

## Stop the False Race/Gender Divide: A Call to Action

We are calling on white progressive women activists and feminists to join us in challenging the onslaught of reactionary and racist arguments being put forward in the name of feminism and in defense of Hillary Clinton. We are saddened and frustrated by the abandonment of feminist commitments to the freedom and liberation of all women from all forms of oppression. We stand with all the women who have stepped up in the past several months to say no to this kind of feminism – including Barbara Ransby, Melissa Harris-Lacewell, Kimberlé Crenshaw and Eve Ensler, Zillah Eisenstein, Suzanne Pharr, among others. We are adding our voices to this dialogue as white women grounded in the feminist movement and actively engaged in issues impacting women and girls.

We strongly disagree with this reactive critique of sexism that has been grounded in a denial of the ongoing legacies of racism and white supremacy. The misogyny and sexism directed against Hillary Clinton are real and must be called out and challenged. However, a critique of sexism must not be at the expense of addressing racism and other forms of oppression. The misogyny is deplorable to say the least, and yet it must not be used as a reason to deny racism, to distance ourselves from struggles against racism, and/or to perpetrate racism in defense of “women.”

We need to resist and refuse this exclusive, defensive, and racist politics if we are serious about coalitional, broad-based, interconnected women’s solidarity movements. For white women, an exclusive and defensive focus on sexism denies accountability for our racial privilege. It erases our own complicity in the multiple systems of oppression that shape our lives, perspectives, and allegiances. We believe these politics significantly undermine the efforts of many women – especially women of color – to create feminisms that are grounded in multiple identities and in struggles against multiple oppressions. They destroy the possibilities for coalition, alliance, and solidarity across our differences and inequalities of race, sexuality, immigration status, gender identity, age, and more.

Here in Chicago, we have dialogued with white women and women of color as a way of challenging the racial divides being promoted by some white feminists and the mainstream media. We feel that as white feminists it is imperative that we speak out publicly against the racism and divisiveness that we are seeing. We therefore offer the following statement of our refusals and commitments.

**We invite you to join us in our efforts.** We are calling on white progressive women to take a stand by signing onto this letter and distributing it far and wide. We welcome all progressive activists, including women of color and allies, to sign the letter as well. Add your signature to <http://www.thepetitionsite.com/1/stop-the-false-race-gender-divide>. We will share this letter and signatures with a variety of feminist, progressive, as well as mainstream media.

Signed,  
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## **WE REFUSE....**

**We refuse a feminism that assumes that “women” are a homogeneous group.** We recognize that women identify along a spectrum of identities, and that gender is not always the most prominent one. Gender is a significant structure, to be sure, but it is not the only structure shaping women’s lives. Multiple systems of oppression and privilege, including racism, white supremacy, class hierarchy, religious intolerance, xenophobia, anti-immigrant policies, heterosexism, ableism and ageism shape women’s lives, identities, and experiences. We need movements that recognize these multiplicities.

**We refuse a feminism that pits sexism against racism, that claims that sexism is more entrenched than racism, and that the existence of sexism means that racism no longer exists.** We do not accept the logic that criticizing sexism must be tied to a denial or minimization of racism. Sexism and racism, as well as other forms of oppression, are interconnected. The misogynist spectacle against Hillary Clinton is directly tied to her white, middle-class heterosexuality, which is different from attacks on women who are not white, middle-class and heterosexual. We are dismayed that when media pundits frame Michelle Obama as an angry black woman, or as unpatriotic, or suggest that she should be the target of a “lynching party”, there has been no similar feminist outcry by white women.

**We refuse a feminism that claims to speak for all women, while denying and minimizing the ongoing legacy of white supremacy and racism in this country.** This legacy includes the ways that women’s movements and organizations are embedded in white supremacist structures, ideas, and practices. We refuse to participate in women’s organizations that demand allegiance to women with no accountability for privilege and complicity in racism, class exploitation, homophobia, transphobia, imperialism, ableism, ageism, etc.

**We refuse a feminism that marginalizes and undermines young women’s voices and perspectives.** We reject the adultism of older women activists who dismiss the views of young women as naïve, unrealistic, sexist, and based in sexual fantasy. We reject the presumption that if younger women do not agree with older women, it is because they are less radical. We need to create intergenerational dialogues around our different political ideas and commitments.

**We refuse a feminism that mobilizes white folks by cultivating solidarity on the basis of whiteness.** We reject any attempt to play divide and conquer by cultivating the racism of white middle class professional women and white working class women and men against women and men of color. We do not accept the reframing of this racism as “racial resentment.” We reject the way that the media and some feminists divide people into homogeneous categories that do not reflect the complexities of any of our lives. Everyone has a race, class, gender, sexual orientation, nationality.

**We refuse a feminism that blames people of color for focusing attention on racism as if that focus was the cause of sexism and misogyny.** We refuse this zero sum game politics, and we refuse to undermine efforts to dismantle white supremacy as a way to bolster attention to sexism. We reject attempts by some white feminists to silence people of color and to cultivate white racist bonding with claims of “reverse racism.”

**We refuse a feminism that confuses a campaign with a movement.** We reject the idea that as feminists, we must all agree on a particular candidate. As Barbara Ransby pointed out in a lecture at DePaul University (Chicago, April 2008), campaigns are not movements, and we need to actively engage all candidates around their positions on issues and use the campaigns as opportunities to push candidates to address our issues and visions for social change and justice.

## AND WE COMMIT...

**We commit to consistently challenge ourselves to be self-reflective.** We recognize that we are in process in our work to dismantle white supremacy and other systems of oppression, and we do not claim to have all of the answers. However, we are firmly committed to continuing to build our awareness of, and accountability for, our own participation in systems and processes of power and privilege.

**We commit to critically engaging our communities about this historic moment in U.S. feminism and progressive politics.** We commit to taking an active role in creating community dialogues and town hall forums that re-center feminist and women's activism based in coalitional politics.

**We commit to holding any and all politicians accountable for their politics, rather than their identities.** We believe that identity does matter in terms of who is represented in the government, and yet, we believe that all candidates must be evaluated based on their commitments and actions. As movements, we need to hold all politicians accountable to our issues and goals.

**We commit to challenging misogyny and racism and other forms of oppression in media coverage.** We will challenge all discourses that make women of color invisible, by assuming that gender = white women, and race = men of color. We will disrupt the media's promotion of divisions between gender-based agendas and race-based agendas, between different racial and ethnic groups, and between different political movements. We will call out the media's racism and sexism, as well as other forms of oppression.

**We commit to speaking publicly against white supremacy as it operates in our movement and in the upcoming election.** We believe it is the responsibility of progressive white women and feminists to consistently challenge white supremacy as part of our work for social change. We will insist that white people in feminist organizations dialogue, challenge, disrupt, and transform white supremacist thinking, ideas, and practices, particularly as they play out in creating divides between race and gender politics.

**We commit to challenging feminist media activists and organizations to use an anti-oppression approach.** We commit to consistently look not solely at gender, but at interconnected forms of oppression in media coverage, and we challenge other activists and organizations to do the same. Along these lines, we call on the National Organization for Women's campaign against media sexism, the "Media Hall of Shame," to include all the forms of oppression that shape the representation of women, including racism and white supremacy, as well as heterosexism, ableism, classism, adultism, xenophobia.

**We commit to creating intergenerational dialogues between women of all ages.** Older women need to check adultism when working with and/or responding to young women. It is important to learn from young women, particularly young women of color and those facing multiple oppressions, who do not enter the social justice movement with a race versus gender versus sexuality divide. All of us, old and young, need to find ways to create intergenerational dialogues that honor our different knowledge, experiences, and frames of reference.

**We commit to building a broad-based movement for social justice by working in solidarity across differences.** We must build connections, not divisions. In order to build coalitions, we must commit to being accountable for our own privilege and complicity in systems of oppression. We believe that accountability is a necessary starting point to creating collaborations, coalitions, and alliances across identities and issues.