalienable rights, among whom are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

[…] We members of the Afro-American Patrolmen's League will continue to work towards [a fair, just and impartial Police Department]. We will no longer allow ourselves to be used as the oppressors of this Black Community in which we live. We will become its protectors.

Statement of Afro-American Patrolmen's League; 9/10/1969; 70C2220; Renault Robinson and the Afro American Patrolmen's League v. James B. Conlisk, et al., 1970 - 1993; Civil Case Files, 1938 - 1995; Records of District Courts of the United States, Record Group 21; National Archives at Chicago, Chicago, IL. [Online Version, https://docsteach.org/documents/document/statement-afroamerican-patrolmens-league, April 26, 2022]

Textbook Critique: Attending to the Dimensions of History

The most closely related sections of *The American Nation* by James West Davidson and John E. Batchelor to this project are contained within Chapter 31: "Challenges of the 1980s and 1990s," sub-chapter "Currents of Social Change," subtitled "African Americans in the 1980s" and "Opportunities for Women," and are on pages 706-707 of the textbook. Altogether, the section on Black Americans post-Civil Rights Movement is 5 paragraphs long and includes one image, of Douglas Wilder celebrating his gubernatorial win in Virginia in 1989, making him the first Black governor in the United States. The section about the continuing women's rights movement is a similar length, six paragraphs, and also includes one visual source, a graph using data from the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics illustrating the percentage of women working outside the home from the years 1960 to 1995, which steadily increased from about 34% to about 61%.

My initial reaction to the length of this textbook entry on these issues is that these aren't nearly long enough sections to encapsulate the nuance of the strides made for Black Americans and women over an entire decade. In the section about Black advancement especially, there is frustratingly little attention to historical dimensions (context and complexity, most egregiously), coupled with an overall bleak image of life for Black communities in the 1980s, spending two of the five total paragraphs discussing poverty and unemployment among Black families, pointing out that, "One out of every four [B]lack families lived below the poverty line–20 percent more than in 1970. Unemployment among young [B]lacks soared. Many young [B]lacks had dropped out of school and lacked the skills to hold a job." These three sentences are followed by one of the section's few attempts to attend to context or causality by pointing to systemic influence: "In cutting social programs, President Reagan had cut back on job training and welfare." The section

goes on to point out that though Reagan supposedly was placing the burden to solve the issue of "jobless youth" on state and local government, that both Black and White leaders "warned that an 'underclass' of poorly educated, jobless [B]lacks" continued to grow. One can't help but be frustrated with this extremely short and limiting telling of an epidemic of poverty and lack of systemic change or assistance for Black Americans, leaving students with an image of an under-educated, unemployed, and poorly motivated group of people, barely undercut by the sentence-long mention of the "progress" middle-class Black people had made.

The remaining three paragraphs of this section are dedicated to the decline in popularity of affirmative action and the achievements of David Dinkins as New York's first Black mayor, and Virginia's election of Douglas Wilder. Overall, four paragraphs about continued setbacks and systemic barriers for Black Americans and one 3-sentence paragraph about strides made in political representation cannot possibly be enough to describe the varied and complex textures of Black communities across the country during the 1980s. Cultural contributions (think Whitney Houston, Michael Jackson, and Oprah, for example) are conspicuously absent, painting a bleak picture of Black everyday life. Also conspicuously absent is the drug epidemic that ravaged these communities, though perhaps it is being alluded to with the phrase "other problems remained a challenge," found in the section about poverty and unemployment.

In the "Opportunities for Women" section, the tone shifts slightly. The opening lines read, "The women's rights movement continued to press for equal treatment of women in all areas of life. It claimed many successes." The sub-headings under this section read, "Taking new jobs," and "Changes at home," pointing to the fact that this section is primarily about women's growing role in the workforce (reinforced by the aforementioned graph that accompanies this section). Affirmative action is mentioned once again here, though instead of discussing its

unpopularity, it is instead framed in a more neutral light: “Prodded by affirmative action programs, businesses hired and promoted many talented female executives.” This framing of women “entering” the workforce, notably, implicitly points to the Whiteness of the women in question, as evidenced by the fact that women of color had been working outside their households for generations before it was a revolutionary talking point for white women. In discussing women entering the workforce, the pioneering careers of astronaut Sally Ride (who became the first woman in space in 1983) and Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor (who was the first woman justice of the court, appointed by Ronald Reagan in 1981). They, thankfully, point to the fact that though women were increasing their participation in the workforce, they were by no means equal to men in this respect, explaining that though women were taking on more roles in government, they “still held only a tiny percentage of the elected offices.” Additionally, they point to the issue of equal pay, stating, “Women’s pay was rising, but men still earned more. [...] Women’s groups demanded equivalent pay. That is, they wanted the pay for each job to be based on the skills it required.”

The section mentions the changes in family structure brought on by women’s entrance into work outside the home, mentioning the prevalence of the two-job family and the increasingly common single-mother household, though they note that, “more than half the children in families headed by women lived below the poverty line.” They note that women’s groups, in addition to equivalent pay, proposed better childcare and more job training, before ending the section with the lines, “Still, many women chose to work at home in traditional roles as wives and mothers. As in the past, they volunteered their time for social and political causes.” This sentence rings uncomfortably misogynistic and unneeded for this section of the textbook, painting stay-at-home mothers and housewives as inherently altruistic in a frustrating way,

especially when they have just heralded the success of women entering government positions and described their advocacy for equivalent pay and improved social infrastructure to assist in their transition out of these "traditional" roles. This sentiment seems to have been made about the educated, wealthy White women who, as an untapped resource in terms of the paid workforce, instead used their skills and free time for charitable work, because it was where their intelligence and leadership were valued. The use of the term "traditional roles," however, is what turns this historical allusion towards a judgment on the "natural order." No mention is made in this section about men's transitions *into* the home, nor anything about progress made towards disrupting sexist gender roles in the first place.

It is easy to frustratingly point out the backward and minimizing way in which these two communities are represented in this section of the textbook, but at the same time, the time in which these authors were writing (the 1990s), as well as the difficulty in writing a textbook must be considered. That is why I believe that the entire book, and especially the chapters regarding human rights, civic engagement, and marginalized communities, could have benefitted from being written from an intersectional perspective. At no point are the advancements or setbacks of women of color (or specifically Black women) discussed or even mentioned. Whether a specific section on intersectionality and Black feminism (as will be written below) can help augment the frustrations I have with this section of the textbook remains to be seen, but the preferred method for improving the text would be an overhaul of the content through the lens of the inherent complexity of intersectionality and with an attention to context and culture that is conspicuously absent from these sections.

What this might look like, for the section on women's suffrage in the early 20th century, for example, would include an acknowledgment of the worldwide influence of women's suffrage

sweeping the globe, including in countries that may surprise students without exposure to the topic, and which will de-center White, Western perspectives and recontextualize this as a human rights issue that has been largely universal (which can also speak to discussions about imperialism and the insert of Western values in non-Western countries). Within the same two decades as women's suffrage was achieved in the United States, it was also achieved in Austria, Canada, Burma, South Africa, and Thailand, to name a few examples. Next, the suffrage section should make note of the fact that organization around the abolition of slavery, in part, allowed for and inspired the collective action of women around suffrage, the two issues tied to one another for many activists such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott. This section should also note that the NAACP (and its predecessor, the Niagara Movement) was an interracial effort, which included suffragists like Mary White Ovington, who advocated for the inclusion of Black women in the women's suffrage movement.

These relationships, between dimensions of intersectionality, can be difficult to imagine in the structure of a textbook, perhaps because textbooks rely on strict categorization and chronology to make meaning. The delineation of historical events as separate (even when they are connected by time, space, theme, or another coordinate of historical theory) is inherent to the structure of a textbook that aims to summarize and distinguish historical events from one another in clear, understandable ways for students. Perhaps, therefore, the balance lies in our ability to utilize both the discussion of how complex and intersectional these topics can be with our ability to write about issues as distinct and provide retrospective or supplementary reminders of the intersectional nature of the issues discussed, as demonstrated in the brief section on the advent of the term *intersectionality* written in the following pages.

New Textbook Entry

A Section on Intersectionality

Nobody is just one thing. Though advancements for individual **marginalized** groups, like the ones detailed in this chapter, are often written about as separate issues, the reality is that nobody on earth is just one thing. Issues that affected the Black community, like mass unemployment, affected Black men as well as Black women–but Black women were also affected by issues affecting women, like equivalent pay and access to childcare. One word you can use to describe this historical and social phenomenon is **intersectionality,** as coined by scholar Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989. According to Crenshaw, intersectionality is a way to look at inequality, noticing the way that several parts of your identity can interact with each other to create a unique experience, rather than simply being the sum of their parts. Some people are Black women and LGBTQIA, for example, like famous Harlem Renaissance poet **Alice Dunbar Nelson,** and that is a unique experience that cannot be captured by understanding what all of those things may mean separately.

Stereotypes and discrimination. When reading the section on African Americans in the 1980s, it would not be uncommon to have built an image of what the average African American looked like, and for that image to have been of a man. The leaders of various eras of Black History, after all, are largely men: **Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Marcus Garvey,** and **Frederick Douglass** are all examples. By contrast, simply by existing, women who have taken on leadership roles in these movements have often inherently taken on women's issues as well as the issues of historical discrimination against Black Americans. **Sojourner Truth**, for example, famously worked with and spoke to White women regarding women's suffrage as well as slavery abolition efforts.

It also would not have been uncommon to have imagined White women, for the most part, when reading about women's rights in the United States. The issues of the women's movement have largely been described without mentioning race. Though it's of course accurate to say that more women than ever were entering the workforce for the first time through the late 20th century, it's also true that many women, especially non-White women had been active participants in work outside the home for generations before the women's rights movement demanded fair participation and equivalent pay in the workforce.

A new school of scholarly writing. Popular texts like *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan (1963), which heavily influenced **second-wave feminism** in the United States, have been studied and criticized by women's rights activists over the years for portraying White women's issues as representative of all women's issues. Writers like **bell hooks** and **Angela Davis** wrote social theory describing how topics like gender, race, class, and sexuality interact, and how different Black women can be from one another. Even though they are often pioneers of both the women's and Black liberation causes, Black women are still commonly forgotten about in mainstream narratives about both movements. One important text in this movement was ***All the Women Are White; All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us are Brave,*** as edited by Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith, published in 1982, which directly inspired Kimberle Crenshaw's work.

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