



BLACKS ON BLACK

DISCUSSING DIMENSIONS OF OUR LIVES

I have been deliberating over this for some months now and I think it's time. Time for us to get together. Time for us to acknowledge that yes, racism AND sexism function often simultaneously in our lives. Time for us to begin to understand what this then means for us as Black women; and time for us to read, talk, listen to each one of us in the Afro-Diasporic community as we look at ways to make that personal change that often leads to political action in the struggle to overcome racism and sexism.

So my critics say: "but feminism is a white women's movement". My answer: the only feminism that I ascribe to is one that is committed to change on all fronts sexism, racism, classism, homophobia, ageism etc. I

have learned much from the women's movement as it pertains to sexism and patriarchy but I think White women tend to forget that racism also exists as a form and function of patriarchy. One can't eradicate sexism without also eliminating racism. To put it bluntly, White women gots to get their shit together and see in what ways they benefit from a white supremacist structure and commit to REAL change on that front.

I've also participated in a few Black groups and somehow or other women are intimidated into silence or when we finally are able to talk about issues that pertain to us as women they are deemed irrelevant. So what kind of a message is this? Are we to be seen and not heard? 'scuse me but that ain't

happening here. Just because I wish to talk about gender issues does not mean that I've forgotten about race. Racism AND Sexism form/inform my lived reality. I live with/in/around both these issues daily. They are not ideologies that make for interesting dialogue along some damned academic praxis but, MY LIVED REALITY.

So, as I said, its time. Its time for us as Black women to get together and acknowledge, discuss and challenge the ways in which racism and sexism function in our lives. I would like for us to meet once a week. I would like the group to run as a collective with in-put from all of us in the diaspora. African, Afro-Nova Scotian, Afro-Caribbean. You are all welcome. No this is not meant as a replacement for BUS or any other organizations that you belong to, but an additional place where we can enrich our lives further by discussing the dimensions that make up our lives. It will be a place for us to get together, feel comfortable speaking to each other about ANY issues felt to be important. Ul-

timately the goal remains to strengthen solidarity among all of us, sisters AND brothers.

So, let's get together. For the month of March, the general theme for discussion is THE BODY POLITIK: Issues on Race and Gender.

MEETING 1) Weds. March 3. 6:00 pm. Meet at the Black Student Advisor's Office.

Discussion: Stereotypes on Race and Gender in media representation. Does Spike Tell It Any Differently.

Movie Presentation: Spike Lee's "She's Gotta Have It".

MEETING 2) Weds March 10. 6:00 pm. Meet at the Black Student Advisor's Office.

Discussion: Race, Gender and Images of Beauty.

Gallery Visit: Buseje Bailey and Donna James Video/Art work "Tradition and Desire" at the Dal Art Gallery.

MEETING 3) Weds March 17 6:00 pm. Meet at the Black Student Ad-

visor's Office.

Discussion: Sexual Harassment and You. What we can learn from the Clarence Thomas/Anita Hill Trial and a look at Dal's sexual harassment policy.

Speaker: A tentative speaker is scheduled for this event.

MEETING 4) Weds. March 24 6:00 pm. Meet at the Black Student Advisor's Office.

Discussion: OPEN FORUM.

MEETING 5) Weds. March 31 6:00 pm. Meet at the Black Student Advisor's Office.

Discussion: OPEN FORUM.

So, here's what's planned. The last two dates are for you to talk about any other issues. Hope to see you there. If you have any questions, just leave a message for me, Deborah Odhiambo at the Black Student Advisor's office and I'll get back to you. Yours In The Struggle.

Deborah Odhiambo

Accentuate the positive

Affirmative action - it's a catchy phrase. It sounds positive, but is it really effective?

The intention of affirmative action is to ensure equal representation in occupations by encouraging (and in some cases, forcing) employers to hire a female or a member of a minority rather than a white male.

Labour laws (which include labour standard codes, human rights codes and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms) "guarantee" the right that no one shall be discriminated against in hiring practices. Employers are not supposed to do anything which indicates that they are hiring employees on the basis of race, religion, creed, colour, sex, ethnic or national origin, physical or mental disability, age or marital status. As of 1991, discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation was not prohibited under either the Canadian or the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act.

According to our legislation, discrimination under the guise of affirmative action does not break this rule. Why not? People are hired directly for the qualities they possess.

It is because females and members of minorities have been traditionally oppressed. Affirmative action attempts to rectify years of oppression by giving jobs to people who fit a

My problem with affirmative action is, why it is okay to discriminate in one situation, and not in another? Is it because society is inherently evil - heterosexist, racist, sexist, etc. - and

Are society's evils the fault of white males?

we must make up for it by reversing the discrimination? Are society's evils the fault of white males? Do they individually cause people to be treated badly? Meanwhile, people who are deemed to be oppressed by society are given special treatment based on certain qualities.

On an individual basis, affirmative action is unfair. Many people know of others who have experienced this reverse discrimination, or have experienced it themselves. An oppressed person has been hired because there are no or not enough oppressed people on staff. In some occupations, only women or minorities may be hired for the next few decades "until things are evened up". In some cases, the white male has had more or better qualifications than the person who got the job.

Is that fair? No, it is not. It is also not "positive". Just ask the white males who are constantly having their discrimination cases turned down by the Human Rights Commission. They believe they have been cheated by the system for being a white male.

Some oppressed people would rather not be hired for their gender or race, but for their talent. Some would rather not be hired at all through affirmative action because

it may perpetuate stereotypes and prejudices that white males are better or more competent.

Affirmative action, through its discrimination, causes more problems than it tries to resolve. Many white males feel they are being oppressed for something they didn't have anything to do with - and, some white males are not racist, sexist, heterosexist pigs. Some actually believe in feminism. It happens.

Some white men end up being more oppressive because they may feel that "people of lesser capabilities are being hired for the same job" (which, of course, is not necessarily the case). So, in the end, oppression may start where it did not exist before, or it may become more obvious. Any mistake that an oppressed person may make, may be interpreted by a white male as an indicator that oppressed people are not worthy of the job in the first place.

Affirmative action, on the whole, does not solve or help the problem of oppression. Let's not make the issue of whether or not affirmative action is useful an issue of political correctness, but rather an issue of human rights.

Mary Jane Hamilton



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