

Cite Black Women: A Critical Praxis (A Statement)

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This collective statement provides a general overview of the Cite Black Women movement, its principles, intellectual genealogy, charge, and history. It is both a reflection and an outline of the project's primary principles, hopes, and dreams.

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This collective statement is the fruit of community conversation and collaborative writing by members of the Cite Black Women Collective. It is a musing that begins to outline the critical praxis of the Cite Black Women Collective and our goals for intervening in citational politics and transformational engagement within the academy. The named authors collaboratively wrote this statement and therefore are listed as its authors/contributors. However, the ideas, framings, and understandings put into the statement are born out of the Cite Black Women Collective's experiences and communications over time. Hence, the names listed are the statement's "authors," but the Cite Black Women Collective is also its coauthor. Our insistence on naming those who contributed to writing this statement is an extension of our politics: we cite to recognize the value of our labor and the need for our work to be explicitly attributed to us collectively and individually. The academy has traditionally used authorship to create hyper-individualistic hierarchies of knowledge that can be monetized and catalogued according to capitalist and neoliberal measurements. This traditional system—built on the logics of heteropatriarchal white supremacy—inherently erases the invisible labor of those who help to build the genealogies of thought that contribute to all knowledge. Within this rubric, Black women have been systematically unnamed. Therefore, naming is an act of rebellion. In that spirit, we acknowledge those who are not named as authors but explicitly contributed to the genealogy of thought of this statement: Bianca Williams, Yasmine Irizarry, Jenn M. Jackson, Michaela Machicote, and Alysia Mann Carey.

It's simple: Cite Black Women. Black women have been producing knowledge since we blessed this earth. We theorize, we innovate, we revolutionize the world. We do not need mediators. We do not need interpreters. It is time to disrupt the canon. It is time to upturn the erasures of history.

[Correction added on May 17, 2021 after first online publication: Spelman University was changed to Spelman College]

It is time to give credit where credit is due: cite Black women. Cite Black Women is more than just a catchphrase or a hashtag: it is an emphatic statement, a command, a rebuke, a call to action, a celebration, an act of rebellion, an ethos, and an act of love.¹ Behind it lies this critical question: What does it look like to dismantle the patriarchal, white supremacist, heterosexist, imperialist impetus of the neoliberal university (and its accomplices) by centering Black women's ideas and intellectual contributions? Embedded within this question we also find our response.

At least since the advent of slavery in the Americas, there has been blatant, total disregard for Black women's "property": our things, our bodies, our love, our creations, and our ideas (Berry 2017; Spillers 1987).² The exploitation of and total disregard for our bodies, in concert with the exploitation of our labor,³ *have been paralleled by the appropriation, abuse, and misuse of our intellectual labor*—the stealing of our ideas and energy without pretense toward any form of acknowledgment (monetary or otherwise). As a result, one of the palpable echoes of slavery is the continued and widespread perception that Black women's ideas and creative works should be plagiarized, just like our labor, our bodies, and our love. Plagiarism, like knowledge, power, and the academy, is a form of exploitation intimately tied to the projects of colonialism, slavery, and their progeny: white supremacy, patriarchy, heterosexism, and imperialism.

For centuries, people have been content with erasing us from mainstream bibliographies, genealogies of thought, and conversations about knowledge production because they view our ideas like they view our bodies: as eminently violable. This has been especially true in the university—a bastion of neoliberal heteropatriarchal white supremacy in the modern era. We are fed up with this state of affairs. Especially now, in this political moment, it is urgent that we reconfigure the politics of knowledge production by engaging in a radical praxis of citation that acknowledges and honors Black women's transnational intellectual production.

Following in the footsteps of the Combahee River Collective (1982 [1977]), the Cite Black Women Collective recognizes that we are writing in a particular moment with a unique (yet not so new) set of challenges. We are living in an era of reactionary, right-wing fascism; escalating gun violence and anti-Black, misogynist, transphobic, and queerphobic violence; increasing Black maternal mortality; the metastatic murders of Black (trans and cis) women; brazen police killings of Black people with impunity; the militarization of the police and the use of federal troops to limit citizenship rights and create police states in what should be public spaces; a global pandemic; and climate change and environmental racism (Ducre 2018; Perry 2013; Roberts 2017; Smith 2016; Taylor 2016). We are living in a time of economic precarity, income inequality, educational privatization, vast student loan debt, and the casualization of labor both inside the academy (i.e., adjuncting) and outside of it (i.e., the gig economy) (Harris 2016; McMillan Cottom 2017; Williams 2017). Although it is 2021, the gender pay gap still exists, there is incessant divestment in public institutions, and Black women's labor is still exploited, just as Claudia Jones (1949) pointed out decades ago and others have since reaffirmed (e.g., Brewer 2016). In a current social context in which white supremacy and patriarchy proliferate, and there is an ever-shifting landscape of knowledge production, the Cite Black Women Collective demands reparations around citational practices. At the same time, we seek out joyous moments of organizing and innovative potentiality.

Who Are We?

Cite Black Women is an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary collective that includes queer, femme, and gender-nonconforming people. We are anthropologists, historians, political scientists, sociologists, interdisciplinary researchers, creatives, and nongovernmental organization workers.

We are tenured professors, administrators, tenure-track faculty, graduate students and people working and engaging outside of the academy. Cite Black Women is a movement dedicated to highlighting the expertise of Black women scholars (organically and academically trained) who are often undercut and undermined. We affirm the values of creative genius that Black women writers and thinkers have brought into this world and continue to develop to this day. We are Black feminists and build on work by canonical Black feminists such as Andaiye, A. Lynn Bolles, Sueli Carneiro, Barbara Christian, Patricia Hill Collins, Angela Davis, Carole Boyce Davies, Lélia Gonzalez, Beverly Guy-Sheftall, bell hooks, Claudia Jones, Audre Lorde, Beatriz Nascimento, Barbara Smith, Hortense Spillers, and many others. However, the mission of Cite Black Women is not *solely* oriented around the promotion of Black feminist thought. Rather, it is also invested in promoting Black feminists advancing intellectual thought in a variety of contexts, disciplines, and interdisciplinary spaces.

Cite Black Women is a Black feminist intellectual project, praxis, and global movement to decolonize the practice of citation by redressing the epistemic erasure of Black women from the literal and figurative bibliographies of the world. In this way, Cite Black Women goes beyond disciplinarity (Ali 2009). We recognize and affirm all Black women: trans, femme, cis, and gender fluid. We understand that knowledge emerges from all sectors of life: from people who are organizers, activists, and artists. We recognize all sites and contexts in which knowledge is produced. We aim to create a network for scholars, activists, artists, and thinkers that will redress the historical tendency to devalue and dismiss Black women's intellectual labor. Cite Black Women is a praxis and also a movement: a Black feminist ethos that we actively expand globally, especially as we seek to move outside of normative notions of sociality. We do this by actively engaging in anti-imperialist forms of knowledge democratization and circulation. Our core understanding of Black women's experiences is not limited to the United States or the English-speaking world. Some of our collective members are fluent in Spanish, Portuguese, and German and have built connections and community with Black women in Colombia, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Germany, and other countries around the world. We realize, however, that we cannot allow the immediate limits of our linguistic capacities and social networks to limit the horizons of our work. Therefore, we continuously seek to forge new alliances, engage in a radical praxis of translation and transnational collaboration, and actively seek to disrupt imperialistic hierarchies of knowledge wherever and however we find them, even when they mirror our own limitations.

Black feminist anthropologist A. Lynn Bolles (2013) notes, "If the citation wars have meaning in the modern academy . . . then in both short and long runs African American scholars are/will be faceless and voiceless" (67). In the face of this invisibilization and erasure, Black women have found alternative methods to assert themselves as radical producers of knowledge inside and outside of academia (Bailey and Trudy 2018; Brewer 1997; Brewer 2016; Collins 1990; Guy-Sheftall 2011; James 1999; Taylor 2017). Citation as a practice allows us to engage with the voices that are often silenced or left behind. In the prescient words of literary scholar Barbara Christian, we have "more pressing and interesting things to do, such as reading and studying the history and literature of Black women, a history . . . ignored [and] bursting with originality, passion, insight, and beauty" (1987, 51). Citing Black women is both feminist and antiracist praxis in academia and beyond. Cite Black Women attends to a radical practice of citation that encourages and honors Black women's transnational intellectual labor (e.g., Boyce Davies 1994; Busby 2019; Carneiro and Camargo 2016; Curiel 2016; Figueroa 2020; Wane, Jagire, and Murad 2014). We recognize that, as Sonia Alvarez and Kia Lilly Caldwell point out, the "inequitable politics of translation" creates a situation in which the

scholarly work of Black feminists publishing in languages other than English and in countries other than the United States and Western Europe have difficulty reaching mainstream global audiences (2016, vi).

We do not seek to simply “inform” or set up networks but to serve as a resource and hub of knowledge production and circulation. We strive to make ourselves visible to each other and to the broader public. We are intentional about being seen, seeing others, and spreading knowledge. We believe in collective knowledge production while simultaneously honoring and respecting the individual contributions from each one of us. We seek to articulate, enact, and practice a politics of collectivity that can transform disciplines and challenge racism, sexism, and misogynoir (Bailey and Trudy 2018). We understand that community is internal, which makes us visible to one another and also inspires us to action.

What Is Our Praxis?

The Cite Black Women project seeks to produce and share knowledge about Black women’s intellectual contributions to the world. Through our citational practices, we can reflect on our genealogies and mutual relationships and investments in one another’s work. These bonds lay the foundation for Black feminist networking that emerges from Black women’s intellectual labor. The Cite Black Women Collective’s citational praxis allows for recognition and praise of this work, and we embrace all the multiple points of convergence and divergence therein. As mentioned previously, in the spirit of transnationalism, we intentionally amplify Black trans and nontrans women, femmes, and queer people currently circulating knowledges within our various disciplines, institutions, and communities globally.

Our politics of collectivity demand that we strive to embody a particular kind of Black feminist thought, one that rejects profitability, neoliberalism, self-promotion, branding, and commercialization. We make intentional decisions to upturn neoliberal values of hyper-individualistic profiteering. We seek instead to reroute resources back into community and collective. For example, since we began in 2017, we have used our proceeds from Cite Black Women T-shirts to support progressive Black causes like the Winnie Mandela School in Salvador, Brazil, and Black Mamas Bail Out, and intend to continue to use our resources to support progressive, community-based Black mutual aid projects. We engage multiple economies of knowledge production even as we are constantly learning how to negotiate the free circulation of ideas. We acknowledge Black women’s contributions, past, present, and future, inside and outside of the academy.

We are invested in praxis as constant change and movement. This statement is about where we are and how we are thinking right now, at this moment. As a collective we firmly believe in the importance of dynamism and fluidity. In this spirit, this is our first Cite Black Women Collective Statement, but it will most likely not be our last. Our hope is to continue to grow and develop our thought and practice dialogically as well expand our praxis and deepen our movement. This is the beginning, not the end, of our story.

In January 2018, Christen Smith developed five guiding principles for Cite Black Women that outline what we believe to be essential steps to critically taking on the challenge of our practice:⁴

1. **Read Black women’s work.** Read Black women’s scholarship broadly. Seek out new authors and new texts; engage in multiple forms of knowledge production. Familiarize yourself with the bodies of literature and creative work that Black women have produced and reflect deeply on the

contributions that they make. Black women publish in every area imaginable. All you have to do is find us.

2. ***Integrate Black women into the core of your syllabus (in life and in the classroom).*** Don't just slap us onto your bibliography—critically engage us. We aren't just sources of information; we are also theorizers and innovators. Once you have immersed yourself in Black women's work, take the time to let it soak in and shift your thinking. Incorporating Black women into the core of your syllabus means doing more than just making passing reference to our work or tacking us onto a syllabus as an afterthought. To truly engage, you must let our ideas transform your thinking and let them lead, not follow, traditional, hegemonic approaches to your field. For example, in anthropology, it is not enough to just add a Zora Neale Hurston reading to your syllabus to be sure you "include a Black woman" and then pat yourself on the back for a job well done! Think critically about how your syllabus must change if you are to take Black women's thought seriously. Ask students to think about how Black feminist anthropology changes our perspectives of culture and power.
3. ***Acknowledge Black women's intellectual production.*** Once you have incorporated us into the structure of your class/bibliography, acknowledge our work. How have we uniquely changed/impacted the field? Say our names out loud. Don't just paraphrase what we've taught you and pass it off as your own intervention. If you like an idea, let us know who inspired it. When doing literature reviews, when reviewing articles, and when drafting your manuscripts, ask yourself: Where are the Black women authors? If they are not there, seek them out. Do the work.
4. ***Make space for Black women to speak.*** Give us the space and time to speak. If you assign a Black women's work, invite her to speak on your campus. Invite her to speak in your class (and pay her!). Support her by attending her conference presentations and/or talks. Make space in your daily practices to ensure that Black women's ideas are heard. If you are a non-Black person who is invited to speak on panels, ask yourself: Where are the Black women? If they are not there, advocate for them to be included. Be a true accomplice in words and deeds. Cite us in your lectures, talks, meetings, even casual conversations. It makes a difference.
5. ***Give Black women the space and time to breathe.*** Black women are doing a lot of visible and invisible labor. Most of us work three to four shifts, not just two (à la the second shift). Don't overwork us. Give us a break. Give us the space to be quiet, write, reflect, laugh, cry, and be. And don't take it personally when we need time away. Do not ask Black women for additional labor to aid your process of citing Black women. Give us the space and time to breathe.

What Is Our Charge?

The Cite Black Women Collective charges scholars in all disciplines to reimagine hegemonic citational politics by critically and actively reflecting on how gender, race, nationality, and class shape the possibilities of knowledge production. Recognizing this, we charge one another to think about practical steps we all can take to transform the academy and the world, while acknowledging that transformation is a continuous process of growth and renewal. We think carefully and at times slowly. However, as Black women scholars, we are often asked to do everything at once even when we do not have the capacity to do so. The urgency of our survival often requires us to push beyond our limits in malicious and damaging ways to continue to exist in spaces and among people that never meant for us to survive. Yet, we must fight for change. In the spirit of acknowledging what ails us and actively seeking a way forward, we encourage us all to consider the following points and questions, which continue to inspire our work:

- What does it look like to dismantle the patriarchal, white supremacist, heterosexist, imperialist impetus of the neoliberal university (and its accomplices) by centering Black women's ideas and intellectual contributions in anthropology as well as other disciplines?
- How are we participating in and naming a genealogy of a Black radical feminist tradition within anthropology and other disciplines? What are our tangible and ethical commitments to this inquiry, historical practice, and way of theorizing?
- How do we model citation as a Black feminist ethic—not only in our publishing but in our teaching, service, and mentoring as well?
- How can we restructure and design our classroom environment and educational spaces to look different? What values do we carry into our community environments? What systems are learned from our communities? How can we better merge these spaces?
- Thinking about the politics of citation as a praxis, could we imagine what it would look like to think about letters of recommendations, external review letters, reports and award nominations (the bureaucratic shuffling of intellectual life) as a practice of citation?
- How can we think about the practice of citation for administrators? For instance, is the legacy of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) work by Black women erased through citational practices within the university system itself?
- What does citational currency look like outside of the ivory tower? And, if citation is currency, how can we ensure Black women creatives are paid?
- Finally, in everything we do, we must ask: What does my perspective add to what we know? Who has contributed to what I know and what I do not know? And who am I in conversation with—or who should I be in conversation with—to carry this knowledge forward?

Engage

We invite all those who wish to be actively engaged with the Cite Black Women project. To date, most of our work has been done through digital media. We believe that virtual communities can serve as points of contact where Black women's knowledges converge and are made manifest. We believe that digital spaces of belonging are vital to daily life for Black people as community elsewhere and otherwise, especially as a global pandemic forces many of us to shelter in place and physically distance ourselves from others. The virtual world and the digital spaces therein have allowed us to engage in global community dreaming and building in ways that were not possible before the advent of new technologies. Yet, we also value meeting in person, face-to-face whenever possible and we recognize that digital and hashtag activism is not and never has been enough. Creating and maintaining analog and digital networks as our way to build community requires imagination, creativity, and conviction. It requires practice, and we hope to practice alongside you. Therefore, the Cite Black Women Collective invites you all to join, support, and engage Black women's intellectual knowledges as we embark on and sustain the momentum behind this journey together.

Social media continues to be our primary platform to connect with people outside of our immediate physical communities, although this is ever expanding. You can find us as @CiteBlackWomen on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. The Cite Black Women official website also provides resources to the general public and contains information about our story, our blog, and our podcast (citeblackwomenscollective.org). We produce a regular podcast, we offer and conduct workshops based on our principles internationally, and we have an expanding repertoire of research projects related to our work, some of which are published in this special issue. We believe that these

sustained activities are the manifestation of our praxis. This praxis facilitates an ethos where applied practice of the theory work Black women produce in the academy (and beyond) is placed into context and in conversations with important interlocutors digitally and in real life.

The Cite Black Women movement is one that is both rooted in community and seeks to produce community. Our critical praxis motivates us not only to be intellectual change makers but also to invest in community building and Black women's knowledge production. This movement, in tandem with the project's various components, amplifies and animates the work we do, scholarly and otherwise. Our collective imaginaries and the freedom practices we enact are fueled by a commitment to centering Black women's organic and intellectual labor: if they won't give us a seat at the table, we will bring a folding chair (to paraphrase Shirley Chisholm).

We are a project of radical refusal with revolutionary possibilities. If universities and oppressive spaces of knowledge production seek to silence and erase Black women, then acknowledging and centering us holds revolutionary possibilities as a radical praxis of Black feminist utopian imagining and formation.

NOTES

- 1 Christen Smith started the Cite Black Women project in 2017, and it became popularized through Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook and through the hashtags #CiteBlackWomen and #CiteBlackWomenSunday.
- 2 Hortense Spillers's (1987) theorization of the ungendering of Black women through the experience of slavery and the Middle Passage is fundamental to our understanding of the relationship between the exploitation and violation of Black women's bodies, our love, and our labor as one systemic process of dehumanization.
- 3 Angela Davis's classic book *Women, Race, and Class* (1981) is fundamental to our conceptual understanding of the relationship between slavery and the exploitation of Black women's labor in all of its forms, including most pointedly the exploitation of our physical and reproductive labor.
- 4 This list of five principles was originally published on Twitter via @CiteBlackWomen in January 2018. We have added a longer elaboration of each point here, which also incorporates commentary Christen Smith did on the five principles in her blog for our site on August 22, 2019. <https://www.citeblackwomenscollective.org/our-blog/five-steps-you-can-take-to-citeblackwomen-now-tips-for-the-new-academic-year-christen-a-smith>.

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