

## FROM OUR WEB SITE

I am bewildered by women who share my feminist concerns and refuse to call themselves feminists. They have bought the perception of us being man-hating and on the attack. When it comes to white feminists alienating women of color, I've been amazed how men can be blind to my experiences even when they're happening in the same room! So I don't doubt I'm missing a world of understanding about women of color.

—Laurel Thornton

It's frustrating to have worked so hard for something so big only to be misunderstood, underrated, and unacknowledged.

—Barbara Byram

“Feminists supporting welfare reform are saying to poor women, especially women of color, ‘You don't have the right to care for your children.’”

**Theresa Funciello**

Activist

# Jennifer Baumgardner

Coauthor of *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future*

I recently had a conversation with a young woman of color, a high-school student. She was asking, isn't there a history of racism within the women's movement? And I said, yes and no: proportionally, there have been more black women who have identified as feminists than white women. So, in that sense, women of color have been central, in some ways dominant. But there have been betrayals of women of color. Like when we were getting the vote. And in terms of media leaders, they have been white, although the real leaders have not always been white. And white women, too, often think that women of color should join “our group”—without even being aware of what's behind the “our.” White women haven't been thinking about what women of color are doing—which is plenty—and then seeing if they could work with them. That takes a lot more work. There is a lot of discomfort on the part of white women about doing that. It has to be confronted. I call myself out on this. I haven't worked in a majority women of color group before, and I think that's a problem. If most people are like me, that's a problem for the movement. Women of color are right to call us on it. Also, it's important not to be defensive even though it's painful to be talking about race. Be willing to take a leap of faith. I wonder what would happen if the leader of a group that was primarily white should reach out to the leader of a group of women of color? If she said, could we meet? Meet as people,

instead of, *We're interested in reaching out to women of color, and we need to be more diverse.* You paint yourself into a corner right away by doing that. The issues will emerge from a real relationship as opposed to an “Add color. Stir.” approach.

Even though feminism has this history of not being conscious enough about race or class, it is still the most diverse, race-sensitive, and class-sensitive social justice movement I have ever observed. But people are so tough on women—including women ourselves. We assume that because we're not perfect, we've really screwed up. But I think we have been confronting these issues and just need to keep reaching to do more.







## Mary Kay Blakely

Ms. contributing editor  
and activist

The generation of feminists that the media called strident, hysterical, and hairy-legged—we *were* very angry. We had to be. This generation is coming along to an altered landscape, and it was our stridency (although the media was wrong—we had a great time) that altered the landscape. They will have different issues to fight for. And we'll be there for them.

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The notion that we were and are a white movement is wrong, but it may come from the fact that *The Feminine Mystique* was a motivator for the second wave, and it resonated for white suburban women. But by the time we got to the National Women's Conference in 1977, delegates from conservative states were arguing that if we wanted to pass the ERA (we only had three states to go), we couldn't burden the movement with “other issues,” like race and class and sexual identity. The conference adopted all 17 of our issues. It was all of us or none of us. Race and class and sexuality were not other issues—they were *the* issues.

The problems feminism has tackled have everything to do with women of color as well as white women: day care, domestic violence, pay equity. But if they're articulated by a white spokesperson, do women of color see their experience identified? No. There are spokeswomen of color, but the media doesn't focus on them. Especially in the early days, it was a white male media and they were covering feminism and thinking, *could this be my wife?* In Fort Wayne, Indiana, where I was first involved in feminism, the matrons of the city jails were making half of what the male janitors were making. They were largely African American, but divided by gender. We never said we're only interested in raising white women's paychecks. Whether you call yourself a feminist doesn't matter to me, but I think it's

important that women of color who believe in these values identify themselves as feminists so their peers can see that the movement is about all of us.



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