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**Multiple Archives, Multiple Futures: Reexamining the Socialism of
"The Combahee River Collective Statement"**

Kayla M. Bloodgood

**Faculty Advisor: Robyn Wiegman
Program in Literature**

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Abstract

While contemporary scholars celebrate “The Combahee River Collective Statement” as an early articulation of intersectional theory, little scholarship current exists that takes seriously the authors’ self-identification as socialists. In this paper, I place the erasure of the Combahee River Collective’s identity in three major contexts: citational practices in feminist scholarship, socialist feminism’s resistance to late twentieth century reworkings of what constitutes the “material,” the fall of socialist feminism from its status as the “crowning achievement” of feminism. Rather than argue for its inclusion in socialist feminist archives at the expense of its place in intersectionality, I advocate for the Statement’s inclusion in multiple archives of thought, including and beyond intersectionality and socialist feminism.

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Acknowledgements

I first read “The Combahee River Collective Statement” three years ago. Today, the questions it raises feel just as urgent for me as they did then, and not simply because I am finishing this paper in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, but because this crisis has laid bare the very issues Combahee sought to address in 1977. I want to thank the three authors of the Statement—Barbara and Beverly Smith and Demita Frazer— for writing a document that has shaped feminist movements and my own life in profound ways.

I would also like to thank the many faculty at Duke who from whom I learned more than I can express here, especially Gabe Rosenberg, Ara Wilson, Julianne Werlin, Michael Hardt, and Kathi Weeks. I am particularly grateful for Robyn Wiegman, who helped turn a jumbled mess of book-length ideas into a manageable project and provided insight at key junctures in the writing process. Additionally, my studies at Duke would not have been possible without the academic support of the Graduate Liberal Studies program and the generosity of the MALS Endowment/GLS Director’s Award.

Finally, I would not be here and this project would not exist were it not for three people: my parents, Karen and Pete Bloodgood, and my dear friend Katie McNeilly. These three saw me through bug infestations, painful breakups, mental health crises, and much more in the last two years. I feel something beyond grateful for them.

Introduction

In 1977, three members of the Combahee River Collective (CRC)—a group of black socialist feminists based in Boston— wrote what would become a touchstone in black feminism and women’s studies when they drafted “The Combahee River Collective Statement.” Often described as a “manifesto,” the Statement is now thought to have inaugurated a “new wave of twentieth century social movements,” and contributed to an ongoing critique of the hegemony of whiteness associated with the second-wave women’s movement (Norman 2007, 115; Morgensen 2005). In 2017, the fortieth anniversary of the Statement inspired the women’s studies journal *Frontiers* to hold a roundtable on the legacy of the text in which the participants remarked on its widespread and enduring effects:

It occurred to us that there may not have been any other essay or book in the last forty years that could have garnered such animated conversation among us. It is both singular in its influence and generative in its presence. (Kolenz et al. 2017, 182-83)

Indeed, the Statement’s introduction of the terms “identity politics” and “interlocking oppressions” continues to animate leftist political discourse as well as academic fields in the humanities, where it is considered a “major document in women’s liberation history” and a necessary text on syllabi in women’s studies courses (Aguilar 2012, para. 5). Since its first publication in 1979, it has been reprinted in 31 anthologies and journals—a signal of the sustained influence it has maintained in its 43 years of life.¹

The *Frontiers* roundtable is illuminating not only for its consideration of the reach of the CRC, but also for its positioning of the Statement primarily in relation to “intersectionality,” a concept that offers critical sustenance for understanding the interconnections between multiple

¹ For a full list, see Appendix: Full Text Publications

systems of oppression and discrimination. Although the term first appears in Kimberlé Crenshaw's 1989 influential article "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex," the authors of the roundtable describe the Statement as a "forerunner" that "laid the groundwork" for Crenshaw's theory (170). For contributor Analouise Keating, the Statement is prophetic and "singularly prescient" because of the emphasis on the simultaneity of experiences of racism and sexism that it shares with Crenshaw's work a decade later (170). In her text, Crenshaw employs the metaphor of a traffic accident in an intersection to work against a single-issue framework in antidiscrimination law. Just as one cannot determine the cause of an accident in an intersection where cars travel in several directions, she argues that the struggles of racism and sexism are actually "indistinguishable" from one another (Crenshaw 1989, 149, 162). Today, intersectionality is considered a primary paradigm for scholarship in both women's studies and the humanities, with the Collective's work consistently positioned as "the inaugural intersectional text" (Nash 2019, 6).

To a large extent, this view of the Collective as thinking intersectionally before such a political vision was academically named seems correct to me. But I am interested in an aspect of the Collective's work that has not been sufficiently linked either to intersectional thought or to the historical context of its political work: the CRC's self-identification as socialists and their relationship to the 1970s socialist feminist movement. Tellingly, none of the contributors to the *Frontiers* roundtable take up Combahee's socialist identity. Even as they celebrate the group's "early realization" that oppressions are interwoven with political-economic systems of capitalism, they do not include socialist feminism in the long list of feminisms to which Combahee is connected (178, 176-77). The only evidence of the group's history with socialism appears in the bibliography, which cites without commentary the Statement's first publication in

Zillah Eisenstein's *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism* (1979). As I read it, the *Frontiers* roundtable is indicative of a larger tendency in contemporary feminist discourse that loses the specifically socialist worldview of the Statement as it reaffirms its status as a "foundational" intersectional text (Carastathis 2016, 5).

As self-identified lesbians and socialists, the Combahee River Collective held a unique position in relation to both mainstream feminist and black liberation movements during their six-year existence between 1974-1980. The CRC developed an analysis that sought to compensate for white feminism's lack of attention to race, the sexism internal to black liberation movements, and the "bourgeois" stance of organizations like the National Black Feminist Organizations (NBFO) on issues of sexuality and class (Combahee River Collective 1986, 16).² In describing the "major systems of oppression" as interlocking, the CRC sought to "extend" Marxist theory to consider capitalism as a system entangled with histories of racism, sexism, and heterosexism. At the same time, their call for a practice of politics that builds upon one's personal identity required a substantive consideration of the category "worker" such that the revolutionary subject of analysis was not an abstract "raceless" and "sexless" one (13).

In 2017, Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor began to recover the radical politics of the CRC in her book *How We All Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective*. Taylor, a former member of the now dissolved International Socialist Organization (ISO), praises the Statement as a "seamless discussion about socialist politics and ideas in concert with Black feminism" (129). Conducting interviews with the text's three authors—sisters Beverly and Barbara Smith and Demita Frazer—Taylor considers how the anti-capitalist critique of the Statement is crucial to its political legacy and seeks to connect the "radical roots" of Combahee

² Although I discuss a number of republications of the Statement, I use the 1986 pamphlet published by Kitchen Table in all citations in this paper.

to contemporary black feminist organizing. Like Taylor, I find it necessary to ask how the CRC “sharpened Marxist analysis” in order to understand the depth of its critique.

At the same time, I am particularly interested in the reason the socialist identity of the CRC needs to be recovered in the first place. My aim is thus to consider the institutional and intellectual shifts that made possible the adoption of the text as an object for establishing and extending theories of intersectionality while asking why certain radical aspects of the manifesto and the CRC’s political work—namely associations with socialism and Marxism—begin to disappear as the Statement increasingly becomes synonymous with intersectionality. Instead of seeking a single temporal moment in which the Collective’s socialist identity drops away, I intend to situate the manifesto’s citational history in three contexts: socialist feminism’s resistance to late twentieth century reworkings of what constitutes the “material,” the fall of socialist feminism from its status as the “crowning achievement” of feminism, and the ongoing assumption that intersectionality is anti-Marxist (Weeks 2011, 115).

How, I ask, does the Statement’s connection to theoretical developments such as postmodernism, poststructuralism, and affect theory prevent it from being read as a socialist feminist text? Further, how does feminism’s dismissal of socialist feminism as obsolete require an erasure of Combahee’s socialism in order for the Statement to mark the inauguration of a new way of theorizing? In my sustained attention to this particular document, I want to approach “The Combahee River Collective Statement” both within and beyond intersectionality, as a text critical to intersectionality theory but not reducible to it. What then does it mean to consider the CRC Statement not only as an early document in intersectionality’s archive, but also as a specific political vision and internal critique within second-wave socialist feminist thought? To explore other ways of being for the CRC Statement beyond intersectionality opens the door for

considering the intimacies between the Statement and other less-remembered socialist feminist texts that analyze racism, capitalism, and sexism, such as Gloria Joseph's "The Incompatible Menage À Trois: Marxism, Feminism, and Racism" (1981).

As I consider the CRC's socialist identity, I find it important to first clarify what I mean by the terms Marxism, socialism, and socialist feminism. By Marxism, I mean the broad tradition of philosophical and political thought that considers issues of political economy using dialectical historical materialism as its methodology. I use socialism here to refer to a specific theoretical and political current that develops out of this larger Marxist tradition and holds collective, democratic control of the means of production as its chief aim. Finally, I employ socialist feminism to encompass a discourse that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s and sought to incorporate feminist and Marxist analysis and integrate feminist political goals into leftist organizing. Under this heading, I include the work of "dual-systems" theorists, the "Wages for Housework" campaign, and the more recent development of "social reproduction theory."³ As Ashley Bohrer observes, the line of distinction between "Marxist feminism," "socialist feminism," and "communist feminism" is a "fuzzy" one (Bohrer 2019, 47). I choose to use socialist feminism because I find that it is the most frequently used term of the three in contemporary scholarship and it speaks to the particular leftist feminist thought emerging during Combahee's existence.

In order to examine the CRC's relationship to Marxism and socialist feminism, I will first consider the history of the Collective, their activism in Boston during the 1970s, and the political

³ Dual-systems theory, advocated for perhaps most famously by Heidi Hartmann in "The Unhappy Marriage" (1979), suggests that capitalism and patriarchy are autonomous but related systems. The "Wages for Housework" campaign, begun in Italy and New York by Sylvia Federici, Selma James, and Maria Dalla Costa, used the demand of paid housework to reveal the role of domestic work in sustaining a capitalist economy. First developed by Lise Vogel (1983), "social reproduction theory" attempts to conceive of capitalism as a totalizing system that encompasses patriarchal oppression.

vision articulated in the manifesto. I will then assess the status of the CRC in collective memory, comparing the few historical accounts of the group's activism to the proliferation of republications of the Statement in feminist anthologies. In doing so, I will consider how the CRC Statement becomes folded into larger debates about materiality, the critical nature of identity, and intersectionality's theoretical ability to navigate both structures of power and individual experience. Rather than argue that the Statement belongs to one tradition or the other (intersectionality or socialist feminism), I argue for allowing the text to exist in multiple archives of thought.

The Combahee River Collective: A Brief History

The group that would come to be known as the Combahee River Collective first began meeting in Boston in early 1974 following the eastern regional conference of the NBFO. The NBFO had formed only a year earlier in 1973 in response to racism within the second-wave women's movement and sexism within movements for black liberation. As the three authors of the Statement explain, it was only an initial "core group" of about ten members that worked to establish a Boston chapter of the NBFO. As they detail in the Statement, their early meetings were marked by a lack of clear focus, strategy, or political goal (Combahee River Collective 16). During the summer of 1974, they held several consciousness-raising sessions but did not organize political action as a group. Despite this, the authors explain, individual members were involved in work against sterilization abuse and abortion rights, Lesbian politics, and activism around the trials of Dr. Kenneth Edelin, Joan Little, and Inéz García.⁴

⁴ In February 1975, an all-white jury convicted Dr. Kenneth Edelin, a black physician of Boston City Hospital, for manslaughter for a legally performed abortion. That same year, 22-year-old Joan Little faced trial after killing a Beaufort Country Jail guard in self-defense while he attempted to sexually assault her. In 1974, Inéz García was

Following disagreements with the NBFO, the group decided to become an autonomous organization with a collective leadership model. The group's name serves as a tribute to the Combahee River Raid of 1863, a successful operation led by Harriet Tubman in which three Union ships arrived via the Combahee River to raid South Carolina plantations. Following the attacks, slaves boarded the three ships and the operation resulted in the freedom of more than 750 slaves (Springer 2005, 66). In addition to the Smith sisters and Frazier, the CRC consisted of about ten consistent members during its run from 1974-1980, with about 40 other official members on record (Taylor 2017, 55). While the group never exceeded 40 members, Barbara Smith recalls that dozens of non-members attended their consciousness-raising sessions, signaling the Collective's influence and reach outside of official organizational membership (Springer 55). In addition, in her introduction to the statement in a 1986 pamphlet, Barbara Smith describes the CRC as a "link" between "the coalitions that grew among Black and white people" and "feminists and non-feminists" when twelve black women were murdered during a four-month period in 1979 in Boston's Roxbury neighborhood (5). Combahee's position as a linkage between various coalitions demonstrates its unique position in Boston, serving as a legitimizing "rubber stamp" of approval for movements citywide (146).

During the late 1970s, the CRC remained active in Boston, working for abortion rights, protesting forced sterilization, and distributing the tract "Six Black Women: Why Did They Die?" following the murders in Roxbury.⁵ In the final years of the Collective's existence, the group transitioned into what the authors of the Statement call a "study group," holding seven retreats between 1977-1980 (Combahee River Collective 17). In the Statement, the authors say

convicted of second-degree murder of the man who stood guard while another man raped her. García was granted a second trial in 1975 and her conviction was overturned.

⁵ For an account of this activism, see Terrion L. Williamson, "Why Did They Die? On Combahee and the Serialization of Black Death" in *Souls* 19(3) (2017).

that the idea for retreats first emerged in the fall of 1975 following disagreements within the group about what sort of political work the Collective ought to pursue. Many of those invited to the retreats were writers, such as Cheryl Clarke, Lorraine Bethel, Audre Lorde, and Linda Powell, and attendees spent time sharing and discussing readings and original writing with one another (Springer 107). The last retreat, held in 1980, generally marks the decline of the CRC, with its last official gathering taking place sometime that year (Springer 142).

The Combahee River Collective Statement

When Eisenstein asked Barbara Smith to prepare a statement on the Collective's politics, Smith worked with Beverly and Frazer to prepare an initial draft. Following several hours of taped discussions, Barbara wrote a draft that she later revised after further discussion with Beverly and Frazer (Combahee River Collective 3). The authors begin by establishing their commitment to struggle against a multiplicity of oppressions, describing such systems of oppressions as "interlocking" in one of the most frequently quoted lines of the Statement:

The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives. (9)

Given the similarity between interlocking and intersecting—both in imagery and linguistically—it is clear why this particular line so often provides evidence for intersectionality's origin with Combahee. In fact, Frazer says that she laughs when she reads that Crenshaw "coined"

intersectionality because an earlier draft of the Statement included a line about standing “at the intersection where our identities are invisible” (Taylor 123).

I include Frazer’s reaction to Crenshaw here because I want to acknowledge the very real relationship between Combahee and Crenshaw’s later articulation of intersectionality. At the same time, I think the CRC offers a distinct analysis of oppression with its particular use of “interlocking,” and I follow Anna Carastathis in distinguishing between interlocking systems, Crenshaw’s metaphor of the intersection, and the “jeopardy” models presented by other canonical intersectional works like those of Frances Beal and Deborah King. For one, as Carastathis points out, interlocking makes a specific kind of “social ontological” claim, highlighting the existence of multiple oppressions while complicating their relationship as merely “additive” or even ontologically distinct from one another (36). Unlike the notion of double or multiple jeopardy, in which singular oppressions “add” or “multiply,” interlocking systems complicates the notion that categories of race, class, or gender are ever autonomously constituted apart from another, suggesting instead that their very composition can only be understood in and through one another.

The conversation about interlocking oppressions does not just mark a theoretical difference between the CRC and other documents in the intersectional canon, it directly informs their explicit anti-capitalist position. Although the Smiths and Frazer had different histories in activism and political organizing—Barbara with Students for Democratic Society (SDS), Beverly with the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE), and Frazer with the Black Panthers—each arrived at the “revolutionary conclusion that their, and indeed all Black people’s oppression was rooted deeply in capitalism” (Taylor 6-7). In the Statement, they describe the evolution of their thought:

A combined anti-racist and anti-sexist position drew us together initially, and as we developed politically we addressed ourselves to heterosexism and economic oppression under capitalism. (11)

In this narrative, Combahee's analysis of capitalism develops out of an anti-racist and anti-sexist position, suggesting that no understanding of oppression would be complete without an economic analysis.

At the same time, the authors avoid assigning what Carastathis calls "causal priority" to the economic (37). Unlike Frances Beal, who describes racism as the "after-birth" of capitalism, the CRC attends to capitalism's entanglements with racism, patriarchal domination, heterosexism, and imperialism without making capitalism the root cause (Beal 2008, 166). Hence, instead of describing capitalism as a single over-arching system, the authors treat it as one among many:

We realize that the liberation of all oppressed peoples necessitates the destruction of the political-economic *systems* of capitalism and imperialism as well as patriarchy. We are socialists because we believe that work must be organized for the collective benefit of those who do the work and create the products, and not for the profit of bosses. (12-13, emphasis mine)

In describing capitalism, imperialism and patriarchy as separate systems, the Collective resists presenting capitalist relations of production as that which produces realities of colonial exploitation and male domination while still suggesting their inextricable ties to one another.

Although calling for a redistribution of material resources in which workers appropriate the surplus generated by capital, the CRC resists a call for a "socialist revolution" that is not simultaneously a "feminist and anti-racist revolution" (13). Later in the Statement, the authors

elaborate their relationship to the socialist feminist movement, describing some members' experience at the 1975 National Socialist Feminist Conference in Yellow Springs, Ohio. In her interview with Taylor, Barbara Smith discusses her experience at the conference, which she remembers had very few women of color in attendance (49). In the documents from the conference itself, there is a clear desire to imagine a socialist revolution that will not only addresses feminist issues, but also racism within the US and the exploitation of women of color abroad. For instance, in a letter addressed to conference participants, Willie Mae Reid argues that the struggle for socialism involves a "united fight by all the oppressed—women, Blacks, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, gays, working people, and youth" (Reid 1975). But the members of the "Anti-Imperialist and Marxist-Leninist Caucus" observe in their letter that "Third World sisters were not actively sought out to participate" in the conference. Another letter invites Third World attendees to caucus so that the needs of "Black, Latin, Asian, and Native American people" may be properly represented. These documents support Wini Breines's claim that while there was a commitment to anti-racism in 1970s socialist feminism, this commitment was often an "abstract" one (Breines 2002, 1123). In the CRC Statement, the authors discuss the "narrowness" of the ideology at the conference and their subsequent awareness of a need to develop an economic analysis particular to their own situation (17).

Despite their more distant relationship to the national socialist feminist conversation, Demita Frazer recalls in her interview with Taylor that every member of the Combahee River Collective was either a "nascent" or "fully blown out-and-about" socialist (127). In the letter to National Conference participants, Reid describes the current moment as an "important time" because of the conviction of Dr. Kenneth Edelin and the upcoming trial of Joan Little, two of the issues Combahee members were also involved in. In Boston, the socialist feminist's activism

around these trials, work against sterilization abuse, and what Barbara Smith describes as a “solid” race and class analysis made it so that the CRC saw socialist feminists as the most “aligned” with their work (Taylor 50). Although Smith describes conflicts with the socialist feminists over racist tendencies in their organizations, she explains that in general the women understood “that you could not really deal with sexism and the exploitation of women if you didn’t look at capitalism and also at racism” (50).

Examining capitalism in relationship to race and gender was the foundational task of the CRC, as Smith recalls early conversations with Frazer in which they discussed racial politics while developing an economic analysis “right next to it” (43). When Taylor asked Barbara Smith why the CRC remains valuable into the twenty-first century, Smith replied: “the first is the fact that we were socialists” (Taylor 43). Later in the interview, Smith elaborates on the connection between the group’s socialist identity and its relevance to contemporary politics: “Combahee’s black feminism is so powerful is because it’s anti-capitalist. Anti-capitalism is what gives it the sharpness, the edge, the thoroughness, the revolutionary potential” (69). While Combahee’s anti-capitalism surely grants it revolutionary potential, contemporary accounts of the CRC Statement do not grant it a privileged position in their analysis.

Besides “interlocking oppressions,” contemporary feminist discourse primarily remembers the CRC Statement for its introduction of the term “identity politics.” Like intersectionality, the ubiquity of the phrase has generated confusion, critique, and conflict over its intended meaning. As Grace Kyungwon Hong notes, contemporary understandings of the term as a “process whereby one singular identification—race, class, gender—is prioritized over all else” is quite different from the identity politics first developed by the CRC and other women of color feminists. Their conceptions were “fundamentally critical of a unitary and

reified notion of subject formation,” focusing on the development of an inclusive political vision rather than the elevation of any singular identificatory category (Hong 2006, xxvi).

The desire for an inclusive vision is evident in the Statement. Finding that no other progressive movement has yet to consider their “specific oppression,” the authors conclude that “the most profound and potentially most radical politics come directly” out of their own identities (Combahee River Collective 12). Barbara Smith describes identity politics in terms of a right to specific kinds of political organizing:

What we were saying is that we have a right as people who are not just female, who are not solely Black, who are not just lesbians, who are not just working class. . . . We are people who embody all of these identities, and we have a right to build and define political theory and practice based upon that reality. (Taylor 61)

Smith goes on to explain that their argument was not intended to discourage hope for solidarity in feminist and anti-racist movements, but instead to imagine a new kind of work that mediated various politics goals through the establishment of coalitions (Taylor 62). There is, then, in Smith’s version of identity politics, a kind of ongoing relation between one’s own lived experience and generalized political theorizing such that a movement might represent the needs of everyone.

Remembering Combahee

Despite their short six-year existence, discussion of the Combahee River Collective continues to appear in scholarly work in history, women’s and gender studies, and African American studies— even more so in the first decades of the twenty-first century than ever before. In the three accounts that deal with the history of the CRC I will examine here, Combahee is

recognized in connection to a plurality of movements, including anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist Third World feminism and the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA). In the first instance, Kimberly Springer offers a robust historical analysis of the Collective in her 2005 book *Living for the Revolution: Black Feminist Organizations, 1968-1980*. Through interviews with Barbara Smith and research with primary materials, Springer analyzes the Collective while contextualizing their work with contemporaneous black feminist organizations. Springer finds that the CRC’s specific attention to class alongside issues related to gender, race, and sexuality demonstrates what she calls the “polyvocality” of Combahee (115). In her comparison of organizations, she generates a chart comparing the “placement of emphasis on identity aspects” between the CRC, NBFO, Third World Women’s Alliance (TWWA), National Alliance of Black Feminists (NABF), and Black Women Organized for Action (BWOA):

Table 1: Comparison of Black Feminist Organizations from *Living for the Revolution*

	Black feminist movement	TWWA	NBFO	NABF	Combahee	BWOA
Race	X	X	X	X	X	X
Gender	X	X	X	X	X	X
Class	X	X	x	x	X	x
Sexual orientation	X	X	x	—	X	—

Note: The large *X*s denote those aspects of black women’s identities that were articulated in organizations’ mission statements and acted on through activities, such as rallies, political forums, and committee work. The smaller *x*s denote those identity aspects that were articulated in organizations’ statements but marginalized in their activities. Last, the dashes denote those aspects of black women’s identities that specific organizations did not explicitly address, either in statements or activities.

From Springer, Kimberly. 2005. *Living for the Revolution: Black Feminist Organizations, 1968-1980*. Durham: Duke UP.

Of the five organizations in the chart, only TWWA and CRC receive an “X” in each of the boxes of race, gender, class, and sexual orientation, where an X denotes explicit emphasis on the issue in official statements *and* attention to the issue in actual organizing. Springer notes that Combahee and TWWA were closely aligned as “socialist organizations with heightened awareness about class discrimination and the role of capitalism in oppression” (115). Springer’s analysis thus echoes the statement of Smith and Frazer, who find that Combahee’s particularly socialist and anti-capitalist views were organization-defining in relation to the NBFO, NABF, and BWOA. Springer also provides insight into the last years of the Collective, finding that the group’s dissolution most likely occurred due to lack of funding, tensions around leadership models, and disagreements about the value of pursuing advanced degrees in higher education (142).

Lydia Lindsey offers another historical perspective on Combahee in her 2019 article “Black Lives Matter: Grace P. Campbell and Claudia Jones,” placing Combahee in a multigenerational tradition of radical black feminist work that extends back to the early twentieth century activism of Grace Louise Patterson, Grace Campbell and Claudia Jones— all of whom were involved with CPUSA. Lindsey considers Patterson, Campbell, and Jones predecessors not only for the CRC but also for Frances Beal, the members of the TWWA, and Angela Davis (Lindsey 2019, 117). Unlike Springer, Lindsey extends her analysis into the twenty-first century, positioning the Black Lives Matter movement as the next link in the black feminist radical position because of its demand for economic justice—including a reconstruction of the economy around collective ownership— which Lindsey argues “has put socialism back on the table (129).

Lindsey’s account is not the only one to historicize the CRC in terms of a black feminist radical tradition, as Eric McDuffie also finds intimacy between the CRC, TWWA, Beal and an

earlier generation of black left feminists (McDuffie 2011, 209). McDuffie considers that the legacy of the political repression of the McCarthy period, in addition to generalized marginalization of women in histories of black radicalism, created a generational divide such that people like Barbara Smith were not aware of their predecessor's work and were forced to "reinvent the wheel" (209). McDuffie also considers that black women involved in the CPUSA presented a challenge to the Communist Left's tendency to "to portray the 'working woman' as white and the 'Negro worker' as male" (217). McDuffie's claim offers two important observations about the relationship between black feminists and mainstream leftist movements. For one, he reminds us that early twentieth century Communism's influence on black feminist thought in no way makes it "synonymous" with Communism or even later socialist movements, since their particular analysis differed from that of CPUSA (217). At the same time, he offers a perspective from which to consider the erasure of Combahee's radical identity in the four decades since its writing by drawing attention to a larger trend towards marginalization and erasure of black women within leftist radical thought. Together, Springer, Lindsey and McDuffie offer historical accounts of the Combahee River Collective that place the group in multiple lines of activism, including black liberation movements, black radical movements, feminism, and black feminism.

Outside of these few historical accounts, the CRC lives on in contemporary conversation primarily through "The Combahee River Collective Statement." In 2007, Brian Norman analyzed the Statement's publication history and found that it had been reprinted a total of 21 times between 1979 and 2007 (130). Since Norman's writing, it has been republished an additional nine times, including two translations into Spanish.⁶ To read "The Combahee River

⁶ Melissa Brown, *Una Declaración Negra Feminista*. Papel Negro (2018) and Combahee River Collective, *The Combahee River Collective Statement*, Gato Negro (2017)

Collective Statement” today, one need only to Google the title before finding links to several PDFs and websites with the full text. The first time I read the Statement in the spring of 2017, my professor had printed it off from the personal blog of a woman in Chicago— distributing what felt like a mysterious document with no markings of its origin or publication information, save for the footnote at the end indicating its 1977 composition date. Perhaps because of the document’s feeling of timelessness and the kind of political urgency that weighed especially heavy during that semester following the US presidential election, our class found the Statement particularly useful for thinking through the future of social movements in the twenty-first century.

I recall my own experience of encountering the text as a timeless piece with an element of futurity because it aligns with Norman’s analysis of the document as a manifesto. Norman considers that the “we” in the Statement “opens up” possibilities for a project that extends beyond the initial “we” of the authors into future actors, movements, and contexts (107). As a manifesto, it exists as a text without a “demand to replicate origins, and thus countless futures are made possible” (126). I agree with Norman that much of the celebration of the document in the last forty years relates to the revolutionary promise it holds and its ability to speak into contexts beyond its own. As both Norman and Barbara Smith observe, the publishing history of the CRC Statement “reflects a historical progression and the growth of the very movement which the Statement heralded” (Combahee River Collective 1986, 3). Building on Norman’s work, I consider not only the re-printings of the CRC Statement, but also its citational life in intersectional discourse as a key sign of the term’s origin in black feminism. While Norman contends that the Statement's republication in anthologies allows groups like “black feminists, lesbian feminists, womanists, theorists, rhetoricians, cultural feminists, women’s historians,

consciousness-raising groups, socialists” to lay “claim” to it, I find that no specific discourse has made the kind of proprietorial claims to the Statement with the same intensity as intersectionality, especially socialist feminism (110). Analyzing both the full text re-publications and citations reveals the unevenness with which the Statement has been historicized as a document of intersectionality and offers insight into when and why the socialist identity of the Collective disappears.

To be sure, the “polyvocality” of the Collective presents a challenge for short-hand introductions of the group. Combahee receives a variety of introductions in writings on intersectionality, including as a “Black US feminist lesbian group,” “anti-racist feminists,” and even as “intersectionality theorists” (K. Davis 2008; Apolloni 2014; Mitchell 2013). Even when the editors of *Framing Intersectionality: Debates on a Multi-Faceted Concept in Gender Studies* refer to Combahee as a “socialist lesbian” group, there lacks sustained attention to the specificity of the CRC, which quickly becomes folded into the category of “lesbian feminist activists” (Supik et al. 2012). While all the above labels do reflect the important interventions Combahee sought to make, there requires further reflection on why certain aspects of the groups’ identity fail to enter into the conversation, and what it might mean for a group to identify as black, lesbian, feminist, and socialist all at once.

Although the CRC Statement does share several qualities of a manifesto in its wide distribution and explicit political aims, an initial proliferation of re-publications in the 1980s contributes to its periodization as a text specifically belonging to that decade and thus the development of “women of color” feminism. In many ways, its first publication in Eisenstein’s *Capitalist Patriarchy* was unique due to the collection’s political project, academic orientation, and association with the socialist feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s. In *Capitalist*

Patriarchy, the Statement appears in the final section of the book under the heading “Socialist Feminism in America,” a section aimed at mediating the boundaries between theory and practice. The CRC Statement is included alongside “Principles of Unity,” a statement by the Berkeley-Oakland Women’s Union (BOWU), and a “report” on the activity and ideology of five Marxist-Feminist organizations (anonymously identified as M-F groups 1-5). As opposed to earlier sections in the book with more traditional academic theorizing by names familiar to socialist feminism such as Nancy Hartsock, Linda Gordon, and Nancy Chodorow, this last section seems to turn to questions of what kind of immediate political organizing the earlier theories might inspire (Eisenstein 1979, 349). As such, it helps form a praxis-oriented offset to the academic arguments for socialism that comprise the rest of the book.

The Statement’s re-publications in the early 1980s further reflect its position at the border between grass-roots political organization and institutionalized academic work while also solidifying its place in the particular moment when “women of color feminism” begins to outpace the language of “Third World feminism.” During this time, the Statement appeared in the three landmark anthologies that helped establish “women of color” as a politically viable term: Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa’s *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1981), Akasha Gloria Hull, Patricia Bell-Scott, and Barbara Smith’s *All the Women Are White, All the Men are Black, But Some of Us are Brave* (1982), and Barbara Smith’s *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* (1983). Prior to 1980, it was the language of “Third World” that primarily mediated the identification and solidarity between women of color in the US and abroad, drawing links between black and brown women in overexploited and undeveloped regions and the US. As the animating language of identification for TWWA— who used the term “triple jeopardy” to describe the interaction between racism, imperialism, and

sexism— Third World was also bound up with global socialist and anti-colonial projects (Third World Women’s Alliance 1971).⁷ Although the subtitle of *This Bridge* describes it as the “writings of radical women of color,” the contributors still employ the language of “Third World” throughout the anthology. In the introduction, Moraga and Anzaldúa note that all contributors identify as “Third World Women and/or women of color,” suggesting that the two have a level of interchangeability. In the preface to the fourth edition in 2015, Moraga describes the contributors to *This Bridge* as “inheritors” of TWWA’s “vision” (xxi).

Although “Third World feminism” and “women of color feminism” are somewhat synonymous in *This Bridge*, Ranjoo Soedu Herr has more recently advocated for recognizing the distinctions between them. She sees Third World feminism as a more politically oriented framework, describing it as invested in a geopolitical vision that connects specific local contexts and nationalist projects while women of color is homogenizing and depoliticizing. As she puts it, “*women of color* fails to connote the complex dimensions of women’s oppression across the globe due to the history of European imperialism, colonialism, and globalization in the last five hundred years” (Herr 2014, 6; Herr et al. 2017, 736). Herr traces the erosion of a “Third World” framework in the last two decades of the twentieth century, looking not only to the “ascendency” of women of color but also to the increasing ubiquity of “transnational” feminism (Herr 2014, 9).

While Herr is engaged in a larger conversation about reclaiming “Third World” in the twenty-first century, I find her discussion useful for placing the CRC Statement’s publication in *This Bridge* in the context of shifting objects of study and methodologies in feminism. Although “Third World” is still present in the anthology, the book is engaged in a different kind of project

⁷ *Triple Jeopardy* was the title of the newspaper started by Francis Beal and TWWA in 1971. The paper covered issues related to the liberation of Palestine, movements for independence in Africa, Latin America, South America, and the Caribbean, forced sterilization of black and Puerto Rican women, anti-war activism, and workers and welfare movements.

than the “Third World” of TWWA. This project is best defined by the editors as “theory in the flesh” in which “the physical realities of our lives—our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings—all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity” (Moraga and Anzaldúa 19). This attention to individual experience marks a different kind of analysis than the writing in TWWA’s *Triple Jeopardy* newspaper, which focuses on international geopolitical conflicts and national issues related to worker’s rights and anti-war movements. This is not to say *This Bridge* does not speak to global questions, only that it takes individual experiences as its primary theoretical ground.

While socialist feminists such as Delia Aguilar argue that *This Bridge* loses the “material anchor” of earlier anti-capitalist Third World feminism in its focus on “the realm of experience,” I find that it puts pressure on what counts as “material” and thus on what it means to perform a materialist analysis (Aguilar 2012, para. 7). Aguilar argues that *This Bridge* was the first of several texts to “dramatize” the “intersection of gender, race, and class” while leaving out “the anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist perspective” invoked by 1970s feminist works connected to Marxist theory and anti-capitalist struggles (para. 5, 7). In addition to texts such as Deborah King’s “Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness” (1988) and works by bell hooks and Patricia Hill Collins, Aguilar argues that *This Bridge* produces a “profound shift” in which a “class” is no longer connected to the relations of production and the “material” is replaced by experience and discourse (para. 7).⁸ But the very notion of “theory in the flesh” connotes a certain sense of materiality—although focusing on subjective experience, we should recall that the editors define their objects of study as the “physical reality” of their lives. Thus “theory in the flesh” is more an expansion of

⁸ hooks published a number of books during the 1980s including *Ain’t I a Woman?* (1981), *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984), *Talking Back* (1989), and *Yearning* (1990). Collins’s first publication came in 1986 with her article “Learning From the Outsider Within” in *Social Problems* 33 (6), followed by her first book, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, in 1990.

what constitutes the material—including the body and sexual desire—rather than an erasure of it altogether.

Although Aguilar does not mention the other two landmark anthologies of the 1980s in which the CRC Statement appeared (*Home Girls* and *But Some of Us Are Brave*), both texts also establish a different set of objects and way of doing theory. Like *This Bridge Called My Back*, *Home Girls* combines poetry, essays, photographs, and literary criticism in its exploration of black feminism as a concept, examining experiences of sexism and homophobia within black communities, black women’s art and writing, and questions of spirituality and sexuality. While *But Some of Us Are Brave* reads more like a traditional academic text as a collection of essays, its contributors also seek to establish “black women’s studies” as a discipline that takes cultural myths, artistic expression, and experiences of “body, mind, and spirit” as its objects of study (Hull et al. 1982). That the Statement has numerous re-printings from this period in which black and women of color feminists sought to redefine what counts as material and what makes valuable objects of study is not incidental to its citational life in feminist discourse: as I will explore in the following sections, the Statement’s association with intersectionality and disassociation with socialism centers around the question of the theoretical status of “class” as either an expression material relations or a subjective experience, and, more broadly, if and where to draw the line between the material and immaterial.

Combahee and the Rise of Intersectionality

At the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, Crenshaw published the two influential articles that introduced “intersectionality” to both feminist and legal audiences. In both articles, she engages with the “key concepts” of the CRC Statement as identified by the

Frontiers roundtable participants: the intersecting nature of oppression and identity politics.

Neither the Statement nor the CRC is mentioned in the articles, but Crenshaw does note that her work is inspired by an “emerging scholarly discourse” that examines “the connections between race and gender” (Crenshaw 1991, 1243 fn. 3). Included in the footnote as examples for such discourse are names now familiar to the twenty-first century intersectional genealogy including Beal, King, Collins, and bell hooks. But while her discussion of simultaneous oppressions and identity politics is conceptually similar to some of the CRC Statement, it is worth thinking through the relationship between Crenshaw’s work and that of Combahee for the sake of understanding how CRC’s would come to be situated in relation to intersectionality.

In 1989, Crenshaw published “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex” in the *University of Chicago Legal Forum*. Crenshaw examines three paradigmatic anti-discrimination cases in which the courts refuse to recognize black women as a special class, grounding the experience of discrimination in “white women and black men” (141). By forbidding black women to represent “all women” before the court, the cases also demonstrate a discrimination doctrine in which the multiply-disadvantaged can never represent the singularly-disadvantaged, and where those experiencing multiple forms of discrimination are rendered invisible and unable to seek remedy from the state for a full range of harms (145). But Crenshaw’s text also extends beyond legal representation, turning its critical lens on feminist and antiracist politics. She finds both movements guilty of elevating a single issue, thereby failing to construct a “bottom up” approach that challenges all forms of discrimination (145).

The notion of a bottom-up approach also informs Crenshaw’s use of a second metaphor to evoke the multiply oppressed who, she writes, are positioned in the social hierarchy at the level of the basement. She imagines a scenario in which all those facing any kind of

discrimination are stacked on top of one another such that the most disadvantaged are on the bottom and the singularly disadvantaged are nearest to the ceiling. Any effort to provide an exit that begins from the top—such as creating a hatch in the ceiling—will necessarily leave out those at the lowest level (151). In order to find a way out, those at the bottom must “somehow pull themselves up into the groups that are permitted to squeeze through the hatch,” or, in the case of anti-discrimination law, translate their experiences into those which are recognizable by the court (152). According to Jennifer Nash, the metaphor of the basement shows the flaws in anti-discrimination law by demonstrating the inadequacy of the “special class” to account for all experiences of discrimination. For Nash, as for Crenshaw, this inadequacy underscores the need for a transformed legal regime based not in objectivity, but in lived experience (Nash 2019, 127).

In “Mapping the Margins,” Crenshaw builds on her earlier article and identifies the structural, political, and representational dimensions of intersectionality. Instead of offering “a totalizing theory of identity,” she tries to study how “multiple grounds of identity factor into the construction of our social world” (1244, 1245). A structural intersectional analysis of “systems” and “patterns,” she finds, will produce better policy that does not increase harm on women of color. At the same time, she posits intersectionality’s usefulness for political organizing. While identity politics have previously failed to account for “intragroup differences,” intersectionality renders visible all of the subjects it longs to protect (1246, 1249, 1242). For example, policies and responses to domestic violence based on an “imagined white female victim” have “devastating consequences” for those who fall outside such an image, such as when a women’s shelter requires all victims to speak English (1249).

In her concluding discussion on identity politics, Crenshaw marks a critical distinction between the creation of identity categories themselves and the process by which those

categories facilitate hierarchies and subordination, critiquing those who wish to simply “vacate” all politics based in social location (1297-98). Despite their social construction, categories of identity remain significant because power has “clustered” around certain categories and “is exercised against others” (1297). In doing so, Crenshaw seeks to maintain the language of identity even as she recognizes all that is non-essential, constructed, and contingent about it. Like Combahee, she frames identity politics in terms of “coalitions” that form where categories intersect, looking not so much at individual experiences as collective ones (1299).

While Crenshaw and Combahee share an analytic approach to multiple oppressions and a vision of coalition-based identity politics, Carastathis observes a crucial distinction between Crenshaw and the CRC. While the CRC calls for “revolutionary strategy” that holds universal liberation as its ultimate goal, while Crenshaw’s basement metaphor shows that “strategies like antidiscrimination law function at best remedially, at worst to reproduce the existing hierarchy” (Carastathis 92). While I agree that the Statement and Crenshaw differ from one another, I find that their differences are not in the revolutionary reach of their projects but in their particular objects of critique. As Nash observes, Crenshaw’s critique of anti-discrimination law does not disclose the law as a site of political change but highlights its potential to be thoroughly reimagined. In contrast, the CRC’s concern with multiple oppressions and identity politics grew out of a dissatisfaction with the liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s and their collective failure to organize an inclusive coalition. Thus, the specific revolutionary desire of the Statement is its call for an organizational strategy that advocates for economic restructuring while maintaining awareness of the ways class differences distribute unevenly across lines of race and sex.

Before Crenshaw’s theory of intersectionality emerged as a dominant paradigm for

women's studies at the turn of the century, there was a fair amount of conversation about "The Combahee River Collective Statement" in contexts outside intersectionality. For instance, Joy James draws from the Statement when she makes the argument for conceiving a multiplicity of black feminisms in 1999. In her article "Radicalizing Feminism," James finds that "liberal, radical, and revolutionary black feminisms" are presented as "uniformly 'progressive'" and thus as interchangeable with one another (19). She calls for differentiation between "revolutionary" and "radical," reading "radicalism" as a reconfiguration of revolutionary politics into liberal paradigms (20, 22). As an example of such distinction, James cites Combahee's dissatisfaction with the "bourgeois" politics of the NBFO. Because of a general American political bias against what is truly revolutionary— that which challenges state power and class exploitation— James argues that critiques like those offered by the CRC Statement get lost in the "mainstream" (18). She goes on to include two block quotes from the Statement, including the passage in which the authors discuss their desire for anti-racist and anti-sexist socialist revolution.

Like James, Angela Davis discusses the CRC's revolutionary stance in a 1995 interview. Davis comments on the clear influence of Marxism on the Statement and the importance of guarding against the erasure of anti-capitalist work by black feminists before the publication that pre-dates the influential *This Bridge Called My Back* (A. Davis 1998, 313). Together, both James and Davis serve as examples of analysis of "The Combahee River Collective Statement" that seek to understand its revolutionary desires and the ways in which it represents a specific articulation of black feminist thought that is not reducible to a generalized body of work called black feminism. While there remains a few instances of this kind of engagement with the Statement after the rise of intersectionality, scholarly work after the turn of the century increasingly limits discussions of the text to the intersectional context.

Assembling the Intersectional Canon, Building Consensus

By the end of the 1990s, several authors committed to intersectionality were engaged in building a genealogy of pre-Crenshaw texts. One of the earliest and most influential examples of such works is Patricia Hill Collins's 1998 article "It's All in the Family: Intersections of Gender, Race, and Nation." While Collins sets out to define "the family" as a key object for applied intersectional analysis, she begins by describing intersectionality as an "emerging paradigm" built on the "tradition of Black Women's Studies" (63). In a footnote, she elaborates on this tradition:

In the early 1980s, several African-American women scholar-activists called for a new approach to analyzing Black women's lives. . . . In this tradition [are] works such as *Women, Race, and Class* by Angela Davis (1981), "A Black Feminist Statement" drafted by the Combahee River Collective (1982), and Audre Lorde's (1984) classic volume *Sister Outsider*. . . . Subsequent work aimed to name this interconnected relationship with terms such as matrix of domination (Collins 1990), and intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991). (79, fn. 2)

What is striking about Collins's genealogy is its specification of the "early 1980s" as the legible beginning of intersectional analysis and its subsequent dating of the CRC Statement as a text published in 1982. By citing the Statement's re-publication in *But Some of Us are Brave*, Collins' footnote obscures its earlier appearance in Eisenstein's socialist collection.

It is not only that the Statement's relationship to Eisenstein is lost, but also that the Statement becomes linked to an intellectual and political project distinct from socialist feminism. For instance, in their 2004 article "Ain't I a Woman: Revisiting Intersectionality," Avtar Brah and Ann Phoenix emphasize its connection to such later works as *This Bridge* rather than earlier

works of the 1970s (Brah and Phoenix 2004, 78). Although they have different investments than Aguilar, Brah and Phoenix also conceptualize the publication of *This Bridge* as an important shift in modern feminist thought—one that moves away from “woman” as a category of analysis and towards “poststructuralist theoretical ideas” (82). Included in this category is “discourse theory, deconstruction, psychoanalysis, queer theory, and postcolonial criticism.” In this way, the authors align *This Bridge* with anti-essentialist theories that disrupt the universality of “woman,” account for “physic and emotional life” in theories of subjectivity, emphasize the subject’s production in discourse, and view experience as a “signifying practice at the heart of the way we make sense of the world symbolically and narratively” (82).

In order to link Combahee to this new moment of theory, Brah and Phoenix use the Statement’s composition date as the beginning of a project continued in *This Bridge*:

Political projects such as that of the Combahee River Collective, the black lesbian feminist organization from Boston, pointed, *as early as 1977*, to the futility of privileging a single dimension of experience as if it constituted the whole of life. (78, emphasis mine)

The authors’ use of the language “as early as” positions the Statement as the commencement of a new theory of subjectivity attentive to multiple dimensions of experience. Brah and Phoenix go on to describe the CRC’s concept of interlocking oppressions as “one of the earliest and most productive formulations” of a “decentered subject,” or a theory of the subject in which consciousness is a “site of multiple voicings” that originate in “discourses that traverse consciousness” (78). Thus, the Statement for Brah and Phoenix not only emphasizes the multidimensionality of human experience, but specifically articulates a kind of poststructuralist view of the subject that fits with a larger “disruption of modernist thinking” (82).

Both Brah/Phoenix and Aguilar read the publication of *This Bridge* as a definitive theoretical shift, but their differing investments in intersectionality's definition lead to distinctive characterizations of CRC's relationship to the anthology. Whereas Aguilar emphasizes the Statement's connection to earlier works and imagines its inclusion in *This Bridge* as the death knell for its class analysis, Brah and Phoenix conceive of the Statement as the beginning of a theoretical tradition *This Bridge* helps establish, extend, and crystallize. In both cases, the CRC Statement serves as an evidentiary object in the search for intersectionality's true meaning— it is either proof of intersectionality's Marxist roots in need of recovery or its compatibility with poststructuralist views of the subject. As such, even nuanced analysis about its particular insights and contributions still occur within the frame of intersectionality and never outside of it.

In my sustained attention to these early citations of the CRC Statement in relation to intersectionality, I aim to demonstrate Clare Hemmings's claim that citational practices “produce consensus” about feminist history (Hemmings 2011, 161). In the case of intersectionality and the Statement, a few early works by influential voices like Collins, Phoenix, and Brah started to build a collective narrative about the text's foundational status for the theory. As conversation increased about intersectionality's status as a “buzzword” in women's studies, so too did the number of texts interested in uncovering intersectionality's origins (K. Davis 2008). In “Intersectionality as Buzzword,” for instance, Kathy Davis argues that Crenshaw's concept was “hardly a new idea.” She then repeats the language of Brah and Phoenix when she identifies the beginning of intersectionality “as early as 1977” with the publication of the CRC Statement (73). Although she does not cite Brah and Phoenix at this moment in the text, she does reference both “Ain't I a Woman” and “It's All in the Family” as she builds intersectionality's theoretical history. In addition, Davis does not actually provide a specific reference for the Statement,

although she does include references for the three women of color anthologies from the 1980s (83-85). As scholars with influence writing in prominent journals like *Hypatia*, *Journal of International Women's Studies*, and *Feminist Theory*, all of these authors help build consensus around the CRC's status as the inaugural intersectional work with vital temporal connections to 1980s theorizing.

To be clear, this is not a critique of the above authors nor a dismissal of their works. In fact, I find all of these works incredibly valuable for their specific insights about intersectionality. My intention in highlighting these texts is to think broadly about the way citational practices work, how they build on one another, how they create and solidify traditions and histories. It is through citational practices that scholars, by the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, would begin to solidify the Statement's position as the clear origin for intersectionality, defining the Combahee River Collective not only as "one of the first groups to promote an intersectionality framework" but as "originating an intersectional way of thinking" (Mehrotra 2010, 420; Hulko 2009, 46). Both Mehrotra and Hulko reference Brah and Phoenix's article as they describe the history of intersectionality, further evidencing Hemmings's claim that citations work to create shared visions of feminist pasts (Mehrotra 424; Hulko 48; Hemmings 161). In this instance, that vision is one in which intersectionality possesses a clear genealogical line that begins with "The Combahee River Collective Statement," which inadvertently circumscribes the way that Combahee's expansive political vision is understood.

I find Hemmings's notion of consensus particularly helpful to describe the status of the Statement in our current moment. In recent works, the Collective's position as an early articulation of intersectionality is considered an already established fact. In their 2018 article, for instance, Jessica Fish and Stephen Russell observe that "the roots of thinking and theorizing

about intersectionality *are often traced* to the Combahee River Collective” (Fish and Russell 2018, 13, emphasis mine). Here, the action of drawing the connection between the Statement and intersectionality occurs in the past—it has been already “traced.” Meanwhile, the passive voice further underscores a notion of unstated and unanimous agreement, as we do not know who performs the action of tracing. As such, the Statement appears as an undisputed beginning for intersectionality theory while its particular insights are folded into a generalized conception of what the theory means.

Around the twentieth anniversary of Crenshaw’s text in 2009, debates augmented about intersectionality’s proper owners, subjects, definitional and theoretical scope, political usefulness, and institutional investments. At the same time, a “proliferation” of scholarship on intersectionality further cemented Combahee’s status as a key document in the theory’s intellectual history. The growing number of journal articles, special issues, and books marked the beginning of what Jennifer Nash calls the “commemorative genre” of intersectionality. This body of work seeks to celebrate the term while also asserting its “correct” usage, meaning, and origin (Nash 2019, 60). As a whole, the texts of this genre aim to reattach intersectionality to its specific intellectual genealogy in black feminism. Entangled with questions about intersectionality’s origins, meaning, and circulation, Nash finds, is a “battle” over the place of black women in the “field imaginary” of women’s studies. In the “intersectionality wars,” intersectionality functions as a proprietary object “under siege,” where the task of its defenders is to secure its place in black feminist thought through a practice of careful reading (38-39, 48).

Many of the works Nash includes in her discussion use “The Combahee River Collective Statement” as a central citation, including Vivian May’s “‘Speaking into the Void?’ Intersectionality Critiques and Epistemic Backlash” (2014). Writing in response to what she

perceives as a “flattening” of intersectionality’s epistemological critique, May presents intersectionality as a concept with an “under-recognized history,” one that has been “misrepresented” as a theory of abstract identity by its critics. Citing critics who find fault with intersectionality’s ability to connect lived experience and structures of power, May argues that their critique misses key insights “intersectionality scholars have *long articulated*” (103). In other words, such critics do not identify a fundamental issue, but instead fail to closely read intersectional scholars and consequently critique a hollowed out, erroneous version of intersectionality (104). This lack of attention to intersectional texts informs May’s second contention that critics “use intersectional ideas without attribution,” presenting intersectional insights as their own instead of crediting women of color (104). May’s call for “adequate attribution” raises the stakes for citational practices in intersectional scholarship: in order to guard against the “appropriation” of intersectionality—in which it is “stripped of its radical meaning” and connection to women of color discourses—scholars must use “correct citational practices” in order to produce “accurate genealogies” (May 107; Nash 42-44).

I find that these conditions—under which intersectionality receives protection through practices of proper attribution—ironically discourages “careful readings” of the canonical texts like the CRC Statement and subsequently limits the contexts to which Combahee is imagined to speak. In the case of May’s article, attribution takes the form of parenthetical citations rather than direct quotes or specific summaries. The Statement appears in three parentheticals (dated as 1983) as an example of an intersectional text that “challenges notions of liberal equality,” “links the material with the discursive” and emphasizes the need for “structural models of identity” (96, 103). Referencing only the author and date of a text highlights the kind of work citations perform on their own, where merely including a reference builds a certain level of credibility. At the same

time, because the Statement is one of two or three texts in a single parenthesis, May implies a level of similarity between them and thus collapses their distinctions from one another.

The particularity of the CRC Statement is thus lost in May's larger project to establish intersectionality as a theory capable of speaking to both structures of power and individual lived experience. Because the critic of intersectionality supposes that the theory can speak only to one or the other—using the very “either/or” approach intersectionality disrupts—May sets out to provide evidence for the theory's ability to navigate between the “micropolitical” and the “macropolitical (102, 96). But in all this, there is no sustained reflection on why the CRC Statement appears as example of intersectionality's “both/and” approach to the structural and the lived. Coupled in a parenthesis with Collins's *Black Feminist Thought*, the Statement in May's article is only an expression of identity politics where one's identity informs a political agenda. There is thus no consideration of what the CRC specifically offers in terms of a structural-lived connection, nor how that connection could be related to Marxist theory.

In fact, the only discussion of Marxism appears in the form of a Marxist critique of intersectionality: May cites Martha Gimenez's contention that intersectionality's treatment of race, gender, and class as “equivalent” categories misses the particularity of class (May 102; Gimenez 2001, 27). But rather than considering how Combahee might speak to Gimenez's desire to fuse an analysis of political economy with a race and gender analysis, May implies an incompatibility between Marxism and the intersectional texts she cites. In seeking to defend proper attributions for intersectional texts like the CRC Statement, May ultimately suggests its interchangeability with other intersectional works and, in the process, forecloses a consideration of how the Collective's alignment with Marxist theory might inform its specific view of the relationship between embodied experience and systems of power.

Thus, as the CRC Statement becomes folded into a debate about structure and identity in intersectionality, its specific views on Marxist theory and socialism disappear into a larger conversation about how to theorize social systems and subjectivities. May is not alone in looking to the Statement as evidence for intersectional theory's "structural" emphasis, as Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall adopt a similar stance in their introductory article to a special *Signs* issue on intersectionality (Cho et al. 2013, 797). While the authors turn to Crenshaw's "Mapping the Margins" to dispel the notion that intersectionality is "fascinated" with infinite combinations of overlapping identities and uninterested in structures of power, they include the CRC Statement in a footnote for "early work" with "explicit references to structure" (797, fn. 6). As in May, the Statement does not so much provide any evidence itself but serves as an example of earlier texts one *could* reference to back up the authors' claim that intersectionality has always been invested in structural power. In another influential article defending intersectionality, Brittney Cooper draws a related conclusion to Cho et. al, conceding that while it might not represent a useful analytic tool for thinking about identity, it is one for thinking about power (Cooper 2016, 405). While building a group of texts that begins pre-Combahee, Cooper includes the Collective's Statement in what she calls "a body of proto-intersectionality theorizing," noting its "most important" insight was the concept of interlocking and synthesizing oppressions (388).

In Cooper's article, as in May and Cho et. al, Combahee's notion of interlocking oppressions bears no relation to Marxist theory, but instead helps refute critiques of intersectionality as invested in ahistorical conceptions of categories of identity such as race, gender, and class. This defense is primarily mounted in response to the work of Jasbir Puar, whom Nash observes is often figured as intersectionality's "paradigmatic critic" (50). I find

understanding Puar's argument important here because it shapes interpretations of the CRC Statement by those who respond to her critique. First expressed in her 2007 book *Terrorist Assemblages* and further developed in her 2012 article "I'd rather be a cyborg than a goddess," Puar challenges intersectionality's dependence on an ontologically stable "grid" onto which pre-constituted identities can be mapped. Drawing on the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Puar pivots from the grid to the "assemblage," defined as "a series of dispersed but mutually implicated and messy networks" (Puar 2007, 211). Within this messy series of networks, there is no demand for the "stabilizing of identity across space of time" (212). Instead, Puar builds on Brian Massumi's affect theory to emphasize the bodily sensations that pre-exist the perception, recognition, and language of emotion and identity (Puar 2007, 214; Massumi 2002, 28). Identity then becomes "one effect of affect," where affect is ontologically "*prior to* representation" and therefore prior to "race, class, gender, sex, and nation" (215). To "dismiss assemblage," Puar contends, is to dismiss the way in which "societies of control tweak and modulate bodies as matter" through "affective capacities" more so than through "signification or identity interpellation" (Puar 2012, 63).

In order to establish intersectionality as a theory sufficiently attentive to affect while maintaining the usefulness of identity categories such as race, class, and sex, the Statement must be rearticulated to some extent within Puar's framework. For instance, Cooper turns to the CRC's observation that a synthesis of multiple oppressions "forms the conditions of our lives" (Combahee River Collective 1986, 9). For Cooper, Combahee demonstrates the way in which "material conditions bear some relationship to how one identifies in the world and moves through the world (389). In other words, the concept of interlocking oppressions speaks not to the relationship between capitalist relations of production and systemic patterns of

discrimination, but to the relationship between generalized “material” conditions and embodied experience.

While an abstract version of “The Combahee River Collective Statement” is ubiquitous throughout intersectional discourse, it does not have a presence in socialist feminist discourse. Its exclusion from this archive is evident in texts such as Susan Archer Mann’s 2012 book *Doing Feminist Theory: From Modernity to Postmodernity*. Providing a history of feminist thought extending from the late eighteenth century into the twenty-first century, Mann organizes her text according to “historical” and “political” perspectives (Mann 2012, xvii-xviii). She divides “modern” feminist thought into categories such as “Marxist, Socialist, and Anarchist Feminisms” and “Intersectionality Theories.” As Ashley Bohrer observes, Mann discusses the Combahee River Collective at length in her chapter on intersectionality but makes only a brief mention of the CRC in her chapter on Marxist and socialist feminism. Mann gestures to the CRC as an example of the “many second wave women of color” who identify as socialists (Mann 156). But because this is revealed in the conclusion of the chapter, Bohrer observes, her acknowledgement of the CRC’s place in socialist feminist conversation “appears as an afterthought” (Bohrer 2019, 62, fn. 40).

Further, Mann closes the chapter by positioning Combahee as an external critic of socialist feminism. There, she quotes the CRC Statement as an example of a “common” critique of Marxist and socialist feminism:

That Marxist and socialist feminists prioritize class and gender oppression. . . . They fail to see the simultaneous and interlocking nature of oppressions where the influence of one type of oppression cannot be separately determined (Smith 1983). (Mann 157)

Although the citation for Smith references *Home Girls*, it is clear that “interlocking oppressions” refers specifically to the CRC Statement. While I *do* think the Statement offers important critiques of 1970s socialist feminism, citing Combahee *only* in the list of external critiques implies that the Collective has no internal place within the movement.

I do not intend to single out Mann’s book as particularly flawed, only to demonstrate the Statement’s exclusion from socialist feminism while it remains a frequent citation for intersectionality. It would, of course, be an overstatement to claim that every citation of the CRC Statement misses the Collective’s Marxist and socialist identity. There are several examples of works— including Eric McDuffie and Lydia Lindsey’s historical accounts and other texts by white socialist feminists writing critical historiographies of late twentieth century activism— that do treat the document as one internal to a socialist/Marxist canon.⁹ But still, citations for the Statement in reference to intersectionality far outnumber those that reflect on its relationship to socialist feminist and/or black left radical thought.

The Material Divide

Thus far, I have aimed to demonstrate how a relatively small number of influential works dedicated to securing the proper history and definition of intersectionality leads to a proliferation of texts in feminist discourse that solidify the CRC Statement’s connection to intersectionality as given, accepted, and common sense. At the same time, I have noted how some of the larger academic contexts influence the Statement’s circulation and interpretation. These contexts include the rise of “women of color” and the decline of “Third World women,” the turn to the sexual desire, experience, and discourse as part of what constitutes the “material,” and the

⁹ See Aptheker (2008), John (2017), and Riddiough (2018)

growing attention to affective sensations that are prior to the perception of identity. I find that socialist feminism's resistance to changing academic priorities—of which turns to discourse, experience, and affect are a part—shapes its resistance to intersectionality and, by extension, its lack of engagement with “The Combahee River Collective Statement.” At the same, as critical shifts take place at the end of the twentieth century, socialist feminism becomes written off by general feminist discourse as obsolete and unfashionable. Both of these phenomena—socialist feminism's refutation of new theoretical concerns and feminism's dismissal of socialist feminists—create the conditions in which the socialist aspects of “The Combahee River Collective Statement” begin to disappear.

My concern is not so much in the validity of socialist feminist's analysis of changes in critical theory, but with how that analysis shapes twenty-first century critiques of intersectionality and the CRC Statement. For instance, Nancy Holmstrom's contends that the rise of “postmodernism” directly contributes to the fall of socialist feminism:

Socialist feminism as a theoretical position distinct from Marxism also declined for external reasons, both intellectual and political. 2 (Holmstrom 2003, 44-45)

Although Holmstrom does not specify specific postmodern authors or texts, her critique does reveal her primary concerns: the dismissal of the universal in favor of the “local” and the disappearance of the “body” amidst “significations.”

I thus find that for Holmstrom, “postmodernism” actually functions as a synecdoche for a much larger movement towards anti-essentialism and an expansive definition of the “material.” “Postmodernism” here then refers to a set of related but distinct intellectual discourses, including poststructuralism, queer theory, and affect theory—each of which grapples with claims to the universal and considers revised notions of materiality. Moreover, in describing “their emphasis”

on particular experience, Holmstrom implies that there is a certain group of people who identify as postmodernists, but she does not indicate what authors might be included in this group. I read the identification of an unspecified group of postmodernists as evidence that Holmstrom's critique is aimed more generally at recent intellectual trends than a specifically "postmodern" set of scholars.

Despite a lack of specificity, this passage does reveal socialist feminism's major sources of contention with critical shifts at the end of the twentieth century. First, the notion that postmodern theory's critique of the a notion of the universal and the use of "meta-narratives" to legitimize knowledge casts doubt upon socialist feminism's ability to account for capitalism, patriarchy, and racism as one coherent system or as interrelated systems (Lyotard 1979). Further, the idea that the body "disappears" in significations indicates a dissatisfaction with postmodern views of the subject. Finding that the conditions of contemporary capitalism have fundamentally undone the classical Marxist concepts of production, use value, and exchange value, postmodernists like Jean Baudrillard argue that it is no longer possible to conceive of a "conscious subject" who produces and consumes commodities (Baudrillard 1976, 19). Under late capitalist conditions in which currency can no longer be converted into its referent (gold), "exchange" no longer means the trading of objects in reference to "controlled equivalents," but of signs against one another, thus producing a "hyperreal" world organized around simulation (19, 7, 73).

In this hyperrealist mode, there is no longer the subject who labors relative to fixed relations to produce surplus value, or that value which the capitalist extracts through the discrepancy between the cost to maintain the laborer and the laborer's expenditure in his or her work (Marx 1867, 301). The subject instead becomes like a "pure absorption and re-absorption"

surface for an endless play of images and signs (Baudrillard 1989, 27). Further, because one's labor is no longer "productive," it becomes primarily a "sign of one's social position" (Baudrillard 1976, 19). Although Holmstrom does not specify her concern with postmodernism beyond its obsession with "experience," I think this aspect of Baudrillard—the treatment of labor as a sign of social location— incites the critique about valuing personal experience over material conditions.

The specific concern over "signification" also speaks to misgivings about poststructuralism, which similarly argues for a change in temporality in which signs precede subjects. Like Baudrillard, poststructuralists problematizes a stable relationship between sign, signifier, and signified, finding instead that the author of a text plays a kind of "performative" role in which he or she can only play out language's endless significations (Barthes 1977, 145). Within feminism, poststructuralists like Judith Butler extend this idea of the subject's production in discourse to consider how subjects become gendered through the repetition of certain habitual acts (Butler 1990, 23). Butler's consideration of certain "regulatory practices"— such as one's dress and walk— as discursive ones extends both Baudrillard and Barthes's notion that subjects are formed through encounters and negotiations with a number of signs.

When Holmstrom calls for a return to the "body," I read this as call to refute postmodern and poststructuralist views of subjectivity and return to a more orthodox demarcation between the material and immaterial, one that Butler's classification of bodily acts as discursive threatens to disrupt. Again, I am interested not in defending or rejecting Holmstrom's analysis but in considering how socialist feminism's general aversion to changes in critical theory informs its critique of intersectionality. Recall, for instance, that it is specifically the focus on "experience" and "discourse" in *This Bridge Called My Back* that Delia Aguilar finds most troubling.

Although unnamed in her article, Aguilar's critiques of experience and discourse in fact allude to the emerging theoretical discourses of postmodernism and poststructuralism. While Aguilar implies intersectionality's collusion with major theoretical reconceptualizations through her critique of *This Bridge*, we should also recall that Brah and Phoenix specifically align the Combahee River Collective and intersectionality with the late twentieth century "disruption of modernist thinking" (82). As such, I find Aguilar's dispute with intersectionality to reflect Holmstrom's belief that new ways of theorizing displaced socialist feminist ideals.

A socialist feminist aversion to shifting intellectual priorities and conceptions of materiality is evident in socialist feminist critiques of intersectionality that challenge its theoretical treatment of class primarily as an "identity" rather than a "relation." This is to say that it is not the absence of class from intersectional texts that incites criticism, but its theoretical status as a marker of identity. For example, Johanna Brenner calls for a move from "class as a social location to class as social relations of production" (Brenner 2002, 293). Similarly, Barbara Foley argues that the language of "classism" is problematic for its treatment of class as an identity instead of as a "relationship" (Foley 2019, 12). Although neither author/critic/scholar explicitly invokes postmodernism or poststructuralism, their attempt to distinguish "class" from other sources of oppressions like race and sex reveals a desire to separate analysis of labor and relations of production from discussions of individual experience, subjectivity, and identity.

Other scholars like David McNally do invoke postmodernism in their critique, arguing that a "postmodern cultural element" took hold of intersectionality (McNally 2017, 109). For McNally, this "cultural element" led intersectionality to develop a theory "haunted by social Newtonianism," which is to say haunted by a belief in the ability to map differences onto a social space comprised of "ontologically separate and autonomous bits" (99). McNally's resistance to

intersectionality emerges from a desire to move away from what I read as the implications of the postmodern condition, including that we can no longer conceive of the social in terms of totality or unified whole. The specific metaphor of the intersection becomes an important subject of critique, as the independence of individual roads goes against his synthetic “vision of life, where multiple creeks and streams have converged into a complex, pulsating system” (107).

Totality is part of the larger vision of the collection in which McNally’s essay appears, *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression* (2017). Edited by Tithi Bhattacharya, the book announces Social Reproduction Theory (SRT) as both a “theory” and a project for twenty-first century Marxism that treats capitalism as a “systemic totality” encompassing all that goes into reproducing society as a whole (Bhattacharya 2). Drawing on the work of Holmstrom and other prominent socialist feminists like Lise Vogel, the collection reads not just as an attempt to update Marxism for the twenty-first century, but specifically the socialist feminist tradition.¹⁰ As such, I find it noteworthy that its primary engagement with intersectionality comes in the form of McNally’s critique, where it is positioned as a theory corrupted by postmodernism. *Social Reproduction Theory*, like Aguilar’s article, exemplifies the way in which intersectionality’s relation to postmodernism and recent theoretical movements forms the basis of socialist feminist criticism. Moreover, its resistance to intersectionality prevents the authors from including “The Combahee River Collective Statement” in their analysis despite the CRC’s shared concern with capitalism’s entanglements with racism, sexism, heterosexism, and imperialism.

¹⁰ Lise Vogel’s *Marxism and the Oppression of Women* (1983) is an important text related to “social reproduction.” In her book, she argues for a “unitary theory” between Marxism and feminism, finding that Marxist theory and an understanding of the mechanisms of capitalism could explain the majority of women’s oppression.

While the socialist feminist critique of intersectionality as “postmodern” constitutes one condition for the exclusion of the CRC Statement from its own archive, feminism’s general dismissal of socialist feminism also influences collective memory of Combahee. I find the evolving status of Donna Haraway’s famous essay “A Manifesto for Cyborgs” (1985) to reflect this evolution and to demonstrate how socialism disappeared from feminist discourse. As a reply to the *Socialist Review*’s question “Why has socialist feminism all but disappeared?” Haraway offers a striking critique of humanist tendencies in the Marxist tradition and argues that feminism in the late twentieth century must move beyond false dualisms like human/animal, organism/machine and material/semiotic (154). Further, she criticizes Marxism’s reliance on “foundational myths” in a manner that mirrors Jean-François Lyotard’s postmodern critique of meta-narratives (150). In a footnote, Haraway insists upon Fredric Jameson’s notion that postmodernism is not merely one preferred “style among many others,” but the dominant cultural logic of late capitalism (Haraway 244; Jameson 1991, 45-46). Socialist feminists, she argues, must do away with critiques that postmodernism and poststructuralism disregard lived relations in favor of semiotic play and instead try to reinvent leftist politics under postmodern conditions (152).

Although she offers thorough criticism of socialist feminism, Haraway still largely operates within its terms in order to forward a socialist feminist agenda. But as early as 1989, some like Joan Scott wondered whether Haraway’s text was *too* beholden to the outdated language of socialist feminism (Scott 1989, 217). Scott describes socialist feminism as an “older mode of analysis” that might be incapable of moving beyond its “humanist history” (216). This kind of explicit distancing from socialist feminism fits with Kathi Weeks’s observation that the discourse lost its place as feminism’s “crowning achievement” by the 1990s, its “privileged

position” handed instead to poststructuralist feminism (Week 2011, 115). Today, Haraway’s embrace of “the textualization of everything” and the “leaky” boundary between the physical and non-physical is mostly regarded as a triumph in poststructuralist, postmodern and posthuman feminisms rather than as the renewal of socialist feminism (Haraway 152-53).

“A Manifesto for Cyborgs” and the CRC Statement are of course distinct documents outside of their shared manifesto form and strained relation to socialist feminism, but the kind of dismissal of socialism in Scott’s analysis of Haraway’s work reveals the tendency to assume socialist feminism’s incompatibility with new modes of theory. It also demonstrates how a text as explicitly socialist as Haraway’s can lose its specific attachment to the socialist archive as it circulates in feminist discourse. That celebrating Haraway’s text as the foundation for a new moment in feminism necessitates downplaying her socialism matters for a consideration of the CRC Statement. As the Statement earns a reputation as one of the initial intersectional texts, acknowledging its relationship to socialism could risk portraying it as passé instead of the kind of as the groundbreaking and innovative work needed to develop a new theory.

Conclusion: Multiple Archives, Multiple Futures

My desire is for “The Combahee River Collective Statement” to exist in a number of academic spaces, both within and beyond debates about intersectionality. In particular, I advocate for its inclusion within Marxism and socialist feminism conversation. I find that the Statement fits with an archive of twentieth century socialist feminist texts that continues to inform projects such as *Social Reproduction Theory* and its contributors’ attempts to theorize the relationship between economic exploitation and cultural oppression. It is critical to include works such as the CRC Statement in this discussion because it eschews the old distinction of

“material” and “immaterial” by considering racism and sexism’s imbrication within a capitalist economy, but still resists the lure of totalization in social reproduction theory that risks subsuming all of life to the economic.

In this archive of socialist feminism I imagine texts that have sometimes gone by the name “dual-systems” such as Heidi Hartmann’s “The Unhappy Marriage” (1975), but also ones that are less-remembered such as Gloria Joseph’s “The Incompatible Menage À Trois: Marxism, Feminism, and Racism” (1981), which challenges Hartman to develop a racial analysis. Responding to Hartmann’s claim that the marriage between Marxism and feminism is an “unhappy” one because the feminist struggle is continually “subsumed” by the struggle against capital, Joseph argues that both Marxism and feminism are unable to analyze the material conditions of black women’s lives (Hartmann 5; Joseph 93). She advocates for a “specifically Black feminist approach” that eschews the kind of universalization of “men” and “patriarchy” in Hartmann’s text (93, 99). Joseph builds on Hartmann’s insight that capitalism, although quite “flexible” in its ability to incorporate and adapt to a number of social structures, remains a purely economic system that is not “all-powerful” (Hartmann 18). But she also complicates Hartmann’s notion of a simple “partnership” between capitalism and patriarchy, arguing that it is necessary to distinguish between the role of black and white men and consider the ways in which white women benefit under current capitalist conditions (102).

Both Hartmann and Joseph’s essays are included in the larger 1981 collection *Women and Revolution: A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism*, which as a whole grapples with Hartmann’s charge of the unequal partnership. It is here that a split between “dual-systems theory” and “social reproduction” becomes evident, as critics such as Iris Young and Lise Vogel begin to argue for a conception of capitalism and patriarchy as a unified “single”

system where women's oppression can be situated "in the context of a theory general social reproduction" (Young 44; Vogel 212). Vogel later expands upon her vision for a "unitary theory" of social reproduction in a full-length book, where she maintains that the source of women's oppression lies in capitalism's historical gendered division of labor. As such, a project of socialism will necessarily be a project of women's liberation, as socializing domestic labor such as childcare will reduce the burden on women (Vogel 1983).

The basic distinction between dual-systems theorists and social reproduction feminists emerges not just from the source of women's oppression, but from their particular conceptions of capitalism. The former understand capitalism as primarily an economic system defined by its specific exchange of labor for capital, while for the latter capitalism includes those social structures that allow for the surplus value creation and reproduction of the labor force, arguing that unwaged labor is also a "constituent element of capitalism" (Bohrer 65). While both concede that capitalism in theory does not imply any specific social structures or conditions, each takes a different stance on this same concession. For dual-systems, that the positions within a capitalist system such as the proletariat, the ruling capitalist class, the wage-laborer, and the reserve army of labor are themselves "sex-blind" and "race-blind" necessitates the existence of other autonomous social systems (Joseph 93). But advocates for the social reproduction approach argue that capitalism has *always* historically and empirically been bound up with racism, sexism, and heterosexism, and imperialism, thus negating the theoretical question of whether or not it could accommodate itself to another set of social conditions. (Bohrer 70; McNally 107).

While it is "social reproduction" that has survived into the twenty-first century and most explicitly influences Bhattacharya and the contributors to *Social Reproduction Theory*, I find that the collection still grapples with the questions raised by other socialist feminist texts—most

critically how to conceive of capitalism's far-reaching influence without subsuming everything to the economic. Even as Bhattacharya seeks to establish SRT as a theory that treats questions of non-economic oppression "in distinctly non-functionalist ways," which is to say in a manner where oppression is not seen as simply deriving from and therefore secondary to economic exploitation, McNally's essay at times threatens to subsume everything to the economic by describing racism as a "partial totality" that is analogous to one body part in a living organism (3, 105). It is unclear in this illustration of the organism if capitalism is the whole body itself, or something akin to the essential functioning of the "heart" as Cinzia Arruzza describes it (Arruzza 2014). Nevertheless, the metaphor of the bodily whole threatens to exclude analyses of racism that do not have clear connections to the economic.

In their critique of Marxism's failure to incorporate race and gender into its analysis, the Combahee River Collective, Gloria Joseph, and Heidi Hartmann agree with social reproduction theory's claim that a consideration of capitalism must include the ways in which it is intertwined with racism, patriarchy, imperialism, and compulsive heterosexuality. But their work challenges social reproduction's insinuation that this dependency goes both ways—that an analysis of racism or sexism cannot take place apart from capitalist analysis. Take, for instance, the work of the CRC in Boston after the Roxbury murders in 1979. As Terrion Williamson observes, the Collective's pamphlet, "Six Black Women: Why Did They Die?" laid "the groundwork" for a consideration of what he calls the "serialization of black death" (Williamson 2017, 332). Combahee's intervention was to demonstrate the ways in which black death is seen as "mundane" and unworthy of news, to reveal the murders of the women as one "particular iteration of the many forms of black death" (331, 332). In seeking to understand the normalization of violence against black women, the pamphlet points towards an analysis of

gendered and racialized violence that considers non-structural dimensions of perpetual violence, including cultural signs and images in reproducing “the fabric of violence against women” and the everyday task of achieving means of “self-protection” and a right to exist in public spaces without threat of death (Combahee River Collective 1979, 45).

My point here is that there are many targets for analysis, including the production of public affects and the political discounting of certain kinds of life, that emerge out of a consideration of the serial murders of twelve black women. It is likely that the language of dual or even “triple” systems no longer suffices in describing a capitalist form that does indeed operate through both waged labor and unwaged work while depending upon a social fabric that codes certain kinds of labor as feminine and reduces blackness to non-life. But maintaining the work of Combahee in contemporary conversation will challenge us to inhabit the “autonomy” McNally sees in the “partial totality” of racism and the ways in which white supremacy and patriarchy are what Bohrer describes as “constitutively ineradicable” and “equiprimordial” elements in a “complex and multifaceted system of domination” (McNally 107, Bohrer 64). In other words, the contribution of the CRC and those who have been placed under the heading “dual-systems” is their persistent calling of attention to all dimensions of social life capitalism both encounters and shapes.

To close, I want to think about what insight the Statement brings to a contemporary issue such as black maternal death. A 2016 study conducted by the American College of Obstetricians found that between 2005-2014, non-Hispanic black women averaged 40.2 maternal deaths for every 100,000 live births while non-Hispanic white women averaged only 14.1 (Amirhossein et al. 2018, 708). At the same time, black infants in the US are twice as likely to die as white infants, a disparity worse than it was in 1850 (Villarosa 2018). In the face of this

disproportionality, Combahee brings us to ask: What would the socialization of health care mean for preventing pregnancy-related deaths among black women? What kinds of redistributions of resources would ensure access to sufficient pre- and postnatal care? But still, the CRC's attention to the autonomy of racism and sexism leads us to consider how the same problems will persist even after the establishment of a universal health insurance program.¹¹ It is here that we can turn to other kinds of analysis, such as Arline Geronimus's "weathering hypothesis," or the physical deterioration of the body from the repeated trauma and stress of being black and female in America, deterioration that leaves black women vulnerable to complications while pregnant (Geronimus 1992). We can also consider the systemic dismissal of black women's pain within medical spaces in relation to the work of Saidiya Hartman and Hortense Spillers, who return to the history of transatlantic chattel slavery in order to locate the marking of the black body as inhuman property and the black female as invulnerable to the violence of rape (Spillers 1987; Hartman 1996).

I raise the alarming rates of black maternal and infant death because it speaks to the amount of work left to be done before us and the continued need to consider oppressions as interlocking, as working in and through one another, and as enmeshed within the functioning of a capitalist economy. It also reminds us that, as the authors of the CRC assert, to simply call for a socialist revolution aimed at collective ownership of the means of production and the socialization of all forms of care will never be enough to reconfigure a world without racism and sexism. But by reading this critique as one internal to socialist movements, we can ask what kinds of analysis and projects could accompany this baseline vision to end capitalist exploitation.

¹¹ That access to adequate health care alone is not the single issue is demonstrated in the findings of a Brookings Institute study. The infant mortality rate for black mothers with an advanced degree was still higher than the rate for white mothers with less than a high school education. Source: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/social-mobility-memos/2016/10/21/6-charts-showing-race-gaps-within-the-american-middle-class/>

After endorsing Senator Bernie Sanders in the 2020 presidential election, Barbara Smith pinned the following tweet to her Twitter profile: “Indeed we were #Socialists and still are” (Smith 2018). I am left dwelling in the language of “still are” in this tweet. It tells us we are in need of a reminder: that the members of Combahee River Collective have always been working under socialism’s name, and that this commitment persists despite our collective forgetting of it.

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Appendix: Republications of the CRC Statement

The follow publications include all reprintings of the Statement's full text, with the exception of one slightly abridged version (2009), by academic, trade, and independent publishers in both English and Spanish. Not included are unofficial publications of the text such as those on personal blogs and websites or self-published translations in other languages. This list expands upon one generated by Brian Norman (2007) to include translated and recent publications.

1979

Eisenstein, Zillah, ed. *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 262-272.

Combahee River Collective. "Combahee River Collective: A Black Feminist Statement." *Off Our Backs* 9 (6): 6-8.

1981

Moraga, Cherrie, and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds. *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. Boston: Persephone Press.

1982

Hull, Akasha Gloria, Patricia Bell-Scott, and Barbara Smith, eds. *All the Women Are White, All the Men are Black, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies*. New York: Feminist Press, 1982.

1983

Smith, Barbara, ed. *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*. New York: Kitchen Table, Women of Color Press, 1983.

1984

Jaggar, Alison, and Paula S. Rothenberg, eds. *Feminist Frameworks: Alternative Theoretical Accounts of the Relations between Men and Women*. New York: McGraw Hill, 202-209.

1986

Combahee River Collective. *The Combahee River Collective Statement: Black Feminist Organizing in the Seventies and Eighties*. New York: Kitchen Table, Women of Color Press, 1986.

1988

Moraga, Cherrie, and Ana Castillo, eds. *Esta Puente, Mi Espalda: Voces De Mujeres Tercermundistas En Los Estados Unidos*. San Francisco: Ism Press, 172-85. (In Spanish)

1989

Ware, Susan, ed. *Modern American Women: A Documentary History*. Chicago: Dorsey Press, 297-305.

1991

"'Instant Classics': The Combahee River Collective Statement." *Ms. Magazine* 2 (1): 40-44.

1994

Schneir, Miriam, ed. *Feminism in Our Time: The Essential Writings, WWII to the Present*. New York: Vintage Books, 176–87.

Herrmann, Anne C. and Abigail J. Stewart, eds. *Theorizing Feminism: Parallel Trends in the Humanities and Social Sciences*. Boulder: Westview Press, 29–37.

1995

Guy-Sheftall, Beverly, ed. *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African American Feminist Thought*. New York: New Press, 232–40.

1997

Nicholson, Linda J., ed. *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*. New York: Routledge, 163–70.

Bartkowski, Frances and Wendy K. Kolmar, eds. *Feminist Theory: A Reader*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 268-272.

2000

James, Joy, and T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, eds. *The Black Feminist Reader*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 261–70.

Manning, Marable, and Leith Mullings, eds. *Let Nobody Turn Us Around: Voices of Resistance, Reform and Renewal: An African American Anthology*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 524–29

2001

Ritchie, Joy, and Kate Ronald, eds. *Available Means: An Anthology of Women's Rhetoric*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 292–300.

Ryan, Barbara, ed. *Identity Politics in the Women's Movement*. New York: New York UP, 59–66.

2003

McCarthy, Timothy Patrick, and John Campbell McMillan, eds. *The Radical Reader: A Documentary History of the American Radical Tradition*. New York: New Press, 449-52.

Sigerman, Harriet, ed. *The Columbia Documentary History of American Women Since 1941*. New York: Columbia UP, 316–21.

2004

Burrell, Barbara, ed. *Women and Political Participation: A Reference Handbook*. Santa Barbara: ABL-CLIO 186–91.

2009

MacLean, Nancy. *The American Women's Movement 1945-2000: A Brief History with Documents*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 134-39. (Abridged)

2013

McCann, Carole R. and Seung-Kyung Kim, eds. *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives*. New York: Routledge, 164-71.

2014

Combahee River Collective. "A Black Feminist Statement." *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 42 (3): 271-280.

2016

Kerber, Linda K. *Women's America: Refocusing the Past*. New York: Oxford UP, 2016, 736-40.

Mann, Susan Archer, and Ashly Suzanne Patterson, eds. *Reading Feminist Theory: From Modernity to Postmodernity*. New York: Oxford UP, 247-52.

2017

Taylor, Keeanga-Yamahtta et al. *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2017, 15-28.

Combahee River Collective. *The Combahee River Collective Statement*. Mexico City: Gato Negro. (In Spanish)

Morris, Catherine, and Rujeko Hockley. *We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women, 1965-85: A Sourcebook*. New York: Brooklyn Museum & Duke University Press, 176-83.

2018

Brown, Melissa. *Una Declaración Negra Feminista*. Translated by Sara Carrasco Granger. San Cristobal de las Casas, Mexico: Papel Negro. (In Spanish)

2019

Combahee River Collective. "A Black Feminist Statement." *Monthly Review* 70 (8): 29-36.