

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

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One of the very few Black women's studies books is entitled *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us are Brave*.¹ I have chosen this title as a point of departure in my efforts to develop a Black feminist criticism² because it sets forth a problematic consequence of the tendency to treat race and gender as mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis.³ In this talk, I want to examine how this tendency is perpetuated by a single-axis framework that is dominant in antidiscrimination law and that is also reflected in feminist theory and antiracist politics.

I will center Black women in this analysis in order to contrast the multidimensionality of Black women's experience with the single-axis analysis that distorts these experiences. Not only will this juxtaposition reveal how Black women are theoretically erased, it will also illustrate how this framework imports its own theoretical limitations that undermine efforts to broaden feminist and an-

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¹ Gloria T. Hull, et al, eds (The Feminist Press, 1982).

² For other work setting forth a Black feminist perspective on law, see Judy Scales-Trent, *Black Women and the Constitution: Finding Our Place, Asserting Our Rights (Voices of Experience: New Responses to Gender Discourse)*, 24 Harv CR-CL L Rev 9 (1989); Regina Austin, *Sapphire-Bound!*, forthcoming in *Wisc Women's L J* (1989); Angela Harris, *Race and Essentialism in Feminist Legal Theory* (unpublished manuscript on file with author); and Paulette M. Caldwell, *A Hair Piece* (unpublished manuscript on file with author).

³ The most common linguistic manifestation of this analytical dilemma is represented in the conventional usage of the term "Blacks and women." Although it may be true that some people mean to include Black women in either "Blacks" or "women," the context in which the term is used actually suggests that often Black women are not considered. See, for example, Elizabeth Spelman, *The Inessential Woman* 114-15 (Beacon Press, 1988) (discussing an article on Blacks and women in the military where "the racial identity of those identified as 'women' does not become explicit until reference is made to Black women, at which point it also becomes clear that the category of women excludes Black women"). It seems that if Black women were explicitly included, the preferred term would be either "Blacks and white women" or "Black men and all women."

ently, or that they are different and harmed by being treated the same. But I cannot say both.

This apparent contradiction is but another manifestation of the conceptual limitations of the single-issue analyses that intersectionality challenges. The point is that Black women can experience discrimination in any number of ways and that the contradiction arises from our assumptions that their claims of exclusion must be unidirectional. Consider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination.

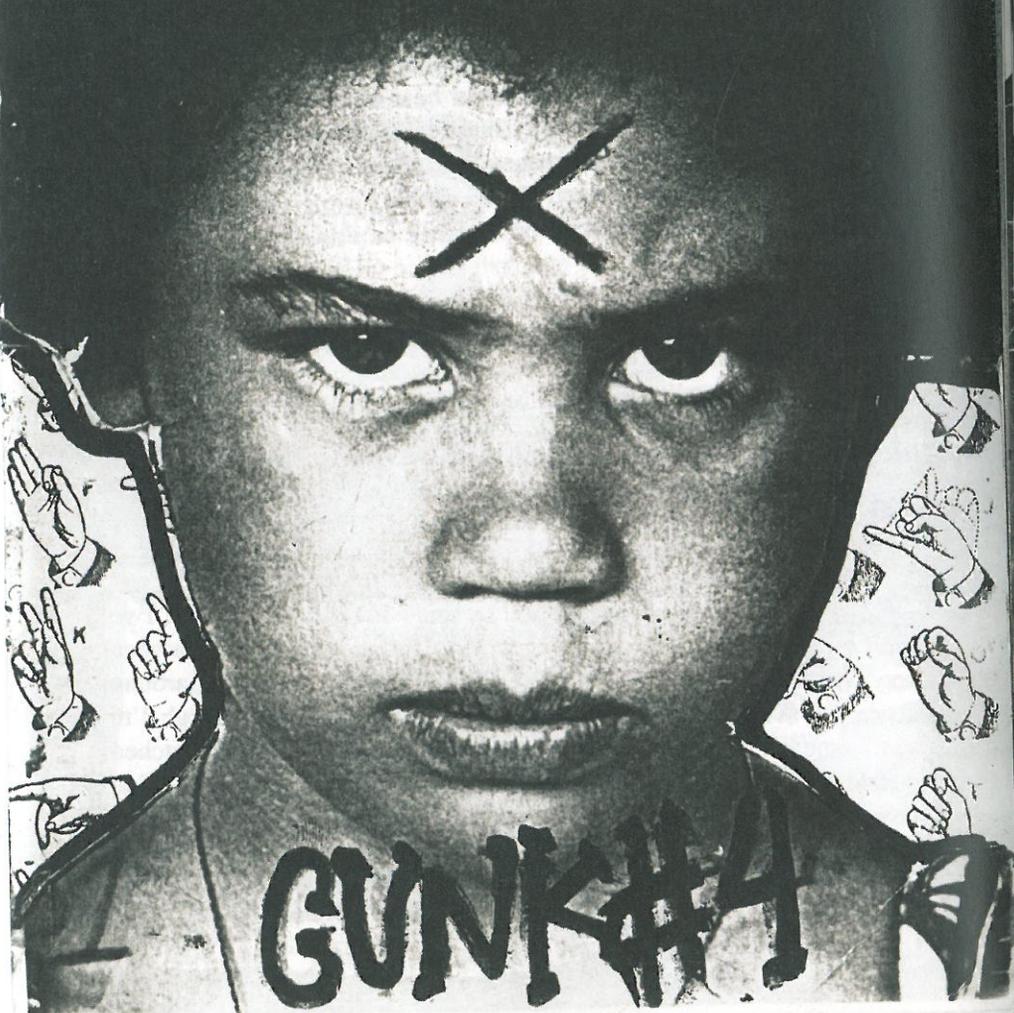
Judicial decisions which premise intersectional relief on a showing that Black women are specifically recognized as a class are analogous to a doctor's decision at the scene of an accident to treat an accident victim only if the injury is recognized by medical insurance. Similarly, providing legal relief only when Black women show that their claims are based on race or on sex is analogous to calling an ambulance for the victim only after the driver responsible for the injuries is identified. But it is not always easy to reconstruct an accident: Sometimes the skid marks and the injuries simply indicate that they occurred simultaneously, frustrating efforts to determine which driver caused the harm. In these cases the tendency seems to be that no driver is held responsible, no treatment is administered, and the involved parties simply get back in their cars and zoom away.

To bring this back to a non-metaphorical level, I am suggesting that Black women can experience discrimination in ways that are both similar to and different from those experienced by white women and Black men. Black women sometimes experience discrimination in ways similar to white women's experiences; sometimes they share very similar experiences with Black men. Yet often they experience double-discrimination—the combined effects of practices which discriminate on the basis of race, and on the basis of sex. And sometimes, they experience discrimination as Black women—not the sum of race and sex discrimination, but as Black women.

Black women's experiences are much broader than the general categories that discrimination discourse provides. Yet the continued insistence that Black women's demands and needs be filtered

HAVE YOU SEEN ME?

"What Degenerate Created this Abortion?"





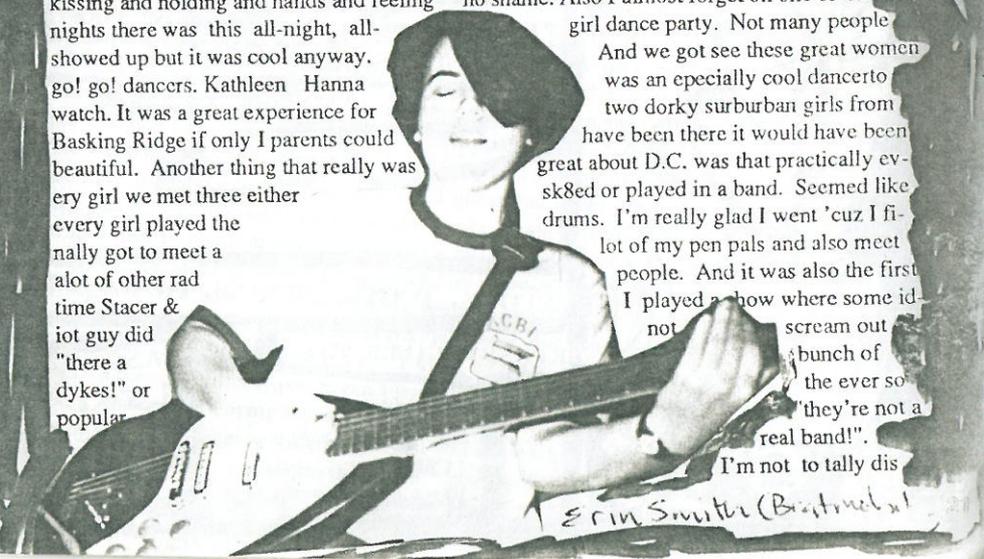
we hadn't heard of these dumb D.C. bands. He went on to babble about how D.C. was the scene of all scenes and that we were really missing out. Duh! I found out later after this ultra cool guy saw us play at the outside show, he couldn't believe how punk we were. Duh! Duh! Basically alot people in D.C. annoyed me with thier scene antics and they're "way cool man" attitudes. Another reason why I was kinda unhappy about the whole D.C thing was realization of how.... dare I say "white bread" everyone was. I mean mostly all Riot Grrrls are white and only a few asians were there. I think I was one of the only 3 black kids there I mean.

Riot Grrrl calls for a change, but I question who it's including. Another thing was that most of the girls there were pretty aware and tough so why did we need to be continually told that we are. I mean it's important but it's kinda like preaching to the choir. I know alot of the "Riot Grrrls" are probably aware of this and it's difficult to come up with the solutions and I certainly don't have them all.

But basically the whole idea of putting a name on this movement is kinda of limiting and excluding. I mean the liberation of women is not just for us it will effect every single aspect of this fucking planet so when we say o' it's the Grrrl movement, it suggest that this is all we care about and this is all we stand for and we only want what we want Me! me! me! is all I hear. This sounds kinda snotty but I see Riot Grrrl growing very closed to a very chosen few i.e white middle class punk girls. It's like it's some secret society, but then again there are some who feel that a secret society is what we need. I constantly don't feel comfortable with this cuz I know so many girls that need to hear this shit, but weren't there cuz they would feel intimidated 'cuz they don't look punk or they never heard of Bikini Kill. Was this the point? I think Riot Grrrl is filled with positive stuff and as a group I think it give girls a sense of solidarity and self worth to girls in need. But still when you have all your beliefs in one bucket and you say this is all I'm about and I won't change my mind 'cuz I'm a Riot Grrrl and they do this and that and this is how we are suppose to be.... Your digging yourself a serious hole and it's called stagnation. Fuck! I'm not all negative about Riot Grrrl cuz there were so many aspects of this whole convention that were so fuckin rad! Like I was filled with joy to see all these young dyke girls kissing and holding hands and feeling no shame. Also I almost forget on one of the nights there was this all-night, all-showed up but it was cool anyway. go! go! dancers. Kathleen Hanna watch. It was a great experience for Basking Ridge if only I parents could be beautiful. Another thing that really was every girl we met three either nally got to meet a alot of other rad time Stacer & riot guy did "there a dykes!" or popular

girl dance party. Not many people And we got see these great women was an epecially cool dancerto two dorky surburban girls from have been there it would have been great about D.C. was that practically ev-sk8ed or played in a band. Seemed like drums. I'm really glad I went 'cuz I fi-lot of my pen pals and also meet people. And it was also the first I played a how where some id-not scream out bunch of the ever so they're not a real band!".

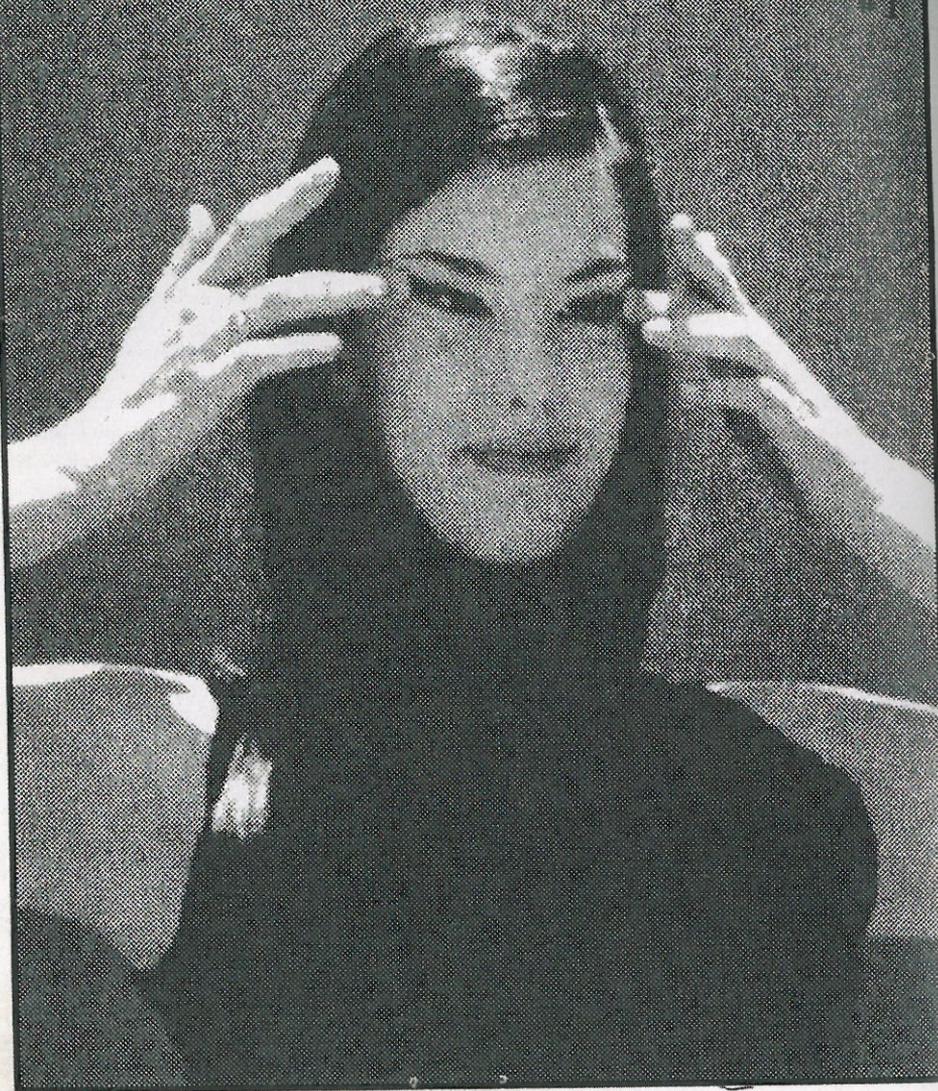
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Erin Smith (Bassist)

CHOP SUEY SPEX

(DO YOU THINK I NEED THESE?)





What Happened?

Tribe 8 just finished their set at "You've Got Bad Taste" a store in Silverlake co-owned by Exene Cervenkova (formerly known as Exene Cervekanka from a band called X). I was wandering around the store with my Lala and Karla, looking at a lot of old stock merchandise and the old school punk rock flyers and photos that cover the walls. One minute we were looking at harmless popsicle stick ~~hoses~~ and the next we were staring at these fake glasses with "Oriental" eyes (read: slanted slits) molded into the frames. They were sick and fucked up and we couldn't understand why Exene would want to stock them. We saw her walking by so we stopped her to ask. Lala pointed to the Chop Suey Specs and asked, "Do you think I need these?" Exene maintained a borderline blank stare. Then Karla told her we thought the glasses were racist. Exene reminded us that the store is called "Youve Got Bad Taste" We told her that this was not an issue ~~of~~ of GoodTaste-Badtaste. Then she told us that her store specializes in Americana. Karla argued that the Specs were Alienating to Asian customers. This comment got us dismissed. Exene shook her head and said, "Whatever. I don't care. ~~Steal them.~~ Steal them." Then she walked away.

(xo)

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4	5	6
7	8	9

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A4

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KEEP THE PAPER FOLDED.

LIFT AND FOLD BACK ONE LAYER OF PAPER FROM THE OPEN EDGE TO THE MIDDLE FOLD

FLIP THE PAPER OVER, THEN LIFT AND FOLD BACK THE OTHER EDGE TO THE MIDDLE FOLD. THE FOLDED PAPER MAKES A "W" SHAPE.

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Citations

Crenshaw, Kimberlé. “Dermarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics.” *The University of Chicago Legal Forum* (1989): 139–167. Print.

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