

Black Women's Liberatory Pedagogies

Olivia N. Perlow • Durene I. Wheeler
Sharon L. Bethea • BarBara M. Scott
Editors

Black Women's Liberatory Pedagogies

Resistance, Transformation, and Healing Within
and Beyond the Academy

palgrave
macmillan

Editors

Olivia N. Perlow
Northeastern Illinois University
Chicago, Illinois, USA

Durene I. Wheeler
Northeastern Illinois University
Chicago, Illinois, USA

Sharon L. Bethea
Northeastern Illinois University
Chicago, Illinois, USA

BarBara M. Scott
Northeastern Illinois University
Chicago, Illinois, USA

ISBN 978-3-319-65788-2 ISBN 978-3-319-65789-9 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-65789-9>

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017957620

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s) 2018

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use. The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, express or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Cover illustration: © Cattallina / iStock / Getty Images Plus

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature
The registered company is Springer International Publishing AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

We dedicate this volume to our foremothers, bloodmothers, and othermothers upon whose shoulders we stand and whose fighting spirits live in us today. Their impeccable foresight, fortitude, and commitment to social justice and equality has expanded our horizons and improved our communities and our lives. We continue to be inspired by them and we are honored to follow in their formidable footsteps.

PREFACE

This book is simultaneously a personal and political project, which are of course inextricably linked. The idea for this volume, conceived via “kitchen table” talks and *sista* girl check-ins, was birthed out of our relentless resistance to the continuous denial and dismissal of Black women’s intellectual production and liberation projects. In these moments, we began to envision an intellectual space to celebrate the breadth of Black women’s liberatory practices, contextualizing them within our lived experiences.

Over the course of this project, we have learned many life lessons, one of the most profound being that despite numerous academic and political accomplishments, so many Black women carry a *brave bruised girlchild* inside of them. She has continually been told that she is not good enough, not smart enough, and that she does not deserve to let her light shine. Even though Black women are often able to intellectualize our awareness of the negative socio-political messages constructed about us, it is not easy to escape their impact.

We came to realize that with all of our presumed sophistication, we were not exempt from this conundrum. Consequently, we found ourselves coaching many of the authors and each other through the very difficult writing process, which required collectively and radically embracing our vulnerabilities as well as our knowledge, skills, and ways of being as Black women and as scholars. By cultivating mutually empowering co-mentoring relationships with many of the Black women in this volume, we engaged in what Denise Taliaferro Baszile calls the *praxis of radical Black female intersubjectivity*, or what Mary Louise McCarthy calls a *pedagogy of*

Sistership. Guided by the spirits of our ancestors and foremothers, we invoked the bonds that stretch across time and space. In so doing, we were able to discover and/or reclaim our collective power as Black women. Acknowledging each other, we reaffirmed our own and each other's humanity.

The editorial process took unfamiliar twists and turns, leading us to places we never envisioned or experienced, but nevertheless embraced. Throughout this process, some of the women (including ourselves) experienced illness (both physical and mental), financial strain, the dissolution of partnerships, the incarceration, and even the passing of loved ones. And yet, these are the everyday lives of Black women. Although we took extra precaution to be tender with each other, if at any time we failed to be as gentle as we could've or should've been, we are truly sorry, for transcending the *culture of domination* is not always easy or straightforward.

Notwithstanding these challenges, we were able to provide, not only an intellectual space but also, in keeping with our African traditions, a spiritual and familial space in which we constructed a community of resistance as we continue to develop and hone our talents and skills as educators and activists. Within the context of such nurturing intellectual spaces, we can continue our resistance and liberatory work that challenges the Western intellectual tradition of white and male superiority, of socially constructed knowledge and exclusivity—spaces where we develop, set forth, and share strategies for liberation.

To be sure, in the final analysis, the purpose of this volume is not to appease, make comfortable nor safe, those that do not share our struggle. Rather our primary goal is to plant seeds of resistance, water the roots of transformation, and cultivate the fruits of healing for Black women, our communities, and humanity as a whole. In conclusion, for us as well as many of the authors, this volume has been about going home—a spiritual and metaphysical repatriation—an honoring and celebration of our ancestors and foremothers as well as our African roots, all of which have kept us grounded in a vision of a more just and humane world. Ashe.

Chicago, IL
Chicago, IL
Chicago, IL
Chicago, IL

Olivia N. Perlow
Durene I. Wheeler
Sharon L. Bethea
BarBara M. Scott

LIBERATION PEDAGOGIES

(For the twins, Minnie Lee and Mattie Mae)

—Joy James, Williams College

Black Women's Liberatory Pedagogies provides many examples of what it means to risk to be both teacher and learner in the pursuit of freedoms that serve privileges or predations of the captor.

The authors write as liberators—for themselves, their communities, and institutions. They labor for *thinking* that revives concepts of what is *just*. The issue of justice, so central to this volume, is of course an issue of politics and power.

These first decades of the twenty-first century have been a political roller coaster ride. The breakneck speed of our perilous journey in democracy is marked by cheap thrills and screams yet offers no new destinations: We end up where we started. This book brakes at personal, national, and global impulses that shut eyes tightly against a blurred, accelerated world where carnival barkers and salesmen engineer nerve-wracking tumult with threats and violence that most—especially Black women—can neither avert nor control.

In this climate, *Black Women's Liberatory Pedagogies* becomes essential. It has the courage to call us to senses shaped by community “theorizing.” Historically depicted as interlopers within the realm of “higher thinking,” infantilized as entertainment and caretakers, Black women see the scope and depth of their intellectual, political, artistic-spiritual autonomy overlooked or underestimated. Still, as progressives or radicals they redefine

the academy. Re-centering its pantheon and factory, while deflecting abuse or “micro and macro aggressions,” Black women educators continue to demand accountability and insight.

Dismissive attitudes and attacks challenge Black female presence, scholarship, and integrity reflected in research, narratives, critiques, and art. However, this book moves past vilification to examine how educators turn victimization into inspiration in order to leverage a productivity that focuses on liberatory, critical thinking.

Victimization does not constitute leadership. Resistance does. In subtle and bold ways, *Black Women’s Liberatory Pedagogies* presents scholarship, insight, humor, and humility that rewrites what it means to be a thoughtful, caring person with capaciousness for thought directed toward reality rather than deceptions. In and as resistance, these writers “threaten” demagoguery and refined and vulgar violence in which capture and consumption disproportionately fixate on Black women.

In a fair fight, opponents meet you in a battle of ethical ideals and intellectualism. Fair fights are rare. With the absence of public, intellectual debate, distortions and lies are increasingly more fashionable than virtue. Recognizing precarity, this book unveils unethical ploys and rewrites the codes for obtainable freedom.

Not everyone desires pedagogies of liberation. Structures demand unwavering loyalty to themselves, at the expense of truth telling and theorizing. Yet, here readers find fidelity to forms and figures of brilliance that allow teaching with dignity and honor.

Books are not sufficient on their own to make necessary changes. Backlash and co-optation are common. The dismissals of Black women building liberation pedagogies function in a similar way to man-made CO₂ emissions. Anti-Black female intellectualism exudes a pernicious toxicity. The denigration or celebration of Black female resilience co-exists with Black women’s emotional, intellectual, biological amputations, prosthetics, and graveyards. This is why the political organizing expressed in this text is extremely important.

We celebrate this publication for varied reasons. First, because, as Audre Lorde observes, we were never meant to survive, and definitely not in the academy. Second, because, as Octavia Butler notes, with foreign bodies clearly marked by dismemberments and mutations, Black maternals disciplined by love inevitably fight captivity. Third, because collective genealogy reveals that ancestral mothers made formidable demands upon the

truth: Whenever and wherever truth was interred, they unearthed everything including their own lives to restore it.

We have all buried and will continue to bury our mothers. Some mothers raised us intellectually with spirit. Other mothers abandoned us after giving what they could spare in a rage with defeat that they thought could not be undone. The maternal lineage exists in the tutelage of Toni, Zoe, Cecile, Uvanney, Valerie, Kirsten, Andrea, Raven, Kathryn, A. Marie, Edward, Eyo, William, Loretta, Stephanie, Eve, Janaé, Derise, Lakeesha, Denise, Jennifer, and Olivia, Durene, Sharon, BarBara.

Their anthology is thorny. Its painful and devastating experiential knowledge shapes scholarship, alphabet, and grammar in a fiery critique written on the board and wall. With steely, patient kindness, these epistemologies work to refuse cheap games and offer instead a transformative thrill: Swim in the dark, cool waters of Yemoya and Oshun, and, rather than fixate on drowning, focus on the fires lit to illuminate shore.

CONTENTS

1 Introduction	1
Olivia N. Perlow, Durene I. Wheeler, Sharon L. Bethea, and BarBara M. Scott	
Part I Challenges to Black Women in the Academy: Pedagogies of Resistance	19
2 The Curriculum That Has No Name: A Choreo-pedagogy for Colored Girls Seeking to Fly over the Rainbow	21
Toni C. King	
3 <i>Black Skin, White Masks</i>: Negotiating Institutional Resistance to Revolutionary Pedagogy and Praxis in the HBCU	45
Zoe Spencer	
4 Black Women Academics and Senior Managers Resisting Gendered Racism in British Higher Education Institutions	65
Cecile Wright, Uvanney Maylor, and Valerie Watson	

5	Stories of Migration: Passing Through, Crossing Over, and Decolonial Transgressing in Academyland	85
	Kirsten T. Edwards	
6	Gettin' Free: Anger as Resistance to White Supremacy Within and Beyond the Academy	101
	Olivia N. Perlow	
7	Black Women's Co-Mentoring Relationships as Resistance to Marginalization at a PWI	125
	Andrea N. Baldwin and Raven Johnson	
Part II	Transformative Pedagogies: Theory, Praxis, Strategies, and Applications	141
8	Teaching and Learning Philosophical "Special" Topics: Black Feminism and Intersectionality	143
	Kathryn T. Gines, A. Marie Ranjbar, Edward O'Byrn, Eyo Ewara, and William Paris	
9	Teaching Reproductive Justice: An Activist's Approach	159
	Loretta J. Ross	
10	<i>Close/Bye</i>: Staging [State] Intimacy and Betrayal in 'Performance of Literature'	181
	Stephanie Leigh Batiste	
11	The Quality of the Light: Evidence, Truths, and the Odd Practice of the Poet-Sociologist	195
	Eve L. Ewing	
12	Black Queer Feminism as Praxis: Building an Organization and a Movement	211
	Janaé E. Bonsu	

Part III Pedagogies of Healing	225
13 Calling on the Divine and Sacred Energy of Queens: Bringing Afrikan Indigenous Wisdom and Spirituality to the Academy	227
Derise Tolliver Atta	
14 Healing Through (Re)Membering and (Re)Claiming Ancestral Knowledge About Black Witch Magic	245
Lakeesha J. Harris	
15 Another Lesson Before Dying: Toward a Pedagogy of Black Self-Love	265
Denise Taliaferro Baszile	
16 Healing Circles as Black Feminist Pedagogical Interventions	281
Jennifer L. Richardson	
17 Kuja Nyumbani (Coming Home): Using African- Centered Pedagogy to Educate Black Students in the Academy	295
Sharon L. Bethea	
18 Afterword: Giving Life—Black Women’s Liberatory Praxis	321
Helen A. Neville	
Index	325

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Derise Tolliver Atta, Ph.D., is a tenured Associate Professor at the School for New Learning (SNL), DePaul University. Dr. Tolliver Atta, a licensed clinical psychologist, is a past Chicago Director of the DePaul University/Tangaza University College B.A. Degree Program, which was based in Nairobi, Kenya. She has been the co-director of DePaul University's travel study program to Ghana, West Africa, since 1996 and is currently the faculty coordinator of the SNL International and Travel Study Committee. She has been recognized at the university level for excellence in teaching and her commitment to diversity and social justice.

Andrea N. Baldwin is an attorney-at-law and transnational feminist, who holds a Ph.D. in gender and development studies, and an M.Sc. in international trade policy. Dr. Baldwin is a visiting assistant professor in the Gender and Women's Studies Department, and the Assistant Director of the Africana Studies program at Connecticut College. Her research interests include transnational feminist epistemology, theorizing pedagogy as a form of feminist activism, and Caribbean cultural studies.

Denise Taliaferro Baszile is Associate Dean of Diversity and Student Experience and Associate Professor of Curriculum and Cultural Studies at Miami University. Denise's work focuses on understanding curriculum as racial/gendered text with an emphasis on disrupting traditional modes of knowledge production, validation, and representation. Her scholarship draws on curriculum theory, critical race theory, and Black feminist theory and seeks a fuller understanding rather than simply a legitimate understanding of the dynamic relationship between race, gender, and knowledge.

Stephanie Leigh Batiste is Associate Professor of Black Studies and English at the University of California at Santa Barbara and Director of the Hemispheric South/s Research Initiative. Batiste co-edits the NYU Book Series Performance and American Culture and directs the UCSB Hemispheric South/s Research Initiative. Her book *Darkening Mirrors: Imperial Representation in Depression Era African American Performance* (Duke University Press, 2011) focuses on the relationship between power and identity in Black performance cultures to reimagine Black life and ways of being. She is also a creative writer, performer, and supporter of the arts.

Sharon L. Bethea is Associate Professor in Counselor Education, Inner City Studies and Coordinator of the African and African American Studies Program at Northeastern Illinois University. She serves on the National Board for the Association of Black Psychologists. Her interests are African healing systems, Black youth civic engagement, and African Diaspora study abroad with students.

Janaé E. Bonsu is an activist-scholar and organizer based in Chicago. She serves as the National Public Policy Chair of Black Youth Project 100 (BYP100), a national member-led organization of 18- to 35-year-old Black activists and organizers dedicated to creating justice and freedom through a Black Queer Feminist lens. Janaé is also a Ph.D. candidate in social work at the University of Illinois at Chicago, where her work focuses on Black women, state violence, and alternatives to state intervention.

Kirsten T. Edwards is Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, as well as affiliate faculty for Women's and Gender Studies and the Center for Social Justice at the University of Oklahoma in Norman, Oklahoma. Her research merges philosophies of higher education, college curriculum, and pedagogy. More specifically, Dr. Edwards is interested in the ways that socio-cultural identity and context influence teaching and learning in post-secondary education. Dr. Edwards received her Ph.D. in Higher Education Administration with a specialization in Curriculum Theory at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. She additionally holds a cognate in Women's and Gender Studies.

Eyo Ewara is a Ph.D. candidate in Philosophy at the Pennsylvania State University. His research focuses on ontology through the intersections of continental philosophy, queer theory, and critical philosophy of race. His work currently centers on questions around the conceptions of ethical comportment that resist intelligible appearance politics of civil society.

This project focuses on Afro-pessimism, Queer Theory, and Phenomenology through readings of Judith Butler, Lee Edelman, Frank B. Wilderson, and Martin Heidegger.

Eve L. Ewing is an Assistant Professor at the University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration. She is a qualitative sociologist of education whose work is focused on racism and inequality, and the impact of these social structures on American public schools and the lived experiences of young people. She is also the author of the poetry collection *Electric Arches* (Haymarket Books).

Kathryn T. Gines' primary research and teaching interests lie in Continental philosophy (especially Existentialism and Phenomenology), Africana Philosophy, Black Feminist Philosophy, and Critical Philosophy of Race. She has published articles on race, assimilation, feminism, intersectionality, and sex and sexuality in contemporary hip-hop. Gines is the author of *Hannah Arendt and the Negro Question* (Indiana University Press, 2014) and co-edited an anthology titled *Convergences: Black Feminism and Continental Philosophy* (SUNY Press, 2010). She is the founding director of the Collegium of Black Women Philosophers (CBWP), co-founder (with Shirley Moody Turner) of the Anna Julia Cooper Society, and a founding co-editor of the journal *Critical Philosophy of Race* (CPR).

Lakeesha J. Harris is the founder of Black Witch Chronicles, Sojourner's Healing Room, and Black Witch University. As a practicing and evolving Black Witch, Lakeesha is a Reiki Master Teacher, Root Worker, Diviner, Community Healer and Urban Farmer. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Women's and Gender Studies from Northeastern Illinois University and in 2011 was selected as a Student Laureate. Her political literary work, *Spirit House*, was commissioned by the Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center for the healing of the community.

Raven Johnson is a high school English teacher in Birmingham, Alabama where she was born and raised. She spent her undergraduate years at Auburn University in Auburn, Alabama where she met Dr. Andrea Baldwin. They would eventually work together to co-author this article. At Auburn, Raven gained a profound passion for minorities and minority issues. She spends much of her work as a teacher advocating for the inner city students she teaches. She is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Secondary Education from the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

Toni C. King, Ph.D., is Associate Professor of Black Studies and Women's and Gender Studies, and Director of the Center for Black Studies at Denison University. She earned a Bachelor's degree in psychology from Oklahoma State University, a Master's degree in Counseling from The Ohio State University, and a doctorate in Organizational Behavior from Case Western Reserve University. King co-edited *Black Womanist Leadership: Tracing the Motherline* (King and Ferguson, SUNY Press, 2011). Her scholarship, professional consultations, workshops, and seminars focus on relationships as a site for leadership development and recovery from oppression.

Uvanney Maylor is a professor and the Director of the Institute for Research in Education at the University of Bedfordshire. Her research interests include race, ethnicity, culture, educational equity, inclusion, and social justice. She is particularly concerned about the impact of race and culture on educational practice and student and teacher experience, identities and outcomes. She is a former member of the UK-wide Higher Education Funding Council for Education Research in Excellence Framework (2014) sub-panel for Education, and is an invited fellow of the Royal Society of Arts.

Helen A. Neville is Professor of Educational Psychology and African American Studies at University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. She is past Associate Editor of *The Counseling Psychologist* and *Journal of Black Psychology*. Her work on race, racism, and racial identity is widely published in peer-reviewed journals and books. Dr. Neville has been recognized for research and mentoring including receiving the APA Kenneth and Mamie Clark Award, the APA Division 45 Charles and Shirley Thomas Award, the Winter Roundtable Janet E. Helms Mentoring Award, The Association of Black Psychologists' Distinguished Psychologist Award, and the APA Minority Fellowship Program Dalmas Taylor Award for Outstanding Research.

Edward O'Byrn is a Ph.D. candidate in Philosophy at Penn State University. His areas of research are Ethics, Black American Philosophy, and 20th Century Existential Philosophy. O'Byrn's specific interests are in Black American Philosophy with a special emphasis on the Black Panther Party and Black Existentialism. His dissertation explores the intersections of Black American Philosophy and Existentialism. His work seeks to explore and emphasize the importance of existential thinking across

existential thought focusing on figures such as Lewis Gordon, Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, and Angela Davis.

William Paris is a Ph.D. candidate for the Dual Title in Philosophy and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Penn State University. He is currently the Forrest S. Crawford Fellow in Ethical Inquiry with the Rock Ethics Institute. His dissertation, entitled "Frantz Fanon, Sylvia Wynter, and Hortense Spillers on the Ungendering of Black Life," brings these three theorists together in order to show how they develop critical tools for understanding the violent apparatus of colonial gendering toward "Black life" post-Enslavement and Colonialism. He is planning to finish in the Spring of 2018.

Olivia N. Perlow currently serves as an Associate Professor of Sociology and the African and African American Studies and Women's and Gender Studies programs at Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago. She is also the coordinator of the Women's and Gender Studies program. She specializes in race and ethnicity, social inequalities, critical criminology, and radical pedagogies.

A. Marie Ranjbar is a Ph.D. candidate in the Departments of Geography and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at the Pennsylvania State University. Her research and teaching interests include human rights, environmental and social justice, and transnational and postcolonial feminisms. Her current research focuses on intersections between human rights and environmental justice in Iran by examining how social movements use environmental conservation to make broader rights claims against the state.

Jennifer Richardson is Assistant Professor of Gender and Women's Studies at Western Michigan University. As a Black feminist and sociologist, her scholarship investigates identity and its complex and nuanced intersections. Particularly interested in exploring intergenerational healing circles, in the tradition of African ring shouts, as a methodological approach, Dr. Richardson's work focuses on bringing attention to Africana women and collective healing as a socio-political path to the recovery of self. Dr. Richardson's scholarship also brings light to the multidimensional ways Africana women negotiate the intersections of popular media, dominant discourses of beauty, and constructions of identity.

Loretta Ross started her career in the women's movement in the 1970s, working at the D.C. Rape Crisis Center, NOW, the National Black

Women's Health Project, and SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective, among other social justice organizations. She is one of the co-creators of the Reproductive Justice framework and has lectured extensively on human rights, racism, appropriate whiteness, Calling In the Calling Out Culture, and violence against women. Her most recent publication is *Reproductive Justice: An Introduction* co-written with Rickie Solinger and published in 2017. She was the co-director of the 2004 March for Women's Lives with 1.15 million participants.

Barbara M. Scott is Professor Emeritus in Sociology and Interim Director of the Carruthers Center for Inner City Studies at Northeastern Illinois University. She is the author of numerous publications including a co-authored introductory textbook and a co-authored Marriage and Families textbook which is now in its 8th edition. Dr. Scott is an enthusiastic advocate of *applying sociology* and a *feminist/womanist and intersectional analysis* to the everyday worlds in which we live. She is also a social activist who has been at the forefront of organizing among national and international women of color, both within and outside of academia.

Zoe Spencer is a Black Woman Activist Scholar from Barry Farms Projects in Southeast Washington, DC. While she currently serves as a professor of Sociology in the Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice at Virginia State University, she firmly believes that her material and academic accomplishments are only relevant to the way in which they give her the space to be heard and the opportunity to carry out her Divine Purpose, that is, nourishing the consciousness of the students, inmates, and community members that she is called to serve.

Valerie Watson has worked in education for over 30 years, initially as a school teacher then working as an adult education lecturer, trainer, director of counseling studies, and now as a head of a university counselling service for students and staff. She has maintained an abiding interest in issues of race, ethnicity, and the impact of difference on relationships, community action, and the maintenance of health through the use of and access to the arts for all. Latterly her work has focused on the potential of therapeutic work in groups and organizational reflective practice as a healing agent.

Durene I. Wheeler holds an associate professor position at Northeastern Illinois University in Educational Inquiry and Curriculum Studies. She holds a Core faculty appointment in African and African American Studies

along with Women's and Gender Studies. Dr. Wheeler's teaching and research interests include historical intersections of race, class, and gender in U.S. education, and practical application of critical and feminist pedagogy.

Cecile Wright is a professor in Sociology at the University of Nottingham. Her research and teaching interests include youth, race, social inclusion, and ethno-cultural diversity in intersection with other markers of social location, such as gender, class, age, and the complex outcomes (both individual and social structural) that such intersections can entail.