Black Women Been Knew: Understanding Intersectionality to Advance Justice*

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Although the term intersectionality was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in the late 1980s, Black feminist scholars have long interrogated how having multiple marginalized identities reproduce inequity in their daily lives. Black women have been at the forefront of justice efforts way before it was popular and thus, continue to offer insight into ways to advance justice and equity for not only themselves, but for people and communities experiencing systemic oppression. This article examines Black Feminist Traditions to contextualize how Black women have remained resilient despite systemic racism and injustice. Additionally, this article offers strategies to thoroughly integrate Black Feminist Theory into public administration.

"We have always been the best actors in the world…I think that we are much more clever than they are because we know that we have to play the game. We've always had to live two lives—one for them and one for ourselves."

—Ella Surrey, elderly Black woman domestic (as cited in Collins 2000, 107)

Public administration is a discipline and practice. Public service professionals are representatives of government and therefore are the bridge between the various systems and the people who are served by them. The legacy of U.S. society broadly, but public administration specifically is rooted in a system of hierarchical power that prioritizes the needs, voices, preferences, and values of white men over all others. This is evident in the genocide of Indigenous People (Loewen 2007; Zinn 2003); in the enslavement of Black people, whereby they were considered property; in the disenfranchisement of women until the 1920s (Davis 1983); the internment of Japanese immigrants; the Tuskegee experiment; the stronghold of Jim Crow in the 20th century (Alexander 2011), among a host of other atrocities. Consequently, Black, Indigenous, Latino/a, and Asian people have been largely marginalized from the sources of power and resource structures to live full and authentic lives without harassment, intimidation, or fear of death.

As bell hooks (2013) noted, the United States is an "imperialist, white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchy" (xx).

This is an explicit phrase that illuminates the varying structures that seek to marginalize Black, Indigenous, Latino, and Asian people globally. As a "superpower" the United States has exacted its military and cultural dominance to influence the political, economic, and social context of nation-states across the world. This, in turn, normalized white identity, preferences, and values, all of which are now deemed normal and natural, while all other realities and perspectives are violently subjugated. This frame was used to inform the development of the U.S. government and its respective governance style (e.g., objective, neutral, technical, and ahistorical). Colorblindness (a willful decision to not see difference) allows the United States to rhetorically stand behind the values of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, without ever having to confront the racialized inequities that deny Black, Indigenous, and Latino people access to the rights and privileges of citizenship. Blessett (2015) argued:

> the adoption of Constitutional Amendments (14 and 20), signed Executive Orders (8802 and 11246), approved legislation (Civil Rights Acts of 1866, 1871, 1964, and 1991), the court-mandated judicial remedies (*Brown v. Board of Education, Shelly v. Kraemer*) all sought to level the playing field, but were ultimately undermined by lack of implementation, lack of compliance, minimal enforcement, or overwhelming public opinion. (11)

The stronghold of racist structures and ideologies (both conscious and unconscious) in the institutions, management, and administration of government prevents the United States from ever actualizing its stated values of fairness, justice, and equality.

To bring public administration into alignment with its espoused values, the field needs to shift toward a race-conscious perspective to better understand the nuance of life outside of white normativity. The ability to anchor the field and discipline in ways that honor the lived experiences and realities of people and communities of color will help public administration be more responsive to the needs of all its constituents. This article leverages the expertise of Black women activists, scholars, and practitioners to offer insight to advance equity and justice for all people. Black women specifically have always advocated to be seen, heard, and valued, yet even today they remain invisible and exploited within the ranks of society's hierarchy. Centering the experiences and insight of Black women is necessary and important because of their marginalized status in U.S. society. Amy Jacques Garvey, wife of Marcus Garvey, called to Black women to recognize their role as the "burden bearers of their race and for Black women to center their dedication to social justice and to national liberation, abroad as well as at home" (Terborg-Penn 2004, 72). In many ways, this sentiment has informed how Black women have been taught to lead their lives—putting all others ahead of themselves, oftentimes at the expense of themselves.

Malcolm X (as cited in Jones 2020) is famously quoted as saying "The most disrespected person in America is the Black woman. The most unprotected person in America is the Black woman. The most neglected person in America is the Black woman." Although these words were spoken more than 50 years ago, Jones (2020) aptly argued:

> Malcolm's words . . . ring true and it is a shame . . . we continue to face institutional violence in health care, education, and employment. Our lives continue to be at greater risk than those of other women because of how devalued we are by others.

Throughout history, Black women have used their collective experience to not only survive, but also to create better circumstances for their families and communities holistically. An appreciation of a willingness to examine, and the thoughtfulness to understand, "the holistic nature of the struggle" experienced by the most vulnerable people in society is the true foundation of equity and justice movements (Brown 2004, 48). Black feminist scholars have been ahead of their time. It is precisely this reality that has resulted in Black women's advocacy to be central to liberation and freedom.

Black Feminist Traditions

> Subject to legalized rape by the slaveowners, confined to slave pens, forced to march for eight to fourteen hours with loads on their backs to perform back-breaking work, even during pregnancy, Negro women bore a burning hatred for slavery, and undertook a large share of responsibility for defending and nurturing the Negro family. (Jones 1949, 7)

Early feminist thinkers like Maria Stewart, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Amy Jacques Garvey, Maggie Lena Walker, among so many others were on the front lines in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to advocate for the humanity of Black women, men, and children (Bobo, Hudley, and Michel 2004). Black people were rarely seen as thought leaders during this time. However, through Black women's interactions in women's clubs, civic organizations, religious institutions, and communal gatherings, they organized around the important issues of the day, which include the anti-lynching campaign, suffrage rights, educational access, exploitive working conditions, and more (Davis 1983; Jones 2013; Terborg-Penn 2004). These women recognized early the need to seek refuge from practices of race, sex, and class domination in public and private spaces (hooks 1989). Black women understood that their race and gender identities cumulatively created a disadvantaged reality for them. Therefore, collectively many spent their time advocating for a world that would allow people to navigate society without restriction or discrimination. Black feminist praxis understood the need to be antiracist and antisexist in their organizing practice because if Black women were free, everyone else would be free since freedom for Black women meant the eradication of all systems of domination and oppression (Hull, Bell-Scott, and Smith 1982).

Maria Stewart, one of the first Black feminists (Collins 2000; Davis 1983; Jones 2013), explicitly recognized the differential experiences between the races and genders, making special note of Black women's relationships

with one another (Collins 2000). As a Black woman suffragist and outspoken leader in the 1880s, Stewart's positionality was rather unique for the time. Her advocacy sought to bring Black women's talents and intellect to bear as real contributors to burgeoning U.S. society. She asks, "How long shall the fair daughters of Africa be compelled to bury their minds and talents beneath a load of iron pots and kettles?" (as cited in Jones 2013, 36). There is clear recognition that Black women have been isolated from opportunities beyond the physical backbreaking work of domestic life. She spends her life championing causes to advance justice for Black people, but especially Black women.

For example, after emancipation Black people remained in a cycle of economic exploitation. Whether working as sharecroppers, which placed farmers in a perpetual state of indebtedness (Blessett and Box 2016), educational opportunities were all but nonexistent, and the convict-leasing system served as the next iteration of slavery for many Black men and women (LeFlouria 2015). Black women were segregated into low-wage, low-skilled work, specifically domestic and personal service, agriculture, and manufacturing and mechanical industries (Jones 1949; Terborg-Penn 2004). Due to the segregated labor economy, white women rejected domestic work because it was a vestige of slavery, particularly as sexual abuse and harassment were considered occupational hazards (Davis 1983). In 1935, Black domestic workers and washer women worked in deplorable working conditions and earned approximately $3 and $.75 per week, respectively (Terborg-Penn 2004). The collective experience of economic isolation informed the ways Black women sought to organize, not only for themselves, but also in collaboration with people of the "Third World" (Davis 1983; Hull, Bell-Scott, and Smith 1982; Terborg-Penn 2004).

The nuance of identity and the necessity to navigate systems of oppression proved to be a gift and a curse for Black women. On the one hand, Black women and their allies were building a collective knowledge of resistance designed to bring about real change for the most vulnerable people and communities. From the various labor, anti-lynching, and political campaigns of the times, Black women were intimately involved, but were forced to the sidelines. However, the physical presence of Black women in positions of leadership has been met with opposition, irrespective of context. So whether in the 19th or 21st century, for issues of race or gender or class, Black women have been told they have to pick a side, rather than being able to holistically fight against intersectional oppression in the ways for which their respective marginalized identities require. Black women's lived experiences are spaces for intellectual development, theorizing, and action, especially because even without formal recognition within the academy or policy spaces, Black women have advanced an intellectual legacy that is inclusive, intersectional, and liberating.

Womanism

Black Feminist Thought has continued to populate transformative understandings of resistance. Alice Walker introduces the term womanist to address the solidarity of humanity (Collins 2000). For Walker (1983),

> Womanist is a Black feminist or feminist of color . . . Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior . . . Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered "good" for anyone . . . Committed to the survival and wholeness of entire people male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health . . . Loves music . . . Loves the moon . . . Loves the spirit . . . Loves love and food and roundness . . . Loves struggle . . . Loves the Folk . . . Loves herself. Regardless. Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender. (xi–xii)

Walker envisions a reality where Black women can live full and authentic lives by being seen, heard, loved, not only by society, but for themselves to fully embody these ideas and principles. Ogunyemi further articulates,

> Black womanism is a "philosophy" that concerns itself both with sexual equality in the Black community and "with the world power structure that subjugates" both Blacks and women. "Its ideal is for Black unity where every Black person has a modicum of power and so can be a 'brother' or a 'sister' or a 'father' or a 'mother' to the other . . . [I]ts aim is the dynamism of wholeness and self-healing. (as cited in Brown 2004)

Black feminism and womanism embrace the idea of personhood as defined by oneself. Therefore, the ability for Black women to define themselves is an opportunity to upend the stereotypes and the controlling images that have historically dictated life outcomes.

Intersectionality

An acknowledgment of identity, its cumulative effect, and its multiplicative implication for life within the context of a global society is central to Black Feminist Thought. When Angela Davis wrote *Women, Race, and Class*, she was contextualizing Black womanhood from slavery through the mid-20th century. In this work, Davis (1983) interrogates how women (Black and white) intersect (sometimes cooperatively, most times competitively) for the advancement of rights and privileges in the United States. Within this context, white women are interested in partnerships that will advance their rights, at the expense of Black people holistically. bell hooks' *Ain't I a Woman* (1981) illuminates how the virtues of womanhood have never been recognized for Black women in the United States. Inspired by the famous speech by Sojourner Truth, hooks explained how racism and sexism dictate the marginal status of Black women. "Black women were placed in a double bind; to support women's suffrage would imply that they were allying themselves with white women activists who had publicly revealed their racism, but to support only black male suffrage was to endorse a patriarchal social order that would grant them no political voice" (hooks 1981, 3).

Audre Lorde's *Sister Outsider* is a collection of essays that speak to a "contemporary feminist theory" whereby Lorde is "at the cutting edge of consciousness" due to her ability to expand, deepen, and enrich what it means to be a feminist (Lorde 1984, 8). Lorde specifically understands that beyond the analytical framework that examines the nuance of identity, systems of oppression, and the dynamics of power and privilege, there must be praxis for action. Praxis, for Lorde, speaks to embracing all the identities individuals occupy and working to construct a new future. Building off earlier theories and frameworks, intersectionality is a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) to examine the experiences of Black women in the workplace. In her seminal work "Mapping the Margins," Crenshaw recognizes that Black women in the workplace experienced gender discrimination similar to their white women counterparts as well as the same racial discrimination as Black men. The unique and cumulative experience of gender and racial marginalization for Black women who are situated at the intersection of these systems of oppression creates a unique environment they must navigate.

The single axes of gender oppression do not require white women to also wrestle with racial discrimination. White identity offers racial privilege, which benefits white women. Similarly, Black men are privileged by their male identity, thus must navigate racial issues, but not gender dynamics. While this conversation is not a game in the oppression Olympics, it does require us to interrogate the ways disadvantage can influence the quality of life for people with multiple identities who are being marginalized today. Because race and gender movements have been siloed, these false dichotomies prohibit interrogation into the ways multiple forms of oppression are experienced simultaneously and limit comprehensive advancement (Brown 2004). Consequently, Lorde (1984) argued, the acceptance of one's differences helps us to devise ways to use each other's differences to enrich our visions and our joint struggles. The inability of public administration to integrate intersectionality as a central analytical frame results in the field, through its policies, decision-making practices, resource allocation, engagement styles, and pedagogy, to deem the inequities experienced by Black women, as well as other people with intersecting and marginalized identities, as invisible and justified.

The Salience of Identity in Public Administration

> In the end, Black women in vulnerable positions within disadvantaged communities fall so far from the gaze that is now sympathetic to some women who experience violence that they have virtually no right to safety, protections, or redress when victimized. (Richie 2012, 21–22)

Over the last decade, conversations regarding the salience of identity in public administration have garnered more attention. While inattention to identity may appear frivolous to critics, the subjugated status of people deemed as "other" has quality of life implications. The criminal, legal, housing, health care, and other systems demonstrate how inequity is built into practices that maintain the status quo, thus relegating Black women to some of the worse outcomes. Using Young's Five Faces of Oppression (exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence), Gaynor (2018) argues that the hegemony and universality of public administration research and practices reinforce unethical practices for people and communities of color. Additionally, the violence enacted on marginalized groups has a detrimental effect on the legitimacy of public institutions and their respective administrative professionals.

To better illustrate this point, Lopez-Littleton and

Sampson (2020) discuss the policy artifacts of structural racism to demonstrate how social policies have contributed to the systemic disadvantage of Black and other marginalized groups. With a focus on social security, education, mass incarceration, health care, housing, and residential segregation, the authors examine the collaborative nature for which policy systems contribute to an inequitable environment for communities of color. For example, maternal and infant mortality for Black women far exceed their white and Latina counterparts. From 2011 to 2015, the Black maternal mortality rate for Black women was 42.8 deaths per 100,000 live births compared to 17.2 deaths per 100,000 live births for all U.S. women and 13.0 deaths per 100,000 births for white women (Lopez-Littleton and Sampson 2020). Disparate health outcomes are complicated by interactions with law enforcement, housing that is economically isolated, inadequate schools, and limited employment opportunities, all which are informed by racist policies and decision-making practices designed to prioritize white preferences and values.

Law enforcement specifically comes to mind in thinking about the unequal impact of surveillance, contact, incarceration, and detainment. Blessett and Box (2016) used the Department of Justice (DOJ) report into the Ferguson Police Department to examine how race and class justified the entire municipal government's (law enforcement, city hall, and the courts) pattern of practice to use Black motorists as a revenue source. Gaynor and Blessett (2021) found that the New Orleans Police Department (NOPD) were more likely to reinforce modes of power (i.e., normativity) and use social control tactics (i.e., verbal or physical harassment, public shaming) when interacting with LGBTQ people of color. Using narrative interviews, participants discussed discomfort and fear when the NOPD are within their proximity. One person from the study stated, "is there a such thing as police involvement when your community is being brutalized, harassed, arrested, discriminated against, and not listened to?" (Gaynor and Blessett 2021, 5).

Housing policy is a steadfast indicator of racial inequity. The Federal Housing Administration (FHA) institutionalized discrimination across all aspects of housing from construction, finance, appraisals, and insurance (Rothstein 2017; Taylor 2019). On the surface, these were objective measures designed to protect the investment of government and increase equity for homeowners. History reveals the patterns of practice of finance, appraisals, and insurance were all based in racist ideas about people and place. Taylor (2019) notes that despite evidence of collusion and mismanagement by FHA, Housing and Urban Development (HUD), real estate speculators, and bankers, poor and working-class Black women were targeted as the culprit for an urban housing market gone awry in the 1960s.

Black women homeowners were labeled as "unsophisticated" and domestically dysfunctional, thus adversely affecting federal housing initiatives (Taylor 2019). Provisions were made for low-income residents, but its implementation lacked the requisite infrastructure (e.g., staff, resources, and technical assistance) to really bring equity to bear for participating families. Again, an intentional decision was made to not fully fund and operationalize the low-income homeownership program. The callousness of this decision reflects a total disregard for the social and political implications of people who would participate in this program—mostly poor Black women. Given the scarcity of the housing stock available to Black families, acknowledged predatory practices, and exorbitant rents, participating in a federal housing program appeared to be a better option. Unfortunately, this proved not to be the case. Housing policy continues to exemplify how Black women became the scapegoats for racist narratives and policy decisions.

Dantzler (2021) specifically argued that the modalities of racial capitalism (e.g., redlining, slum clearance, foreclosures, and exclusionary zoning) all reflect the intention to dispossess and displace undesirable people and communities. This commodification produces divergent outcomes for long-standing urban residents of color. Their neighborhoods are intentionally disinvested and, thus, prime for rehabilitation to benefit white middle-class residents (Blessett 2020a). Whereas slum clearance was the mid-20th century policy of the day, gentrification and resegregation evolved to recapture and reorganize land and neighborhoods 60 years later. Despite Fair Housing laws and provisions, Black women are still more likely to be renters and are disproportionately threatened with eviction. Now more than ever, race and gender increase the likelihood of eviction, with Black women facing the compounded risk of eviction compared to Black men and women of other races (National Partnership 2021). Despite what we know to be institutional failures, society continues to point to Black women as examples of individuals who are predisposed to make bad decisions; thus,

outcomes are attributed to their status as low-income and working-class. As a result, the harm (institutional, political, economic, emotional, social) caused to them is virtually ignored.

Significant discussion of representation within public bureaucracies often advances the idea that diversifying the demographic makeup of an organization will produce more equitable outcomes. As Balfour, Adams, and Nickels (2020) note,

> Ordinary people may simply act appropriately in their organizational role—in essence, just doing what those around them would agree they should be doing—and at the same time, participate in what a critical and reasonable observer, usually well after the fact, would call evil. Even worse, under conditions of what we call *moral inversion,* in which something evil has been redefined convincingly as good, ordinary people can all too easily engage in acts of administrative evil while believing that what they are doing is not only correct, but in fact, good. (4)

Laws, alone, cannot and will not right the wrongs of injustice, discrimination, and oppression. The people inside of bureaucracy must be willing to act on the side of equity and justice. Public administration as a field of scholarship and practice needs to raise its consciousness and be honest about the harms caused when we align with the narratives of objectivity, meritocracy, and neutrality. It remains disingenuous to applaud these narratives while simultaneously seeing the ways disparity is perpetuated in ways that victimize "other" people and communities outside of white, male, and heterosexual identities.

The reality is that our bureaucratic institutions are racialized. Bureaucracies shape the agency of individuals (access to education, employment, healthcare, political power). They legitimize the distribution of resources for deserving populations, while justifying scarcity for undeserving populations. And, they consolidate political power in ways that sustain the status quo (Ray 2019). Whites' identity and their respective communities are atop the social, political, economic, and racial hierarchies, and thus overwhelmingly benefit from the existing structures. Leveraging colorblindness allows for adverse policy decisions to operate without question, which ultimately hurt Black, Indigenous, and Latino people and communities. Vague language absolves public administrators and officials from taking ownership or seeing themselves as purveyors of injustice through policy decisions and administrative actions. Use of such language mimics the "just doing my job" sentiment used by British functionaries when subjugating Indigenous populations in Africa and India as expendable and superfluous (Alkadry and Blessett 2010).

Public administration needs to be better. The legitimacy of U.S. institutions hangs in the balance as racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, and transphobia become political platforms for local, state, and federal leaders. The politics of today will continue to inform the practices of tomorrow. With less and less room for compromise, people who fall outside of white, male, heterosexual, able-bodied, and affluent identities will continue to be harmed and the violence inflicted upon them will be justified. The evidence is clear on the subjugated status of Black women and their respective lives. Despite this reality, Black women have remained resilient and have developed non-traditional strategies to navigate the world, support each other, and advocate for ideas that empower other oppressed groups. Moreover, as stated in the Combahee River Collective ". . . it is apparent that no other ostensibly progressive movement has ever considered our specific oppression a priority or worked seriously to ending that oppression…We realize that only people who care enough about us to work consistently for our liberation is us" (Hull, Bell-Scott, and Smith 1982, 15–16).

Black Feminist Epistemologies and Methodologies Applied

Black Feminist Theory (BFT) is "a political and intellectual intervention developed by women activists and scholars challenging the traditional body of knowledge about Black women and the ways it is produced and validated" (Richie 2012, 127). BFT is not just theorizing. It is also praxis, which is the action that leads to liberation and empowerment. To advance Black Feminist Theory in public administration,

- There needs to be a clear understanding and analytical framing of the way interlocking oppression uniquely affects Black women;
- Black women's experiences need to be at the center of analysis;
- Lived experience (everyday knowledge) is given authority to serve as a source of authentic expertise;
- Dialectical images/depictions of Black womanhood are allowed to be nuanced and complex without being

circumscribed by narrow, normative notions of femininity; and

- Scholarly work should be in service to activism (Richie 2012).

Black Feminist Theory recognizes that U.S. Black women have produced social thought designed to oppose oppression.

The integration of Black Feminist Theory into public administration has largely been absent, despite its ability to offer context into the myriad ways oppression has and continues to operate for people and communities of color. Within public administration (PA), quantitative methods continue to reign supreme based on their premise of objectivity, rationality, and ability to determine causality. BFT, along with other approaches like Participatory Action Research (PAR) and interpretive and indigenous methods, are less likely to be valued because they center women of color, LGBTQ individuals, poor people, disabled folks, and others who sit outside of the status quo. In other words, the desire to prioritize the lived experiences of directly impacted people, to leverage their expertise, to use and honor their voice, as well as to utilize "nontraditional" methods (e.g., poetry, dialogue, relationship building, and art) to understand the nuances of life have been scorned as less sophisticated and not as rigorous.

Black Feminist Theory and intersectionality specifically can be used in PA to embrace inclusive perspectives, ideologies, and methodologies as alternatives to the inhumane treatment of people with multiple intersecting identities (Blessett 2020b). Public administration can then pose questions about how disparity emerges, the role of institutions in perpetuating inequality, and why and how communities of color have the lowest quality of life statistics. This will facilitate examination of the individual and societal consequences of being burdened by administrative actions and public policy (Blessett, Gaynor, Witt, and Alkadry 2016). With these questions, race cannot just be a variable in some statistical analysis; it requires an in-depth level of interrogation about the social, political, economic, and cultural context of institutions and society. Rather, these approaches take time, require trust, need active listeners, use deliberation, demand flexibility, and necessitate patience. Understanding the implications of intersectionality cannot be explored with a survey or a one-off interaction. There are just some things numbers cannot explain; adding the necessary context of interpersonal experiences and relationships may offer insight behind the numbers. More than anything, research-

ers and practitioners must be willing to step outside of normativity and learn how to thoughtfully and authentically engage with people who have been marginalized, if there is a desire to be responsive to the needs of all citizens, but especially the most vulnerable.

Within the classroom, centering what has been traditionally known as subjugated knowledge helps to expand the collective understanding of oppression, struggle, tension, and engagement. Therefore to advance justice, there must be a rejection of race-neutral perspectives and a growing capacity (beyond rhetoric) to embody a just and liberated world (Gaynor and Lopez-Littleton 2021). This, indeed, is the work, the praxis of public administration, to actively dismantle old practices and develop new strategies and varied ways of knowing, and to push for change in ways that restructure a new world. Classes, for instance, like Intro to Public Administration, Human Resource Management, Strategic Planning, Organizational Theory, and Qualitative and Quantitative Methods, can benefit from having discussions, projects, and engagement around intersectionality to explore the ways identity is affected by theory and practice. For research, this means modifying tenure and promotion requirements to acknowledge the time to work collaboratively with community. It requires foundations and philanthropic organizations to reward funding proposals that are mindful of the complexity of the wicked problems and that acknowledge the flexibility needed in working with community members. The social ills of society did not emerge in a one-year funding cycle, so it is important for organizations to manage their expectations with respect to the types of solutions and progress that can be garnered within that time. Funding should support longitudinal studies that allow researchers, in partnership with community members, to develop projects designed to address root cause issues. Time and resources are essential for the investigation into complex problems. Additionally, as community partners have to navigate external factors, flexibility is important to demonstrate care, concern, and commitment to sustain working relationships with people and organizations within the community. Social ills are systemic issues, and therefore more time, attention, and resources must be dedicated to efforts to address the root cause of these issues rather than the symptoms.

Conclusion

Black women are resilient, not necessarily because they want to be, but because they have to be. The non-tra-

ditional tools and approaches to build community have allowed Black women and other marginalized communities to create networks and develop collaborations outside of formal institutions and mainstream society. White identity, ideologies, and values are threatened by the thought of centering people deemed as "others." This may be part of the reason Black Feminist Theory and other interpretive approaches are viewed as less valuable and sophisticated. The status quo will be disrupted when public administration centers the lives of people with intersecting identities; offers a counter-narrative about a field that has largely been white-washed; includes the contributions of Black women and people of color who helped to build the United States, its institutions, and culture; decenters whiteness; and situates the field within the appropriate historical, political, and economic context. While the backlash will be great (see responses to the 1619 Project, critical race theory (CRT), divisive language bills, anti-trans laws), public administration must take a stand, interrogate, and be honest about the harm caused by the field via its research and practice.

It was difficult to write this article because none of this information is new. The writings and teachings of the Black feminist go back for centuries. The societal ills Black women were interrogating then, are literally the roots of our oppression now, but because of their low social status, no one viewed them as credible. As a result, the oppression has been reified into a system that seems almost impossible to disrupt. However, if we listen to Black women, if we honor their experiences navigating a society that is hierarchical and oppressive, if we leverage their intellectual contributions to activism, advocacy, and resistance, there is a possibility we can recreate a new world.

To honor the legacy of Black women who tried to tell us, here are a few of their names: Jarena Lee (b. 1783), Sojourner Truth (b. 1797), Maria W. Stewart (b. 1803), Harriet Ann Jacobs (b. 1813), Mary Ellen Pleasant (b. 1814), Harriet Tubman (b. 1820), Anna Julia Cooper (b. 1858), Ida B. Wells-Barnett (b. 1862), Mary Church Terrell (b. 1863), Amy Jacques Garvey (b. 1895), Florynce Kennedy (b. 1916), Dr. Pauli Murray (b. 1910), Dorothy Height (b. 1912), Shirley Chisholm (b. 1924), Audre Lorde (b. 1934), Frances Beal (b. 1940), bell hooks (b. 1952), Toni Morrison (b. 1931), Akasha Gloria Hull (b. 1944), Alice Walker (b. 1944), Angela Y. Davis (b. 1944), Patricia Hill Collins (b. 1948), Barbara Smith (b. 1946), Beverly Smith (b. 1946), and exponentially more.

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