Alice Walker, «Everyday Use», and Black Feminism


We All Can Do It!
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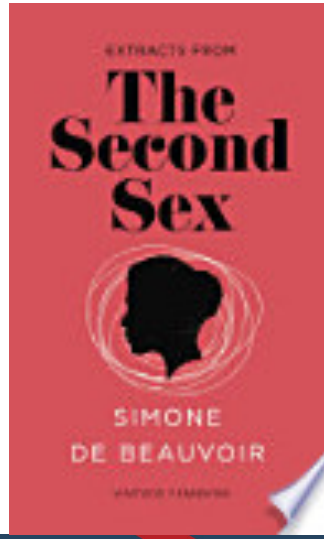
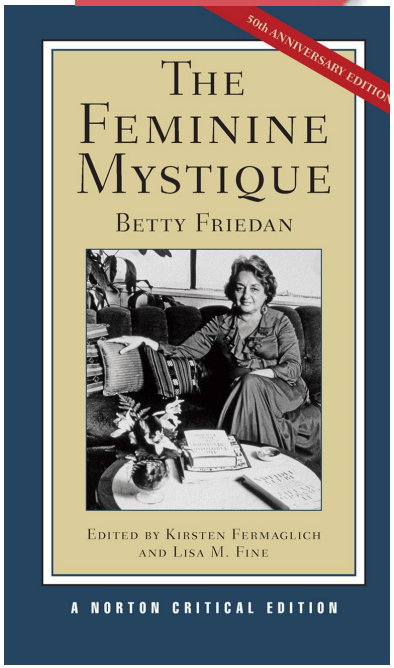
The Three Waves of Feminism

The history of modern western feminisms is divided into three "waves”. The first wave refers to the emancipation movement of the 19th through early 20th centuries, which focused on basic rights: women fought mainly for suffrage, better working conditions, access to education, property rights and more prestigious jobs. The second wave, which goes from the 1960s to the 1980s, focused on gender inequality in culture and society, reproduction rights and sexuality. The third wave of feminism, from the late 1980s to our times, criticized preceding women’s movements for their race, class, and sexual bias and their essentialism. They were middle class, white, heterosexual women who believed they represented all women and their fights were the same.

Second wave feminism and motherhood

Reaction against Freud's notion of women's biology as destiny > fight for reproductive freedom and also rejection of motherhood both as reproduction and institution





Simone de Beauvoir: patriarchy controls women through marriage and motherhood
"That the child is the supreme aim of woman is a statement having precisely the value of an advertising slogan."
"Few tasks are more like the torture of Sisyphus than housework, with its endless repetition: the clean becomes soiled, the soiled is made clean, over and over, day after day."
"We have seen what poetic veils are thrown over her monotonous burdens of housekeeping and maternity: in exchange for her liberty she has received the false treasures of her 'femininity'. Balzac illustrates this manoeuvre very well in counseling man to treat her as a slave while persuading her that she is a queen."(*The Second Sex*, 1949)

Betty Friedan (co-founder of NOW-National Organization of Women, 1964): women need to discover their own identities outside the confines of the home, marriage, and family
Shulamith Firestone: motherhood is the heart of women's oppression, women must get free of the burden of reproduction

From the Empire of the Mother to Rejection of Motherhood to Maternal Thinking

Motherhood vs mothering

Adrienne Rich: the patriarchal notion of motherhood, not the actual experience of mothering, is the source of women's oppression

Motherhood as ideology and institution, social construct influenced by history as well as race, class, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation

Mothering/motherwork/maternal practice as experience (the work of caring) and identity (women's sense of self as rooted in the experience of mothering) - Mothering as women's culture

By rejecting the experience of mothering instead of questioning the institution/ideology of motherhood and challenging it, women are renouncing a fundamental part of their unique cultural identity
Because of mothering women are different from men: In *Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace* (1989) Sara Ruddick provided an alternative intepretative frame to reproductive labor by focusing on the intellectual capacities a mother develops in mothering

“While white feminists often painted motherhood as the ultimate apparatus of patriarchy, many activist women of color saw in motherhood not only freedom but also agency”

Just yesterday I stood for a few minutes at the top of the stairs leading to a white doctor s office in a white neighborhood. I watched one Black woman after another trudge to the corner, where she then waited to catch the bus home. These were Black women still cleaning somebody else’s house or Black women still caring for somebody else’s sick or elderly, before they came back to the frequently thankless chores of their own loneliness, their own families. And I felt angry and I felt ashamed. And I felt, once again, the kindling heat of my hope that we, the daughters of these Black women, will honor their sacrifice by giving them thanks. We will undertake, with pride, every transcendent dream of freedom made possible by the humility of their love.

June Jordan, On *Call*, 1985

Rachel Cargle, “When Feminism Is White Supremacy in Heels,” *Harper’s Bazar* 2018

“If there is not the intentional and action-based inclusion of women of color, then feminism is simply white supremacy in heels.”

ILLUSTRATION BY ERIN LUX

White Feminism

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VNdZcegK1lQ

https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/intersectionality-meaning

Word We're Watching: Intersectionality
What happens when forms of discrimination combine, overlap, and intersect

Update: This word was added in April 2017.

It's been around since the late 1980's but intersectionality is a word that's new to many of us. It's used to refer to the complex and cumulative way that the effects of different forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, and yes, intersect—especially in the experiences of marginalized people or groups.

INTERSECTIONALITY

"The concept of the simultaneity of oppression is still the crux of a Black feminist understanding of political reality and, I believe, one of the most significant ideological contributions of Black feminist thought."
Barbara Smith, ed., *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000), xxxiv.

"Consider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in an intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination. . . . But it is not always easy to reconstruct an accident: Sometimes the skid marks and the injuries simply indicate that they occurred simultaneously, frustrating efforts to determine which driver caused the harm."
Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics," University of Chicago Legal Forum, 1989, 139–67.

Sharon Smith, "Black Feminism and Intersectionality,"*ISR* 91 (2013-2014)

Crenshaw argues that Black women are discriminated against in ways that often do not fit neatly within the legal categories of either "racism" or "sexism"—but as a combination of both racism and sexism. Yet the legal system has generally defined sexism as based upon an unspoken reference to the injustices confronted by all (including white) women, while defining racism to refer to those faced by all (including male) Blacks and other people of color. This framework frequently renders Black women legally "invisible" and without legal recourse…

Crenshaw describes several employment discrimination-based lawsuits to illustrate how Black women's complaints often fall between the cracks precisely because they are discriminated against both as women and as Blacks…

After Crenshaw introduced the term intersectionality in 1989, it was widely adopted because it managed to encompass in a single word the simultaneous experience of the multiple oppressions faced by Black women. But the concept was not a new one. Since the times of slavery, Black women have eloquently described the multiple oppressions of race, class, and gender—referring to this concept as "interlocking oppressions," "simultaneous oppressions," "double jeopardy," "triple jeopardy" or any number of descriptive terms.

Like most other Black feminists, Crenshaw emphasizes the importance of Sojourner Truth's famous "Ain't I a Woman?" speech delivered to the 1851 Women's Convention in Akron, Ohio… Truth's words vividly contrast the character of oppression faced by white and Black women. While white middle-class women have traditionally been treated as delicate and overly emotional—destined to subordinate themselves to white men—Black women have been denigrated and subject to the racist abuse that is a foundational element of US society.

Yet, as Crenshaw notes, “When Sojourner Truth rose to speak, many white women urged that she be silenced, fearing that she would divert attention from women’s suffrage to emancipation,” invoking a clear illustration of the degree of racism within the suffrage movement.

Crenshaw draws a parallel between Truth’s experience with the white suffrage movement and Black women’s experience with modern feminism, arguing, “When feminist theory and politics that claim to reflect women’s experiences and women’s aspirations do not include or speak to Black women, Black women must ask, “Ain’t we women?”

Intersectionality as a synthesis of oppressions

Thus, Crenshaw’s political aims reach further than addressing flaws in the legal system. She argues that Black women are frequently absent from analyses of either gender oppression or racism, since the former focuses primarily on the experiences of white women and the latter on Black men. She seeks to challenge both feminist and antiracist theory and practice that neglect to “accurately reflect the interaction of race and gender,” arguing that “because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated.”

Crenshaw argues that a key aspect of intersectionality lies in its recognition that multiple oppressions are not each suffered separately but rather as a single, synthesized experience.

There is no such thing as single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives.

–Audre Lorde

The Combahee River Collective, “The Combahee River Collective Statement” (1978)

We are a collective of Black feminists who have been meeting together since 1974. During that time we have been involved in the process of defining and clarifying our politics, while at the same time doing political work within our own group and in coalition with other progressive organizations and movements. The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives. As Black women we see Black feminism as the logical political movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions that all women of color face....

Before looking at the recent development of Black feminism we would like to affirm that we find our origins in the historical reality of Afro-American women's continuous life-and-death struggle for survival and liberation. Black women's extremely negative relationship to the American political system (a system of white male rule) has always been determined by our membership in two oppressed racial and sexual castes. As Angela Davis points out in "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves," Black women have always embodied, if only in their physical manifestation, an adversary stance to white male rule and have actively resisted its inroads upon them and their communities in both dramatic and subtle ways.

There have always been Black women activists—some known, like Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Frances E. W. Harper, Ida B. Wells Barnett, and Mary Church Terrell, and thousands upon thousands unknown—who have had a shared awareness of how their sexual identity combined with their racial identity to make their whole life situation and the focus of their political struggles unique. Contemporary Black feminism is the outgrowth of countless generations of personal sacrifice, militancy, and work by our mothers and sisters. A Black feminist presence has evolved most obviously in connection with the second wave of the American women's movement beginning in the late 1960s. Black, other Third World, and working women have been involved in the feminist movement from its start, but both outside reactionary forces and racism and elitism within the movement itself have served to obscure our participation. In 1973, Black feminists, primarily located in New York, felt the necessity of forming a separate Black feminist group. This became the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO). Black feminist politics also have an obvious connection to movements for Black liberation, particularly those of the 1960s and I970s. Many of us were active in those movements (Civil Rights, Black nationalism, the Black Panthers), and all of our lives were greatly affected and changed by their ideologies, their goals, and the tactics used to achieve their goals. It was our experience and disillusionment within these liberation movements, as well as experience on the periphery of the white male left, that led to the need to develop a politics that was anti-racist, unlike those of white women, and anti-sexist, unlike those of Black and white men.

“MAMMIES, MATRIARCHS, AND OTHER CONTROLLING IMAGES,” by Patricia Hill Collins

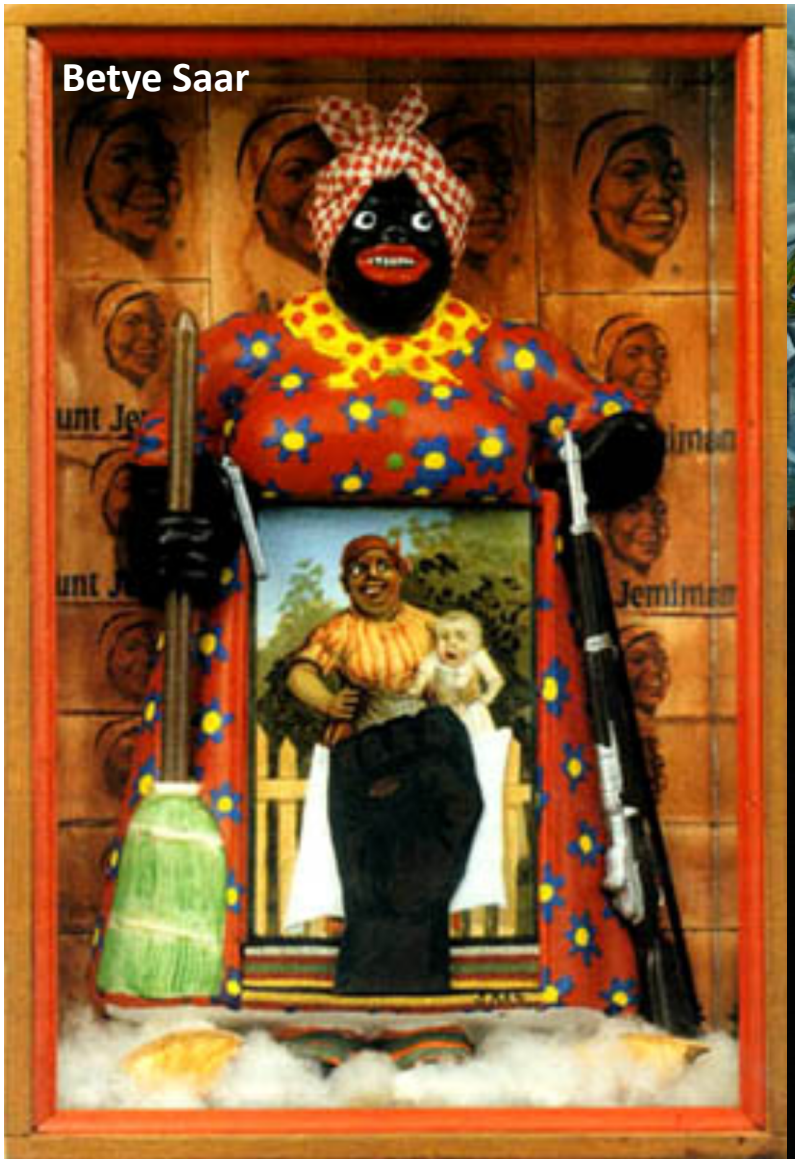
Intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, and sexuality could not continue without powerful ideological justifications for their existence. As Cheryl Gilkes contends, “Black women's assertiveness and their use of every expression of racism to launch multiple assaults against the entire fabric of inequality have been a consistent, multifaceted threat to the status quo. As punishment, Black women have been assaulted with a variety of negative images” (1983a, 294). Portraying African-American women as stereotypical mammies, matriarchs, welfare recipients, and hot mommas helps justify U.S. Black women’s oppression. Challenging these controlling images has long been a core theme in Black feminist thought.

As part of a generalized ideology of domination, stereotypical images of Black womanhood take on special meaning. Because the authority to define societal values is a major instrument of power, elite groups, in exercising power, manipulate ideas about Black womanhood. They do so by exploiting already existing symbols, or creating new ones. ... These controlling images are designed to make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life.

The dominant ideology of the slave era fostered the creation of several interrelated, socially constructed controlling images of Black womanhood, each reflecting the dominant group's interest in maintaining Black women's subordination. Moreover, since Black and White women were both important to slavery's continuation, controlling images of Black womanhood also functioned to mask social relations that affected all women. According to the cult of true womanhood that accompanied the traditional family ideal, "true" women possessed four cardinal virtues: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. Propertied White women and those of the emerging middle class were encouraged to aspire to these virtues. African-American women encountered a different set of controlling images.

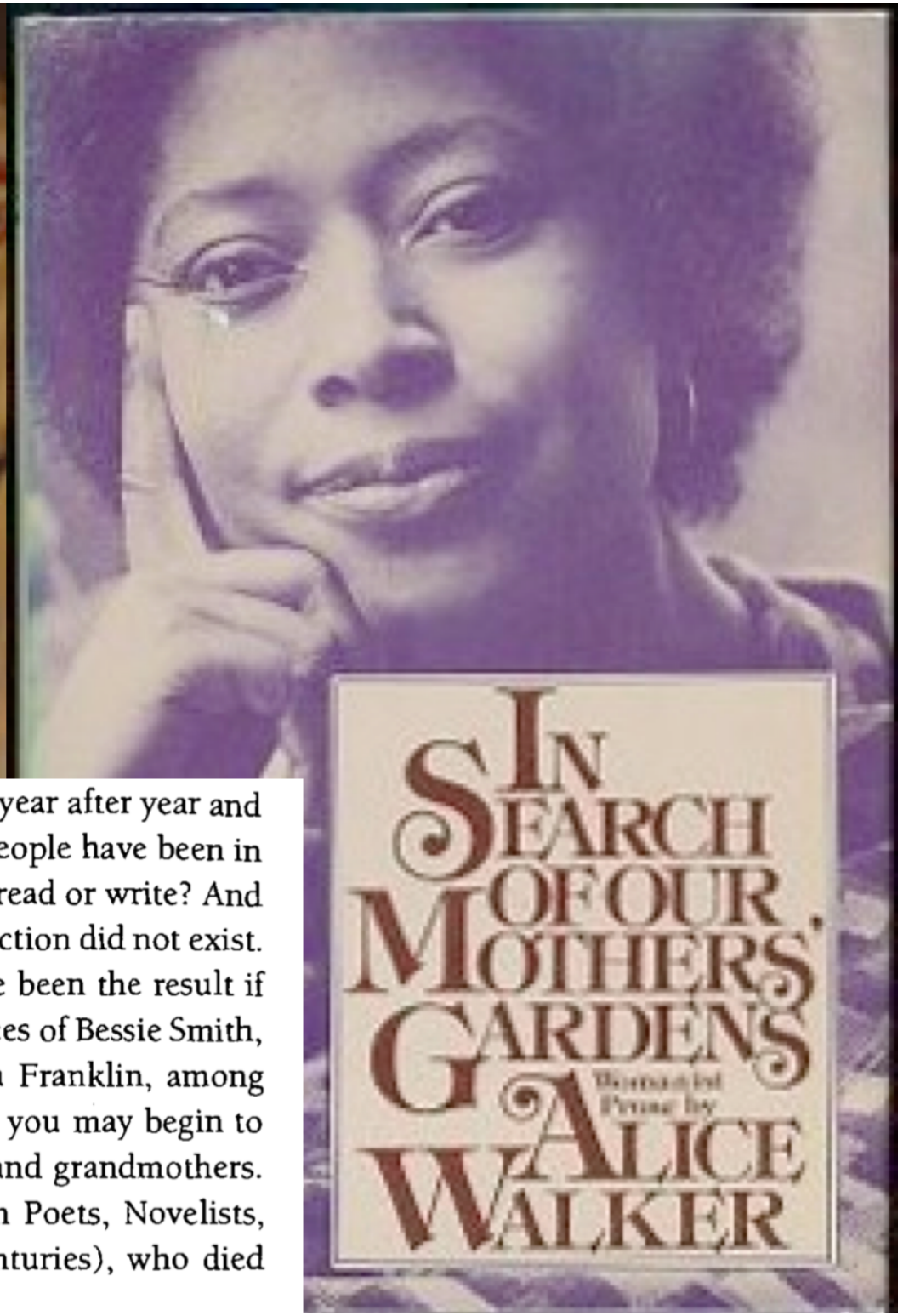
The first controlling image applied to U.S. Black women is that of the mammy—the faithful, obedient domestic servant. Created to justify the economic exploitation of house slaves and sustained to explain Black women's long-standing restriction to domestic service, the mammy image represents the normative yardstick used to evaluate all Black women's behavior. By loving, nurturing, and caring for her White children and "family" better than her own, the mammy symbolizes the dominant group's perceptions of the ideal Black female relationship to elite White male power. Even though she may be well loved and may wield considerable authority in her White "family," the mammy still knows her "place" as obedient servant. She has accepted her subordination.

The mammy image is central to intersecting oppressions of race, gender, sexuality, and class. Regarding racial oppression, controlling images like the mammy aim to influence Black maternal behavior. As the members of African-American families who are most familiar with the skills needed for Black accommodation, Black mothers are encouraged to transmit to their own children the deference behavior that many are forced to exhibit in their mammified jobs. By teaching Black children their assigned place in White power structures, Black women who internalize the mammy image potentially become effective conduits for perpetuating racial oppression. Ideas about mammy buttress racial hierarchies in other ways. Employing Black women in mammified occupations supports the racial superiority of White employers, encouraging middle-class White women in particular to identify more closely with the racial and class privilege afforded their fathers, husbands, and sons. In a climate where, as Patricia Williams (1995) puts it, “those blacks who do indeed rise into the middle class end up being figured only as those who were given whatever they enjoy, and the black ‘underclass’ becomes those whose sole life activity is taking ” (p. 61), no wonder that working-class Whites expect Black women to exhibit deferential behavior, and deeply resent those who do not. Mammy is the public face that Whites expect Black women to assume for them.



Renée Valerie Cox, Venus Hottentot 2000

Alice Walker



How was the creativity of the black woman kept alive, year after year and century after century, when for most of the years black people have been in America, it was a punishable crime for a black person to read or write? And the freedom to paint, to sculpt, to expand the mind with action did not exist. Consider, if you can bear to imagine it, what might have been the result if singing, too, had been forbidden by law. Listen to the voices of Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, Nina Simone, Roberta Flack, and Aretha Franklin, among others, and imagine those voices muzzled for life. Then you may begin to comprehend the lives of our "crazy," "Sainted" mothers and grandmothers. The agony of the lives of women who might have been Poets, Novelists, Essayists, and Short-Story Writers (over a period of centuries), who died with their real gifts stifled within them.

“For you will find, as women have found through the ages, that changing the world requires a lot of free time. Requires a lot of mobility. Requires money, and, as Virginia Woolf put it so well, ‘a room of one’s own’, preferably one with a key and a lock. Which means that women must be prepared to think for themselves, which means, undoubtedly, trouble with boyfriends, lovers, and husbands, which means all kinds of heartache and misery, and times when you will wonder if independence, freedom of thought, or your own work is worth it all. We must believe that it is. For the world is not good enough; we must make it better.”

“We are a people. A people do not throw their geniuses away. And if they are thrown away, it is our duty as artists and as witnesses for the future to collect them again for the sake of our children, and, if necessary, bone by bone.”

Alice Walker, In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose

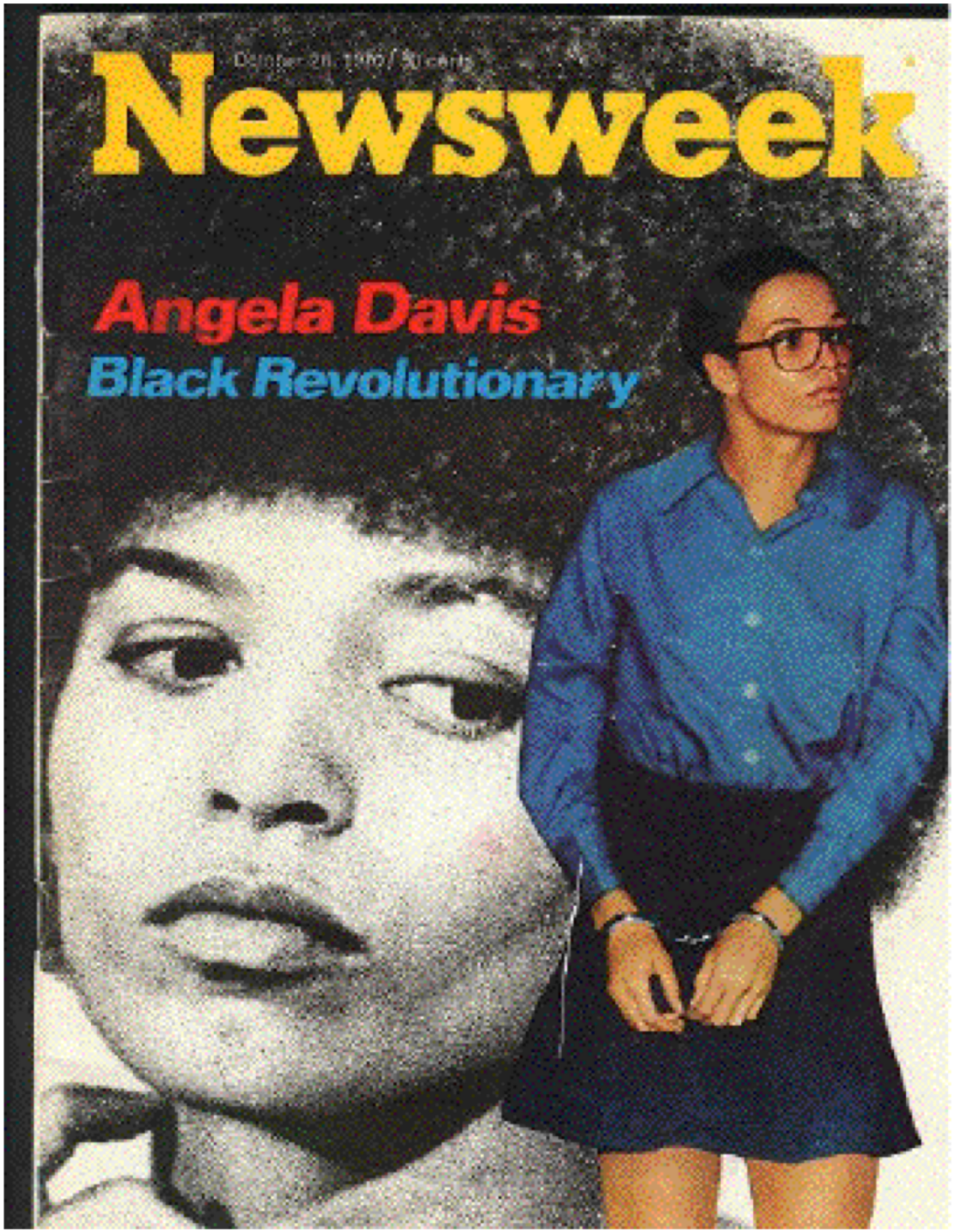
Alice Walker's Definition of a "Womanist" from *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* Copyright 1983.

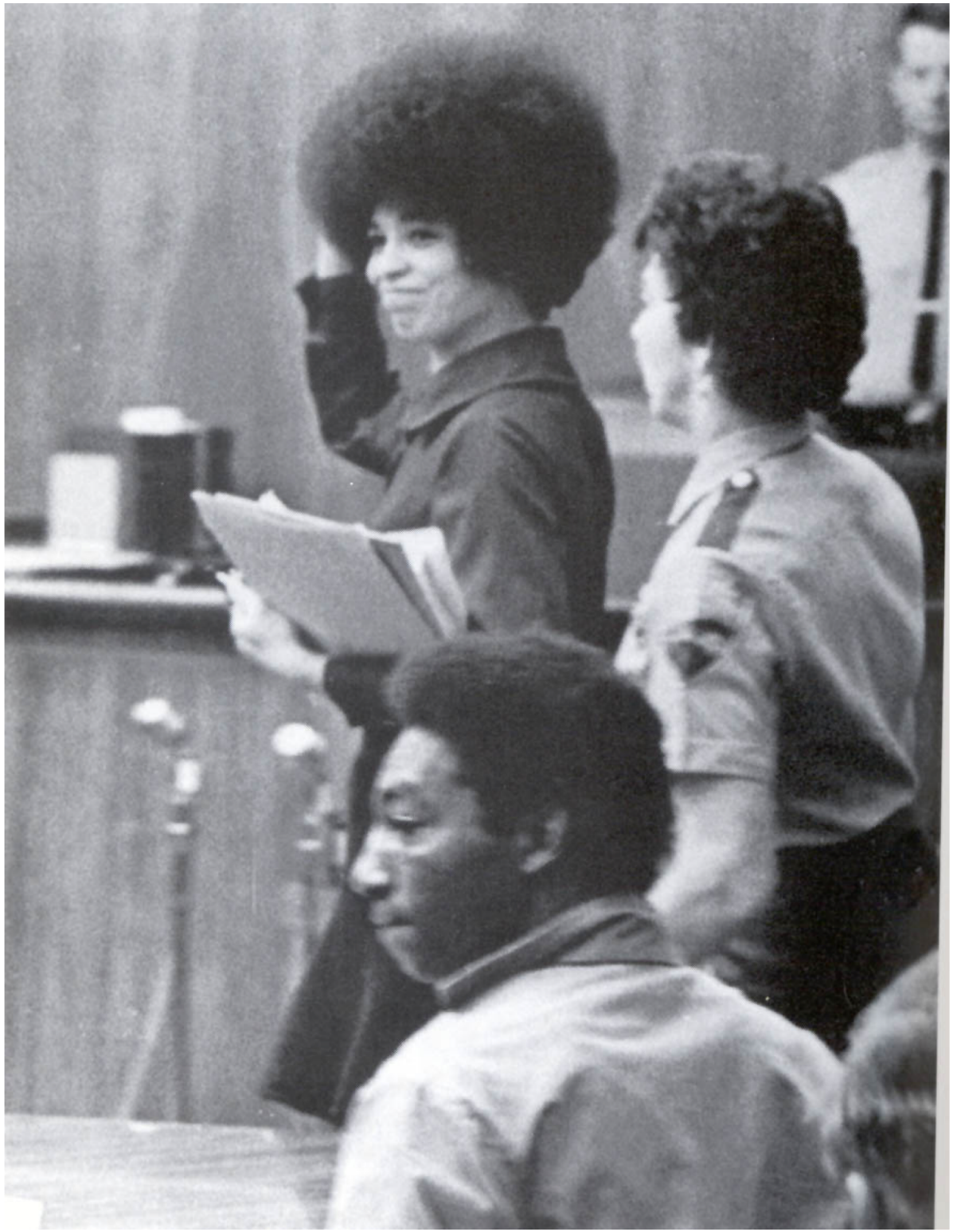
WOMANIST

1. From *womanish*. (Opp. of "girlish," i.e. frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, "you acting womanish," i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or *willful* behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered "good" for one. Interested in grown up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: "You trying to be grown." Responsible. In charge. *Serious*.
2. *Also:* A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally a universalist, as in: "Mama, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige and black?" Ans. "Well, you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented." Traditionally capable, as in: "Mama, I'm walking to Canada and I'm taking you and a bunch of other slaves with me." Reply: "It wouldn't be the first time."
3. Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. *Loves* the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. *Loves* the Folk. Loves herself. *Regardless*.
4. Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender.

Everyday use

- The story begins with Mama, a Southern black country woman, waiting for the arrival of her daughter Dee, who is described as a beautiful, smart and self-confident young black woman who is college-educated and years before moved to the city. Mama is in the yard with her second daughter Maggie, a shy and humble girl. As they wait for Dee to arrive, Mama reminisces about her life, the conflicting relationship with Dee and her concern for Maggie.
- Dee arrives with Hakim, her boyfriend. She wears a *striking African dress* and she asks to be called *Wangero*, her new African name, because the name Dee is a symbol of her oppression, as whites gave slaves European names to replace their own African ones. She takes a few pictures of Mama and Maggie standing in front of the house even before greeting them, and she seems only interested in taking away with her some authentic items of her African American heritage instead of asking Mama and Maggie how they are doing.
- She finds some *quilts* that were meant for her younger sister, and wants them for herself. She claims that she deserves the quilts more than Maggie, because she would hang them, as a precious antique to be proud of, while her sister would put them to everyday use, ruining them instead of preserving them. Mama does not give in and tells 'Wangero' to take two ordinary quilts instead, but Dee refuses because they are not authentic. p 24
- Dee points out again how the two women do not understand their *heritage*, then she turns around and leaves.


October 20, 1969 / 50 cents
Newsweek
Angela Davis
Black Revolutionary



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The Dashiki: The History of a Radical Garment

Dive into the unique history and revolutionary politics of the symbolic West African garment.

DIASPORA—The dashiki is clothing as politics.

It might not exactly seem that way in its present state—a revived, streetwear trend largely associated with the intricate and highly recognizable 'Angelina print,' but its story is one of African innovation and Black resistance.

The word “dashiki" comes from the Yoruba word danshiki, used to refer to the loose-fitting pullover which originated in West Africa as a functional work tunic for men, comfortable enough to wear in the heat. The Yoruba loaned the word danshiki from the Hausa term dan ciki, which means "underneath." The dan chiki garment was commonly worn by males under large robes. Similar garments were found in sacred Dogon burial caves in Southern Mali, which date back to the 12th and 13th centuries.

The roots of the garment are not lost on anyone—it is an unmistakably African item. Its symbolic significance, however, was molded thousands of miles outside of the continent's borders. It was those of African descent, whose ancestors were hauled to North America in chains, who carried this torch. The Civil Rights and Black Panther Movements of the 1960s and early 70s gave the dashiki its political potency. African Americans adopted the article as a means of rejecting Western cultural norms. This is when the dashiki moved beyond style and functionality to become an emblem of Black pride, as illustrative of the beauty of blackness as an afro or a raised fist.

ww.okayafrica.com/history-politics-dashiki/

The dashiki's political vigor weakened towards the end of the 60s when it became popular among white counterculture groups, whose adoption of the garment—based primarily on its aesthetic appeal—undermined its status as a sign of Black identity. Retailers began to import dashikis made in India, Bangladesh and Thailand in large numbers. These versions, often featured the East African-associated kanga print, commonly worn as wrappers by women in Kenya and Tanzania.

During this period, notable Black intellectuals began to warn their communities against the trivialization of dashikis and other symbols of Black beauty. "Donning a dashiki and growing a bush is fine if it energizes the wearer for real action; but 'Black is beautiful' is dangerous if it amounts only to wrapping oneself up in one's own glory and magnificence," wrote Civil Rights activist and politician, Sterling Tucker in his 1971 book *Black Strategies for Change in America*.

The dashiki lost some of its fervor in the tail-end of the 20th century when its use in the United States was largely limited to ceremonies or festivities, or as a pop culture stereotype.

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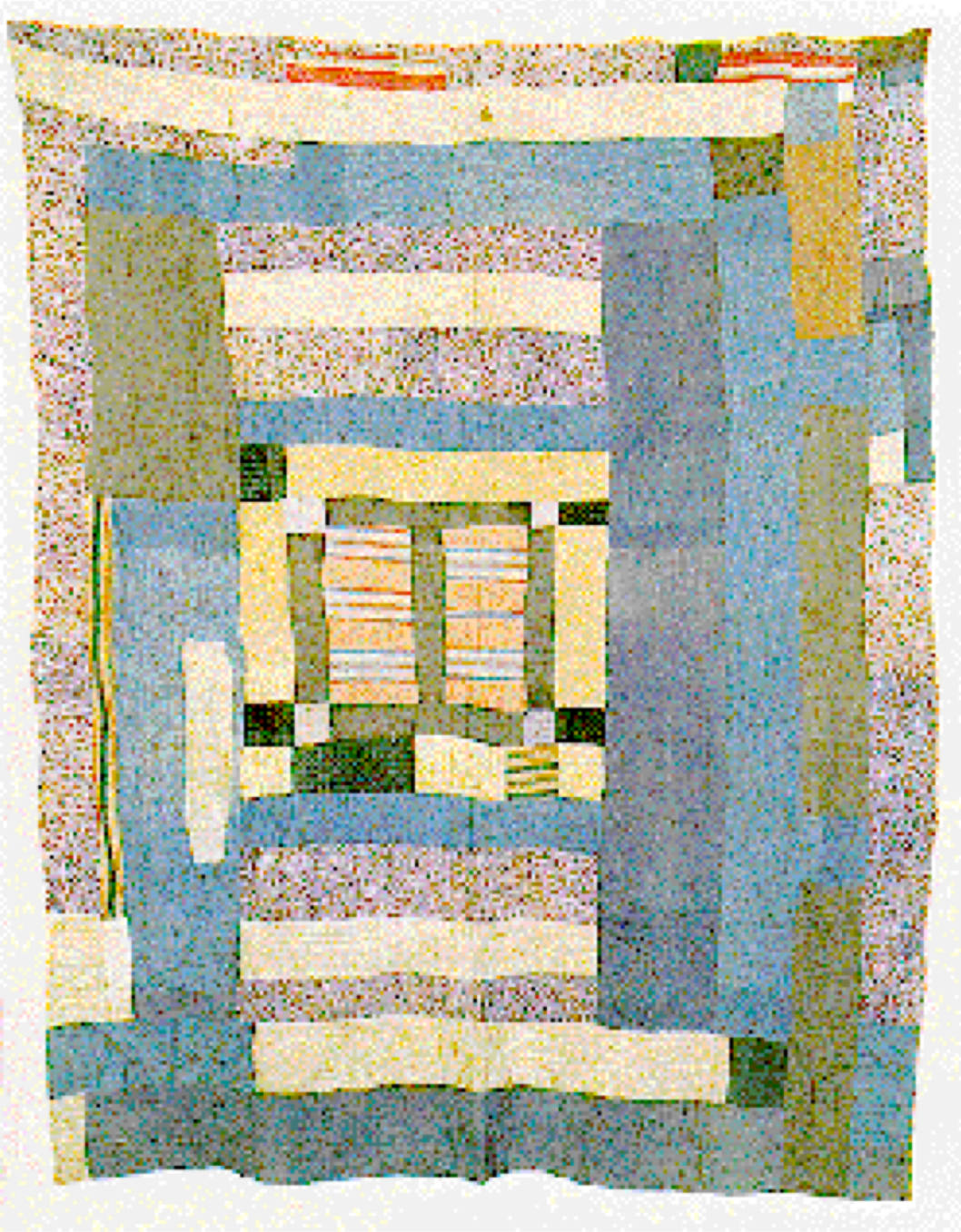
QUILTS AS SYMBOL IN AMERICA

Quilting is a unique American tradition because it has been developed as a union of different ethnic and cultural traditions. Developed as a "houseware" and as an art form along with the development of our country, quilting has been preserved as a symbol in our tradition as a country. Quilting has come to symbolize the union of African and European traditions in a unique manner -- as union, rather than a separation, of two, often contrasting or forcibly separated cultures and traditions. In the following literature this symbol can be seen in the ways that quilts and quilting are used to convey certain themes of self-expression, union of opposite values or people, the formation of close bonds among women and kin, heritage, history, family, comfort, love, and commitment. Quilting in America has become a type of symbol used not only for individual artists or authors, but symbol for a country.

http://xroads.virginia.edu/~ug97/quilt/table.html



Alice Walker} *on Quilting*

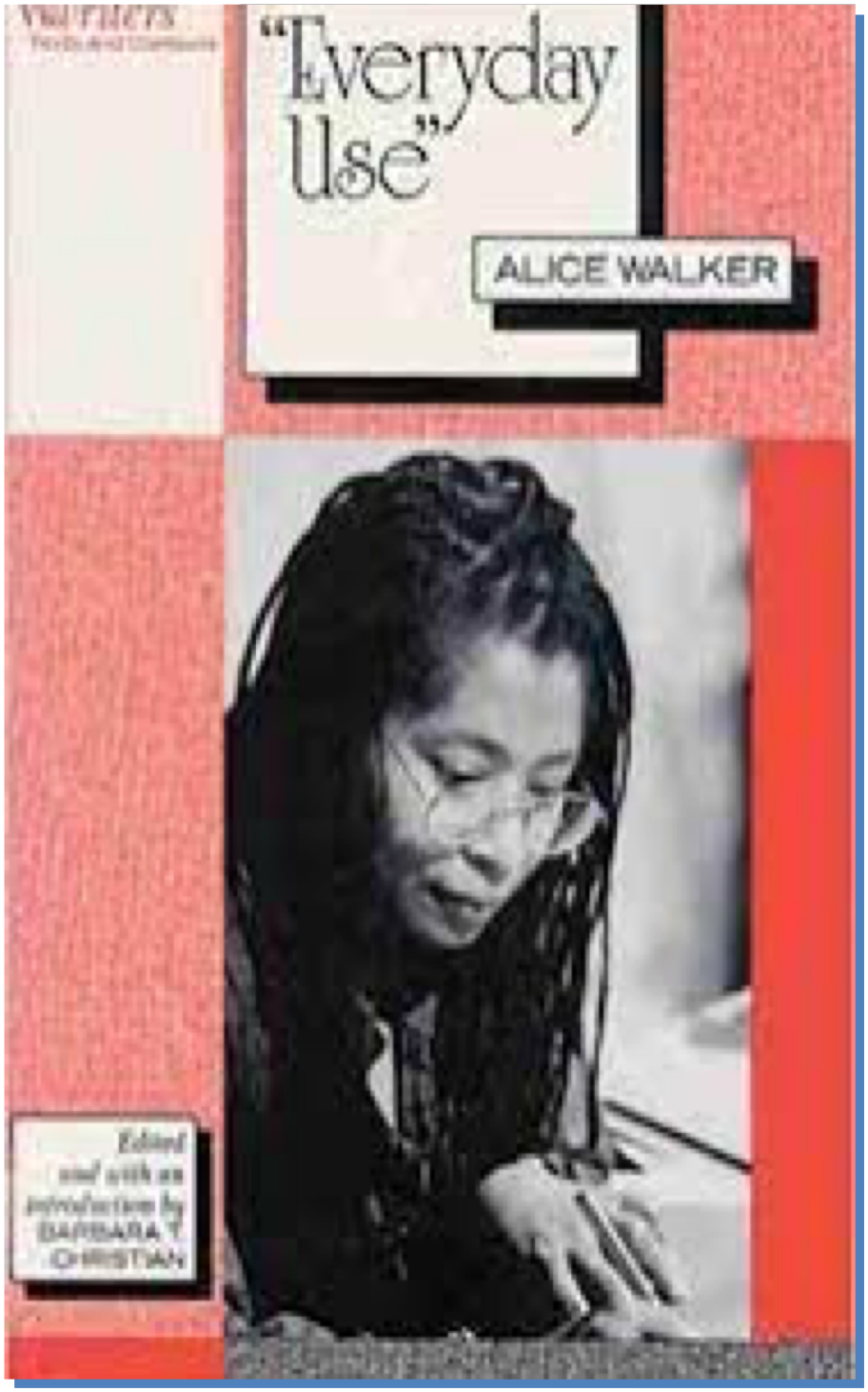
Well, my mother was a quilter, and I remember many, many afternoons of my mother and the neighborhood women sitting on the porch around the quilting frame, quilting and talking, you know; getting up to stir something on the stove and coming back and sitting down. My mother also had a frame inside the house. Sometimes during the winter she would quilt and she often pieced quilts. Piecing . . . I'm really more of a piecer, actually, than I am a quilter, because I can get as far as piecing all of the little squares or sections together, and sometimes putting them together into big blocks, but then I always have to call in help—spreading it out on the frame, or spreading it out on the floor and putting the batting in and doing the actual quilting.

Alice Walker among her many quilts

[The first quilt] I worked on [was] the In Love and Trouble quilt. And I did that one when I was living in Mississippi. It was during a period when we were wearing African-inspired dresses. So all of the pieces are from dresses that I actually wore. This yellow and black fabric I bought when I was in Uganda, and I had a beautiful dress made of it that I wore and wore and wore and eventually I couldn't wear it any more; partly I had worn it out and also I was pregnant, so it didn't fit, and I used that and I used the red and white and black, which was a long, floor-length dress that I had when I was pregnant with my daughter, Rebecca, who is now twenty-three. I took these things apart or I used scraps. I put them together in this quilt, because it just seemed perfect. Mississippi was full of political and social struggle, and regular quilts were all African American with emphasis on being here in the United States. But because of the African consciousness that was being raised and the way that we were all wearing our hair in naturals and wearing all of these African dresses, I felt the need to blend these two traditions. So it's a quilt of great memory and importance to me. I use it a lot and that's why it's so worn.

In her essay "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens," published in 1974 before the rise of Cultural Studies, Walker celebrates the creative legacy, symbolized by the quilt that women Like her mother had bestowed on her and other contemporary black women writers. In this essay, Walker searches for literary models of her own, as Virginia Woolf does in *A Room of One's Own*. Instead of analyzing the reasons why women had not created great art, as Woolf—an upper-class British white woman—does, Walker wonders whether, instead of looking for a clearly defined African American female tradition of 'art,' perhaps we should look for the female folk creativity that sustained our maternal ancestors. When she looks "low," Walker finds quilts like the one she saw in the Smithsonian Institution, composed by an "anonymous black woman" who lived in an almost invisible past, yet who created a work of art valued for its passion and imagination. What Walker, a Contemporary black woman writer, stresses in her appreciation of such examples of the creativity of nearly anonymous black Southern women like her mother is their ability to devise something beautiful and functional out of throwaways, from what the society considers to be waste. "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" beautifully complements Walker's short story "Everyday Use." In both pieces she uses the metaphor of the quilt to represent the pivotal role Southern black women played in the development of African American culture. The ability to transform nothing into something, central to these women's creativity, is the critical theme of "Everyday Use."

Barbara Christian, "Introduction," in A. Walker*, Everyday Use*, Rutgers UP 1994



It was first published in 1973 and is part of Walker's short story collection *In Love and Trouble*.

"Everyday Use" takes place during the 1960s, when many African Americans were discovering their heritage.

The "black pride" movement, which grew out of civil rights campaigns, called upon African Americans to celebrate their African roots and affirm their cultural identity.

Discussion Questions for Alice Walker's *Everyday Use* (1973)

What is the importance of the TV show, and popular culture in general, in the story?
What is the meaning of Mama's dream?
How are the three women in the story described physically? What about their personality?
Comment on the three women's responses to the fire.
What is the importance of the quilt in the story? What does it represent? What does it mean to Dee, Mama and Maggie?
What could be the significance of quilt making from a black feminist perspective?
What is the importance of names in the story?
What is Dee's attitude to her birthplace? How has it changed?
Why is the story titled "Everyday Use"?
Do you think the story is critical of the Black Power Movement?

Maggie will be nervous until after her sister goes: she will stand hopelessly in corners homely and ashamed of the burn scars down her arms and legs, eyeing her sister with a mixture of envy and awe. She thinks her sister has held life always in the palm of one hand, that "no" is a word the world never learned to say to her.

You've no doubt seen those TV shows where the child who has "made it" is confronted, as a surprise, by her own mother and father, tottering in weakly from backstage. (A pleasant surprise, of course: What would they do if parent and child came on the show only to curse out and insult each other?) On TV mother and child embrace and smile into each other's faces. Sometimes the mother and father weep, the child wraps them in her arms and leans across the table to tell how she would not have made it without their help. I have seen these programs.

Sometimes I dream a dream in which Dee and I are suddenly brought together on a TV program of this sort. Out of a dark and soft-seated limousine I am ushered into a bright room filled with many people. There I meet a smiling, gray, sporty man like Johnny Carson who shakes my hand and tells me what a fine girl I have. Then we are on the stage and Dee is embracing me with tears in her eyes. She pins on my dress a large orchid, even though she has told me once that she thinks orchids are tacky flowers.

In real life I am a large, big-boned woman with rough, man-working hands. In the winter I wear flannel nightgowns to bed and overalls during the day. I can kill and clean a hog as mercilessly as a man. My fat keeps me hot in zero weather. I can work outside all day, breaking ice to get water for washing. I can eat pork liver cooked over the open fire minutes after it comes steaming from the hog. One winter I knocked a bull calf straight in the brain between the eyes with a sledge hammer and had the meat hung up to chill before nightfall. But of course all this does not show on television. I am the way my daughter would want me to be: a hundred pounds lighter, my skin like an uncooked barley pancake. My hair glistens in the hot bright lights. Johnny Carson has much to do to keep up with my quick and witty tongue.

Have you ever seen a lame animal, perhaps a dog run over by some careless person rich enough to own a car, sidle up to someone who is ignorant enough to be kind to him? That is the way my Maggie walks. She has been like this, chin on chest, eyes on ground, feet in shuffle, ever since the fire that burned the other house to the ground.

Dee is lighter than Maggie, with nicer hair and a fuller figure. She's a woman now, though sometimes I forget. How long ago was it that the other house burned? Ten, twelve years? Sometimes I can still hear the flames and feel Maggie's arms sticking to me, her hair smoking and her dress falling off her in little black papery flakes. Her eyes seemed stretched open, blazed open by the flames reflected in them. And Dee. I see her standing off under the sweet gum tree she used to dig gum out of; a look of concentration on her face as she watched the last dingy gray board of the house fall in toward the red-hot brick chimney. Why don't you do a dance around the ashes? I'd wanted to ask her. She had hated the house that much.

I used to think she hated Maggie, too. But that was before we raised the money, the church and me, to send her to Augusta to school. She used to read to us without pity; forcing words, lies, other folks' habits, whole lives upon us two, sitting trapped and ignorant underneath her voice. She washed us in a river of make-believe, burned us with a lot of knowledge we didn't necessarily need to know. Pressed us to her with the serious way she read, to shove us away at just the moment, like dimwits, we seemed about to understand.

It is hard to see them clearly through the strong sun. But even the first glimpse of leg out of the car tells me it is Dee. Her feet were always neat-looking, as if God himself had shaped them with a certain style. From the other side of the car comes a short, stocky man. Hair is all over his head a foot long and hanging from his chin like a kinky mule tail. I hear Maggie suck in her breath. "Uhnnnh," is what it sounds like. Like when you see the wriggling end of a snake just in front of your foot on the road. "Uhnnnh."

Dee next. A dress down to the ground, in this hot weather. A dress so loud it hurts my eyes. There are yellows and oranges enough to throw back the light of the sun. I feel my whole face warming from the heat waves it throws out. Earrings, too, gold and hanging down to her shoulders. Bracelets dangling and making noises when she moves her arm up to shake the folds of the dress out of her armpits. The dress is loose and flows, and as she walks closer, I like it. I hear Maggie go "Uhnnnh" again. It is her sister's hair. It stands straight up like the wool on a sheep. It is black as night and around the edges are two long pigtails that rope about like small lizards disappearing behind her ears.

"Don't get up," says Dee. Since I am stout it takes something of a push. You can see me trying to move a second or two before I make it. She turns, showing white heels through her sandals, and goes back to the car. Out she peeks next with a Polaroid. She stoops down quickly and lines up picture after picture of me sitting there in front of the house with Maggie cowering behind me. She never takes a shot without making sure the house is included. When a cow comes nibbling around the edge of the yard she snaps it and me and Maggie and the house. Then she puts the Polaroid in the back seat of the car, and comes up and kisses me on the forehead.

Meanwhile Asalamalakim is going through the motions with Maggie's hand. Maggie's hand is as limp as a fish, and probably as cold, despite the sweat, and she keeps trying to pull it back. It looks like Asalamalakim wants to shake hands but wants to do it fancy. Or maybe he don't know how people shake hands. Anyhow, he soon gives up on Maggie.

"Well," I say. "Dee."

"No, Mama," she says. "Not 'Dee,' Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo!"

"What happened to 'Dee'?" I wanted to know.

"She's dead," Wangero said. "I couldn't bear it any longer being named after the people who oppress me."

"You know as well as me you was named after your aunt Dicie," I said. Dicie is my sister. She named Dee. We called her "Big Dee" after Dee was born.

After dinner Dee (Wangero) went to the trunk at the foot of my bed and started rifling through it. Maggie hung back in the kitchen over the dishpan. Out came Wangero with two quilts. They had been pieced by Grandma Dee and then Big Dee and me had hung them on the quilt frames on the front porch and quilted them. One was in the Lone Star pattern. The other was Walk Around the Mountain. In both of them were scraps of dresses Grandma Dee had worn fifty and more years ago. Bits and pieces of Grandpa Jarrell's paisley shirts. And one teeny faded blue piece, about the piece of a penny matchbox, that was from Great Grandpa Ezra's uniform that he wore in the Civil War.

"Mama," Wangero said sweet as a bird. "Can I have these old quilts?"

I heard something fall in the kitchen, and a minute later the kitchen door slammed.

"Why don't you take one or two of the others?" I asked. "These old things was just done by me and Big Dee from some tops your grandma pieced before she died."

"No," said Wangero. "I don't want those. They are stitched around the borders by machine."

"That's make them last better," I said.

"That's not the point," said Wangero. "These are all pieces of dresses Grandma used to wear. She did all this stitching by hand. Imagine!" She held the quilts securely in her arms, stroking them.

"Some of the pieces, like those lavender ones, come from old clothes her mother handed down to her," I said, moving up to touch the quilts. Dee (Wangero) moved back just enough so that I couldn't reach the quilts. They already belonged to her.

"Imagine!" she breathed again, clutching them closely to her bosom.

"The truth is," I said, "I promised to give them quilts to Maggie, for when she marries John Thomas."

She gasped like a bee had stung her.

"Maggie can't appreciate these quilts!" she said. "She'd probably be backward enough to put them to everyday use."

"I reckon she would," I said. "God knows I been saving 'em for long enough with nobody using 'em. I hope she will!" I didn't want to bring up how I had offered Dee (Wangero) a quilt when she went away to college. Then she had told me they were old-fashioned, out of style.

"But they're *priceless!*" she was saying now, furiously; for she has a temper. "Maggie would put them on the bed and in five years they'd be in rags. Less than that!"

"She can always make some more," I said. "Maggie knows how to quilt."

"She can have them, Mama," she said, like somebody used to never winning anything, or having anything reserved for her. "I can 'member Grandma Dee without the quilts."

I looked at her hard. She had filled her bottom lip with checkerberry snuff and it gave her face a kind of dopey, hangdog look. It was Grandma Dee and Big Dee who taught her how to quilt herself. She stood there with her scarred hands hidden in the folds of her skirt. She looked at her sister with something like fear but she wasn't mad at her. This was Maggie's portion. This was the way she knew God to work.

When I looked at her like that something hit me in the top of my head and ran down to the soles of my feet. Just like when I'm in church and the spirit of God touches me and I get happy and shout. I did something I never had done before: hugged Maggie to me, then dragged her on into the room, snatched the quilts out of Miss Wangero's hands and dumped them into Maggie's lap. Maggie just sat there on my bed with her mouth open.

"Take one or two of the others," I said to Dee.

But she turned without a word and went out to Hakim-a-barber.

"You just don't understand," she said, as Maggie and I came out to the car.

"What don't I understand?" I wanted to know.

"Your heritage," she said. And then she turned to Maggie, kissed her, and said, "You ought to try to make something of yourself, too, Maggie. It's really a new day for us. But from the way you and Mama still live you'd never know it."