THEORIZING RACE, CLASS AND GENDER

The new scholarship of Black feminist intellectuals and Black women’s labor

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At the centre of the theorizing about race, class and gender in the USA is a group of Black feminist intellectuals. These are academics, independent scholars and activists who are writing and rethinking the African-American experience from a feminist perspective. In this chapter, I am most concerned with the ideas of those women involved in knowledge production who are situated in the academy: colleges and universities throughout the USA. Their insights are essential to the rethinking which must occur in conceptualizing the African-American experience. Although they are few in number, their recent placement in Women’s Studies, Ethnic Studies and traditional disciplines such as sociology, political science, history, English, anthropology, comparative literature and so on, is strategic to the current upsurge in Black feminist scholarship.

What is most important conceptually and analytically in this work is the articulation of multiple oppressions. This polyvalency of multiple social locations is historically missing from analyses of oppression and exploitation in traditional feminism, Black Studies and mainstream academic disciplines. Black feminist thinking is essential to possible paradigm shifts in these fields; for example, in Black Studies to begin explaining the African-American experience through the multiple articulations of race, class and gender changes the whole terrain of academic discourse in that area. Black feminist social scientists deconstruct existing frameworks in sociology, history and a range of other disciplines.

In the ensuing discussion I look more carefully at how Black feminist theorizing is central to our rethinking the African-American experience. I examine Black women’s labor and African-American class formation to illustrate how race, class and gender in intersection contribute to our understanding of African-American life. I organize the chapter around the following three themes: (1) an examination of the context of recent
Black feminist theorizing in the social sciences; (2) a closer analysis of a major proposition of Black feminist thought, "the simultaneity of oppression," given race, class and gender as categories of analyses in the social sciences; and (3) sketching out a reconstructed analysis of Black women's labor and African-American class formation through the lenses of race and gender.

THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF RECENT BLACK FEMINIST THEORIZING

The theory and practice of Black feminism predates the current period. Even during the first wave of feminism, according to Terborg-Penn (1990), prominent Black feminists combined the fight against sexism with the fight against racism by continuously calling the public's attention to these issues. Turn-of-the-century Black activist Anna Julia Cooper conceived the African-American woman's position thus:

She is confronted by a woman question and a race problem, and is as yet an unknown or unacknowledged factor in both.

(A Voice from the South by a Black Woman of the South, 1892)

Although early-twentieth-century Black suffragettes saw women's rights as essential to relieving social ills, they repeatedly called attention to issues of race. Nonetheless, within the vise of race, African-American women forged a feminist consciousness in the USA. Such women might be called the original Black feminists. Again, the life and work of Anna Julia Cooper is a case in point. Gay-Sheftall and Bell-Scott (1989: 206) point out that Cooper's work, A Voice From the South by a Black Woman of the South (1892), "has the distinction of being the first scholarly publication in the area of Black women's studies, though the concept had certainly not emerged during the period."

Yet the gateway to the new Black feminist scholarship of the past twenty years is the civil rights movement and the mainstream feminist movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. E. Frances White, an activist in the civil rights movement, captures the recent historical context in which contemporary Black feminists are located. She says:

I remember refusing to leave the discussion at a regional black student society meeting to go help out in the kitchen. The process of alienation from those militant and articulate men had begun for me.

(1984: 9)

White goes on to point out that:

many of today's most articulate spokeswomen, too, participated in the black student, civil rights, and black nationalist movements.

Like their white counterparts, these women felt frustrated by restraints imposed on them by the men with whom they shared the political arena.

(RACE, CLASS AND GENDER)

For Cynthia Washington, an activist in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), this incipient Black feminism is given a different slant. She points out that although Black women's abilities and skills were recognized in the movement, the men categorized the women as something other than female (Echols, 1989). Both these positions reflect the historic path of Black feminist development in the second wave of US feminism. While and Washington's interpretations of the movement point to the multiple consciousness which informs Black feminist thinking and struggles. Black feminism is defined as a multiple level engagement (King, 1988).

This is strikingly exemplified by the Combahee River Collective. The organization was formed by a group of Black lesbian feminists in the mid-1970s. In the context of murder in Boston, Barbara Smith and a group of other Black women founded the collective. Smith was insistent that the murder of Black women was not only a racial issue. The fact that thirteen Black women were killed cruelly exhibited how sexism and racism intersected in the lives of African-American women. Given this, the collective argued:

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 an integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that major systems of oppression create 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.

(1983: 272)

Importantly, Black feminist theorizing places African-American women at the center of the analyses (Hull et al., 1982; Collins, 1986, 1990; King, 1988; Dill, 1979). By theorizing from the cultural experiences of African-American women, social scientists such as Collins argue epistemologically that experience is crucial to Black women's ways of knowing and being in the world. Thus capturing that cultural experience is essential to a grounded analysis of African-American women's lives. This means analysis predicated on the everyday lives of African-American women. More difficult has been linking the everyday to the structural constraints of institutions and political economy (Bresser, 1983, 1989). Indeed, a challenge to Black feminist theory is explicating the interplay between agency and social structure. However, nearly all
the recent writing has been about everyday lived experiences. Less successful and visible is the explanation of the interrelationship between lives and social structure.

Finally, running through Black feminist analyses is the principle of "the simultaneity of oppression" (Hull et al., 1982). This is the conceptual underpinning of much of recent Black feminist reconceptualization of African-American life. In the following discussion, "the simultaneity of oppression" is examined more carefully and is central to our understanding of Black women's labor and African-American class formation. Furthermore rethinking the social structure of inequality in the context of race, class and gender intersections is crucial to this discussion, using Black women's textile industry work in North Carolina as a case in point.

**RACE, CLASS AND GENDER: THE SIMULTANEITY OF OPPRESSION**

The conceptual anchor of recent Black feminist theorizing is the understanding of race, class and gender as simultaneous forces. The major propositions of such a stance include:

1. Critiquing dichotomous oppositional thinking by employing both/and rather than either/or categorizations
2. Allowing for the simultaneity of oppression and struggle, thus
3. Escaping additive analyses: race + class + gender
4. Which leads to an understanding of the embeddedness and relationality of race, class and gender and the multiplicative nature of these relationships: race × class × gender
5. Reconstructing the lived experiences, historical positioning, cultural perceptions and social construction of Black women who are enmeshed in and whose ideas emerge out of that experience, and
6. Developing a feminism rooted in class, culture, gender and race in interaction as its organizing principle.

Importantly, theorizing about race, class and gender is historicized and contextualized.

**RACE, CLASS AND GENDER: AS CATEGORIES OF ANALYSIS**

Race has been defined in a number of ways, yet a few powerful conceptualizations are useful to our discussion of Black feminist theory. Recently feminist historian Higginbotham notes:

Like gender and class, then, race must be seen as a social construction predicated upon the recognition of difference and signifying
case of race as a category of analysis. In fact, Higginsbotham (1992) draws our attention to the metalanguage of race in which internal issues of gender and class are subsumed to a unitarian position of African-Americans. Here, class is hidden or misspecified and gender is rendered invisible in this conceptualization of African-American inequality. Indeed, race in the context of the globalization of capitalism makes gender the center of the new working class. Thus the following discussion draws upon recent Black feminist theorizing to place Black women at the center of an analysis of labor and African-American class formation emphasizing the relational and interactive nature of these social forces.

BLACK WOMEN'S LABOR AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN CLASS FORMATION THROUGH THE PRISM OF RACE, GENDER AND CLASS

The contestation among scholars on race and class reflects conceptual, political interests and careerist concerns. Yet, the debate on the relative importance of race and class has been fought largely on a nongendered terrain. The writings of Black feminist intellectuals give us some new insight into how the race and class might be viewed in the context of gender. Indeed, as theorists explicate the intersection of race, gender and class, our conceptualizations of racial inequality will change. The complexity of race, gender and class interactions suggests that scholarly work must accomplish a number of difficult theoretical tasks especially around interrelationships. Thus, in the context of explaining Black women's labor and class formation, at least one question is key: How does explicating African-American women poorly paid productive or unwaged social reproductive labor recenter our understanding of African-American inequality and class formation? I can begin to answer this question by examining more closely the changes in Black women's labor, drawing upon the insights of Black feminist theorizing.

Striking is the research on race and labor. Baron (1971), in a classic essay titled "The Demand for Black Labor," essentially discusses Black men's labor. This tendency is pervasive in a good deal of the work on the Black experience (Collins, 1986, 1990). Consequently, the inequality of Black-American life is conflated with Black men's inequality. Indeed, much of the discussion of inequality in the USA has been centered on the dynamics of either race or gender which translates into discussions of white women or Black men. Dismissing intersections of race and gender in such autonomous analyses conceptually erases African-American women. Recent Black feminist thinking strongly emphasizes the error in this kind of analysis.

Accordingly, a critical defining element of the current time is the regionalization and internationalization of women's work. Indeed, a crucial determinant of Black life today is not simply Black men's marginalization from work but the social transformation of Black women's labor. Furthermore, the transformation of Black women's labor is tied to structural changes in the state and economy as well as to shifts in the racial/gender division of labor.

Three major labor transformations in Black women's waged labor are key: (1) movement from domestic to industrial and clerical work, a process still incomplete and particularized by region and class (Simmons and Malveaux, 1980); (2) integration into the international division of labor in low-paid service work which is largely incapable of providing a family wage (Brewer, 1985); and (3) the increasing impoverishment and fragmentation of Black women, children and families (Sidel, 1986). An analysis of the North Carolina textile industry is a good case in point of the above processes. These changes are matched by the pervasive peripheralization of Black men from manufacturing work and the labor force (Beverly and Starnback, 1980). Theorizing race, class and gender in the context of these broad-based structural changes in Black women's labor exemplifies a division of waged labor built on racial norms and values, as well as material arrangements embedded in a gendered division of labor. More recently, uneven economic growth and internationalization have involved Black women in the complex circuitry of labor exchange of women nationally and globally. In short, capitalist firms do not have to depend upon Black labor, either male or female. Low-wage, low-cost labor can be found all over the world. The world labor force is a cheap substitute for Black labor in the USA. Yet this is further complicated by the feminization of much of labor (low-paid women within the USA and outside). Furthermore, women's work in the USA is gender/race divided. Disproportionate numbers of Black women are at the bottom of this division of labor, rooted in social meanings systems which get remade in the material context of social practices as well as the calculus of profit. Structurally such processes anchor a disproportionate number of African-American women at the bottom of the service sector with some regional variation and some convergence of women's status across race in gender-segregated jobs. Thus African-American women represent a significant component of the new working classes. What more can be said about the social forces integral to African-American labor changes and class formation? To answer this, I will look carefully at the structural shifts of the last thirty years.

The concrete manifestation of regional political economy is uneven capitalist development (Clavelli et al., 1980). Today, US workers compete in an international market for labor power. There is a worldwide latent reserve labor force which competes with unskilled and semi-skilled labor in both the USA and Europe. White women, men and women of color,
and increasingly white male workers in the USA either directly compete with or are bypassed in favor of cheaper labor in Malaysia, Mexico, Singapore, the Philippines and the Dominican Republic among others (Williams, 1985).

Thus, a regional and international approach to political economy is central to this analysis. However, this must be matched by a concern with racial/cultural formation, gender inequality and concrete political struggles. White workers have historically been in competition with Black workers (Bonacich, 1976). They have been able historically to close rank against Black labor for the best jobs. Black women and men have often been left with the least desirable work, but some work. Today, this is not so for many African-Americans. During the era of advanced capitalism, competition moves beyond the confines of single industries and nations and becomes internationalized (Williams, 1985).

Economic changes are not abstractions from the activities of agents. Choices are made: who will be used, who will not. These choices are not wholly separated from cultural/racial/gender practices which get remade under conditions of internationalization of the economy. This means that much of the explanation of African-American marginalization from the economy is explained as cultural deficit. The economic locking-out of the Black poor and working poor is defined as a reflection of a culture of poverty rather than the remaking of racism, sexism and economic oppression under conditions of advanced capitalism. The white power elite makes decisions based on profit as well as the ideology of race and gender.

Given this, uneven economic development encompasses more than a labor/capital struggle. It is shaped by cultural processes reflecting long-standing definitions, perceptions of what is natural and given around hierarchies of race and gender. It is the issue of who loses. And, increasingly, the answer is young Black women and men of American inner cities. Moreover, the concern with the changing division of labor through economic restructuring is matched in this discussion by a concern with racial and gender divisions of labor. Pivotal here is the intersection of race/gender hierarchies and the way contemporary economic restructuring is shaped by existing arrangements of race/gender divisions. Furthermore, class fractioning within the racial/gender divisions of labor intersects with racial constraints within the gender/class division of labor. These processes take on an urban, regional and international form. Consequently, although at issue is the transformation of Black women's labor, it should be viewed as a transformation in three moments: race, gender and class simultaneously.

Evidently, historically and currently, political change the state appear to mediate the process of class, race and gender struggle. Hence, uneven economic development and economic restructuring are a political process, too. The state and its political relations are part of the calculus of change and restructuring engaged in by capital. For example, Perry and Watkins (1977) explain the political and economic nature of sunbelt growth and development: a state/business coalition created desirable conditions in the sunbelt. So, moving defense money to sunbelt-based industries, providing tax breaks and R & D subsidies, was essential to early sunbelt growth. It was as much a political as an economic process.

Thus, economic restructuring, uneven economic growth and internalization of the labor force embody cultural, gender, political and economic moments. The consequence of this now in the USA is that about two-thirds of all working persons are engaged in services (Williams, 1985). A good number of these are African-American women performing public reproductive work in the form of nurses' aides and old-age assistants, and in fast-food outlets and cafeterias. Indeed, nearly all new job growth during the 1970s and 1980s was in the service category. Externally and internally women are filling these new service jobs. They are the new working class. Under conditions of economic restructuring, highly skilled labor is largely technical labor and unskilled labor is largely manual and clerical labor. Thus, Black women's work today in the USA reflects the high demand for clerical labor emerging out of restructuring. Moreover, Black women's clerical work reflects the partial collapsing of a racial/gender division of labor. Both Black and white women do the same work in most places in the USA. Even so, Black women are more likely to be supervised and white women are more likely to supervise (Simms and Malveaux, 1986). Nonetheless, structural changes in the American economy and globally are changing cities and regions. This restructuring is changing Black women's work and all women's relation to work.

The second transformation in Black women's labor reflects a changing relationship to the new international division of labor. There is a diasporic connection with African women in the Americas, the USA, the Caribbean and South America. In sub-Saharan Africa, in the wake of colonization and imperialism, there has been a profound reconstitution of Africa's women's productive and reproductive labor (Amadiuanue, 1988). What is not well understood in this process is what further changes African women globally will undergo. Within the USA, shifts will be costly in human terms under conditions of uneven economic development, restructuring, regional and international labor change. Job loss is occurring for many Black women as they are in part-time, rather than full-time jobs (Woody and Malton, 1984). Their unemployment rate is among the highest in the USA (Simms and Malveaux, 1986). And paradoxically, just as some Black women are being more firmly linked to white-collar/clerical work, others are being excluded from the economy altogether. This job loss is linked to the replacement of the most
vulnerable women of color with women workers outside the country and new immigrant women within the society.

This labor exchange process is increasingly being studied by scholars in research on labor transformation and Third World women globally (Nafz and Saha, 1976; Fernandez-Kelley, 1985; Leacock and Saha, 1986). These writers discuss the impact of the new international division of labor on women of color globally. It is arguable that Third World women internationally are an essential part of the search for cheap labor (Saha, 1983). Furness and Ehrenreich concur (1983). Women generally, and Third World women specifically, have become essential to cheap labor in the global capitalist economy.

Hence given the international division of labor, some Black women within the USA are losing work just as they are making a niche for themselves in regional industries such as textiles. The racial/gender division of labor historically in the USA has opened from the bottom for Black women. This continues to be the case. For example, as southern white women in textiles moved to more desirable industrial jobs in the past two and half decades, Black women in North Carolina, South Carolina and across the textile South have filled the unskilled and semi-skilled jobs. Black women now hold over 50 per cent of the operative positions in many southern plants (Wooly and Mahon, 1984). Yet, with plant closedown and internationalization, many of these women are being fired. Textile workers peaked at over 1 million in the 1950s; in 1978 there were 754,296 (Sawars and Tabb, 1984). As usual Black women were again the last hired, the first fired.

Given the regional evolution of Black women’s work within the USA, North Carolina serves as a good case study of the racial/sexual division of labor for African-American women. Some work has already been done on this process in the state through the 1950s (Janiewski, 1985). Clearly, Black women’s work has been carefully crafted by economic and cultural forces. Well into the 1960s, economically and politically the state of North Carolina was completely dominated by whites. Jim Crow was only officially coming to an end, and the vestiges of the civil rights struggle lingered. White males dominated the state politically and socially. Nonetheless, all whites shared in a cultural heritage of white supremacy dating back to the days of slavery, accepting the notion of their specialness vis-à-vis Black women, whether they themselves were economically privileged or not. This meant that poor white women were committed to the premises of white supremacy as well as wealthier women.

Despite a shared heritage around white supremacy, a racial order built on the belief and ideology of white supremacy alone would have toppled. It was solidified and maintained through the domination of political institutions and the economic control by white male elites. Economics, politics and culture meshed to form a special kind of racial order in North Carolina, but the linchpin of the system was white male domination and control of key political and economic institutions.

Certainly by the time of the incorporation of Black women into the textile mills of the region, usually in the dirtiest and most distasteful jobs, the racial and gender distinctions were strong enough to generate four separate groups of labor: white men, white women, Black men, Black women. The gender distinctions generated a different kind of labor hierarchy: white men, Black men, white women, Black women.

Black women in North Carolina have been overwhelmingly concentrated in the secondary sector of the state. Secondary jobs are dirtier, harder and lower-waged than primary sector jobs. Job turnover is greater and job benefits are fewer in the secondary sector. Indeed jobs are different in the secondary and primary sectors. US census data for 1980 show that Black and white women held different types of jobs in North Carolina. A typical job for a white woman was white-collar. A large number of white women were clerical workers, and others were involved in teaching, health allied professions and retail sales work. Black women in the state were in blue-collar occupations. These include nondurable goods, operatives, private household workers, service workers. And unlike the nearly complete shift of Black women out of domestic work nationally, a somewhat greater percentage of the Black women in the state were involved in domestic work. Overall, there had not been major penetration into white-collar clerical work for these women. They were nearly all in the lower reaches of the occupational structure.

Thus, when Black women moved into industrial work in North Carolina textile mills, they did so without parity with white women. The gender division of labor was overlaid with the particularities of race. Only in the 1980s did Black and white women begin to share a common occupational trajectory. Currently, there is some convergence similar to the national convergence of all racial ethnic women. Some Black women in the state are moving into clerical work. Moreover, there is a racially mixed workplace for women in North Carolina textile mills today. Even still, Black women occupy a disproportionate percentage of low income work in this industry in the South (Wooly and Mahon, 1984). They bear the brunt of lay-offs and the industry has been devastated by plant mobility and closedowns.

More broadly, as noted earlier, uneven economic growth and internationalization have involved these women in a complex circuitry of female labor exchange nationally and globally. Racial segmentation of labor persists, rooted in cultural assumptions and social practices, as well as the calculus of profit. Consequently, although occupational segregation separates all women from men in the labor process, there is none around race.
Race in the context of gender and class means African-Americans are quite vulnerable. For example, Black women are still more likely than white women to be paid less, to be employed, to be supervised rather than to supervise (Simms and Malveaux, 1986). Given these differences (Wallace, 1980), their relationship to capital is different from that of white women. Even still, a small group of Black women are moving into the white-collar occupations. Their numbers are indicative of the growing significance of class relative to race in national labor markets. Nonetheless, it is the service sector in which a disproportionate number of African-American women work. This job slot for Black women cannot provide a family wage for high school educated and/or less skilled urban Blacks. This is highly problematic in the midst of extremely high Black male unemployment rates. In the case of African-American adolescents, the nearly complete erasure of their labor force participation has occurred. Phyllis Wallace (1974) is one of the few early scholars who place this reality in context. She points out that:

Black teenage females constitute one of the most disadvantaged groups in the labor markets of large metropolitan areas.

(1974: 8)

Woody and Mahon (1984) elaborate this point:

Current employment patterns indicate substantial underrepresentation in hiring black women in all income levels in key U.S. industry and a strong possibility of discrimination based on race.

(1984: 5)

Indeed the working poor as a significant segment of the working class must be understood in a gendered context. Black male joblessness alone does not account for the tremendous disadvantage of the Black poor. Race/gender segmentation and low wages as reflected in the position of African-American women are conceptually central to African-American class inequality today.

SOCIAL REPRODUCTION; GENDER INEQUALITY
AT HOME AND WORK IN THE CONTEXT OF
BLACK WOMEN'S LABOUR TRANSFORMATION

Labor is not simply about waged work at the site of production. Within households, Black women perform a significant portion of the social reproductive labor. The socialization of children and the cleaning, cooking and nurturing functions are all disproportionately Black women's work. Indeed, poor Black women are often expected to do everything. Their work within the home is devalued, even though housework is accomplished under trying circumstances: substandard housing, no

household washers and dryers, or few appliances. Yet these women are increasingly expected to work in low-paid jobs to qualify for Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). Indeed "workfare" is the key to recent public "welfare reform" legislation. Here again, race and gender intersect to anchor African-American women in a different stratum from white women or Black men.

Furthermore, the public service work referred to earlier is increasingly public social reproductive work: care for aged, sick and children. It falls disproportionately on Black women and other women of color. Yet, wages are very low and the average service salary is less than $12,000 per year (Williams, 1985). There simply is not enough money to support a family. Given this, some form of state support should make up a portion of the social wage for young Black people. Realistically, with severe cutbacks in the social wage, increasing immiseration for poor African-Americans is likely. Thus, Black male marginalization from work, and a particular type of work and welfare for the poorest African-American women, point to extremely difficult times ahead for the Black popula- tion in the USA. The increasing impoverishment of the Black family must be viewed in this context: Black women's placement in poorly paid jobs, Black men's increasing marginalization from work altogether and little state social support for men, women or children. Out of these processes emerges the lowest sector of the Black class structure.

For this reason, although there has been an assault on the Black working class, there is still a working class. It is conflated with the working poor. It is highly exploited and has experienced heavy assaults on its wage. It is a class which is often poor and female. Sidel (1986) points out that many poor families are headed by women who work all year long. For those households, the problem is not lack of work, it is low wages. The problem is also, as noted in the North Carolina example, sex segregation marked by a racial/gender division of labor. The labor force participation of Black men has dropped precipitously and now about 55 per cent of them are in the labor force. Such realities have profound implications for African-American life. Understanding Black men's placement in the economy provides only a partial analysis of what is happening. Explicating Black women's labor transformation in the context of race, class and gender gives us a fuller understanding of the African-American experience in the 1990s.

SUMMARY

My purpose in this chapter has been to explicate some of the recent thrusts in the social-welfare field by Black feminist thinkers in the academy. This theorizing is further explored in an analysis of Black women's labor and African-American class formation. The labor transformation
of Black women has been explicated in terms of economic restructuring and capital mobility, racial formation and gender inequality. It is a process linking Black women in the northeast and southwest to the south and southwest. As, Africa and the Caribbean. It is not the tie of poverty to prosperity, but the tie of subordinate status to subordinate status cross-cut by internal class differences in all these regions. Because of class, which intersects with race and gender, a sector of Black women is in the upwardly mobile integrative sector of a stratified economy. These are women who are moving out of the fast-growing female service sector made up of clericals into the somewhat slower-growing high technology fields which are male dominated. Even still, the rate of change into high-paying fields has been slow for Black women. In 1970, 1 per cent of African-American women were engineers and by 1980 only 7 per cent were (Amott and Mathaes, 1991). More often Black women professionals are ghettoized in the lower-paying professional fields. They are poorly represented in engineering, computer science, and other highly skilled fields with high pay. Currie and Skolnick (1984) aptly note that "short of an unprecedented shift in the sex composition of these occupations, their growth (highly paid professionals) seems unlikely to have a very strong effect on the overall distribution of Black women in the job hierarchy."

Finally, a discernible number of Black women are unemployed (desire full-time rather than the part-time work they have) or have been marginalized from work altogether (Woody and Malson, 1984). This occurs across regions; it is especially evident in northern and southern inner cities and rural areas. About half of all poor female-headed Black families are in the South. Additionally, the bifurcation of Black women's labor plays out a certain logic. Somewhat higher levels of clerical and white-collar service work are being performed by skilled Black women in the northeast, midwest and west while capital mobility has devastated the Black male semi-skilled and unskilled working class in older industrial areas. What is left is a service sector of racial minority women working for low wages. Simultaneously, there is a marginalization of some Black women from work altogether. They depend upon transfer payments, the informal economy of bartering, hustling, exchange, and kinship support.

Even now, the largest category of Black women workers in the USA is clerical and service workers (Simms and Malveaux, 1986). The latter is a category encompassing household workers, cleaners, janitors and public service workers, jobs which are extensions of the private household service role. Internationally, there is a broad base of women doing semi-skilled labor in the electronics, computer and other "sunrise" industries which have gone abroad. This is the work, primarily, of the white and Asian working-class female in the internal national women's economy. Finally, the intersection of race, class and gender, in interplay with economic restructuring, accounts for the internal fractionalization and separation of women from one another. Yet, this is not the entire story Cultural practice, beliefs and ideology also structure female labor. The ideology of what is appropriately Black women's work is played out in the arena of the public social reproduction of labor. Kitchen and cafeteria workers, nurses' aides, these are defined as appropriate jobs for Black women, very much as the domestic labor of a generation ago was defined as "Black women's work." It is only when all these processes are better understood that perspectives on African-American inequality will be more accurate.

Crucially, the Black class structure is made in the context of economic, state restructuring and political struggle, and the recreation of race, and a gender/racial division of labor. These are not unrelated phenomena. The result is a highly complexifying positioning of the Black population with some sectors clearly worse off than in the past, and other sectors more securely tied to mainstream institutions. African-American women are at the center of this reconstitution of Black labor and class formation. Most importantly, only in theorizing the complexity of the intersections of race, class and gender can we adequately prepare to struggle for social change in the African-American community.

CONCLUSIONS

In theorizing the construction of race, class and gender in intersection, three key themes are apparent. First, gender alone cannot explain the African-American woman's or man's experience. Feminism must reflect in its theory and practice the race and class terrain upon which hierarchy and inequality are built globally and within the USA. Second, the simultaneity of these social forces is key. In turn, practice and struggle must be anti-racist, anti-classist, anti-racist and anti-homophobic.

Finally, the "gender, race, class" dynamic is the major theoretical frame through which gender is incorporated into discussions of the position of Black women. Alone, they are rather sterile categories infused with meaning developed out of many decades of social thought on class and race. In interplay with the concept gender, the paradigm becomes fairly rich (Brewer, 1989). It is the simultaneity of these forces which has been identified and theorized by Black feminist thinkers. Preliminary thinking in this direction suggests that any such analyses must be historically based and holistic.

Given the writings of Black feminist thinkers in the social sciences, social scientific analyses embodying race, class and gender are growing. Simms and Malveaux (1986), Dill (1979), Collins (1986), King (1988) and Higginbotham (1992) are among a growing number of Black feminist social scientists. These writers critique parallel tendencies and
oppositional dualistic thinking. The old additive models miss an essential reality, the qualitative difference in the lives of African-American women through the simultaneity of oppression and resistance. Thus we must rethink many of the extant analyses on African-Americans through the lenses of gender, race and class. This is just the beginning phase of the kind of work which must be done for a robust and holistic understanding of African-American life.

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