According to Brittney Cooper, Black women have worked tirelessly to produce conscientious intellectual work as public thinkers and to strategize ways in which they could physically construct a space where their intellect could be used to advance the Black race. Yet, the efforts of these race women—the first Black women intellectuals—have been long overlooked as a source of understanding the Black experience as a tool of Black liberation. These efforts, Cooper warns, are not to be confused with the politics of respectability or the culture of dissemblance. Instead, *Beyond Respectability* introduces the concept of *embodied discourse*, which examines the experiences and theoretical framing of race women through the authorial lens of the activist Anna Julia Cooper (1858–1964). Opposite the paradigmatic culture of dissemblance and the politics of respectability, which were employed by Black women to maneuver unwelcoming social spaces by appearing socially acceptable, *embodied discourse* positions Black female bodies within “the texts they write and speak” (3). In doing so, embodied discourse goes further than previous studies by centering the experiences of Black female embodiment to invoke racial progress. This idea is manifested through a dual concept: *intellectual genealogy* of ideas produced by race women, and an *intellectual geography* of the deliberate locations in which these women entered the public sphere.

To begin, Cooper introduces the role of the National Association for Colored Women (NACW) as a beginning point for Black women’s intellectual work. As a Black women’s club, it held key preeminence in the Black liberation movement. Founded in 1896, the NACW was an organization that empowered Black women to refine their intellectual leadership, ultimately allowing them to contribute to their community. Thus, Cooper’s work illustrates how understudied Black women advocated for the right to “do intellectual work in public space,” where the NACW proves invaluable to a project of Black intellectual thought (14).

The first chapter, “Organized Anxiety: The National Organization for Colored Women and the Create of the Black Public Sphere,” opens with the narrative of the NACW as the intellectual foundation for race women, Fannie Barrier Williams and Mary Church Terrell. Cooper argues that W.E.B. DuBois held a gendered bias toward the work of the NACW. Following the NACW’s biennial convention in 1899, he complimented the women’s physical beauty and their work with families, yet did not contend with their intellectual labor. Fannie Barrier Williams, at the turn of the century, sought to recuperate women’s intellectual labor by refuting DuBois’s narrative through a series of essays and speeches. Williams’s writing depicted early movements diminishing the value of Black women as intellectuals, even as they supported White women and Black men as
leaders. Black women’s concern about their social status, Cooper writes, produced an “organized anxiety” born out of their subjugation to forms of physical and mental violence. Their responses to issues became public, disregarding the social norm that viewed Black women’s feelings as a private matter. Here, a relationship between dialogue and the physical body emerged. Opposed to following politics of respectability, Williams lead the NACW to transform the public discourse of Black women, with Mary Church Terrell as the first president of the NACW.

In the next chapter, readers are given insight into the life of Mary Church Terrell, a race woman who termed the phrase “dignified agitation” (56). Cooper reveals Terrell’s development of Black women’s agitation for political rights and warnings concerning respectability politics. Terrell’s inability to fully inform readers of her depression, private discouragement, and public discord whilst working as an activist conceptualizes the narrative of using particular language to appear more socially acceptable and respectable. Since Black women were not afforded the opportunity to publish scholarly works theorizing social issues, Cooper cites Terrell’s autobiography as a narrative of dignified agitation to get her readers to understand how race and gender overlap to disregard the intellectual thought of Black women. In this way, Terrell redirects her peers to see her as a dignified intellectual and how she acted as the bridge between historical and modern Black feminist that presages Pauli Murray as a race woman with a unique outlook to social justice.

Murray’s work as a Black, queer, intellectual Black feminist was unprecedented at her time. Her struggle began when she first believed she was intersex, which would be later defined by a nonbinary gender identity. Murray developed her own sense of embodied discourse by disregarding the physiological inconsistencies associated with being a queer-identified woman and leading racial opportunities for other women with the same inequalities. Cooper dissects Murray’s intricate use of legal training to pave the way for a reframing of the politics of respectability as it controls Black women. Doreen Drury’s dissertation and article on Murray form the basis of Cooper’s argument, which expands Drury’s outlook on Murray’s conceptualization of race, gender, and sexual politics to include Murray as a Black feminist theorist who was before her time in her studies and activism of Black, queer leadership. Cooper recounts Murray’s experiences of discrimination and explores her embrace of her identity whilst incorporating the journey to understand all facets of her intersectional identity. From there, Cooper reassesses Murray’s Proud Shoes and other scholarly works to understand her theoretical growth as “Jane Crow” and opposition to the respectability politics of the transition from Civil Rights to the Black Power era.

Following the growing intellectual ferment of Black women, Cooper brings attention to the misogynist critiques that suggested that these race women stay in their place. Many argued that the crisis of the Black intellectuals necessitated pinning men against women, reasserting the traditional dominance of men in society. However, Cooper shows that race women in politics, such as Anna Arnold Hedgeman, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Shirley Chisholm, resisted the notion that Black
women were not proficient in handling their own social standings. Still, a misogynist view contended that Black womanhood depended on the success of Black manhood. This concept misconstrued the roles of men and women in the Black family. Cooper cites Toni Cade Bambara, Toni Morrison, and Alice Walker, among others, as restoring the legacies of race women. This role extends into preserving and revisiting the origins of Black intellectual thought.

Beyond Respectability forcefully argues that race women and their intellectual contributions to society need to be taken seriously and viewed beyond the scopes of the culture of dissemblance and politics of respectability. Cooper, who was recently awarded the Merle Curti Intellectual History Award by the Organization of American Historians, creates a genealogy of race women and brings to light their contributions to Black women’s intellectual thought. Race women advocated for recognition of Black woman’s experience to which Cooper unfolds their centrality to early and modern discourse on race politics. She urges readers not only to frame race women as intellectual scholars, but to dig further into the content of their work to examine how they reframe the dialogue of Black women as capable of producing quality theorists, who strategically stationed themselves at the forefront of major political movement in the United States.

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Rhodes Must Fall: The Struggle to Decolonise the Racist Heart of Empire, edited by R. Chantiluke, B. Kwoba, and A. Nkopo. London: Zed Books, 2018. $14.95, paperback. 184 pages.

Reviewed by Tovio Asheeke

At the nadir of explosive Black-led university and high school student protests, the editors of Rhodes Must Fall: The Struggle to Decolonise the Racist Heart of Empire have delivered a timely text. Divided into three parts, the volume is a compilation of various perspectives of different Black radical activists and academics, like the editors themselves, who in the UK, South Africa, the United States, and across the world took part in decolonization struggles in universities and colleges. Importantly, Rhodes Must Fall sketches the global reverberations of the University of Cape Town (UCT)–led movement where Black students demanded the removal of the Cecil Rhodes statue and a complete decolonization of the entire university structure. This