

Ange-Marie Hancock
Intersectionality: An Intellectual History
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Jennifer C. Nash (George Washington University)

Jennifer C. Nash is an assistant professor of American studies and women's studies at George Washington University. She is the author of *The Black Body in Ecstasy: Reading Race, Reading Pornography* (Duke University Press, 2014) and journal articles in *GLQ*, *Social Text*, *Feminist Theory*, and *Feminist Studies*. She is currently completing a manuscript entitled "Black Feminism Remixed."

Ange-Marie Hancock's *Intersectionality: An Intellectual History* weighs in on a set of debates in feminist theory that I have termed the "intersectionality wars": intensifying battles over intersectionality's histories, genealogies, meanings, and circulations (Nash forthcoming). Hancock's book begins by considering intersectionality's complex and often contentious citational trajectories, and asks "How do intersectionality scholars find a middle ground between an impossible conceptualization of intersectionality as intellectual property, and a destructive conceptualization of intersectionality as meme, which shape-shifts so much as to no longer be recognizable as anything other than a meme gone viral?" (17). Her queries gesture to how much ground intersectionality is asked to cover: it is "meme," "intellectual property," theory, analytic, method, politics, and activist strategy. It is taken up as the totality of black feminist intellectual production, and also cited apart from both black feminism and women of color feminism. It has different meanings and uses across the humanities and social sciences, and is genealogically tethered to different scholars depending on the field in which it is invoked. In other words, intersectionality is saddled with a wide array of political promise and hope (and paradoxically, as I have argued elsewhere, a sense of being politically passé), becoming a dense site of what Robyn Wiegman has termed feminists' "political desires" (Wiegman 2012, 4).

Hancock identifies two ways that intersectionality is frequently mobilized: as "an inclusionary project designed to remedy specific instances of intersectional stigma or invisibility" (34) and as "an analytical project designed to reshape how categories of difference are conceptually related to each other" (34). As her book unfolds, it is clear that Hancock wants to shift scholarship away from the visibility project that is, she argues, the one that "has long received most of the attention among scholars engaging with intersectionality" (200), and instead to value and validate the second project, intersectionality's capacity to radically reconceptualize the relationship among categories of so-called difference. This investment is in line with her earlier work on intersectionality, which sought to untether intersectionality from its narrow association with prominent feminists of color, such as Kimberlé Crenshaw and Patricia Hill Collins, and develop the analytic beyond what she termed "the noble" pursuit of studying their work (Hancock 2007, 251).

Hancock celebrates intersectionality's approach to difference, and she is also invested in advancing a new way of engaging with the analytic: *stewardship*. Stewardship invites scholars to ask: How do we care for intersectionality? How do we use it in ethical ways? How do we preserve intersectional theory and methods for future generations of feminist scholars and activists? As she notes, the aim of stewardship is to "produc[e] projects that hopefully leave intersectionality scholars better equipped to engage in knowledge production projects in intersectionality studies" (23).

For Hancock, a practice of stewardship requires (at least) three commitments: first, it demands an interdisciplinary intellectual imagination. Hancock performs her investment in interdisciplinarity by drawing on scholarship from ten disciplines, including American studies, English, philosophy, political science, and sociology, and her book ends with a call for other scholars to "read, read, read across disciplines, across continents, and across communities of engagement so that we might engage in careful and responsible management of a burgeoning field of study that has been entrusted to our care for future generations" (201). Second, stewardship demands an attention to intersectionality's "global reach" (26) and distinctive local practices. Hancock's approach asks scholars to recognize the panoply of forms intersectional theory and practice take, and the variations in these forms according to place, space, and historical moment.

Finally, stewardship necessitates a rigorous attention to intersectionality's histories. Hancock is clear that her account of intersectionality's history is *an* account and not *the* account, but it is also apparent that there are general principles undergirding her historical project that she seeks to advance. Indeed, the book emphasizes intersectionality's long "historical arc" (24), moving beyond Crenshaw's and Collins's centrality to intersectional genealogies to consider Maria Stewart, Sojourner Truth, Gloria Anzaldúa, the Combahee River Collective, and other intersectional scholar-activists. If historicization expands our conceptions of who intersectionality's key practitioners are, it also expands what intellectual and political labor is considered intersectional. Hancock's work attends to "intersectionality-like thought" (24), intellectual and activist work grappling with the interconnectedness, complexity, and contingency of difference, and includes that work in the account of intersectionality's histories. Historicization, then, becomes a strategy for revealing intersectionality's multiple reaches and uses, and, as is revealed in the book's final chapter, a tool for rescuing intersectionality from debates about whether it remains useful and necessary.

The book's second chapter, "The Activist Roots of Intersectionality," takes a look at the long roots of intersectionality, revealing the "multiple and overlapping movements to end violence against women" and their mobilizations of intersectional logics, with a particular focus on global feminist efforts to combat violence against women. Her examination of the intersectional work of a variety of activists demonstrates that "several key figures in the late twentieth century . . . [placed emphasis on] complex understandings of visibility and invisibility, along with complex categorical relationships" (70). In other words, Hancock again underscores the long life of intersectional practice invested in theorizing difference's complexity.

"The Multicultural Epistemology of Intersectionality," the book's third chapter, examines the linkages and divergences among concepts like standpoint epistemology, multicultural feminism, and intersectionality to highlight a "diverse set of intersectionality-like theoretical arguments" (73). Placing these concepts into conversation suggests the multiple avenues that feminists might traverse as we act as "stewards" of intersectionality. For example, Hancock celebrates Anzaldúa's work on "foster[ing] and preserv[ing] a deep trust of oneself, one's connection to knowledge, and the worthiness of that knowledge in the face of devaluation" (122), and suggests that intersectionality theory might embrace that same project of self-making.

In "Bridges, Interstices, and Intersections," Hancock examines the variety of metaphors that have marked women of color feminist scholarship on the experiential and the identitarian. Hancock is particularly invested in historically tracing a split that she argues emerged in the late 1980s and 1990s between "feminist thought's focus on the significance and implications of different experiences (a deconstructive register)" and intersectionality's investment in "the aftermath of such diverse experiences (a reconstructive register)" (127).

The book's fifth chapter, "We Are Named by Others and We Are Named by Ourselves," examines the historical connections between intersectionality and social constructivism, and allows Hancock to argue that "intersectionality-like thinking about how power is relationally constituted predates and anticipates Michel Foucault's well-known arguments about power" (164). In so doing, Hancock reveals the importance and power of her historical work; rather than presuming that the analytic was born with Crenshaw or Collins, and is thus indebted to postmodern theory, she suggests that postmodern theory is actually indebted to intersectionality's insights. The book's conclusion, "Whither Intersectionality?" attempts to save intersectionality from critique, especially the critique that the analytic is exclusive or neglects certain intersections (namely religion and disability), by again suggesting that its power is its attention to difference's complexity and relationality.

Hancock's provocative work left me with a number of questions. First, and most broadly, why is there an ongoing preoccupation with doing intersectionality correctly? In other words, can we engage in historicization, as Hancock advocates, without presuming that there is a correct (or "ethical") way to do intersectional work, without presuming that a retrospective gaze can reveal the appropriate way to do intersectional work? And how do we understand our field's ongoing desire to locate correct intersectional practices and to isolate problematic usages of the analytic? Stewardship is a promising way of engaging intersectionality, but it suggests that intersectionality can be deployed in "ethical" ways (and, necessarily implies the converse: that intersectionality can be deployed unethically). But how do we determine ethical usage of an analytic? And what are the exertions of territoriality and defensiveness that even the idea of "ethical usage" can produce? In other words, it seems to me that the idea of an ethical intersectional practice presumes a correct way to do intersectional work, rather than disrupting the idea that the analytic

moves, changes, and morphs. Indeed, part of intersectionality's power, I would argue, is that it has been particularly and peculiarly able to travel and transform.

Second, I am interested in the idea of historicization as a critical practice, and wish the book had engaged more with the utility of a historical approach. Although I appreciated Hancock's efforts to create a vast archive of intersectionality through a consideration of multiple disciplinary perspectives and "intersectionality-like" thought, I found myself wondering why historicization is crucial for intersectional stewardship. How is a historical perspective particularly useful for enabling "ethical" usage of intersectionality? And if we embrace the practice of historicization, how do we determine what intersectionality's archives are? My own queries about historicization's particular value for intersectionality suggest that the book might not fully demonstrate the importance of the labor it engages in: making the case for how and why stewardship demands a historical vantage point.

Finally, although Hancock importantly underscores intersectionality's "global reach," I found myself wishing the book more rigorously considered intersectionality's institutionalization and its impact on the analytic's global travels. In other words, to what extent have intersectionality's global movements been made possible by an account of the narrative's history that links it to US feminism (and to US academic feminism)? Given the continued centrality of US feminism to women's studies, it is worth considering how intersectionality's movements across borders has been made possible by the dominance of US women's studies programs and departments in global conversations about feminist theory and practice.

Despite these questions, *Intersectionality: An Intellectual History* proves a valuable contribution to feminist scholarship on intersectionality's many lives. Not only does the book reveal the importance of historical approaches to intersectionality, it also develops the rich concept of stewardship that provides a vocabulary for considering mindful, ethical deployments of intersectionality that ensure the analytic's future vitality.

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