"I am deliberate and afraid of nothing", self-described “black, lesbian, feminist, mother, lover, warrior, poet”, Audre Lorde said (Lewis). Born in 1934, she used her West-Indies heritage, painfully frank poetry, and sharp New York tongue to leave her mark on the civil rights movement of the 1960’s. Lorde fought not only for the feminist movement, but also within it, inspiring a more inclusive movement, free of ignorance towards women of color and lesbian women. Believing that “art is not living, it is the use of living” (Lewis), Audre Lorde called on America to fight hatred and celebrate differences, with poetry her megaphone. Her voice still inspires positive change today, as the relevance of her writing remains and the feminist movement she fought for continues to revolutionize. She spent the last fourteen years of her life continuing to battle social injustice as a poet-activist until finally losing her battle with breast cancer in 1992.

From an early age, Lorde was aware of racism not only in her society, but also in her own home. Although both her parents immigrated from the Caribbean to New York, her mother, Linda Gertrude Belmar Lorde, had much lighter skin than her father, Frederick Byron Lorde. Her mother's side of the family took great pride in Linda's more Caucasian appearance. They even admitted that though Frederick Byron Lorde's skin was much too dark for their liking, they condoned the marriage because what his skin tone lacked, his charm and ambition made up for. Exposure to these ugly prejudices only fueled Audre Lorde's sense of injustice.

She learned from a young age how to read and write, and made education a priority, eventually graduating from Hunter College High School. She was soon after accepted into Hunter College, and worked multiple jobs to support herself while earning her bachelor's degree in Library Science. Lorde then spent time in Stamford, Connecticut, and at the National University of Mexico, describing this period as a time of self-discovery and renewal. Choosing to estrange herself from her family, she explored her sexuality, accepted herself as a lesbian, and welcomed the influence this new sense of self would have on her art. She then returned to New York as a passionate activist for gay rights and earned her master's degree in Library Science at Columbia University. Audre Lorde valued education and believed in her right to be valued as a student, regardless of her gender, sexuality, race, or upbringing.

Lorde recognized the gaps in the feminist movement of the 1960's, particularly those influenced by Betty Friedan, author of *The Feminine Mystique*. She posed the question: "What woman here is so enamored of her own oppression that she cannot see her heelprint upon another woman's face?” (Lorde). Her activism was instrumental in the transition to the new wave of feminism. She drew attention to the flaws in white, upper-middle class oriented feminism, and encouraged others to acknowledge the privilege the color of their skin lent them. She argued the contradictions that existed in their cause if it did not see a place for women of color. Fighting passionately against homophobia in the feminist movement, she said, "but the true feminist deals out of a lesbian consciousness whether or not she ever sleeps with women” (Hammond). Demandig a place for lesbians in feminism, she believed that defending their rights had nothing to do with your own sexuality, and everything to do with equality, justice, and a united and inclusive approach to the movement. Audre Lorde's concerns continue to influence the movement today, as we fight for the inclusion of transsexual women, and the right to define oneself as a...
woman, regardless of physical and biological attributes, or gender assigned at birth. Audre Lorde helped pave the way to these positive changes of today.

Poetry drove Lorde’s activism, focusing primarily on feminism, civil rights, and the anti-war movement. She was recognized by many American Book awards, and the Lambda Literary Award for Lesbian Poetry. Her writing explores the differences between women of different cultural, racial, socio economical backgrounds, and the inner struggles we face as women living in a society ruled by labels and judgment. She once said, "there's always someone asking you to underline one piece of yourself -- whether it's Black, woman, mother, dyke, teacher, etc. -- because that's the piece that they need to key in to. They want to dismiss everything else" (Hammond). Her poetry explores what it means to accept our whole selves, unrestricted by others’, or, indeed, our own judgment, and examines the importance of "selfhood". In one of her later publications, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, she writes, "For women, then, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action. Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought”.

Today, inspired by Lorde and many others, the feminist movement continues to evolve and demand change. According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, one in four women will experience domestic violence in their lifetime, and eighty five percent of total domestic violence victims are women. While one in four college women has been raped, or experienced attempted rape at some point in their lives, ninety seven percent of their rapists will not spend one single day in prison (RAINN). Perhaps this is because sixty percent of rapes are not reported (RAINN). Perhaps this is because the war on women that Audre Lorde believed in fighting against, must still be confronted. Women today do not earn salaries equal to those of our male colleagues, our reproductive rights are controlled by politicians, and we face constant media pressure to look, think, feel, and be a certain way. While one quarter of college-aged women have attempted to control their weight by bingeing and purging (ANAD), an average of ninety two women per day were raped in India last year (India Today). Audre Lorde’s goals remain relevant and necessary. She believed in the power of words, and her words have helped to create the unity necessary for fighting against today’s war on women.

I am personally inspired by the strength behind the vulnerability in her writing. She was fearlessly honest about weakness, which liberates us from the expectations of perfection we face as woman. She once said, "poetry is not only dream and vision; it is the skeleton architecture of our lives. It lays the foundations for a future of change, a bridge across our fears of what has never been before" (Damon). Audre Lorde's path inspires positive change, because against many odds, she persisted. She believed in talking about difficult things and confronting her most inner doubts. She believed in change. As Audre Lorde said herself, "revolution is not a onetime event" (Lorde, Sister). If this is true, then the revolution that she believed in continues today as those she inspired fight for that foundation, and bridge she spoke of. Thanks to the influence of Audre Lorde and similar warriors after her, I am a feminist who sometimes feels she can say, "I am deliberate and afraid of nothing".
Ruby Nightingale

Works Cited


