

Education and Liberation: Black Women's Perspective

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How can a queer Asian person learn from Black feminism?

I am particularly drawn to this essay written in the collection, because as an educator, I have experienced the power of knowledge the first hand. As an immigrant in this country, I have also experienced the years in which people saw me as someone who was silent, timid, and without a point of view. It was really until I went to my first feminist class I started to understand how knowledge helps us make sense of otherwise quite irrational reality, particularly for the oppressed communities. How do we continue to believe our truth when everyone tells you what think and feel is not just irrelevant, but also untrue?

As now we know, racial minorities and non-cis male people are much more likely to be diagnosed with schizophrenic, and Blacks in this country particularly. Women were historically diagnosed with hysteria as a way of disciplining their unmet desire. The psyche of the oppressed tells a different story about objective reality than the hegemonic white male norm that was named "science." Black feminism tells us another standpoint, another perspective of truth. That is the most critical point I have learned from Black feminism. From Angela Davis.

In this essay, Angela Davis argues that "[under] the mystifying powers of racism...Black people were allegedly incapable of intellectual advancement." It's interesting that now as racialized Asian people we are viewed quite differently. We are thought as smart, but only "book-smart" – that is, our intellect is only recognized when it is profitable. We see Asian bodies occupy spaces of engineering, mathematics, scientific laboratories, and sometimes at the performance arts industry that requires the most exquisite techniques – violin or gymnastics. What we don't see, is the Asian body in politics, in leadership, even quite rare in the higher food chain of academia. And Angela Davis reminds us, education is not just about accumulating knowledge; education is about liberation.

The essay is also about solidarity. Angela Davis writes about how Northern white women went south to assist Black women who were determined to educate themselves. With the building of colleges in the South, significant number of Black people became educated post-Civil War. Education is collective labor. I thought of the mentors I have on my educational journey that have encouraged me to be curious, and not to be satisfied with superficial answers. To seek meanings in my experiences. There are women, mostly Asian women, queer women. They read Michel Foucault and Judith Butler with me, they bought me the first book written by Audre Lorde. Without them, I would probably still have had a college degree, even a PhD, but I would not know that education is about freeing ourselves.

So today, I am interested in hearing from you, who are the ones who support you in your pursuit for education? What kind of solidarity have you provided for others? Can we rethink reading not as a form of privilege but collective labor?