

Honey Vinegar of Rosa Parks

Written by Kaia Niambi Shivers ID2104
Monday, 14 November 2005 08:43 -

The following was written by Kaia Niambi Shivers, She Speaks Hip-Hop Columnist.

As notables and dignitaries from the four corners of the world laid Rosa Parks to rest, dabbing strained tears looking solemn-faced as if their own mama passed, I thought of the oxymoron in this façade. At the funeral these people, performed, grandiose testimonials about a “meek” and “humble” woman who courageously took a stance against unjust Jim Crow laws of the United States which were overtly enforced in the southern region. A black woman, a sister who risked it all, now lies in soil polluted by sickening racism. Her sacred bones resting in dirt defiled by gender discrimination, and racial-sexism, particularly against the very population that is her, black women.

As many mammy-fied an uncompromising warrior, practically neutering the sanctified ancestor of her power, I could only think about the dilution of black women’s roles in revolutionary struggles. I could only think about black women’s battle for voices, for our audacious, avant-garde actions to be recognized as thus, and not be scandalized or postulated in a weakened, substandard context. And so I think of them, one by one. How they fought tirelessly, and were hardly preserved for their unquestionable freedom fighting, fortified by integrity. The Fannie Lou Hamers, the Shirley Chisholms, the Ida B. Wellses, the Winnie Mandelas, the Harriet Tubmans, the Sojourner Truths—all relegated to this second-rate level of power assertion. These great women were mocked, even by their own men and women! They were branded as “unladylike”, crazy, insane, out-of-place, or too manly, only for their legacies to be left in amnesia’s decay of revisionist history.

One of the methods to watering down the legacy of strong black women is a stripping of our once multifaceted, limitless roles in society. Those that are left for us to fight over and fend for are defined in foreign, debilitating concepts. For instance, the political terms “Mother of the Struggle” and “Mama of the Movement”, is implemented with a white, European idea of mother. From a European worldview, recognizing strong black women in distinctly female roles lessen the force of their activism. This is an attempt to diminish black women’s fearless leadership. It has evolved into such that we too, struggle with concepts of power and gender, and are lost in this shuffle of male/ female co-rulership.

Rosa Parks’ famous title, “Mother of the Modern Day Civil Rights Movement” was affected by this Victorian purist, European concept of mother. Her identity projected an image of a docile, genteel, overly empathetic, non-threatening, physically frail woman. Conversely, this persona of passive woman was the polar opposite of black women involved in the Civil Rights struggle, as well as, the antithesis of motherhood in the black, African perspective. Mother, in our indigenous eyes, is the creator, sustainer, and life-taker of a nation. She is the ultimate businesswoman, the minister of foreign affairs, the department of defense, true homeland security, and the head of economy. She furnishes the power, and revokes it, just like the black women of Montgomery responding to the battle cry of their phenomenal sister in what would be a 382-day boycott in Alabama.

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This whole notion of Parks as a “meek” and “humble” person is unsettling to the very depths of me, for it nullifies the truth of her rooted courage, her radical activism during an era black women in particularly southern, but also northern US were the main targets of open physical, verbal, sexual and economic abuse. Parks boldly defied the institution of white supremacy, while endangering her livelihood, family and very breath. In my opinion, this guise of mild character was a tactical display to convey non-intimidation to a paranoid, gutless, sociopath white America, that massacred black towns, brutally beat and castrated Emmitt Till and bombed churches killing little black girls. Parks was far from passive, as it is evidenced in her history of activism prior to and beyond her famous act of rebelliousness. Unfortunately, these mainstream, whitewashed Civil Rights pamphlets and conformist-controlled, children’s coloring books never indicate the true history leading up to the events that sparked the collective national campaign of Civil Rights—also contributing to the activation of an undeniable seizure of power by oppressed peoples around the globe.

Parks consciously refused to give up her seat, as an act of defiance for her people. This undertaking resulted into critical maneuvering by Civil Rights organizers. Parks was aggressively involved in strategy planning of Civil Rights, and did not flinch when she accepted the tremendous responsibility to carry the weight of the revolution upon her back. She wasn’t a novice in activism. Unlike this caricature of being this naïve, politically uninformed nanny that just happened to be too exhausted to move from her seat on December 1, 1955, is a farce.

Parks was a community respected woman for her character and political involvement. She was self-employed, forty-something, formally educated, renegade woman that began participating in progressive civil rights since the 1930s. She held an elected officer’s position in the NAACP for over ten years. At the time of her arrest, she was serving as secretary to president of the NAACP Montgomery branch, and was one of the first women to join that chapter. As a matter of fact, Parks wasn’t the only woman who defied Jim Crow transportation laws. Numerous black women displayed this type of resistance prior to Parks’ historical stance. It is recorded that the Women’s Political Council of Montgomery decided way before the Parks’ incident that a boycott would be a solid strategic move to address the degrading busing system in the city.

Rosa Parks, as a symbol of black women revolutionaries, is a legacy left with huge gaps and voids along with the untold story of the Montgomery boycott. Since much of the bus riders were women, they were in turn the driving force for rallying the black community into collective political and economic radicalism. A woman would rather walk miles across town, in the middle of bitter winter or a sweltering summer, than support an institution that devalued black life. As a result, alternative, independent taxi services and carpooling was formed by men to assist their sisters. This statement of power forged alliances between female and male, reinforced black nationhood, and strengthened a sisterhood cultivated by acts of war.

Parks’ acceptance of a most valiant, righteous task was more than an act of courage, by a “meek” and “humble” woman. Her movement was the continuum of black women revolutionaries sounding off war cries, as a call to their people into action. She contributes to a rich history of black women resisting oppressive regimes, domination and control, in aim for restoration of humanity

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Though Parks and other women involved during that era of Civil Rights agreed to men mostly taking the public realm, it didn't mean, they were to forever sit in the back of the bus in a movement co-signed by their blood, sweat, and souls. This heroic act and the many that followed by other Civil Rights sisters were slighted. Unfortunately, black women were positioned and also placed themselves as secretaries, silent organizers, fundraisers, budgeters, backbones or "mothers" of a movement—resulting in many nameless faces and undocumented, uncelebrated critical contributions.

Shamelessly today, some of the men in the struggle carry front line battle stories as if they were the lone soldier and gender on the battle field. They wear seniority on tailored suits decorated with Civil Rights officer stripes, or medallions of courage, surrounded by adulating entourages spewing lists of accolades. In the midst of the frenzy, the non-profit organizations, the political offices, the trips to the White House, the speaking engagements and unspoken pension afforded by a reputation of activism, they, and we have somehow left behind, left out, the Ella Bakers, Daisy Bates and the Ruby Hurleys.

Nevertheless, Rosa Parks waved her hand and stood as the "Mother of the Movement", even if it did pacify her true, warrior core. Why did this presentation of her continue? From my viewpoint, her delicate demeanor is reminiscent of the women who would tell me, "You can catch a bee quicker with honey, than vinegar." I do not dispute the African proverb. However, black women gave their last dash of honey, 50 years ago, on a Montgomery bus. That is to say, there is a second part of the proverb we often leave out. It goes. "You can catch a bee quicker with honey, than vinegar. So show them sweetness, just never forget that vinegar is needed for cutting through the bullshit."

"Now is the time for us to come together with one another, to organize, to speak out and speak up on behalf of each other. There is no time to waste, while we debate, define, and discuss; the enemy continues his genocidal plan. We need to bear in mind the Ashanti proverb: "Two men in a burning house must not stop to argue." " - Dr. Mutulu Shakur (Tupac's (2Pac) Father Figure)

Support and Sign the Petition for Stan 'Tookie' Williams at <http://www.tookie.com/>

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Assata Shakur Forum - <http://www.assatashakur.org/forum>
FTP Dollar A Month Club - <http://www.ftpmovement.com/dollar.html>
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*Article can also be found at <http://assatashakur.org/forum/showthread.php?t=12066>