

Abstract

My graphic short story is a semi-biographical depiction of the experience of Dr. Regina Jennings, a poet who reflected on her experiences as a woman joining the Black Panther Party in the 1960s. Through her personal account in “Why I Joined The Party: An Africana Womanist Reflection”, Jennings describes her journey from Philadelphia to Oakland and her immersion in the Party but highlights a unique and intersectional experience that many women in the party faced. Jennings describes her experience dealing with both racism and sexism jointly, and her narrative centers on the collective trauma that many Black women endure(d) within liberatory movements.

Ethnic/cultural trauma, as discussed in our course, refers to the psychological and communal wounds inflicted by racism, sexism, and historical oppression. I was inspired to depict this specific form of ethnic/cultural trauma after our in-class discussion about March 3 by John Lewis, where we observed that much of the discourse and reflection on liberatory movements heavily foreground men. This leaves a critical gap in depictions of non-male actors, who played a significant role in the functioning of these movements but are rarely acknowledged. For Jennings and other women in the Black Panther Party, the nuance of facing internal sexist harassment from male counterparts in the joint pursuit of liberation was difficult to comprehend and was compounded by the external threats of police violence, poverty, and racism. My graphic short story aims to spotlight the experience of a woman who dealt with this compounded trauma firsthand, to give attention to her experience which might otherwise be overlooked in favor of stories that emphasize prominent men in her movement.

Using a graphic medium to depict this story allowed me to highlight the joyous and dangerous intricacies of intersectionality and Jennings’ personal experience, within the Black Panther Party. I was able to display negative moments and Jennings’ struggles with addiction, which complicated her story, in ominous black shadows and incorporate real, archival media such as photos of Black Panther fashion and images of real Black hair products from the 1960s into the story, to immerse a reader further into a time and social context they may not have experienced yet.

To inform my story, I engaged with texts surrounding the intersectionality of race, gender, and trauma, drawing on the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw and other scholars. I also conducted extensive research into the fashion, initiatives, and culture within the Black Panther Party, paying special attention to accounts from or about women in the movement despite a gap in research material on the subject. By centering Jennings’ voice and experiences, my story aims to challenge dominant narratives that often marginalize Black women’s contributions and struggles in liberatory movements. The graphic novel format allowed me to utilize visual storytelling to evoke empathy and understanding in ways that traditional writing cannot.

Ultimately, my graphic short story attempts to educate readers about the complexities of Black women’s experiences in the Black Panther Party, highlighting the unique traumas they

faced in pursuit of justice. Through Regina Jennings' journey, the story not only documents trauma but also the resilience, agency, and perseverance displayed by Black women in the Party.

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