Published in final edited form as:
Du Bois Rev. 2013 ; 10(2): 303–312. doi:10.1017/S1742058X13000349.

INTERSECTIONALITY:

Mapping the Movements of a Theory1

Devon W. Carbado,
School of Law, University of California, Los Angeles

Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw,
School of Law, University of California, Los Angeles and Columbia Law School

Vickie M. Mays, and
Department of Psychology and Health Policy and Management, University of California, Los Angeles

Barbara Tomlinson
Department of Feminist Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara

Very few theories have generated the kind of interdisciplinary and global engagement that marks the intellectual history of intersectionality. Yet, there has been very little effort to reflect upon precisely how intersectionality has moved across time, disciplines, issues, and geographic and national boundaries. Our failure to attend to intersectionality's movement has limited our ability to see the theory in places in which it is already doing work and to imagine other places to which the theory might be taken. Addressing these questions, this special issue reflects upon the genesis of intersectionality, engages some of the debates about its scope and theoretical capacity, marks some of its disciplinary and global travels, and explores the future trajectory of the theory. To do so, the volume includes academics from across the disciplines and from outside of the United States. Their respective contributions help us to understand how intersectionality has moved and to broaden our sense of where the theory might still go.

Rooted in Black feminism and Critical Race Theory, intersectionality is a method and a disposition, a heuristic and analytic tool. In the 1989 landmark essay "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," Kimberlé Crenshaw introduced the term to address the marginalization of Black women within not only antidiscrimination law but also in feminist and antiracist theory and politics. Two years later, Crenshaw (1991) further elaborated the framework in "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence AgainstWomen of Color." There, she employed intersectionality to highlight the

[1]The authors acknowledge the editorial assistance of Ezra Young in producing this collection and the support of the Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies at Columbia Law School, the Critical Race Studies program at UCLA Law School, and the African American Policy Forum. Additional support was provided by the National Institutes of Health, National Institute for Minority Health and Health Disparities (MD00508 and MD006923).

Corresponding author: Professor Devon Carbado, UCLA School of Law, University of California, Los Angeles, 405 Hilgard Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90095. carbado@law.ucla.edu.

ways in which social movement organization and advocacy around violence against women elided the vulnerabilities of women of color, particularly those from immigrant and socially disadvantaged communities.

In both “Demarginalizing” and “Mapping,” Crenshaw staged a two-pronged intervention. She exposed and sought to dismantle the instantiations of marginalization that operated within institutionalized discourses that legitimized existing power relations (e.g., law); and at the same time, she placed into sharp relief how discourses of resistance (e.g., feminism and antiracism) could themselves function as sites that produced and legitimized marginalization. As a concrete example, Crenshaw described the subtle ways in which the law has historically defined the contours of sex and race discrimination through prototypical representatives, i.e., white women and African American men, respectively. She then demonstrated how this antidiscrimination approach narrowed the scope of institutional transformation, truncated both the understanding of and advocacy around racism and patriarchy, and undermined possibilities for sustaining meaningful solidarity by placing resistance movements at odds with each other.

Since the publications of “Demarginalizing” and “Mapping,” scholars and activists have broadened intersectionality to engage a range of issues, social identities, power dynamics, legal and political systems, and discursive structures in the United States and beyond. This engagement has facilitated intersectionality’s movement within and across disciplines, pushing against and transcending boundaries, while building interdisciplinary bridges, and prompting a number of theoretical and normative debates. These movements of intersectionality have left behind a lively and provocative travelogue characterized by adaptation, redirection, and contestation. While no single volume could fully capture this travelogue, the essays that constitute this special issue provide a useful window into how intersectionality has moved and the many different places to which it has travelled. As a prelude to introducing these essays, we highlight six important themes that flow from mapping the movements of intersectionality.

First, paying attention to the movement of intersectionality helps to make clear that the theory is never done, nor exhausted by its prior articulations or movements; it is always already an analysis-in-progress. Put another way, there is potentially always another set of concerns to which the theory can be directed, other places to which the theory might be moved, and other structures of power it can be deployed to examine. This is why Crenshaw (1989) described her intervention in “Demarginalizing the Intersection” as “provisional,” “one way” to approach the problem of intersectionality. Any analysis must necessarily limit itself to specific structures of power. For example, intersectionality’s initial emergence as a product of the juridical erasure of Black women’s subjectivity in antidiscrimination law did not interrogate Black men’s intersectional marginalization vis-à-vis the criminal justice system. All intersectional moves are necessarily particularized and therefore provisional and incomplete. This is the sense in which a particularized intersectional analysis or formation is always a work-in-progress, functioning as a condition of possibility for agents to move intersectionality to other social contexts and group formations.

Understanding intersectionality as a work-in-progress suggests that it makes little sense to frame the concept as a contained entity. Nor is it productive to anthropomorphize the concept as its own agent replete with specific interests and tasks that reflect its capacity and fundamental orientation. An alternative approach to knowing what intersectionality *is* is to assess what intersectionality *does* as a starting point for thinking about what else the framework might be mobilized to do. A work-in-progress understanding of intersectionality invites us to do just that—that is, to see the theory in places in which it is already doing work and to imagine other kinds of work that agents might employ intersectionality to perform.

A second theme that builds on the first is that there is no a priori place for intersectionality in either its discipline of origin, or more broadly in the academy itself. Agents of its movement have sought to adapt, refine, and articulate intersectional projects across multiple disciplines as well as within arenas outside academia altogether. This collection represents only a subset of the disciplines and subfields that have seeded intersectional projects and methods, ranging from law, sociology, and education to history, psychology, and political science.

Third, the movement of intersectionality has not been limited to interdisciplinary travel within the United States, but has encompassed international travel as well. Various academics, advocates, and policy makers have taken up, redeployed, and debated intersectionality within institutional settings and discourses that attend to the global dimensions of history and power.

These international engagements with intersectionality highlight a fourth dimension of intersectionality's movement: an undercurrent of anxiety around the continuing salience of Black women in a theory that reaches beyond their specific intersectional realities. The notion seems to be that Black women are too different to stand in for a generalizable theory about power and marginalization. The travels of intersectionality belie that concern. Actors of different genders, ethnicities, and sexual orientations have moved intersectionality to engage an ever-widening range of experiences and structures of power. At the same time, the generative power of the continued interrogation of Black women's experiences both domestically and internationally is far from exhausted, as contributors to this volume also demonstrate.

The final theme we want to mark is the social movement dimensions of intersectionality. Of course, not all who deploy intersectionality perceive themselves to be part of a social movement. The point is that the multiple contexts in which intersectionality is doing work evidences—more than any abstract articulation of the theory—the social change dimension of the concept.

The foregoing themes do not represent the only ways in which intersectionality has moved. We focus on them because they capture important dimensions of the intellectual and political history of intersectionality and thus function as a useful point of departure for introducing the essays that constitute this special issue. In the remainder of this introduction

we describe these essays and discuss the extent to which they reflect the various themes highlighted herein.

INTERSECTIONALITY MOVES AS A WORK-IN-PROGRESS

No particular application of intersectionality can, in a definitive sense, grasp the range of intersectional powers and problems that plague society. This work-in-progress understanding of intersectionality suggests that we should endeavor, on an ongoing basis, to move intersectionality to unexplored places. This is precisely what Dorothy Roberts and Sujatha Jesudason do in their essay, "Movement Intersectionality: The Case of Race, Gender, Disability, and Genetic Technologies." More particularly, Roberts and Jesudason describe a set of valuable lessons in applying insights from intersectionality theory to radical coalition-building and political change. They illustrate that intersectional analysis can identify and emphasize commonalities and create solidarity between political groups. The authors describe their experiences as leaders of the social justice organization Generations Ahead, employing intersectionality to forge alliances between formerly adverse groups to achieve real political accomplishments. According to Roberts and Jesudason, identifying categorical differences can enhance the potential to build coalitions between movements by acknowledging differences while promoting commonalities. This can lead to mutual acknowledgement of how structures of oppression are related and, therefore, how struggles are linked. They argue that an intersectional lens can reveal, on a given issue and between separate identity groups, perspectives of both privilege and victimhood, and thereby create a connection around shared experiences of discrimination, marginalization, and privilege. Crucially, Roberts and Jesudason's argument suggests that intersectional interventions can facilitate cross-movement building.

Sumi Cho's contribution to this collection, "Post-Intersectionality: The Curious Reception of Intersectionality in Legal Scholarship," more directly advances an argument based on the work-in-progress conceptualization of intersectionality. Cho's essay highlights the temporality of intersectionality's mobility. She challenges the assumption that simply because intersectional analysis has not *yet* entered a particular arena, that it *cannot* enter that arena productively. Schematically, one criticism that Cho examines is the contention that intersectionality cannot do X because it has not heretofore done X. More specifically, the argument claims that because intersectionality originated in an article on race and gender issues (specifically, the Black female experience), it cannot engage experiences outside of that subjectivity. Cho contests this claim both descriptively by arguing that it is not true that intersectionality has focused solely on Black women's experiences, and theoretically by arguing that there is no reason intersectionality cannot engage other categories of power and experience, such as sexuality. According to Cho, "race and gender intersectionality merely provided a jumping off point to illustrate the larger point of how identity categories constitute and require political coalitions." In other words, intersectionality is not fixed to any particular social position. The theory can and does move.

Cho's article is particularly important in setting the stage for articulating the interface between race and sexuality. Scholars, advocates, and activists have brought intersectional prisms to bear in analyzing the diverging trajectories of equality demands vis-à-vis the

constitutional law doctrines that govern race and sexuality. This interface warrants deft analysis in the wake of the Roberts Court's dismantling of race based jurisprudence (e.g, restricting racial remediation under the Voting Rights Act), while simultaneously opening up constitutional protections against some practices that reflect historic biases against LBTQ communities. Equally salient is the problematic assertions that "gay is the new black," and the ongoing discussions within racial justice movements about the place of sexuality in antiracist politics and vice versa. These developments cry out for intersectional interrogations, not with the goal of finishing an incomplete project but to broaden the range of work that a variety of agents mobilize intersectionality to perform.

Alfredo Artiles' contribution, "Untangling the Racialization of Disabilities: An Intersectionality Critique Across Disability Models," broadens the reach of intersectionality in precisely the way that Cho's essay suggests. Artiles argues that special education scholarship recognizes the importance of the "racialization of disability," but that scholars have been slow to frame this racialization as an intersectional project. In explaining the benefits and problems of various models examining disability, Artiles deploys intersectional analysis to reframe problems to make new solutions imaginable. Importantly, Artiles shows how scholars can mobilize intersectionality to go beyond the recognition that disability is racialized to theorize how this racialization is produced.

INTERSECTIONALITY MOVES WITHIN AND ACROSS DISCIPLINES

Intersectionality moves not only in relation to shifting subjects, but it moves more broadly as a prism linking and engaging scholarly subfields, research methodologies, and topical inquiries. Although intersectional projects that foreground categories and their dynamic relationship to power are most readily identified as prototypically intersectional, Leslie McCall and Averil Y. Clarke remind readers that the terrain upon which the prism works need not be so constrained. In "Intersectionality and Social Explanation in Social Science Research," McCall and Clarke identify aspects of intersectional research that they believe can further develop social explanation in social science research. Focusing on the *process* of developing social science research, they argue that scholars can and should draw from a wide range of empirical research that is not necessarily defined as intersectional, but which nevertheless enables an intersectional analysis. Illustrating their points by focusing on three areas—fertility, marital homogamy, and classical liberalism—they examine how intersectional prisms constructed over the course of the research cycle can generate new insights from data that are not initially framed through an intersectional prism. They also identify challenges associated with constructing intersectional research within particular subfields and propose ways of facilitating communication across disciplinary and subdisciplinary divides.

Moving to an intra-disciplinary interrogation of social psychology, Philip Atiba Goff and Kimberly Barsamian Khan reveal how disciplinary conventions that have historically inhibited intersectional knowledge in law are resonant within contemporary research paradigms pertaining to race and gender bias. In "Sexist Racism and Racist Sexism: How Psychological Science Impedes Intersectional Thinking," the authors argue that social psychology has tended to discount the ways in which race and gender mutually construct

each other. Because of this omission, social psychology posits prototypical targets of racism and sexism as Black men and White women, respectively. Goff and Khan's argument parallels the critique of antidiscrimination law that was articulated in "Demarginalizing"—namely, that the prototypical subjects of antidiscrimination protection were Black men (with respect to racism) and White women (with respect to sexism). Drawing examples from experimental social psychology, Goff and Kahn identify how specific methodologies and habits of thought in the sampling, operationalization, and interpretation of data function to marginalize Black women. They draw attention to the potential distortions that non-intersectional methodologies engender, and suggest ways to rethink conventional methods more broadly in order to address the biases embedded within standard research practice.

INTERSECTIONALITY MOVES ACROSS NATIONAL BOUNDARIES

Intersectionality's domestic life as a prism attuned to localized patterns of thought and action has not impeded its movement into global spheres and international discourses. Intersectionality has moved internationally both as a means to frame dynamics that have been historically distinct within other domestic spheres and also as a way to contest material and political realities that are, by some measures, part of global and transhistorical relations of power. One manifestation of this international movement is the feminist engagement with intersectional discourse in Europe. Although intellectual and political projects have long sought to map the interface between systems of power and their attendant subjects, intersectionality has emerged within European contexts as a useful tool for articulating these interactions. Yet despite its uptake within feminist discourses, intersectionality frequently has been framed as a North American import that does not reflect the significant differences in the historic context, the disciplinary practices, and discursive traditions between the United States and Europe. One important difference that is often cited in this regard pertains to the relative salience of class over race in Europe, and the minimal traction that analogies to race provide for feminists there.

Sirma Bilge's contribution interrogates efforts on the part of some European feminists to distance intersectionality from its association with race in the United States. In "Intersectionality Undone: Saving Intersectionality from Feminist Intersectionality Studies," Bilge explores the discourse around intersectionality that has emerged in several European conferences and texts to highlight argumentative rhetorics that she maintains have neutralized the political potential of intersectionality. These moves include explicit arguments that intersectionality is a feminist project (as distinct from a racial project), a claim that effectively "whiten[s] intersectionality." Bilge also links the development of intersectionality in Europe to a specifically disciplinary academic feminism that has depoliticized the theory, and to prevailing neoliberal cultures that aim to commodify and manage "diversity." To challenge these developments, Bilge revisits intersectionality's grounding as a counter-hegemonic and transformative intervention in knowledge production, activism, pedagogy, and non-oppressive coalitions.

Intersectionality's movement in the international arena draws attention to how contextual differences generate alternative engagements with the theory. Caribbean feminists, for example, have deployed intersectionality to delve into historical relations and nation-

building outside the metropole. In so doing, they draw attention to alternative ways of conceptualizing intersectional subjects that place some of the more limited conceptualizations of intersectional work in sharp relief. Tracy Robinson shows, for example, that the hierarchies to which intersectionality attends are considerably more robust than the formal regimes of race, gender, and class power that are embodied by the legally imposed classifications of certain subjects. In "The Properties of Citizens: A Caribbean Grammar of Conjugal Categories," Robinson argues that intersectionality proves productive "for thinking about how conjugality comes into being as a regulatory regime of race, class, and heteropatriachy." Robinson addresses the continuum of conjugal relationships in the Caribbean to show how hierarchies of conjugality were shaped by the intersection of various influences, including "postcolonial family law reforms, censuses, social science research, population policies, national culture, and everyday interactions." Through this matrix of influences, marriage was the idealized hetero-patriarchal institution, while common-law marriage (heterosexual cohabitating unions without legal sanction) occupied the middle of the continuum, and visiting relationships (unions without legal sanction and in which partners do not live together) occupied the far end. In revealing how such regimes are intersectionally constituted, Robinson mobilizes intersectionality to capture dynamics of power beyond the more narrow terrain of articulating identities. Robinson's contribution provides a provocative counterpoint to claims that race or some other marker of social marginalization is inoperative simply because the processes of categorization are not formally articulated as such. More broadly, her analysis demonstrates both the importance of understanding colonial legacies through an intersectional prism, and the importance of understanding how intersectionality moves beyond the metropole.

INTERSECTIONAL MOVES ENGAGE BLACK WOMEN

Despite an enormous range of intersectional research addressing concerns of many racial and ethnic groups, genders, sexual orientations, nationalities, disabilities, and so forth, some scholars have criticized intersectionality for focusing "too much" on Black women. Among such critics are those who de-racialize intersectionality as well as those who comfortably work within a paradigm that is sensitive to race but worry that antiracism has been "too concerned" with Blacks. Such arguments imply either that Black women no longer face problems of structural power, or that their subjectivity is too particular to be productive in broader efforts to understand and counter contemporary manifestations of subordination. Three articles in this issue demonstrate that the underlying assumptions of this critique are thoroughly contestable.

In "Public Tales Wag the Dog: Telling Stories about Structural Racism in the Post-Civil Rights Era," Tricia Rose focuses on the case of KelleyWilliams-Bolar, an African American single mother from Ohio who was arrested in 2011, charged with a felony, and jailed for sending her two daughters to a predominantly White suburban public school in violation of the township's residency requirements. In examining the public and legal discourse surrounding the case, Rose draws out the intersectional dimensions of the narrative that framedWilliams-Bolar as the embodiment of the single Black mother on welfare. Rose names the intersections of gender, economic privilege, spatial containment, systemic educational inequality, and racialized criminalization as the "invisible intersections of

colorblind racism." It is through these converging narratives that Williams-Bolar's protective investment in her children is recast as a symbol of criminalized Black motherhood. Importantly, the backdrop against which Williams-Bolar is framed reflects myriad disadvantages that touch multiple populations. Yet, the potential coalition that might otherwise arise from this convergence of interests is aborted by the unyielding stigma attached to Williams-Bolar, a multiply-marginalized subject. Rose draws attention to how uncontested intersections invisibly construct the stifling terms of social life and also defeat the possibilities of emerging coalitions of resistance. She concludes with an argument about the role of mass media in mobilizing a powerful counter-narrative.

The theme of intersectionality in relation to social control is further amplified in Priscilla Ocen's "Unshackling Intersectionality." Ocen casts her gaze at prisons, an institutional and social embodiment of racialized punishment that has drawn substantial attention from scholars and advocates over the last decade. Although existing scholarship has understood incarceration as a system of racial control, Ocen charts new territory by deploying intersectionality to draw attention to Black women's vulnerability to the criminal justice system. Ocen argues that "prison operates to discipline, police, and punish deviant gender identity performance in ways that are deeply raced, classed, and animated by heteronormativity." Ocen describes how the intersection of race, class, and gender render Black women particularly vulnerable to harassment and violence—including being shackled during childbirth—once they are incarcerated. Moreover, negative constructs of Black women, such as the term "welfare queen" and the claim that Black women's households are criminogenic, have legitimated the view "of Black women as pathways to disorder and criminality." As such, according to Ocen, intersectional prisms on incarceration need not be limited to the specific contours of Black women's vulnerability, but should seek to understand how the convergence of gender, race, and class has constituted fertile ground upon which incarceration became a mass project. "Incarceration became a response to manage Black inequality that was allegedly caused by Black familial pathologies." Thus, the framing of Black women as non-normative women is a critical site for disrupting the patriarchal underbelly of mass incarceration that entraps both Black men and women. Ocen's essay, together with Rose's, cautions against imperatives to "get beyond" Black women's experiences. Their work reveals not only how crucial intersectionality is to engendering our understanding of race and criminal justice, but how the marginalization of Black women within the media as well as within social justice discourses leads to an under-theorization of the contours of social control.

Further elaborating intersectionality moves, DevonW. Carbado and Mitu Gulati uncover a further iteration of intersectionality, namely "intra-intersectional" discrimination. To illustrate this intra-intersectional distinction, Carbado and Gulati explore the vulnerability of professional Black women to workplace discrimination in "The Intersectional Fifth Black Woman." Carbado and Gulati employ a narrative of a hypothetical "fifth" Black woman named Tyisha, one of five Black women who interview for an associate position at a law firm. Four of the Black women get hired, but Tyisha does not. Carbado and Gulati discuss how certain performative dynamics perceived by the firm—specifically one's demeanor and other characteristics such as name, accent, hair, political identity, social identity, marital status, residence, and religious affiliation—caused Tyisha to be a victim of discrimination

while the other four Black women were not. Specifically, all of the five Black women are ostensibly in the same intersectional group (Black women); however, because Tyisha's performative identity has a stronger "Black racial signification" than the other four Black women, she is not hired based on negative racialized gender perceptions held by the firm. Naming this phenomena "intra-intersectional discrimination," Carbado and Gulati expand their notion of a "performative conceptualization of race" to encompass its intersectional expressions. Like Rose and Ocen, Carbado and Gulati employ intersectionality not to move beyond Black women's experiences, but to better understand them.

INTERSECTIONALITY MOVES TO ENGAGE BLACK MEN

In "Black Male Exceptionalism?: The Problems and Potential of Black Male-Focused Interventions," Paul Butler challenges a widespread thesis that Black males are more marginalized than Black women and, therefore, deserve more of our attention and aid in countering racial subordination. Butler defines "Black male exceptionalism" as the notion that African American males are at the bottom of almost every index of inequality—exceptionally burdened and marginalized—and therefore should be treated as a distinct group in fashioning racial justice strategies. According to Butler, numerous organizations ranging from traditional civil rights groups like the NAACP to local governments have responded favorably to Black male exceptionalism by structuring how civil rights interventions are framed and how they are funded. Butler contends that the metaphor of "endangered species" is problematic in that it is aggrandizing, victimizing and evokes the notion of animal conservation. Interrogating the claim of Black male exceptionalism through an intersectional lens, Butler questions whether the ideological "monopoly" it holds on racial justice issues is justified. Butler argues that the deep disparities in resourcing social justice interventions for Black men and Black women are not justified and contends that the needs and interests of Black women are as important as those of Black men. He concludes by urging proponents to embrace gender equity as a value in antiracist discourses, beginning with the presumption that Black women should enjoy equal time and equal funding.

The intersectional politics of racial solidarity is also a central theme of Luke Charles Harris's contribution, "The Sounds of Silence: Taking Stock of a Political Travesty." In his critical examination of the nomination of Justice Clarence Thomas to the U.S. Supreme Court, Harris presents a clear example of how an uncritical embrace of the endangered Black male narrative can legitimize Black men's claims of racial injustice and discredit similar claims on the part of Black women. This displacement not only contributes to an intraracial discourse that legitimizes certain injustices that are visited upon Black women, but it may also generate consent within the Black community to conservative social policies that are frequently packaged together with such rhetorics.

According to Harris, Clarence Thomas deployed the trope of the endangered Black male to garner support for his nomination and to deflect attention away from Anita Hill's allegation of sexual harassment. More specifically, Thomas claimed that Senate hearings on his nomination, against the backdrop of Hill's allegations, were a form of "high-tech lynching." Through this deployment of this symbol of racial terrorism, Anita Hill became embattled within the Black community as a race traitor, while Justice Thomas garnered widespread

support as a Black man in trouble. “Lost in the bluster of Thomas’ use of the metaphor was the reality that no Black man had ever been lynched at the behest of an aggrieved Black woman.” Harris makes clear that “Anita Hill had become persona non grata for many Blacks because they felt that even if her allegations were true she should not have sought to bring a brother down.” Black women were expected “to put loyalty to their race first and foremost, even in cases where they may have been subjected to unprofessional or predatory conduct by Black men.” These demands of solidarity, however, were gendered and unidimensional, a dynamic that Harris elaborates in the subsequent re-enactment of Black women’s marginality in Black political rhetoric. Harris does not offer the Clarence Thomas confirmation hearings to question the historical functions of solidarity, nor does he suggest a fundamental indeterminacy around the political and social interests of the Black community. Instead, Harris challenges us to reimagine a Black political sphere that acknowledges and honors the linked fate of Black men and women.

Together, Harris’s and Butler’s contribution reveal the work intersectionality can perform in engaging the contemporary contours of Black political discourse as well as Black male subjectivity. An underlying theme of both is that intra-racial political discourse that is silent about or in fact receptive to the marginalization of Black women unduly limits the scope of Black politics and undermines the realizability of a politics that centers the well-being of women as well as men.

INTERSECTIONALITY AS A SOCIAL MOVEMENT

The last theme might be framed as the link that draws the collection full circle, connecting the first article that shows how intersectionality was deployed to highlight unexpected coalitions to the last article that imports intersectional analysis to interrogate rhetorics of solidarity that are presumed but not realized. Beyond its role as a thematic book-end, our deployment of intersectionality’s engagement with social movement, however, is a theme that appears throughout the collection. When Kimberlé Crenshaw drew upon Black feminist multiplicitous conceptions of power and identity as the analytic lens for intersectionality, she used it to demonstrate the limitations of the single-axis frameworks that dominated antidiscrimination regimes and antiracist and feminist discourses. Yet, consistent with the practical dimensions of Critical Race Theory within which intersectionality was situated, the goal was not simply to understand social relations of power, nor to limit intersectionality’s gaze to the relations that were interrogated therein, but to bring the often hidden dynamics forward in order to transform them. Understood in this way, intersectionality, like Critical Race Theory more generally, is a concept animated by the imperative of social change. In various ways, each of the essays in this volume demonstrates this dimension of the theory. They do so by interrogating the inter-locking ways in which social structures produce and entrench power and marginalization, and by drawing attention to the ways that existing paradigms that produce knowledge and politics often function to normalize these dynamics. Our contributors provide a conceptual template—and in some instances, a set of practices—that respond to this dynamic view of power and facilitate more productive efforts to transform these structures.

We began this introduction with the claim that intersectionality is a method and a disposition, a heuristic and analytic tool. Mapping intersectionality's movements reveals at least this much. More fundamentally, articulating how intersectionality has moved—and the places to which it has travelled—makes clear that intersectionality is what intersectionality does. Conceptualizing intersectionality in terms of what agents mobilize it to do invites us to look for places in which intersectionality is doing work as a starting point for understanding the work that the theory potentially can—but has not yet been mobilized to—do. In this respect, the essays that constitute this volume are as much a signification of how scholars across the disciplines, inside and outside of the United States, have moved intersectionality as they are a signification on the uncharted terrains to which intersectionality might still move.

REFERENCES

Crenshaw, Kimberlé. Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine. University of Chicago Legal Forum. 1989; 1989:139–168.

Crenshaw, Kimberlé. Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity, and Violence Against Women of Color. Stanford Law Review. 1991; 43(6):1241–1300.