

Feminist fight called unjust, has low Black participation

by Kenneth Harris
Special Projects Editor

Amid the applause and the laughter, a Yale University professor preached on how sexism and racism affected the black woman's involvement in the feminist movement.

"Feminism in the United States has not been a revolutionary movement," Bell Hooks said to an audience of 250 March 26. "Most of the black women are not engaged in the feminist struggle," she continued.

Hook's lecture was part of the Black Women's Leadership Symposium which was a joint project of the Women's Studies Program and the Curriculum in African and Afro-American Studies at the University.

According to Hooks, the feminist movement is "a political movement to end sexism and sexual oppression." Sexism and racism has slowed involvement among black women in the movement, she said.

"The systems of racism and sexism are interlocking systems," Hooks said, adding that both are indistinguishable as with links in a chain.

"How can we tell which link in that chain is strongest?" she asked. "These systems of domination... are interlocked."

The impact of racism is felt in women studies departments across the nation, according to Hooks. "There are very few women studies departments in the United States headed by black women," she said. "Racism within the feminist movement blocks black women studies."

"We work in isolation," Hooks said of the black women in the country, adding that there are few support

groups open to black women. She said black women in college are susceptible to isolation.

"As black women scholars we tend to be isolated from one another," she said.

Continuing, Hooks said: "Another major difficulty with black women studies is internatized racism. There is a failure of black women to extend their love to one another. We have a strong tradition of black female bonding."

"It is not the same thing as affirming one another when we are doing our best," she said, adding that black women seem to support each other only during a time of emotional crisis.

"When we see another women doing well we can't tell her she is doing well," according to Hooks. Women, especially black women, are not loved, she said. The most love a woman receives is from her mother, Hooks added.

"We need to show black women how to have these types of relationships within one another," she continued. She suggested that black women communicate through letters or use the church as a means of education.

During the question and answer period, Hooks was asked to explain the inadequacies of the black male.

She blamed society for the behavior of the black male.

If women want the image of the black male to change, then "we (women) should work to make sexuality in the whole culture change," she said.

"The feminist struggle has meaningful and positive implications for black lives," Hooks continued.

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families as white families are headed by women, Norton said. In 1980, she said, 50 percent of black births were by single women. Today, that figure is 57 percent, she added.

Norton said that although there is nothing inferior about a female-headed household, the greatest danger is poverty.

In 1979, the medium income for these households was \$6,600 compared with \$20,000 in most families, she said.

Norton said that though families began to change, black women kept the tradition of work that began when they picked cotton beside their husbands.

"In this country, black women are not allowed the luxury of not working," she said.

"We have swept away the most audacious brands of sexism," she said. "Nothing we have done has been as

important as the spread of support among women of all backgrounds and color."

She said through the deep changes in family life, the work force and education have been settling and unsettling, and they have taken place with the most remarkable acceptance by the American people.

However, she said, "What remains to be accomplished is the hardest part. The barriers that have fallen were the least stirred."

One of the problems to be faced, she said, is finding ways to relieve pressure of dual responsibility between motherhood and careers.

"I realize that such challenges can be seen as awesome," she said. "But they need not be if we keep in reach of our own possibilities."

Poverty for women

by Shirley Hunter
Managing Editor

By the year 2,000 a majority of the poor adults will be women, according to the 1983 film, "Poverty has a Woman's Face." The film was part of a program of the Black Women's Leadership Symposium which was held on campus March 25-27. WTVD Channel 11 anchorwoman Miriam Thomas was the commentator of the film and host of the discussion session afterwards.

According to the presentation, poverty is becoming more of a problem for women, especially those in several categories. The divorced mother is often in financial trouble because ex-husbands will not pay court-ordered child support. According to the program, 60 percent of all court-ordered child support is not paid. This makes it especially hard on families which are headed by women.

In the program, Thomas said, "For women, divorce is a financial catastrophe." Statistics support this statement. On a recent Phil Donahue show, it was said that after divorce, the standard of living for men tends to increase by 41 percent, while for women, it decreases 79 percent.

With decreases in their stan-

dard of living, many women without any skill to obtain good jobs, find themselves in financial ruin. The situation for the widowed is not better, according to the presentation. Those women who married at a young age without any thought about a career, who suddenly find themselves without a husband to support them, are caught between a rock and a hard place.

While they were still married, all credit remained in their husbands' name. So, when the husband dies, she has not power to purchase and means to earn money to gain that power.

For the homemaker, poverty was something that was almost alien, the film stated. Many women, who spent most of their adult lives at home with children while their husbands worked to pay bills discover that they have no way to support themselves after a divorce or the husband's death. The homemaker previously let her husband take care of all the financial aspects of the household, and finds that she cannot manage without his help.

Some of these women turn to public assistance when all else fails.

"In North Carolina, women and

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Giddings

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Giddings said black businesses thrived in every community. "Ours is a history of having things taken away."

Many of the gains blacks made were turned back at the turn of the century, however, black women were not deterred.

Giddings said in 1896, the National Organization of Colored Women was established to meet the need of blacks. In its height, there were fewer births out of wedlock than any time in history for black women.

Institutions were created to help children. Black women lobbied to get funds to establish kindergartens as part of schools, she said.

The importance of political power was also realized by black women. "A black woman threatened to leave her husband if he sold his vote," Giddings said.

"Black women suffragists fought just as intensely as the white women suffragists you read about in your history books," she said.

In a question and answer session that followed her speech, Giddings was asked to respond about blacks who don't seem to know their racial identity.

"No matter what experience one

has had, he knows deep inside that his roots are black. Maybe he doesn't appreciate it. A lot of people can't deal with the emotional impact of race," she said. "I would advise them to take it one step at a time and think of the positive side of being black. Some folks have had bad experiences and think being black is a problem."

Giddings was asked, "Where have black women gone wrong?" She responded that, "We (black women) don't know our history."

"We internalize and begin to think something is wrong with us... it is not all our fault." She said the Moynihan Report of the 1960's blamed the problems of the black family on the black woman. The report attributed the break down to black women being too strong. Black men were so discouraged because black women's earnings were closer to theirs than white women's were to white men. So black men felt they had to leave their families. "It's a psychological thing," she said.

The Delta Sigma Theta Sorority held a reception for Giddings in Toy Lounge of Dey Hall immediately following the speech.