

# FEMINISM/S

All (wo)Men Are Created Equal | The Second Wave | Intersectionality or Bust!

## 1967 - Vietnam

I learned later that he joined up without telling my mother. Or his own mother. They were not pleased. While he was there he had the first of how many affairs we'll never know. Confessed in a letter (which he later burned along with all the love letters). She somehow went along with it. I was born 20 months after his return.

## Free 2 Be - You & Me

We listened to Marlo Thomas & Friends over and over. Atlanta won the race and refused to get married! Delilah Bush insisted on wearing "those dirty pants with the hole in the knee" to David's house to play! The snooty girl in "Ladies First" got eaten by tigers!

## 1977 Divorce

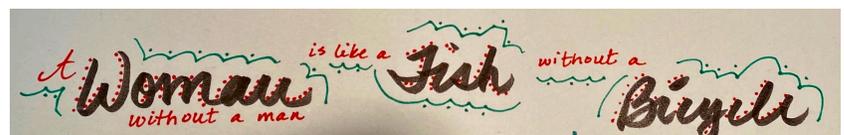
I will never know for certain what that last straw was, but one sunny day in June we piled into the "family wagon" and drove away. Counted the trucks on the Pennsylvania Turnpike deep into the night. She did it. Finally. I am woman hear me roar!



## Psychology of Women

Back in the day, before Women & Gender Studies had its own department, we had to seek out our own courses across campus - as a psychology major, Psychology of Women was one of my first ones. It was a lovely small seminar class, with fewer than 20 students (all female, surprise!) and our amazing badass Feminist teacher, Carole. At Mary Washington College in the late 1980's we still had small classes. We were on a first-name basis with most of our faculty members, but especially Carole. It was a magical time. She had Middle Eastern roots and gave me my first taste of hummus. I still think of her whenever I make and/or eat it.

I still have the book from this course. Unbelievably, it sits on my bookshelf, 3000 miles from that classroom, with a handful of books from my Masters' programs and the many dozens from my



## 1987 Abortions

I and half my friends ended pregnancies due to birth control failure, carelessness, rape, or something that seemed like rape but we refused to call by that word.

We refused to be trapped. We had futures, dammit! Was I going to start college eight months pregnant? No way? Was Maggie going to marry that guy and stay home? No thanks! Was Kelly mature enough to be in charge of another live being? Hardly! So we pooled our resources, cut school, drove to the clinic together, and fended off the "rescuers" who we both hated and feared.

We saw them as individual crazy people, not part of a movement that would destroy us if given half a chance.



A handful of politically astute students in our high school wore the buttons, but we who freely (except for the rescuers) sought medical services in this realm did not know our rights were under attack in the US Supreme Court. (Thornburgh, 1986; Webster, 1989).

"Every woman for herself," we thought. We were wrong.

current doctoral work. The price sticker is still on it! (\$29.95 at the MWC book store according to the sticker on the front.) PSYC 495 was the first course where my conception of Feminism was challenged. Like many of the young people I see around UO today, my worldview was changed by the things I read and the discussions I had in college.

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I was raised by a second-wave feminist - I witnessed her personal struggle. Saw her fight for her very *survival*. I watched as she secured her individual rights and claimed her own freedom to live her own life - to break out of the "Girl Land" that we heard about on Free to Be ("where good little girls clean up after the boys"). I understood her battle as an individual one, just as I understood sexism as a problem that my father and grandfather had, and later my stepbrothers and even my stepmother (which was weird - but that's another essay altogether).



<https://www.penzancestudios.org/carole-baroody-corcoran-new>

Carole Baroody Corcoran, my professor!

I understood feminism as a struggle for equal rights for each individual woman - the right to vote, led by Susan B Anthony, whose silver dollar came out when we were living paycheck to paycheck in a sketchy apartment complex while my mom was going back to school to finish her degree and get her teaching credential in Special Education.

*That coin seemed like such a big deal. Like most “hero/ine stories” what we learned in school made it seem like one person had single-handedly won justice for all.*

But in Carole’s class, even though it was psychology-focused, she exposed us to new ways of looking at women’s issues as collective issues, and it really challenged my understanding of feminism. I began to understand that if we are fighting for individual rights - the right for a vote, the right for a divorce, the right for an abortion, etc - we are limiting the potential of the movement as a *whole*, and limiting ourselves - and all of our “sisters.” Given my personal experiences, it was challenging to think of feminism as a collective project, as work across race and class and as a struggle for *freedom for all of us*, not for one measly scrap at a time for only *some* of us. We had to stand with our brothers who were suffering with AIDS and whose suffering was being magnified by homophobia. We had to stand with our sisters of color whose presence in the movement was always erased.

There was a complicating factor to this challenge as well: I was taking Sociology courses, and learning about inequality, poverty, structural racism, and — reading a book called “Welfare Mothers” (or something like that - I can’t find it anywhere) really had me confronting my own prejudice about poor “urban” families. Of course now I know that “urban” is color-blind talk for Black and Brown folx, but back then I was horrified to learn that I was harboring these racist assumptions about mothers who, like my own mother, were literally just struggling to keep it all together on a daily basis. I remember one scene in the book where the boys peed on the wall and the mom said nothing. This really challenged me. “How could she not say something?” But being from NYC and being in their neighborhood I could understand the boys’ having a feeling of “Nobody else cares about our neighborhood and we don’t >>>

## 1997 Grad School “Round One”

As a proudly raging feminist, or what recent “Presidential” Medal of “Freedom” honoree Rush Limbaugh would call a “feminazi” and a budding anti-racist I entered a dual-Masters program determined to become a school counselor, but with only vague notions of the systemic injustices still firmly anchored in public schools (and the secret places in my heart where they were still harbored).

Enter Professor Robert T. Carter

Obviously I am white. But what is my ethnicity? His classes made me reckon with being an American. That challenged me, sometimes to the point of tears. I wanted to be a “good person” not someone who could be unconsciously thinking ill off the brilliant brown babies in my class!



But I had to get in there and dig that mess out. So that when I ended up a school counselor, and often the only “white face” in the building, I would do ok - do right by my kids. I would not succumb to a savior complex or deficit thinking. I know that our freedom is bound up together and I am here for the fight!

respect it either.” And now, as a female parent myself, I can completely understand the mother’s perspective. I now picture her walking ahead of her two sons rolling her eyes and mumbling something to herself about “not worth it” and “picking your battles” and “deal with this later” (I believe they were on their way to a conference with the kids’ teachers, and now I know that the school is probably not the mother’s favorite place to go either).

## 2007 - Motherhood

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I knew I would have girls, and I named them after my grand-mothers to carry on our matrilineal traditions. My mother has a sister and they were best friends, my aunt has two daughters, my mom has three daughters, my sister has daughters, it is glorious.



The follow-up to *Free to Be You and Me* was a book *Stories for Free Children*, in which a baby is born and no one defines them by gender and they get to do whatever they want. I knew that in this society I couldn’t manage that level of gender neutrality, but I did my best to keep my kids away from the most damaging aspects of society aimed at girls - we have been Barbie-free for 16 years! We have never shopped at Justice for adult clothing for little girls. I loudly criticize sexist commercials and tell my kids if anyone touches them inappropriately to punch them and when they invariably get “in trouble” don’t say a word, except “Call my lawyer,” where lawyer means “mother.”

I, like all mothers, am just doing my best.

## 2017 - Indigenous Feminism

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These days, I read the work of Indigenous Feminist writers, scholars, and activists and work among the tension with radical black feminist thought and Chicanx/Borderlands feministas. Sometimes it feels awkward - not unlike an awkward silence as compared to a comfortable silence, but most often it’s electric (like an electric silence?) Braided together, struggling to stay together at times, forward and backward through time, from Anna Julia Cooper to the Combahee River Collective, Audre Lorde, Angela Davis, and Charise Cheney. Gloria Anzaldúa, Zitkala Sá, Eve Tuck, Dolores Calderón, and Michelle Jacob; Gloria Steinem, Carole Corcoran, Joanna Goode, and now...me.

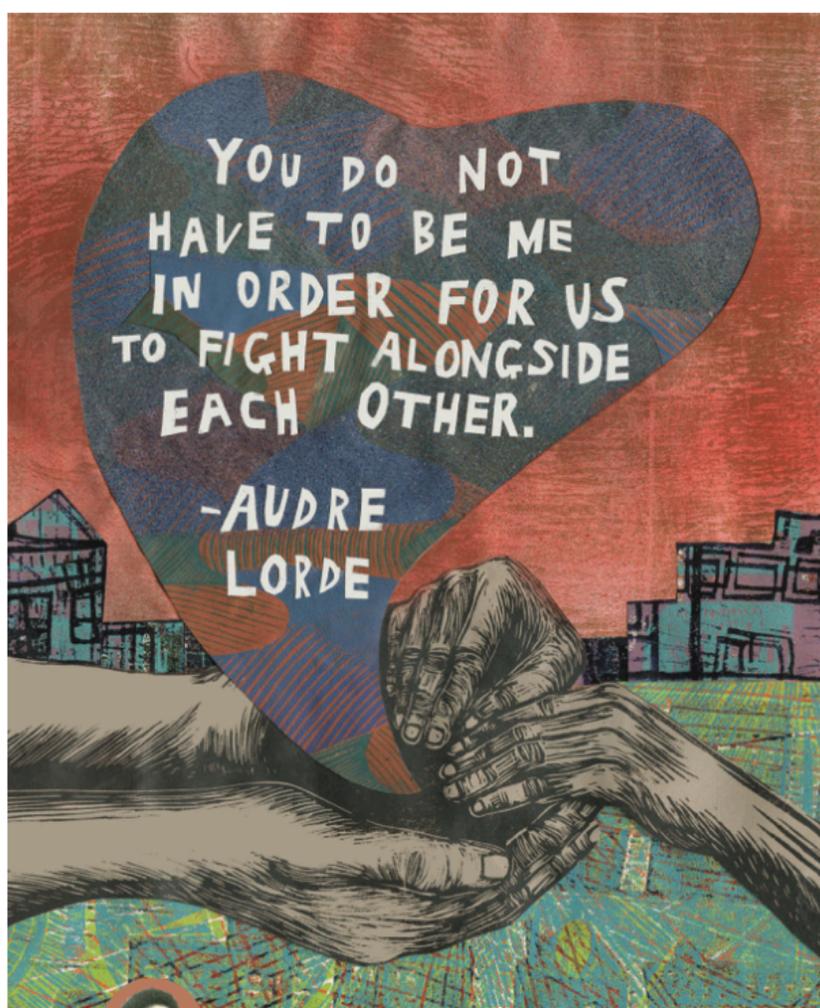
Whitestream feminism allows itself to be limited by its association with whiteness and its unwillingness to identify itself as such. It remains in collusion with settler colonial whiteness as long as the settler triad (settler, Native, enslaved) remains unexamined. Modern white settlers still enact this deadly combination of enslavement, land theft, and dominance, through public schooling practices - things that we are so used to that to question them - to unsettle them - seems like a lost cause, seems like a fool’s errand. But Indigenous Feminism also gives us hope.

In contrast to the “specialization, standardization, compartmentalization, and systematicity that are inherent features of western bureaucratic forms of organization” (Kawagley & Barnhardt, 1998), Indigenous philosophies underlying teaching and learning “connect humans to the environment and to each other, and which generate principles for living a life which is sustainable, respectful, and possible” (Smith, 2012, p. 109). Reading the problems of education through an Indigenous Feminist lens allows us to think beyond the settler-colonial conception of academic “accountability” and the conformist goals of schooling structures. “Collectivist, reciprocal ways of being and living in respectful and honest relations are of utmost importance as we [within academia and schooling] have increasingly denounced our connectedness, spiritualities, and possibilities in the name of competition, efficiency, individualism, measurement, and profitability (Cannella & Manuelito, 2008, p. 54).

At a time when neoliberal reforms of public education are reducing children to widgets and teachers to factory floor automatons, Indigenous Feminist frameworks for thinking - for teaching and learning - just for *living* - are “life-seeking”

alternatives (Cajete quoted in Tuck, 2013). Through life-seeking work we are able to create better alternatives, which may ultimately displace the current emphasis in public schooling on conformity and [conformity as?] employability, and employment as success.

“Neoliberal logic can be characterized as being caught ... with no sources for solutions outside the spectrum [state control v market freedom]. To seek solutions to social problems that lay beyond this spectrum is seen as unrealistic and irrational. As impossible” (Tuck, 2013). On the contrary, Indigenous Feminisms *make possible* new and unique spaces to create and share knowledge, to do truly collaborative and potentially transformative research and teaching. Within the creative contours of Indigenous feminisms we are free to explore the use of artistic expressions to theorize our lives and to imagine futures that are not visible from within the colonial/neoliberal construct of binaries.



Audre Lorde (1934-1992) insisted upon the dignity of intersectional identities, including her own: She famously described herself as a “black, lesbian, feminist, mother, poet warrior.” In her writing and her activism, Lorde fought for equity and justice for people of color, women, members of the LGBTQ community and more.

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My dog is a plumber, he must be a boy.  
 Although I must say that his favorite toy  
 is a little toy stove with pans and with pots,  
 which he really must like cause he plays with it lots!  
 So perhaps he's a girl, which kind of makes sense  
 Since he can't throw a ball and he can't climb a fence.  
 But neither can dad, and I know he's a man.  
 And mom is a woman and... she drives a van!  
 So maybe the problem is in trying to tell  
 just what someone is by what he does well.

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