Black Feminist Thought:

Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment

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Part I: The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought

Chapter 1: The Politics of Black Feminist Thought

Maria Stewart was one of the first U.S. Black Feminists in a time when metaphors to symbolize the subordination of Black women were the very pots and kettles they utilized often for their chores. The author claims that the intellectual traditions begun by Maria Stewart and others were suppressed by the dominant group, specifically, the White males. However, despite their hardships the U.S. Black Women have overcome their obstacles. More important, understanding this dialectical relationship is critical in assessing how U.S. Black Feminist thought—its core themes, epistemological significance, and connection to domestic and transnational Black feminist practice—is fundamentally embedded in a political context that has challenged its very right to exist. ***The Suppression of Black Feminist Thought***  The vast majority of African-American women were brought to the United States to work as slaves in a situation of oppression. Oppression describes an unjust situation where, systematically and over a long period of time, one group denies another group access to the resources of society. Race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, age, and ethnicity among others constitute major forms of oppression in the United States. African-American women’s oppression has encompassed 3 (three) interdependent dimensions. 1. Exploitation of Black Women’s labor---iron pots and kettles to symbolize Black women’s ghettoizaiton in service occupations and few opportunities to engage in intellectual work. 2. Political dimension of denying women rights and privileges extended to white males (right to vote, hold public office). 3. The controlling images applied to Black women to maintain the stranglehold over them by the dominant group. By attaching unpopular and unattractive descriptive adjectives such as mammies, jezebels, ad Aunt Jemimas, prostitutes or welfare mothers unable or undesiring of getting off to uphold the unpleasant descriptive of Black women is unfair andthese stereotypes have caused unnecessary pain and anguish associated with the Black Women’s oppression. Black ***Feminist Thought as Critical Social Theory*** The purpose of Black Women’s collective thought or social theories emerging from and/or on behalf of U.S. Black women aim to find ways to escape from, survive in, and/or oppose prevailing social and economic injustice. U.S. African-American social and political thought analyzes institutionalized racism, not to help it work more efficiently, but to resist it. By working for the white man, the Black women certainly saw the contradictions between what they saw of the white man’s actions and what they said should be in terms of race relations, etc. Other contradictions included if women are passive and fragile as some suggest, then why are Black women considered “mules.” And if good mothers are supposed to stay at home with their children, when why are Black women on public assistance forced to find jobs, and leave their kids in daycare***. Developing Black Feminist Thought:*** Starting from the assumption that African-American women have created independent, oppositional, yet subjugated knowledge concerning their own subordination, contemporary U.S. Black women intellectuals are engaged in the struggle to reconceptualize all dimensions of the dialectic of oppression and activism. Central to this enterprise is reclaiming Black Feminist intellectual traditions as a result of the fact that in the past their relatives were not permitted to make any contributions. **The ideas we share with one another as mothers in extended families, as othermothers in Black communities, as members of Black churches, and as teachers to the Black community’s children have formed one area where African-American women have hammered out a multifaceted Black women’s standpoint. Musicians, vocalists, poets, writers, and other artists constitute another group from which Black women intellectuals have emerged.**  ***OBJECTIVES OF THIS VOLUME*: There are 4 basic components of Black feminist thought—its thematic content, its interpretive frameworks, its epistemological approaches, and its significance for empowerment—constitute the core of this volume.**

1. **Author Patricia Collins aims to summarize core themes in Black feminist thought by surveying their historical and contemporary expression. Primarily U.S. Black Women thinkers.**
2. **Using an interpretive framework that was known as race, class, and gender studies constituted a second objective of Black feminist thought.---there were different dimensions of an interconnected relationship with terms such as intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991) and matrix of domination. Intersectionality refers to particular forms of intersecting oppressions, example: intersections of race and gender, or of sexuality and nation.**
3. **3rd objective to develop an epistemological framework that can be used both to assess existing Black feminist thought and to clarify some of the underlying assumptions that impede its development. What criteria determine Black and/or feminist? Etc. what essential features does Black feminist thought share with other critical social theories, particulary Western feminist theory, Afrocentric theory, Marxist analyses, and postmodernism?**
4. **Collins aims to further Black feminist thought’s contributions to empowering African-American Women. Empowerment remains an elusive construct and developing a Black feminist politics of empowerment requires specifying the domains of power that constrain Black women, as well as how such domination can be resisted. Ideally, Black feminist thought contributes ideas and analytical frameworks towards this end. *CHAPTER 2: DISTINGUISHING FEATURES OF BLACK FEMINIST THOUGHT:* U.S. Black Feminist Thought encompasses diverse and often contradictory meanings. The author set out to explain six (6) distinguishing features about Black feminist thought that can be held as similar without the quandary of definitions. 1. transcend U.S. Black women’s particular needs. Groups organized around race, class, and gender sexuality and citizenship status in and of themselves are not inherently a problem. However, when African-Americans, poor people, women, and other groups discriminated against see little hope for group-based advancement, this situation constitutes social injustice. U.S. Black women as a group live in a different world from that of people who are not Black and not female. There is a connection between experience and consciousness that shapes everyday lives of individual African-American women. Overall, these ties between what one does and what one thinks illustrated by individual Black women can also characterize Black women’s experiences and ideas as a group. Historically, racial segregation in housing, education and employment fostered group commonalities that encouraged the formation of a group-based collective standpoint.  *Diverse Responses to Common Challenges within Black Feminism* 2. A second distinguishing feature of U.S. Black feminist thought emerges from a tension linking experiences and ideas. On the one hand, all African-American women face similar challenges that result I living in a society that derogates women of African descent. On the other hand, despite the common challenges confronting U.S. Black women as a group, diverse responses to these core themes characterize U.S. Black women’s group knowledge or standpoint. Despite differences of age, sexual orientation, social class, religion, and region, U.S. Black women encounter societal practices that restrict us to inferior housing, neighborhoods, schools, jobs, and public treatment and hide this differential consideration behind an array of common beliefs about Black women’s intelligence, work habits, and sexuality. These common challenges in turn result in recurring patterns of experiences for individual group members. \*\*Since standpoints refer to group knowledge, recurring patterns of differential treatment such as these suggest that certain themes will characterize U.S. Black women’s group knowledge or standpoint. For example, one core theme concerns multifaceted legacies of struggle, especially in the forms of violence that accompany intersecting oppressions (Collins 1998d). Katie Cannon observes,”Throughout the history of the United States, the interrelationship of white supremacy and male superiority has characterized the Black woman’s reality as a situation of struggle—a struggle to survive in two contradictory worlds simultaneously, one white, privileged, and oppressive, the other Black, exploited and oppressed.” Black women’s vulnerability to assaults in the workplace, on the street, at home, and in media representations has been one factor fostering this legacy of struggle. This legacy of struggle constitutes one of several core themes of a Black women’s standpoint. Efforts to reclaim U.S. Black women’s intellectual traditions have revealed Black women’s long standing attention to additional core themes first recorded by Maria W. Stewart. Stewart’s perspective on intersecting oppressions, her call for replacing derogated images of Black womanhood with self-defined images, her belief in Black women’s activism as mothers, teachers, and Black community leaders, and her sensitivity for sexual politics are all core themes advanced by a variety of Black feminist intellectuals. Despite the common challenges confronting African-American women as a group, individual Black women neither have identical experiences nor interpret experiences in a similar fashion. The existence of core themes does not mean they respond to these themes in the same way. For example, when faced with controlling images of Black women as being ugly and unfeminine,---such as Sojourner Truth----demand, “ain’t I a woman?” others internalize the controlling images as they see fit to survive. Yet, others aim to transgress the boundaries that frame the controlling images. Many factors explain these diverse responses to the controlling images. Primarily, it is just overwhelming. The 2nd second factor that influences African-American women’s varying responses to common challenges is sexuality. Black lesbian have identifies heterosexism as a form of oppression and the issues they face living in the homophobic communities as shaping their interpretations of everyday events. In a similar fashion varying ethnic and citizenship statuses within the United States nation-state as well shape differences among Black women in the U.S Black Puerto Rican women thus must negotiate a distinctive set of experiences that accrue to being racially Black, holding a special form of American citizenship, and being ethnically Latino*. Black Feminist Practice and Black Feminist Thought* A 3rd third distinguishing feature of Black feminist thought concerns the connections between U.S. Black women’s e experiences as a heterogeneous (mixed) collectivity and any ensuing group knowledge or standpoint. One key reason that standpoints of oppressed groups are suppressed is that self-defined standpoints can stimulate resistance. On an individual level one’s actions illustrates the connections among the lived experiences with oppression, developing one’s own point of view concerning those experiences, and acts of resistance that can follow (a Black girl during Jim crow laws- cleaning segregated bathrooms had to clean the White person’s toilet in plain view closest to her, but if she had to go herself, she had to walk nearly a half a mile around the building down the stairs into a filthy pigsty---oppression!) -- After a while she said to herself—oh no!! I am going to use this toilet for the Whites---she used the act of resistance. As members of an oppressed group, U.S. Black women have generated alternative practices and knowledge that have been designed to foster U.S. Black women’s group empowerment. Unlike the dialectical relationship (which linked oppression and activism); this was a dialogical relationship ---which characterized Black women’s collective experiences and group knowledge. For U.S. Black women as a collectivity, the struggle for a self-defined Black feminism occurs through an ongoing dialogue whereby action and thought inform one another. A dialogical relationship suggests that changes in thinking may be accompanied by changes in actions, and that altered experiences may in turn stimulate a changed consciousness. Within this collective experience Black women acted in concert with the common history and destiny of Black solidarity. The belief that Blacks have common interest and should support one another has long permeated Black women’s political philosophy. Through the process of Rearticulation, Black feminist thought can offer African-American women a different view of us and our worlds. By taking the core themes of a Black women’s standpoint and infusing them with new meaning. Black feminist thought can stimulate a new consciousness that utilizes Black women’s every day, taken-for-granted knowledge. Rather than raising consciousness, Black feminist thought affirms, rearticulates, and provides a vehicle for expressing in public a consciousness that quite often already exists. More important, this rearticulated consciousness aims to empower African-American women and stimulate resistance. *Dialogical Practices and Black Women Intellectuals A 4th fourth distinguishing feature of Black feminist thoug*ht concerns the essential contributions of African-American women intellectuals. The existence of a Black women’s standpoint does not mean that African-American women, academic or otherwise, appreciate its content, see its significance, or recognize its potential as a catalyst for social change. Very different kinds of thought and theories emerge when abstract thought is joined with pragmatic action. Denied positions as scholars and writers, exemplify this tradition of merging intellectual work and activism. Black women who were denied formal educations, for form of their activism as well as the content of the ideas they developed differed from those of the middle class black women. The live performances of classic Black women blues singers in the 1920’s can be seen as one important arena where working-class women gathered and shared ideas especially germane to them (Davis 1998). There is a special relationship of Black women intellectuals to the community of African-American women parallels the existence of 2 interrelated levels of knowledge. First, the commonplace, taken-for-granted knowledge shared by African-American women growing from our everyday lives and actions. And two: the experts or specialists who participate in and emerge from a group a more specialized type of knowledge. Whether working-class or not, everyday or famous, the range of Black women have greater access to education, However it illustrates a tradition of ongoing scholarship and activism. Black women intellectuals are central to Black feminist thought for several reasons: first; our experiences as African-American women provide us with a unique angle of vision concerning Black womanhood unavailable to other groups, should we choose to embrace it. Second; Black women intellectuals are less likely to walk away from the struggle. Third; Black women intellectuals from all walks of life must aggressively push the theme of self-definition because speaking for oneself and crafting one’s own agenda is essential to empowerment. Fourth; Black women intellectuals are central in the production of Black feminist thought because we alone can foster the group autonomy that fosters effective coalitions with other groups. *Black Feminism as Dynamic and Changing* A fifth 5th distinguishing feature of U.S. Black Feminist Thought concerns the significance of change. In order for Black feminist thought to operate effectively within Black feminism as a social justice project, both *must remain dynamic. The 6th and FINAL distinguishing feature of* Black Feminist thought concerns its relationship to other projects for social justice. Black women’s intellectual struggles are part of a larger struggle for human dignity, empowerment, and social justice. Political office etc. The words and actions of these diverse Black women intellectuals may address markedly different audiences. Yet, in their commitment to Black women’s empowerment within a context of social justice, they advance the strikingly similar theme of the oneness of all human life.**

***PART II: CORE THEMES IN BLACK FEMINIST THOUGHT***

**Chapter 3: Work, Family, and Black Women’s Oppression: One core theme in U.S. Black feminist thought consist of analyzing Black women’s work especially Black women’s labor market victimization as “mules.” As dehumanized objects, mules are living machines and can be treated as part of the scenery. Black feminist analysis of Black women’s work emphasizes two (2) themes. One: how Black women’s paid work is organized within intersecting oppressions of race, class, and gender. Historically, they made it out of domestic work. Two: concerns how Black women’s unpaid family labor as mother at home is simultaneously *FAMILY AND WORK: CHALLENGING THE DEFINITIONS:* Traditional definition of family supported and sponsored by government policy is a father-head earning an adequate family wage, a stay-at-home wife and mother, and children, idealizing the traditional family as a private haven from a public world, family is seen as being held together through primary emotional bonds of love and caring, sexual division of labor, wherein women’s roles are defined as primarily in the home with the men’s in the public world of work, the traditional family ideal also assumes the separation of work and family. A Heterosexual marriage that confers legitimacy not only on the family structure itself but on children born in this family. The traditional family ideal is thought to be, African-American families are NOT. Two (2) elements of this IDEAL are PEOBLEMATIC; 1—assumed split between public of paid employment and paid sphere of unpaid family responsibilities without pay has never worked out for U.S. Black women. 2—African-Americans suffer from deficient ideas concerning gender, particularly when describing Black women as “unfeminine” if they are fulfilling their duties within the household and working outside the home. However, instead of trying to describe Blacks or Black women within the confines of this ideal definition, the author suggests that we used a different way of describing how Black women are living and working. Work grants White men more status and human worth because they are employed in better-paid occupations. Black women work in questionable practices based on race and gender inequality. Work as alienated labor can be economically exploitative, physically demanding, and intellectually deadening, the type of work long associated with Black women’s status as “mule.” Alienated labor can be paid—the case of Black women in domestic service, those Black women working as dishwashers, dry-cleaning assistants, cooks, and health-care assistants, as well as some professional Black women engaged in corporate mammy work.** What is the connection between U.S. Black women’s work both in the labor market and in the African-American family networks? **Addressing this questions for four (4) KEY HISTORICAL PERIODS in Black political economy uses this broader understanding of Black women’s work to further Black feminist analyses of U.S. Black women’s oppression. 1. Enslavement 2. Free Labor 3. Urbanization 4. Post World War II. CONNECTION BET/W BLACK WOMEN’S WORK AND A.-A. FAMILY NETWORKS.THE PROCESS OF ENSLAVEMENT During the shift to industrialization in the early 19th century, most Whites of all social classes and citizenship categories had the legal right to maintain families and to work for pay. In contrast, the majority of African-Americans were enslaved, no citizenship rights--Africans were property. And one way that many resisted the dehumanizing effects of slavery was by re-creating the African notions of family as extended kin units. (Webber 1978; Cobol 1979). Bloodlines carefully monitored in West African societies were replaced whereby enslaved Africans drew upon notions of family to redefine themselves as part of a Black community consisting of their enslaved “brothers and sisters” (Guttmann 1976). The slave community stood in opposition to a White male-controlled public sphere of the capitalist political economy. Prior to U.S. enslavement and African colonization, women in African societies apparently combined work and family without seeing much conflict between the two. The women could work and take care of their children simultaneously (similar to some working women in the U.S. today). For African women enslaved in. the United States, these basic ides concerning work, family, and motherhood were retained, yet changed by two fundamental demands of enslavement. 1. Enslaved women benefited their owners. 2. Nature of the work was altered, their forced incorporation into a capitalist political economy as slaves meant that West African women became economically exploited, politically powerless units of labor. They worked the same duties as men or as the owner wanted them to do. THE TRANSITION TO FREE LABOR: Because of Plessey v. Ferguson and for at least 75 years after emancipation, Black women workers in the South worked in the fields with the male head of the extended family, or domestic work. Work for both occupations was not much different than under slavery. URBANIZATION AND DOMESTIC WORK Plessey separated Black society from the Whites. Urbanization meant impersonal relations. Also, the employers wanted the women to act more submissive and servile. Domestics had to refer to employers as sir and ma’am as also wear uniforms to as “physical markers” to show others their place in society. The use of space was a major device in structuring deference behaviors as well. Domestics were confined to usually the kitchen. A benefit of urbanization meant that U.S. Black women were able to work day shift and then go home and take care of the family. *BLACK WOMEN’S WORK AND POST-WORLD WAR II POLITICAL ECONOMY:* As long as African-Americans lived in self-contained albeit racially segregated urban neighborhoods, The sizable working class expanded upward to middle class for many Blacks. However, due to others who were not fortunate to find jobs, the Blacks were also representative of a lower class. In addition, Crack cocaine led to Black underclass developing in many urban areas. *Just Holding On: Working Class Black Women :* A crucial factor in contemporary African-American civil society is not simply Black men’s marginalization from work but changes affecting Black women’s paid and unpaid work (Brewer 193). First change is Black women’s movement form domestic service to industrial and clerical work. The second is Black women’s integration into the international division of labor in low-paid service work, which does not provide sufficient income to support a family. The *New Working Poor: Black Single Mothers:* Many Black women who find employment work in jobs characterized by low wages, job instability, and poor working conditions. These jobs are increasing rapidly, but they are in places not where Blacks live. Moreover, they don’t pay like the manufacturing jobs that the Blacks once had in the urban area close to home. The employment vulnerability of working class blacks in post WW II political economy, the relative employment equality of poor Black women and men had gender specific patters of dependence on the informal economy. All have implications for U.S. Black women who find themselves among the working poor. One effect has been the increase of the families maintained by Black single mothers. There is a post-world war II trend that accelerated after 1960 that is part of changes in African American community structures overall: The communal child-care networks of the slave era, the extended family arrangements of the rural south, and the cooperative family networks of the prior eras of the Black urban migrations have eroded. There is a threadbare, overstretched Black extended family system where Black mothers could not support the emotional needs of their daughters. In the absence of support, teenagers got pregnant and decided to keep their babies.  *Middle Class Black Women* On all three dimensions of middle-class power---economic, political and ideological—the Black middle class differs from its White counterpart. Persistent racial discriminations means that Black middle class women and men are less economically secure. The Whites are ambivalent about their function as “CONTROLLERS OF WORKING CLASS EMPLOYEES, NAMELY BLACKS.Black feminist Barbara Ooldea’s (1994) three tiered Black female work site not only explores the needs of the clerks and clients, it points to the new demands placed on Black women professionals. Large number of poor Black women are employed as cooks, laundry, workers, nursing home aides, and child-care workers. Far too many Black single mothers living in inner-city neighborhoods remain isolated and encounter middle class Black women primarily as police officers, social workers, teachers, or on television. How will these working-class Black women, many of whom feel stuck in the working poor, view their more privileged sisters? Contemporary middle-class Black women seem to have a choice. Will they continue to value Black solidarity with their working-class sisters, even if creating that solidarity might place them at odds with their proscribed mammification duties? Or will they see their newly acquired positions as theirs alone and thus perpetuate working-class Black women’s subordination? *CHAPTER 4: MAMMIES, MATRIARCHS, AND OTHER CONTROLLING IMAGES:***  **Intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, and sexuality could not continue without powerful ideological justifications for their existence. Black women’s assertiveness and their use of every expression of racism to launch multiple assaults against the entire fabric of inequality have been a consistent, multifaceted threat to the status quo. As punishment, Black women have been assaulted with a variety of negative images. Portraying African-Americanwomen as stereotypical mammies, matriarchs, welfare recipients, and hot mommas helps justify U.S. Black women’s oppression. Challenging these controlling images has long been a core theme in Black feminist thought. Elite groups, in exercising power, manipulate ideas or symbols about Black womanhood. These controlling images are designed to make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice appear to be natural normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life. *The Objectification of Black Women as the Other:* Maintaining images of U.S. Black women as the Other provides ideological justification for race, gender, and class oppression. Another basic idea concerningBlack women is how their objectification is** central **in the process of oppositional difference. In binary thinking (white/black, male/female, fact/opinion, etc.,), one element is objectified as the other, and is viewed as an object to be manipulated and controlled. Domination involves attempts to objectify the subordinate group. Making Black women work as though they were “mules of the world” represents one form of objectification. The foundations of intersecting oppressions become grounded in interdependent concepts of binary thinking, oppositional difference, objectification, and social hierarchy. With domination, based on difference, forming an essential underpinning for this entire system of thought, these concepts invariably imply relationships of superiority and inferiority, hierarchical bonds that mesh with political economies of race, gender, and class oppression. *Controlling Images and Black Women’s Oppression :*** **The dominant ideology of the slave era fostered the creation of several interrelated, socially constructed, controlling images of Black womanhood, each reflecting the dominant group’s interest in maintaining Black women’s subordination. According to the cult of TRUE WOMANHOOD there were four cardinal virtues girls aspired to when becoming women; piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. However, unlike the White women, the African-American women encountered a DIFFERENT SET OF CONTROLLING IMAGES: mammy, unfeminine matriarchs, welfare mother, unfeminine Black Lady, Jezebel or hutchie. First controlling image applied to U.S. Black women—MAMMY-faithful, obedient, domestic servant. Created to justify economic exploitation of house slaves. Dominant Whites claim that the Black women use all of their time to take good care of the White children and other family duties in the White household better than she does in her own house.** 2.**Unfeminine Matriarch—female headed households in African-American communities, This symbol represents the “bad” Black mother (whereas the mammy was deemed the “good Black mother). The matriarch failed the fulfill her duties at home and, as a result, it led to social problems in Black civil society. Spending too much time away from home, these working mothers could not properly supervise their children and thus were a major contributing factor to their children’s failure at school. Also, as overly aggressive women, they emasculated their lovers. From the dominant group’s perspective the matriarch represented a failed mammy, a negative stigma to be applied to the African-American women who dared reject the image of the submissive, hardworking servant. These mothers who worked so hard to achieve a modicum of middle class respectability felt cheated when their daughters became pregnant during their teenage years.**3.**The welfare mother is the 3rd controlling image. Constitutes a class-specific controlling image developed for poor, working-class Black women who make use of social welfare benefits to which they are entitled by law. African-Americans successfully acquired political and economic protections from a greatly expanded social welfare state. Job export, de-skilling and increased use of immigrants have all been used to replace the cheap, docile labor force that U.S. Blacks used to be. Until the 1990’s, the large numbers of undereducated, unemployed African-American** g**hettoized in U.S. inner cities, most of whom were women and children, could not be forced to work. This surplus population no longer represented cheap labor but instead, produced instability. Many men turned form legitimate jobs to drugs, specifically, crack cocaine. The 4th controlling image sees the Black Woman content to sit around and collect welfare, shunning work and passing on her bad values to her offspring. The image of the welfare mother represents another failed mammy, one who is unwilling to become a “mule of the world.” Media images in 1980’s during the Reagan administration blamed Black women for the deterioration of U.S. interests, and symbols of what was wrong with America. In contrast to the welfare mother who draws upon the moral capital attached to American motherhood, the welfare queen constitutes a highly materialistic domineering, and manless working-class Black woman.** **The 4th controlling image in the Black Lady, referring to the middle-class professional Black women who represent a modern version of the poli*tics of respectability advanced by the club women. These women stayed in* school, worked hard and have achieved much. Yet the image of the Black lady builds upon prior images of Black womanhood in many ways. Similar to matriarch—no time for family. Job is time consuming. These Black ladies take jobs that should go to more worthy Whites, especially U.S. White men. Given the political climate of the 1990’s, these U.S. Black Ladies were examples of reverse racism.** The 6th and  **final controlling image is the jezebel or “hutchie.” Because efforts to control Black women’s sexuality lie at the heart of Black women’s oppression, historical jezebels and contemporary “hutchies’ represent a deviant Black male sexuality. Black women bashing in new rap songs take this injustice to new heights. Sexuality is a theme that runs throughout each of these controlling images as well. For example, the Black matriarch is depicted by the dominant group as an asexual because she assumes her role is to get ahead at her job and nothing more-- has other depictions of the other controlling images. Controlling Images and Social Institutions. Schools, media, and government agencies constitute important sites for reproducing these controlling images. Popular culture has become increasingly important as well in promoting these controlling images. *Color, Hair, Texture, and Standards of Beauty The controlling images of Black woman* are not simply grafted onto existed social institutions but are so pervasive that even though the images themselves change in the popular imagination. Black women’s portrayal as the Other persists. Particular meanings, stereotypes, and myths can change, but the overall ideology of domination itself seems to be an enduring feature of intersecting oppression. These objectifications as the Other are powerful. Being blue-eyed, blond, thin, and White could not be considered beautiful without the Other—Black Women with African features of dark skin, broad noses, full lips, and kinky hair.** **Race, gender and sexuality converge on this issue of evaluating beauty. Black women cannot escape a system that elevates Whites. Controlling images are hegemonic and taken for granted. Indeed, Black women writers explored the theme of Black women’s resistance to these controlling images, a resistance typified by the emergent woman in Black women’s literature. Independent Black women heroines populate U.S. women’s fiction of the 1990’s, expressing diverse dimensions of emergent woman thesis. Upward Social class mobility, overcoming economic hardships, freedom after the male protagonists absenteeism, new relationships with male counterparts, new friendships with other Black women in the same predicaments lead to several novels that depict Black women as stable. The many documentaries and feature films where Black women appear as central characters constitute another arena where emergent Black women appear. Emergent women have found the one way of surviving that everyday disrespect and outright assaults that accompany controlling images is to “turn it out.”*CHAPTER 5: THE POWER OF SELF-DEFINITION* Behind the mask of behavioral conformity imposed on African-American women, acts of resistance, both organized and anonymous have long existed. These workers have retained a “remarkable sense of “self-worth.” In 1905, a period of heightened racial repression, educator Fannie Barrier Williams viewed the African-American woman not as a defenseless victim but as a strong-willed resister.” Williams saw the Black woman as irrepressible. “She is insulted, but she holds up her head, she is scorned, but she proudly demands respect…The most interesting girl of this country is the colored girl.” (Williams, p. 151) Resisting by doing something that “is not expected” could not have occurred without Black women’s long-standing rejection of mammies, matriarchs and other controlling images. (Richardson 1987, 30). How have African-American women as a group found the strength to oppose our objectifications “de mule uh de world.” How do we account for the voices of resistance of Audre Lorde, Ella Surrey, Maria Stewart, Fannie Barrier Williams, and Marital Bonner? What foundation sustained Sojourner Truth so that she could ask, “Ain’t I a woman?” The voices of these African-American women are not those of victims but of survivors. Their ideas and actions suggest that not only does a self-defined, group derived Black women’s standpoint exist, but that its presence has been essential to U.S. Black women’s survival. Finding a Voice: Coming to Terms with Contridictions.The overarching theme of finding a voice to express a collective, self-defined Black women’s standpoint remains a core theme in Black feminist thought. Why this theme of self-definition should preoccupy African-American women is not surprising. Black women’s lives are a series of negotiations that aim to reconcile the contradictions separating our own internally defined images of self as African-American women with our objectification as the Other. The struggle of living two lives, one for them and one for ourselves (Gwaltney 1980, 240) creates a peculiar tension to construct independent self-definition within a context where Black womanhood remains routinely derogated. Much of the best of Black feminist thought reflects this effort to find a collective, self-defined voice and express a fully articulated womanist standpoint. For U.S. Black women constructed knowledge of self emerges from the struggle to replace controlling images with self-defined knowledge deemed personally important, usually knowledge essential to Black women’s survival. *Safe Spaces and Coming to Voice:*  while domination may be inevitable as a social fact, it is unlikely to be hegemonic (preponderance influence, esp. one nation over another) as an ideology within social spaces where Black women speak freely. Extended families, churches, and African-American community organizations are important locations where safe discourse potentially can occur.—they also form prime locations for resisting objectifications as the Other. By advancing Black women’s empowerment through self-definition, these safe spaces help Black women resist the dominant ideology promulgated not only outside Black civil society but within African-American institutions. Schools, media, and government agencies reproduce the controlling images of Black womanhood. In response, African-American women have traditionally used family networks and Black community institutions as sites for countering these images. *Black Women’s Relationships with One Another:* Traditionally, U.S. Black Women’s efforts to construct individual and collective voices have occurred in at least 3 safe spaces. 1. Black women’s relationships with one another Informal, private dealings among individuals. In others, Black churches, or in Black women’s organizations where they affirm one another. The mother/daughter relationship is one fundamental relationship where mothers pass on everyday knowledge essential to survival as African-American women, the right to exist. In literature this is also a prevailing theme. The *Black Women’s Blues Tradition*—African-American music as art has provided a second 2nd location where Black women have comer to voice (Jackson, 1981). Art is special because of its ability to influence feelings as well as knowledge,” suggests Angela Davis (1989, 200). “Black people were able to create with their music an aesthetic community of resistance, which in turn encouraged and nurtured a political community of active struggle for freedom.” (1989, 201). Spirituals, Blues,, jazz, rhythm and blues, and progressive hip-hop all form part of a continuum of struggle which is at once aesthetic and political. *The Voices of Black Women Writers*: Since the 1970’s the increased literacy among African-Americans has provided new opportunities for U.S. Black women to expand the use of scholarship and literature into more visible institutional sites of resistance. A community of Black women writers has emerged since 1970, one in which African-American women engage in dialogue among one another in order to explore formerly taboo subjects. Black feminist criticism has documented the intellectual and personal space (the 3rd space) created for African-American woman in this emerging body of ideas. ( Washington, 1980, 1982; Tate 1983; Evans 1984; Christian 1985; O’Neale1986)How “Safe” are Safe Spaces? Historically, these were safe spaces because only Black women interacted. Since the 1970’s, U.S. Black women have been unevenly incorporated into schools, jobs, neighborhoods, and other U.S. social institutions that have historically excluded them. As a result, African-American woman have been class stratified. In these newly desegregated settings, a new challenge for U.S. Black women was to find new “safe spaces” that do not become stigmatized as separatist. As Black women are increasingly integrated into new social arenas, they are nonetheless subject to new and oftentimes not-so-subtle forms of discrimination. In response, these Black women urgently need to respond to these injustices, as they did in the past. Contemporary African-American musicians, writers, cultural critics, and intellectuals function in a dramatically different political economy than that of any prior generation. The author believes that it remains to be seen whether the specialized thought generated by contemporary Black feminist thinkers in very different institutional locations is capable of creating safe spaces that will carry African-American women even further Traditionally, when taken together, Black women’s relationship with one another, the Black women’s blues tradition, and the work of Black women writers provided the context for crafting alternatives to prevailing images of Black womanhood. These sites offered safe spaces that nurtured the everyday and specialized thought of African-American women. In them Black women intellectuals could construct ideas and experiences that infused daily life with new meanings. These new meanings offered African-American women powerful tools to resist the controlling images of Black womanhood. The Importance of Self-Definition When Black women’s very survival is at stake, creating independent self-definition becomes essential to that survival. The issue of the journey from internalized oppression to the “free mind” of a self-defined, womanish consciousness has been a prominent theme in the works of U.S. Black women writers. It is the self in relationship with an intimate other, with the community, the nation and the world. (in Tate, 1983, 54). This placement of self at the center of analysis is critical for understanding a host of other relationships. The affirmation of self is often the only solution to the problem or situation. The affirmation of self in Blues make a critical contribution in understanding this; The assertion of individuality and the implied assertion—as action, not merely verbal statement of self is an important dimension of the blues; this affirmation usually comes at the end of the song, after the description or analysis of the troubling situation. (Nina Simone is one of many blues singers who exemplify this concept). Typically ties to children and/or community, fictional Black women characters, especially prior to the 1990’s, search for self-definition within close geographical boundaries. Even though physical limitations confine the Black heroine’s quest to a specific area, forming complex relationships adds depth to her identity quest in lieu of geographical breadth. (Tate 1983, xxi). In their search for self-definition and the power of the free mind, Black heroines may remain “motionless on the outside…but inside?” Given the physical limitations on Black woman’s mobility, the conceptualization of self that has been part of Black women’s self-definitions is distinctive. SELF is not defined as the increased autonomy gained by separating oneself from others. Instead, self is found in the context of the family and community—As Paula Marshall describes it, “the ability to recognize one’s continuity with the larger community.” (Washington 1984, 159). By being accountable to others, Black women become more human, less objectified selves. This journey toward self-definition has political significance. Black women who struggle to “forge an identity larger than the one society would force upon them….are aware and conscious and, fundamentally shaped by intersecting oppressions of race, gender, sexuality, and class. In their journey, the Black women must be cognizant that they are acutely aware of the power of the controlling images, not only controlling images of degree, but of kind. Black women voices from a variety of sources reflect this demand for respect. Katie G. Cannon (1988)suggests that Black womanish ethics embraces three basic dimensions: “ INVISIBLE DIGNITY, QUIET GRACE, AND UNSTATED COURAGE,” all qualities essential for self-valuation and self-respect. Women must assume responsibility for strengthening their self-esteem by learning to love and appreciate themselves. The right to be Black and female and respected pervades everyday conversations among African-American women. Many U.S. Black women have earned the right to deem it necessary to declare toward the dominant group, “I’m just as good as anybody.” (Simons 1986, 132). Self-Reliance and Independence In her 1831 essay Black feminist thinker Maria Stewart not only encouraged Black women’s self-definition and self-valuations but linked Black women’s self-reliance with issues of survival. By struggling for self-defined womanish perspectives that reject the master’s images, African-American women change themselves. A changed consciousness encourages people to change the conditions of their lives. The multiple strategies of resistance that Black women have employed, such as withdrawing from post-emancipation agricultural work in order to return to their labor to their families, ostensibly conforming to the deference rituals of domestic work, protesting male bias in African-American organizations, or creating the progressive art of Black women’s blues all represent actions designed to bring about change. Here is the connected self and the individual empowerment that comes from change in the context of community. But change can also occur in the private personal space of an individual women’s consciousness. Equally fundamental, the inside of a changed consciousness as a sphere of freedom, becoming personally empowered through self-knowledge, even within conditions that limit one’s ability to act, is essential. Does Black Women’s Consciousness Still Matter? Despite the persistence of these four ideas about consciousness---1. The importance of self-definition, 2. The significance of self-valuation and respect, 3. The necessity of self-reliance, 4. The centrality of a changed self to personal empowerment---these themes do not find a prominent place in much U.S. Black feminist thought within academia. Sadly, Black women intellectuals in the academy find themselves pressured to write for academic audiences, most of which remain resistant to including U.S. Black women as students, faculty, and administrators. There is an increased attention to new situations create new intellectual and political space for the “hellish” journey Black women still encounter in this historic moment. Weaving throughout these historic and contemporary efforts at self-definition is the quest to move from silence to language to individual and group action, persistence is the fundamental requirement for this journey—the strong belief that to be Black and female is valuable and worthy of respect. Whether individual struggles to develop a changed consciousness or the group persistence needed to transform social institutions, actions that bring about changes empower African-American women. By persisting in the journey toward self-definition, as individuals, we are changed. When linked to group action, their individual struggles gain new meaning. Because their actions as individuals change the world form one in which they merely exist to one over which they have some control, they see everyday life as being in process and therefore amenable to change. Perhaps that is why so many African-American women have managed to persist and “make a way out of no way.” Perhaps they knew the power of self-definition. *CHAPTER 6: THE SEXUAL POLITICS OF BLACK WOMANHOOD* Black woman’s sexuality is often described in metaphors of speechlessness, space, or vision; as a void or empty space that is simultaneously ever-visible (exposed) and invisible, where Blackwomen’s bodies are already colonized. (Evelyn Hammonds 1997, 171). In response to this portrayal Black women have been silent because they have not been in power to respond. Those who control the schools, news media, churches and government groups are the ones who contract Black women as “the embodiment of sex and the attendant invisibility of Black women as the unvoiced, unseen—everything not White.**

**The convergence of these factors—1. Suppression of Black women’s voice by dominant groups, 2. Black women’s struggles to work within the confines of norms of racial solidarity, and 3. The seeming protections offered by a culture of dissemblance, 4. Influences of Black lesbianism---have led to silence about Black women sexuality. Suppression of Black women’s voice by dominant groups. *Black Women, Intersecting Oppressions, and Sexual Politics.***  What is sexuality? What is power? Sexuality is part of intersecting oppressions, the ways in which it can be conceptualized is different. One approach is viewing heterosexism as a system of power that victimized Black women in particular ways; another approach examines how sexualities become manipulated within class, race, nation, and gender as distinctive systems of oppression and draw upon heterosexist assumptions to do so. Regulating Black women’s sexualitites emerges as a feature of social class exploitation, of institutionalized racism, of U.S. nation-state policies, and of gender oppression; another approach views sexuality as a specific site of intersectionality where intersecting oppressions meet. Black women ceding control over self-definitions of Black women’s sexualitites upholds multiple oppressions. Heterosexism as a system of power: two thoughts: symbolic and structural. symbolic refers to hootchies—black women are seen as unnaturally dirty, sick, and sinful. Structural- encompasses how social institutions are organized to reproduce heterosexism through laws and social customs.—refusing to prosecute Black women’s rapist because the women are viewed as sexual “freaks” constitutes a social practice that reinforces and shapes these symbolic structures. Two thoughts about Black women’s sexualities emerge—one is that Black women have excessive sexual appetites, and homosexuality constitutes an abnormal sexuality. Black people, in general, experience a highly visible sexualized racism. This seeming intractability of the stigma of Blackness in turn shapes responses. One response is to claim the erotic as a mechanism for empowerment.

***Sexuality within Distinctive Systems of Class, Race, Gender, and Nation*** The

Analyzing how heterosexism as a system of oppression victimizes Black women constitutes one major approach to examining sexuality. A second approach sexism becomes manipulated within class, race, gender, and nation as distinctive systems of oppression. For example, the controlling image of jezebel reappears across several systems of oppression: class oppression; jezebel image fosters sexual exploitation of Black women’s bodies through prostitution; racial oppression by justifying sexual assaults against Black women; gender ideology also makes a devalued jezebel impossible to become a pure White woman. As a result, the nation-state overseeing these relationships implicitly sees Black women as jezebels, and denies them equal protection under the law. U.S. notions of racial purity, such as the rule claiming that one drop of Black blood determines racial identity, required strict control over the sexuality and subsequent fertility of Black women (also of Black men and Whit women).

***REGULATING BLACK WOMEN’S BODIES:*** Sexuality can be conceptualized as a freestanding system of oppression similar to oppressions of race, class, nation, and gender. A third approach views sexuality as one important social location that joins these distinctive systems of oppression. Black women’s experiences with pornography, prostitution, and rape constitute specific cases of how more powerful groups have aimed to regulate Black women’s bodies. These cases emphasize the connections between sexual ideologies developed to justify actual social practices and the use of force to maintain the social order. As such, these themes provide a useful lens for examining how intersecting oppressions rely on sexuality to mutually construct one another. 1. The linking of views of the body, social constructions of race and gender pornography’s profitability, and conceptualizations of sexuality that inform Black women’s treatment as pornographic objects promises to have significant implications for how we assess contemporary pornography. Pornography’s significance as a site of intersecting oppressions promises new insights toward understanding social injustice. ***Prostitution and the Exploitation of Black Women’s Bodies*** Prostitution represents the fusion of exploitation for an economic purpose—namely, the commoditization of Black women’s sexuality—with the demeaning treatment afforded pets. Sex becomes commoditized not merely in the sense that it can be purchases—the dimension of economic exploitation. Rape and other acts of overt violence that Black women have experienced such as physical assault during slavery, domestic abuse, incest, and sexual extortion, accompany Black women’s subordination in intersecting oppressions. These violent acts are the visible dimensions of a more generalized, routinized system of oppression. Violence against Black women tends to be legitimated and historically, garnered the backing and control of the state (James 1996). ***CHAPTER 7: BLACK WOMEN’S LOVE RELATIONSHIPS***  African-American women’s experiences with pornography, prostitution, and rape demonstrate how erotic power becomes commodified and exploited by social institutions. Equally important is how Black women hold fast to this source of individual empowerment and use it in crafting fully human love relationships. ***Black Women, Black Men, and the Love and Trouble Tradition***  Exploring the tensions between African-American men and women has been a long-standing theme in U.S. Black feminist thought. First: Black women were frustrated to say the least about their lackluster counterparts in times of slavery, oppression, Jim Crow laws. But they did not want to give up on their men either. Black women have commented on the “love and trouble” tradition in Black women’s relationships with Black men; acknowledging all kinds of different feelings at once. Understanding this love and trouble tradition requires assessing the influence of heterosexist, Eurocentric gender ideology—particularly ideas about men and women advanced by the traditional family ideal—on African-American women and men. Definitions of appropriate gender behavior for Black women, Black men and members of other racial/ethnic groups not only affect social institutions such as schools and labor markets, they also shape daily interactions. Advising Black women to unquestioningly support sexual harassment, domestic abuse and violence, done by U.S. Black men does not help either Black women or Black men. The Eurocentric understandings of gender derived from White, middle class experiences are not only troublesome for African-Americans but damaging. The U.S. Black feminists point out, the sexual politics of Black womanhood limits the development of transformative social justice projects within Black civil society.Black Women Alone: Many Black women want loving sexual relationships with Black men, but instead end up alone. Black men may be the closest to Black women, and thus receive the lion’s share of the blame for all the daily ways that Black women are caused to feel less worthy, yet this societal judgement and rejection of Black women permeates the entire culture.This aloneness causes divergent reactions among African-American women; some express hope for future marriage still. Some concentrate on beng single mothers, some concentrate on their jobs.Black Women and Erotic Autonomy: When Black women learn to hold up new “mirrors” to one another that enable them to see and love one another for who they really are, new possibilities for empowerment via deep love can emerge. One: it helps U.S. Black women reject the dual stigma applied to Black heterosexual women as hoochies and to Black lesbians as sexual deviants. Two: involves-redefining beauty in ways that include Black women. Women’s beauty, according to U.S. Black women, is not based solely on physical criteria because mind, spirit and body are not conceptualized as searate, oppositional spheres. Instead, all are central in aesthetic assessments of individuals and their creations. Beauty is functional in that it has no meaning independent of the group. Being a functioning individual who strives for harmony is key to assessing an individual’s beauty. A final component of developing African American women’s erotic autonomy requires finding ways to stress that African-American women learn to see expressing love for one another as fundamental to resisting oppression. AS the next two chapters explore, this legitimated maternal love as spurred many Black women into more activist arenas and can be seen as an mportant dimension of U.S. Black feminism.Love and Empowerment.All of these emotions—the fact that Whites know that Blacks are human, that fact that men love women, and the fact that women have deep feelings for one another—must be distorted on the emotional level of the erotic in order for oppressive systems to endure, in order for the structural domain of power and the smooth operation of domination. CHAPTER 8: BLACK WOMEN AND MOTHERHOOD (pp.173-200) Until the growth of modern Black feminism in the 1970’s, analysis of Black motherhood were largely the province of men, both White and Black, and male perspectives on Black mothers prevailed. Black mothers were accused of failing to discipline their children, of emasculating their sons, of defeminizing their daughters, and of retarding their children’s academic achievement (Moynihan 1965). Citing high rates of divorce, female-headed households, and out-of-wedlock births, prevailing scholarship claimed that African-American mothers wielded unnatural power in allegedly deteriorating family structures (Zinn 1989: Dickerson 1995b). Many African-American thinkers tend to glorify Black motherhood. The controlling images of the “superstrong Black mother” praises Black women’s resiliency in a society the routinely paints them as bad mothers. Yet in order to remain on the pedestal, these same superstrong Black mothers must continue to place their needs behind those of everyone else, especially their sons. Several factors within Black civil society contribute to patters of emphasis and omission characterizing Black feminist analyses of motherhood; one reflects the self-imposed restrictions that accompany norms of racial solidarity. Ina context of institutionalized racism where African-Americans have long aimed to present a united front to Whites, many U.S. Blacks learn to police one another (Lubiano 1997). Internal dissent is frowned upon. Another factor concerns African-American women’s reluctance to challenge African-American men in public. In addition, when combined with the perception of feminism as being antifamily and, by implication, anti-motherhood, U.S. Black women’s collective reluctance to advance critical analysis of Black motherhood becomes even more understandable. In general, African-American women need a revitalized Black feminist analysis of motherhood that debunks the image of happy slave or superstrong Black mother.A Black Women’s Standpoint on Mothering. Some women see motherhood as a truly burdensome condition that stifles their creativity, exploits their labor, and makes them partners in their own oppression. Others see motherhood as providing a base for self-actualization, status in the Black community, and a catalyst for social activism. The five enduring themes described below emerged in the context of and were sustained by specific social conditions associated with slavery, Southern rural life, and class-stratified, racially segregated neighborhoods of earlier periods of urban Black migration. These conditions fostered the appearance of a distinctive Black women’s standpoint on mothering and gave clear reasons for its continuation. U.S. Black women’s agency becomes important in determining that Black women’s standpoint on motherhood will be, which specific, resilient lifelines must be created to ensure collective survival. In some cases, a lifeline may form the foundation for new ways of dealing with social problems of special concern to African-Americans. U.S. Black working mothers needs for child care, the chronically poor education offered to Black children in underfunded, inner-city school, the disproportionate numbers of young Black men who have arrest records or are incarcerated, and the large numbers of African-American children currently in government-run foster care all constitute new versions of some old problems of special concern to African-American women. The task is to ask how U.S. Black women are responding to the new challenges of today. Organized, resilient, women-centered networks of bloodmothers and othermothers are key in understanding this centrality. Grandmothers, sisters, aunts, or cousins acts as othermothers by taking on child-care responsibilities for on another’s children. In the 1980’s, the entire community structure of bloodmothers and othermothers came under assault. Racial desegregation as well as the emergence of class stratified Black neighborhoods greatly altered the fabric of Black civil society. In many communities life eroded when crack cocaine flooded the streets. African-American children often formed the casualities of this expanding market for drugs, for the increasing numbers of Black children in foster care (Nightingale 1993), to children threatened by violence (Canada 1995), to those killed. However, the resiliency of women-centered family networks and their willingness to take responsibility for Black children illustrates how African-influenced understandings of family have been continually reworked to help African-Americans as a collectivity cope with and resist oppression. However, far too many African-American children are assuming that there will not be cared for in the same way as in the past. U.S. Black mothers of daughters face a troubling dilemma. On the one hand, to ensure their daughters’ physical survival, mothers must teach them to fit into the sexual politics of Black womanhood. On the other hand, Black daughters with strong self-definition and self-valuations who offer serious challenges to oppresssive situations may not physically survive. These women feel accountable to their own kin, and for the community’s children as well. Because factors such as social class differences among African-Americans, region of the country, and degree of racial discrimination in housing, education, jobs, and public services all influence Black community organization, othermother traditions characterizing Black women’s community work have taken various forms. Motherhood-Othemother, bloodmother or community othermother demands a lot of respect. This is the type of power many African-American women have in mind they they describe the “strong Black women” They hope will revitalize Black communities and neighborhoods.The View from the Inside: The personal Meaning of Mothering: Protecting Black children remains a primary concern of African-American mothers. Black children are at risk for higher infant mortality, poor nutrition, inferior housing, environmental pollutant, AIDS, and a host of other social problems. Because it can strike at random, violence is of special concern to Black mothers. Such women organize building-by-building and block-by-block struggles to rid their neighborhoods of drug dealers. Because drug related income may be the primary source of income for many low-income families, these mothers’ efforts are often unsuccessful. But still they try. That special relationship that Black mothers have with their children can also foster a creativity, a mothering of the mind and soul, for all ivolved.***CHAPTER 9: RETHINKING BLACK WOMEN’S ACTIVISM***  Historically, African-Americans’ resistance to racial and class oppression could not have occurred without an accompanying struggle for group survival. Without this important part of Black women’s activism, struggles to transform U.S. educational, economic, and political institutions could not have been sustained. Black feminist works portray African-American women as individuals and as a group struggling toward empowerment within an overarching matrix of domination. If power as domination is organized and operates via intersecting oppressions, then resistance must show comparable complexity. Domination encompasses structural, disciplinary, hegemonic (preponderant influence) and interpersonal domains of power. Conceptualizing Black Women’s Activism: in 2 primary dimensions. 1. Struggles for group survival, consist of actions taken to create Black female spheres of influence within existin social structures. The power of the free mind crafting independent and oppositional identities for African-American women. As such they embrace a form of identity politics, a worldview that sees lived Black experiences as important to creating a critical Black consciousness and crafting political strategies. 2. Struggles for institutional transformation—namely those efforts to change discriminatory policies and procedures of government, schools, the workplace, the media, stores and other social institutions. This dimension means that Black women must develop coalition-building strategies. Black women must not be and cannot be content with merely nurturing their families and communities because the welfare of those families and communities is profoundly affected by the injustices that characterize U.S. political, economic, and social institutions. Because African-American women and men must function in schools and labor markets controlled by unsympathetic officials, Black women often find themselves working for institutional transformation. Struggles for Group Survival: The external constraints of racism, sexism, and poverty have been so severe that, like Sara Brooks, the majority of African-American women have found it difficult to participate in organized political activities. Therefore, strategies of everyday resistance have consisted of trying to create spheres of influence, authority, and power within institutions that traditionally have allowed African-Americans and women little formal authority or real power in the past. From Black mothers within their homes, or Black churchwomen and soriority sisters, Black women use a variety of strategies to undermine oppressive institutions. Education has long served as a powerful symbol for the connections among the self, change, and empowerment in African-American communities (Lerner 1972, 83-149). Working for race uplift and education became intertwined. Black women’s activities in churches have also been profoundly influenced by similar ideas concerning education, motherwork, and political activism. “It was biblical faith in the prophetic tradition,” declares Katie Cannon, that helped Black women “devise strategies and tactics to make Black people less susceptible to the indignities and proscriptions of an oppressive White social order.” (1985, 35).

Struggles for Institutional Transformation: Actions taken to eliminate discrimination in housing, employment, education, public accommodations, and political representation represent activism aimed at changing the rules that circumscribe African-American women’s lives. Traditionally, Black women have either been assigned subordinate roles within civil rights, women’s labor or other organizations devoted to male leadership of Black civil rights organizations found it difficult to see Black women as leaders in the civil rights movement. One Black women leader of civil rights—Ruth Powell went throughout the country’s cafeterias and sat where the Whites were supposed to and changed the law by this activist action. Faye Wattleton’s astute leadership of Planned Parenthood, Gloria Scott’s resourceful actions to make the Girl Scouts of America more racially and economic and economically inclusive, and Marian Wright Edelman’s judicious leadership of the Children’s Defense Fund all appear to tie these women to single-issue causes, but they were effective nonetheless in uplifting their race in the process.Black Women’s Leadership and Institutional Transformation: U.S. Black women’s participation in organized political activities fosters a rethinking of the ways in which many Black women conceptualize and use power. Black women’s use of power seems to grow from distinctive conceptions of how people become empowered, how power can be structured and shared in organizational settings, and how organizations would look if people were to be fully empowered within them. Examining Black women’s leadership in organizations whose mission is institutional change offers a route to examining these larger questions. Research on Black women community leaders and women institutional leaders reinforces the notion that thy moved on when organizational limits combined with turning points in self-development. By defining their jobs versus trying to fit into existing system, Black women earned their leadership skills in changing their institutional rules. By fostering African-American autonomy through their institutions, these women expanded their web of affiliations to make alliances with one another. Black Women’s Activism Revisited: as long as social justice remains elusive for African-american women, it is likely to evade U.S. society. Therefore, the need for Black women’s activism will persist. While the dialectical relationship linking oppression and activism remains, the changing organizations for resistance demand a dynamic Black women’s activism. The litany of social problems that now, presently, face far too too many U.S. Black Women—poverty, violence, poor living conditions, inadequate health care, and reproductive concerns—are well known. However, as Pearl Cleage says, weapons llike information, analysis, and positive group identity can always overcome the dominant group’s efforts of controlling images. Presently, there are three additional problems and the magnitude of drugs, violence, and Black street children left to raise themselves threaten to erode the social fabric not only of the Black neighborhoods, but of the United States as well. Present-day rappers and the symbolic portrayal or Malcolm X as a redemptive Black patriarch also viewed Black women as hoochies and whores as well as other derogatory names of a sexually deviant nature. Moreover, concerns for the growing numbers of mixed-race children who seek new guidelines of how to negotiate Black political identities. These issues do not erase the need for Black women’s organizations that build on the base of the activist mothering of Black women’s community work. Black women’s struggles for group survival as well as those dedicated to institutional transformation are just as needed now as in the past. . PART III: BLACK FEMINISM, KNOWLEDGE, AND POWER CHAPTER 10: U.S. BLACK FEMINISM IN TRANSNATIONAL CONTEXT: Black women must learn to lift as they climb. (Angela Davis 1989, 9). Within U.S. Black feminism, race, class, gender, and sexuality, constitute mutually constructing systems of oppression (Davis 1981; Smith 1983: Lorde 1984). 2. Important contributions to understanding the connections between knowledge and empowerment. 1. They stimulate new interpretations of African-American experiences. 2. They shed new light on how domination is organized. The term matrix of domination describes this overall social organization within which intersecting oppressions originate, develop, and are contained. Such domination has occurred through schools, housing, employment, government, and other social institutions that regulate the actual patterns of intersecting oppressions that Black women encounter. However, the shape of domination has changed, and racial segregation persists, but not like in the past. Black feminist thought helps re-conceptualize social relations of domination and resistance. Nation and Nationalism: Despite many contributions, U.S. Black feminist thought must continue to develop even more complex analysis of intersecting oppressions—how such oppressions are organized, their effect on group composition and history, their influence on individual consciousness, and most importantly, collective strategies of resistance. Nation. Consisting of people who are shaped by a common past and are determined to share a common future. Nationallism—a political ideology that is expressed by any group that self-defines as a distinctive people or nation. Nationalist ideologies strive to foster beliefs and practices which permit a people or nation to control its own destiny. When any one group acquires sufficient state power that allows it to realize its goals, it controls a nation-state. In the United States, because affluent White men control government and industry, public policies usually benefit this group. Black Women in Transnational Context Shifting to a transnational context, women in African, Latin American, and Asian nations have not sat idly by (Linsdsey 1980). waiting for middle-class White women from North America and Western European nation-states to tell them what to do. Instead, using the United Nations as a vehicle, major themes affecting women from quite diverse backgrounds have identified gender oppression as a major theme affecting women transnationally (see, e.g. Rights of Women 1998­). In 1981, U.S. Black feminist theorist Barbara Smith identified her definition of what it meant to be radical. “What I really feel is radical is trying to make coalitions with people who are different from you.” I feel it is radical to be dealing with race, and sex and class and sexual identity all at one time. I think that is really radical because it has never been done before (Smith and Smith 1981, 126). Black feminism resemble similar issues raised by women of African descent elsewere. Issues that are of great concern to U.S. Black women explored in earlier chapters—work and family, negative controlling images, struggles for self-definition in cultural contexts that deny Black women agency, sexual politics that make Blackwomen vulnerable to sex work, rape, and meida objectification, and understandings of motherwork within Black women’s politics-find different meanings in a transnational context. It is important to remember that jus as African-American women are neither African Nor American, neither is U.S. Black feminism. The task now lies in flesning out dialogues and coalitions with Black women who live elsewhere in the Black diaspora, keeping in mind that intersecting oppression have left a path of common challengers that are differently organized and resisted. Despite these differences there are certain common themes that keep them together. Poverty, violence, (African descent—women must contend with war; however, women in Harlem also must face and overcome devastating violence that one could deem or define it “war.” Overcomiing disease, hunger, and employment are all issues that preoccupy all Black feminist transnationally. One outome of Black women’s efforts to negotiate work, family, and motherhood is the emergence of Black mother-child families as a growing global phenomenom. Situating mother-child families in the context of the global political economy highlights the significance of advanced capitalism for understanding mother-child families in transnational context (Mencher and Okongwu 1993). Instead, race gender, class, citizenship status, sexuality, and age shape any group’s social location in the transnational matrix of domination. These locations in turn, frame group participation in a wide range of activities. Because groups occupying different positions display varying expressions of power, they have distinctive patterns of participation in shaping domination and resistance. Coming to terms with these diverse group histories provides a new foundation for developing a transversal politics. Several issues provide the contours and effectiveness of transversal politics. First, transversal politics requires rejecting binary thinking that has been so central to oppressions of race, class, gender, sexuality, and nation. Biinary means that Black women are poor because they are either Black or poor. It is one or the other. Second, issues control how social groups are organized and maintained. Third, concerns the internal dynamics of groups. (for U.S. Black women, engaging in processes of group self-definition requires confronting the entirety of history, not just a portion of it. Fourth, group histories are relational. It is important t remember that U.S. Black women’s group history remains interdependent with those of other groups—patters characterizing one group’s experiences are intimately lilnked to those of other groups. CHAPTER 11: BLACK FEMINIST EPISTEMOLOGY : As critical social theory, U.S. Black feminist thought reflects the interests and standpoint of its creators. Tracing the origin and diffusion of Black feminist thought or any comparable boy of specialized knowledge reveals its affinity to the power of the group that created it (Mannheim 1936). Because elite White men control Western structures of knowledge validation, their interest pervade the themes, paradigms, and epistemologies of traditional scholarship. As a result, U.S. Black women’s experiences as well as those of women of African descent transnationally have been routinely distorted within or excluded from what counts as knowledge. U.S. feminist thought as specialized thought reflects the distinctive themes of African-American women’s experiences. Black feminist thought’s core themes of work, family, sexual politics, motherhood, and political activism rely on paradigms that emphasize the importance of intersecting oppressions in shaping the U.S. matrix of domination. It has not been easy because Black women have had to struggle against White male interpretations of the world. In this context, Black feminist thought can be viewed as subjugated knowledge and the suppression of Black women’s ideas within White male-controlled social institutions led African-American women to use music, literature, daily conversations, and everyday behavior as important locations for constructing a Black feminist consciousness, and more recently, higher education has served that purpose as well. In producing specialized knowledge, U.S. Black feminist thought encountered 2 distint epistemologies; 1. Elite White male inters and 2. Expressing Black feminist concerns.Eu rocentric Knowledge Validation Processes and U.S. Power Relations. In the U.S., the social institutions that legitimate knowledge as well as the Western or Eurocentric epistemologies that they uphold constitute two interrelated parts of the dominant knowledge validations processes. In general, scholars, publisher, and other experts represent specific interests and creditialing processes, and their knowledge claims must satisfy the political and epistemological criteria of the contexts in which they reside. (Kuhn 1962: Mulkay 1979). Because this enterprise is controlled by White men, knowledge validation processes reflect this grouup’s interests. U.S. Black women have been able to earn positions traditionally suited for White males and now have been able to challenge to knowledge validation processes, but they must be extremely careful and scientific in order to break the stranglehold on them by the White man’s controlling images. Criteria for methodological adequacy associated with positivism illustrate the standards that Black women scholars, especially those in the social sciences, would have to satisfy in legitimating Black feminist thought. Positivist approaches aim to create scientific descriptions of reality by producing objective generalizations. Many Black women intellectuals invoke the relationships and connectedness provided by the use of dialogue. Oral traditions, story telling, dialogues in which there is always the consciousness and importance of the hearer. (Tate 1983 91). Black women’s centrality in families, churches, and other, community organizations provides African-American women with a high degree of support for invoking dialogue as a dimension of Black feminist epistemology.

The Ethics of Caring (262): This theme of talking with the h eart taps the ethic of caring. , another dimension of an alternative epistemology used by African-American women. The ethics of caring suggests that personal expressiveness, emotions, and empathy are central to the knowledge validation process. Three components of ethic caring are: 1. The emphasis placed on individual uniqueness or unique expression of a common spirit, power, or energy inherent in all life. 2. The appropriateness of emotions in dialogues indicating that the speaker believes in the validity of being in touch with everyone’s feelings. 3. Developing the capacity for empathy. The Ethic of Personal Accountability (265): an ethic of personal accountability also characterizes Black feminist epistemology. Not only must individuals develop their knowledge claims through dialogue and present them is a style proving their concern for their ideas, but people are expected to be accountable for their knowledge claims. Traditional Black Church services also illustrate the interactive nature of the dimensions of epistemology. Emotion, ethics, and reason are used as interconnected, essential component in assessing knowledge claims. Black Women as Agents of Knowledge (266): Social movement of the 50’s. 60’s 70’s stimulated a greatly changed intellectual and political climate in the United States. Many more Black women became legitmated agents of knowledge. No longer passive objects of knowledge manipulated within prevailing knowledge validation processes, African-American women aimed to speak for ourselves. Black feminist thought must be validated by ordinary African-American women who grow to womenhood in a world where the saner you are, the madder you are made to appear” (Gwaltney 1980, 7). The community of Black women scholars constitutes a second constituency whose epistemological standards must be met. As the number of Black women academics grows, this heterogeneous collectivity shares a similar social location ini hiher education, yet finds a new challenge in building group solidarities across differences. African-American women place different amounts of furthering Black feminist scholarship. Consists of dominant groups who still control schools, graduate programs, tenure processes, publication outlets, and other mechanisms that legitimate knowledge. Lorraine Hansberry expresses an idea about universality: “ I believe that one of the most sound ideas in dramatic writing is that in order to create the universal, you must pay ver great attention to the specific. Universality, I think, emerges from the truthful identity of what is.” (1969, 128***). Toward Truth:*** The essence of Black feminist thought suggests another path to the universal truths that might accompany the “truthful identity of what is,” In this volume Patricia Collins placed Black women’s subjectivity in the center of analysis and examine the interdependence of the everyday, taken-for-granted knowledge produced by Black women intellectuals, and the social conditions shaping both types of thougt. (Here she describes the creative tension linking how social conditions influenced a Black women’s standpoint and how the power of the ideas themselves gave many African-American women the strength to shape those same social conditions. She approach Black feminist thought as situated in a context of domination and not as a system of ideas divorced from political and economic realilty. Moreover, I present Black feminist thought as subjugated knowledge in that African-American women have long struggled to find alternative locations and epistemologies fo validating our own self-definitions. In briref, I examined the situated, subjugated standpoint of African-Americanwomen in order to understand Black feminist thought as a partial perspective on domination. Also, in transversal politics, people can learn to center in another experience, validate it, and judge it by its own standards without need of comparison or need to adopt that framework as their own.CHAPTER 12: TOWARD A POLITICS OF EMPOWERMENT (273-290): Brazilian feminist Sueli Carneiro’s words identify the work facing Black Brazilian women in fostering their own empowerment. Because U.S. Black feminism participates in this larger social justice project of Black diaspora feminisms, it too must “never stop questioning” social injustices. Within this larger endeavor, U.S. Black feminist thought make a special contribution. By stressing how African-American women must become self-defined and self-determining within intersecting oppressions, Black feminist thought emphasizes the importance of knowledge for empowerment. Ideas matter, but doing “plenty of work” may matter even more. As chapters 10 and 11 suggest, Black feminist thought offers two important contributions concerning the significance of knowledge for a politics of empowerment. First. Black feminist thought fosters a fundamental paradigmatic shift in how we think about unjust power relations. By embracing a paradigm of intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, sexuality, and nation, as well as Black women’s individual and collective agency within them, Black feminist thought reconceptualizes the social relations of domination and resistance. 2. Black feminist thought addresses ongoing epistemological debates concerning the power dynamics that underlie what counts as knowledge. This volume has synthesized two main approaches to power. 1. Dialectical relationship linking oppression and activism, where groups with greater power oppress those with lesser amounts of power, and that change results from human agency. 2. Emphasize how individual subjectivity fromes human actions within a matrix of domination . U.S. Black woman’s efforts to grapple with the effects of domination in everyday life are evident in our creation of safe spaces that enable us to resist oppression, and in our struggles to form fully human love relations with one another, and with children, fathers and brothers, as well as with individuals who do not see Black women as worthwhile. Oppression is ever changing and is felt in mind and body,too so the Black women must always be on guard. Black women’s experiences and ideas illustrate how the four domains of power shape domination. But they also ilustrate how these domains have been and con be used as sites of Black women’s empowerment.

The Structural Domain of Power (277): encompasses how social institutions are organized to reproduce Black women’s subordination over time. One characteristic feature of this domain is its emphasis on large-scale, interlocking social institutions. The policies and procedures of labor markets, schools, housing industry, banking, insurance, news media, worked to disadvantadged Black women, having multiple forms of segregation backed by Plessy V. ferguson. Separate but equal clause. And excluded Black women from full citizenhip rights. However, Through the Civil War, different Civil Rights Acts, and Brown v. Topeka Board of Education as well as integration, Blacks were able throughout history to gain more freedoms; political, social, economic, and individual. Black women were included in this fight for freedoms.

The Disciplinary Domain of Power: Ordering schools, industries, hospitals, banks, and realtors to stop discriminating against Black women does not mean that thes and other social institutions will comply. Laws may change, but the organizations that they regulate rarely change as rapidly. Burearcracy, in turn, has become important in controlling population, especially across race, gender, and other markets and difference. The dominant group still try to keep the controlling images popularized to subordinate the U.S. Black women. However, U.S. Black women have been instrumental in changing the organizational bureaucratic rules in their favor once they become leaders in the business.

The Hegemonic Domain of Power To maintain their power, dominant groups create and maintain a popular system of “commonsense” idea support their right to rule. In the United States, hegemonic ideologies concerning race, class, gender, sexualit, and nation alone ways of resisting

The Interpersonal Domain of Power: African-American women have been victimized by intersecting oppressions. lely as passive, unfortunate recipients of abuse stifles notions sthat Black women can actively work to change our circumstances and bring about change in their lives. Similarly, presenting African-American woman solely heroic figures who easily engage in resisting oppression on all fronts minimizes the very real costs of oppressions and can foster their perception that Black women need no help by seducing, pressuring, or forcing African-American women, members of subordinated groups, and all individuals to replace individual and cultural ways of knowing with the dominant groups’ specialized thought—hegemonic ideologies that, in turn, justify practices of other domains of power.

Individual biographies are situated within all domains of power and reflect their interconnections and contradictions. Whereas the structural domain of power organizes the macro-level of social organization with the disciplinary domain managing its operations, the interpersonal domain functions through routinized, day-to-day practices of how people treat one another (.g. micro-level of social organization). Such practices are systematic, recurrent and so familiar that they often go unnoticed. Their everyday resistance strategies within this domain can take as many forms as there are individuals.

The Politics of Empowerment (289):Rethinking Black feminism as a social justice project involves developing a complex notion of empowerment. Shifting the analysis to investigating how the matrix of domination is structured along certain axes—race, gender, class, sexuality, nation—as well as how it operates through interconnected domains of power—structural, interpersonal, disciplinary, and hegemonic—reveals that the simple models of oppressors and the oppressed would suggest. When it comes to knowledge, Black women’s empowerment involves rejecting the dimensions of knowledge that perpetuate objectification, commoditization, and exploitation. African-American women and others like them become empowered when they understand and use those dimensions of their individual. Black women value their self-definitions, participate in Black women’s domestic and transnational activist traditions, view the skills gained in schools as part of a focused education for Black community development, and invoke Black feminist epistemologies as central to their worldviews, they empower themselves. Black women’s empowerment involves revitalization U.S. Black feminism as a social justice project organized around the dual goals of empowering African-American women and fostering social justice in a transnational context. Black feminist thought emphasis on the ongoing interplay between Black women’s oppression and Black women’s activism presents a matrix of domination and its interrelated domains of power as responsive to human agency.