

Feminist Reading Tools For Recognizing and Countering Racism

Excerpted from a post by ProfBW on the WoC PhD blog posted May 2, 2008. Originally located at <http://profbw.wordpress.com>, but unfortunately no longer online.

There are a lot of texts about racial oppression as well as intersecting oppressions out there and many of them are accessible and helpful in the context of the recent issues we have all been grappling with in the feminist blogosphere. I want to put the list I made there here for my readers as a start point, recognizing that these essays in one way or another center racial conflict because that is what the conflicts have been about of late.

The List:

Gloria Yamato, "Something About the Subject Makes it Hard to Name," in Anzaldua & Moraga, [This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color](#)

This essay outlines types of racism including "unintentional" and intentional and breaks down how they work, why they are part of a system of oppression, and gives examples. For people struggling with "I didn't mean it" or "I am a good person" issues this is a really great essay to think about intentionality. For people trying to talk to people with those issues, it is an important tool in helping them see the problems in their actions/denials.

Gloria Anzaldua, "Now Let Us Shift," in Anzaldua & Keating, [This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation](#) .

This essay talks about the path we all take in coming to consciousness. It is great because it shows the path is not linear nor does it stop at "enlightenment," people can become enlightened and then get scared or experience a loss of privilege that often comes with fighting against oppression and go back to an earlier stage of consciousness or become enlightened about one thing but still need to work on others. It is a good piece for mapping out the fears and the process AND helping people to understand that making mistakes or finding lapses does not mean you have to throw in the towel and give up or that doing good work elsewhere does not mean they don't exist. For anyone who has ever struggled, made a mistake, or failed, when confronting oppression this is a great piece.

Patricia Hill Collins, "The Matrix of Domination" section from "Black Feminist Thought in a Transnational Context" in [Black Feminist Thought](#)

This piece is the classic tome on how race, gender, and class intersect and is part of a larger chapter contextualizing black feminist thought from PHC's perspective using both sociological and historical information. The matrix provide a key theory to understanding intersectionality but should really be read in the context of the entire chapter before being pulled out for its singular import so as to avoid the ways that many key terms and theories, particularly from feminists of color, are repeatedly taken out of context and that many key terms and theories, particularly from feminists of color, are repeatedly taken out of context and watered down until they have lost all real, known, meaning. The section and chapter look specifically at black women's experiences of oppression but the matrix is a key metaphor for understanding how oppressions work together at the state, local, and individual levels.

Andrea Smith, "Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy" in [The Color of Violence: The INCITE! Anthology, Women of Color Against Violence](#) . (Also available online

here: http://www.jessicapettitt.com/images/Color_of_Violence.pdf)

This piece is similar to Collins except that it takes the discussion out of the black experience and expands the levels of oppression up one to colonialism or the international level. Smith critically examines the meaning of "women of color" as essentially "not white" which erases our differences and the specificity of our racial oppression(s). She also discusses heterosexism and how it exists in both dominant and marginalized communities, including activist communities, as part of a larger system of domination and how it too must be addressed and dismantled on all sides in order to combat oppression.

Allison Bailey, "Locating Traitorous Identities: Toward a View of Privilege Cognizant White Character" in Harding and Narayan, [Decentering the Center: Philosophy for a Multicultural, Postcolonial and Feminist World](#)

This piece is really heady philosophy and may not be the most accessible of the bunch. However it does talk about privilege with regards to whiteness and heterosexuality. It expands on the idea of reclaiming "race traitor" as a good thing - ie being traitorous to white supremacy - and mapping out some other steps for white people to make the critical shift to ally.

Marilyn Frye, "Oppression." Available online

at <http://www.terry.uga.edu/~dawndba/4500Oppression.html>

Its metaphor of the bird cage where oppressions intersect and reinforce like a cage so that moving one oppression does not make enough space for oppression(s) to be dismantled has always been effective in my classes. It is a good piece for people who

continue to argue "there is so much to do in feminism, I can only focus on _____" or "gender-only can free all women."

Ofelia Schutte, "Cultural Alterity: Cross-Cultural Communication and Feminist Theory in North-South Contexts," in Harding and Narayan, [Decentering the Center: Philosophy for a Multicultural, Postcolonial and Feminist World](#)

Another piece that might not be as accessible to all readers but does a great job of mapping out the kinds of disconnects that happen in cross-cultural communication between white women and women of color. It looks at all kinds of assumptions about intentions, intelligence, importance, etc. that get in the way of successful communication even when everyone thinks they have done their work on becoming aware of/ dismantling oppression. It is a great piece for thinking through what went wrong and how not to do it again.

Eli Clare, "Introduction" to [Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness and Liberation](#)

He works at the intersections of trans, disability, class, location, and sexuality in this book and has a really good piece deconstructing whiteness and the class and location of whiteness in the book itself that I think are important. I include the "intro" in this list however because of the metaphor of the mountain and how it talks about the process expected of people on the margin to reach the center. It helps to show that no matter how far removed or how close you are to the center that the system is designed to hold everything in place, so that if white women don't confront racism or do so only when it is not about the racism of their immediate friends or themselves, or only if it does not interfere with the ways they benefit from supremacy, than they ultimately cheat themselves by thinking they can reach the top of the mountain by buying into oppression. (The metaphor is also a good way for making sense of what goes wrong for all marginalized groups who think they are making headway and then suddenly get thrown back down the trail.)