

Excerpt from “Anger in Isolation: A Black Feminist’s Search for Sisterhood” by Michele Wallace (1975)

It took me three years to fully understand... that the countless speeches that all began “the black man...” did not include me. I learned. I mingled more and more with a black crowd, attended the conferences and rallies and parties and talked with some of the most loquacious of my brothers in blackness, and as I pieced together the ideal that was being presented for me to emulate, I discovered my newfound freedoms being stripped from me, one after another. No, I wasn’t to wear makeup, but yes, I had to wear long skirts that I could barely walk in. No, I wasn’t to go to the beauty parlor, but yes, I was to spend hours controlling my hair. No, I wasn’t to flirt with or take shit off white men, but yes, I was to sleep with and take unending shit off black men. No, I wasn’t to watch television or read *Vogue* or *Ladies’ Home Journal*, but yes, I should keep my mouth shut. I would still have to iron, sew, cook, and have babies.

...

When I first became a feminist, my black friends used to cast pitying eyes upon me and say, “That’s whitey’s thing.” I used to laugh it off, thinking, yes there are some slight problems, a few things white women don’t completely understand, but we can work them out...

One usually awkward moment for me as a black feminist was when I found out that white feminists often don’t view black men as men but as fellow victims. I’ve got no pressing quarrel with the notion that white men have been the worst offenders, but that isn’t very helpful for a black woman from day to day. White women don’t check out a white man’s bank account or stockholdings before they accuse him of being sexist—they confront white men with and without jobs, with and without membership in male consciousness-raising group. Yet when it come to the black man, it’s hands off....

Despite a sizable number of black feminists who have contributed much to the leadership of the women’s movement, there is still no black women’s movement... We exist as women who are black who are feminists, each stranded for the moment, working independently because there is not yet an environment in this society remotely congenial to our struggle...

SOURCE: Michele Wallace, “Anger in Isolation: A Black Feminist’s Search for Sisterhood,” July 28, 1975. In *Let Nobody Turn Us Around: Voices of Resistance, Reform, and Renewal; An African American Anthology*, edited by Manning Marable and Leith Mullings, 520-523. New York: Bowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000.