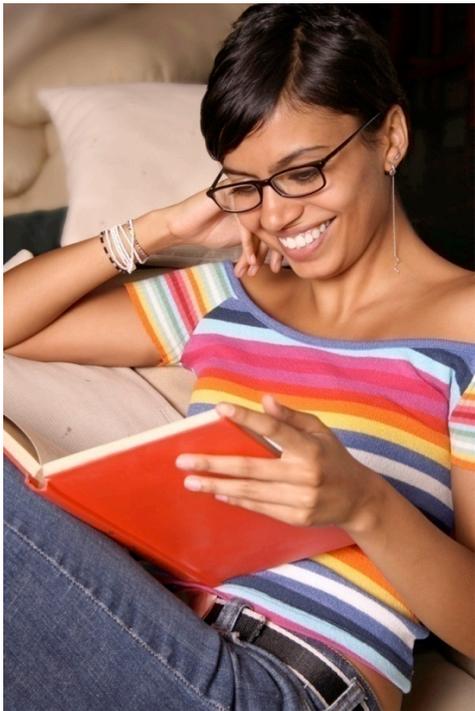


# BLACK FEMINIST THOUGHT



CHAPTERS 1-4

# CHAPTER 1

## The Politics of Black Feminist Thought

Fundamental causes of Black Women's Poverty  
Race/Gender/Class Oppression

- Break the bond of oppressors – intellectual work has aimed to foster Black women's activism
- Dialectical relationship is critical in assessing how US Black feminist thought connects to domestic and transitional Black Feminist practices

# SUPPRESSION

Seamless web of economy,  
polity and ideology  
Highly functioning effective  
system designed to keep  
African-American women in  
the assigned subordinate  
place

- ECONOMIC DIMENSION

Ghettoization in service occupation

- POLITICAL DIMENSION

Denial to vote, exclusion from public office, inequity in criminal justice system

- IDEOLOGICAL DIMENSION

Assumed qualities attached to justify  
I.E.: mammies, jezebel, Aunt Jemima, welfare mothers

# Critical Social Theory

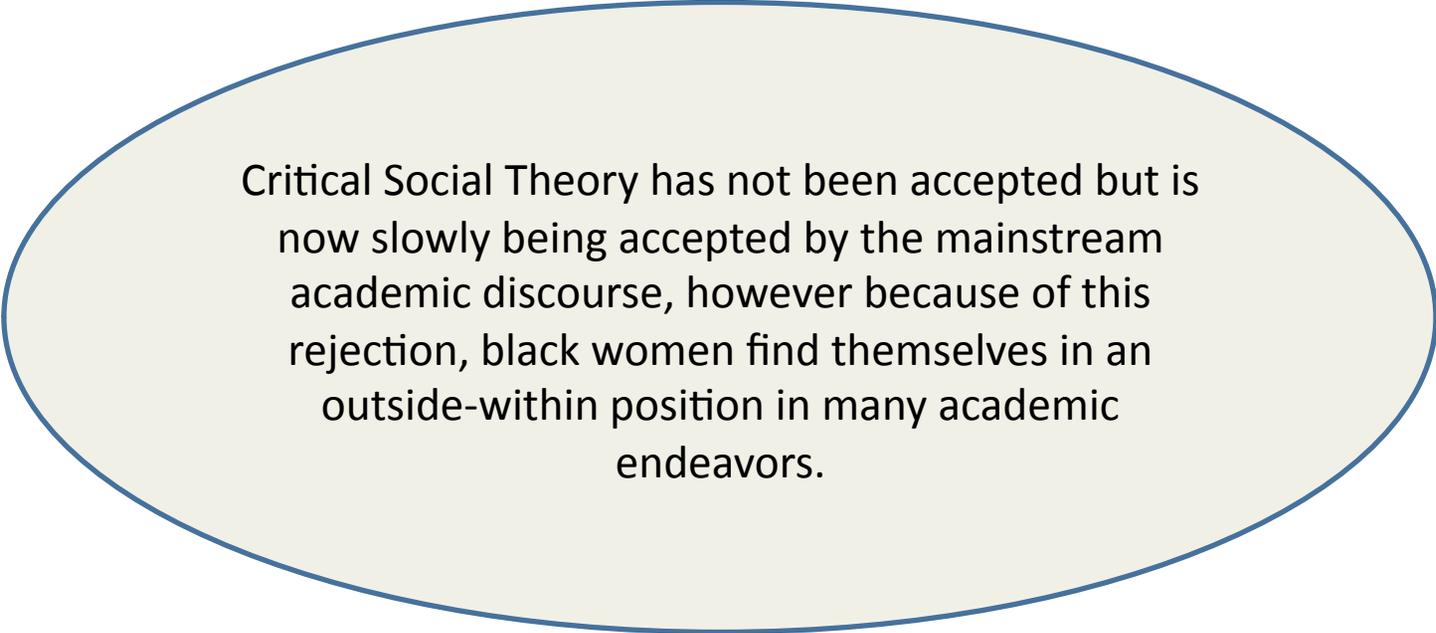
African-American women produce social thought designed to oppose oppression

- Academic theory
- Poetry
- Music
- Essays
- Speeches

Remain oppressed within the United States by injustice (matter of containment -segregation for survival)

# Two Factor Stimuli for Critical Social Theory

- Urban Housing
- Common experiences gained from jobs



Critical Social Theory has not been accepted but is now slowly being accepted by the mainstream academic discourse, however because of this rejection, black women find themselves in an outside-within position in many academic endeavors.

# Developing Black Feminist Thought

- Black Women's knowledge passed down through the generations has been suppressed
- Reinterpretation of existing works is another dimension
- Alternative institutional locations is also part of this endeavor
- Most new angles of vision came via outside the academic institutions

# CHAPTER 2

## Features of Black Feminist Thought

- Encompasses diverse and contradictory meanings
- Experiences and consciousness shape and often pervade the works of Black Women activists and scholars

Segregation in housing, education and employment fostered group commonalities that encouraged the formation of a group-based standpoint. This leads to collective wisdom

# Two Interpretations of Consciousness of Oppressed Groups

- Subordinate groups identify with the powerful
- The oppressed are less human than their rulers and are therefore less capable of interpreting their own experiences



# Diverse Responses to Common Challenges

- Living in a society that historically and routinely derogates women of African descent.
- Encounter societal practices that restrict them to inferior housing, neighborhoods, schools, jobs and public treatment
- Recurring patterns of differential treatment characterize US Black women's group knowledge or standpoint
- Core themes of struggle exist amongst Black women
- Thought and practice in a transnational Diaspora context specifies what is particular to Black Women

# Dialogical Relationships

Definition: characteristics of Black Women's collective experiences and group knowledge

Black Feminist Thought encompasses general knowledge and reflects a dialogical relationship

# Dialogical Relationships

Two

Prominent Moments

Turn of the century with  
Black women's club  
movement

Women's social justice  
moments of the 60's  
and 70's

Change in social  
conditions stimulate the  
need for new analyses

Social conditions  
affect the intellectual  
work

Institutions serve as  
outlets

May cause own  
universe entrapment

# Dynamic and Changing

Change in social conditions stimulate the need  
for new analyses

Social conditions affect the intellectual work

Institutions serve as outlets

May cause own universe entrapment

# Social Justice

Intellectuals see political actions as a means for human empowerment

Commitment to Black women's empowerment within a context of social justice help advance the similar theme of oneness of all human life



# Black Feminist Thought

## Chapter 3

### Work, Family, and Black Women's Oppression

# Family and Work: Challenging the Definitions

- Public Sphere- paid employment
  - African American women work in low paid service; day care aides, fast food employees, dry cleaning workers
- Private Sphere- unpaid family responsibilities
  - Empowering and oppressing; seen as a form of resistance to oppression rather than as a form of exploitation by men

# The Process of Enslavement

## Women's activities with work and family differed from those they encountered under slavery

- Work, family and motherhood were retained yet changed by two fundamental demands of enslavement. African women worked on behalf of their families and children whereas enslaved African American women's labor benefited their owners.
- The nature of work performed was altered. Women did not retain authority over their time, technology, workmates or type or amount of work they performed.
- Black women's work affected the organization of child care. By denying enslaved African women marriage and citizenship, slavery provided no social context for issues of motherhood. When Black slave mothers taught their children to trust their own self-definitions and value themselves, they offered a powerful tool for resisting oppression.

## The Transition to "Free" Labor

The period between emancipation and migration has been called the Accumulative Period.

- During this period, political and economic oppression of African American in the South influenced the actions and ideas about family and community.
- For Black women the issue was less achieving economic parity with their Black male counterparts and more one of securing and adequate family income.
- Black women workers were confined to two major occupations:
  - Field work
  - Domestic work

The move from the South to Northern cities during the early 1900's, historical employment patterns persisted. Black men were able to locate higher-paying jobs, yet less secure work. On the other hand, Black women found lower-paying jobs and they were more plentiful

# POST WORLD WAR II

- A changing global economy in conjunction with a new transnational context fostered significant shifts in Black civil society.
- Black activism in the 1950s – 1970s stimulated the dismantling of racial segregation. Combined these shifts greatly affected the relationship between work and family for African America women.
- Racial discrimination was not the sole problem that African Americans faced. Class factors were just as important. Poverty became a prominent culprit for many Blacks who could not attain work when the society became a global political economy

# Other factors affecting African Americans

- Manufacturing for Black men disappeared
- Crack cocaine in urban Black neighborhoods appeared in 1980s
- Drugs became the employer for many young Black men
- Young Black women looked to these men for financial assistance
- US Blacks became more stratified, racial segregation in housing that fosters inequities of education and employment persisted
- Extended family networks weakened
- Many young Black men saw their futures in terms of rap stars, basketball players or drug dealers

# NEW WORKING POOR: BLACK SINGLE MOTHERS

This group is economically marginalized:

- Low wages
- Job instability
- Poor working condition

Persistent poverty of African Americans living in single parent households especially Women:

- Increase in unmarried Black adolescents
- Decline in marital rates
- Erosion of child-care networks

# MIDDLE CLASS BLACK WOMEN

Increased access to managerial and professional positions led to increment of African American women to move into the middle class.

Three areas of middle-class power that are different for African Americans and their White counterpart;

- Economic – Lower income
- Political – Limited
- Ideological – not as respected

Black Women are not used to being seen in these positions – put through more challenges on the job

# Middle class vs. Lower class Struggles

Many Blacks who have become middle class via social mobility may express ambivalence concerning their functions as controllers of working class employees especially working class Blacks. When traditional gender differences in Black employment patterns are combined with the economic, political and an ideological weaknesses caused by race, certain patterns emerge.

- Black women not born in the middle class dealing with the demands of family and work can be unsettling
- US Black professional women are finding it increasingly difficult to find middle class Black men to marry

# CHAPTER 4

## CONTROLLING IMAGES

- Elite groups define social values and to remain in power is done by manipulating existing symbols or images
- Black Women's status as outsiders becomes the point from which other groups define their normality

# Objectification of Black women

- Enslaved Black women became the basis for the definition of our society's "other"
- Objectification is central to this process of oppositional difference
- Domination always attempts to objectify the subordinate groups

# Binary Thinking

- White/black
- Male/female
- Reason/emotion
- Culture/nature
- Fact/opinion
- Mind/body
- Subject/object

## Oppositional Binaries

- Tension temporarily relieved by subordinating the other binary
- Whites rules Blacks
- Men dominate Women
- Reason is superior to Emotion
- Facts supersede opinion
- Subjects rule objects

# Controlling Images

## Traditional Family Ideals (White)

- Piety
- Purity
- Submissiveness
- Domesticity

## US Black Women

- Mammy-faithful, obedient, domestic servant
- Matriarch- Black mother image for family
- Assertive, aggressive  
Black women are penalized, abandoned, impoverished, stigmatized as being unfeminine

Slavery destroyed black families by creating reversed roles for men and women.  
Absence of Black patriarchy is used as evidence of Black cultural inferiority

# Welfare Mother

- Class specific developed for the poor working class who makes use of social welfare
- Breeder woman image created during slavery
- Large numbers of undereducated, unemployed – women and children could not be forced to work
- Like matriarch the welfare mother is labeled a bad mother- not aggressive enough
- No male authority figure (violates the one cardinal tenet of White male dominated ideology)
- 1980's stigmatized as the welfare queen

# The Black Lady

Middle class professional woman who represents the one who stayed in school

- Jobs are all consuming- have not time for men
- Compete with men and are successful at it
- Become less feminine and that's why they can't marry
- Allegedly take jobs from Whites because of Affirmative Action

# The Jezebel

- Deviant Black female
- Sexually aggressive- wet nurses
- Black slave women – excessive sexual appetites
- Misogyny of the term Hoochie masks the acceptance of such images and provides financial benefits to rap artists and white controlled media
- Hoochie mama speaks to the number of Black women in poverty who are single parents- sexual favors for money is motivated by their children's economic needs

# Controlling Images

- Schools, news media, government agencies
- Government plays an important role in controlling the images by censorship
- Productions are primarily White owned

## Black Community Organizations

- Black community organizations oppose racial oppression, but perpetuate gender oppression
- Many churches subordinate women
- Some black colleges also subordinate women, limiting authority positions

# Color, Hair Texture, and Standards of Beauty

Skin color, facial features and hair texture are controlling derogate images

Division of African-American into two categories

- Brights- light skinned who were shown preference by Whites
- Lesser Blacks (Darker)- those who were judged as inferior and more discriminated against by Whites
- Black women with long flowing hair more accepted than those with short hair

# Black Women's Reactions to Images

Recurring theme in Black feminist thought is the exploration of controlling images.

Literature from Black women writers provides one comprehensive view of black women's struggles to form positive self-definitions in the face of derogated images of Black womanhood

Denial is another response by authors