

# The U.S. Women's Movement

Rory Dicker

Vanderbilt University

November 4, 2021



**Week Five: Challenges and Divisions**

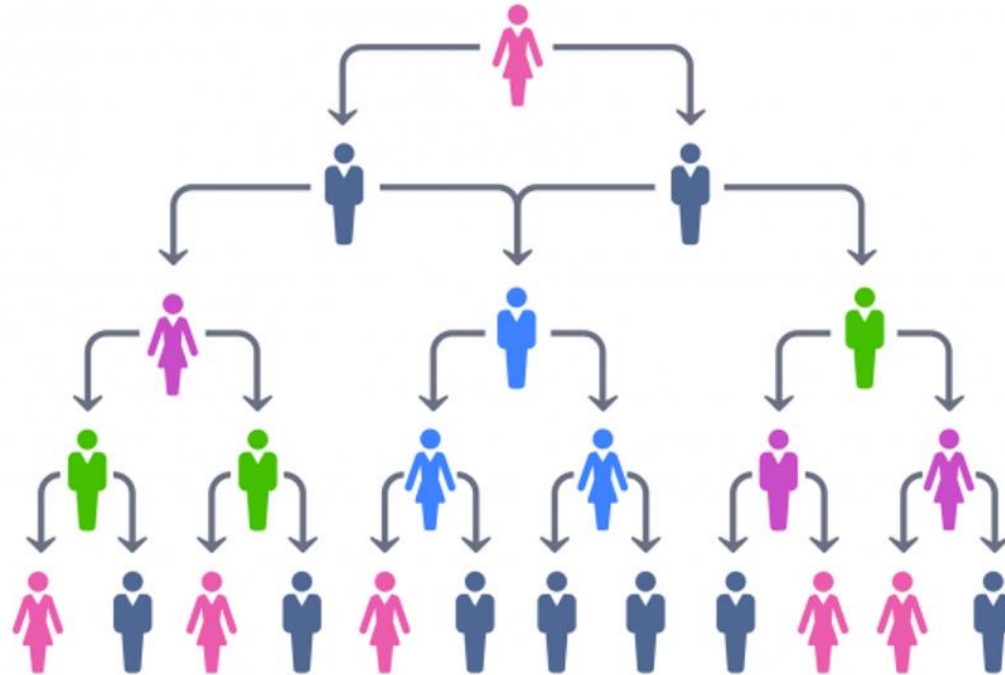
# Conflicts within Feminist Groups

- Structure and Organization
- Racial issues
- Sexual orientation

# Structure and Organization

# Hierarchy

## HIERARCHICAL ORGANIZATIONS





**NATIONAL**

**ORGANIZATION**

**FOR WOMEN**

- New York Radical Women
- Redstockings
- New York Radical Feminists
- The Feminists
- The Westside Group
- Bread and Roses
- Cell 16
- Women's Liberation Front





# Structurelessness

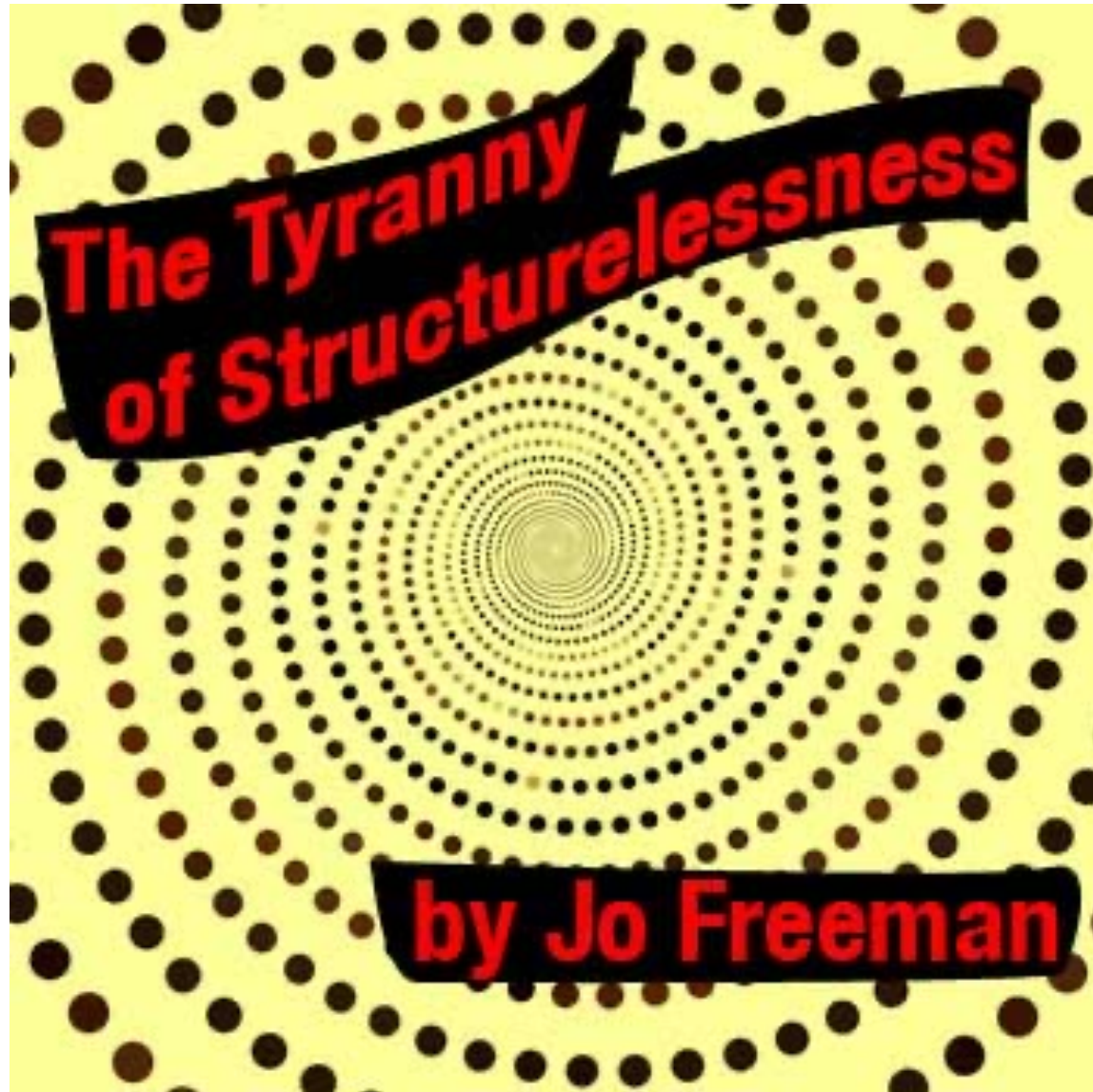


# Division of Labor



# Jo Freeman





# The TYRANNY of STRUCTURELESSNESS

by Joreen

During the years in which the women's liberation movement has been taking shape, a great emphasis has been placed on what are called "horizontal, non-hierarchical" groups as the basis of our new organizational form of the movement. The essence of this idea was a mutual respect among the decentralized entities in which most of us found ourselves, the equitable control the poor others were seeking, and the central pillars of the left and center groups among those who were supposedly fighting the establishment.

The idea of structurelessness, however, has proved to be a healthy counter to those intentions to becoming a golden rule in its own right. The idea is as often examined as the new is much used, but it has become an intrinsic and unquestioned part of women's liberation ideology. For the early development of the movement, this did not matter. It was defined in non-political and non-ideological, as non-organizational, and the "structureless" (no group was an excellent means to this end. The freedom and flexibility of it encouraged participation in discussion and its other supportive strengths obtained personal insight. If working more cohesively than personal insight was needed from these groups, that did not matter either because their purpose did not require it and beyond that.

The basic problem didn't appear until individual or groups advanced the ideas of consciousness-raising and found they wanted to do something more specific. At this point they usually floundered, because most groups were unwilling to change their structure when they changed their goals. Women had thoroughly accepted the idea of "structurelessness" without solving the problems of its use. People would try to use the "structureless" group and the structure continued for purposes for which they were conceived, or of a fixed belief that no other means could possibly be any longer appropriate.

If the movement is to gain beyond these necessary stages of development, it will have to shake out itself of some of its prejudices about organization and structure. There is nothing inherently bad about either of them. They can be just what are needed, but to reject them out of hand because they are present is to forego the necessary tools to further development. We need to understand why "structurelessness" does not work.

### Formal and Informal Structures

Contrary to what we would like to believe, there is no such thing as a structureless group. Any group of people of various talents that comes together for any length of time for any purpose will necessarily structure itself in some fashion. The structure may be flexible. It may vary over time. It may merely incrementally distribute tasks, power, and resources over the members of the group. But it will be formed regardless of the abilities, personalities, or intentions of the people involved. The very fact that we are individuals, with different talents, predispositions, and backgrounds creates this inevitably. Only if we intend to allow or tolerate as my best whatsoever would we approach structurelessness—and that is not the nature of a loose group.

The means that to give to a structureless group is as useful, and as desirable, as it also as an "openness" means very. "Value-free" social science, or a "free" economy, or "leave them" group is about to collapse as a "leave them" means, the idea becomes a contradiction for the group or the body to establish organizational beginning and ending. This legitimacy can be as easily established because the idea of "structurelessness" does not possess the functions of informal structure, only formal ones. Similarly "leave them" philosophy did not possess the necessary means. If less structure could save wages, prices, and distribution of goods, it only presented the government from doing so. Thus structurelessness becomes a way of making power, and within the women's movement it made most strongly advocated by those who are the most powerful (whether they are conscious of their power or not). As long as the structure of the group is informal, the rules of how decisions are made are known only to a few and awareness of power is limited to those who know the rules. Those who do not know the rules did not get chosen for activities, were ignored in meetings, or after their personal activities they something is happening of which they are excluded aware.

For someone to have the opportunity to be involved in a group group and to participate in its activities the structure must be explicit, not implicit. The rules of decision-making must be open and available to everyone, and this can happen only if they are formalized. This is not to say that structureless or a structure of a group will destroy the

For everyone to have the opportunity to be involved in a given group and to participate in its activities the structure must be explicit, not implicit. The rules of decision-making must be open and available to everyone, and this can happen only if they are formalized. This is not to say that formalization of a structure of a group will destroy the informal structure. It usually doesn't. But it does hinder the informal structure from having predominant control and make available some means of attacking it if the people involved are not at least responsible to the needs of the group at large.



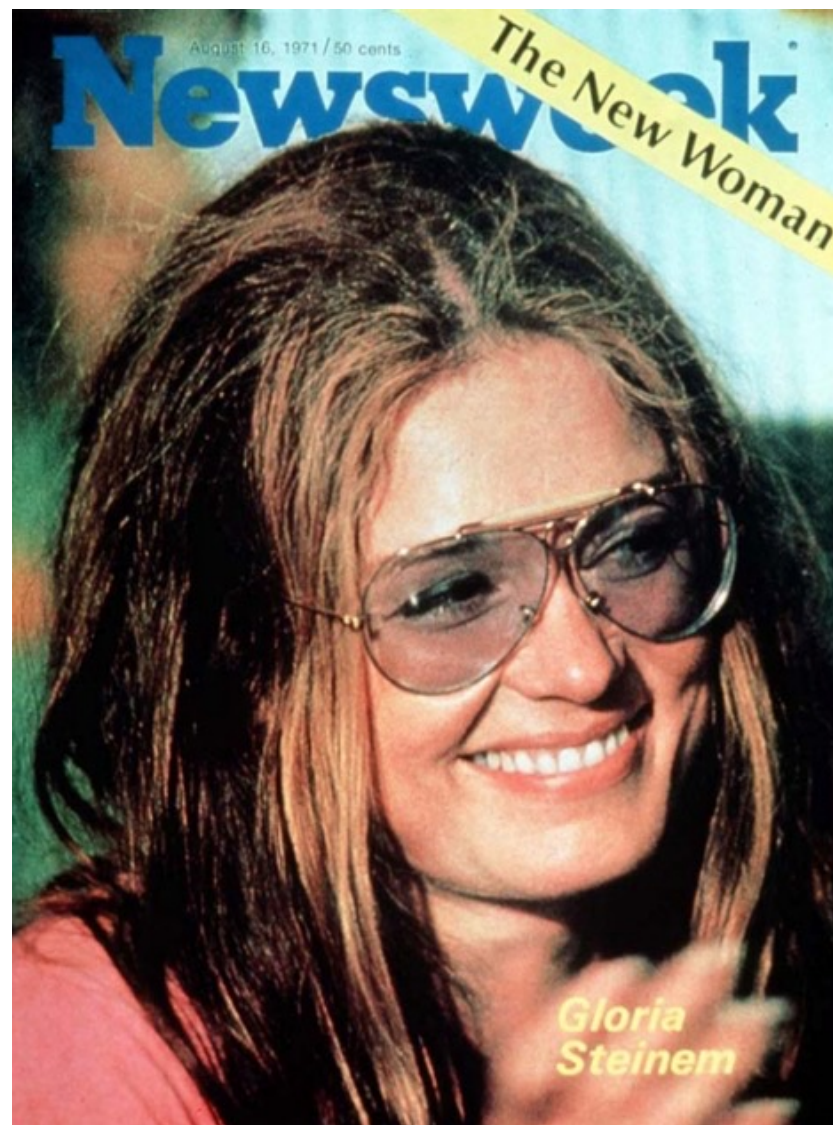
# Kate Millett, 1970





# Gloria Steinem, 1971







# Racial Exclusion

# Florynce Kennedy



# Pauli Murray



# Shirley Chisholm

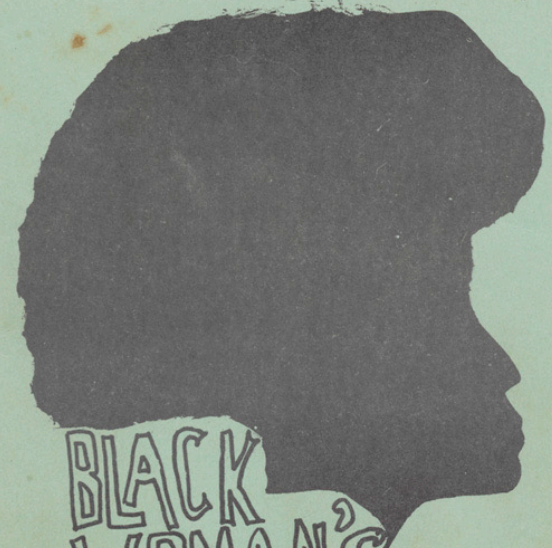


# Black Women's Liberation





Clifton Rd Women



BLACK  
WOMAN'S  
MANIFESTO

# Frances Beal



*Double Jeopardy:  
to be Black & Female*



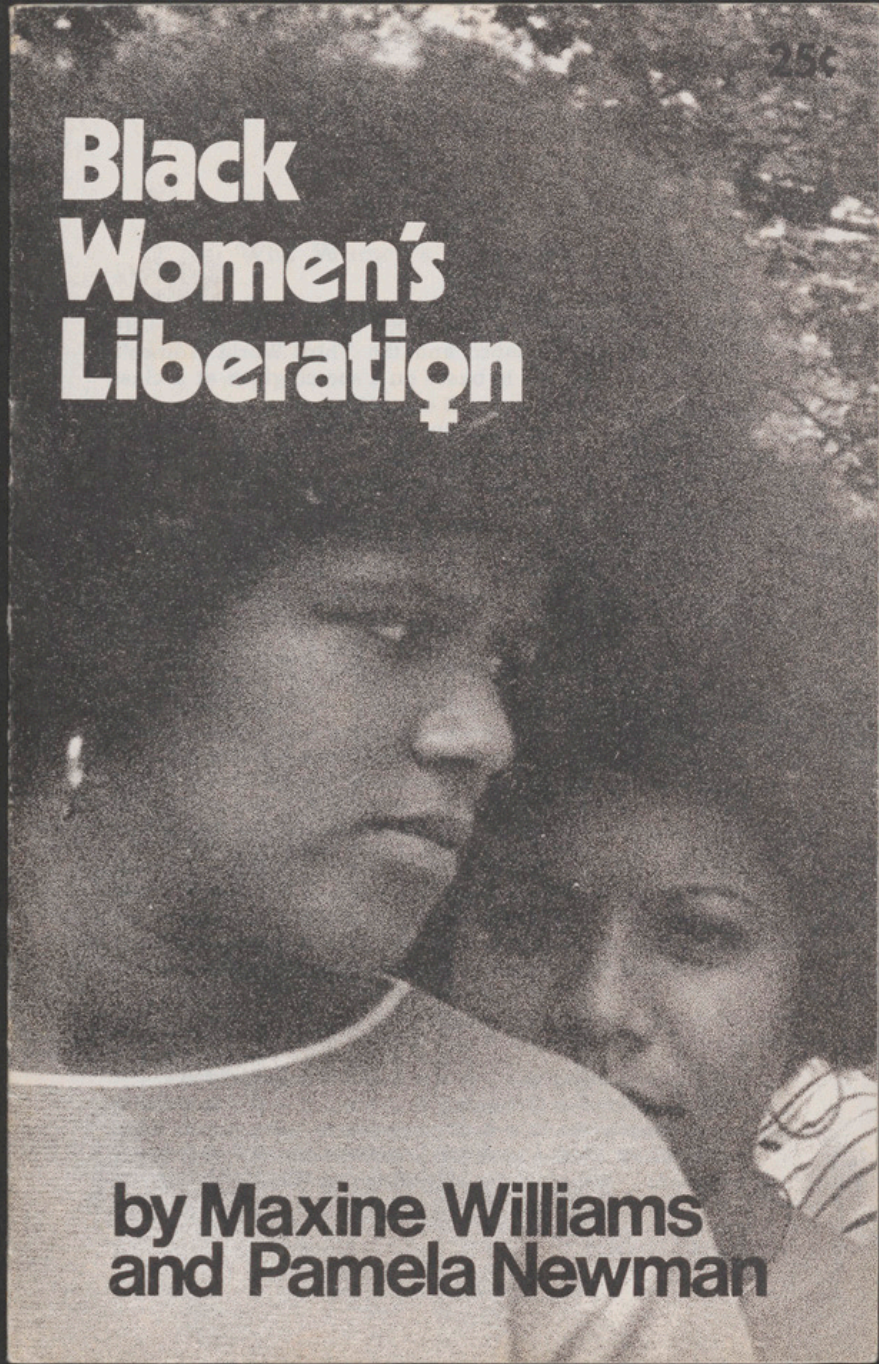
*by Frances Beal*

20¢

25c

# Black Women's Liberation

by Maxine Williams  
and Pamela Newman





# On The National Black Feminist Organization

Michele Wallace

In the spring of 1973, Doris Wright, a black feminist writer, called a meeting to discuss "Black Women and Their Relationship to the Women's Movement." When I arrived, Margaret Sloan, a *Ms.* Magazine editor then, was chairing the meeting and Doris Wright was sitting quietly over in a corner. As the meeting progressed, it became clear that the majority of the most vocal people there were employees of *Ms.* Magazine, members of Radical Lesbians, the Socialist Workers Party and N.O.W., in that order. We voted to become an organization, The National Black Feminist Organization, and Margaret Sloan was voted chairman which was probably our first mistake because the only thing my grandmother and thousands of other black women knew about Margaret Sloan was that she had sung a love song to her white female lover locally on television, strumming her guitar, her child at her feet. Margaret Sloan as chairman ruled out the possibility of NBFO having a mass appeal though that was the goal of the organization from the beginning. I suppose NBFO wasn't unlike a lot of feminist groups in that we simply could not work out a balance of power between lesbians and non-lesbians; the non-lesbians spent most of their time being intimidated or feeling guilty for fear of some deeply buried anti-lesbian feeling.

The last vote was to have a press conference which sort of stunned me but right from the start NBFO was extraordinarily media conscious. I naively ventured that in order to have a press conference, one had to have something to say. Volunteers were enlisted for a platform committee. Suppressing a groan as the SWP women and the Radical Lesbian women raised their hands, I was one of the fifteen. On a Wednesday night I arrived as instructed with platform proposals in hand. To my surprise no one else even had notes. We spent the next two unusually long hours arguing about why all of my platform proposals were unsuitable. We came to no compromise or agreement on a single issue, not on abortion, birth control, daycare or welfare. But I'm leaving out one thing. There was resounding and unanimous applause for the following proposal: "We recognize the oppression of our black lesbian sisters four times over - first as women, second as blacks, third as gays and fourth as gays who are women, and we advocate the revoking of all laws and practices that constrict their movement and hinder their free existence." The meeting was adjourned and the next week NBFO held a press conference with nothing to say, since cries of "triple oppression" were not likely to attract throngs of new members.

After awhile it became an embarrassment to try to answer the question "what does NBFO do?" so a meeting

was called to plan an action. Someone suggested that we demonstrate in front of a supermarket in Harlem on the day welfare checks are received to protest the common practice of raising food prices on that day (this was around the time of the meat boycott). Most everyone else disliked that idea. One woman argued somewhat illogically that some products (she could name none) were beneficial to black women. The idea of having some kind of demonstration on African Liberation Day was not approved either. It was as though white feminists were peering over our shoulders every time we talked. "That wouldn't be right for our white sisters," was a frequent cry. Each proposal had to withstand the following test: had white women done it and would white women like it?

There was also a contingent of women in NBFO who were plainly not feminists of any kind, but since NBFO had no position on anything, there was nothing to alter their consciousness and nothing to make them indignant enough to leave. One of the worst battles in NBFO's history was waged over whether or not Shirley Chisholm and Florynce Kennedy would be allowed to speak at the national conference scheduled for the spring. At an earlier meeting there was even a lengthy discussion about whether or not to call the organization feminist. An aspiring political candidate was overheard saying at the conference, "I'm gonna get me some votes out of these niggas."

It is very possible that NBFO was not meant to happen when it did. Most of the prime movers in the organization were representing some other organization and whatever commitment they might have had to black women's issues took a backseat to that. Women who had initiative and spirit usually attended one meeting, were turned off by the hopelessness of getting anything accomplished, and never returned again. Each meeting brought almost all new faces. I think NBFO was willed into existence by white feminists who get tired of being asked "where are the black women?" Movements cannot be run from the outside (and NBFO is all that black women have to suggest that they are organized) so NBFO has become an organization of people who actually seem to enjoy long, pointless meetings and endless squabbling. It is conceivable that the level of consciousness feminism would demand of black women wouldn't lead to any sort of a separatist movement anyway. I'm not really sure but I do know that despite a sizable number of black feminists who have contributed much to the leadership of the Women's Movement, there is no Black Women's Movement and it appears there won't be for some time.

— June 1975

# National Black Feminist Organization Statement of Purpose (1973)

The distorted male-dominated media image of the Women's Liberation Movement has clouded the vital and revolutionary importance of this movement to Third World women, especially Black women. The Movement has been characterized as the exclusive property of so-called White middle-class women and any Black women seen involved in this movement have been seen as "selling out," "dividing the race," and an assortment of nonsensical epithets. Black feminists resent these charges and have therefore established The National Black Feminist Organization, in order to address ourselves to the particular and specific needs of the larger, but almost cast-aside half of the Black race in Amerikkka, the Black woman.

# The Combahee River Collective

Barbara Smith and other founding members attend the first regional meeting of the National Black Feminist Organization in NYC.

**1973**

The collective releases the seminal "Combahee River Collective Statement."

**1977**

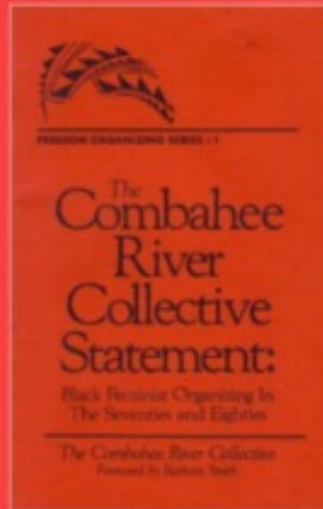


The Combahee River Collective assists in organizing a march to protest lack of media coverage of the murders. 500 people attend the protest in the Boston Common.

**April 1979**

**1974**

The Combahee River Collective forms its own organization to specifically address the needs of black lesbians



**1979**

Twelve black women are murdered between January and May. Throughout the months, the Combahee River Collective releases pamphlets drawing attention to the murders.





# Barbara Smith



# Combahee River Collective





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FREEDOM ORGANIZING SERIES #1

*The*  
Combahee  
River  
Collective  
Statement:

Black Feminist Organizing In  
The Seventies and Eighties

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*The Combahee River Collective*  
*Foreword by Barbara Smith*

Above all else, our politics initially sprang from the shared belief that black women are inherently valuable, that our liberation is a necessity not as an adjunct to somebody else's but because of our need as human persons for autonomy. This may seem so obvious as to sound simplistic, but it is apparent that no other ostensibly progressive movement has ever considered our specific oppression a priority or worked seriously for the ending of that oppression.



# Angela Davis



VINTAGE BOOKS

"AS USEFUL AN EXPOSITION OF THE CURRENT  
DILEMMAS OF THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT  
AS ONE COULD HOPE FOR." —*THE NEW YORK TIMES*

**ANGELA  
Y. DAVIS**  

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**WOMEN  
RACE  
& CLASS**

bell hooks





# feminist theory

from margin to center

bell hooks

# Alice Walker



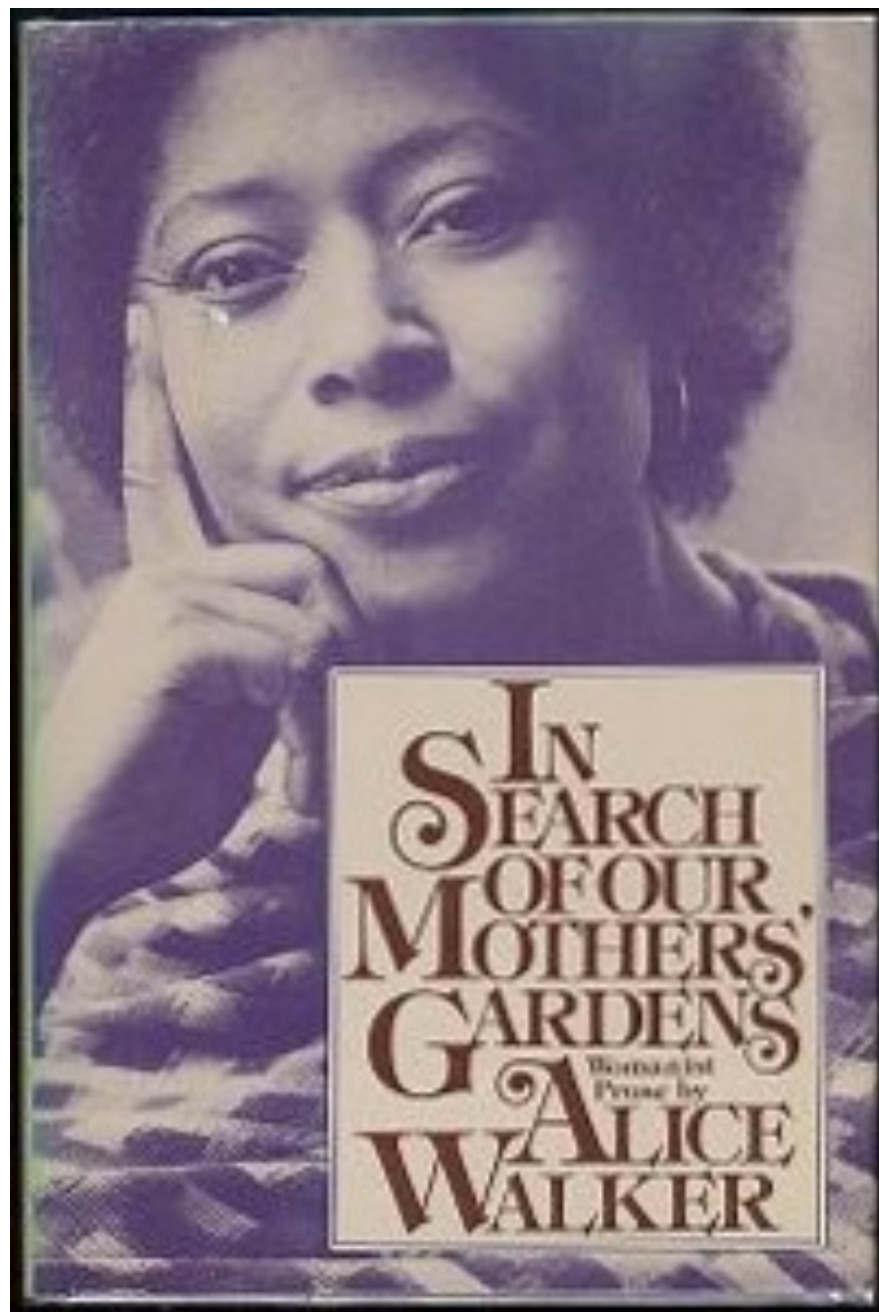
NEW! ALSO A MAJOR MOTION PICTURE

The Wondrous Pulitzer Prize Winning Novel—  
Now a Major Motion Picture

# The Color Purple

Alice Walker





IN  
SEARCH  
OF OUR  
MOTHERS'  
GARDENS  
With an Introduction  
by  
ALICE  
WALKER



**WOMANISM**

“Womanist is to feminist  
as purple is to lavender.”

--Alice Walker

# Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga



86,000 Copies Sold

Winner Of The 1986  
BEFORE COLUMBUS  
FOUNDATION  
AMERICAN BOOK  
AWARD

**THIS  
BRIDGE  
CALLED MY  
BACK**

**WRITINGS BY  
RADICAL  
WOMEN OF  
COLOR**

EDITORS:

**CHERRIE MORAGA  
GLORIA ANZALDÚA**

FOREWORD:

**TONI CADE BAMBARA**



# Sexual Orientation

# Gay Liberation



# Gay Liberation





# Lavender Menace







# The Woman Identified Woman

BY RADICALESBIANS

What is a lesbian? A lesbian is the rage of all women condensed to the point of explosion. She is the woman who, often beginning at an extremely early age, acts in accordance with her inner compulsion to be a more complete and freer human being than her society - perhaps then, but certainly later - cares to allow her. These needs and actions, over a period of years, bring her into painful conflict with people, situations, the accepted ways of thinking, feeling and behaving, until she is in a state of continual war with everything around her, and usually with her self. She may not be fully conscious of the political implications of what for her began as personal necessity, but on some level she has not been able to accept the limitations and oppression laid on her by the most basic role of her society--the female role. The turmoil she experiences tends to induce guilt proportional to the degree to which she feels she is not meeting social expectations, and/or eventually drives her to question and analyze what the rest of her society more or less accepts. She is forced to evolve her own life pattern, often living much of her life alone, learning usually much earlier than her "straight" (heterosexual) sisters about the essential aloneness of life (which the myth of marriage obscures) and about the reality of illusions. To the extent that she cannot expel the heavy socialization that goes with being female, she can never truly find peace with herself. For she is caught somewhere between accepting society's view of her - in which case she cannot accept herself - and coming to understand what this sexist society has done to her and why it is functional and necessary for it to do so. Those of us who work that through find ourselves on the other side of a tortuous journey through a night that may have been decades long. The perspective gained from that journey, the liberation of self, the inner peace, the real love of self and of all women, is something to be shared with all women - because we are all women.

It should first be understood that lesbianism, like male homosexuality, is a category of behavior possible only in a sexist society characterized by rigid sex roles and dominated by male supremacy. Those sex roles dehumanize women by defining us as a supportive/serving caste in relation to the master caste of men, and emotionally cripple men by demanding that they be alienated from their own bodies and emotions in order to perform their economic/political/military functions effectively. Homosexuality is a by-product of a particular way of setting up roles (or approved patterns of behavior) on the basis of sex; as such it is an inauthentic (not consonant with "reality") category. In a society in which men do not oppress women, and sexual expression is allowed to follow feelings, the categories of homosexuality and heterosexuality would disappear.

But lesbianism is also different from male homosexuality, and serves a different function in the society. "Dyke" is a different kind of put-down from "faggot", although both imply you are not play-





# The Furies





# the furies

January 1972

lesbian/feminist monthly

Volume 1

25c

The story of the Furies is the story of strong, powerful women, the "angry dead," the avengers of mortals, the protectors of women. Three Greek goddesses, they were described (by men) as having snakes for hair, blood-red eyes, and bats' wings; like Loki in the story, they were feared and feared. They have been whom figures (the male symbol) was persecuted by his son at the urging of Earth (the female symbol). The blood from the wound fell on Earth and fertilized her, and the Furies were born. Their names were Alecto (Never-resting), Tisiphone (Avenger of Blood), and Megere (Straggle). They were extremely powerful, they represented the supremacy of women and the primacy of mother right.

Their most famous exploit (Orestes because it is they took much of their power) involved Orestes in the legend who was connected with the crime of the Trojan War. Agamemnon, acting in the orders of the God God Apollo, killed his mother, Clytemnestra, because she had killed his father. Clytemnestra had killed the father because he had sacrificed their daughter Iphigenia, in order to get favorable winds of the three winds from the gods. The Furies demanded Orestes. They lit a fire under his chair, putting him under a spell where he dare he could not get up and wash his blood-stained hands. He lit his hair to try to appease them, but he was unable. Finally, in desperation, Orestes went before the court of Athena to plead his case.

The point of issue was whether matricide was justifiable in revenge over father's murder, or in other words, whether men or women were to dominate. Apollo defended Orestes and totally denied the importance of motherhood, claiming that women were so weak they couldn't even recognize for men, and that the father was the only parent worthy of the name. She might have thought that Athena, Goddess of Wisdom, would have condemned Orestes, but Athena was the creator of the male God, Zeus, system that grew from his body, the first male woman. Athena decided for Orestes. Two mythologists say that Zeus, Athena, and Apollo had conspired from the beginning, arranging Orestes to kill his mother in order to put an end, once and for all, to the religious belief that motherhood was more divine than fatherhood. In any case, that was the result.

The Furies were, of course, furious, and threatened to lay waste the city of Athens. But Athena had a clever idea to save King of the gods, she told the Furies to accept the new male supremacist order of Zeus everything. Some of the Furies and their followers refused, they then pursued Orestes until he died.

We call our paper the Furies because we are also angry. We are angry because we are oppressed by male supremacy. We have been fucked over all our lives by a system which is based on the domination of men over women, which defines men as good and female as evil as good as the God you are with. It is a system in which heterosexuality is rigidly enforced and lesbianism rigidly suppressed. It is a system which has further divided us by class, race, and nationality.

We are working to change this system which has kept us separate and powerless for so long. We are a collective of women lesbians living and working in Washington, D.C. We are rural and urban; from the Southwest, Midwest, South and Northeast. Our age range from 21 to 28. We are high school drop-

outs and we say that feelings are irrelevant, only that they are defined by our experience which is limited by our class, race, etc. Furthermore, feelings are too often used to excuse inaction and inability to change.

A political movement cannot advance without systematic thought and practical organization. The leadership, non-strategic, step-by-step tactics of the straight women's movement, the male left, and more class-restricted revolutionary groups have led only to frustration and disillusion. We do not want to make these same mistakes, our ideology forms the basis for developing long-range strategies and short-term tactics, projects, and actions.

The base of our ideological thought is: lesbian is the root of all other oppressions, and lesbian and women oppression will not end by smashing capitalism, racism, and imperialism. Lesbianism is not a matter of sexual preference, but rather one of political choice which every woman must make if she is to become urban-identified and thereby end male supremacy, lesbianism, as separate from many others but their own. Let us the need to push for ending race, class, and national supremacy within their own ranks. Lesbians must get out of the straight women's movement and form their own movement in order to be taken seriously, to stop straight women from oppressing us, and to form straight women to deal with their own lesbianism. Lesbians cannot develop a common politics with women who do not accept lesbianism as a political issue.

In this (see page 8) and following issues of The Furies we will share our thoughts with you. We welcome your comments, letters, articles, fiction, poetry, news, graphics, and support. We want to build a movement in this country and in the world which can effectively stop the violence, risk, oppression acts of male supremacy. We want to build a movement which makes all people free.

But the Furies want what has been denied and oppressed, for the Goddess of Africa whose ritual was mutilated, the angry women who have never been raped, physically, economically, psychologically, or taken the name of the Furies, Goddess of vengeance and protectors of women.

Clayton Harvey



ORESTES PURSUED BY FURIES

outs and D.C. candidates. We are lower class, middle and upper-middle class. We are white. Some of us have been lesbians for twelve years, others for two months. We are committed to ending all oppressions by attacking their roots—male supremacy.

We believe The Furies will make important contributions to the growing movement to destroy racism. As a collection, in addition to multiple projects, we are spending much time building an ideology which is the basis for action. For too long, women in the Movement have fallen prey to the very male propaganda they seek to refute. They have rejected thought, building an ideology, and all intellectual activity as the result of men, and tried to build positive bonds only on feelings, the area traditionally left to women. The philosophy has been, "if it feels good, it's a D.D. If not, forget it." But then it like saying that strength, which is a "male" characteristic, should be left to men, and women should embrace weakness. Most straight women, in so working of men, feel afraid of empowerment of lesbians. They have and have in addition to the feelings which class white have towards Blacks or lower class people. These feelings are the result of our socialization and are badly worth questioning. They

Lesbianism is not a matter of sexual preference, but rather one of political choice which every woman must make if she is to become woman-identified and thereby end male supremacy.

--Ginny Berson, 1972

**cultural feminism**



AlixDobkin photo©LizaCowan 1975

QUEST *\$2.00*  
a feminist quarterly



PROCESSES of CHANGE





**MAKING  
WOMEN'S MUSIC  
FOR YOU!**

PHOTOS: IRENE YOUNG

*CRIS WILLIAMSON*



*The Changer and the Changed*

### POLITICS:

We want to help create a physical/psychological space for three days where women can retreat to the country to experience women's energy, especially women's music. We envision this gathering to be a cultural and spiritual expression of our energies, with music being a primary collective sharing. Our focus has been on making possible an atmosphere that is totally inclusive of all women.

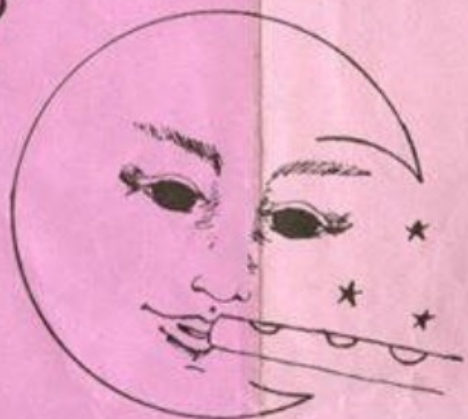
There has been much controversy and dumping on women because of the issue labeled "separatism". We, as a collective, support those women who are choosing to channel their energies toward other women, and we share this choice in the fabrics of our own lives and in the manifestation of this woman-space festival.

There's been negative criticism and baiting leveled at us from people who have attacked our efforts, calling them reverse discrimination and focusing on a by-product of this choice, the exclusion of men. We feel that we are offering an alternative to the mass-produced patriarchal culture, that this alternative is an important part of the process of reclaiming our own identities, and that this expression will have an ultimate and immediate uplifting, positive effect on consciousness as a whole. Our culture has been ripped off and forced underground - much is still buried within our own subconscious. To experience ourselves, to create and recreate our culture anew is vitally important at this point in time and space.

So, if men come, they will be asked to leave.

We haven't set an age limit for male children. We felt that this decision should be left up to the individuals involved. Our focus has not been on being heavy-handed anti-male. Rather, we have felt the need for this space as part of a process, not necessarily an ultimate end-goal in itself, and as part of a process of growth and change, essential. Our energies will be felt by this planet, and it is to this expansion of consciousness that we are committed.

# Women's Music Festival



1976

$$\begin{array}{r} 26:22 \\ 28:39 \\ \hline 54:61 \end{array}$$

Aug. 20, 21, 22

in the country, near mt. pleasant, michigan

### GENERAL INFORMATION:

This is an outdoor women's music festival on 120 acres of country land in the form of meadows bordered by woods and dirt roads. Festival activities will start late Friday afternoon and continue through Sunday evening. If you get here on Thursday, we'll be setting up and you're welcome to pitch your tent and pitch in. The nearest town is seven miles from the festival and has one grocery store. We advise that you stock up with what you need before you get here.

Music will begin at 11:30 in the morning and will be going through the evening with breaks for meals and stretching. We will not be organizing workshops. If women want to do workshops, we will announce them periodically during the festival. Because most of the time has been scheduled for performances and because of our need to do sound checks before and between sets, there will be no open mike time available. There is plenty of open country air and we hope women will share their music informally.

### WHAT WE PROVIDE:

Camping and parking space on festival site  
Portable toilets  
Drinking water  
Simple vegetarian foods\*  
First Aid  
Large canopy for listening area  
Childcare\*\*  
Security

\*Raw fruits and vegetables, breads, cheeses, juices, granola, etc. Preparing and distributing food (cleanup too) will be shared responsibilities.

\*\*This, too, will be shared by women who come. We'll have a tent and toys and activities planned. Your energy and idea input are important.



MICHIGAN

WOMYN'S MUSIC FESTIVAL  
AUGUST 4TH - 9TH 2015

# OWL Farm, c. 1976

