

# Black Feminist Thought

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UNIVERSITY OF RIJEKA  
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# BLACK FEMINIST THOUGHT

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## **Abstract**

The oppression of black women began when first slaves were brought to America in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Many black people went through horrendous circumstances during slavery where they were discriminated, beaten and treated as less of a human. Black women, on the other hand, endured a lot more than black men, they were sexually abused, beaten, silenced, had to work long hours and were ‘human breeders’. The status of black women was very low, and it took decades to change it – first through the Abolitionist Movement and then through feminism. Black women were educated, oppressed, had no voice or control over their lives – all that started to change with the encouragement by people like Sojourner Truth, who was outspoken women’s rights activist and the predecessor of black feminism. In the 1900s the first wave of feminism started in America with the beginning of the Suffrage Movement. While many black women were willing to fight for their rights, they were mostly excluded by white feminists, which marked the separation of feminism into two branches – white feminism and black feminism.

White feminists became more focused on their rights, while black women focused on theirs – black women had to deal with intersectionality which made their progress slower, nevertheless they continued fighting all throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century with each new generation coming with their own set of issues. Black feminism is divided into three waves, the first wave which lasted from the 1900s to the 1940s, the second wave which occurred simultaneously with the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and lasted until the 1980s and the 1990s, and the third wave which occurred in the 1990s. Each wave had their representatives who were very vocal and active in their attempts to achieve rights. Many black feminists, including Anna Julia Cooper, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Mary Church Terrell, Alice, Walker, Angela Davis and Michelle Wallace showed through their works the difficulties that black women had to endure, how their voices were silenced and their needs as human beings neglected. They also challenged many stereotypes about black women, encouraged black women to pursue education and uplift each other. Their goal was not to achieve ‘some’ rights, but to become equal members of the society as they were fully capable of being that. Progress of black women was slow, included many women, some heard some unheard, but each made her contribution to bring the whole race forth.

**Key words:** feminism, black feminism, women’s rights, racism, sexism, equality, Suffrage Movement, education, intersectionality, oppression

## Introduction

The term feminism was first used in 1894 and its origin stems from French word ‘feminisme’, coined by Charles Fourier, French Utopian Socialist. The term feminism had different usage in the mid-1800s as it was used to denote ‘the qualities of females’, and only after the First International Women’s Conference in Paris in 1892 it was used as a belief and advocacy for equal rights. Broadly, feminism could be defined as a belief in social, political and economic equality of both sexes. The problem with definition of feminism arises as each generation of feminists had their own problems, worries and demands, meaning that each generation would define feminism according to problems of that time. Feminists first started to advocate for their rights to vote, but that later expanded to advocacy for rights of contract and property rights (altogether known as women’s legal rights), for women’s right to bodily autonomy and integrity, for workplace rights (which includes equal pay and maternity leave), for protection against domestic violence towards both women and young girls, for abortion and reproductive rights (reproductive rights include access to contraception and prenatal care), against sexual harassment, rape, gender-specific discrimination and child sexual abuse. Feminism became more prominent during the 1900s when the suffrage movement arose, but it started much before – there have been numerous records of women protesting in ancient Rome and Greece, women advocating for their rights in the era of Enlightenment, works about attitudes toward women dating back to the 14<sup>th</sup> and the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Abigail Adams writing to her husband John to “Remember the Ladies” when writing the *Declaration of Independence*, etc. Major breakthrough towards achieving women’s rights was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the first women’s rights convention, Seneca Falls Convention, was held in 1848 in Seneca Falls, New York. The Convention passed 12 resolutions demanding rights for women, yet there was no mention of black women or slavery.

The aim of the Suffrage Movement and feminism in general was to give women equality, but it became noticeable that feminism largely focused on white, college-educated women, while completely neglecting black women, lesbians, immigrants and women from religious minorities. While the term ‘white feminist’ became widely known during the 21<sup>st</sup> century, its origins can be traced to the beginning of the Suffrage Movement. It is said that the white feminism focused only on the issues concerning white women and failed to address any other issues by women of different races – it also failed to acknowledge the notion of

intersectionality<sup>1</sup> while fighting for women's rights. Because of racism, black and white women were restricted from uniting in their fight for women's rights, which made contrast between them grow as years went on. Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton were women's rights activists who advocated for equality between gender, but they did not advocate for universal suffrage<sup>2</sup>. It is even said that white women condoned racism if it meant benefits for the white Suffrage Movement. Furthermore, many black women were restricted by institutional racism – the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) established by Anthony and Stanton did not invite black women to attend meetings, and women's suffrage conventions in Southern states were segregated. Mary Church Terrell, an African-American activist was one of the few women who were allowed to attend NAWSA's meetings where she spoke about injustices and issues in African-American society. She believed that black women had to overcome both their sex and race, which made it harder to achieve due to racism. All this led to the beginning of black feminism, forming of various organizations and groups for black women's rights and black people in general, more female authors wrote about struggles as being black and being a woman in American society. Black feminism became more prominent during the 1960s and the Civil Rights Movement, and since then it has been on the rise.

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<sup>1</sup> Intersectionality - term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989; Kimberlé used the term to address how African American women were discriminated on the basis of gender and race.

<sup>2</sup> Universal suffrage gives right to vote to all adult citizens, regardless of wealth, gender, social status, race or any other restriction.

## 1. The beginning of black feminism

Black feminism is a philosophy whose main idea is that “Black women are inherently valuable, that [Black women’s] liberation is a necessity not as an adjunct to somebody else’s but because our need as human persons for autonomy”. It can be said that black feminism started as a result of slavery dating back to the 18th century when slaves were being brought to America. Slavery is also the component that separates black women from other feminists, since other women did not experience slavery and struggles that came along with it. Black feminism is said to have started in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, when a group of free black abolitionists emerged including Sojourner Truth, Maria Stewart and Frances E.W. Harper. The three women were heavily involved in the Abolitionist Movement, and soon became involved in women’s rights as well, which paved the way for the beginning of black feminism. They raised the problem of being both black and a woman, which expressed the essence of black feminist thought in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Guy-Sheftall Beverly stated in his book *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought* that there are several premises that remain constant in black feminism – that black women experience different and specific kind of oppression in a country that is racist, sexist and classist, meaning that problems and needs of black women were much different from those of white women, but black men as well. Black women did not have to struggle for abolitionism and black liberation, but for gender equality as well, and the fight for their rights is deeply rooted in their own experience<sup>3</sup>.

The fight for freedom and rights first emerged from horrendous circumstances that African Americans had to endure since being brought to America, which continued through the Abolitionist Movement. Both men and women suffered greatly as slaves, but the degree of their suffering was not the same – enslaved women had to endure constant sexual abuse and beatings, humiliating stereotypes surrounding them, involuntary breeding, separation from family, bad living conditions and much more. Harriet Jacobs stated in her autobiography, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself* (1861) that slavery was terrible for men, but much worse for women. When it came to stereotypes that white people had about black women, they were often portrayed as promiscuous, seductive and tempting which came into harsh contrast with women who were embodiments of modesty, self-respect and purity. One of the stereotypes that

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<sup>3</sup> Sheftall, Beverly Guy. *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*. New York, The New Press, 1995. (pp. 2)

arose in the beginning of slavery was the Jezebel stereotype<sup>4</sup> – when colonizers first came to Africa, they viewed nudity or semi-nudity in African tribes as something promiscuous and offensive, thus creating a bad picture of black women. They failed to recognize differences in other cultures around the world, and only looked at people through their own culture and morals. This was one of the reasons why the colonizers believed it was justified to enslave black people – they were not seen as humans, as people who had moral beliefs and values, but rather as people who were inferior, both morally and intellectually and sexually like animals. White people created a distinction depicting themselves as civilized, rational and moral, while everyone who was different was uncivilized and therefore deserved to be enslaved. Black women were described as always having unending desire for sex, which was quite the opposite to the truth. If a black woman refused her owner, she risked being beaten, raped, sold or having her children sold, and even killed. Many records during slavery also describe what black people had to go through when first brought to America – first they had to endure bad conditions while travelling across the sea (and those who died were often considered lucky, while some would deliberately jump in the ocean just to escape slavery), then they would be stripped naked when offered for sale; reasons for that included that possible owners had to be sure that the slaves they would buy were healthy and able to reproduce; while a normal person would consider something like that as humiliating and degrading; feelings of black people were not taken into account. One major issue that black women had to go through was pregnancy, which was very frequent and often forced – black women were often encouraged and forced by their owners to reproduce to supply future slaves, so many black women would have up to six children and more. They also had to endure sexual abuse and rape by their owners who were never charged with a crime. Young black girls did not have it easier either, they also had to endure hard work, bad living conditions, sexual abuse and rape, pregnancy, beatings and much more. Black women were not excused from work even if they were pregnant and worked long after men had retired<sup>5</sup>. Black women were often mocked for their features - everyday items, such as postcards, ashtrays and drinking glasses depicted naked or barely clothed black women. They were mostly caricatures whose main purpose was to mock black women. One such item became popular in the 1950s called “Zulu Lulu”<sup>6</sup> sticks used for stirring drinks. The women on these items would

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<sup>4</sup> Pilgrim, David. *The Jezebel Stereotype*. Ferris State University. Last updated 2012.

<<https://www.ferris.edu/jimcrow/jezebel/>>

<sup>5</sup> White, Deborah Gray. *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South (Revised Edition)*. New York, W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1999. (pp. 122)

<sup>6</sup> Pilgrim, David. *The Jezebel Stereotype*. Ferris State University. Last updated 2012.

<<https://www.ferris.edu/jimcrow/jezebel/>>



be so much distorted in order to look physically unattractive furthering the bad image of black women, or they would be depicted exotic, but these were less frequent. Black women were also forbidden to vote, they were excluded from public office just like black men, excluded from organizations, prevented from getting higher education, etc. All these bad images created about black women and all attempts to exclude them from all possible areas of life were designed to prevent black women from being seen as intellectuals and as human beings capable of doing everything and to keep them in a state that is seen as uncivilized, irrational and inferior. These were just some of the struggles that black women had to go through since the beginning of slavery and which they had to endure all throughout the Abolitionist Movement to the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Around the 1800s free black women in Northern states started forming their own organizations because they could not gain access to organizations led by white women, and in organizations led by black men they had difficulties becoming leaders who could state their own problems. Therefore, it was much easier for them to form their own organizations. One such organization was the Afric-American Female Intelligence Society of Boston which was founded in 1831, making it one of the first ever organizations led by black women. A year later, the Salem Massachusetts Female Antislavery Society was founded which became the first female abolitionist organization. Free black women also founded racially mixed Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, as women were prohibited from becoming members in American Anti-Slavery Society (AAS) which only accepted men. Additionally, black female organizations discussed issues and circumstances of black women that were not even mentioned in other organizations of that time. The goal of these organizations was not only for black women to gain rights, but to defend themselves, to challenge stereotypes and images proposed by white people, to uplift one another, improve their family life and to start their own careers. Around that same time, Maria W. Stewart, activist for abolitionism and women's rights, became presumably the first black woman to speak in public about issues of race, women's rights, abolitionism, literacy and racial unity. Stewart is recognized as one of the first black feminists as she encouraged black women to educate themselves and become leaders: "How long shall the fair daughters of Africa be compelled to bury their minds and talents beneath a load of iron pots and kettles"<sup>7</sup> and to "Turn your attention to knowledge and improvement; for knowledge is power". Stewart encouraged black women to reject the bad images placed on them and the

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<sup>7</sup> Sheftall, Beverly Guy. *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*. New York, The New Press, 1995. (pp. 4)

entire black womanhood, and emphasized that gender, race and class oppression were major causes of the conditions of black women. Stewart urged black women to fight for themselves and not rely on the help of others, as that was the only way they would gain their independence. She also placed the importance on mothers as they would be the ones to support their children and inspire them to achieve higher education and become independent men and women. Maria Stewart was a strong advocate for the rights of black women, yet she was heavily criticized by black men who considered her behaviour inappropriate as she gave speeches and lectures in public and uplifted black women. While many black men criticized black women for speaking up, Frederick Douglass was one of the first black men who advocated for women's rights. Mary Shadd Cary became the first black female newspaper editor in a field that was entirely male-dominated and the first black female lawyer in United States. She was also active in her work against the abolition of slavery and inspired other women to pursue college degrees and careers.

### **1.1. Sojourner Truth: *Ain't I a Woman?***

Sojourner Truth, an African American abolitionist, who later became a women's rights activist is considered to be the predecessor of the first wave of black feminism, it is believed that she paved the way for black women in the 1900s. Sojourner was, like many other women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, born into slavery around 1797 in Ulster County, New York. Sojourner Truth was born as Isabella Baumfree, but she changed her name later in life as God told her to preach the truth. During her early life, she experienced family separation as she was sold a few times, her brothers and sisters were sold as well, she endured sexual and physical abuse, until she finally managed to escape to her freedom. After she became free, she settled with the Van Wagenen family, who helped her to go to court in order to save her son who was illegally sold and after winning the case she became the first African American woman to win a case against a white man. Around the same time, she converted to Christianity and started preaching which brought her closer to abolitionists and women's rights activists and soon she started advocating for abolitionism and women's rights herself. A few years later, on 29 May 1851, Sojourner Truth attended Ohio Women's Rights Convention where she delivered her speech *Ain't I a Woman?*. As Truth did not know how to write, her speech was not written, meaning that people present at the convention wrote what she had approximately said. Today

we have two popular versions<sup>8</sup> of her speech – one published by Frances Gage in 1863 and one by Reverend Marius Robinson in 1851. When comparing both version, Robinson’s did not include the line “Ain’t I a Woman?” which is known as the title of the speech. Moreover, Gage’s version included stereotypical southern slave accent which does not correspond with the fact that Truth grew up in New York and had a more Dutch accent since that was her first language. In 2017, Leslie Podell launched *The Sojourner Truth Project* in which she wrote how Gage’s version distorted Sojourner’s true identity and how the original speech is much different than what Gage wrote. This difference was first noticed by Nell Irvin Painter, a professor at Princeton University, who agreed with Podell that Gage changed Sojourner’s original speech. They concluded that Robinson’s version of the speech, published in the Anti-Slavery titled *On Woman’s Rights*, is more authentic. Sojourner’s speech *Ain’t I a Woman?* had inspired and still inspires many black women – in the speech Truth stated that women were as just as strong as men, and that they could work as much as men as it was something they had been doing for decades: “I am a woman’s rights. I have as much muscle as any man and can do as much work as any man. I have plowed and reaped and husked and chopped and mowed, and can any man do more than that? I have heard much about the sexes being equal; I can carry as much as any man, and can eat as much too, if I can get it. I am as strong as any man that is now. As for intellect, all I can say is, if woman have a pint and man a quart – why can’t she have her little pint full? You need not be afraid to give us our rights for fear we will take too much – for we can’t take more than our pint’ll hold.”<sup>9</sup> At the convention a white man gave a speech in which he spoke against the idea of equal rights for women, and Truth, from her personal experience, stated that women were as strong as men, but pointed out the inequality when it came to education and intellect as women only had a pint and it was not even full. Nell Irving Painter had also pointed out how Sojourner Truth emphasized that among black people there were women, as there was a notion that all black slaves were men, while that was far from the truth. The title *Ain’t I a Woman?* is said to derive from Josiah Wedgwood’s medallion called *Am I Not a Man and a Brother?*<sup>10</sup> from 1787, and from medallion *Am I Not a Woman and a Sister?*<sup>11</sup> that first appeared around 1830. It was seen as a symbol of struggle for abolition of slave trade,

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<sup>8</sup> Podell, Leslie. *Ain’t I a Woman?* (Comparison between two speeches). *The Sojourner Truth Project*. <<https://www.thejournertruthproject.com/compare-the-speeches>>

<sup>9</sup> Podell, Leslie. *Ain’t I a Woman?*. *The Sojourner Truth Project*. <<https://www.thejournertruthproject.com/compare-the-speeches>>

<sup>10</sup> Trodd, Zoe. *Am I Still Not a Man and a Brother?*. *Historians against Slavery*. <<https://www.historiansagainstsavery.org/main/2014/08/am-i-still-not-a-man-and-a-brother/>>

<sup>11</sup> Crawford, Elizabeth. *Am I not a Woman and a Sister?*. *CommonLit*. <<https://www.commonlit.org/en/texts/am-i-not-a-woman-and-a-sister>>

but they were people who saw it as derogative as it showed an enslaved African begging for freedom and generosity. At that time, around the 1820s, abolitionists used it to stop slave trade and free all slaves. The other term, *Am I not a Woman and a Sister?* appeared much later in the abolitionist newspaper *Genius of Universal Emancipation* and was widely used by women in Britain to end slavery everywhere, but also to be able to speak up for their rights. It is believed that this served as an inspiration for Sojourner to use *Ain't I a Woman?* asserting her gender. Sojourner gave speeches all throughout her life about abolition and women's rights and stated that women's rights were essential to person's wellbeing and the whole humanity as every person had a mother: "Then that little man in black there, he says women can't have as much rights as men, 'cause Christ wasn't a woman! Where did your Christ come from? Where did Christ come from? From God and a woman! Man had nothing to do with Him." Her attempts for equality can be best described in her own words: "Children, who made your skin white? Was is not God? Who made mine black? Was it not the same God? Am I to blame, therefore, because my skin is black?... Does not God love colored children as well as white children? And did not the same Savior die to save the one as well as the other."<sup>12</sup> Sojourner was a fierce advocate for women's rights as she even supported white feminists for the fear that black men might get rights before women, which would mean that they would be able to dominate over black women.

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<sup>12</sup> History.com. Editors. *Sojourner Truth. HISTORY.* A&E Television Networks. Last updated 25 May 2021. <<https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/sojourner-truth>>

## 2. The first wave of black feminism

The first wave of black feminism emerged out of the Abolitionist Movement and reached its highest peak during the Women's Suffrage Movement around 1920s. Sojourner Truth is often credited as the predecessor of the black feminist movement as her speeches about women's rights encouraged many women to take action. During the 1890s and the 1900s, black women started becoming more active in the organization and founding of their clubs – in 1896 they founded the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) and in 1890 the *New Era Club* which became a turning point in black female history as one of the first journals founded and led by black women. The main purpose of the journal was advocacy for the rights of black women. One of the most known black female journalists was Ida B. Wells-Barnett. Through her writing she aspired to depict conditions and issues that black people experienced, especially black women. Like many other black women, Ida was born into slavery as well, but her parents taught her the importance of education which then made way to her work as a journalist and a feminist. Another important feminist in the first wave of black feminism was Mary Church Terrell who became a strong advocate for women's rights and anti-lynching. Like Ida, Mary believed that education was crucial as it would help black people to advance in their life. Terrell also believed that uplifting black women would signify the uplifting of an entire race, so her words "Lifting as we climb" became the motto of the National Association of Colored Women. Although Terrell's activist work focused mostly on black women and anti-lynching campaigns, she also spoke against brutality, Jim Crow Laws and segregation in public places, and eventually in 1953 the Supreme Court decided that segregation in public space was unconstitutional. Terrell, as many other black feminists, believed that white feminists were not able to and did not want to understand the struggles of black women, as black women were still not able to participate in organizations led by white feminists making the gap between them even bigger, which became very evident during the second wave.

Black female writers, historians, journalists, scientists, poets, teachers had been around for quite some time, but they were mostly excluded from public space and leadership positions. So, during the first wave of black feminism, the number of educated black women became much higher than before and they were starting to slowly emerge in the public sphere. The number of black female writers also became greater, with many women writing about their own experiences or about experiences of all black women throughout the history. Main topics that black women spoke about were the issues of race and gender, inequality between black and

white women and black women and black men, education, property rights, bodily autonomy, childcare and many others. Speaking about these issues in public also became quite common, with Mary Church Terrell delivering one such speech at the National American Women's Suffrage Association at the Columbia Theatre in Washington. Her speech, called *The Progress of Colored Women* addressed that black women could not have control over their bodies or properties on which they lived. What was more, they were not able to get access to education the way white women did, making the percentage of educated black women very small: "While those of the dominant race have a variety of trades and pursuits from which they may choose, the woman through whose veins one drop of African blood is known to flow is limited to a pitiable few."<sup>13</sup> The issues of hard work and neglecting children is also central in her speech, as these were the issues that lasted since the beginning of slavery in America. Black women had to endure hard labour all day long, while at the same time neglecting their children for that reason, making the mortality of black children immense. This was why she supported the establishment of nurseries and kindergartens for black children as those were non-existent during that time. Terrell challenged how white people would view black people - "It is unfortunate, but it is true, that a majority of the dominant race in this country insists upon judging the Negro by his lowest and most vicious representatives instead of by the more intelligent and worthy classes." She constantly urged people not to judge by appearance, but by character of a person, and teach children the same. Terrell also mentioned hard-working black women whose names would never be known, but who made through their sacrifice a great contribution towards the entire black race - "In the backwoods, remote from the civilization and comforts of city or town, on the plantations, reeking with ignorance and vice, colored women may be found battling with evils which such conditions always entail. Many a heroine, of whom the world will never hear, has thus sacrificed her life to her race, amid surroundings and in the face of many privations which only martyrs can bear."<sup>14</sup> Although Terrell was not in good relations with many white feminists, she did urge them to help black women and black children, especially because children deserved to have a better future - "In the name of American children, black childhood as well as white, colored women are asking their white sisters to do all in their power to make the future of our boys and girls as bright and as promising

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<sup>13</sup> Terrell, Mary Church. *The Progress of colored women. Internet Archive*. New York: Congregational Rooms, Oberlin College Library. (pp. 5) <<https://archive.org/details/progressofcolore0000terr/page/10/mode/2up>>

<sup>14</sup> Terrell, Mary Church. *The Progress of colored women. Internet Archive*. New York: Congregational Rooms, Oberlin College Library. (pp. 6) <<https://archive.org/details/progressofcolore0000terr/page/10/mode/2up>>

as should be that of every child born in a country which owes its existence to the love of liberty in the human heart.”<sup>15</sup>

Anna Julia Cooper, one of the most known female black writers and feminists in the first wave, published a book called “A Voice from the South by a Black Woman of the South” in which she gives insights about racism, sexism, class, importance of education, status of black women in the society and their rights. Cooper was born in slavery and experienced many injustices in her life, regarding male privilege, discrimination on the account of her skin, sexism and other. In the book, she comprised essays and speeches she delivered in which she spoke about oppressed status that black women had – black women had ‘double jeopardy’ as they had to deal with discrimination against both gender and race, one of the central issues throughout whole black feminism. She was especially concerned with the education of black women and talked about uplifting black women, just like Terrell did, and placed importance on respecting other people’s differences as each person had a role in this world and contributed to in a different and special way. Cooper understood that black men and women shared many problems, but she did criticize them for being unsupportive about women’s rights<sup>16</sup>. Cooper, Terrel, Stewart and Wells-Barnett all emphasized the importance of education and uplift of black women in their speeches and works as necessary components which would help black women advance in society. Cooper did not only criticize unsupportive black men, but also everyone who denied basic human rights to people, including white feminists, white men and the institutions. In her book, Cooper mentions how it is not up to white men to speak about black person’s experience, which correlates with the fact that there is little information about black history, especially the history of black women. Only a small percentage of the history at that time was written by black people, and very little in general. Over the years, that became the mission of black people to record their own history, otherwise it would be completely erased. Cooper especially encouraged black women to speak for themselves and not let others speak about them.

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<sup>15</sup> Terrell, Mary Church. *The Progress of colored women*. *Internet Archive*. New York: Congretional Rooms, Oberlin College Library. (pp. 11) <<https://archive.org/details/progressofcolore0000terr/page/10/mode/2up>>

<sup>16</sup> Sheftall, Beverly Guy. *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*. New York, The New Press, 1995. (pp. 43)

## **2.1. The second generation of black feminists in the first wave**

The next generation of black women in the first wave continued where feminists like Cooper and Terrell stopped. A member of NACW, Nannie Burroughs, became known for speaking about sexism occurring in churches and criticized the church for not being involved in women suffrage and helping black women to advance. She was also one of the founders of the Women's Convention which was connected to the National Baptist Convention (one of the largest organizations of black women in the United States) and the National Training School for Women and Girl whose main goal was to prepare black women for employment (1909). A few years later, World War I broke out in 1914, meaning that many women, both black and white, had to leave their domestic jobs in order to fill in the jobs that men used to do. Unfortunately for black women, many of them were fired after the end of the war and they were forced to return home and because of that, the Women Wage Earners' Association was formed in Washington in 1920 with the goal of uniting black female workers. The same year, in 1920, the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment was passed guaranteeing all women the right to vote; some black women did manage to vote, but many were restricted on the basis of race, place where they lived, age, etc. With the passing of 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, the struggle of black women did not stop. Around that time, black women like Elise McDougald (teacher and journalist), Margaret Murray (the founder of the Tuskegee Woman's Club) and Amy Jacques Garvey (a journalist and an activist) continued in their efforts for black women to achieve their rights. Garvey especially focused on the working class, exploitation of black people in the South and the Caribbean, gender oppression, racism and capitalism. She also motivated black women to participate in the public sphere as she believed that women were central to the black liberation and supported women all around the world who were standing against any sort of oppression. While big families were quite common during slavery, in the 1920s and the 1930s the fertility rates in black women declined as 'women must be free to choose motherhood', stated by William E.B. Du Bois in *The Damnation of Women*. Another breakthrough that happened during that time was educating black women on birth control and the establishment of birth control clinics. One of the first campaigns for birth control, the American Birth Control League, was founded by Margaret Sanger in 1921, while the Women's Political Association of Harlem founded in 1918 was the first black organization that advocated birth control. During the 1940s and World War II, many black women emigrated to the North to find better jobs, but were met with low-paying jobs, bad conditions overall and discrimination. Claudia Jones became one of the spokeswomen for



the rights of black women in the 1940s and stated in *Political Affairs* in 1947 that black women “as worker, as Negroes, and as women were the most oppressed stratum of the whole population”<sup>17</sup>. She heavily criticized racism present in white feminism and bad conditions that black women had to endure calling them dehumanizing. The first wave of black feminism started to slowly fade away at the end of the 1940s until the Civil Rights Movement, which marked the beginning of the second wave of feminism and black feminism.

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<sup>17</sup> Sheftall, Beverly Guy. *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*. New York, The New Press, 1995. (pp. 13)

### 3. The second wave of black feminism

The second wave of feminism started emerging around 1950s and 1960s when the Civil Rights Movement began and lasted until late 1980s and early 1990s. The second wave was also led by educated white women and the contrast between them and black women remained. Betty Friedan, who is considered to be the leader of the second wave, wrote a book called “Feminine Mystique”<sup>18</sup> in which she described the lives of women in the 1950s, but failed to address women of other races and lesbian women. That era of the Civil Rights Movement and the second wave of black feminism is called the ‘angry decade’ because of racial segregation, discrimination and sexism that continued since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. During the second wave, more black women took part in founding many organizations for the rights of black women including the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO), Salsa Soul Sisters, Combahee River Collective, Black Women Organized for Action (BWOFA), Black Women’s Liberation Committee, Black Women’s Alliance and Third World Women’s Alliance among many others. The purpose of these organizations was to help black women gain rights in all aspects including work, gender, property, education, maternity leave, etc. Among all these organizations, one of the most important is considered to be the Salsa Soul Sisters<sup>19</sup> as it was the first ever organization devoted to the rights of lesbian women of colour. The organization was founded by Reverend Delores Jackson in 1974 and consisted mostly of black women, Asian American, Native American and Latin women. The organization’s main purposes were to ‘create safe space and supportive community’ and fight for the rights of non-white lesbian women as they were the most neglected group of all. The members of the organization were involved in all sorts of activities including poetry, singing and dancing; they even established their own newspaper *The Salsa Soul Gayzette* which published poetry, artwork, short stories and more. One of the members, Cassandra Grant, recalled saying: “We were a village taking care of itself. Salsa Soul was a catalyst for an emerging community that addressed the question, how do we live a better life.”

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<sup>18</sup> Burkett, Elinor. *Feminism*. *Britannica*. <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/feminism/The-suffrage-movement>>

<sup>19</sup> Exhibit: *Salsa Soul Sisters*. Brooklyn College Library.

<<http://www.brooklyn.cuny.edu/web/academics/centers/wolfe/events/stonewall-50/salsa-soul-sisters.php>>

When it came to the system in America, it was built in a way that did not enable black people to thrive, and while white women did not like the role of being housewives, black women had no choice at all, they struggled to find any job which was in most cases low paying. That era is widely known for the economic exploitation of black women whose jobs could easily reduce them to a state of enslavement, against which many worked for decades. While black men were paid less than white men, and white women paid less than both white and black men, black women were earning the least out of all four groups. Black women had to deal with a number of problems while working in the industry besides just low pay, including constant harassment and discrimination based on skin colour. Another big issue that arose was sterilization of black women – since the beginning of slavery, many black women were encouraged and forced to give birth to as many children as possible who would also become slaves, then in the first wave of black feminism birth control became more common for black women, as it was believed that they should have children only if they wanted to, but now in the second wave, sterilization was promoted to keep the population of black people in control. Moreover, before birth control pills were introduced in the United States, they were first tested on Puerto Rican women and poor black women who served as lab rats or guinea pigs. Many women suffered from various effects and even death, and it only came to light when middle-class white women experienced the effects of it. This sterilization comes in contrast with encouraging black women to have children, but it is presumed that it started because black people started to rise against oppression. With the Civil Rights Movement, many black people were enraged at the society and many riots took place across United States, so with a higher number of black people, those riots and protests would have escalated even more and would have led to a change in the system. On top of all that, organizations such as the Association for Voluntary Sterilization were formed in order to promote sterilization among women. What angered black women were the threats of cutting all sorts of funds that they received if they refused the procedure, not to mention that it was often a painful procedure. Besides birth control and sterilization, laws regarding abortion are considered as another form of oppression as death rates among black women and other non-white women were significantly higher than those of white women – many black women had low access to safe birth control methods and legal abortion. All these issues led to many attempts to end all sorts of oppression - it was crucial for black women to be completely liberated so that change could happen and each member of the society had to take part in those attempts.

### 3.1.Black female writers in the second wave of black feminism

Notable black women who marked the second wave of black feminism included Angela Davis, Alice Walker, bell hooks, Michelle Wallace, Florynce Kennedy, Margaret Sloan, Barbara Smith, Toni Morrison, Audre Lorde, Patricia Hill Collins, Maya Angelou, Pauli Murray, Aileen Hernandez, Shirley Chisholm, Fannie Lou Hamer and Akasha Gloria Hull. All these women advocated for the rights of black people, especially the rights of black women. Through their works and activism, they tried to give to the public an insight into black women's lives, circumstances and issues that they had to deal with on a daily basis. They did not only talk about struggles they were facing now, but also the struggles that many black women had faced before them and how oppression was still present. Most known works during that era include books *Women, Race and Class* written by Angela Davis in 1981 and *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker from 1982. Davis's book explores history of black people since the beginning of slavery to the time when the book was written. It explores topics such as the position black women had during slavery, abolition, racism that black women experienced during the suffrage movement, racism, education, black women working in industry and reproductive rights<sup>20</sup>. The book also explains how many white women were seen as feminine, gentle and nurturing, while black women were considered more masculine as they worked in factories, in the field, and even coal mines. *Women, Race and Class* is Davis's more known book, but she has other works dealing with black women's issues as well, such as her essay *Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves* in which she challenges various stereotypes about black women and criticizes the view that a black men's experience is the norm, while black women are completely forgotten. *The Color Purple* is considered to be one of the most important works on black women in second wave. The book's characters are fictional, but their struggles are not, the main character Celie could have easily been any black woman in the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Alice Walker wrote in the preface that the book's purpose was to "explore the difficult path of someone who starts out in life already a spiritual captive, but who, through her own courage and the help of the other, breaks free into the realization that she, like Nature itself, is a radiant expression of the heretofore perceived as quite distant Divine". Celie represents every black woman who had no voice and would endure oppression coming at her from all sides – beatings and rape by her father, rape by her husband, loss of children, responsibility to care for everyone but herself. Through this book, Alice wants to show to other black women that it is

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<sup>20</sup> Davis, Angela Y. *Women, Race and Class*. New York, Vintage Books, 1983. (pp. 117)

possible to break free from the struggle and fight for yourself no matter how much time it takes – it took Celie years to finally speak up for herself and take control over her life. In the book, Celie is also surrounded by many black women who encourage her – her sister Nettie encouraged her to fight for herself unless she wants to live a miserable life, Kate, her husband’s sister told her she deserved happiness, but she needed to fight as no one is going to do it for her. Shug Avery and Sofia were two women that played a major role in Celie’s life – Sofia was the one who helped Celie stand up for herself, Sofia never let anyone beat, humiliate or abuse her, while Shug helped Celie explore womanhood, to enjoy life and find passion. The purpose of these other women in the book was to show how substantial support from other women was, the women who were probably going through the same problems and were able to overcome them. This support also shows the importance and strength in unity. Black women have found their courage, voice and value through the support of other black women. The theme of abuse is present throughout *The Color Purple*, Alice wants to show to black women that it is always possible to stand up to the abuser and that it is something no women should put up with in the first place. Growing up in a rural area, Celie did not know anything about the world, just like many other women of that time, and through character Nettie, Alice demonstrates that it is important to go out and see the world as there is much more than misery. It is possible to achieve success, to dress nicely, to have your own car or house as those were dreams that black women considered unachievable, but it was necessary to take action. Toward the end of the book, Celie owns a successful clothing brand and is finally happy, giving the reader the main message, also stated in the preface, that through adversity it is possible to reach happiness. The novel explores other themes as well, including race, rape, education, attitude and sexuality. Pauli Murray, a lawyer, professor, civil rights activist and feminist, also wrote about issues of black women. In 1970 Murray wrote an essay *The Liberation of Black Women* in which she introduced the term “Jane Crow”<sup>21</sup> referring to institutional barriers, assumptions, attitudes and stereotypes which prevented black women from reaching their full potential as equal members of the society. In the essay she analysed the ‘double jeopardy’ or ‘double burden’ referring to racism and sexism and the immense strength black women needed to have in order to overcome those issues. She mentions the efforts of former feminists, Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Mary Church Terrell, women active in the Civil Rights Movement like Rosa Parks, Daisy Bates and Gloria Richardson, but also the efforts of many women who will never be known to the public, but who have contributed a great deal to the advancement of black women’s rights. While many of

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<sup>21</sup> Sheftall, Beverly Guy. *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*. New York, The New Press, 1995. (pp. 185)

the issues black women have been dealing with have been the same issues for years, Michele Wallace introduced two more problems – that is the problem of black macho man and the myth of being a superwoman in the novel of the same name *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* written in 1974. Wallace described in the novel how black men felt superior<sup>22</sup> towards black women and failed to address their issues, even more, many of those men refused to support women in the public sphere which made Wallace angry. She also stated that Black Power Movement only empowered black men and how black men pursued white women in order to uplift their status in society. On the other hand, she introduced the myth of a black superwoman, meaning a woman who worked hard, who had to sacrifice everything for others, was independent, always appeared strong no matter what, did not have emotions or sympathy, which Wallace states is hard to achieve. It seemed as if black women had to maintain that image of strong black woman at all times, especially in public, and if they had problems, they should hide them.

Four years earlier than Wallace's novel, in 1970, several books were published, including Audre Lorde's *Cables to Rage*, Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Cade's *The Black Woman: An Anthology* and Shirley Chisholm's *Unbought and Unbossed*, which marked the awakening among black women. This literacy awakening helped black women to define precisely what their problems were, how they differentiated from problems of white feminists and what their goals and priorities were. This marked the beginning of black liberation movement which was supported by the National Black Feminist Organization. Black women agreed that 'there can't be liberation for half the race', and that same year gathered in a meeting comprised of black feminists only with the aim of fighting against racism, sexism, domestic abuse, and fight for the better childcare, rights of black lesbian women, women's liberation and sexuality, education, etc. As a result, another organization was formed called the Combahee River Collective in 1975 with the goal of raising female black consciousness and working on a number of problems including prison reform, rape, reproductive rights, racism within white feminism, homophobia and much more. Members of the Combahee River Collective believed that "black women are inherently valuable, that our liberation is a necessity not as an adjunct to somebody else's but because of our need as human persons for autonomy"<sup>23</sup> as written in their statement. The members also stated that they did not advocate separation from black men,

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<sup>22</sup> Wallace, Michelle. *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*. 1979, The Dial Press, Verso, 1990. (pp. 14, 29)

<sup>23</sup> Sheftall, Beverly Guy. *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*. New York, The New Press, 1995. (pp. 231)

rather unity, but they still struggled with black men when it came to sexism. Issues of race, gender and black feminism became topics of various black journals, including *The Black Scholar* and *Black Books Bulletin*. Black men also gave back their response to black feminists, Robert Staples's *The Myth of Black Macho: A Response to Angry Black Feminists* being just one of them. Black men would accuse black women of bashing them which all led to various conflicts between them. Barbara Smith presented various myths surrounding black feminism stating that black women were still not liberated as most people believed, just because a black woman had a job and a family did not mean that she was liberated, racism was not the only reason why black women were oppressed and feminism did not mean that black women hated men – Smith wrote “Women’s desire for fairness and safety in our lives does not necessitate hating men”. She brings forth issues including killings, rape and abuse of black women and states that women’s problems are serious and not something that should be taken lightly. As the years went on, black women were still very active in feminism with many works being published throughout the 1980s – some notable works include Paula Giddings’ *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Sex and Race in America* (1984), Barbara Smith’s *Home Girl: A Black Feminist Anthology* (1983), Deborah Gray White’s *Ar’n’t I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (1985) and many other. The second wave of black feminism slowly merged into the 1990s when the third wave began.

#### 4. The third wave of black feminism

The third wave of feminism emerged in the mid-1990s and simultaneously with the white feminism emerged the third wave of black feminism. The third wave became more inclusive of other women, including black women, Native American, Latin, Asian American and lesbian women. Even though white feminism became more inclusive, many black women believed that there was still a lot of racism present and white women barely did anything to stop it in their organizations and movement, and that was the reason why third wave was also separated. The phrase ‘third-wave feminism’<sup>24</sup> was coined by Rebecca Walker, a daughter of Alice Walker, one of the most known feminists during the second wave. The aim of the third wave was to redefine priorities and ideas about feminism, womanhood, gender, beauty, sexuality, transgender rights, black consciousness, maternity-leave, domestic violence, abortion and much more. Additionally, women stopped portraying themselves as weak, and began to take more control in their life, become more assertive and powerful. The fight for black women’s rights continued from the second wave. In January 1994, over 2000 educated black women gathered at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology during a national conference called *Black Women in the Academy: Defending Our Name, 1894-1994*. Many of these women were heavily criticized including Johnetta Cole and Lani Guinier who worked at MIT. Not only were black feminists criticized, but many were fired from their jobs because of their political views.

Notable women in the third wave of black feminism include Darlene Clark Hine, Barbara Omolade, Shirley Chisholm, Evelyn Hammonds, Paula Giddings, Pearl Cleage, Rebecca Walker, Veronica Chambers, Joan Morgan, Lisa Jones, E. Frances White and many second-wave feminists like Barbara Smith, bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins, Toni Morrison and Angela Davis. Darlene Clark Hine’s work focused on black women, immigration of black women, sexual exploitation, rape and negative stereotypes about sexuality. Shirley Chisholm advocated for black women’s liberation and legalization of abortion since the beginning of second wave. She publicly spoke about legal abortion and its importance for black women, stating that it was much more important for black women to be safe, then to be negatively impacted by an unwanted pregnancy, but she was met with opposition by people who believed

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<sup>24</sup> Springer, Kimberly. *Third Wave Black Feminism?*. JSTOR. The University of Chicago Press, 2002., Vol. 27, No. 4 (pp. 1063). < [https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/339636?seq=5#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/339636?seq=5#metadata_info_tab_contents) >



it was not morally right. Moreover, she spoke about various disadvantages of black women stating that it was so because they were women, rather than the fact they were black. Pearl Cleage focused on the problem of violence against black women and based her response *What Can I Say* on the murder of Nicole Simpson and her friend Ronald Goldman. Cleage thinks that there are many ‘Nicole’s’ around the world which are tortured, beaten and killed every day by their abusive ex-partners. A woman who leaves an abusive partner is more likely to be killed, so Cleage emphasizes that women have to be protected and that there should be laws protecting them. This problem ties closely to Michele Wallace’s notion of macho men who view women as inferior. Cleage questions whether women who deal with abusive ex-partners should be armed and protect themselves instead on waiting for someone to help. It seems that with the beginning of the third wave problems started resurfacing day by day. Besides sexual and domestic abuse, rape and drugs, one major problem arose in the 1990s and that was the case of AIDS – in 1990 black people would die on daily basis from HIV, and by 1992 the situation was much worse – around fifty-two percent of HIV cases in women were black women. This major issue Evelyn Hammonds discussed in her works along with the lack of health care for black women and high number of affected women. While media placed the blame on black women for being reckless, being drugs abusers and bad parents as they could pass AIDS onto their children, Cleage takes on the role to defend these women – she states that many are poor, lack basic health care and are helpless, while others use such conditions to blame them for being irresponsible and not having control over their lives. Cleage challenges the stereotypes about AIDS, how people with it are affected and the emotional trauma that many endure. Moreover, many black feminists had to deal with harsh criticism from other black women who believed they were traitors or sell-outs – Veronica Chambers recalls being called such names for placing importance on education of black women. While many black women did unite in their fight against oppression, there was still a gap between them and women who did not support them. Another issue that became more talked about was the fact that many black women were single mothers raising children on their own while working long hours. It became a sort of a norm for black fathers to leave their families and never appear again, leaving black women struggling even more if they were uneducated or poor. While Michelle Wallace first introduced the myth of the superwoman, Joan Morgan brings it into focus stating that it became a standard image of a black woman – to appear strong no matter what. Black women were expected to always appear strong in front of everyone and in every situation writing “No matter how bad shit gets, handle

it alone, quietly, and with dignity”. Morgan introduced the phrase ‘strongblackwoman’<sup>25</sup> and abbreviates it to ‘SBW’ referring to the stereotype of always appearing strong – those three words became inseparable and it was an expectation in the black community to be that all the time. To be strong meant to be independent, but Morgan, like Wallace, believes that such image is hard to maintain. Morgan states that pretending to be strong only brings more problems and pain while trying to hide it at the same time. Similarly, Veronica Chambers stated that she too was expected to appear strong and when she could not, she was accused of being ungrateful. It seems that black women were not only in the battle with the system that oppressed them, but also in the battle with each other.

#### **4.1. Black feminism in hip-hop**

Additionally, black feminism entered many songs of female artists as hip-hop became big in the music industry in the 1990s. Patricia Hill Collins argued that hip-hop reached far greater number of women than just a small percentage of women who want to find women’s studies at colleges. She also argues that hip-hop itself is a response by young black and Latin people who were denied access to colleges, schooling, health care, recreational activities and many more<sup>26</sup>. Collins states that music became a classroom for often troubled youth, but just because it is educational for people, does not mean it is not problematic – many artists, whether male or female, rapped about poor living conditions, drugs, abuse, women, violence between black people and police, police brutality, oppression, etc. Many of these themes were controversial at the time and those artists were often looked down by the media and public, but praised by other artists for speaking the truth – many rappers stated that they rapped about their reality, their day-to-day lives, problems they endured throughout their lives, and it was not something that should be silenced. While male rappers were involved in all sorts of controversies around ‘gangsta rap’, female rappers became the voice of many silenced women. With their songs, female rappers challenged and destroyed images and stereotypes posed by other people about black women. Many female rappers would also give their responses to male rappers who would use all sorts of derogatory terms to disrespect and objectify black women.

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<sup>25</sup> Springer, Kimberly. *Third Wave Black Feminism? JSTOR*. The University of Chicago Press, 2002., Vol. 27, No. 4 (pp. 1069). < [https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/339636?seq=5#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/339636?seq=5#metadata_info_tab_contents)>

<sup>26</sup> Collins, Patricia Hill. *From Black Power to Hip Hop, Racism, Nationalism, and Feminism*. Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 2006. (pp. 191)

For example, Queen Latifah criticized men who would insult black women and encouraged black women to unite and work together towards a greater purpose, female rap group Salt-N-Pepa encouraged women's self-esteem, ability to express themselves and creativity. Other female rappers, like Yo-Yo, Lil' Kim, Foxy Brown and Missy Elliot used their sexuality as a means of empowerment and freedom. They were loud, provocative, were not afraid to speak their mind and shock the public with their appearance and lyrics. Lauryn Hill, another female artist, used her music to connect to women who had difficulties while growing up and encourage them to have better lives. Alicia Keyes often sang how black women should be able to express themselves freely without judgment, that they deserved respect and love, and should not be judged based on stereotypes made over almost a century ago. Many of these songs were used as a way to uplift and unite black women, they were personal expressions of what it meant to be a black woman in America. It seems that black feminism took a different path when it comes to hip-hop, but it shows that women have managed to find their own ways of expressing themselves and fighting for their rights while at the same time not fitting in the norm – Queen Latifah once stated that she did not act in a way that society expected of her: “I am not dainty. I do not hold back my opinions. I don't stay behind a man. But I'm not here to live by somebody else's standards. I'm defining what a woman is for myself. Simply put, I am not interested in subscribing to what society had decided for half of humankind. I am an individual”<sup>27</sup>.

Patricia Hill Collins also points out the constant mockery of black women who were often depicted as big, black, aggressive and having short hair. Many black comedians used this stereotype for their comedy shows to make fun of them - Collins and Jill Nelson state that such acts became some sort of a tradition and those women became symbols of ridicule in the society<sup>28</sup>. Many women who fit those stereotypes and were loud and had opinions were often called ‘bitches’ which all created a bad picture of black women and put them all in the same category. Such terms were derogatory, but many black women decided to use them to their advantage, so being called a ‘bitch’ was used by women to empower each other, rather than insult. Black women who were comfortable with their sexuality and being called a ‘bitch’ made up for a deadly combination – these women were often described as being able to handle their business, they were loud, confident, materialistic and did not care about opinions of other people.

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<sup>27</sup> Collins, Patricia Hill. *From Black Power to Hip Hop, Racism, Nationalism, and Feminism*. Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 2006. (pp. 196)

<sup>28</sup> Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Sexual Politics*. New York, Routledge, 2004. (pp. 125)

The third wave of feminism is said to have lasted from the 1990s when it was most active and throughout the 2000s to approximately 2012, when it is estimated that a new, the fourth wave of feminism began with its main issues being sexual harassment, body shaming, rape culture and Me Too movement. The key component became wide use of social media through which issues could be addressed to wider audience. Although it was thought that feminism ended around the 1990s as that is what the media portrayed, feminism still remained very active and is not near its end.

## Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to discuss the status of black women in America from the 18<sup>th</sup> century when they were brought to America as slaves to modern time. The status of black women in America was the lowest among other groups such as black men, white women and white men. Black women endured more abuse than black men did, they were often raped, beaten, abused and forced to give birth – black women were known as ‘human breeders’ in order to secure another generation of slaves. Slowly black people started rising against slavery and with the Abolitionist Movement they managed to abolish slavery. Even though the slavery was abolished, black people were still discriminated on the basis of race and gender – their fight for freedom and gaining rights continued. With the Abolitionist Movement, black women demanded their rights as well, but their needs were often neglected. That is when Sojourner Truth came into picture – she began advocating for women’s rights through her speeches, among which her most known is *Ain’t I a Woman?*. Through her activism, Sojourner Truth inspired many black women who followed her example and that is why she is often regarded as the predecessor of black feminism. The first wave of feminism began in the 1900s with the Suffrage Movement in which white women demanded their right to vote.

Black women demanded their rights too, but were excluded by white feminists and completely ignored by the public which marked the beginning of black feminism. Unlike white women, black women had to deal with more problems, mostly because they were discriminated on the basis of their race and gender, which Kimberlé Crenshaw calls intersectionality. Anna Julia Cooper, Ida B. Wells-Barnett and Mary Church Terrell were most known feminists during the first wave. Through their works, speeches, essays and personal experience they described struggles of black women and encouraged them to stand up and fight for their rights. They also emphasized the importance of education, advocated for better health care, childcare, better working conditions and much more. The second wave of black feminism occurred simultaneously with the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and the 1960s, as discrimination was nowhere near its end. With each new generation of feminists, new problems arose. Black women were still excluded from white feminism and their struggles were rarely addressed. The second wave and the Civil Rights Movement was marked with racial segregation, black lesbians, various organizations formed for black women specifically as many problems black women had were rarely addressed. The era of the second wave was filled with educated black women who encouraged other women to educate themselves, works like *The Color Purple* by

Alice Walker, *Women, Race and Class* by Angela Davis, *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* by Michelle Wallace and *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison, were written.

These women did not only write about issues of the African American people, but they took action as well, inspiring other people to follow their example. The second wave started to slowly fade away in 1980 and the 1990s when the third wave of black feminism began. While white feminism became more inclusive in the third wave, many black women still felt that their needs were still neglected. The third wave dealt with many issues as well, such as domestic violence, abuse, drugs, abortion, AIDS, derogatory terms used against black women, sexism, racism, the list goes on. What was different in this wave was that writers and activists were not the only ones who considered themselves feminists, black feminism became present in songs of many female rappers who used their voice and sexuality to speak about black women, their struggles, to encourage and uplift them. Black feminism was divided into three waves, but each time their purpose was the same – to gain rights and freedom, help other black women, end racism and sexism and to uplift the entire race.

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