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Book Club Kit

Discussion Guide

Hood Feminism by Mikki Kendall

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Biography

Mikki Kendall is a writer, diversity consultant, and occasional feminist; she has appeared on the BBC, NPR, The Daily Show, PBS, Good Morning America, MSNBC, Al Jazeera, WBEZ, and Showtime, and discusses race, feminism, police violence, tech, and pop culture at institutions and universities across the country. She is the author of the New York Times-bestselling HOOD FEMINISM (recipient of the Chicago Review of Books Award and named a best book of the year by BBC, Bustle, and TIME). She is also the author of AMAZONS, ABOLITIONISTS, AND ACTIVISTS, a graphic novel illustrated by A. D'Amico. Her essays can be found at TIME, the New York Times, The Guardian, the Washington Post, Essence, Vogue, The Boston Globe, NBC, and a host of other sites.

Source: **Author's website**

https://mikkikendall.com/about/

Review by LaToya Council

Burning Questions: Hood Feminism: Notes from the Women that a Movement Forgot

March 1, 2020

In 1851, Sojourner Truth gave a speech at the Women's Convention in Akron, Ohio, titled Ain't I a Woman? In 2020, feminist popular scholar Mikki Kendall, like Black women before her, has posed that question to white women anew.

Kendall's powerful and timely book, Hood Feminism, draws attention to many problems within feminism, asks many questions of white feminists, and provides some solutions. Kendall's collection of essays is also at the center of a conversation regarding social media and its intersection with feminism and the Ivory Tower. Drawing on key essays, I will focus on the ways in which Kendall's book brings attention to Black feminism's ongoing battle with mainstream feminism. That is, will mainstream feminism place an effort on engaging in inclusive justice toward women who support and lean into its national rallying cries?

Kendall came to national attention in 2013 with her #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen twitter hashtag questioning why white "digital" feminists supported a controversial male writer who admitted to targeting women of color. Kendall's essay "Is Solidarity for White Women" further explores the question. Solidarity is when people with different identities and abilities come together to work towards the same goal. Kendall's essay sheds light on how mainstream feminism falls short in practicing this. Drawing on media references to celebrities such as Lena Dunham, Katy Perry, and Patricia Arquette, Kendall shows how the arguments for representation of different kinds of bodies and equal pay are wrapped in white womanhood experiences. Mainstream feminism's call for women to stand together, while continuously ignoring the experiences of marginalized women, sparks the question: who benefits from solidarity? Engaging solidarity is a critical step in standing against inequality—but not if solidarity only focuses on one experience at the expense of varied experiences.

As Kendall argues, incorporating intersectionality into feminism will expose the inequity embedded within mainstream feminism. Intersectional feminism can also be an avenue to do solidarity work that dismantles mainstream "oppression Olympics" (i.e., my grievances and problems are worse than yours, so my point of view trumps yours). Solidarity does not mean one approach; it means making room and advocating for people in ways that are best for them—allowing room for solidarity to manifest in multiple ways.

I have attended many mainstream feminist events where equal pay, environmental injustice, and work/family policies were focal. However, I have not sat at a meeting where food insecurity was part of the discussion. In her essay "Hunger," Kendall invites readers to interrogate a topic that any intersectional feminist would be concerned with—food insecure households. Readers learn that food insecurity is an unequal pay issue, an environmental injustice issue, and a work/family policy issue.

Because of this, how can mainstream feminism continue to ignore the passing of bipartisan welfare-to-work policies that cut assistance to low-income families? Or, ignore how living in a food desert with inadequate grocery stores and expired products is part of environmental injustice? Why isn't rhetoric on increasing minimum wage central to discussing unequal pay policies and the gender wage gap? Not including food insecurity as part of the national rallying cries continues to overlook the needs of marginalized women in a movement that is supposed to be for all women. Kendall expresses this concern:

If we're going to say that this is a movement that cares for all women, it has to be one that not only listens to all women but advocates for their basic needs to be met. You can't be a feminist who ignores hunger.

Food insecurity is a feminist issue and deserves to be included in mainstream agenda items such as equal pay, environmental injustice, and work/ family policies.

Hood Feminism captures the essence of the problem with mainstream feminism in the essay "How to Write About Black Women." In this essay, Kendall interrogates two problems: mainstream feminism's misguided rhetoric about Black womanhood and the impact of respectability politics within communities. Many national conversations about Black women are driven by non-Black women. It is not often that voices of Black women are elevated above credentialed experts. Credentialed experts (mostly white) often express statistics emphasizing Black women's lower marriage rates, higher rates of infertility, and higher maternal mortality rates to name a few. Although these credentialed experts are citing facts and studies, what is often missing from the reports are the parallels between these outcomes and systemic racism, sexism, and classism. If mainstream feminism is truly invested in a movement that centers all women, then these reports must be coupled with a deeper conversation of the interplay between multiple isms.

A second point raised in this essay is respectability politics—the ability (and social pressure) to closely resemble middle-class mandates of womanhood and manhood. Respectability politics grew out of racism and the boundaries constructed to distinguish "good" from "bad." Respectability politics are burdensome because they tend to be internalized by marginalized communities, with the idea that achieving aspects of middle-class lifestyle will help improve social conditions. But, as Kendall argues, respectability politics may allow for some measure of advancement, but at the expense of doing much harm to self and others. Pointing to respectability politics as rooted in white supremacy, Kendall writes,

We were taught to fear the impact of rejection by whiteness, to embrace their standards without giving much thought to the impact on our own well-being or that of our communities. We have to break down this conditioning, have to ask ourselves why we're more concerned with how we are received by white supremacist patriarchy than we are with protecting ourselves.

The alignment with middle-class respectability politics is, therefore, opposed to personal wellbeing. Because mainstream solidarity practices tend to lack an intersectional lens, communities of color must continue to take back our narratives and replace current forms of being with new ones— centering our experiences.

I am a work, family, and gender sociologist. I study Black families and examine how being Black shapes their experiences. In 2015, I attended a conference in Washington, D.C. on work, family, and motherhood. Each plenary panel featured only white academics as the "experts" on work/family policies. Women of color were represented in the audience. The recommendations and conclusions presented from the workingpapers excluded our voices and uplifted white middle-class women's voices and experiences. Kendall's essay "Parenting While Marginalized" captured my feelings at a conference that promoted expanding policies for all women but relied on one group of women to do so.

Parenting is hard. Parenting while marginalized is unimaginably so, but many marginalized women do it. Taking on the "mommy wars," Kendall describes parenting in the hood as "survival parenting," which includes women's engagement in precarious work and activities to support their children. Vivid examples popped into my mind, such as leaving children home unattended because childcare is unavailable; "no show" work policies that penalize low-income mothers if they call out or do not appear; or insufficient transportation systems that make it hard for under-resourced mothers to travel to work. Again, if these mothers are late, many are penalized and at risk of losing access to welfare assistance. Alternatively, many middle-class Black mothers consistently worry about their children's safety. Many fear their children will encounter police violence even in "safe, middle-class" neighborhoods. These forms of "parenting while marginalized" are overlooked in the "mommy wars," which tends to pit women with hard-driving careers and nannies against "stay-at-home" mothers, and speaks to mainstream feminism's alignment with white sisterhood. Like Kendall, I wonder, "how do you discuss overpolicing and discrimination as a feminist issue when women who fit the mainstream idea of feminism are most likely to be complicit in a particular form of oppression?"

Mikki Kendall provides multiple solutions to her framing of the problem of mainstream feminism and sparks a much-needed discussion between popular writers and the academy. Directly speaking to white women, she urges them to fight patriarchy and racism in their own communities. If mainstream feminists truly desire to create crossgroup solidarity and foster allies, then they must ask marginalized women how they can support and make room for their causes. In short, mainstream feminists must use their access to white privilege to become "accomplice feminists," who "actively and directly challenge white supremacist people, policies, institutions, and cultural norms." Until mainstream feminism can do this, Black feminists and other feminists of color may continue to be in constant battle with mainstream feminist politics.

Kendall's book also sparks a conversation regarding social media and the Ivory Tower, where the ideas expressed in the collection of essays are often discussed. I wonder, after reading this book, how in sync everyday conversations regarding social problems and the Ivory Tower are. And does this relationship matter? Throughout Hood Feminism: Notes from the Women that a Movement Forgot, I recognized key conversations that Black women academics are having in the academy. For example, #CiteBlackWomen was created by Black women academics to acknowledge the work we do in the academy on the same issues presented by Kendall. Does this conversation need to be included within the popular press world and its conversations on "forgotten women?" Kendall's book is a great place to begin that conversation— moving forward best practices for the sake of all women.

It is unfortunate that in 2020 minority women, lesbian women, trans women, and differently abled women must continue to ask to be included in mainstream feminism. Feminism was founded to promote equality and equity with only one group in mind—white women. Equity is a pesky problem because it requires one group to shift certain privileges to promote access for all members of an organization. If mainstream feminism is unwilling to use white privilege to dismantle white supremacy, then minority feminists must not let the term intersectional modify feminism. Is solidarity for white women? Ask yourself the question.

Source: **Women's Review of Books**

Council, L. (2020, March 1). Burning Questions. (Hood Feminism: Notes from the Women That a Movement Forgot). *Women's Review of Books*, *37*(2), 30-31.

Review by Miranda McDonald

Book Review: Hood Feminism: Notes from the Women that a Movement Forgot

2023

Since its inception, the feminist movement has greatly evolved in the scope of issues it addresses. Today, conversations about challenging wage-gap inequalities and advancing female representation in executive positions are at the forefront of the mainstream movement. However, in terms of benefitting all women equally, the feminist movement still has a long way to go. While the scope of issues addressed by the movement has changed over time, the focal point has not. Dominated by white feminism, the contemporary movement is not much different from its historical embodiments, where the needs and perspectives of white women are prioritized, and often at the expense of other marginalized groups. The title of Mikki Kendall's 2020 book Hood Feminism: Notes from the Women that a Movement Forgot, embodies this sentiment.

Hood Feminism offers a critique of how the movement operates in America today. The book argues that mainstream feminism is falling short in the scope of people it includes, and in the breadth of issues it covers. Because mainstream feminism centers itself largely on the needs of white women, the movement fails to address how patriarchal forces condition the lives of a wide range of marginalized women. For example, conversations at the forefront of the contemporary movement center issues such as wage-gap inequality and body hair. While these remain important issues for the feminist agenda, Kendall highlights that these conversations are occurring without regard for the women who have yet to secure basic elements of survival, such as access to stable housing and food. Kendall dedicates each of the 18 chapters to a specific issue where feminism is currently failing. Some chapters focus on the shortcomings of contemporary feminism's impact on specific issues, by dissecting the discourse to identify who is being left out of the conversation. For example, in the chapter "Black Girls Don't Have Eating Disorders," Kendall delineates how eating disorders experienced by those in marginalized communities, such as Black girls, trans and non-binary folks, and people with disabilities, are often rooted in structural factors that negatively impact identity and self-worth. Thus, while body-positive feminism has been present in the mainstream conversation, the impact of these structural forces is overlooked because it centers on the experiences of white women. The narrow focus of the mainstream movement's discourse thus leaves many issues unaddressed by feminism, such as how racism and colourism shape eating disorders within the Black community. Other chapters, such as "Housing," identify areas that are currently outside the purview of the mainstream movement, building an argument for why the issue should be regarded as a feminist concern. With each chapter concluding with a discussion of how the movement can better address the matters outlined, this book is essentially a call to action.

Through an intersectional lens, Kendall reflexively situates herself in the writing, enhancing the piece with accounts of her own experience as a Black woman in America. With this, Kendall illuminates the nuanced ways that feminism is differently understood and embraced within her community. Kendall engages with Black feminist thought, which she characterizes as being rooted in an understanding of how white supremacy is linked to patriarchal ideals. Through this lens, she illuminates many cases where

the mainstream feminist movement works to uphold white supremacy and to reinforce the privilege that white women have over their racialized female and male counterparts. Throughout the book, Kendall challenges the narrow boundaries of white mainstream feminism and pays homage to the many Black women before her who championed victories for women's equality, but who are largely forgotten by history.

In the introductory chapter, Kendall explains how feminism has always existed in her community, albeit differently than how it is understood by white women. She tells the story of her grandmother, who despite being a feminist role model for Kendall, would have never identified with a feminist label. This is because as a Black woman who grew up in the Jim Crow era, the feminist movement was not one that included her. In the ensuing discussion, Kendall provides an in-depth analysis of how and why feminism operates differently in the Black community, and other communities of color. For example, Kendall reflects on how the stringent gender roles that she faced as a little girl and the toxic masculinity that is seemingly present in gang culture have shaped her own interpretation of feminism. Within the mainstream movement however, white feminists have leveraged these experiences and community dynamics against Black women to question the authenticity and integrity of the Black feminist agenda. It is this failure of the mainstream movement to understand the complexities that race, class, and history have on marginalized communities that work to exclude women of colour in particular, from the feminist movement.

Kendall addresses these biases by highlighting the pervasive impact of white supremacy on communities of colour. For example, rigid gender roles are embedded in the conservative values that many marginalized residents historically embraced in hopes of providing their children with better opportunities. Similarly, toxic masculinity has been shaped by the war on drugs and ensuing mass incarceration. Cultivated by what she refers to as a "twisted method of self-defence" (2020: 80), Kendall explains that Black men resort to this bravado in their communities to insulate them from the harms in the broader world. This explanation does not, however, excuse the reproduction of toxic culture derived from white supremacy in smaller communities like her own. Although these issues are likewise present in communities with higher socioeconomic standing, Kendall contends that they have a unique dynamic in communities of color, and thus must be solved internally. Kendall maintains that patriarchal structures can be dismantled and replaced only through a comprehensive understanding of the patriarchy, which acknowledges the history, violence, and trauma that marginalized girls and women face. This theme of change from within is woven throughout the book. In many chapters, Kendall emphasises the importance of treating those currently left out of the movement as self-determining agents. She also highlights that these individuals must be at the forefront of conversations about how issues concerning their communities are to be addressed. Here, Kendall draws a boundary for these communities. She clarifies that white feminists have no place addressing any issues on behalf of communities to which they do not belong unless specifically invited. In chapters concerning other shortcomings of the movement, Kendall pinpoints where white feminists need to step up and use their privilege to advocate for all women and reduce the harm done to others.

A core strength of this book is the positionality that Kendall offers and how the discussions extend beyond her own racial and middle-class locations to highlight how the movement leaves out a myriad of identities. In each chapter, Kendall discusses how the focal issue differently impacts other communities

of color, the disabled community, LGBTQIA individuals, and a long list of others who are ignored by white mainstream feminism. She often approaches these issues intersectionally, considering how individuals marginalized by multiple identities are presented with unique challenges at their intersection. At the same time, Kendall never claims to understand nor know how to best solve the problems experienced by groups that are different from her own. She highlights the importance of this approach within discussions across various chapters that clarify how the White saviour mentality of many proponents in the mainstream movement rarely helps resolve any issues and, in many cases, ends up further marginalizing the very groups that white women are claiming to protect.

Kendall explains how accusations of being divisive have followed those who criticized the movement for leaving out certain groups. However, Kendall rejects this, because the alternative of doing nothing means accepting that feminism can operate in ways that are antithetical to its supposed goals of equality for all. With Kendall citing examples of how mainstream feminism has been co-opted by white conservative women in politics to push anti-choice legislation, or by white female voters to defend electing President Donald Trump, the pitfalls of this movement as it stands today could not be clearer. Hood Feminism is written in the American context, but the structural forces driving the issues discussed are similarly present in Canada. Therefore, Kendall's advice and actionable steps are equally applicable to Canadian readers. With the breadth of topics covered and identities included, scholars at both the undergraduate and graduate level studying inequalities and intersectionality may be especially interested in Hood Feminism. The blend of personal experience and theory in Kendall's writing bridges the gap between the shortcomings of the movement and how it can improve. She offers a clear directive on how conversations can be constructed to push the movement forward. Because of this, Hood Feminism is also useful for organizational leaders seeking to inform their workplace policies with diverse perspectives. Whether it is a call to action to do work in your community (or stay out of the work being done in other communities), how to include diverse voices, how to lend your privilege to the benefit of others, or how to act in solidarity for other women, Kendall offers advice and clear, actionable steps for readers looking to make the feminist movement more inclusive.

For readers in the academy and business world alike, Hood Feminism is for those looking to have their own diverse experiences discussed and recognized in feminist discourse, and for white readers seeking to confront their privilege and to learn how to perform better allyship. This book is a refreshing take that identifies the limitations of the feminist movement without diminishing the various ways women in marginalized communities embrace feminist thought and use it as a tool for self-determination. With a piece for all identities, Hood Feminism highlights the work that must be done in solidarity by all feminists to make the movement one that reflects diverse backgrounds and that works to the benefit of all.

Source: **Canadian Journal of Sociology**

McDonald, M. (2023). Book Review: Hood Feminism: Notes from the Women That a Movement Forgot. Canadian Journal of Sociology, 47(1), 87-90. https://journals.library.ualberta.ca/cjs/index.php/CJS/article/view/29910/21569

Interview by Vicki Borah Bloom

The Future of Feminism: PW Talks with Mikki Kendal

December 20, 2019

In *Hood Feminism* (Viking, Mar.), blogger and activist Kendall charts a new direction for the women's movement.

Who's the audience for this book?

Hopefully feminists who want to do better, and feminists who are doing the work but often feel like they're going unrecognized. People invested in the future of feminism.

How do you hope they respond?

I hope it makes people really consider what they've done, how they've done it, and what other people are doing. Even if it makes them angry. The response might look like a little less pink pussy hats and a lot more people showing up for Black Lives Matter protests.

What did your hashtag #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen accomplish?

I started that before we understood viral hashtags. I was ranting, basically. And it was like I gave people permission to say all of the things they had been feeling and thinking. All over the world, more than seven million people used that hashtag to talk about everything from gender to medical care—issues where they felt like they had no use for feminism, because mainstream feminism had no time for them.

Third- and fourth-wave feminists often discuss intersectionality as one of their core precepts. What are they still doing wrong?

I've seen a lot of people talk about intersectional feminism, but they're quick to remove black people and other identities and turn it into "It's about class, not about race." They're sidestepping their own discomfort with race, I suspect, but also creating a situation where their work leaves out the people most likely to be impacted. I want to shift that.

How do majority-white feminist organizations know when to step in and when to stay out of the way?

If you know that people in your town are food insecure, or that homelessness is a struggle, and that those people are disproportionately women of color, you can go to organizations already inside the community and ask "How can I help?" Sometimes it may be as simple as writing a check or forwarding our fundraiser blast to your network. There's a lot you can do that doesn't require you to run in as a savior and solve someone else's problem.

Can historically white feminist organizations fundamentally change by bringing in more women of color in leadership roles?

I think they can, if the organization actually wants it to work. But this is the problem. If an organization thinks diversity looks like a majority white group with one or two brown people, then it isn't really committed to decolonizing. Sometimes you get excuses: "Well, no one like that applied!" But if you're recruiting for a position and there's not a single face darker than a paper bag on your web page? You've told people who's likely to be welcome.

Source: **Publisher's Weekly**

The Future of Feminism: PW Talks with Mikki Kendall

Bloom, V. B. (2019, Dec. 20). *The Future of Feminism: PW Talks with Mikki Kendall.* Publishers Weekly. https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/authors/interviews/article/82028-the-future-of-feminism-pw-talks-with-mikki-kendall.html

Interview by Megan DiTrolio

"There Have Been Points in My Life When I Have Felt Like Feminism Was Not for Me": Mikki Kendall, author of Hood Feminism, on how the mainstream feminist movement has largely ignored women of colour

July 1, 2020

Behind the facade of millennial pink and Rosie the Riveter posters, mainstream feminism has largely ignored an entire population: marginalized women. In Hood Feminism, Mikki Kendall argues with searing prose that because mainstream feminism is so focused on elevating more (usually, white) women into CEO positions, it has neglected the foundational needs of many Black women—things like food security, education, and childcare.

Cutting, critical, and consequential, Hood Feminism is required reading for anyone who calls himself or herself a feminist, an urgent piece of feminist discourse. It's a tough read—especially if you've been giving yourself woke feminist gold stars—but that makes it all the more necessary. At this moment when the Black Lives Matter movement has swept the nation and the demand for racial justice has grown louder than ever, we spoke with Kendall to learn more about the failures of the mainstream feminist movement and how it can change—must change—for the better. Here, Kendall shares a few pillars of her argument, but pick up your own copy to understand the breadth of the conversation.

Megan DiTrolio: What does the term "Hood Feminism" mean?

Mikki Kendall: I would say it's lived feminism. The feminism that is the work that you do for your community, for yourself, and for your family. It's less about the academic end, or about becoming a CEO, and more about survival and sustainability for the long-term—for your community and yourself.

Megan DiTrolio: In the introduction of Hood Feminism, you write: "The hood taught me that feminism isn't just academic theory." Can you expand on that?

Mikki Kendall: A few years ago, I was the target of a lot of backlash for writing about medically necessary abortion. What was jarring was that there were plenty of people who wanted me to testify [about abortion], but it was my community that said, "Are you safe? Do you have enough food? How can we help you?" It was less about advancing my thought [on medical abortion].

Megan DiTrolio: Was that a moment that helped shape your theory of feminism?

Mikki Kendall: Yes. But it's not like that was the only time—there have been various points in my life when I have felt like feminism was not for me or spoke to me. A lot of feminist texts, especially academically centered texts, engage with low-income Black women who are single mothers like we're objects, like we're problems to solve.

I really wanted to talk about what I saw day to day, as opposed to what people think happens. There's this weird narrative that the hood is a terrible place, and that no one takes care of anyone and you're out there struggling by yourself. The reality for poverty, whether you're in the inner city or a rural area,

is that you are with your community all the time. You're all working together, because otherwise you're not going to make it.

Megan DiTrolio: You argue that feminism has largely ignored the problems that many Black women and women in poverty face: things like food security and education. Why is it crucial to view those problems through a feminist lens?

Mikki Kendall: When we say a feminist movement is for women, it's supposed to advance equality for all women. But then we say that these issues that only some women face [like food insecurity or education] are someone else's problem. Well, then we're not a movement for all women. We're a movement for women who want to be a CEO, we're a movement for women who want equality with white men. We're a movement for a lot of things, apparently, but we're not a movement for women who need support in their struggles. Then, mainstream feminism often turns to these women and says, Why aren't you showing up for us? Solidarity can't be a one-way street.

Megan DiTrolio: Can you describe your relationship with the word solidarity?

Mikki Kendall: I think it's a great idea to have each other's backs, but it seems like often the actual having of the back is more likely to happen between communities of color and between feminists of color.

I feel like sometimes the concept of solidarity becomes a trap. It's not that it's take a penny, leave a penny in terms of support. I understand sometimes it's going to be 60–40. But when your idea is 99–1, that's not solidarity.

Megan DiTrolio: It brings up an interesting illustration: Take the Women's March, for example, which had a huge turnout. Where are all the people who were part of that movement now, during Black Lives Matter protests?

Mikki Kendall: It’s interesting to see people suddenly realize as the videos [of injustice against Black people] roll in back to back to back: Oh, wow, this is really bad. Well, it was really bad eight years ago. It was really bad 16 years ago. The videos have made it easier to see. Tamir Rice was killed at a park at 12 years old. So, there's something sort of jarring about how feminism as a movement didn't figure out back when Rekia Boyd was killed [in 2012], that maybe Black women are in danger from police. I've seen some now with Breonna Taylor go, Oh, police brutality affects Black women. But we had that conversation with Daniel Holtzclaw and his victims, and we've had that conversation with Rekia Boyd.

I just want feminism to show up. I understand that for the most part, upper middle class white women don't have anything to fear from police. The police will not use your name or your safety as a justification for their behavior. We need you to show up and say something.

Megan DiTrolio: Why is prioritizing intersectionality crucial?

Mikki Kendall: At this point, there's a weird sub narrative. We think somehow that all women are safer regardless of race, right? Really, women, especially women of color, aren't any safer [than men]. They're in more danger. And in some cases, like for indigenous women, there are higher levels of risk for certain crimes like sexual assault.

People are starting to realize that those women aren't safe. You can find any number of mainstream feminists who will be happy to tell you about the work they've done in the Congo or in India. Then when you start asking them about educational access in America, or about gun violence that particularly targets girls who are often of the same racial background as the ones that they feel like they can go save, [feminists] don't seem to recognize that [those American girls are] people. Some of that is definitely about being able to go and feed this white [savior] complex and feel good about yourself.

You might also have to face the fact that the people oppressing women of color are your neighbors. Are your relatives. Are you. There's a point where I think it's almost painful for feminism to look at the work it didn't do. It's easier in some ways to go clean up someone else's house than to clean your own.

Megan DiTrolio: As people start to acknowledge and understand their implicit bias and try to become better anti-racists, better allies, how do we separate that from the problematic white savior narrative?

Mikki Kendall: I do think some people are trying to be better. They want to be better. They want to be helpful. They want to be in solidarity. But then there's also this: [Feminists] don't want to be infantilizing. We don't want to be in this moment where white saviorism trumps the work that Black people are doing. How do we look at that? I would argue that that's where [people need to show up]: at the voting booth, school board meetings, and municipal meetings. Municipal meetings are the most boring things in the history of humanity. But those are the places where the hard work of change happens. Showing up in these ways probably won't get you as many savior cookies, but you can be super effective if you use your privilege to make sure things are better for a community, as opposed to just for you.

Megan DiTrolio: Why do you think mainstream feminism hasn't acknowledged the cracks in the facade? Is it fear of weakening the movement, or do you think people are actually ignorant of the plight that many women of color are facing?

Mikki Kendall: There are people who identify as feminist who are as racist as the day is long. They are perfectly fine with the idea that white women will get ahead, or some women will get ahead, and they have attached a value system to which women deserve to get ahead. Then you add in classism. Low-income white women have a lot more in common with low-income Black women than they do with middle class or upper middle class white women, right? I know that they are often blamed for racism, but they don't functionally have any power to make racism as a structural oppression work. You know who does? Rich white people. They want that access, that freedom, that opportunity. But what they're really chasing is equality to oppress, not equality for all.

I don't think it's just ignorance. I think some people are ignorant. I think some aspects of this are definitely "the bubble." I know people like to say a liberal bubble, but really, the bubbles are not in the big city. The bubbles are in your small town Americana. And they're there because your parents or grandparents moved you to a sundown town or built a sundown town. They deliberately voted to avoid integration. If you live in a place that's all white or 99 percent white, that's not organic. That didn't happen by accident. When you say, "My town has no problem with racism," you're choosing ignorance at the expense of other people. It's not that feminism doesn't know better. I think feminism doesn't want to do better all the time.

Megan DiTrolio: Recently we've seen the commodification of white feminism by major brands. What are your thoughts on that?

Mikki Kendall: I'm going to bring The Wing in as my example. And they're not the only one. Con artists can show up anywhere, and you know who's the easiest to con? People who want to be part of something. A lot of corporations are saying, we can give you something exclusive. Business are selling you this special space devoted just to you.

One of the passages in that [New York Times] exposé [about The Wing] described someone who had a tantrum and was throwing things at a staffer. I would bet money that that's a person who behaves that way, period. Those people are by and large enabled by their money, yes, but also by the fact that there's always someone selling this idea that they can have something exclusive. There's always a way to create an exclusive bubble. And I think a lot of businesses, even though they say their state of intent is to be for women, a lot of them are just hucksters taking advantage.

Megan DiTrolio: What else is on your mind?

Mikki Kendall: A few things: One: Trans women are women. Trans men are men. Nonbinary and genderqueer people exist. No one's identity, safety, or humanity should be up for debate or discussion. Trans exclusionary equals bigotry.

Two: Childcare is one of those spaces where feminism remembers that there are costs. Childcare subsidies are an often-neglected part of the conversation around public assistance. If we want women to be empowered to work [especially during the COVID-19 pandemic], we have to make it possible for them to be able to go to work, even if they have children. I would love to see us remember the purpose of social safety nets. There's a reason that public housing and other assistance programs exist. It's not that they're handouts; it's that they're "hand ups." No one in bootstraps can lift more than their legs.

Source: **Marie Claire**

"There Have Been Points in My Life When I Have Felt Like Feminism Was Not for Me": Mikki Kendall, author of Hood Feminism, on how the mainstream feminist movement has largely ignored women of color

DiTrolio, M. (2020, July 1). *"There Have Been Points in My Life When I Have Felt Like Feminism Was Not for Me": Mikki Kendall, author of Hood Feminism, on how the mainstream feminist movement has largely ignored women of color.* Marie Claire. https://www.marieclaire.com/politics/a32936025/mikki-kendall-hood-feminism-interview/

Discussion Questions

1. In the introduction, the author says, “It’s not going to be a comfortable read, but it is going to be an opportunity to learn for those who are willing to do the hard work.” (xv) How did you deal with feelings of discomfort, if any? Which parts were most difficult for you to get through?

2. How do you feel about activism and its intersection with social media? Have you participated in any such hashtags or trending topics? What were the end-results?

3. The author writes on page 14, “Sometimes being a good ally is about opening the door for someone instead of insisting that your voice is the only one that matters.” How can you become an ally like this in your community or workplace?

4. In the chapter, “Allies, Anger, and Accomplices,” does the author’s description of allies resonate with your experience?

5. What is your understanding of respectability politics in relation to feminism? What are its limitations, and how can we counter it?

6. Kendall writes on page 60, “Any system that makes basic human rights contingent on a narrow standard of behavior pits potential victims against each other and only benefits those who would prey on them.” Growing up, what kind of messaging have you received around sex? Or on the topic of rape prevention? How did they make you feel or act?

7. How has poverty or the threat of poverty touched your life, especially in the areas of food security and housing?

8. Did the book challenge your assumptions or change your opinions about a topic? Which ones?

9. Were there any discussions that changes in the Canadian context? How do we support or fail to support our communities?

10. How did this book affect your view of feminism? How do you live as a feminist?

Discussion Themes

Intersectional Feminism | *Racism* | *Violence and Rape Culture* | *Poverty* | *Education* | *Parenting*