

A Feminist's perspective on the THIRD WAVE



By Krystle Davis, Staff Writer

One word seldom uttered in casual conversations today is that ever elusive, always politically charged f-word. This notorious word seems to have become even dirtier than a four-letter expletive. It's almost too explosive to print, but here it goes: feminism. We may learn about feminism in our women's studies, sociology, African American studies, philosophy, and history classes, but one begins to wonder if any such movement still exists in society today.

According to Gwendolyn Pough, a writing professor at Syracuse University, self-proclaimed feminist, and the author of *Check It While I Wreck It: Black Womanhood, Hip Hop Culture, and the Public Sphere*, Black feminism still thrives in every woman of color "who believes in women's rights and is working toward equality."

Pough says that the way one views feminism depends on his or her personal perspective. She attributes the negative connotation feminism has taken on for some in society to a backlash from the right wing beginning in the early 1990s and cites Rush Limbaugh as one contributor to this backlash. Limbaugh popularized the term "feminazi," which has been used derogatorily toward feminists and feminist groups. A May 2004 *Media Matters for America* analysis of Limbaugh's radio show found that he used the term "feminazi" eight times over a six-week period in March and April 2004.

Pough also says that Black women may have difficulty iden-

fronting race, gender, and class oppression, Afrocentric feminist thought speaks to the importance that knowledge plays in empowering oppressed people," Collins writes.

Despite the progress Black feminists have made, Pough says she remains pessimistic about the prospect of seeing a Black woman rise in the political ranks to become President of the United States.

"I'm willing to be pleasantly surprised if it happens but I don't think that this country has gotten over its racism or its sexism enough to elect a Black woman president. I honestly don't even think we're ready for a female president...There's a lot of work still to be done before that happens," she says.

Pough says that although there has been a lot of attention paid to feminist causes on the academic front, it is equally important to make a difference on a grass roots level.

"There have definitely been studies done about women and poverty...but when we look at what happened with Hurricane Katrina and we saw the faces of mostly Black women and children—I mean that's the feminization of poverty right there. But you know we can do studies about it 'til kingdom come," she says, smiling.

"We need to be doing something to end the poverty. So I think that on some levels studying stuff and doing research is fine, but let's do something. We can come up with catchy names and whatever, but when you're looking at those faces and you're seeing that, no study is enough," she says.

Among the many problems facing Black women in

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tifying as feminists because they view feminism as a White women's movement. For instance, while White women were fighting for the right to enter the workplace in the 1970s, Black women were already in the workplace and supporting families in some cases. Pough also points out that there has been a lot of racism within the women's movement, from the suffrage movement until the women's movement in the 1970s. "But I think that women of color have participated in feminism and made a lot of changes that created the kind of open, aware feminist movement that we have today in the 21st Century," she says.

Pough says she believes Black feminism is alive in today's society, especially among third-wave feminists. "I think that feminism has different faces. You definitely have the ivory tower, academic face of feminism, and then there are people that are doing the activist work. I think we have both going on and thriving," she says. She mentions hip-hop feminists Joan Morgan, bell hooks, and Patricia Hill Collins as some of the Black feminists who have reached iconic status through their published work. In her book *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Hill Collins expresses the importance of Black feminism as a scholastic discourse. "By portraying African-American women as self-defined, self-reliant individuals con-

America today, Pough identifies two pressing issues she feels Black feminists should make a priority on the agenda. She says that the incarceration rates for women of color and the high HIV/AIDS rates in the Black community need to be addressed in any strong or worthwhile Black feminist movement.

Pough says college students can get involved in any number of ways and she urges young women to become active in the movement.

"There's a lot of movements—movements against globalization, movements against prisons, so many other places that you can get your foot in and work towards change. And that change will mean something towards making it better for women," she says.

"So even if somebody didn't want to identify as a feminist per se, there's so much work that can be done on behalf of women and so many groups working on so many different levels that there's lots especially college aged students could do. Protest. Get out there. Do something," she says.