

INTERSECTIONAL FEMINISM

MARCH ADVOCACY GUIDE



WHAT IS INTERSECTIONALITY?

Intersectionality is a term that has existed for decades, but as it has left the domain of the Black feminist scholars who coined it, the meaning has distorted over time. Intersectionality is about **identities** and the intersections between them.

"Intersectionality is the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups"

- MIRIAM WEBSTER



Everybody has identities: their race, gender, class, sexuality, or disability. Certain identities can bring privilege or marginalization. Intersectionality acknowledges that people who have **multiple marginalized identities** (for example Black women or LGBTQ+ working-class men) experience discrimination in a different way than someone who has only one of the marginalized identities. In this way, the experience of a Black woman is not the same as that of a white woman OR of a Black man. Intersectionality has legal, social, and academic applications.

FOR EXAMPLE

DEGRAFFENREID V. GENERAL MOTORS

Emma DeGraffenreid, a Black woman, applied for a job at General Motors and was rejected. She, and four other Black women who were also denied, took the company to court, arguing that they were being discriminated against on the basis of *both* gender and race. The case was thrown out because General Motors hired African Americans and Women, and therefore wasn't discriminatory on the basis of gender or race individually.



"Only if the court was able to see how these [identities intersected] would he be able to see the **double discrimination that Emma DeGraffenreid was facing."
- KIMBERLÉ CRENSHAW**

However, what the court failed to recognize, was the intersectionality of DeGraffenreid's identity and its impact on her treatment. General Motors did hire African Americans, yes, but African American *men*, to work in industrial jobs. Similarly, the plant only hired *white* women to work front-office or secretarial jobs. Because DeGraffenreid didn't fit neatly into either of these roles, she wasn't hired. It is clear that she was discriminated against not because she was Black, or a woman, but because she was a *Black woman*.

IMAGINE AN INTERSECTION



RACE DISCRIMINATION

GENDER DISCRIMINATION

"Maybe a simple analogy to an intersection might allow judges to better see Emma's dilemma. So if we think about this intersection, the roads to the intersection would be the way that the workforce was structured by race and by gender. And then the traffic in those roads would be the hiring policies and the other practices that ran through those roads.

Now, because Emma was both Black and female, she was positioned precisely where those roads overlapped, experiencing the **simultaneous** impact of the company's gender and race traffic. The law -- the law is like that ambulance that shows up and is ready to treat Emma only if it can be shown that she was harmed on the race road or on the gender road but not where those roads intersected."

- KIMBERLÉ CRENSHAW, THE URGENCY OF INTERSECTIONALITY

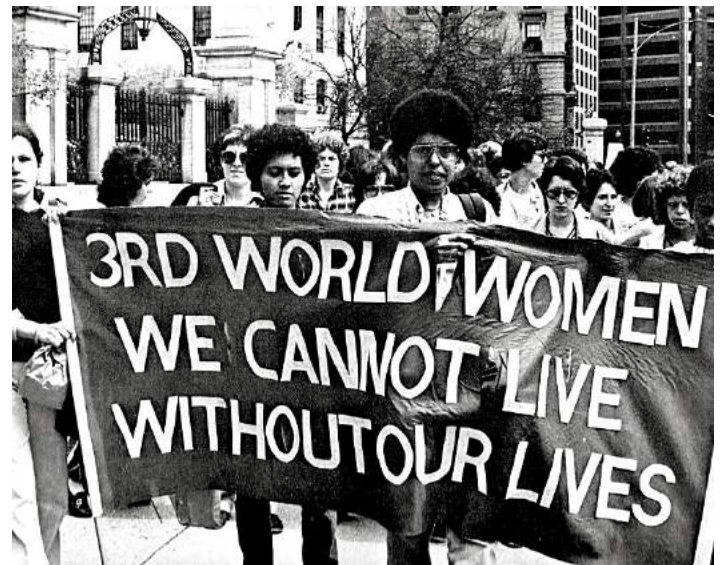
HISTORY

COMBAHEE RIVER COLLECTIVE STATEMENT

In the mid-twentieth century, Black Feminist scholars and activists began work on Intersectionality Theory to combat the largely **white** mainstream Feminist movement as well as the **male**-centered Civil Rights movement. The Combahee River Collective was one such group, which from 1974-80, organized to address the issues of Black women, specifically Black lesbians. In 1977, they released **The Combahee River Collective Statement** which outlined their beliefs, history, and, although they did not have a word to describe it, the importance of Intersectionality.

1970s

"As Black women we see Black feminism as the logical political movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions that all women of color face"
- COMBAHEE RIVER COLLECTIVE STATEMENT



Combahee River Collective

Throughout the 1980s writers, activists, and scholars such as Audre Lorde, Gloria E. Anzaldúa, and Angela Davis continued to work with intersectionality. Books such as Davis's *Women, Race, and Class* called out racism and classism within the women's liberation movement. Intersectionality theory continued to evolve, although without an official name.

1980s

HISTORY

KIMBERLÉ CRENSHAW

1990s
In 1989, Kimberlé Crenshaw, a lawyer and scholar of critical race theory, coined the term "intersectionality" in her paper for the University of Chicago Legal Forum titled, *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics*. She went on to popularize and expand on the term in her 1991 article, *Mapping the Margins*. This gave a name for the problem black feminist scholars had been calling out for decades.

**"Where there's no name for a problem, you can't see a problem, and when you can't see a problem, you pretty much can't solve it."
- KIMBERLÉ CRENSHAW**



2000s
2010s
Since 1989, Intersectionality as a concept has expanded to include much more than the intersection of race and gender. The intersection of discrimination based on sexuality, class, ability, immigrant-status, and religion also fall under the label of intersectionality. However, it wasn't until the mid-2010s that the term was used much outside of academia. The Women's March on Washington in January 2017 helped bring the word intersectionality to the mainstream as once again feminism received criticism for focusing on only white and privileged voices. Today, intersectionality is commonly referenced as something to strive for in feminism and social organizing.

INTERSECTIONALITY AND FEMINISM

Feminism throughout history has excluded and decentered women of color, queer women, and poor women. When suffragettes won the right to vote in 1920, they really only won it for white women. Famous white feminists such as Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton spoke out against the 15th amendment because they did not want Black men to be able to vote before white women.



"The hallmark of feminism today is [...] Intersectionality"
- ANGELA DAVIS

As feminism has progressed through its third and fourth waves, mainstream feminism continues to focus only on the issues of the most privileged of women, alienating anyone who is not white, cis, straight, or affluent. As Angela Davis argues, the very concept of the "glass ceiling" metaphor implies those who are high enough to reach the ceiling are those who are already on top, who already have the privilege. Because of this, some women of color have elected to reject the label "feminist" because they don't subscribe to the rhetoric of "white" feminism*.

*White feminism should not be mistaken for any feminism practiced by a white person, but a feminism that only listens to white voices

"I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own."

- AUDRE LORDE



Angela Davis continues **"any feminism that privileges those who already have privilege is bound to be irrelevant to poor women, working-class women, women of color, trans women, trans women of color."** Therefore, **Intersectional Feminism** is feminism that acknowledges the oppression of these "multiply-burdened" women.

STEPS FOR MAKING YOUR FEMINISM MORE INTERSECTIONAL

1. Center the voices of multiply-burdened women
2. Recognize that your experience is not the only one
3. Acknowledge what privilege you hold
4. Learn the history of women of color and LGBTQ+ women in the feminist movement
5. Listen to criticism

"All women do not share the same levels of discrimination just because they are women"

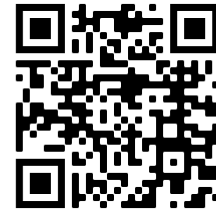
- CHANDRA MOHANTY AND LINDA CARTY

RESOURCES

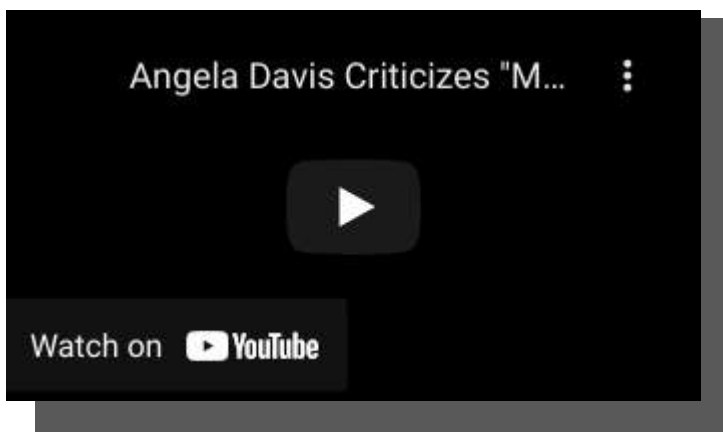
TO WATCH



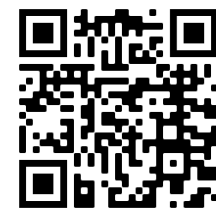
Kimberlé Crenshaw:
What is Intersectionality?
<https://bit.ly/3r5sSal>



The Urgency of
Intersectionality: TED Talk
<http://bit.ly/3lFjDNi>



Angela Davis Criticises
Mainstream Feminism
<https://bit.ly/392s0gD>

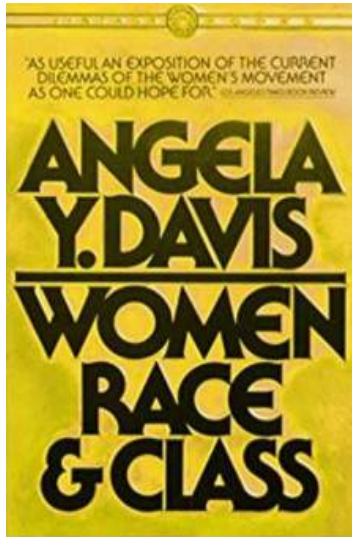


Kimberlé Crenshaw
Discusses Intersectional
Feminism
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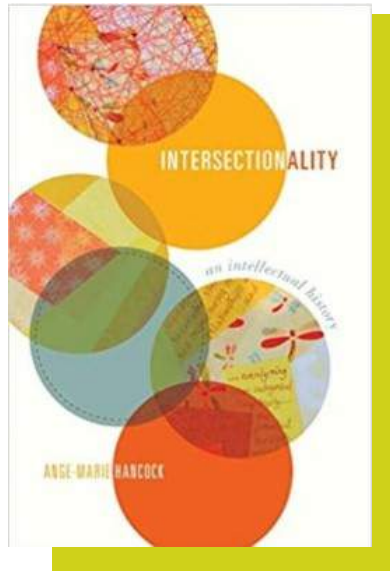


RESOURCES

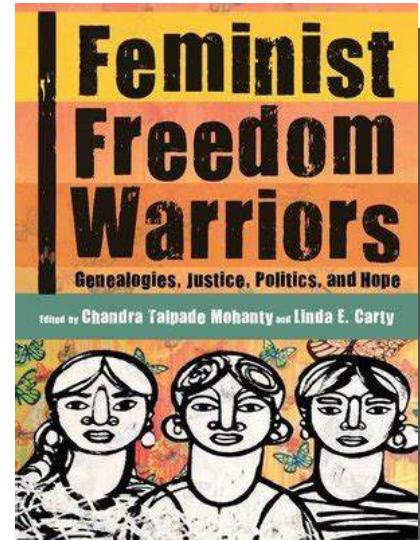
TO READ



Women, Race, & Class
Angela Davis



Intersectionality: An Intellectual History
Ange-Marie Hancock



Feminist Freedom Warriors
Chandra Mohanty and Linda E. Carty

The Combahee River Collective Statement

Combahee River Collective

We are a collective of Black feminists who have been meeting together since 1974. [1] During that time we have been involved in the process of defining and clarifying our politics, while at the same time doing political work within our own group and in coalition with other progressive organizations and movements. The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives. As Black women we see Black feminism as the logical political movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions that all women of color face.

We will discuss four major topics in the paper that follows: (1) the genesis of contemporary Black feminism; (2) what we believe, i.e., the specific province of our politics; (3) the problems in organizing Black feminists, including a brief history of our collective; and (4) Black feminist issues and practice.

1. The genesis of Contemporary Black Feminism

Before looking at the recent development of Black feminism we would like to affirm that we find our origins in the historical reality of Afro-American women's continuous life-and-death struggle for survival and liberation. Black women's extremely negative relationship to the American capitalist system (a system of white, male, ruled, bourgeois men

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Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics

Kimberlé Crenshaw
Readers and Comments at <http://www.law.uchicago.edu>

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Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex
Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989)
<https://bit.ly/3c8HhP0>

Kimberlé Crenshaw on Intersectionality, More than Two Decades Later

< Stories and News

Professor Crenshaw coined the term and co-founded the African American Policy Forum. Before AAPF's 10th anniversary, Crenshaw reflects on where intersectionality is heading.

Twenty-eight years ago, Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term "intersectionality" in a paper as a way to help explain the oppression of African-American women. Crenshaw's then somewhat academic term is now at the forefront of national conversations about racial justice, identity politics, and policing—and over the years has helped shape legal discussions. A leading thinker and scholar in the field of critical race theory, Crenshaw, a professor at Columbia Law School, directs the Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies and is a co-founder of the African American Policy Forum, a think tank, both based on campus.

Kimberlé Crenshaw on Intersectionality, More Than Two Decades Later (2017)
<http://bit.ly/3lHyyX6>

The Combahee River Collective Statement (1977)
<https://bit.ly/3c9hgz2>



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