

Constellating White Women's Cultural Rhetorics: The Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching and Its Contemporary Scholars

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Abstract: *This article reconsiders the rhetorical legacy of the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching, a Southern postbellum organizing group, in light of emerging scholarship on cultural rhetorics and critical whiteness studies as well as popular critiques of white womanhood by women of color writing online. Using cultural rhetorics methodologies of constellating, critical reflexivity, and affirmative hyperlinking, the author articulates white women's rhetorical practices of appropriation, exclusion, and tokenism, locating these practices both in the archival records of the ASWPL as well as in contemporary rhetorical scholarship on the group. By returning to the archives of the group's founder, Jessie Daniel Ames, the article shows that the founding of the ASWPL was an explicitly segregationist act and critiques appraisals of the group as successful at ending lynching. The article advocates situating the group's legacy within richer histories of Black women's anti-lynching activism and taking up the call made by digital writers of color to include white appropriation and erasure in discussions of fair use, intellectual property, and plagiarism.*

Keywords: *whiteness, white feminism, critical race theory, cultural rhetorics, fair use, ASWPL*

Introduction: Kvetching About White Women's Rhetorics

Hillary Clinton's defeat in the 2016 presidential election intensified critiques of U.S. "white feminism," defined here as a feminism that centers the concerns of white and often bourgeois women without attention to the needs of women who experience intersecting oppressions of race, class, sexuality, citizenship, and ability ([Featherstone](#), [Florio](#), [Grant](#), [Mirza](#), [LaSha](#) "The color-blind sisterhood," "An Open Letter"). Critics of contemporary white feminism, especially women of color writing outside the academy in digital spaces, have

vocally linked white feminism's current exclusionary practices to the history of U.S. feminism dating back to Sojourner Truth's critique of first-wave feminist organizing ([LaSha "Bye, Becky!"](#), [Loza](#)). Since 2016, women of color have continued to use digital publication platforms to forward intersectional critiques of white feminist organizing, for example around the Women's March and in the context of the [#MeToo](#) movement against sexual harassment and assault ([Garcia](#), [Garza](#), [Alianza Nacional de Campesinas](#)). This cultural context offers an exigence for critical studies of white women's rhetoric within our field.

In this opening section, I draw on academic scholarship from cultural rhetorics, critical race theory, and critical whiteness studies to create a framework for better understanding the segregationist and appropriative rhetorical choices of the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching, a Jim-Crow-era activist white women's group, as well as the defenses of the ASWPL that appear in contemporary rhetorical scholarship by white women rhetorical historians. I argue that contemporary rhetorical scholars' apologies for the ASWPL arise from a traditional rhetorical analysis of texts over cultures and contexts and a misunderstanding of the ongoing and unresolved history of white supremacy in United States women's activism. Constellating rhetorical practices between the ASWPL and their contemporary scholars, I posit that contemporary white women scholars reproduce the same white feminist practices of division from, plagiarism from, and erasure of Black women that the ASWPL practiced eighty years prior. In this section, I offer theory from cultural rhetorics, critical race theory, critical whiteness theory, and women's studies from inside and outside academia to ground this analysis. In the following section I apply this theory to an analysis of contemporary rhetorical scholarship on the ASWPL. I then perform an analysis of select archival materials from the ASWPL archive related to their founding as an organization before concluding by critiquing narratives of the ASWPL's "success" in ending lynching.

In their disruptive critiques of mainstream white feminism, women of color writers "bring wreck" (Pough) to feminist discourses whose theories of women's liberation exclude the intersectional oppressions faced by women of color, trans women, poor women, and migrant women. Yet for me, as a white-passing Ashkenazi Jewish woman, to engage bringing wreck in my own critique would be to enact the same rhetorical practices of appropriation that women of color have critiqued in white women's rhetorical production. Indeed, a 2014 manifesto called [#ThisTweetCalledMyBack](#) (see also [Devereaux](#)) written by a collective of "Black Women, AfroIndigenous and women of color" reframed white women's appropriation of their ideas and work in terms of plagiarism, theft of intellectual property, and unpaid labor. Black women and women of colors' recurring critique of white women's rhetorics as frequently impinging on fair use—through appropriation, misquotation, and outright

plagiarism—deserves sustained attention in our field. As a white-passing Jewish woman, I occupy a liminal position vis-a-vis white womanhood. Thus, in this introduction I offer my critique as an instance of “kvetching,” a Yiddish word I grew up with meaning to whine or complain. In this context, I offer my own community’s cultural rhetoric of complaint as a cultural rhetorics practice that disturbs my own performance of whiteness and interrupts the rhetorics of passing, which reify the normative power of whiteness

Critical whiteness studies and cultural rhetorics overlap in their commitment to disrupting whiteness as normative and to investigating whiteness as a historical formation that is produced by specific cultural practices that uphold white supremacy. Although a cultural rhetorics framework is invested in including global nonwhite and non-European meaning-making practices into a still-Eurocentric conception of “rhetoric,” it also opens avenues for investigating whiteness as a cultural rhetorics practice. In their [“Our Story Begins Here: Constellating Cultural Rhetorics,”](#) coauthors Malea Powell, Daisy Levy, Andrea Riley-Mukavetz, Marilee Brooks-Gillies, Maria Novotny, Jennifer Fisch-Ferguson and the Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab position cultural rhetorics as viewing all “rhetorics as always-already cultural and cultures as persistently rhetorical.” Drawing on Walter Mignolo’s definition of decoloniality as the study “of the construction, transformation, and sustenance of racism and patriarchy” (Mignolo qtd. Powell et al), the authors invite rhetorical study to consider not just texts but “actions,” re-placing texts in their constellations of production and producers. By viewing all rhetorical practices as “always-already cultural,” cultural rhetorics is an important vehicle for understanding whiteness as rhetorically produced and maintained. In its commitment to rhetorical scholarship that is decolonial, seeking to understand and disrupt systems of racism, patriarchy, and empire (Powell et al), the co-authors’ vision of cultural rhetorics intersects with critical race theory and critical whiteness studies, including studies of U.S. white women’s discursive practices.

White women are already the subject of much research in rhetorical history, for example the growing body of research on how white female subjectivities in the United States have been shaped through rhetorical performances in fashion, conversational style, and etiquette (Donawerth, Johnson *Gender*, Johnson “Parlor Rhetoric,” Mattingly, Meyers, Rose). These texts vary in their attention to race; for example, Donawerth’s *Conversational Rhetoric* is deeply interrogative of how conduct books forwarded class-based agendas, but is less attentive to how constructions of whiteness shaped femininity, while Mattingly’s study of the rhetoric of women’s clothing dwells more extensively on how clothing’s messages were regulated around preserving racial strata. Meanwhile, contemporary white women’s discursive practices have also been a subject of study in women’s and gender studies and in critical whiteness

studies which consider how white women historically and currently resist antiracist critique (Srivastana, Hunter and Nettles). For example, Hunter and Nettles identify an “orientation to whiteness” that existed in a women-of-color centered sociology class they taught (385). This orientation could be seen as a feature of what Bonilla-Silva terms the “white habitus” which arises when whites live in segregated, all-white communities. This white habitus, he writes, “creates and conditions [white people’s] views, cognitions, and even sense of beauty, and, more importantly, fosters a sense of racial solidarity” (123). Drawing on interviews with whites, Bonilla-Silva identifies rhetorical patterns like evasive language, exaggeration of whites’ numbers of Black friends, and ahistorical and miseducated notions of the roots of segregation as rhetorical strategies white people use to defend and explain the persistence of racial difference in contemporary society. We can see the “racial solidarity” borne of a white habitus emerging in the ASWPL’s orientation to white audiences as well as in their contemporary scholars’ efforts to sanitize or sanctify the complex legacy of the ASWPL. Although these studies emerge out of ethnographies of contemporary white populations, by bringing them to a study of the ASWPL we can begin to see how the rhetorical practices of U.S. white women have existed in and transformed across specific historical locations. Engaging with this theory from the institutional position of rhetorical studies also clarifies the stake rhetoricians have in how other fields characterize white people’s practices of languaging and composing around race.

White women express white solidarity in specific ways. Sarita Srivastava has demonstrated the “emotioned resistance” white feminists present when faced with critiques of their racist practices. White women’s contemporary resistance to critique, she argues, emerges from a history of white women represented at times as literally “angelic” (32); she notes that “not only feminine but also feminist moral identity has been historically focused on benevolence and innocence” (32). For many white feminists, she argues, anti-racism or at least an inherent goodness are assumed to be part and parcel of a feminist identity. Srivastana seeks to move feminist discourse beyond individual culpability and toward larger questions of systemic inequities by disrupting contemporary white feminists’ “strategic innocence” when it comes to facing critiques of racism. Relatedly, in education literature, the concept of “white comfort” has arisen to question antiracist pedagogies that still center white people’s needs, for example their individualized processes of working through their own racial animus, when teaching antiracist pedagogies (Leonardo 126, Matias 167). In this article, I embrace the positionality of the kvetch in order to critique exclusionism in white women’s historical and contemporary movement-building as constituting a cultural rhetorics practice of white womanhood.

The ASWPL and their founder, Jessie Daniel Ames, are worthy subjects of analysis for exploring U.S. white women's cultural rhetorics because of the centrality of white womanhood to the public ethos they worked to shape. Ames's biographer Jacqueline Dowd Hall writes that Ames believed "an organization of impeccably respectable white southern women...would..have an impact on white public opinion that [an integrated] or Black protest movement could not achieve" (181). In this article, I use critical whiteness studies to understand the ASWPL's centering of their own and their audience's whiteness as a cultural rhetorical practice that upholds white supremacy even in the context of a declared fight against lynching. As I am not the first rhetorician to study this group, I also look at contemporary scholarship on the ASWPL and consider how cultural rhetorics of white womanhood function into the rhetorical choices of the ASWPL's scholars. I suggest that contemporary scholars protect whiteness in their defenses of the ASWPL's choice to exclude Black women from their group. By returning to the ASWPL's archives for new archival research, I clarify their history as a segregationist offshoot of an integrated group and examine how a "white habitus" (Bonilla-Silva) set in once they expunged people of color from their ranks, compromising their antiracist goal of eradicating lynching.

I opened above with attention to popular feminist debates because, as a millennial scholar whose politics have been shaped by social media discourses that unfurl apart from mainstream media outlets, these debates shaped my understanding of the limitations of white feminism as a liberatory intellectual practice, and guided my commitment to investigating the cultural rhetorics of white U.S. feminisms and femininities as antiracist intellectual labor. In other words, I learned from women of color on Twitter that [#SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen](#) (Kendall; Loza; Patiño). By acknowledging these women of color digital writers here, I try to emulate their historicization of white feminism, their analysis of appropriation as plagiarism and unpaid labor, and their use of hyperlinked citations on open-access publishing platforms (see Ahmed), without erasing them by only citing scholarly sources shaped by the institutional exclusions of academia. The digital writings of the contemporary women of color who penned [#ThisTweetCalledMyBack](#)—many of whom I follow individually on Twitter—have shaped my analysis, in this article, of the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching, a Jim Crow-era whites-only antilynching activist group based in Atlanta, Georgia. Keeping critiques of white feminism by contemporary women of color in mind, in this article I critically kvetch about U.S. white women's cultural rhetorical practices of segregationism, plagiarism, and tokenism in the rhetorics of the ASWPL as well as in contemporary scholarship about them. To perform my analysis here without acknowledging the contemporary women of color digital writers who

shaped this framework would be to repeat these processes of appropriation, plagiarism, and erasure myself.

Contextualizing the ASWPL in History, Culture, and Scholarship

The ASWPL was a late Jim-Crow-era antilynching advocacy group that used the identity of its members as white women to try to persuade white men to stop supporting and performing lynchings. Founded by a woman named Jessie Daniel Ames in 1930, the ASWPL is remembered as a progressive women's organization that fought racism at a time when it was politically inconvenient and personally challenging for white women to do so. Because of these contours of its memorialization and thanks to federal grants, [Jessie Daniel Ames's archives at UNC](#) are digitized and available online, where I accessed them. These archives include Ames's personal papers as well as administrative papers of the ASWPL and the Council on Interracial Cooperation (CIC), of which Ames was Director of Women's Work. Jessica Enoch suggests we "study [] archives in and of themselves as rhetorical producers of public memory about women" (66) and so I'll note briefly here that the archive itself, in blog posts on the UNC Library website, frames the ASWPL as integrationist. A [post](#) written for Women's History Month in 2013 highlights archival images of 1938 meetings between the ASWPL and the Black women of the CIC, suggesting that these two groups "shared a common mission: the battle against racial discrimination and violence in the South" (Bowden). This framing as well as one of the actual photographs highlighted becomes central in Jordynn Jack and Lucy Massagee's article on the ASWPL, discussed below, although this archive's blog post is not cited.

I learned about the ASWPL from a passing reference in readings for a course on Black American rhetorical history. As a white woman committed to antiracist activism myself, I took up a study of the ASWPL hoping to contribute to the historical record of antiracist activism within white communities in the U.S. As I studied the secondary literature on the group and delved into their archives, however, I began to see that their legacy as women doing antiracist activism is deeply complex. We want to remember the ASWPL as admirable because they were white women asserting themselves in a patriarchal society and advocating for Black people in a racist society.

In fact, one of the great complexities in assessing the work of the ASWPL is the ways that limitations on Black men's and white women's freedom of movement were linked under Jim Crow. In *The End of American Lynching*, Ashraf Rushdy identifies the emergence of the lynching-for-rape discourse during the end of the 19th century, a pervasive rhetorics which worked to divert attention

from lynching as warfare against Black economic and political power in the postbellum era. The lynching-for-rape discourse argued that Black men were lynched for raping white women, and became so dominant, Rushdy argues, that “anti-lynching advocates had to confront and dismantle that discourse” before offering alternative explanations for lynchings (11). The Black anti-lynching activist Ida B. Wells was the first person to identify the falsity of this discourse and instead point out the economic and political roots of lynchings of Black men in the South when, in an 1892 editorial that saw her exiled from Memphis and her Black newspaper destroyed, she decried “the same old racket—the new alarm about raping white women” for which five Black men had been lynched the previous week (Wells 4). In fact, this discourse was so pervasive that Wells did acknowledge in her autobiography that she had once “accepted the idea” that Black lynching victims really had earned their death through rape (qtd. in Rushdy 10), and it took the murder of her friends, prominent Black business owners in Memphis, to expose to her the economic and political roots of the Jim Crow regime of lynching (Rushdy 10). The ensuing years saw the publication of *The Clansman* in 1905 and its film adaptation *Birth of a Nation* in 1915, which rendered visual the threat free Black men posed to white women’s movement and celebrated the rise of the Ku Klux Klan.

This was the environment in which the lynching-for-rape discourse arose, which linked limitations on white women’s movement to the supposed danger presented by free Blacks. Historians of the period have noted how the post-Reconstruction period inherited transformed versions of the strict roles that existed for white men, white women, Black women, and Black men under slavery. Southern historian Anne Firor Scott writes of the antebellum era:

Women, along with children and slaves, were expected to recognize their proper and subordinate place and to be obedient to the head of the family. Any tendency on the part of any of the members of the system to assert themselves against the master threatened the whole, and therefore slavery itself. It was no accident the most articulate spokesman for slavery were also eloquent exponents of the subordinate role of women. (17)

After the Civil War, which saw the death of a whole generation of Southern men, white women in the South became more engaged with public life and public activism, where they had previously been less active than white women in the North (Scott 106). But Southern women activists did not fully shed the social role and rhetorical scripts available to them in the antebellum South.

ASWPL founder Jessie Daniel Ames, a white woman raised in central Texas, had a long history of activism, including in the suffrage movement, before becoming involved in antiracism efforts in Atlanta in the 1920s (Hall). In

1930, Ames persuaded the Atlanta-based Council on Interracial Cooperation (CIC), for which she served as Director of Women's Work, to fund and support an all-white offshoot organization that came to be known as the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching (ASWPL). Ames justified this move as an explicitly rhetorical choice, arguing that a coalition of exclusively white women working to end the lynching of Black men would have better access to the ears and minds of the elite and non-elite white people who made and enforced laws and, in lynch mobs, broke them. Scott's work helps us see how the ASWPL's attachment to traditional white femininity was common among white women activists of the time. Scott places the ASWPL "firmly in the female reform tradition," noting that "women in the progressive period carefully cherished a ladylike aspect...The power of the [antebellum feminine ideal] also helped to explain the kinds of women who appeared in southern reform movements: those of impeccable antecedents and secure family position" (x). Scott's comments help us reconstruct how the women of the ASWPL understood their own rhetorical situation, including their sense that their rhetorical power emerged from an ethos of respectable white women. Ames biographer Hall confirms that the ASWPL's "chief strategy was to play on the image [of ladyhood]. Asserting their claim to gentility, they used their moral capital, as well as their class position, to persuade men to abide by the law. They spoke as insiders, and their effectiveness lay as much in what they were as in what they did" (142).

Yet this attachment to their traditional social role was also a limitation, as it signified an attachment to the white supremacist patriarchy in which it had arisen. In truth, the ASWPL was segregationist, and its founding involved breaking away from an integrated organization to form their all-white group. The group's writings, especially their public writings, work to center the comfort of a white male audience—indeed, the comfort of this audience was explicitly named by ASWPL founders as the reason for keeping their group exclusively white. Ultimately, the ASWPL was compromised by its commitment to white comfort, as they worked to challenge lynching without attacking underlying systems of white supremacist patriarchy.

Comparing scholarship that mentions the ASWPL highlights the complexities in assessing and remembering them. In my review of the literature, I identified three types of relevant secondary scholarship on the ASWPL: histories of lynching and anti-lynching activism, from a number of disciplines, which mention but do not focus on the ASWPL (Little, Rushdy, Zagando); histories of women's activism in the antebellum South (Freedman, Scott, Brown), including histories of the ASWPL and their founder Ames (Hall, Hishida); and rhetorical theory from rhetoric, communication, and literacy studies specifically about the ASWPL (Powell "United," Powell "The Association," Powell and Condit, Jack

and Massagee). In the remainder of this section, I review the literature on the ASWPL, paying special attention to how sources converge and diverge in their portrait of the group. As a cultural rhetorician who views all "rhetorics as always-already cultural and cultures as persistently rhetorical" (Powell et al), in this section I begin constellating U.S. white women's rhetorical behaviors between the ASWPL and its contemporary white women scholars. I use secondary literature about the ASWPL and its period to understand the cultural rhetorical situation in which the ASWPL chose to orient its rhetoric toward white audiences. I also begin to demonstrate how contemporary rhetorical scholarship about the ASWPL continues this orientation toward whiteness.

The first group of literature, that which mentions the ASWPL in passing, tends to remember it positively as one of many groups fighting against lynching from Reconstruction through the second World War. Histories note that the ASWPL's work chronologically followed activism by many Black activists including Black women and Black organizations like Ida B. Wells and Mary B. Talbert, Walter White at the NAACP, and the Anti-Lynching Crusaders, a Black women's group within the NAACP (Zagrando 4). These histories list the ASWPL approvingly as a group of white woman valiantly joining the fight to end lynching. However, the historical literature focusing on the ASWPL and white women's activism in the South tends to complicate this legacy. Firor Scott argues that white women activists of the time were constrained by "the values, rituals, and networks" of "middle-class women's culture" (143). This culture emerged from an antebellum society where a white woman's life was "one long act of devotion" in which she "must never oppose her husband" and instead offer the model of "perfection and submission" (5-6). This "devotion" to whiteness shaped the ASWPL's orientation to white audiences. Jessie Daniel Ames's biographer Jacqueline Dowd Hall writes that Ames believed "an organization of impeccably respectable white southern women...would...have an impact on white public opinion that a biracial or black protest movement could not achieve" (181). Thus, the prioritization of "white public opinion" led Ames to leave an integrated organization to form the all-white ASWPL, as I discuss in more detail in the next section.

Historical scholarship on the ASWPL in the context of contemporaneous women's activism notes how this orientation to whiteness led the group not just to reject Black members but to plagiarize Black women's strategies for investigating and decrying lynchings. In her biography of Ames, Hall is careful to note the history of Black activism against lynching in the South, "stress[ing]" that "for decades, black women had filled the front ranks against lynching," a fight which "made the founding of the Anti-Lynching Association possible" (165). Hall also clarifies the work of the NAACP which, beginning in 1910,

“expanded Ida B. Well’s one-woman anti-lynching crusade into a multifaceted offensive against mob violence” (165). “In 1922,” Hall writes,

the NAACP formed a women’s group called the Anti-Lynching Crusaders to mobilize support for the Dyer Anti Lynching Bill. Led by Mary B. Talbert, president of the National Association of Colored Women, the Crusaders sought to enlist one million women and raise one million dollars for the lobbying effort....The structure of the organization closely resembled that of the ASWPL eight years later. (165)

If Hall is transparent about the ASWPL’s unacknowledged debt to Black women activists, historian Mary Jane Brown takes up Hall’s critique and sharpens it:

The women at the Atlanta [ASWPL] conference did not acknowledge Wells’s precedence in breaking the rape/lynching connection. Jacquelyn Dowd Hall relates that the gulf between black and white society was great enough that Jessie Daniel Ames seems to have been unaware of Wells’ anti-lynching theories and strategies; however, Ames may have absorbed Wells’ ideas through black CIC women. In addition to Wells’ critique of the protection of white women rationale, the white women used many of the strategies that were inspired by her and then embraced by the NAACP and the CIC, such as on-site investigations of lynchings and the collecting and reporting of lynching statistics. (178)

Outside of rhetorical studies, the literature is very clear that the ASWPL appropriated argumentative, investigative, and organizational strategies from Black women and their organizations who had begun working against lynching by the end of the nineteenth century. Hall’s biography of Ames was published in 1979 and is cited in all of the rhetorical scholarship that I discuss below. Yet this critique of the ASWPL is largely elided by later rhetorical scholars, who use traditional rhetorical analysis to defend the ASWPL’s choices, offering up apologies for their segregationism and generally ignoring their appropriation and erasure of Black women’s work. A cultural rhetorical approach to the ASWPL resists an exclusive focus on the texts they produced and demands we replace them in their social and cultural context. This context includes both the earlier work of Black women to fight lynching and the historical literature on white female Southern reformers’ orientation to white men in a chivalric antebellum society.

In particular, I want to kvetch about four article-length studies of the ASWPL, all by white female scholars of rhetoric: two articles by Kimberly Powell, both published in 1995 in *Communication journals*: “United in Gender, Divided by Race: Reconstruction of Issue and Identity by the Association of Southern

Women for the Prevention of Lynching" and "The Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching: Strategies of a Movement in the Comic Frame"; an entry on Jessie Daniel Ames, by Powell and Celeste Condit, in *Women Public Speakers in the United States, 1925-1993: a bio-critical sourcebook*, published in 1994; and an article by Jordynn Jack and Lucy Massagee, "Ladies and Lynching: Southern Women, Civil Rights, and the Rhetoric of Interracial Cooperation," published in 2011. In the remainder of this section, I consider how these articles continue the white rhetorical practices of the ASWPL by centering white women's comfort and continuing the ASWPL's practices towards Black women of exclusion, plagiarism, and tokenization.

Broadly speaking, these four articles defend the ASWPL's segregationism on the grounds that it was a rhetorically savvy choice. Powell's two single-authored articles argue that this choice to enact segregation was rhetorically but not ethically sound—but her sourcebook entry, co-authored with Condit, evades criticisms of the ASWPL, instead offering a sanitized portrait of Ames. Meanwhile, Jack and Massagee's article, published most recently, offers a full-throated apologia for the ASWPL's segregationism and in fact, eliding the group's history as an off-shoot of an integrated organization, attempts to lionize the ASWPL for inviting some Black women to meetings in the late 1930s. In the next section, I will offer original archival research alongside further secondary literature that clarifies the ASWPL's founding as a segregationist act that was counter to the integrationist goals of Black women members of the CIC.

The articles listed above all use rhetorical analysis to defend the ASWPL's problematic choices; none of them draw on critical race theory or whiteness studies to understand the ASWPL's failings and successes as deeply interconnected. The articles vary in their acknowledgment of Black women's antilynching work before the founding of the ASWPL. In her "United by Race, Divided by Gender," which specifically challenges the ASWPL's segregationism, Powell acknowledges the work of the ASWPL's Black women-led predecessors organizing before the ASWPL (36), but also notes the ASWPL's "shocking...decision to personally investigate each lynching" (38) without mentioning that Ida B. Wells pioneered this strategy in the late nineteenth century. In their rhetorical biography of Ames, Powell and Condit credit her with "several striking inventional strategies in constructing her rhetoric against lynching," namely her central thesis "that lynching was not caused by rape" (136), again not acknowledging Wells's development of this theory.

Powell's single-authored articles clearly acknowledge the limitations of the ASWPL's fight against racism given their explicit segregationism. "Since black women and white women were not socially equal within the ASWPL organization," Powell writes, "racism was a barrier to true bonding between them...That

white women have the power to speak for all women was a racist assumption underlying the rhetoric of the ASWPL” (“United by Gender” 41). But in their piece from 2011, Jordyn Jack and Lucy Massagee reject Powell’s problematized look at the ASWPL and instead work explicitly to defend the ASWPL’s segregationism as a rhetorical choice. Responding to two criticisms of the ASWPL—its segregationism and its opposition to federal antilynching legislation—they “argue here that both of these facts stem from the rhetorical strategy the ASWPL chose in its public rhetoric, not from a failure to communicate with African American women,” who favored integration as well as federal antilynching law (502). This defense of the ASWPL echoes the apologia by Condit and Powell, who insist that “each of [the same] criticisms arises from a failure to attend to the way in which [Ames’s] communication strategies and rhetorical philosophy were intertwined and the ways in which they were tailored to the specific conditions of her rhetorical situation” (137).

Most problematic is Jack and Massagee’s praise of the ASWPL for its integrationism, a move that obscures the ASWPL’s origin story as a rejection of the integrated CIC. In order to rehabilitate the ASWPL, Jack and Massagee focus on the late 1930s, when the ASWPL responded to critiques of their segregationism by inviting Black women to participate in meetings as non-members. Looking at archives of meetings between the ASPWL and their Black colleagues, Jack and Massagee celebrate

the repertoire of rhetorical strategies Ames and the ASWPL used to facilitate communication with African American groups that were also tackling the lynching problem: arranging meetings, writing statements, conducting surveys, and writing reports. We argue that what may appear to be a failure to collaborate or an unresponsiveness on the part of the ASWPL stems in large part from the private nature of these strategies (as opposed to the more public speeches, editorials, and pamphlets the ASWPL designed for white audiences) as well as from the differing rhetorical strategies espoused by the ASWPL and the African American groups to argue publicly against lynching. (495)

Yet simply writing letters and arranging meetings are only impressive insofar as Jack and Massagee center the comfort of the white members of the ASWPL and their courage in merely speaking to Black women. Drawing on the autobiography of the ASWPL’s contemporary, Southern woman Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin, Jack and Massagee argue that since “simply hearing an African American woman give a speech seemed an intimidating occasion to Lumpkin,” we should celebrate that the ASWPL was “taking tentative but significant steps toward solidarity at a time when shaking hands or sharing a meal required real courage” (496). This celebration of white women reaching out to Black

women obscures the ASWPL's prior relationship to the CIC, an integrated organization, and sets a low bar for antiracist activism, even for the time.

This focus on the white women's comfort, and elision of the ASWPL's history as an offshoot of the CIC, allows contemporary rhetoricians to obscure how Black women were used as tokens and as source material for the group, but not included as real members. This oversight is a continuation of the appropriation that happens when contemporary rhetorical scholars do not affirm the ASWPL's indebtedness to Black women activists, as discussed above. Jack and Massagee, as well as Condit and Powell, point to the instances in which the ASWPL invited Black women to their meetings in order to "share their stories directly in an atmosphere that was as unthreatening as possible" (Condit and Powell 139). Unthreatening for whom? This language on the part of contemporary scholars has uncomfortable echoes of how Black women were objectified by the women of the ASWPL as tools to be used in the anti-lynching crusade. For example, the minutes of a 1932 meeting of the Administrative Committee of the Women's Department of the CIC remark that a "Mrs. Brown suggested that since Negro women could speak so much better for themselves than white women could speak for them, a Negro woman under the direction of the Director of Woman's Work be secured to appear before gatherings of white women" ("Minutes" 1). Jack and Massagee insist that the ASWPL invited Black women to meetings to build interracial understanding, but the language above, which demands a "Negro woman...be secured," suggests the ASWPL used Black women from the CIC as rhetorical sources to make their own appeals more heart-wrenching to their white audiences. And while Jack and Massagee celebrate the ASWPL's affirmation of "the high standards of virtue set by the best element of Negro women" (ASWPL qtd. 499), we might see this as tone policing, setting moral standards for Black women's access to white women's attention and care. This appropriation of Black women's experiences by the ASWPL are a continuation of their unacknowledged use of earlier Black women activists' rhetorical strategies. Although the ASWPL was successful in publishing their resolution and receiving accolades from white men for their eloquence and courage, they were not successful in ending lynching, a practice of spectacular Black death which arguably still exists today. We can see the limitations of the ASWPL's fight in their unwillingness to confront white supremacy as they tokenized Black women, maintained their segregationism, and approved of lynching's migration into the criminal justice system, as I discuss in the final section.

Returning to the Archives: The ASWPL's Birth as a Segregationist Organization

In this section, I return to the ASWPL archives, focusing specifically on their founding. After studying a wide selection of the digitized archival materials, which stretch several decades and include papers from the CIC as well as the ASWPL, I decided to focus on the ASWPL's founding and first meeting because clarifying that genesis does significant work in troubling the history, offered in Jack and Massagee's work, that remembers the ASWPL as an integrationist organization. In fact, Black women from the CIC were advocating for integration in the 1920s, in the decade before Ames advocated for creating the all-white ASWPL. In minutes from CIC meetings at the end of the 1920s, several different moments attest to black women members' interest in integration as an intrinsic good. For example, in an undated [memo](#) from "the colored members of the Woman's General Committee of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation" to the rest of the group, probably from 1925, the women offer an overview of some of the work being conducted across southern states, focusing explicitly on whether women's work in various states was integrated or not. Their language makes clear that they value integration as a goal in and of itself. They write, "So far, the members of the white woman's committee of Tennessee have not worked with the colored committee" (2). By contrast, "The State of Georgia is organized and the white and colored committees are cooperating" (2). Their comments on Atlanta are most striking given that the ASWPL was based there as well:

The work of Atlanta is most outstanding in working out the real spirit of the commission. We have possibly here a larger number working together on a constructive program than in any other center. It is interesting to know that the white women are working in cooperation with the colored women of Atlanta for the purpose of bringing about a development and reformation in the use of Washington Park. (2)

They conclude:

The Colored Women's Committee feel greatly encouraged by the spreading of better relations among the races throughout our country....We stand loyal in our cooperation with the true spirit and motive of the Commission, believing that it stands uncompromisingly for the full development of the manhood and womanhood of all races. (2)

In this memo, the black women of the CIC clearly establish their belief in integration as an inherent good. They celebrate this value in slightly oblique rhetoric that suggests they wanted to convey the value they placed on integration

without drawing it out too explicitly: for example, they never denigrate the un-integrated states' commissions, but clearly establish their preference for interracial work, a preference highlighted by their focus on the "outstanding" interracial work in Atlanta. They appeal to the value of integration as central to the organization and therefore the hearts of their audience members, repeatedly referring to the "real spirit" and the "true spirit and motive of the Commission." In the report, the Black women of the CIC make clear to the women of the CIC, which included Ames, that they value integration as contributing to "the full development of the manhood and womanhood of all races."

Yet in 1928, at the annual meeting of the Woman's General Commission on Interracial Cooperation, Dr. Will Alexander, the director of the CIC, made what are reported [in the minutes](#) as vague, veiled comments about a new organization within the group: "Doctor Alexander, in speaking on...a future program for the Woman's General Committee, said that the Commission is trying to create, not an organization, but an educational agency building toward a new set of ideas and habits in different communities, with just enough organization to accomplish the idea" ("Minutes...November 19, 1928"). The record doesn't make clear what "just enough organization" Dr. Alexander is referring to, but in this coded language we see some of the evasiveness Bonilla-Silva characterizes as rhetorical incoherence, which he argues "increases noticeably when people discuss sensitive topics" like race (68). It makes sense that the director of an organization literally called the Commission on Interracial Cooperation would struggle to find the words to defend its decision to fund an all-white offshoot. And while Ames is recorded as present at this meeting, she does not appear to have spoken about her plans herself. By November of 1930, the first meeting of the new all-white organization had convened: "At the call of Mrs. Jessie Daniel Ames, Director of Woman's Work, Commission on Interracial Cooperation, a group of leading women from eight Southern States met as individuals to consider lynching and its control" ("[Minutes... November 1 1930](#)"). So begin the minutes of the first meeting of the ASWPL. Notice how the women frame themselves using colorblind language and make pains to note that they "met as individuals" even as they acknowledge their connection to the rejected CIC. Whiteness quickly becomes normative and they skip describing themselves as white in the white habitus of their new segregated organization. In fact, the list of present members so assumes a white Christian norm that all women present are listed by their name and hometown except for one entry which stood out to me: "Miss Gertrude Weil, Goldsboro, North Carolina, Jewish" (1).

In this meeting, the women gave and received a rhetorical education based in their experiences as white southern women, an education spear-headed by Ames but also forwarded by the women's collective cultural and

rhetorical knowledge. In *Refiguring Rhetorical Education*, Jessica Enoch expands the scope of rhetorical education from the narrow confines of male-dominated traditional schooling spaces where classical rhetoric was taught. Although Enoch focuses specifically on teachers, we might also find in the ASWPL women who “focused on the kinds of language practices, rhetorical strategies, and social and bodily behaviors their students needed to participate and change their civic and cultural communities” (Enoch 28). As we will see however, the ASWPL members’ cultural identities as white women led to an over-identification with their white male audiences, limiting their ability to fight the racist, patriarchal violence of lynching.

According to their [minutes](#), the inaugural meeting of the ASWPL began with a lengthy address by Dr. Will Alexander, the director of the CIC. Dr. Alexander’s address contains some of the points the ASWPL publicly adopted in its first resolution, for example that lynching “keeps us from being the most influential group of people in the world” and “brutalizes us and does something awful to us” (3). However, he also offered a deeper critique of southern society, arguing that lynchings were as white and Southern “as mint juleps” (2) and was “centered in the whole part of our civilization” (3). In appealing to his own audience, Dr. Alexander mistakenly thought he could create identification on the grounds of moral superiority to lynchers: he insisted that “What we need to get aroused is our intelligence” (2) and that southern whites who allow themselves to be manipulated by politicians, as well as the politicians themselves, are “morons” (4) and that “the great mass of white ignorance in the south is as big a problem as the mass of Negroes” (3). In these comments, Alexander attempted to create distance between his white audience and white lynchers based on class, but the ensuing conversation shows that the white women of the ASWPL were more interested in invention based on empathy than abjectification.

The following discussion among the women of the ASWPL makes clear that the women had different rhetorical values than Dr. Alexander. They made claims based on empathy, not righteous indignation, and came to conclusions collaboratively, often speaking, as in the resolution they co-wrote, with the plural pronoun “we.” Mrs. Winsborough responded to Dr. Alexander quite pointedly: “We have been talking a good deal about the morons this morning. I want to say just a word about the prejudiced Christian woman...This woman is not a moron, but has inherited such prejudice that she is rearing a young man in her home who would go out and raise a mob” (7). In this comment we see how the ASWPL rhetorically taught and valued empathy with other whites, even across class lines. This awareness at times produced an astute economic analysis. A Mrs. McCoy remarked, “The group who are causing the trouble are the ones who are competitors of the Negro. The folks who lynch

are the underprivileged industrial group and the farm classes" (6). Mrs. McCoy and others saw the response to this problem in education, and they discussed doing outreach through "the country school teachers" (6).

The ASWLP members also discussed questions of sexuality and sexual violence. They struggled honestly to make sense of the conflicting messages they received about the risks and realities of sexual violence in their society. Mrs. Obear asked, "Is anything being done in the counties to speeding up the trials of the Negro who has committed the unspeakable crime?" (4). This comment suggests that individual members of the ASWPL did believe that being raped by Black men was a real threat. Yet a Mr. Eleazor from the CIC pointed out that "It should not be forgotten that the most unspeakable criminal of the type you are talking about was a white man who was convicted here in Atlanta a few months ago" (5). And Mrs. Lawrence interjected: "Shouldn't Southern white women be concerned about the protection of Negro women and about the crime of white men as well as crimes of Negro men against white women and children?" (7) Mrs. Lawrence recognized, like the Black anti-lynching activists before her, that while the trope of the black male rapist gained media presence, white men were inflicting violence on black women and girls, but no one spoke of it. In another part of the meeting, filed as an "[Appendix](#)," the women specifically took up the question of a sexual "double standard" around white and Black women's sexuality, and came to the same conclusions that many Black women scholars point to today (Collins): that the trope of the lascivious black woman was a rhetorical tool that justified white men's rape of slave women. "To palliate treatment accorded Negro women as slaves, it was inevitable that a public opinion in the past should accept the conclusion as true that Negro women invited and proffered promiscuous relationships with white men" ("Minutes...November 1 1930" 13). In the instance quoted here, we see how these white Southern women, who began in an effort to disentangle the chivalric mythologies that curtailed their own freedom, ended up with a critique of white men's rhetoric around black women, and an indictment of how white men used false representations of black women as having "invited and proffered promiscuous relationships with white men" to protect them-selves from accusations of rape. Yet as we shall see, this private indictment of white men disappeared from the ASWPL's first public statement, suggesting the limits of identification as a rhetorical strategy for anti-racist and feminist work.

As the women moved toward their public resolutions, this free and frank talk dissipated in the interest of identifying with their intended audience, moderate and conservative white women and men. In their discussions over drafting a resolution, the women collaboratively developed the rhetorical strategy

to tailor their message to the various audiences they planned to individually approach. Mrs. Lawrence instructed thus:

I think the discussion we have just had illustrates the fact that we cannot have a resolution for all women's organizations to adopt. I think it would be better to draft resolutions according to the psychology of the individual organizations. The Baptist women can approach the subject through our State Chairmen first. We have to sell this to our State Chairmen, many of whom have not thought about it at all. Will it be possible to put into the findings of today's meeting that all of us may strive for a program which will appeal to its particular type of work. We will write our own resolutions. I believe we Baptist women can frame a resolution that will appeal to the Baptist women better than anybody else can because we must have a "peculiar psychology."
(6)

Mrs. Lawrence's comments attest to a powerful, instinctive understanding of how to build audience identification within the bounds of respectable conduct. Responding to the discussion up to that point, she challenged the notion of a uniform resolution for "all women's organizations to adopt" and instead appealed to the "psychology" of different institutions and the rhetorical prowess of individual women sharing that "psychology" to appeal to their home organizations effectively. Given Firor Scott's characterization of antebellum southern women's lives as characterized by "devotion" and "submission" (5-6), we might imagine that awareness of audience—of building identification with an audience in order to persuade without ever causing discomfort or alarm—might be a crucial rhetorical skill for the educated Southern women of the ASWPL and those like them. We might identify audience awareness as a feature of antebellum Southern white women's cultural rhetorical practice that was called upon in this writing practice. Although this rhetorical awareness powerfully aided the ASWPL in addressing their white audiences, it also created a blind spot as they ignored the Black women they had formerly worked with in the CIC. Indeed, their admirable analysis of the complexity of lynching as a political, economic, and discursive phenomenon evaporated when the ASWPL began to shape their language for a white audience, including economic competition between lower-class whites and free Blacks and the vulnerability of Black women and girls to white men and white discourses.

As evidenced here, the private meetings of the ASWPL served as a time for white women to reveal disruptive knowledge about how class and gender castes protected white men at the expense of Black men and women. Speaking privately, these women identified many of the deep political and economic causes of lynching and lynching discourses that scholars note today.

However, when the time came to craft their public statement, the ASWPL's attention shifted away from deep rooted causes of lynching and engaged rhetoric that was designed to challenge lynching while keeping white audiences comfortable. One of Ames's most famous comments was that the white public held "maintenance of racial supremacy as the cause [of lynching], protection of Southern women as the *reason*" (qtd. in Powell "United by Gender" 36-37, emphasis Ames's). Yet the group's first public statement seemed only directed at undermining the second portion of this formulation, and not the white supremacy at lynching's root. Instead of advocating for the safety and integrity of Black people and Black communities, the women of the ASWPL made appeals to white interests, advocating for the rule of law, appealing to Christian principles, and challenging the rhetoric of chivalry that held lynching as honorable and masculine white men's work. Their language was focused not on protecting the lives of Black men who were lynched, but rather challenging the hypocrisy of a chivalric culture, ironically reinscribing chivalric norms of honor, respectability, and institutionality. Near the end of their inaugural meeting, the women of the ASWPL adopted a resolution which proclaimed:

Distressed by the recent upsurge of lynchings, and noting that people still condone such crimes on the ground that they are necessary to the protection of womanhood, we, a group of white women representing eight Southern States, desire publicly to repudiate and condemn such defense of lynching, and to put ourselves definitely on record as opposed to this crime in every form and under all circumstances.

We are profoundly convinced that lynching is not a defense of womanhood or of anything else, but rather a menace to private and public safety, and a deadly blow at our most sacred institutions. Instead of deterring irresponsible and criminal classes from furtive crime, as it is argued, lynching tends inevitably to destroy all respect for law and order. It represents the complete breakdown of government and the triumph of anarchy. It brutalizes the community where it occurs, including the women and children who frequently witness its orgies...the mob sometimes takes the lives of innocent persons.... It brings contempt upon America as the only country where such crimes occur, discredits our civilization, and discounts the Christian religion around the globe.

Every citizen who condones it, even by his silence, must accept a share of its guilt. (qtd. in "Minutes" 10-11)

In light of the wide-ranging conversation that preceded its writing, this statement is noteworthy for its rhetorical caution. The rhetoric of the statement

challenges social norms around white women and Black men, but in a limited way. Hall writes that “women’s willingness to involve themselves in an issue with such profound psychosocial implications in itself constituted a sign of social change” (167). In the statement, though, the women do not engage with more transformative elements of their private discussion. Clinging to their positions as “white women representing eight Southern States,” the women’s appeals are based on familiar feminine concerns: the rule of law and order; resistance to barbarism; the protection of the naiveté of women and children; and defense of the reputations of nation and of religion. They also use strong sexualized language to gesture toward white men’s failures to live up to their chivalric norms, referring to lynching as a “menace,” “the triumph of anarchy,” “orgies,” and “mob[s]” which offend the sensibilities of foreign nations and domestic (white?) women and children.

In appealing to their white male audience, the ASWPL’s carefully crafted rhetoric was successful: parts of this statement subsequently appeared in newspaper articles across the South, including in the *Birmingham Age-Herald*, the *Arkansas Gazette*, and the *Macon Telegraph*, which are [carefully clipped](#), annotated, and labeled within the archive (“Alabama”). White male editors of these newspapers praised the women, who had successfully appealed to the editors’ Southern chivalry and pride. An article in the *Macon Telegraph* declared that the women “cut the ground from under the lynchers,” and a piece in the *Arkansas Gazette* notes the authority of the women as “white women active in the religious, educational, and social life of eight Southern states” (“Alabama”), arguing that “any progress made in the battle against this mob crime in the South will come from the efforts of our own people. It will not come from organizations in the North and East, or from anti-lynching bills introduced to Congress.” Thus the editorial’s title, “The South Must Find Its Own Cure For Lynching” (“Alabama”). These responses suggest the ASWPL was successful in appealing to a prideful white male ruling class that resisted challenges from Northerners or Southern Blacks, but was willing to listen to—or at least publish—the words of respectable white women.

Outro: Did the ASWPL End Lynching?

But was anything really achieved by these publications? The ASWPL’s rhetoric was clearly successful in gaining access to white male power and white male print. But were they successful in ending lynching, as rhetorical scholars have alleged? Powell’s hedged defense of the ASWPL and Jack and Massagee’s more complete defense of the ASWPL both rely on an understanding of history, forwarded by the ASWPL itself, which argues that the ASWPL successfully ended lynching. Powell offers a hedged celebration of the ASWPL’s legacy, arguing that despite their racism in excluding Black women from their

group, this choice ultimately paid off because they successfully ended lynching. Placing the ASWPL in a Burkean comic frame that seeks change within the existing power structure, Powell writes:

Ames's rhetorical choice to operate within a comic frame was not only a successful, but, I would argue, a necessary strategy for ending lynching in the South...[A] comic strategy was necessary, for the ASWPL was attempting to stop a crime with roots in white supremacy without changing the overarching ideology...The ASWPL focused on changing one result of racism, lynching, while leaving the overarching ideology of segregation intact. While this strategy can be faulted, it was successful in halting lynching because the system as a whole was not threatened. ("The Association" 97)

Without an engagement with critical race theory that recognizes white supremacy's deep investment in and reliance on Black death, Powell accepts the notion—forwarded by the ASWPL itself—that lynching can be separated from the "overarching ideology" of white supremacy. Jack and Massagee also lean on notions of the ASWPL's "success," arguing that "Because [ASWPL members] were the very women whose delicacy and supposed superiority was used to justify lynchings, their status as an all-white women's organization was an important factor in their success, enabling them to speak as insiders to other whites" (503). This analysis defines "success" in an extremely limited fashion. Beyond erasing the work of Black activists to end lynchings for nearly half a century before the ASWPL was formed, these analyses imply that lynching was solved as a problem in the 1930s and resist recognizing the ongoing and evolving ways that U.S. white supremacy continued to procure the deaths of Black people throughout the 20th century and well into the 21st (Rushdy, Craven).

The notion that the ASWPL ended lynching is also compromised by their involvement in the Scottsboro affair of 1931. In March 1931, a group of young Black and white men, and two white women, were involved in a fight on an Alabama train. Afterwards, the two women claimed they were sexually assaulted, but later recanted this. In any case, the nine young Black men, who came to be known as the Scottsboro boys, were all arrested, defended by a shoddy legal team, convicted of rape by an all-white jury, and sentenced to death, all in what Hall describes as "an atmosphere of threatened mob violence" (198). The case made international news and the ASWPL was asked to help prevent a lynching from occurring. Throughout the affair, as Hall recounts it, Ames's leadership of the group continually pushed them not to advocate for the possible innocence of the Scottsboro boys, but instead to prevent a lynching and keep the case within the court system. She refused demands by Northerners

to take a public stand on the case (199). Hall concludes her section on the Scottsboro boys thus:

By the late thirties most participants in ASWPL meetings seem to have agreed that the legal system was weighted against blacks. But rather than act on this realization, ASWPL leaders continued to reassure whites that legal processes could be as “swift and sure” as lynch mobs and gave tacit support to critics of the Scottsboro defense by campaigning for legal reforms to ensure speedy trials. An executive committee meeting in 1936 condemned “legal lynchings” vigorously but finally concluded that such corruption of the courts posed less “danger to social institutions” than mob violence. (201)

Hall’s depictions of their response, and especially Ames’s involvement, suggests that the group was trapped by the ethos it had created for itself as resistant to interests outside the South and concerned only for the rule of law and order. Anti-racist advocacy was not built into their rhetorical mission, which depended upon an ethos of white female respectability—women defending the reputations of America, the South, and Christianity, who wanted protection not from savage mobs but protection provided by the law. In the late 1930s, the ASWPL was adamant that the last lynchings had finally taken place (Rushdy 94-95). But their equivocal response to the possibility of “legal lynchings” sanctioned by the court system suggested the ASWPL was not engaged with a broader fight to end violence against Black people under white supremacy. Indeed, Hall’s characterization of Ames’s leadership of the ASWPL during the Scottsboro trial suggests that ultimately, Ames and the ASWPL were ultimately more allied with protecting the reputation of the white southern power structure than creating lasting positive change for their Black neighbors threatened by white violence.

This close study of the ASWPL suggests the limits to white antiracist and feminist advocacy that does not frankly face white complicity in racial violence. The white women’s writings under study here, including those by the ASWPL and contemporary rhetorical scholars, demonstrate the persistence of white women’s cultural practices around erasure of Black women from history, theorizing, and movement building. Listening to contemporary and historical Black and women of color feminists asks us to develop new citational practices that center the critiques of Black women, like the forgotten Black CIC women who clearly valued integration as a central goal (see also Ahmed). In a moment of heightened and visible anti-Black violence against women and men, the lessons of the ASWPL teach us that we cannot fight lynching without integrated, intersectional activism that responds to the leadership of Black women and women of color, that fights patriarchy and white supremacy and not merely its

grossest symptoms, and that demands bold reflexivity and transparency from white activists, scholars, and writers, even in the face of hostile audiences.

In his stylistic study of recent works in critical whiteness and *Composition/Rhetoric*, Edward Hahn enjoins us to be clear and specific when discussing the history of whiteness. He writes:

Grand-narrative history is crucial for understanding racial injustice and whiteness...Indeed, it is deeply conservative to isolate small narratives of racism from the grand narrative of institutionalized racism, because the small narratives cannot explain phenomena like the transgenerational transfer of wealth. The history of white privilege is, in fact, a grand narrative that enables us to grasp not only the continuity of racial privilege across time and space but also white privilege's contingent, discontinuous forms in specific times and specific places. (334)

Since Sojourner Truth asked "Ain't I a woman?" Black women have been critiquing oversights, imaginative failures, and appropriations in white women's rhetorical production. White women scholars can contribute to this tradition by practicing reflexivity as a reflex, persistently centering racial analysis to any study of white rhetors and interrogating how our own rhetoric as white women resurfaces problematic practices. We can also continue investigating Black women's claims that their work is appropriated and erased as pertinent to our field's attention to fair use and intellectual property, and develop intersectional best practices around fair use in dialogue with women across spectra of race, class, citizenship, gender identity, ability, and institutional affiliation. By constellating specific, historically situated moments of white women's rhetorics into broader rhetorical patterns of white women writing, we can begin to identify and disrupt those practices of white women's rhetorics which uphold white supremacy across time and space.

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