

# CHOICES

Feminist Majority Foundation Campus Program E-Zine

February 12, 2007

www.feministcampus.org

*"If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down all alone, these women together ought to be able to turn it back and get it right-side up again. And now that they are asking to do it, the men better let them." Sojourner Truth*

## Note from the Campus Team

February is Black History Month! Too often, black women and women of color are omitted from the history books when the cause of feminism is discussed. It must be stated that these women were an integral part of getting feminism off the ground. Though figures such as Ida B. Wells and Sojourner Truth have been idolized as leaders in the feminist movement, in truth, there are so many more! Celebrate the achievements of African-American feminists and discuss the resounding effects of these trail-blazing women.

Many thanks to those that responded to the call for *Roe v. Wade*. All over the country women and men alike spoke out for reproductive freedom! Kay Delaney, a practicum coordinator at Antioch University in New Hampshire sent out a mass email to the entire university appealing them to contact their representatives to support real sex education, family planning, and access to contraception. Jessica Yee of Toronto, Ontario, Canada submitted a letter to the editor discussing the time she spent in South Dakota fighting for women's lives and countless others responded with well-wishes, gratitude, and spirit. Keep it up!

For Equality,  
Kassidy Johnson

## Black Feminist Activists



**Mary Church Terrell** was born in 1863, during the Civil War, and died in 1954, shortly after the Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board of Education* -- central to ending the fight against Jim Crow segregation. Terrell had been a leader in this fight throughout her long life. Born to former slaves

turned millionaires in Memphis, TN, Terrell majored in classics at Oberlin College, where she received her bachelor's degree in 1884, one of the first African-American women awarded a college degree. She studied in Europe for two years, becoming fluent in French, German, and Italian. A high school teacher and principal, Terrell was appointed to the District of Columbia Board of Education, the first black woman in the United States to hold such a position. A charter member and first president of the National Association of Colored Women, Terrell became nationally known both for her support of women's suffrage and her opposition to racial segregation. She was also one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. In 1953, at the age of ninety, she led a successful drive to end the segregation of public facilities in Washington, D.C.



**Elaine Brown**, the daughter of a dress factory worker, was born in Philadelphia March 2, 1943. Brown attended the Thaddeus Stevens School of Practice and Philadelphia High School for Girls. After

a brief period at Temple University, Brown found employment at the Philadelphia Electric Company. In 1965 Brown moved to Los Angeles, California, became interested in radical politics and began working for the radical newspaper, *Harambee*. The Black Panthers were formed to protect local communities from police brutality and racism. The group also ran medical clinics and provided free food to school children. Within a couple of years the Black Panthers in Oakland were feeding over 10,000 children every day before they went to school. Brown joined the Black Panther Party and helped to turn it into a supporter of women's rights. In 1974, she was elected party chief. Under her leadership the BPP became involved in conventional politics and successfully supported Lionel Wilson in his campaign to become the first black mayor of Oakland. She will be the keynote speaker at the Visions in Feminism conference April 28, 2007 at American University.

## NO! Powerfully Resounds on the Campus of Bennett College

*"We are powerful because we have survived. I have come to believe over and over again, that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood. When I dare to be powerful, to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid. Your silence will not protect you." -Audrey Lourde*

The Africana Women Studies department at Bennett College for Women invited members of the FMF campus team to make the opening remarks for the hit documentary *NO!* on February 8. The full day of events began with discussion of the film lead by Aishah Shahidah Simmons. A self-proclaimed feminist, she is the producer, writer,

and director of the feature-length documentary, "NO!" which unveils the reality of rape, other forms of sexual violence, and healing in African-American communities.

Acclaimed New Orleans musician Monica Dillon who served as music director of the film, performed some of her pieces that were included in the film. Bennett Belle Wallis Burks performed a rousing and graphic spoken word piece that took the audience back to her rape at 11 years old, through the lens of her rapist. The morning program also included a performance by UBUNTU, a coalition of women of color and sexual assault survivors from Durham, North Carolina.

"We wanted to offer something different from our usual celebrations of Black History Month.

In bringing *NO!* to our campus during this month



*NO!* Producer/Writer Aishah Simmons, Dr. Valarie Kaalund, director of Africana Women's Studies, Michael Simmons, and students.

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East Coast  
1600 Wilson Blvd.  
Arlington, VA 22209  
866.444.FMLA  
703.522.2219(fax)

CHOICES@feminist.org

West Coast  
433 S. Beverly Drive  
Beverly Hills, CA 90212  
310.471.FMLA  
310.556.2509 (fax)

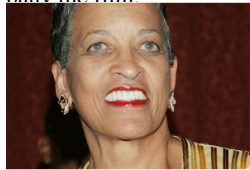
we have an opportunity to bring out of the shadows a subject that is usually treated with silence within our community," said Dr. Valarie Ann Kaalund Johnson, Director of the Africana Women's Studies program at Bennett College for Women. "Our goal with these programs is to encourage informed dialogue in order to promote healing and reconciliation between women and men."

The screening held that evening shed light on atrocities occurring everyday in African-American households across the country. Both men and women were present throughout the 90-minute film. Expectedly, several people had to step out of the room due to the overwhelming pain that exudes from the film.

The discussion following the film engaged the audience. Michael Simmons, the father of the director began the discussion with addressing the reason why it took eleven years for a film of this caliber to come into existence, the main reason being funding.

One woman testified to her own experience of rape, giving her thanks and appreciation to Aishah Simmons for telling a story that needed to be told.

The film is broken down in chapters on DVD, and an educational tool kit is scheduled to be released next month to accompany the film.



A statement in the film from the president of Bennett College for Women Dr.

Johnetta B. Cole summarizes the

evening perfectly, "One out of three women in the United States will be sexually assaulted in her lifetime. Why are we silent about one of the most barbaric, intensely painful, ultimately destructive acts that any community can endure?"

Kassidy Johnson

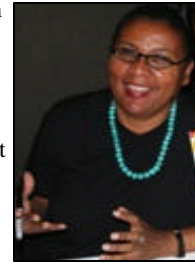
*Bennett College, the first historically black college for women, has been a leader in political activism in the past. Women from the college were instrumental in starting the Sit-In Movement in Greensboro, NC during the 1960's*



**Ida B. Wells** was born in Holly Springs, Mississippi. Her parents were slaves but the family achieved freedom in 1865. In 1884, she was asked by the conductor of the Chesapeake, Ohio & South Western Railroad Company to give up her seat on the train to a white man and ordered into the smoking or "Jim Crow" car,

which was already crowded with other passengers. Wells refused to give up her seat, 71 years before Rosa Parks, and the conductor, who was assisted by two other men, dragged her out of the car. During her participation in women's suffrage parades, she refused to stand in the back because she was black. In 1889, she became co-owner and editor of an anti-segregationist newspaper based in Beale Street in Memphis. In 1892, however, she was forced to leave Memphis because her editorials in the paper, *Free Speech*, were seen as too agitating. That was the same year she published her famous pamphlet, *Southern Horrors: Lynching Law in All Its Phases*. In 1895, she published *A Red Record*, which documented her campaign against lynching. In 1906, she joined with W.E.B. Du Bois to promote the Niagara Movement, a group which advocated full civil rights for Blacks. In 1910, Wells helped form the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (the NAACP). She founded the Alpha Suffrage Club of Chicago, the first black suffrage organization in 1913, and from 1913-16 worked as a probation officer in Chicago. The poet Langston Hughes said her activities in the field of social work laid the groundwork for the Urban League. After her retirement, Wells wrote her autobiography, *Crusade for Justice* (1928). In 1930, she ran for the Illinois state legislature, one of the

first black women ever to run for public office. She died shortly thereafter, March 25, 1931.



**bell hooks** (who spells her name without capital letters) is one of the most widely published black feminist scholars in the U.S. An outspoken cultural critic, educational theorist and professor of English, she is famous for her analyses of the politics of race, gender, class and culture,

and for her attacks on what she calls the "white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (coined in 1989's *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*). She has taught at the University of Southern California, Oberlin College, Yale University and as Distinguished Professor of English at The City College of New York. Her pseudonym, her great-grandmother's name, celebrates female legacies and is in lower case because "it is the substance of my books, not who is writing them, that is important." She has published over thirty books and numerous scholarly and mainstream articles, appeared in several documentary films, and participated in various public lectures. Primarily through an African-American female perspective, hooks addresses race, class, and gender in education, art, history, sexuality, mass media, and feminism. Her works include *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (1981), *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (1994), *Reel to Real: Race, Sex, and Class at the Movies* (1996), *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* (2000) and *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope* (2003), *My Feminism* (1997); and (1995), the latter with Cornel West, with whom she also co-authored the 1991 book, *Breaking Bread: Insurgent Black Intellectual Life*.

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The National Young Women's Leadership Conference:  
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Saturday March 24 & Sunday March 25, 2007

Breakout sessions will include:  
Working for a Congressional Leader: The Role of Hill Staff  
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East Coast

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310.556.2509 (fax)