

and feminist agenda that confronts the capitalist basis for racial, sexual, and homophobic oppression.

I find it encouraging that some black men were furious about what happened to Anita Hill and had the integrity to speak out. Many more need to do so. That too is part of our struggle.

I hope that white feminists have a better sense of the challenges women of color face when we make the commitment to confront sexual oppression. Those who really want to support our struggle can best do so by cleaning the racism out of their own houses. This can only be accomplished by participating in political organizing that directly challenges the multiple oppressions women of color face, oppressions that undermine *their* lives as well. Not only would we then have more trustworthy allies, but it would also be that much harder to accuse us of being the dupes of unprincipled white women.

Although Thomas' confirmation seemingly demonstrated the overarching power of the white male ruling class, I got a different message. The powers that be are

I am not one of the people who sat transfixed before the television, watching the Senate hearings. I had classes to go to, papers to write, and frankly, the whole thing was too painful. A black man grilled by a panel of white men about his sexual deviance. A black woman claiming harassment and being discredited by other women. . . . I could not bring myself to watch that sensationalized assault of the human spirit.

To me, the hearings were not about determining whether or not Clarence Thomas did in fact harass Anita Hill. They were about checking and redefining the extent of women's credibility and power.

Can a woman's experience undermine a man's career? Can a woman's voice, a woman's sense of self-worth and injustice, challenge a structure predicated upon the subjugation of our gender? Anita Hill's testimony threatened to do that and more. If Thomas had not been confirmed, every man in the United States would be at risk. For how many senators never told a sexist joke? How many men have not used their protected male privilege to thwart in some way the influence or ideas of a woman colleague, friend, or relative?

For those whose sense of power is so obviously connected to the health and vigor of the penis, it would have

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in serious trouble. This was only the latest example of their efforts to maintain their hold upon the failing capitalist economy and upon an image of power by using desperate means, by resorting to ever more outrageous lies and deceptions just to stay in place.

Yes, it's going to be a long struggle. But in the aftermath of the Hill-Thomas episode, my new T-shirt will display the words of the old freedom song, AIN'T GONNA LET NOBODY TURN ME AROUND! **Ms**  
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# Becoming the Third Wave

by Rebecca Walker

been a metaphoric castration. Of course this is too great a threat.

While some may laud the whole spectacle for the consciousness it raised around sexual harassment, its very real outcome is more informative. He was promoted. She was repudiated. Men were assured of the inviolability of their penis/power. Women were admonished to keep their experiences to themselves.

The backlash against U.S. women is real. As the misconception of equality between the sexes becomes more ubiquitous, so does the attempt to restrict the boundaries of women's personal and political power. Thomas' confirmation, the ultimate rally of support for the male paradigm of harassment, sends a clear message to women: "Shut up! Even if you speak, we will not listen."

I will not be silenced.

I acknowledge the fact that we live under siege. I intend to fight back. I have uncovered and unleashed more repressed anger than I thought possible. For the umpteenth time in my 22 years, I have been radicalized, politicized, shaken awake. I have come to voice again, and this time my voice is not conciliatory.

The night after Thomas' confirmation I ask the man I am intimate with what he thinks of the whole mess. His

concern is primarily with Thomas' propensity to demolish civil rights and opportunities for people of color. I launch into a tirade. "When will progressive black men prioritize my rights and well-being? When will they stop talking so damn much about 'the race' as if it revolved exclusively around them?" He tells me I wear my emotions on my sleeve. I scream "I need to know, are you with me or are you going to help them try to destroy me?"

A week later I am on a train to New York. A beautiful mother and daughter, both wearing green outfits, sit across the aisle from me. The little girl has tightly plaited braids. Her brown skin is glowing and smooth, her eyes bright as she chatters happily while looking out the window. Two men get on the train and sit directly behind me, shaking my seat as they thud into place. I bury myself in *The Sound and the Fury*. Loudly they begin to talk about women. "Man, I fucked that bitch all night and then I never called her again."

"Man, there's lots of girlies over there, you know that ho, live over there by Tyrone? Well, I snatched that shit up."

The mother moves closer to her now quiet daughter. Looking at her small back I can see that she is listening to the men. I am thinking of how I can transform the situation, of all the people in the car whose silence makes us complicit.

Another large man gets on the train. After exchanging loud greetings with the two men, he sits next to me. He tells them he is going to Philadelphia to visit his wife and child. I am suckered into thinking that he is different. Then, "Man, there's a ton of females in Philly, just waitin' for you to give 'em some." I turn my head and allow the fire in my

eyes to burn into him. He takes up two seats and has hands with huge swollen knuckles. I imagine the gold rings on his fingers slamming into my face. He senses something, "What's your name, sweetheart?" The other men lean forward over the seat.

A torrent explodes: "I ain't your sweetheart, I ain't your bitch, I ain't your baby. How dare you have the nerve to sit up here and talk about women that way, and then try to speak to me." The woman/mother chimes in to the beat with claps of sisterhood. The men are momentarily stunned. Then the comeback: "Aw, bitch, don't play that woman shit over here 'cause that's bullshit." He slaps the back of one hand against the palm of the other. I refuse to back down. Words fly.

My instinct kicks in, telling me to get out. "Since I see you all are not going to move, I will." I move to the first car. I am so angry that thoughts of murder, of physically retaliating against them, of separatism, engulf me. I am almost out of body, just shy of being pure force. I am sick of the way women are negated, violated, devalued, ignored. I am livid, unrelenting in my anger at those who invade my space, who wish to take away my rights, who refuse to hear my voice.

As the days pass, I push myself to figure out



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what it means to be a part of the Third Wave of feminism. I begin to realize that I owe it to myself, to my little sister on the train, to all of the daughters yet to be born, to push beyond my rage and articulate an agenda. After battling with ideas of separatism and militancy, I connect with my own feelings of powerlessness. I realize that I must undergo a transformation if I am truly committed to women's empowerment. My involvement must reach beyond my own voice in discussion, beyond voting, beyond reading feminist theory. My anger and awareness must translate into tangible action.

I am ready to decide, as my mother decided before me, to devote much of my energy to the history, health, and healing of women. Each of my choices will have to hold to my feminist standard of justice.

To be a feminist is to integrate an ideology of equality and female empowerment into the very fiber of my life. It is to search for personal clarity in the midst of systemic

destruction, to join in sisterhood with women when often we are divided, to understand power structures with the intention of challenging them.

While this may sound simple, it is exactly the kind of stand that many of my peers are unwilling to take. So I write this as a plea to all women, especially the women of my generation: Let Thomas' confirmation serve to remind you, as it did me, that the fight is far from over. Let this dismissal of a woman's experience move you to anger. Turn that outrage into political power. Do not vote for them unless they work for us. Do not have sex with them, do not break bread with them, do not nurture them if they don't prioritize our freedom to control our bodies and our lives.

I am not a postfeminism feminist. I am the Third Wave. **Ms.**  
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## We Speak in Tongues . . .

by Marcia Ann Gillespie

We speak in tongues, when the words are not part of the script. When we fail to remain solidly locked into our preassigned roles. You can be Eliza on the ice floe. Mammy in the kitchen. Tina Turner on the dance floor. You can call on Jesus, that's O.K. You can fall on your knees as if in prayer, unzip his pants and open your mouth. But whoever heard of a hot-blooded Negress being sexually harassed, much less offended? She must be delusional, aka crazy! Or else she's just one of those jealous vindictive black women—Mad because she doesn't have a man; Mad because the man she wanted didn't want her; Mad because he married a white woman. No? Well, then she's an innocent dupe of sinister forces—those professional feminists, evil liberals—a dumb bitch!

Read an essay on the Op Ed page of the *New York Times* written by a black man with a Ph.D. that essentially said that all Clarence was doing was some down-home courtin'. According to this self-appointed expert on the courtship rituals of African Americans, this mode of behavior is something that both Mr. T. and Ms. H. understood because they share similar rural backgrounds. The implication of course is that she got uppity. A woman speaks in tongues when her words do not affirm his truth. When we don't say what *they* want to hear. "Did you get a job?" "Where's the support money?" "Why haven't you called?" "Why did you lie?" "I said, 'No.'"

When we dare to discuss the many ways oppression seeks to grind us down, destroy us, we are told that our language is divisive. We are accused of sowing seeds of discord. We are told that we are not behaving like "good sisters." "Come, Sheba, sit, roll over, speak and say black men are endangered, my problems are minor in comparison. We must save them to save ourselves."

Be silent, a symbol. Be Hagar, the perfect vessel, humble, mute, downtrodden. You do poverty well. Stand and be photographed in black and white for gritty realism in stories on poverty, crime, AIDS, drugs. Don't smile, don't look attractive, besides, your hair's too short and nappy, your lips too big, your nose too broad, your skin too dark, your thighs too large. Women like you are to look downtrodden, unkempt, dejected. Do not expect anyone to ask *you* how *you* really feel, what *you* really think, what *you* want or need. They'll use your name, maybe even a quote or two. One may get the impression that this is your story, that you are speaking, but you are not.

We speak in tongues, when someone does in fact stick a microphone in our faces and our rage explodes, or we refuse to beg forgiveness for having babies and no husband. For being poor. For being. When we rail about the conditions we live in, when we deride the politicians who ignore us, the people who use us, it's as if the words were never spoken. We speak in tongues when we say, "I take