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Racism in Anti-Trans “Feminist” Activism



Image credit: Still from Heritage Foundation panel livestream: <https://youtu.be/HMJ9MOuRswc>

[Heron Greenesmith](#) | February 20, 2019

California-based epidemiologist Hacsí Horvath raised this alarm

about protections based on gender identity at a panel titled [“The Inequality of the Equality Act: Concerns From the Left”](#) at the Heritage Foundation in late January 2019—the latest in a [series of panels](#) of anti-transgender activists who root their activism in the rhetoric of feminism platformed by right-wing organizations.

And, in five years. I mean, just imagine what’s gonna happen when China picks up on this, you know? It’s just gonna be, it is already out of control. It’s gonna be a lot worse if we let this happen. So I would urge you all: don’t play along.

When invoking the specter of China adopting laws that would criminalize misgendering a transgender person, Horvath asked participants at the Heritage Foundation panel to imagine a world in which a hegemonic, autocratic super-power could stifle free speech, specifically speech against the lives, health, and safety of transgender people. Suddenly, the rhetorical threat posed by transgender people multiplies. (In fact, China’s human rights record tells a very different story, one of [discrimination](#) and persecution, and the [resilience](#) of transgender people.)

It’s notable that anti-trans feminists are employing similar racist dog-whistles that have been used by the Right for centuries to create out-sized fear and outrage among their constituents and followers to justify the out-sized time and energy spent advocating against the lives and safety of the communities they target.

Disproportionality has also been weaponized to attack Jewish people, ingrained in the conspiracy theory that Jewish people [control](#) the world economy. Within the community of anti-trans “feminists” this antisemitic trope manifests as the conspiracy that transgender advocacy is funded by George Soros. “Who Are

the Rich, White Men Institutionalizing Transgender Ideology,” asks Jennifer Bilek in the [Federalist](#). (By framing transgender activism and advocacy as “Transgender Ideology,” Bilek is also playing into the Christian Right messaging trope of [gender ideology](#).) On [4thWaveNow](#), an anti-trans blog, Michael Biggs explores Open Society Foundations’ funding of, as he calls it, “The Gender Industry Complex.” [Conspiracy theories](#) about George Soros’ participation in progressive advocacy are [anti-semitic](#), and they also [contribute](#) to violence against Jewish people.

Conservative publication *The Washington Times* ran a piece on this false claim, with an additional racist meme illustrated to depict Soros with features frequently used to stereotype Jewish people. When the article was shared on Facebook by anti-trans “feminist” page Object! Women Not Sex Objects, commenters pointed out the antisemitism in the piece and throughout the Times’ overall reporting. The page moderators responded: “Money can buy political influence as it always has. Always happy to be corrected and aware that we work with strange allies on feminist issues. Our line is always to stick to the issue in hand because if you look to the background of your allies you would never ally with anyone at all!”

Evidence of antisemitism by anti-trans “feminists” is present throughout its academic history. In 1979, [Janice Raymond](#) referred to transgender men as the “final solution’ of women” in her book *The Transsexual Empire*, often cited to as the basis for anti-trans “feminism.” And in 2018, [Jen Izaakson](#) erased the [history](#) of genocide of transgender people and the destruction of decades of research into transgender health during the Holocaust to discredit people using the term TERF (or trans-exclusionary radical feminist).

By fronting White major progressive donors like George Soros, anti-trans “feminists” erase the transgender people of color who built the trans movement. And the cisgender people of color who stand with their transgender siblings. In early 2019, anti-transgender “feminist blog” Feminist Current held an [event](#) at the Vancouver Library during which an activist spoke about her work with the Vancouver Rape Relief & Women’s Center, who denied membership to a trans woman. In her speech, Lee

Lakeman, the volunteer, invoked Kimberlé Crenshaw’s work developing intersectionality. Lakeman said, “Feminism is the politics that calls for and has always called for an egalitarian future, for non-violent methods to get there, for open dialogue and transparent processes, for an end to the hierarchies of race and class as well as sex, for an end to the violence that supports those hierarchies, for egalitarian sex practices and sex education, for intersectionality — but not the garbage version that’s being peddled.”

In fact, [Crenshaw](#) herself writes that intersectionality should be used specifically for people living at the intersections of identity. “Intersectional erasures are not exclusive to black women. People of color within LGBTQ movements; girls of color in the fight against the school-to-prison pipeline; women within immigration movements; trans women within feminist movements; and people with disabilities fighting police abuse — all face vulnerabilities that reflect the intersections of racism, sexism, class oppression, transphobia, able-ism and more. Intersectionality has given many advocates a way to frame their circumstances and to fight for their visibility and inclusion.” [emphasis added] By weaponizing Crenshaw’s own work against her specific wishes, Lakeman erased the incredible work that women of color, including Black women like Crenshaw, have done to support transgender people.

Anti-Black racism among anti-trans “feminists” is common and runs the gamut from accusing sex work activists of co-opting language from pro-slavery forces during the Civil War to specifically likening anti-trans “feminism” to the Civil Rights Movement. Rachel Dolezal, in particular, provides anti-trans “feminists” with an opportunity to espouse anti-Black racism. “Why did trans women lead the Women’s March?” asks [Jo Bartosch](#), “It would be like Rachel Dolezal addressing a Black Lives Matter rally.” Feminist Current published an [article](#) titled “You can’t ‘feel’ race, but can you ‘feel’ female? On Rachel Dolezal, Caitlyn Jenner, and unspeakable questions.”

At its heart, the racist rhetoric of anti-trans “feminists” denies the humanity of women of color around the world, transgender and cisgender women alike. And as always, anti-trans advocacy will have the deepest impact on those living at the intersections of multiple identities: transgender people with disabilities, low-income transgender people, and transgender people of color, especially Black, Indigenous, and Latinx transgender women. And therein lies the movement’s true racism.

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