Black Disability Politics
Schalk, Sami

Published by Duke University Press

Schalk, Sami.
Black Disability Politics.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/102121

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=3219368

[Sun Oct  3 19:34:28 2023] Access provided at 8 Oct 2023 18:34 GMT with no institutional affiliation
We are not an afterthought.
We are here.
We are fighting for all of our lives.
We are Black. We are Disabled. We are Deaf.
We are Black.
Our Black Deaf Lives Matter.
—The Harriet Tubman Collective, “Disability Solidarity:
Completing the ‘Vision for Black Lives’”

On August 1, 2016, the Movement for Black Lives, a coalition of over fifty Black organizations, released “A Vision for Black Lives: Policy Demands for Black Power, Freedom, and Justice.” The ambitious vision statement and policy platform sought to center “the experiences and leadership of the most marginalized Black people” by demanding an end to the war on Black people via a broad set of issues including reparations, economic justice, prison abolition, education, health care, political power, legislation, and an end to state violence. The vision statement explicitly named women, queer people, trans people, gender nonconforming people, femmes, Muslims, formerly and currently incarcerated people, poor and working-class people, undocumented people, and immigrants as the most marginalized Black people and incorporated issues specific to these groups into the descriptions of the movement’s demands. Disabled people, however, were relegated to a single reference as “differently-abled” in the third paragraph listing populations of most marginalized Black people. In many ways, “A Vision for Black Lives” has strong similarities to the Black Panther Party’s ten-point platform, particularly in its call for “community control” and its recognition that
“we are a collective that centers and is rooted in Black communities, but we recognize we have a shared struggle with all oppressed people.”

While the Movement for Black Lives’ vision statement, in the Black radical tradition, extended into a wide array of social justice issues, the document was constructed with extremely limited input from Black disabled activists.


In the statement the HTC questions the erasure of disability, “especially considering the critical role ableism and audism play in every institution named by the Movement as a purveyor of violence against Black bodies and communities,” including police violence, poverty, the prison industrial complex, and the educational system. The HTC continues: “Many Black Deaf/Disabled leaders—especially those who have given their time and talent to the Movement for Black Lives—have noticed this deficit and believe that it reflects much larger problems with ableism and audism in the Movement. We, the undersigned, united under the coali tional name the Harriet Tubman Collective, are here to remind the Movement that liberation will never come without the intentional centering of Black Disabled/Deaf narratives and leadership. We know this because it never has.” This powerful statement engages the ethic of centering those most impacted by oppressive systems in the fight against those systems that is valued in both Black feminism and disability justice. It also, in the final sentence especially, asserts contemporary Black disabled cultural workers’ knowledge of and respect for their particular activist genealogy—from the legacies of Black historical figures only recently being recognized as disabled to the participation of Black disabled people within activist movements.

This sense of Black disabled activist legacy is reiterated in the second half of “Disability Solidarity,” which calls the erasure of disability “a grave injustice and offense” and argues unequivocally that “this platform and work is wholly incomplete if disability is not present. To be sure, no successful movement has existed without our leadership, and no movement will be successful without us.” In the final paragraphs of the statement, the HTC calls “upon organizations that label themselves ‘intersectional’ to truly embrace that framework” and states that they, as Black Disabled/Deaf leaders,
“remain as a resource and network of support to any who seek” collective liberation. “Disability Solidarity” ends with a list of names of “Black Disabled/Deaf victims of police brutality” and with the words from the epigraph to this chapter. The statement was signed by seventeen Black D/disabled and Deaf cultural workers.

After the release of the HTC’s statement, the Movement for Black Lives updated their “Vision for Black Lives” statement and policy plan to include disability in a more robust way, with language that aligns with current work in disability justice. The term “differently-abled” was replaced with “disabled” in the introduction to the platform, and people with disabilities are now explicitly named thirteen times across four of the six policy/issue statements. For example, people with disabilities are named as one of several populations who are most likely to be profiled by police, to experience poverty, and to be negatively impacted by failed health-care systems and restrictive voter registration laws. The most detailed engagement with disability appears in the “End the War on Black People” section, which contains a full paragraph about the abuse and harm suffered by incarcerated people with mental disabilities. These changes are substantial and important, and there is no question that the HTC’s “Disability Solidarity” response statement was a—if not the—major factor in bringing about this explicit inclusion, asserting disability as a Black political issue essential to any vision for Black lives. This story is one example of how, in the beginning of the twenty-first century, thanks to the work of disability justice activists generally and Black disabled activists specifically, increasing numbers of Black social justice organizations and movements have begun to better incorporate and name disability as part of their liberatory politics.

Since the “Disability Solidarity” statement in 2016, the HTC also released additional statements via various open-access digital platforms in 2017, 2018, and 2019. These other statements address racism from and exploitation by white mainstream disability rights organizations and explicitly engage in an abolitionist stance against the prison industrial complex from a Black disability politics perspective. I cite these statements to recognize that the HTC has not merely critiqued Black activist organizations for their ableism but is also actively engaged with identifying racism within white-majority disability rights organizations. I encourage readers to use the works cited in this book to locate and read the HTC’s important and ongoing Black disability political work.

This chapter aims to uplift the voices and work of contemporary Black disabled activists and cultural workers, particularly members of the HTC,
by exploring how Black disability politics operate in the present. In what follows, I argue that Black disabled cultural workers are growing Black disability politics in new ways and, as a result, changing how we organize for social change. The eleven people I interviewed are drawing attention to a legacy of Black disabled activism, articulating a robust critical understanding of the relationship of ableism and racism, and developing what it means to engage in Black disability political praxis. Collectively these contemporary modes of Black disability political praxis aim to shape present and future liberation work more broadly. I analyze the contemporary Black disability political work discussed in the interviews and make connections to the qualities of Black disability politics I identified in the historical work of the Black Panther Party and the National Black Women’s Health Project.

Then, in the conclusion, I briefly discuss three sites of social justice work where disability politics are being articulated and enacted by Black activists and cultural workers not interviewed for this project. These short concluding examples are intended less to provide close analysis and more to demonstrate ways of identifying Black disability politics (for scholars) and incorporating disability politics into Black-focused and Black-led social justice work (for activists and cultural workers). This chapter also allows me to highlight what I believe to be some of the most important work of Black disability politics today, work that I hope more scholars will study and more cultural workers and activists will join.

Contemporary Black Disability Political Praxis

My interviews for this project produced an immense amount of knowledge that I do my best to condense into a few key tactics that these Black disabled cultural workers are further developing in Black disability politics today. First, in addition to claiming Black disability identity and encouraging identification with disability in Black communities, contemporary Black disabled cultural workers are also claiming Black disability history and drawing attention to a legacy of Black disabled organizing and activism. Every single interview participant mentioned that to understand the experiences and political needs of Black disabled people, one must understand our history. Candace Coleman, for example, asserts, “We have some bomb ancestors who have had disabilities, but their story hasn’t been told.” A similar sentiment was expressed by Tinu Abayomi-Paul, who states, “The disability part of the history of Black people is removed a lot of the time and revealed later.” Acknowledging the erasure of Black disabled people’s stories,
Heather Watkins explains that it benefits “younger people when we tell them how many of our cultural icons had disabilities like Harriet Tubman, Brad Lomax, Sojourner Truth, Fannie Lou Hamer; all these people had disabilities, and the disability helped govern their lives. It impacted the way they moved politically.” This shift to recognize the cultural and political value of the history of Black disabled people, to acknowledge the fact that, as Dustin Gibson puts it, “Black disabled folks have been doing activism for long time,” is important to Black disability politics in the twenty-first century. Patrick Cokley states, “What I think is important about Black disability thought is that it requires you to take into account that history and then when you are addressing policy changes or political changes to then use those skill sets as a means of basically creating better activism, better engagement, better policies.” The recognition of the history of Black disabled people was clear across the interviews, and several participants even specifically mentioned the work of the Black Panther Party. Most participants also tied this recovery of history to its cultural and political utility today in addressing disability as a political concern within Black communities and social movements. By making our presence in history more visible, we can more effectively lay claim to leadership roles as Black disabled people and help our movements develop strong understandings of the relationship between and manifestations of ableism and racism in order to shape future political praxis.

Black disabled activists and cultural workers in the early twenty-first century tend to recognize that the work must be intersectional in such a way that race does not take primacy over disability because social systems of oppression have to be addressed and fought against as interrelated and mutually constitutive rather than as separable. As a result, they are challenging and changing our understanding of what ableism is and does in our world. This aspect of contemporary Black disability politics echoes, but shifts, the intersectional quality of Black disability politics discussed thus far and also reflects one of the tactics for addressing disabling violence from praxis interlude 1: emphasizing the intertwined nature of multiple social justice issues. Multiple interview participants insisted on an understanding of ableism and racism as inseparable and mutually constitutive, meaning that they help create and inform one another and rely on each other to function. Dustin Gibson argues that “race and disability were pathologized in a way that we can’t separate them now…. I think we can’t literally talk about ableism without talking about racism”; therefore, he continues, “I don’t think that there’s such thing as anti-Black ableism … ableism is inherently anti-Black.”
Patrick Cokley similarly explains that in some regards “ableism is very much one and the same with racism because what we’re really talking about is who has agency in our culture.”

The relationship between racism and ableism (and other systems of oppression) is most expansively articulated by TL Lewis, whom I quote at length in order to make clear not merely how Lewis and other Black disabled activists and cultural workers understand the relationships between these systems conceptually but also how this intersectional understanding shapes political approaches to social change. Lewis states:

I always chuckle about this because my brain doesn’t disconnect them. There is no racism without ableism. There is no ableism without racism … you quite literally can’t have one without the other. … There is a fundamental lack of understanding of the connections between racism and ableism, classism, and other structural and systemic oppressions that is killing us because if we understood those things—how they are connected, how there’s an unbroken chain between asylums, plantations, zoos, circuses, and prisons—then we would be able to actually fight all of those things collectively and very differently. … [If we did make those connections,] then we would be able to have a much more holistic understanding of what is going on in our society but also a much stronger framework from which to unearth the histories … these collective histories and then dismantle the system—all of these systems. … So long as we continue to allow people to think that it is just one or the other, we are going to keep spinning our wheels and not being able to identify the cause of the harm, which is all of these systems operating simultaneously. This is what made Fred Hampton so dangerous. This is what made Martin Luther King Jr. toward the end of his life so dangerous in many regards, [and] Malcolm X for the same reason. It’s because there was a deep understanding of the need to have an anticapitalist, anti-imperialist, antiracist [approach to change]. It was, is, why the Black Panthers were engaged in and supporting disability justice work. This is why Black folks have been fighting for universal health care since quite literally the 1800s. … These are the things that we have always understood, but if you don’t have a historical understanding, if you don’t have a lens from which to view these struggles other than race, race, race … [then] we’ll end up fighting against or harming one another. 17

From the perspective of these interview participants, Black disability politics fundamentally understand racism and ableism as mutually constitutive
and assert that this understanding of the relationship between systems of oppression is required to create systemic change and collective liberation.

This particular aspect of the intersectional quality of Black disability politics today is why Lewis, in conversation and relationship with Gibson and other Black and racialized people, has developed and continues to refine an expansive definition of ableism. The most recent version at the time of writing was released in January 2020 on social media. It defines ableism as “a system that places value on people’s bodies and minds based on societally constructed ideas of normalcy, intelligence, excellence and productivity. These constructed ideas are deeply rooted in anti-Blackness, eugenics, colonialism and capitalism. This form of systemic oppression leads to people and society determining who is valuable and worthy based on a person’s appearance and/or their ability to satisfactorily [re]produce, excel and ‘behave.’ You do not have to be disabled to experience ableism.”

This definition of ableism importantly contains race within it, making clear how racism and ableism not only intersect in the lives of Black disabled people but collude with and uphold one another’s functions in ways that impact even nondisabled people. This is a key way intersectionality—with attention to both identity and systems of oppression that operate violently regardless of identity—works in Black disability politics today. As Lewis clarifies in our interview, “What makes ableism so dangerous is its fluidity and ability to morph. It’s like a chameleon…. It morphs into whatever the system needs it to be to perpetuate the violence or deprivation that is being produced.” This expansive, chameleon nature of ableism and its mutually constitutive relationship to other oppressions further reinforce the need for Black disability politics today to remain holistic as well. As Dustin Gibson explains, he and other multiply marginalized radical activists and cultural workers are “attempting to abolish the systems that inflict violence because we know from history that if an apparatus is built for one people that it’ll expand itself and it’ll be for more people; that once harm is allowed to take place and it goes unchecked that the goalpost for what is fucked up then moves … we know that the harm will beget more harm, and the death-making machines will just grow stronger and stronger, and there are people being killed there right now, whether it’s happening [today], gonna happen tomorrow, or if it’s methodically over a seventy-year period and … it’ll be on us for not resisting now.” Indeed, Black disabled cultural workers are resisting multiple systems of oppression and harmful institutions. In the process, they are modeling methods for Black disability political praxis.
In the interviews several participants insisted that one aspect of their praxis is to hold no person or community above critique. This practice is evident in my opening example of the HTC’s work holding both the Movement for Black Lives and white-led disability rights organizations accountable for their ableism and racism, respectively. Vilissa Thompson, an HTC member, explains that Black disability politics mean “holding the community we’re part of accountable,” and that means every community: white-led disability communities, Black communities, and beyond. As Thompson further asserts in regard to Black social movements and organizations, “if your politics doesn’t include disability … [then] you’re not for the true inclusion and liberation of Black people, particularly disabled Black people, and we see you. We know who’s for us, and we know who’s against us … you are not above being critiqued. If white people are being critiqued, you’re gonna be critiqued.” While the work of Black disability politics in previous chapters focused on the disabling impact of racism from a race-centered or race-and-gender-centered critique, Black disability politics today hold all communities accountable, with appropriate attention to the history and context that shape how oppression manifests in different communities, as discussed in praxis interlude 2 and in this chapter thus far.

Another aspect of Black disability political praxis today, operating in the tradition of Black feminist politics and theorizing, is centering those most marginalized and most impacted by oppression. In their 1977 statement, the Combahee River Collective, a group of Black feminists often credited as early progenitors of intersectional theory, wrote, “If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression.” Several interview participants echoed this Black feminist sentiment from a Black disability political perspective. Candace Coleman, for instance, states that if you center “Black and disabled people, then you center everyone else in the world … look at things through a Black and disability lens [and] you could most definitely serve everyone else.” T. S. Banks expresses a similar belief, asserting that “if we can make accessibility [mean] thinking about access to food, health, housing, heart, art, you know, everything that makes us thrive instead of just surviving, you know, human beings, I think if we can do that for Black disabled, trans folks, nonbinary folks, intersex folks, I think, you know, basically the world has won.” This particular Black disability political sentiment and activist approach, of course, also draws from the ten principles of disability justice articulated by Patricia Berne and Sins Invalid, a performance collective of disabled queer people
and disabled people of color. After the first principle, intersectionality, Sins Invalid names the second principle of disability justice as “Leadership of Those Most Impacted,” explaining, “We know ableism exists in the context of other historical systemic oppressions. We know to truly have liberation we must be led by those who know the most about these systems and how they work.”22 The Black disabled cultural workers interviewed for this book are unquestionably leaders in the liberation movement precisely because of their deep knowledge of how multiple systems of oppression operate in their individual lives and communities. They collectively assert that their leadership as Black disabled people is a distinct advantage for Black disability political work.

Digging further into doing the work of Black disability politics, several interview participants discussed the need for a holistic approach to activism, organizing, and other change work that centers care and accessibility, broadly conceived. One aspect of this holistic approach in contemporary Black disability politics is paying attention to and addressing the various ways oppression impacts our bodyminds. TL Lewis, for example, states that systems of oppression are “set up to exhaust people who are actually fighting them … the mental, physical, emotional, economic, spiritual, political, and any other way in which you can imagine; so in that way they are quite effective.” T. S. Banks similarly notes that “there’s a lot of people that we lost because they were fighting and unwell at the time”; therefore, there’s a need for “care webs within our networks,” which Banks believes we need to work on more.23 The acknowledgment of the toll that living within violent systems takes on the bodyminds of marginalized people, particularly cultural workers actively fighting these systems, is an important part of Black disability politics—the acknowledgment of our full selves and our need for self-care, community care, and state care. Part of this need for care includes calls for increased attention to accessibility within organizations and liberation movements.

Multiple interview participants mentioned the lack of accessibility and at times outright ableism in certain organizations and movement spaces. Lorrell Kilpatrick, a member of the Gary, Indiana, chapter of Black Lives Matter, states:

There are only two of us [from the H T C] that are still members of more mainstream … Black radical groups [Black Lives Matter and Black Youth Project 100 specifically]…. The rest of these folks are anti- all of these groups because of the rabid ableism … that they’ve encountered. I have
had to call another Black Lives Matter planner in another city on behalf of a person in Harriet Tubman Collective to let them know that they are actively excluding Black people with disabilities and got hung up on. The reason why BLM Gary is not rabidly ableist is because I’m in BLM Gary, that’s it. Had I not been, people would have been, you know, very honestly ignorant of accessibility issues, but the other folks who are not part of these two groups used to be, and have vowed they will never be again because of the intense intense ableism, disregard, disrespect, that they got from these activists who are so-called freedom fighters who are treating them in the same way that they say they’re being treated by white liberals.

Attention to accessibility not only ensures the participation of disabled people, which, as Kilpatrick notes, can transform the practices of an entire organization, but also ensures that people can participate in movement work in sustainable ways because the multiple needs of their bodyminds are being considered and care, for one’s self and each other, is valued. As Dustin Gibson contends, “All of the influx of sustainable practices that we [in disability justice work] center for survival will be key to actually being able to do the work long term.” Prioritizing accessibility (physical, sensory, financial, and otherwise), therefore, is an essential part of Black disability political praxis today.

Finally, similar to the work of the Panthers and the National Black Women’s Health Project earlier in the book, a major part of contemporary Black disability politics is to attend to and value both the micro and macro levels of change in order to achieve long-term success—that is, remaining holistic in tactics as well as in topics and issues. Lorrell Kilpatrick explains that though many seek to have widespread impact and influence, “that doesn’t mean that the impact we have on the individual is small. The impact we have on the individual means the world to the individual. So it means the world to me … there’s levels to the effectiveness that we have.” Patrick Cokley echoes that sentiment, stating, “One of the things I think is very important in the disability space and all spaces that are about social justice is to remind us that there are different types of work that are needed to move freedom and justice forward.” Black disabled people are increasingly organizing online, including participating in virtual marches and sharing ideas with one another in order to mobilize for change in new, more accessible ways. The ability for Black disabled people to be less isolated and more involved means that Black disability political work must acknowledge and
value the varied ways people participate in collective liberation. I will say a bit more about my own experiences with accessible Black disability organizing during the 2020 uprisings in the nonconclusion that follows this chapter.

Recognizing the value of micro- and macrolevel work is further reflected in TL Lewis’s metric of success for social justice work, which “is really important when you’re battling an entire system because if you don’t have your own metrics for success, it can drive you mad.” Lewis works, unpaid, with Helping Educate to Advance the Rights of Deaf communities (heard), a volunteer-dependent organization that works to end abuse and imprisonment of D/deaf and disabled people. Regarding this work, Lewis states, “I have learned that in this system we have to have a different metric for ‘success,’ and in this moment, my metric is: How many people love more deeply? How many communities grew closer? How many families did you keep together in the hundred-year battle to tear apart our families? How many children knew they were loved despite the system—that wires, walls, windows, and bars could not separate them from that which they deserved most . . . ?” Here Lewis places immense value on the individual and community level of change in the ongoing fight to dismantle systems of oppression at the macro level, viewing the work and impact at each level as necessary and meaningful. Lewis makes clear, in fact, that “usually folks in mainstream disability communities can only see the law as a means of allegedly remedying abuses . . . when often the law is the cause and perpetuation of more inequality.”

What Lewis notes contemporarily, Kilpatrick reflects on historically in regard to the early disability rights movement, stating, “The way that they got these young scary disabled people out of the streets and out from under those buses [was that] they gave them government jobs and insurance for the first time ever. They legitimized them, and everybody wants legitimization. But with those jobs, with those benefits, with the way to pay for your education, with the way to gain respect as a person, came the sacrifice, of course, of the radicalism.” What both Lewis and Kilpatrick indicate is that a primary emphasis or overreliance on working within institutions like the federal government and the law to create radical change will ultimately fail. The range of work performed by the Black disabled activists and cultural workers I interviewed, combined with their emphasis on the importance of multiple kinds and levels of justice work, indicates clearly that Black disability politics today remain holistic in ways very similar to the work of the Black Panther Party and National Black Women’s Health Project discussed in previous chapters. This chapter (and praxis interlude 2 before it) also makes clear that contemporary Black disability politics remain intersectional (without
centering race above disability), not necessarily based in disability identity (though contemporary work includes and values disability identity much more than the historical work analyzed in this book), and contextualized and historicized. The central qualities I identified in the work of the Black Panther Party and the National Black Women’s Health Project therefore appear in similar and sometimes shifted ways in the work of contemporary Black disabled activists and cultural workers. As a result, I argue that that we can use these qualities as one way to locate and assess historical Black disability politics and develop present and future Black disability politics.

**Black Disability Politics in Contemporary Social Justice Movements**

The practices that I’ve identified in Black disability politics today are, of course, based on a small sample population of experienced Black disabled cultural workers. I believe there is immense value in scholars doing more in-depth interviews with Black disabled activists and cultural workers to better understand the methods and perspectives of Black disability politics in the twenty-first century. I have written this chapter, however, to ensure that the lessons of the past are directly connected to the work of the present and to highlight the leaders whose perspectives are being increasingly incorporated into the work of a variety of social justice movements, organizations, and political campaigns but hardly engaged by scholars in Black studies or disability studies.

It is unquestionable that Black disabled activists and cultural workers are at the forefront of developing Black disability political frameworks today, but the work is also being taken up in locations that are neither exclusively focused on disability nor exclusively Black. Black disability politics are, after all, not limited to issues specific to Black disabled people alone. Moreover, if we take a Black feminist and disability justice perspective here, then we understand that a politics that centers those who are most marginalized and most impacted will benefit those less marginalized and less impacted as well. In these first two decades of the twenty-first century, there are several places where Black disability politics are manifesting and impacting the work of Black and Black-led social justice organizations and movements. While analyzing all the ways Black disability politics are circulating in contemporary justice work is beyond the scope of this chapter and book, I would like to briefly provide some examples that might seed ideas and future research topics for readers.
First, the Black Youth Project is “a national research project, launched in 2004, that examined the attitudes, resources, and culture of African American youth ages 15 to 25,” and that has now expanded into a “cyber-resource center for black youth” intended “to generate new media information, blogs, art, conversations, webinars, and data that will expand the human and social capital of young African Americans, facilitating their general empowerment through highlighting their voices and experiences.” The website regularly includes news stories and essays about Blackness and disability that reflect the qualities of Black disability politics discussed here. A January 2020 search for the terms disability and disabled located just over sixty hits for essays and articles. Some of these pieces simply mention one of these words briefly, such as in a list of marginalized people, but numerous others—such as “Chills down My Spinal Degeneration: Why We Need Black Queer Disabled Kink,” “Black People Aren’t Resistant to Mental Health Treatment. We’re Resistant to Framing It as a Cure,” and “Yup. Non-profit Culture and Performative Activism Perpetuate Ableism and Anti-Blackness”—provide extended engagement with disability and ableism as political concerns for young Black people.

Even outside of Black movements and cultural spaces, Black people, especially Black disabled people, are taking up disability as an explicit political concern tied to other systems of oppression. In 2019 adrienne maree brown published *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good*, a collection of essays and interviews exploring the need to revalue and claim our right to pleasure in a politicized fashion, one that demands that our social systems contain space for rest, healing, joy, and satisfaction, particularly for those who are most impacted by oppression and most likely to have their pleasure policed, denied, and devalued. Brown identifies as a fat Black queer woman with disabilities, and she ensured that the politics of disability were acknowledged in various places throughout the book, not only in the two chapters by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha and myself, which are most explicitly focused on disability. Pleasure activism is grounded in Black feminism, draws from work in harm reduction and healing justice, and is in conversation with social justice work from a wide variety of cultural arenas, from sex work, aging, and parenting to consent, fashion, and trauma. Pleasure activism is an intersectional, holistic framework that focuses on both micro- and macrolevel change in ways that align strongly with Black disability politics even as that language is not central to the work. The politics of disability, I contend, appear throughout brown’s work to encourage us to attend to our bodies, to center the pleasure of those most marginalized, and to work to heal
from systems of oppression that deny us pleasure and freedom so that we are better prepared to sustainably fight for the collective liberation of all.

There is a similar kind of integration of Black disability politics in the work of Sonya Renee Taylor, a Black queer woman leader in the body positivity and body empowerment movements. Taylor came up with the phrase “the body is not an apology,” the title of her influential media and educational website (founded in 2011) and her book (published in 2018), from a conversation with a disabled woman.29 The Body Is Not an Apology website contains “Disability” and “Mental Health” as two of a dozen central topics addressed by articles and personal essays on the site, along with things like weight/size, sexuality, gender, race, and aging. While only a portion of the articles and essays on disability are written by Black people, this indicates another site of activist and cultural work where Black people are ensuring the politics of disability are being integrated and made explicit.

This integration of Black disability politics outside of Black activist and cultural spaces and into other social justice movements led by Black and Black disabled people is incredibly important for future studies. I could have included additional examples from the abolitionist movement, the reproductive justice movement, and the health-care reform movement—all areas I hope others can research and develop further using the frameworks and ideas articulated in this book. What’s important is not that Black disability politics remain owned by Black disabled people alone; rather, what’s important is that these politics influence the work of social justice movements broadly, moving us toward collective liberation and a future where we remember and honor the history of Black disability politics and the legacy of Black disabled people who helped us get free.

I say more on the work that still needs to occur in the nonconclusion, but I want to end this chapter with another expression of gratitude to the eleven Black disabled activists and cultural workers who participated in interviews and provided feedback on this book. Our conversations not only helped me work out the arguments and arc of this project but also helped me decide to use this book to come out as disabled after over a decade of working in disability studies. Thank you for entrusting me with your ideas and knowledge.