

Thesis abstract

The thesis attempts truthfully to illustrate a situation of black female leaders active in the United States of the second half of the twentieth century. In order to cover this period, four black women activists will be focused on as representatives of two different generations. On the one hand, Ella Baker and Fannie Lou Hamer will stand for the older generation because their activist careers culminated in the 1960s. On the other hand, Angela Davis and bell hooks will represent the subsequent decades as it was at that time when their careers matured. A comparison of the two generations will reveal considerable similarities in the four women's perspective on the nature of the struggle against white supremacy. It is necessary to bear in mind that this perspective was to a great extent influenced by a special kind of oppression the women faced as members of a marginalized group, that is, of the black community. Firstly, a detailed examination of the women's childhood and youth will show that it was already at that time when the four black women realized the presence of racism in their lives. Moreover, the focus on their background also introduces similar motives of the four women's decision to become active participants in the black community's struggle.

Secondly, after the description of the specific activist focus of each woman, the thesis will further emphasize that the discussed activists were forced to cope with a sexist oppression solely applicable on them as a result of their gender. Therefore, the black women's oppression should be understood as a multilayered phenomenon because it is actually a combination of various kinds of oppression, sexism and racism being the most easily recognizable components. Notably, the thesis challenges an assumption that white men were the sole perpetrators of this complex oppression as it demonstrates the black men's disapproving responses to the black women's decision of adopting the active role in the community leadership. Significantly, it is mainly in connection with the black male sexism that a considerable difference between the two generations will be presented. As the thesis will argue, Baker's and Hamer's refusal to challenge sexism they experienced can be contrasted with Davis' and hooks' readiness to identify themselves as advocates of feminism. Although the difference between the women's attitude to sexism is worth of exploration, the thesis' comparison of the four activists primarily highlights the characteristic aspects of the black female activism. As the women were influenced by the complex and unique oppression, their perspective should be considered special.

Interestingly, it has only been within the last two decades that the black female activism is paid attention to in the historiographers' accounts. As the thesis will highlight, this omission

or ignorance of the black female contributions to the anti-racist and/or anti-sexist struggle could be easily regarded as yet another layer of the black women's oppression. Still, as will be proved by the examination of the four women's legacy, the black female activism definitely deserves recognition and acknowledgment. Therefore, the author of the thesis will promote the understanding of the black female perspective as especially enriching and beneficial for the black community in the United States.