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Introduction

Speak the truth to the people
Talk sense to the people
Free them with reason
Free them with honesty
Free the people with Love and Courage and Care for their Being

—Mari Evans, from *I Am a Black Woman* (1970)

MARI EVANS' POEM "Speak the Truth to the People" invokes the social and political upheaval of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements of 1960s and 1970s. As an African American poet influenced by the Black Arts Movement, Evans' poetry aimed to speak the truth to the public about issues as diverse as racism, poverty, domestic violence, and the power of love as an antidote to oppression. Her 1970 volume *I Am a Black Woman* constituted one voice in a groundswell of Black feminist intellectual production that saw speaking the truth to African American women as its special mission. This same era produced a broad array of artists and intellectuals from diverse racial, ethnic, class, gender, and sexual backgrounds who, through their scholarship, art, and political activism, questioned prevailing power arrangements. Their creative work contributed to social movements against racism, sexism, militarism, homophobia, age discrimination, and class exploitation. Collectively, their work exemplifies traditions of *intellectual activism*: namely, the myriad ways that people place the power of their ideas in service to social justice.

Just as the themes of intellectual activism are far-reaching, the mechanisms that people use to engage in intellectual activism are similarly broad. Evans, for example, studied fashion design at the University of Toledo, but like others of her generation, rejected the imposed separation between scholarship and activism,

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school and society, thinking and doing. Refusing these binaries created space for new forms of creativity. Evans' chosen terrain of intellectual activism consisted of writing poems, plays, children's books, and a musical adaptation of Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God,* activities quite far afield from her formal field of study. Significantly, by writing and directing *The Black Experience,* a television program that aired from 1968 to 1973 in Indianapolis, Evans foreshadowed the current impetus toward using mass media venues to educate the public. Through visual arts, music, poetry, fiction, essays, journal articles, nonfiction, books, and videography, like Evans, many artists, intellectuals, activists, and everyday people have recognized the necessity of multiple expressions of intellectual activism for social change.

Today, we face equally important social issues—environmental degradation, terrorism, poverty, violence against women, government indifference, racism, and youth disenfranchisement permeate the news. We forget what it was like for youth of Evans' generation. They faced an array of social injustices against women, African Americans, Latinos, poor people, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered people that uncovered stark contradictions between the American Dream and its actualization. Their social movements and their signature intellectual activism reflected these broader social concerns. In their intellectual activism, the youth of Evans' generation could stand on the shoulders of their parents, who faced similar challenges a generation earlier. Drawing on the educational opportunities that their parents struggled to provide for them, Evans' generation changed the terms of discourse and social practices concerning race, gender, class, and sexuality in the United States. Despite the unfinished promise of social justice practices in the contemporary period, their legacy to us has been a social justice agenda in the United States that can serve as a beacon for those who wish to support it.

Given this history, I wonder how effectively today's scholars and public intellectuals speak the truth to the people about contemporary social issues. For prior generations, media access was more carefully rationed and controlled, making it difficult to find others of like mind and to educate the public about important social issues. Face-to-face interaction and landline telephones were necessary for community organizing. Now, however, new technologies have opened up formerly unimaginable ways for us to talk to one another. We are swimming in information, but how much of that information moves us closer to the truths that will sustain us? For example, in 2011, sharing information via cell phones and the Internet, youth in the Arab world sparked democracy movements with global impact. Yet without careful cultivation, these high-tech versions of grassroots politics may be drowned out by the voices of pundits that blast forth from countless cable television stations, from satellite radio, and by the trivialities of podcasts gone viral. Individuals can now see themselves on YouTube and post their ideas on blogs with blinding speed. Yet for all this talk and noise, what are we saying that is of value? Where are the conversations that will spur contemporary intellectual activism?

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Believing in the possibility of intellectual activism is one thing—figuring out how to do it within contemporary politics of knowledge production is another. During the social movements of the mid- to late twentieth century, people like Evans who engaged in intellectual activism were more closely tied to social movement politics. African Americans, Latinos, women, and working-class whites were excluded from the classrooms, faculty meetings, editorial meetings, publishing houses, and media venues of knowledge production. Their social position as outsiders shaped their perception of how their intellectual activism might bring about change. They saw power from afar, typically imagining its organization and envisioning what they would do differently once they gained access to it in business, government, and academia. In contrast, within increasingly corporate colleges and universities and monopolistic mainstream media, in the early twenty-first century, we confront a contradictory politics of inclusion and exclusion. Some individuals from formerly excluded groups now occupy positions of power and authority inside the social institutions that formerly excluded them, with many of these insiders engaged in intellectual work. At the same time, as the lyrics of global hip hop remind us, far too many others remain just as firmly excluded as before. Across the globe, youth, women, people of color, religious and sexual minorities, and the disabled bear the brunt of contemporary social issues. Where is their intellectual activism? What does it mean to harness the power of ideas for social justice within these constraints? What does intellectual activism mean in the context of an inclusionary politics of the early twenty-first century that manages to produce exclusionary outcomes?

Speaking the Truth to Power, Speaking the Truth to the People

As individuals, each of us occupies a dual location: included in some groups, yet excluded from others. The issue for most of us lies less in being a pure insider or outsider than in the terms of our participation within all of the venues to which we belong. For example, as an American citizen, an African American woman from a working-class background, and an academic who has experienced considerable upward social mobility, I have consistently grappled with this theme of being simultaneously an insider and an outsider. Throughout my professional career, I have struggled to gain clarity concerning how ever-shifting patterns of belonging and exclusion have shaped the contours of my intellectual activism.

Negotiating the contemporary politics of knowledge production from "outsider within" social locations raises some fundamental dilemmas. In a misguided effort to protect standards, many of my academic colleagues within colleges and universities derogate any work that they see as being too "popular" as less rigorous and scholarly than other work. Worse yet, having one's work deemed "political" demotes it to the realm of the nonacademic. These

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norms suppress the kind of engaged scholarship that interests me and that is fundamental for intellectual activism. Significantly, higher education claims that it has a monopoly on knowledge production and that scholarly knowledge occupies the pinnacle of excellence. In addition, my activist colleagues working outside colleges and universities see my decision to work within the academy as a default position. They often view professors as people who are either too timid or are not sufficiently committed to the front lines of whatever political or social movement preoccupies them. Because they are outsiders, they can misrecognize academic politics as real politics. They too can cede the power that is attached to knowledge production to people with advanced degrees or stellar careers within higher education. Further, most members of the general public are also outsiders to the legitimated mechanisms of knowledge production in colleges and universities, but they are also major stakeholders in what happens there. Typically unaware of this border warfare between academic insiders and outsiders, members of the general public view higher education as an ivory tower where one can wait out the latest economic downturn.

This perspective that sees intellectual work as occurring primarily within academic settings, populated by pampered teachers and scholars, and political or activist work as situated in the so-called real world, filled with activists and members of the general public, severs ideas from power relations. This basic binary worldview obscures the complexities of engaging in intellectual activism in both social locations as well as the connections between them. Seeing only two choices limits our choices. Rather, because ideas and politics are everywhere, the potential for intellectual activism is also possible everywhere.

In this context, I see two primary strategies that underpin contemporary intellectual activism, both of which constitute legacies of late-twentieth-century social movements. One form of intellectual activism aims to speak the truth to power. This form of truth-telling harnesses the power of ideas toward the specific goal of confronting existing power relations. On a metaphorical level, speaking the truth to power invokes images of changing the very foundations of social hierarchy where the less powerful take on the ideas and practices of the powerful, often armed solely with their ideas. One can imagine this process through the David and Goliath story of the weak standing up to the strong, armed only with a slingshot (as relying solely on the power of one's ideas seems to be). A Google search of the phrase "speak the truth to power" uncovers numerous hits seemingly focused on confronting those who wield power within existing social institutions.

My lengthy educational training was designed to equip me to wield the language of power to serve the interests of the gatekeepers who granted me legitimacy. My teachers did not consider that I might choose to use those same weapons to challenge much of what I learned, at least not as deeply as I have actually done. While we may think of our educations as our individual intellectual property, we quickly find out that powerful groups expect us to place our fancy degrees in service to conservative political agendas. Power routinely

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claims that it has a monopoly on the truth. Yet my education revealed multiple truths, most of which were co-opted and repackaged to suit the vested interests of the more powerful. The richness of alternative points of view remained ignored, neglected, ridiculed, and/or persecuted out of existence.

Much of my academic writing strives to speak the truth to power, namely, to develop alternative analyses about social injustices that scholarly audiences will find credible. For example, my book *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice* (1998) speaks directly to scholarly audiences. In that volume, I present a complex argument, in often dense prose, with the goal of speaking the truth to power. To write it, I mastered the language of abstract social theory, with an eye toward unsettling the very same academic power relations that ironically would be used to legitimate the book itself. Because *Fighting Words* required years of diligent study and endless revisions, many see my efforts to write books like this as removing me from the more important realm of everyday political life. I see it differently. Speaking the truth to power in ways that undermine and challenge that power can often best be done as an insider. Some changes are best initiated from within the belly of the beast. Standing outside, throwing stones at the beast, and calling it names won't change much, except perhaps, to make the beast more dangerous because now it no longer believes that its underlings love it. Challenging power structures from the inside, working the cracks within the system, however, requires learning to speak multiple languages of power convincingly.

A second strategy of intellectual activism aims to speak the truth directly to the people. In contrast to directing energy to those in power, a focus that inadvertently bolsters the belief that elites are the only social actors who count, those who speak the truth to the people talk directly to the masses. The distinction here is critical. It's the difference between producing a memo that documents the many cases of a boss's bad behavior and beseeches him or her to change his or her ways and having a meeting with the staff to strategize ways that they, individually and collectively, might deal with the boss *and* the lines of authority that put them in the situation to begin with. The former strategy speaks the truth to power—the latter strategy speaks the truth to the people.

Mari Evans' poem invokes this second form of truth-telling. Evans demands much from intellectual activists by arguing that ordinary, everyday people need truthful ideas that will assist them in their everyday lives. Such truth-telling requires talking, reason, honesty, love, courage, and care. For academics whose horizons have been narrowed to preparing for the next reappointment, promotion, and tenure committee meeting or their lecture for the huge introductory sociology class that meets at 9:00 a.m. three days a week like clockwork, this conception of truth-telling constitutes a luxury that may be reserved for only the most privileged faculty members. Who has time to talk with every student, reason with the students, give them an honest assessment of the required textbook, love them in ways that empower and not demean, show the courage to try something radically different, and express a level of basic care? Moreover,

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intellectual activists who do devote their attention to the public can pay a high price. In the United States, scholars and activists who place their education in service to their local publics are routinely passed over for cushy jobs, fat salaries, and the chance to appear on NPR. In some areas of the globe, speaking the truth to the people lands you not on cable television but under house arrest, in jail, or killed. Contemporary American intellectuals must remember that, when it comes to our ability to claim the power of ideas, we are the fortunate ones. For our parents, friends, relatives, and neighbors who lack literacy, work long hours, and/or consume seemingly endless doses of so-called reality television, the excitement of hearing new ideas that challenge social inequalities can be a rarity.

I am an intellectual whose scholarly work aspires to speak the truth to power. Yet a sizable portion of my intellectual work has also aimed to speak the truth to the people. Both forms of truth-telling are intertwined throughout my intellectual career, with my books, journal articles, and essays arrayed along a continuum with speaking the truth to power and speaking the truth to the people on either end. For example, the *Handbook of Race and Ethnic Studies* (2010) that I edited with John Solomos explicitly endeavors to speak the truth to power. As a reference work that is written for scholarly audiences, this volume aims to raise new and provocative questions that will enable scholars of race and ethnic studies to speak the truth to power in this field of study. In contrast, the focus of *Race, Class and Gender: An Anthology* (1992–2012) that I edited with Margaret Andersen aims to speak the truth to the people. Not only does this edited volume strive to advance our knowledge of race, class, and gender, it also targets undergraduate students as an important part of the public. Both works explore similar ideas, yet with very different audiences in mind.

Engaging these two forms of truth-telling within a singular work is challenging and, if skillfully achieved, may not be recognized as dual forms of truth-telling at all. For example, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (1990, 2000, 2009) is written in multiple registers, one targeted toward scholarly audiences and the other aimed at a more general readership of African American women. I faced a difficult challenge in crafting this book—how could I write a book about African American women's intellectual production that would be accepted by scholarly audiences that had long excluded and derogated this group? Conversely, how might I write a book that spoke directly to African American women that they would find truthful, yet avoid the risk of being dismissed by scholarly audiences (who controlled publishing resources)? I had to find ways to examine the everyday creativity and resistance of African American women within the constraints of an academic discourse that would not be seen by scholars as being too popular or political. I also had to consider how my arguments in *Black Feminist Thought* would be recognizable to and useful for African American women.

The response lay in sharpening my skills of translation, carefully attending to how the ideas in *Black Feminist Thought* traveled in both directions. Because the material at that time was so new and I was an unknown scholar, I knew

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that my publisher would recruit scholarly reviewers to give my manuscript a thorough assessment. Yet to shield my book from the power relations that made African American women objects of scholarly knowledge, I also developed ways of including African American women as reviewers of my material. For example, I invited a few African American women undergraduates from my University of Cincinnati Africana Studies courses to serve as readers for chapters of my manuscript. My students were bright, energetic, primarily working-class students whose childhoods in the Cincinnati metropolitan areas had provided them broad, heterogeneous networks of African American friends, neighbors, and relatives. I was not interested in my students' ability to correct my English (the copyeditor's job) or to inform me of how my book might benefit from additional citations from the top scholarly journals. Instead, I asked them to tell me what thoughts and emotions the ideas in my book raised for them. Did the ideas in *Black Feminist Thought* "ring true" for them? Could they think of examples from their own experiences that illustrated and/or contradicted the book's main ideas? As I wrote and revised my manuscript, I tried to incorporate both forms of truth-telling into this one volume.

Black Feminist Thought became an award-winning book, with a "classic" edition released in 2009. Its subject matter is certainly important to its readers, but I think that one fundamental reason for the success of *Black Feminist Thought* has been its ability to engage in dual forms of truth-telling. The format of the book enables undergraduate and entering graduate students to access the challenging concepts that they need to speak the truth to power in the academy. To assist in their translation of social theory, I chose to use theoretical language in the volume, yet I also included a glossary of terms that would encourage my readers to tackle difficult ideas. Graduate students and scholars can access more theoretical arguments about how oppressed groups can produce oppositional knowledge that assists in their survival. *Black Feminist Thought* also serves as a point of entry for readers who are interested in intersectional scholarship on race, class, gender, and sexuality. Over the years, I have come to appreciate how people apply the general arguments raised by the experiences of African American women to their own situations. Overall, *Black Feminist Thought* provides its readers with a shared space that validates what each one brings to the table, yet enables them to gain access to the knowledge of the other. It shows that, via processes of translation, it is possible to bring these two seemingly antithetical traditions of truth-telling closer together.

Content and Organization of *On Intellectual Activism*

On Intellectual Activism has two specific goals. First, drawing on my experiences with these dual forms of truth-telling, the speeches, essays, and interviews in *On Intellectual Activism* explore selected core ideas associated with intellectual activism. At its heart, this volume explores intellectual activism as a multifaceted phenomenon that links content and process, ideas and actions,

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and oppression and resistance. Here I use my own scholarship as one site for examining this construct, yet the core ideas go beyond my own experiences. The contradictions of doing this kind of work should be visible, as should its rewards.

Second, this book also introduces important themes from my own intellectual activism: (1) Black feminism and its emphasis on experiential knowing, intersecting systems of power, and the importance of social justice: (2) the sociology of knowledge and its analysis of how power relations shape knowledge of domination and resistance; (3) critical education, or the necessity of developing a more robust understanding of teaching and learning as central to all intellectual production; (4) racial politics in the United States as a way of understanding social hierarchies in general; and (5) the necessity of building self-reflexivity into intellectual activism itself. Here I include accessible discussions of topics from my scholarship from the 1980s to the present, much of it designed to speak the truth to power. Because the majority of the writings included here consist of revised versions of unpublished speeches and interviews, this book documents the trajectory of my intellectual activism, where I aimed to speak the truth to heterogeneous groups of people. By presenting ideas that were developed in large part in conversation with audiences large and small, as a volume, *On Intellectual Activism* engages in this second form of truth-telling.

On Intellectual Activism is organized into five parts that illustrate important conceptual anchors for my intellectual work. Each essay is edited to stand on its own, yet complement others in its section and in the volume overall. Although the book is best read sequentially, because the essays could also be organized in different ways, you can read them in any order.

The essays in Part I, "Black Feminism," draw on my grounding in the ideas and experiences of African American women, the group that has most preoccupied me during my scholarly career. This focus on African American women has anchored a core theme of my scholarship, namely, my longstanding project to understand oppression, a multifaceted project that has taken many forms. Two main ideas are at work here, both of which focus on social structural sources of power. First introduced in *Black Feminist Thought,* and developed throughout my scholarship, I have used the thesis of *intersectionality* and the idea of the *matrix of domination* as interrelated constructs to describe social structures of domination. Intersectional thinking suggests that race, class, gender, nation, sexuality, ethnicity, age, and other forms of social hierarchy structure one another. My goal has been to conceptualize intersectionality and study its manifestations in a matrix of domination from one social setting to the next.

The essays in Part I introduce selected important concepts where I was trying to translate ideas in conversation with different audiences. Introducing standpoint epistemology and its significance for understanding the worldviews of oppressed peoples plays a prominent part here. For example, in *Black Feminist Thought,* I introduced the idea of oppositional knowledge and argued that people's experiences within intersecting systems of race, class, and gender

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shaped their views of the world and their knowledge. In *Fighting Words* (1998), I engaged the question of how to sustain oppositional knowledge in the face of continual pressures to quit. The essays in this section also map my engagement with Black feminism as a social justice project, a concept that is reflected through my consistent attention to issues of power and politics. *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender and the New Racism* (2004) marked a more explicit shift to politics themselves, adding the additional system of sexuality to rethink gender, with an eye toward stimulating a different politics among African Americans in response to the new racism. *From Black Power to Hip Hop: Essays on Racism, Nationalism and Feminism* (2006) took this interest in politics one step further to examine nationalism and feminism as important social justice projects that affect African American women. Collectively, the essays trace themes through their earlier expression to engage the question of future directions for Black feminism itself.

The essays in Part II, "Sociology of Knowledge," stem from my position as a visible public intellectual within the field of sociology. It also describes the kind of sociology that I take into other fields as well as the kind of intellectual production that I share with the general public. "Public sociology" is a relatively recent term that describes a certain segment of sociology as a field of study, although it is not a term that I have used exclusively to describe my work until now. My approach to public sociology is to examine how it feels to do this kind of work, versus speculating about how it might be done or passing moral judgments on how it should be done. Because doing public sociology is engaging in intellectual activism, the costs and benefits attached to this kind of work become more apparent.

Not all public sociology sees itself in these terms. However, the recent rediscovery of public sociology in the United States has provided institutional support, or at least a vocabulary, for talking about issues of intellectual activism. In the current climate of academic sociology, this idea of public sociology has been elevated to a level of increased visibility that has given it some legitimacy. Public sociology speaks to the desire that many sociologists have to talk with and educate the public.

While related, public sociology and critical education are not the same. Critical education encourages people to think about the hard questions, the questions for which there may not be answers, and then helps them to become much better at crafting their own questions. Critical education constitutes another conceptual anchor of my work. The essays in Part III, "Critical Education," examine the interconnections of my use of critical pedagogy, teaching, and scholarship. On the one hand, I think of my publications as pedagogical tools—my dedication to clear prose within my writings on social theory reflects this commitment. I approach my classroom teaching experiences and public speaking engagements as oral arenas for constructing knowledge with my students and audiences. My conception of critical education is situated within this recursive relationship between scholarship and teaching—scholarship and

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teaching are both required to engage in the public conversations that accompany dual forms of truth-telling.

I see my own work as one of engaging in intellectual activism within a context of critical education, broadly defined, that in turn incorporates an expansive array of projects. School sites have been my primary location, but families, neighborhoods, religious institutions, and media are also important social locations for the kind of critical education discussed here. Fields as diverse as women's studies, Latino studies, cultural studies, American studies, subaltern studies, and postcolonial studies often have a strong critical education component at their core, a factor that distinguishes them from traditional academic disciplines. For me, the fields of Africana studies (formerly African American or Black studies), women's studies, and sociology have been my primary sites of practice within this broader framework of schooling in the United States. These three fields of study have provided me with distinctive sets of pedagogical and scholarly tools that have been significant for truth-telling.

Over the corpus of my work, I have focused on anti-racist discourse and practice that might catalyze people to think about their worlds differently and, as a result, act differently within them. My work constitutes theoretical interventions in what counts as truth about race and racism. The essays in Part IV, "Racial Politics," continue along this path by opening up space to discuss some of the most persistent questions about race in the United States, catalyzed by massive social changes of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. This is a difficult time to talk overtly about race, leaving many American citizens believing that we are living in a post-racial world. The 2008 election of Barack Obama to the American presidency has simultaneously highlighted the visibility of race and the difficulties of talking about it. In this context, terms like "family," "community," "post-racial society," and "color blindness" are invoked by thinkers on both the left and the right sides of the political spectrum, with racial subtexts carried within what appears to be a newfound unity across the historically divisive categories of race and gender. Yet what are the policies and practices attached to these terms? What conversations does the use of these terms facilitate and close off?

Recognizing the continued need for a language to conceptualize social injustice and a politics to work for social justice is an important first step in intellectual activism. Yet doing the work to breathe life into ideas requires working across differences and building communities in which dialogue is possible. The essays in Part V, "Intellectual Activism Revisited," address different components of the work of building diverse intellectual and political communities—for example, the need for a vision that will sustain the arduous practices of resisting oppression based on race, class, and gender; the need for that vision to resonate across many social locations; and the need for practices that can sustain differences of ideas.

This section addresses the need for intellectual activism to be self-reflexive. In Part V, I revisit "Toward a New Vision: Race, Class, and Gender as Cate-

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gories of Analysis and Connection," a widely reprinted speech that I initially delivered in the mid-1980s. I include the original version here because I want to see how different the essay feels to me after more than 25 years of work in this field. Keeping with the theme of self-reflexivity, I revisit the core questions and concerns of "Toward a New Vision" in "Where Do We Go from Here?" In this essay, I cast a critical eye on my original essay's promise and its unfinished potential. I also draw together ideas about Black feminism, critical education, race in U.S. society, and themes explored in *On Intellectual Activism*. This theme of self-reflexivity permeates the book, with each individual essay introduced by a short reflexive statement. This is the spirit of Part V, looking backward in order to figure out how to move forward with speaking the truth both to power and to people.

On Intellectual Activism, Truth-Telling, and the Spoken Word

My writings in *On Intellectual Activism* reflect not only the *content* of the corpus of my ideas about intellectual activism but also my choices concerning the *process* of engaging in this kind of work. In heterogeneous democratic societies, finding ways to share important ideas with diverse groups of people is a necessity. In essence, I have tried to make the main ideas of my intellectual work accessible to nontechnical, broad audiences both inside and outside academia. My goal has been academic rigor and accessibility.

I have found that my analyses of important social issues, especially if I want my ideas to be clear, are strengthened when I engage in dialogues, namely, when I speak *with* people and not *at* them. Within African American culture, the spoken word is highly valued, and as a result, Black oratorical traditions shape autobiographies, fiction, essays, and other dimensions of Black American literary traditions. Many of the most powerful African American leaders have been preachers, a field where thought and talking suggests a unique praxis. My choices have often centered on the power of the spoken word, a standpoint that I learned from African American oratorical traditions as diverse as the African American preaching style of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X, Black kids "playing the dozens" on the streets of Philadelphia, the toasts of Black popular culture, and the poetry slams and open mic nights of spoken poetry. Such traditions view voice and movement as crucial to communicating meaning, if not more important than written text. Oral traditions appreciate that knowledge is created in specific times and places, primarily by engaging with an audience that brings its own distinctive rules about what it deems credible in assessing the value of truth. For a speaker like myself, there is a difference between actually engaging an audience in a public conversation of knowledge creation and giving a convincing performance as a bona fide Black feminist scholar.

Regardless of content, in my case, Black feminism or racial politics, I see conversations with multiple publics as a foundational and necessary component

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of intellectual activism. When it comes to the spoken word, making meaning is more than just delivering words. In brief, *process* matters. Speeches and the spoken word not only report the findings of something that has already been discovered but also create knowledge in the moment of communication. Not to be confused with the performances of professional public intellectuals, the kind of engaged truth-telling I recount here can be unfinished, ragged, speculative, boring, and/or all aspects of being "in the moment" for whoever is at the podium, holds the microphone, or has the floor. If one cannot "speak the truth to the people" and listen for dissent and/or the affirming "amen" or "got that right," then how valuable are written words that remain unspoken?

African American oral traditions often are organized via a call-and-response format, one where African American members of an audience bear witness to what the person who holds the floor is saying or doing. Bearing witness is one way to be an active participant in knowledge creation. I often invoke this sensibility in my speeches. Delivering speeches is different than writing for a nameless, faceless, silent readership. Because each speech aims to make meaning *with* a particular audience, it must be crafted for that group and it evolves in the process of delivery. In the United States and abroad, I have delivered countless speeches on college campuses, at conferences, for community groups, and for corporate and civic organizations, taking with me the call-and-response ethos of African American oratorical traditions. Each situation is unique, and no two speeches, even if read from the same text, have *ever* been the same.

Public lectures, for example, are always altered not only by the demographics of the audience but also by the themes raised in question-and-answer periods and in ensuing one-on-one discussions with audience members. Even if I am the only one speaking, I am always in a public conversation with the listeners in attendance. One size does not fit all for speeches. Even the same speech reads differently for different audiences. Sometimes the audience will be highly homogeneous and, if so, I can make certain assumptions and proceed accordingly. For example, speaking to an audience of professional sociologists is markedly different than addressing an audience of Black folks at the local public library. If I know the rules, social norms, and issues of importance for each group, I adjust the content and form accordingly.

Giving speeches that draw on the spoken words ethos of Black oratorical traditions has increased my sensitivity to key elements of speaking to different groups of people. Delivering a successful speech (or writing a successful article, organizing a successful book, or having a successful classroom session, course, and/or curriculum) involves bringing four elements into balance. First, what is the *purpose* of the speech? Why give this speech at all? What is the core question/big idea that everyone in the audience shares, regardless of heterogeneity? Second, who is the intended *audience?* Who is this speech for? What are the concerns of the people in the room? Third, what specific *content* will I share in the speech? What are the main ideas of the presentation? How effectively and efficiently can I communicate these ideas with the audience? Finally, what is the

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overall *form* of the speech? How can I best explore and present the main ideas of the talk? What is the best way to get the content to the audience?

These four elements of purpose, audience, content, and form typically work together differently in an academic book that aims to speak the truth to power and in a speech as a spoken word event whose purpose is to speak the truth to the people. Each form of truth-telling requires its own distinctive balance among these four elements. When it comes to speaking the truth to power, writing for nameless, faceless readers who can pause, look up footnotes, and reflect on specific points at their convenience and on their own terms may vary from one field to the next, yet the author still controls the written text (but not its interpretation). Presenting the same ideas in person is riskier because it highlights the vulnerabilities of the speaker regarding purpose, audience, content, and form.

When it comes to speaking the truth to the people, giving an effective speech requires creating an instant community. For me, the greatest challenge has been speaking the truth to heterogeneous groups of people. Many people shy away from the task of speaking the truth to the people different from themselves, choosing instead to speak only with people who share their rules, even if the audience may disagree with the content of the talk itself. For academics, figuring out what is important to say to heterogeneous audiences not only is difficult but also typically is not valued by tenure committees and other academic gatekeepers. Academics know that the test of so-called truth is in its "telling"; yet when we present our ideas, in writing or orally, to small groups of homogeneous practitioners within our disciplines, we limit our truth-telling. We often do not speak the truth to power, but rather collude with existing power relations.

Editing my speeches and other spoken word experiences for *On Intellectual Activism* meant recording on paper ideas and arguments that typically occurred in conversation. Literal transcripts just cannot capture the meanings created in a one-time event. Here I assemble the richness of ideas gleaned from multiple conversations in a format that returns to you, as a readership, a text that I hope you can use. Some essays evolved from my handwritten notes prepared for 5- to 10-minute panel presentations and were not given as speeches at all. In contrast, other essays resulted from synthesizing multiple versions of speeches delivered for different audiences. Still others evolved as each new dialogue shaped the text. Just as I have engaged others in preparing these ideas, I strive to engage you in dialogue with this text: I introduce each essay with a brief reflexive statement describing how the essay came about and how I approached its content in that context. For selected essays, I also provide a short list of readily available additional resources.

Those of us who participate in intellectual activism must do a better job of engaging the public. How differently our ideas about families, schooling, immigration, and government would be if we presented them not just at academic conferences but also at neighborhood public libraries, to groups of college students,

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to returning students, at parent education classes, or even to our own families. In this spirit, the essays in *On Intellectual Activism* illustrate different strategies for engaging diverse publics by attending to distinctive constellations of purpose, audience, content, and form. As you read, I encourage you to pay attention not just to the thematic content but also to how I say what I say in each essay. When it comes to intellectual activism, content and process both matter.