

Patricia Hill Collins. "From Black Power to Hip Hop: Racism, Nationalism, and Feminism." Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006.

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1 In her new book *From Black Power to Hip Hop*, a collection of previously published essays, Patricia Hill Collins probes the contested spaces of racism, nationalism, popular culture, and feminism in an attempt to expand the struggle for a truly democratic society for all. The first section, "Race, Family, and the US Nation-State" (chapters 1-2), features two essays that take an in-depth look at the intimate connections between motherhood and national identity. Section two, "Ethnicity, Culture, and Black Nationalist Politics" (chapters 3-4), offers two essays on the usefulness and efficacy of Afrocentrism, while section three, "Feminism, Nationalism, and African American Women" (chapters 5-6), offers strategies for empowerment.

2 In the past, one was unlikely to confront the work of Hill Collins outside the disciplinary confines of sociology and gender studies. However, *From Black Power to Hip Hop* should not suffer such a fate, as it fits well within the academic boundaries of cultural studies. Hill Collins regards culture as political — as a terrain of conflict, incorporation, and contestation. Culture is seen as a key site for the production and reproduction of the social, albeit unequal, relations of everyday life. Never for a moment does Hill Collins omit the idea that culture informs the structure and shape of history. She explores various epistemologies of emancipatory knowledge and by extension investigates with great depth ideologies of nationalism and feminism as well as influential knowledges of popular culture and everyday life. *From Black Power to Hip Hop* concludes that what is at stake are the connections between culture, power, and politics, the need for change, and the representations of and for marginalized groups.

3 Throughout the text it is clear that Hill Collins is indebted to many Cultural Studies scholars, most importantly Paul Gilroy. Similar to Gilroy's *Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (1991), Hill Collins attempts to highlight the tension between ethnic and civic nationalism and also attempts to deal with the dilemma of racial solidarity, more specifically black solidarity. Hill Collins uses black nationalism as a background to the discussion of politics in the post-Civil Rights era and attempts to answer how black unity is to be conceived in the new millennium. Insightfully speaking, she is careful not to paint all ideological struggles concerning black solidarity as taking place within the black/white binary. Instead she begins and ends her analysis from within the

black community, in turn illustrating that black solidarity can and does have variable meanings and that black solidarity has always been contextually and historically specific, located within diverse and sometimes overlapping discourses.

4 One point of departure from Gilroy and similar scholarship is Hill Collins' understanding of motherhood in relation to nationalism. According to Hill Collins, motherhood frames national identity: "the construction of infertility as a national tragedy and the huge amounts of media attention paid to this condition reflect [. . .] [a] preoccupation with increasing reproduction among women of the dominant group" (63). Many public services support white mothering, yet public policies drawing upon a logic of eugenics have been used to deal with women of color. She suggests that any new politics must take into account the racially coded language within colorblind discourses that speak of and about women of color (e.g. "unwed mothers" and "family values").

5 Furthermore, while Hill Collins concludes that feminist cultural texts and practices are multiaccultural she also regrets the fact that many black feminist activists have uncritically accepted the tenets of mainstream feminism, neglecting to pay attention to the structural causes of social inequality. Rather than resisting the matrix of power, many feminists are slowly and unknowingly becoming grunt workers for white patriarchal capitalism. Hill Collins criticizes the emphasis on personal politics: "The personal as a metaphor for more transgressive ideas about women's empowerment have [sic] given way to a version of personal politics that is increasingly narcissistic and amenable to the annexation by conservative political forces in the United States" (183). To the dismay of Hill Collins, feminism has become increasingly obsessed with the "self" at the expense of the "social."

6 Some could accuse *From Black Power to Hip Hop* of fetishizing the paradigm of intersectionality and therefore precluding a systemic critique of capitalism. While this may be true of others who use intersectionality theory, what Hill Collins does particularly well is to foreground class and push the politics of difference to the back. Rather than construct a sense of political agency around issues of difference, looming in the text is the suggestion that agency should be constructed around a ruthless critique of capitalism. For example, Afrocentrism has long been vehemently denounced in the academy, yet Kwanzaa has become part of American popular culture because "it articulates with capitalist marketplace relations" (91), not because America is becoming more inclusive. With her use of popular culture, historical analyses and a robust social theory Hill Collins never undermines the analytical power of class and in no way

conceals the predatory and aggressive powers of global capitalism. To this end, developments in this book can serve as a departure point from which to reform the paradigm of intersectionality and revisit some of its core beliefs.

7 What transpires from her analysis is that the shortcomings of intersectionality, mainly the idea that race/class/gender are coprimary, do not warrant a sweeping dismissal. However, this does not imply that we should ignore the realities of intersectionality; rather it suggests that we shift our attention to the plurality of oppression within a broader framework of capitalist class relations. Throughout the text, Hill Collins explains and acknowledges the need to revise intersectionality theory, with the caveat that as a general framework it should not be dismissed. *From Black Power to Hip Hop* does not ask abstract theoretical questions about social change, for it is theoretical without being overly abstract, leaving room to realistically and pragmatically envision a progressive multicultural vision of radical democracy. Moreover, it portends that if any serious challenge to eliminate the multiple forms of oppression is to be successful, the aggressive power of capitalism must be confronted.

8 In the end, what is important is that *From Black Power to Hip Hop* brings together essays that might have otherwise been ignored making it an exceptional text for an introductory course in gender studies or cultural studies. Hill Collins offers guidance by showing how to be critical, what went wrong, and what is right; she takes the best of feminism infused with many insights from cultural studies and reimagines a better, more equitable society.