

A Voice beyond Category

continued ▲ from front

she said millions of black women define Black Feminism as being about expression and sharing realities to create a broader picture.

"Oppression looks different to everyone. Activism looks different to everyone. We all have to find our way in the world, but there are ways as a collective where elements of our experience are similar," she said.

Autry looks at Black Feminism to inspire and get other women to share their stories to remind each other of the multi-faceted struggles and issues affecting equity within our country.

As a movement, which emerged in the belief that we are all aspects of ourselves simultaneously, Black Feminism is inherently about having a wider awareness of how all oppression is interconnected.

"We all have multiple identities that we navigate," she said.

First coined by writer Alice Walker, the difference between Black Feminism and Womanism, from other feminist aims, is the recognition that different women have unique struggles—especially women of color, she said.

While feminism was a strong force for change, it was a movement that spoke to a certain constituency of women, and it wasn't inclusive to all things relevant to black women.

"Historically, it was a movement of women who wanted to work and have equal access to job opportunities, be able to provide their own incomes and be on par with white men in society and their environments."

She said, however, Black women, women of color and poor white women have always been working, so having access to work was not the big push.

"When we look at issues facing Black women we have to look at not only race, not only gender, not only sexuality and class, but how all those things play out together," she said. Black Feminism is looking at the whole person and experience, and it is not an either or situation.

"You don't get to chose to be black one day, and a woman the next. We are all aspects of ourselves, simultaneously."

Autry explained Black Feminism



PHOTO BY MINDY COOPER/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Turiya Autry keeps her creative expressions in tune by keeping her journal close. The local art educator and poet is on a mission to encourage everyone to look more critically and lovingly upon the world around them.

is rooted in the arrival of African Americans to the country during the Diaspora.

"From that moment we were faced with the reality that our race, gender and class were being determined by institutions outside of ourselves," she said. "So everything we had to do to survive and live within those circumstances speaks to the birth and beginnings of Black Feminism."

People see the Civil Rights movement as the beginning of a struggle, but actually women and black people in general, have been involved in that movement throughout slavery and up until the present, Autry said.

"There were often times we would have preferred to be at home and educate our children to give them more of an education that would help them navigate the world," she said. "So much of our survival has been women passing those lessons onto

our children and our communities."

She traces the modern civil rights movement to the resistance black women had to slavery and their activism for building schools and organizing around issues.

She said this analysis of power, privilege and oppression, as well as a study of black women's contribution to time and struggle against those dynamics, has been a strong underlying element to both her work, as well as to her personal perspective of self.

"My work as an artist, and my engagement with black feminism, is about engaging with my identity and the world, and how my identity interacts with the world interacting with me."

Art, she said, becomes part of the resistance against these injustices.

"People are limited by space and geography to certain neighborhood and economics, but one way to claim that space is by adorning the walls with what you want to see."

Like Autry, black women throughout history have also had a strong hand in using the arts and music as a means of social change.

"Black women were the first recording blues artists and traveling around the world and the country," she said. "In hip hop, black women were part of the founding of that too."

As a lyricist and poet, Autry said she sees the value in words and voice beyond the categories of dif-

ference, which is why she has dedicated much of her life to teaching youth to empower themselves through creative expression.

"I feel like young people carry it and they need more opportunities to find and exercise their voices for positive social change," she said. "It is important for us to share it, and it is part of what nourishes us."

The vast majority of people are impacted by oppression, she said, so eliminating one form of oppression is not enough. "If racism hypothetically ends tomorrow, that wouldn't guarantee sexism would," she said. "It is really about having a wider awareness of how all these oppression are linked to uphold the power structure in the U.S., as well as in various places throughout the world."

After nearly a decade of working with youth, she is excited to continue her mission as the Education Director of Caldera, which is a non-profit that empowers kids to share their perspectives through art, which Autry believes, is a powerful weapon for change.

My work with youth around the arts is part of my offering in helping others reach and explore their potential, she said. "Everyone has had some moment when there has been a song, a painting or a book that has helped them see things differently. That is the power of art, whether or not we see ourselves as creative or artists."

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