

Prof. David Robbins, Ph.D., thesis director

B.A. thesis evaluation

Veronika Rybková

African-American Women Leaders after the 1950s

Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

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In this thesis, Ms. Veronika Rybkova undertakes to illustrate some representative situations of black female leaders active in the United States in the second half of the twentieth century. To that end, four black women activists, of two different generations, are focused upon: Ella Baker and Fannie Lou Hamer from an “older” generation whose activist careers culminated in the 1960s; and Angela Davis and bell hooks, from a “younger” post-1960s, cohort. A comparison of the two generations, Ms. Rybkova argues, reveals considerable similarities in the four women’s perspective on the nature of the struggle against white supremacy—a perspective 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. A detailed examination of the women’s childhood and youthful experiences with racism helps illuminate similar motives in the four women to become active participants in the black community’s struggle. After the description of the specific activist focus of each woman, the thesis further examines how the activists were forced to cope with a sexist oppression solely applicable on them as a result of their gender. The black women’s oppression is thus understood as a multilayered phenomenon, a combination of various kinds of oppression, of which sexism and racism constitute the most easily recognizable components. Significantly, Ms. Rybkova concludes, it is mainly in connection with black male sexism that a considerable generational difference between the activists can be observed: Baker’s and Hamer’s refusal to challenge the sexism contrasting significantly with Davis’ and hooks’ readiness to identify themselves as advocates of feminism.

Ms. Rybkova has taken what could have been a personally fulfilling but intellectually and academically sterile biographical inquiry into the lives of leading black female activists and, by extended, comprehensive, and insightful study of their works as well as their biographical experiences, has produced what is, within the limited context offered by the conditions of production of a bachelor’s thesis, a helpful, valuable, and even interesting synthesis regarding the conflicting and conflicted motives of serial participants in various aspects of the “civil rights” struggles among and within Americans since the middle of the twentieth century.

Ms. Rybkova’s bibliography is various and well-chosen, combining biographical and autobiographical studies with theoretical pronouncements and reflections by her subjects. Her reading and interpretation of her sources is diligent and largely accurate, and the conclusions she draws and the connections she makes often usefully add to or clarify, rather than mechanically recapitulate, what we already know.

The volume of information collected and presented, and the level of analysis manifested, in Ms. Rybkova’s interaction with some of the leading contemporary black American activists, organizers, writers, and theorists, significantly surpasses normal expectations for a B.A. thesis.

Accordingly, I believe that, overall, her work deserves to be judged as "1, vyborne."

Thesis evaluation: "1, vyborne."

Signed:

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If the reader has any questions or needs additional information, please contact me at drobbins22@netzero.net.