

**BITCH**

'An organization which does not yet exist. The name is not an acronym,' according to Joreen (JO FREEMAN). (See also 'BITCH MANIFESTO')

**'Bitch Manifesto, The'**

Widely-read paper by Joreen (JO FREEMAN) first published in 1970. Examining the word 'bitch' she says, 'a popular derogation to put down uppity women that was created by man and adopted by women. Like the term "nigger", "bitch" serves the social function of isolating and discrediting a class of people who do not conform to the socially accepted patterns of behavior.'

Bitches violate the (man-made) rules. Self-determining, refusing to be passive, they are the ground-breakers, the ones who change society both for themselves and for their sisters. Yet because they are defined by that society as freaks, they may hate themselves or mistrust other women. The manifesto calls for an organization of bitches, strong women who would work together for their own liberation, teaching each other that 'Bitch is Beautiful'.

**black feminism**

Although it attempts to speak to the needs of all women, feminism is often, and with reason, seen as a white, middle-class movement. The term 'black feminism' may be unfortunate, both because it implies

that feminism is normally white and because it ignores the many other women of colour who do not define themselves as black but feel equally alienated from white feminism. Some call it WOMANISM; others would prefer to redefine the term feminism so that it can be seen as applicable to women of all races and classes.

Black feminists have existed as long as white feminists, although they have suffered the fate of most women in being 'lost' to history. In America, the first wave of feminism emerged from the ABOLITION MOVEMENT. Many abolitionists – black and white, female or male – began to realize, as they fought against slavery, that not only were all blacks oppressed racially, but that women were also oppressed because of their sex. Paula Giddings (1984) has proposed that 'The moral urgency of their being Black and female . . . suffused Black women with a tenacious feminism, which was articulated before that of Whites like Sarah GRIMKÉ, who is credited with providing the first rationale for American women's political activism.'

Similarly, the Women's Liberation Movement was born of the Civil Rights and Black Liberation movements in America, where black women, doubly oppressed, might have been expected to take the lead in the new movement, yet they did not. Black women developed a feminist consciousness

just as white women did, and they faced racism, patronizing attitudes and a lack of understanding from white women. Even worse, they were often made to feel they were selling out their own people by joining a white movement. As Toni Morrison explained in an article titled 'What the Black Woman Thinks about Women's Lib' (1971), 'Too many movements and organizations have made deliberate overtures to enrol Blacks and have ended up by rolling them. They don't want to be used again to help somebody gain power - a power that is carefully kept out of their hands.' Not surprisingly, just as in the first wave of feminism, most black women decided that racial oppression took priority over sexual oppression.

Yet why should fighting oppression be a matter of priorities? How can a black woman decide whether her race or her sex is more important when both are indisputable facts of her existence? Black feminists challenge the idea that a feminism which ignores racism can be meaningful. As Bell HOOKS (1984) wrote, 'Feminist theory would have much to offer if it showed women ways in which racism and sexism are immutably connected rather than pitting one struggle against the other, or blatantly dismissing racism.'

The concept of identity politics, of organizing around one's own oppression, is vital to the idea of

black feminism. 'Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface,' wrote Audre LORDE (1984). 'Black women have particular and legitimate issues which affect our lives as Black women, and addressing those issues does not make us any less Black.' In their statement on black feminism the COMBAHEE RIVER COLLECTIVE declared, 'We realize that the only people who care enough about us to work consistently for our liberation is us. Our politics evolve from a healthy love for ourselves, our sisters and our community which allows us to continue our struggle and work.'

The significance of black feminism is not limited to the lives of black women only. As the Combahee River Collective expressed it, 'If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression.'

This statement recognizes that while all women share a common oppression as women, all women are not equally oppressed. Even while being oppressed on the grounds of sex, a white woman may use the privileges of race and class to oppress others not so privileged. Race, class, and sex oppression may be experienced separately, but because they most often experience all three simultaneously, black women are not likely to believe that a feminist revolution which defeated sexism