Women’s Studies 60
Women of Color: Race, Class, Ethnicity

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Winter 2009
Goals of Lecture

- Define feminism and the women’s movement.
- Introduce some important themes in women of color feminism.
- To offer students useful tools for analysis of women of color feminist texts.
Feminism and the Women’s Movement

Feminism in the U.S. began within the abolitionist movement (anti-slavery) and expanded with the Suffrage Movement. (First Wave)

Expanded again in the 60s and 70s as a result of the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left (Second Wave), and in 80s and 90s (Third Wave).

Includes belief that women have the right to social, political, and economic equality with men, the right to control their bodies, and be safe from violence, including rape.

Feminists have fought for equal employment, pay, and benefits, reproductive rights, education, social justice, and family and children’s rights.
Themes in WOC Feminism

- Oppression vs. Resistance
- Difference and Othering
- Silence vs. Writing and Speaking
- Conquest and Slavery
- Everyday Struggles of Violence and Exploitation
- Politics of Representation
- Expanding Feminism to include race, ethnicity, and class.
- Linking U.S. Women of Color to Third World Women
Women of color feminists see patriarchy, the privileging of men, as disempowering to all women, but in differing ways.

Oppression functions through sexism, racism, classism, heteronormativity and homophobia, ableism, ageism, nationalism, and other systems of power.

Oppression is multiple and intersectional.
Resistance

✓ WOC feminists resist oppression in discourses and institutions of law, labor, education, the media, religion and medicine.

✓ Resistance happens on many levels including the psychological, sociocultural, economic, and political.

✓ WOCF resist patriarchal relations in their own racial, ethnic, class communities as well as dominant society.
Difference and Othering

- "Difference" has been used as a tool of social and political control and alienation.

- "Difference" creates some as outsiders or "Others" and some as insiders.

- Women experience hegemony from different standpoints.

- WOC feminists believe all feminists must recognize women’s "differences" and critique the systems of oppression that marginalize and disempower women.
“Difference must be not merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic...It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. *For the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.* They may allow us to beat him temporarily at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change.”

-- Audre Lorde, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House”
“For us, true speaking is not solely an act of expression of creative power; it is an act of resistance, a political gesture that challenges politics of domination that would render us nameless and voiceless. As such, it is a courageous act--as such, it represents a threat to those who wield oppressive power, that which is threatening must necessarily be wiped out, annihilated, silenced.”

--bell hooks,
“Talking Back”
Legacies of Conquest and Slavery

✓ WOCF writers reference the historical violence against women of color, showing how they have been exploited, marginalized, stereotyped, and otherwise violated in the United States.

✓ For example, the histories of Native American genocide and removal, African enslavement, colonization, Jim Crow segregation, the immigrant exclusion acts, eugenic sterilization policies, welfare reform, the war on drugs, and the war on terror.

✓ These writers argue the legacies of these acts continue to impact the lives of women of color today.
Violence and Exploitation

✓ Repressive power condones and enforces violence on the oppressed.

✓ Gender, race, class, and ethnicity make women of color especially vulnerable to violence.

✓ Women of color feminists critique social, economic, and political marginalization as forms of violence and exploitation.
The Politics of Representation

✓ WOCF believe their images have been distorted and misrepresented through stereotypes.

✓ Misrepresentation functions as a strategy of domination. It perpetuates myths about women of color’s bodies, behavior, intellect, values, choices, and desires.

✓ This has a negative impact on the self image of women of color.
Expanding Feminism

✓ WOCF critique mainstream feminism, and white middle class feminists specifically, for ignoring their histories and concerns.

✓ WOCF contend that white feminists who elide race/class are complicit with patriarchy vis a vis their racial/class privilege over WOC and poor women.

✓ WOCF argue that feminist theories of gender (women and men, femininity and masculinity) need to be expanded to account the intersectionality of gender with race, ethnicity, class and other dimensions of power and identity.
Linking U.S. Women of Color & Third World Women

- U.S. WOCF write about being colonized and second class citizens.

- Identify and sympathize with subjects of current U.S. imperialism and colonialism in the “Third World” or “Global South.”

- See themselves as linked to these women, but also acknowledge the differences between their lives and needs in light of poverty, disease, illiteracy, violence, and lack of political power.
Useful Tools for Analysis of Women of Color Feminist Texts

✓ How does the author challenge sexism, racism, classism, etc.?

✓ How does the author mobilize historical facts to argue for their point? What events, issues and themes do they engage?

✓ How does the author imagine what feminism should look like, or suggest a solution or vision for the future?