Rupturing tradition: Theorizing Black women’s place in the discipline through the disruptive rhetoric of sanctuary

Celnisha Leta Dangerfield

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RUPTURING TRADITION: THEORIZING BLACK WOMEN’S PLACE IN THE DISCIPLINE THROUGH THE DISRUPTIVE RHETORIC OF SANCTUARY

by

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Communication Studies

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Dedication

Daddy, thank you for raising me well.

I know you’re watching. I just hope I make you proud.

I look forward to the day when I get another one of your bear hugs.

You’re missed every day.

I love you!

Signed,
A Proud Daddy’s Girl 💖
Acknowledgments

This is the dissertation I could not write as a newly minted M.A. student. I had to live a little to understand the peace of sanctuary and the grief of living without sanctuary. Thanking all of the people who covered me while I learned the lessons of sanctuary is impossible. However, there are a few key figures I simply must honor.

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Abstract

Black women need refuge from physical, mental, emotional and rhetorical violence. However, refuge that does not foster liberation can never offer the full protection of sanctuary. Black women uniquely understand that the only way to ensure full access to sanctuary is by circumventing place. Yet, people and scholarly disciplines overlook their valuable, experiential awareness of place. This dissertation takes an intersectional approach to place by analyzing Black women’s contributions to the rich rhetorical tradition.

When we look to the past for guidance, it is easy to see Black women’s struggles are not bound by place or time. An analysis of rhetorical artifacts from formerly enslaved, Black women of the 19th century helps us recover, recenter, and reimagine Black women’s complex relationship with place. Black women’s texts teach us that accessing sanctuary means rupturing tradition and rupturing theory that does not speak to their experiences with place. This rupture (or rather disruption) ushers in place’s decolonization. I interrogate the work of Anna Julia Cooper, Sojourner Truth and Hannah Crafts to uncover the ways voice, visual texts, and writing function as rhetorical gateways to sanctuary. An analysis of texts by these Black feminist matriarchs helps us identify the rhetoric of sanctuary borne out of an intersectional, decolonized approach to place.
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Index
Chapter One

Seeking Sanctuary

The book, Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America, captures the violence of a twisted, American pastime (J. Allen, 2000). The text assembles haunting images from postcards and memorabilia with narratives contextualizing the photographic record of lynching across the United States. The text also testifies of mob brutality, the interest in spectacle and the proud memorialization of acts of violence for posterity. Ore (2019) suggests, lynching materially and rhetorically reinforces “an ideological belief regarding black inferiority, white superiority and the need to keep blacks in their racially prescribed place” (p. 16). Allen’s recovery work captures the persistence of place in the discourse of sanctuary, and yet, there are two notable absences in this text.

First, the searing records of human cruelty in Without Sanctuary ask us to contemplate the victims’ loss of sanctuary at their time of death. In some instances, notes accompanying the images contextualize the events immediately preceding the lynchings (J. Allen, 2000, pp. 165–205). There is no discussion of the lives lived without sanctuary long before succumbing to final acts of brutality. Second, we know early lynchings were not limited by racial or gendered lines (J. Allen, 2000; E. J. Ore, 2019). However, Without Sanctuary's uneven photographic record focuses our attention largely on the lynchings of Black men. The result of this civic and rhetorical turn is the inadvertent centering on the absence of sanctuary for Black men. The problem is not that Black men’s struggle is presented as more important than another group’s struggle. Instead, the problem is that even in the record of historical violence, some experiences are minimized, erased, or couched within the plight of another group. The discourse of sanctuary is bigger than lynching memorabilia and much broader than the plight of Black men. There is
room for a broader discussion about the absence of sanctuary. There is also room for texts that do more than leave victims without sanctuary and viewers without hope. Black women are one group whose rhetoric testifies of their experiences living without sanctuary historically and contemporarily.

Black women’s rhetoric about their creation of sanctuary deserves equal attention to any other group. Instead of waiting on protection from others or relying on another’s rhetoric, Black women use their own rhetoric in the creation of sanctuary. Many of these women actively press against the gatekeepers and systems intent on their oppression, erasure and negation. Simply put, Black women participate in a lifelong search for sanctuary. Their search is only satisfied when they push past the barriers designed to keep them in place. Their push may take a nontraditional turn but acts of radicality often inspire much-needed change. Left to navigate place amid incessant rupture, Black women often demonstrate their agency by disrupting traditional readings of place. This dissertation examines the ways Black women use their experiential understanding of place to rhetorically redefine place and create access to sanctuary. This work ultimately interrogates Black women’s strategies for remapping place and surviving when left without sanctuary.

**Justification and Rationale: The Need for a New Place**

Vulnerable Black women need the protection of sanctuary. Data points from multiple domains attest to Black women’s vulnerability and affirm the necessity of sanctuary. For instance, there is a greater likelihood Black women will go missing, die of curable diseases or die in labor and delivery (Chinn et al., 2021; DeSantis et al., 2019; Hamm et al., 2022; Lindsey, 2020; McCarthy et al., 2015; *Missing Persons Statistics 2021, 2023*; Patton & Ward, 2016; Petersen et al., 2019; J. K. Taylor, 2020). One might easily overlook tragic outcomes from poor,
underdeveloped nations struggling to protect their most vulnerable citizens. Yet, the limited protections for Black women extend to prosperous nations like the United States as well.

Assuredly, Black women’s experiences with inequality in the United States are not new. There is a long history of people and systems determining where members of this marginalized community can live and work. Locational limits influence social and economic mobility. The same influencers are intent on controlling aspects of Black women’s existence from motherhood to the ways the same women adorn their bodies and carry themselves in the world. Because their vulnerabilities are complicated by the people and systems intent on maintaining their oppression, generations of Black women live and die without the right to dwell safely and authentically in places of their choosing. The experiences of Black women demonstrate there is a real need for sanctuary. Not only is there a need for sanctuary, but without intervention, Black women are actively pushed back into (a traditional reading of) place. The only way to get beyond the pernicious cycle of place keeping Black women from sanctuary is rupturing the exhausting imposition of place. Black women play an active role in rupturing tradition. Many of these women repurpose rupture by carving out a place of their own. Ladner (1971) argues that instead of the Black woman resigning herself “to her fate, she has always sought creative solutions to her problems. The ability to utilize her existing resources and yet maintain a forthright determination to struggle against the racist society in whatever overt and subtle ways necessary is one of her major attributes” (pp. 276–277).

Black women’s path to sanctuary requires navigating a legacy of place that is fraught with social and political landmines. The journey past traditionally imposed limits of place begins when we garner a better understanding of place as an impediment to sanctuary. In the next
section, I address four common ways a traditional reading of place impedes a culturally mindful understanding of sanctuary.

First, a singular understanding or reading of place overlooks reality. Place is never *just* place—particularly for those with intersectional identities. Place invokes location, identity hierarchy and memory (Dickinson et al., 2010; Moss, 2020; Wilson, 2002). However, those from historically oppressed groups are never subject to these singular readings of place. For this reason, for example, place is never location alone. Under White, Western, patriarchal applications, place always implies ordering across interpretations. This is the imposition of place.

Failure to investigate the real and perceived impact of unaddressed ordering overlooks the reality that a supposed place of sanctuary is inherently tainted by the imposition of place. Further, if the imposition of place remains, hope of accessing sanctuary is thwarted. Frederick Douglass captures this twisted compact when he protests the enslaved person's unethical conundrum: Either the enslaved person escapes and remains under the constant threat that an enslaver will remand them to captivity, or the enslaved person accepts his bondage and concedes to his oppressor. Douglass continues “Wherever I go, under the aegis of your liberty, there I’m a slave” (2013, p. 7). I contend the same underlying system of oppression presenting the incomprehensible choice of remaining confined to the plantation or forever running from an enslaver is alive and currently obstructing the Black woman’s advancement. We are brought to the unfortunate realization that in the search for sanctuary 1) tools of enslavement are not limited to certain historical periods and 2) the restrictive impact of those tools is amplified many times over for those with intersectional identities. The imposition of place is the tool that makes sanctuary elusive.
Second, we must operate under the assumption that sanctuary cannot exist in its highest form alongside an a priori assignment of place. When others define or assign place, this placement squelches the very nature of sanctuary and the hope of freedom. Once again, I return to Douglass who explains:

People in general will say that they like colored men as well as any other, but in their proper place! They assign us that place; they don’t let us do it for ourselves, nor will they allow us a voice in the decision. They will not allow that we have a head to think, and a heart to feel, and a soul to aspire…You degrade us, and then ask why we are degraded—you shut our mouths, and then ask why we don’t speak—you close our colleges and seminaries against us, and then ask why we don’t know more” (2013, p. 12).

With this rebuttal, Douglass establishes a direct link between reinforced power differentials stemming from the continuous assertion of place and the physical or financial ruin of the oppressed’s sites of sanctuary. In this case, Douglass calls out the ways the colleges and seminaries to which Black people often turned for refuge are shuttered. Douglass’ words are a reminder that for Black people, the fear of being placed and (re)placed back under another's control is always there. The realities of placement are amplified many times over for Black women whose intersectional identities leave them exceptionally vulnerable.

To get to a rendering of sanctuary that meets the needs of the marginalized, we must reject White, Western, patriarchal readings of place. Reimagining or reinventing place requires a detachment from its default reading as White, Western, and patriarchal. Without intentional reframing, the instantiation of place under the creation and control of another limits unobstructed access to sanctuary. A partial or tainted encounter with sanctuary remind us of the tentative nature of sanctuary. Further, any place offered to the oppressed that simply (re)presents White,
Western, patriarchal readings of place is never really sanctuary. Ultimately, place must be reinvented if there is any hope of it operating for the benefit of historically marginalized people.

Third, contesting a purportedly universal reading of place is imperative. Indeed, the very fact that some people are identified as members of a marginalized community signals experiences with place and sanctuary are anything but universal. Tuck & McKenzie call attention to particular experiences with place by suggesting, “factors such as gender, racialization, nationality, or access to financial or technological resources affect people’s access to, mobility across, and experiences of place” (2014, p. 30). Relationships with place are complicated further for those people who identify with more than one oppressed group (Collins, 2015; Crenshaw, 1991; Soto Vega & Chávez, 2018). The imposition of place on those from historically oppressed communities negates their agency, voice and humanity. As a result, the oppressed’s experiences with place under a hegemonic system means an outsider’s offer of sanctuary is nothing more than feigned benevolence that keeps the marginalized at the margins and indebted to their oppressor. Because place is primarily read through a White, Eurocentric, patriarchal lens, oppositional readings of place and sanctuary are necessary. Anything less than an undoing of a closed reading of place means accepting the reification of oppressive systems that also prohibit liberation.

Finally, when the points above are considered holistically, it is a logical conclusion that Black women must act. Getting to sanctuary for Black women means doing more than simply navigating the pitfalls of place as rhetorical agents. The pitfalls are so onerous that the only way to truly navigate place is by carving out new pathways beyond the constraining legacy of place. The rhetorical pathways to sanctuary at the center of this project of recovery and resistance testify of Black women’s resilience.
Honoring Black women’s search for sanctuary means taking time to thoughtfully consider the aspects shaping this area of study. Acknowledging the muted voices that are yet speaking begins with operationalizing some of the key concepts central to the discussion of Black women’s sanctuary. Next, I review the relevant literature addressing rhetoric’s critical turn, Black women’s place in the rhetorical tradition. Then, I carefully examine the literature that informs our understanding of place and sanctuary. Within the literature of place and sanctuary, I address the problems and possibilities of place, as well as the sacred and secular readings of sanctuary. After reviewing relevant literature, I outline my research questions and my plan for answering those questions. I conclude with a summary of the subsequent chapters. Taken together, these essential elements help build a case for the sanctuary Black women created when others could not (or would not) create it for her.

**Defining Elements: Operationalizing Sanctuary’s Core Concepts**

This discussion of Black women’s search for sanctuary combines several concepts applicable across academic and functional domains. We cannot condense sanctuary’s core concepts to metaphors because such a move diminishes the arguments of this project. Metaphor reduces Black women’s experiences to something within another’s frame of reference just so that a person unfamiliar with their plight can find a way to subjugate Black women’s experiential knowledge. Moreover, reducing language to metaphor to maintain a position of authority completely dismisses the underlying premise of this work. It is nonsensical to decry blanket applications across people and texts only to revert to a passive posture that privileges someone else’s characterization of sanctuary’s defining elements. Thus, in the spirit of Booth (1978) and Leff (de Velasco et al., 2016; Hyra et al., 2017; Leff, 1983), I challenge an overreliance on metaphor. However, I challenge this approach from an alternative position. That is, I
operationalize concepts here as an assertion of Black women’s place in the study of rhetoric. As a strategy for ensuring the right expression of their epistemological and ontological imprint, I honor the voices and unique perspectives of the Black women at the center of this project. The elements just described shape the ways I define 1.) place, 2.) sanctuary and 3.) rupture in the following sections.

First, place is commonly used in rhetoric in ways that signal its closure and its disciplinary disregard for marginalized people. This closed understanding of place requires rupture (or rather disrupture). To be clear, a challenge to a singular vision of place is not a request for a singular definition of place. This work accepts that place’s use across rhetorical subdisciplines ranges from the understanding of place as a location, identity, hierarchy, memory or community (Asante, 2007; P. G. Davis, 2016; Dickinson et al., 2010; Moss, 2020; Wilson, 2002). Rather than viewing place in this work as an alternative to the standing readings of place, this work considers a much-needed expansion to this broad tent of meaning. In other words, place is used throughout this text in ways consistent with its use across the works noted above. However, this work seeks to intentionally complicate place by considering the ways readings of place intersect in the lives and experiences of those marked by intersectionality. I use the imposition of place throughout this text to call attention to the fact that traditional readings of place do not acknowledge the ways Whiteness, patriarchy and colonization are embedded directly into the language of place. As a result of this failed acknowledgment, mere use of the term place rhetorically reinscribes the historical uses of the term each time the concept is enacted. A regard for those for whom intersectionality is more than a politically expedient concept necessitates an acknowledgment of the ways the readings of place intersect. This present study goes beyond acknowledgment, however. It also highlights the modes of resistance
deployed to undermine the way place places. I discuss the imposition of place here as a way of capturing place’s role as more than a descriptive concept. Describing an act as the imposition of place acknowledges that place is also a rhetorical act that does the work of keeping the oppressed at the margins. Calling out the imposition of place is the first step in fixing the hidden work that happens each time the concept is used without regard for the ways historically oppressed people fit into the narrative. In other words, each time place is discussed without regard for the marginalized, place is doing the work of continuously placing the marginalized at the margins, reifying their subordinate position, and ensuring sanctuary is out of reach.

The second concept warranting explanation here is the concept of sanctuary. Addressing sanctuary in a secondary position may initially suggest a disregard for the concept’s importance to this discussion. However, without place’s operationalization, it is difficult to understand the argument that there is no concept of sanctuary for the oppressed as long as there is a limited understanding of the ways place is imposed onto people and their circumstances. Beyond this point of clarification, sanctuary broadly refers to a place of refuge or retreat. However, the assumption that sanctuary is experienced by all in the same way is a reductive proposition. An ostensible place of sanctuary cannot perform its liberative function as long as it merely reproduces the same power structures one hopes to escape. A generalized understanding of sanctuary is largely attributed to its association with metaphor. Considering the argument already launched against relying on an understanding of sanctuary as metaphor, I take this opportunity to expound on a particularized understanding of sanctuary to get to a more inclusive depiction of Black women’s sanctuary.

I am moved strongly by Hicks’ comprehensive definition of sanctuary. He acknowledges that the concept transcends a physical construction to also include experiences:
You can call sanctuary anything…what you call it is not as important as what you experience…If sanctuary is only a place, however, the place may disappear. If sanctuary is only a building, the building may decay and disappear with time. If sanctuary is merely a ‘church,’ church may not always be [sic] what I need. It is this and more (J. M. Johnson, 2006, p. 157).

Hicks continues noting that sanctuary is:

“…where my soul finds peace, where my soul connects to its Savior, where my spirit finds contentment, where my heart is at rest, where the pains and sorrows of this world disappear if only for a moment” (J. M. Johnson, 2006, p. 157).

Though this thick description is rich with color and meaning, it is undeniable that Hicks’ identity as a Black man and preacher shapes his reading of sanctuary. The realization that sanctuary’s rhetorical symbolism is rooted in religious tradition comes through in his description. However, Hicks greatest gift may be his insight into the ways positionality likely shapes Black women’s experiences with sanctuary as well.

Within this project, I present sanctuary as a contested place or experience born out of the pregnant potentiality of hope. Sanctuary is a site of protection, security, and freedom that rejects the imposition of place and fully accepts and affirms the humanity of those who dwell within its borders. While the search for sanctuary is aspirational, sanctuary itself cannot be aspirational. That is, freedom hoped for is not the same as freedom realized. Within this framing, the rhetoric of sanctuary is the Black woman’s decolonized pushback on the imposition of place.

The last concept requiring further explication at the outset of this project is the concept of rupture. Indeed, rupture is not a construct confined to the field of rhetoric. In most cases though, the idea of rupture is presented universally as discontinuity—or a break, interruption or shift in
time, behavior, and/or systems (Foucault, 2012). Rupture ends harmony and disrupts equilibrium. However, I suggest that rupture has two distinct, but related expressions: Rupture operates as both the catalyst and the response. For Black women then, rupture speaks to collective disturbances attributed to aspects of racial and gendered identities. Just as easily, rupture speaks to individual disruptions that also prompt breaks in time, behavior and systems. Moreover, the response to collective and individual interruptions also represents rupture (or more accurately, disrupture). Thus, while colonization of land, people, language and systems all speak to consequential acts of rupture, decolonization exemplifies a defiant position that rails against falling into place. With this establishment of the primary concepts of place, sanctuary and rupture, I move to explore literature that taps into these central concepts.

**Literature Review**

The rhetorical tradition dates to the 5th century B.C. While this discipline is rich with concepts that stand the test of time, there are elements that invite challenge. This project’s focus on the rhetorical strategies Black women use in their search for sanctuary makes this project a challenge to a discipline that has historically failed at fairly representing all interests (Chavez, 2015; Flores, 2018; Wanzer-Serrano, 2019). Moving forward with a study of place that honors the past while looking forward to a decolonized future begins with critiquing the current state of the discipline. In this section of the project, I course through relevant literature linking Black women’s search for sanctuary back to the rhetorical tradition that rarely claims them as rhetors and less often as rhetoricians (O. I. Davis, 1998; Houston & Davis, 2002). First, I identify some actors in the rhetorical tradition who finally recognized the problems of the discipline’s exclusivity. Next, I address the ways Black women reject their exclusion from a tradition privileging Whiteness and patriarchy from the discipline’s earliest days. I follow the disciplinary-
specific discussions of rhetoric with a cross-disciplinary discussion of place and sanctuary. I conclude this discussion of the discipline’s critical turn, Black women’s contributions to the discipline and the literature on place and sanctuary by articulating the ways this research shapes the mission of this current study.

The Issue with Rhetoric

The far-reaching impact of the rhetorical tradition is undeniable. Yet, there are voids in the broader tradition that carry over to the study of place. A closed worldview creates these voids. However, we are called to remember Foss’ (2017) assertion that, “Theory is a tentative answer to a question we pose as we seek to understand the world” (p. 7, emphasis added). In the rhetorical tradition, the answer remains tentative, in part, because we do not listen to the voices telling us our knowledge is incomplete.

There are recognizable attempts at expanding our knowledge of who and what makes up the rhetorical tradition. These attempts at expansion are often responses to direct and indirect calls for greater inclusion of historically marginalized voices in the discipline (Baugh-Harris & Wanzer-Serrano, 2018; B. Calafell, 2010; Campbell, 1989, 2010; Chavez, 2015; Flores, 2016, 2018; Johnson, 2021; Wanzer-Serrano, 2019). However, the persisting voids testify that we continually read place, for instance, as if the answers to our research questions are complete. As McKerrow notes, “If we are to escape from the trivializing influence of universalist approaches, the task is not to rehabilitate rhetoric, but to announce it in terms of a critical practice” (2017, p. 82) Indeed, a grossly negligent, problematic loop of theoretical omission necessitates a critical approach.

To get to substantive change, we must employ a critical rhetoric that “seeks to unmask or demystify the discourse of power” (p. 82). McKerrow goes on to highlight the ways we come to
“understand the integration of power/knowledge in society—[that is,] what possibilities for change the integration invites or inhibits and what intervention strategies might be considered appropriate to effect social change” (McKerrow, 2017, p. 82) When we take a critical approach, the background of the person theorizing, the subject analyzed, the one applying the theory and the vast number of articulations between these elements make their far-reaching impact on theory as apparent as theory’s far-reaching impact on everything else. In the remainder of this section, I outline the factors creating theoretical and disciplinary voids for Black women connected to the study of place. I use the discussion of voids to argue for a more intentional reading of sanctuary as an extension of place, especially for those historically placed by their intersectional identities.

There are scholars instigating a shift in a discipline that is wildly resistant to change. Researchers who question the discipline’s slow acceptance of diverging voices and critical perspectives usher in an analytical shift. For example, McKerrow calls for a “critical rhetoric” that “examines the dimensions of domination and freedom” (2017, p. 82). Charland adds to McKerrow’s argument when he notes “the emancipatory interest…would be well served by opening to the new critical discourses within communication studies” (1990, p. 263). We witness a pointed critical turn with Campbell’s challenge to women’s erasure from the rhetorical tradition. Using texts like, *Man Cannot Speak for Her* (1989) and *Inventing Women: From Amaterasu to Virginia Woolf* (1989), Campbell works to ensure women’s voices are a part of the rhetorical record. Cloud (2014) also advocates for the cause of the marginalized as she explains the impetus for her work: “We write for the underdog when we produce criticism that explains inequality, raises critical consciousness, and demonstrates how ordinary people have used rhetoric to assert their own interests and take control of their futures” (p. 24). Still, while each of
these scholars concedes the need for change and ushers in some progress towards that end, there are still exclusions that warrant our consideration.

Yet, acknowledging the persistent vacuums and deeply-entrenched systems of oppression and exclusion are not enough. We undermine a critical turn in our scholarship when the work of marginalized scholars is directly or citationally-excluded (Kwon, 2022). Extending the impact of critical rhetoric means adding representation from members of marginalized communities. Scholars from historically marginalized groups call special attention to the institutions and structures that reify separation and marginalization. Work from researchers like Asante (1998, 2007, 2017), Chavez (2012, 2015; Soto Vega & Chávez, 2018), Flores (2016, 2018), Jackson (1999, 2006; Jackson & Dangerfield, 2004; Jackson & Hopson, 2011), Ono (2011; 2010) and Wanzer-Serrano (2019) advance the cause of the marginalized. However, I am reminded of Biesecker (1992, 1993) and Chavez’s (2015) condemnation of our overreliance on inclusion as the ultimate measure of success. Both scholars agree merely expanding a list of rhetors without challenging systemic structures is a losing strategy. Black women are a part of the contingent of rhetors and rhetoricians who know all too well that inclusion is not enough. Black women also challenge systemic structures through their texts and their analysis of texts. The next section of this text is where I discuss Black women’s influence on the rhetorical tradition.

**Black Women and Rhetoric**

We cannot discuss the ways the rhetoric of place informs Black women’s search for sanctuary without considering the ways Black rhetors and scholars advance the discipline. Black people have formally and informally challenged their exclusion from the broader rhetorical tradition (Asante, 1998, 2017; Atwater, 1984; O. I. Davis, 1998; Houston & Davis, 2002; Johnson, 2021). Johnson speaks to the impact of Black scholar’s erasure in his indictment of
rhetoric’s pioneers. He chides the early forerunners of the discipline for overlooking celebrated African American thinkers like Carter G. Woodson. Johnson also encourages us to envision a better alternative. When I employ my “sanctified imagination” at Johnson’s urging, I grasp the inestimable impact of Black women’s erasure on the broader rhetorical canon, on our formal study of African American communication, and on the unchallenged, colonized understanding of place.

Still, despite Johnson’s correct assessment of the discipline’s unwillingness to carve out a place for Black voices, I am careful not to fall into the trap of only letting men—even Black men—make the case against Black women’s omission from the discipline. Black women rhetoricians effectively argue for their own cause through critiques of the rhetorical tradition (Atwater, 2009; duCille, 1994a; Logan, 1999; Royster, 1996). This includes Olga Davis’ indictment that “a discipline concerned with investigating the relationships among language, culture, and society fails to explore the multidimensions of Black women's lives—family, sexuality, age, spirituality, nationality, intellectualism.” She continues her charge questioning, “how then will ‘building community’ occur in communication scholarship to include the social realities of all oppressed peoples?” (O. I. Davis, 1998, pp. 78–79).

I stand in agreement with Atwater, Davis, duCille, Johnson, Logan, Royster and other critical voices outlining their claim for inclusion and calling for a change in the old guard. The scholars on this list help us conclude that if there were substantive additions to the chorus of Black women’s voices before the latter portion of the twentieth century, “not only would we have been introduced to the richness and power of the African American public address tradition earlier but, more importantly, who we start to see as scholars and what we call scholarship would be different as well (Johnson, 2021, p. 17).” This includes an embrace of Black women scholars,
not just a collection of texts from a few well-known orators. As Houston and Davis (2002) echoing Collins (2000) note, it is not enough to accept Black women’s scholarship without honoring the women responsible for significant contributions to the discipline. Fully embracing Black women’s historically marginalized standpoints showcases people and voices “violating the place of otherness” (O. I. Davis, 1998, p. 79). This includes alliances with others with intersectional identities, allies from historically centered groups, and even the disciplines and journals that were more likely to include Black people’s published work when rhetoric would not (Flores, 2016; Johnson, 2021). Ultimately, these critiques “might help communication scholars make room for emancipatory research and methods of looking at the interconnectedness of race, gender, and class” (O. I. Davis, 1998, p. 79). Nonetheless, efforts at emancipatory research and methods are ineffective if we are limited to a material understanding of place alongside overly simplistic attempts at inclusion.

I return to Olga Davis’ work here because she outlines additional voids in the discourse of place and the broader rhetorical tradition. In her discussion of Black women’s erasure from the discipline, Davis acknowledges: “The paucity of rhetorical scholarship on African-American women’s epistemology and ontology implies that Black women’s discursive and nondiscursive practices are inconsequential to understanding human communication” (1998, p. 78). Hidden in this succinct statement are two foundational faults at the heart of Black women’s disciplinary exclusion and thwarted access to sanctuary in rhetoric: 1.) The academy cannot accept Black women’s epistemological and ontological contributions if there is not a settled, unquestioned, affirmative position on Black women’s ability to reason and 2.) Black women cannot contribute to an understanding of “human communication” if people still feel the need to challenge their humanity. In other words, when we elevate Whiteness and patriarchy, we perpetuate the
inaccurate belief that Black women’s voices are of no consequence because these women are not given to reason, nor do they represent a full measure of humanity. Moreover, blindly accepting the Black woman’s exclusion from a place in the rhetorical tradition is an acceptance of her double exclusion as rhetor and theorist. Taken together, any exclusion of knowledge, experience and a unique approach to place ignores the benefits stemming from the betweenness of place (Entrikin, 1991). This problematic line of thought keeps us from embracing an intersectional approach to place and keeps the rhetorical tradition closed.

Weighing the theoretical voids in the broader rhetorical tradition against the unique theoretical gaps in the study of place summarized in this section, two truths are apparent: 1) The voids outlined have far-reaching implications beyond a single person, people group, theory, or discipline and 2) a strategic approach addressing multiple gaps has exceptional value across time, place, and disciplinary distinctions. Considered in this light, the proposition of a new answer to an old problem carries great significance. When the answer privileges an intersectional, decolonized reading of place instead of reinforcing a traditional reading of place, we affirm sanctuary's significance as a tool of decolonization. Furthermore, for those who could not safely rely on others to usher in change for them, reframing the narrative of place for oneself is significant. These acts of reframing showcase the agency of the marginalized, while ensuring the record of that agency is not lost. In short, observing Black women’s contribution to place’s reframing is important because it increases one’s understanding of just how (and why) Black women create their own sanctuary—both in the discipline and in society at large.

**From Rhetoric to the Literature of Place and Sanctuary**

Reviewing the literature that captures the discipline’s critical turn is important. Likewise, there is great significance in documenting Black women’s contributions to this disciplinary turn.
However, reviewing rhetoric’s influence without addressing the central concepts of place and sanctuary reveals a void in the literature and in our understanding about the significance of place and sanctuary. Place and sanctuary are equally complex concepts central to the discourse of captivity and liberation. Since this project analyzes Black women’s participation in their own liberation through their relationship to place and sanctuary, it is important to explore these concepts in greater detail. In this section, I review relevant literature to the study of place and sanctuary. I begin with an introduction to the most common readings of place. Then I transition to a review of place-based literature with a focus on two interrelated themes—the problems of place versus the possibilities of place. Upon concluding my discussion of place, I transition to a discussion of sanctuary. This includes sanctuary’s origins from sacred and secular vantage points. I round out this section with a discussion of the rhetorical discipline as a potential place of sanctuary.

Moving into Place

Before moving to a place of sanctuary, we must first unpack place. Place is a rhetorical construct that shapes territorial boundaries, social identities, laws, languages, cultural practices, and global economies (Agnew, 1987; Chirindo, 2018; Coleman & Collins, 2006; Pile & Keith, 1993). Place is commonly used to describe a site or geographic location (Agnew, 1987). However, the concept of place captures much more.

Moss points to a split reading of place, referring to it as a question of “landscape and geography” and/or “order and hierarchy” (2020, p. 126). The idea of place as landscape transposes easily onto our discussion of Rhetoric’s broad exclusion of Black women’s voices from the discipline. Reading place as a part of the disciplinary landscape flips our expectations about whether sites of bondage hold us close or push us away. Members of historically oppressed
communities seeking a place in the rhetorical landscape are often pushed away. Scholars of color, for example, often seek exile beyond the borders of the discipline. Calafell captures the result of not feeling included as a part of the rhetorical landscape in what she calls her pre-pilgrimage writings. She questions: “Can you help me find my way back? If I perform and honor your memory in a space that refuses to officially recognize it, can WE free ourselves?” (B. M. Calafell, 2005, p. 47). Calafell’s writings are a reminder that one finds a place in a discipline when, as a part of the topography, the mountain or the tree is no longer asked to justify why they are a natural part of the landscape. In this disciplinary reading of the landscape, the exiled find place only when they are repatriated or embraced as a part of the landscape. Calafell speaks on behalf of those in a discipline that never embraced the sum of its topography when she writes: “Performance offered a feeling of reciprocity that I was not getting in rhetoric by offering various ways to acknowledge, rather than suppress, my voice and commitment to experience and the everyday” (2010, p. 112). The disciplinary landscape requires remapping so that it accurately reflects the fullness of the rhetorical topography. Edney (2019) affirms this point when he posits, "If maps are defined by the world/archive and intended for instrumental use, changes in the world must necessarily generate new or updated maps. Cartography must properly maintain maps’ currency” (p. 87). The search for sanctuary in the discipline draws attention to overlooked parts of the landscape. This challenge to place necessitates a new map of the discipline. This new map must include the Black women who were always a part of the landscape and who quietly change the landscape around them, though their influence remains largely uncaptured by the discipline’s official cartography.
In the sections that follow, I delve deeper into the problems of a rhetorically constructed rendering of place. However, because merely outlining the problems of place is unprofitable, I also discuss the possibilities of place as a complimentary response to place’s problems.

**Problematizing Place**

Sanctuary’s access is blocked anytime we remain willfully blind about the problems of place. I use the next section of this discussion of place as an opportunity to discuss the problems of place as location, place as identity and place as memory.

However, before addressing the problems associated with some of place’s common delineations, I contend one of the primary problems of place is the strict adherence to traditional delineations of place as separate though parallel constructs. The current understanding of the rhetorical construction of place omits an essential element that limits place’s possibilities. That is, place is limited as if it is only a statement of location or identity, hierarchy or a conduit for memory. Accepting the traditional isolation of place’s meaning is an impossible task for those historically impacted by multiple readings of place simultaneously. For the slave woman on a plantation, for example, much of her identity is shaped by the fact of her bondage in a particular location. The legacy of her place of bondage is so pervasive that even if she escapes from the location of her enslavement, her historical connection to those sites remains in tact. That legacy of place did not end with emancipation. Even for the generations of Black women born after slavery’s end, place’s rigid lines of demarcation are unrealistic. There is often an experiential recognition that the lines of place separating disparate readings of place do not always hold. Further, it is impossible to imagine something radically different if we fail to see that traditional readings of place are really particularized readings of place. These particularized readings
erroneously presume all people experience the conditions of place in the same way—that is, as separate and distinct encounters with place. Such an assumption is a part of the privilege of living in unmarked bodies whose agency is not challenged for simply being. Conversely, because bodies are texts, we must consider the layered complexity of place when imposed onto marked bodies making those bodies subject to place. Davis (2016) problematizes the compartmentalized reading of place when she acknowledges the intersection of place as identity, location and memory. She writes, “though they have served as the dominant memories of the era, they offer stories that are partial, racially exclusionary, and dismissive of alternative experiences” (P. G. Davis, 2016, p. 1). Though I move forward with a discussion of the problems of place by its traditional demarcations, I contend the distinctions of place are themselves antithetical to an Afrocentric worldview that seeks unity over division, and collectivity and harmony over individualism (Asante, 1998; Jahn, 1961).

**Problematizing Place as Location**

The primary problem with place as location is that though it is a construct that is simultaneously stable and unstable, systemic efforts to maintain stability often create more instability for the oppressed. Tuck and McKenzie (2014) help us understand this dynamic relationship when they first identify place as a, “setting for social rootedness and landscape continuity” (p. 48). However, the stability of place is then juxtaposed against its instability. In other words, through a critical understanding of place, Tuck & McKenzie call attention to the fact that place is equally, “mobile, shifting over time and space and through interactions with flows of people, other species, social practices” (p. 46). While place’s stability may seem more desirable at first glance, a problem emerges when place’s growth is closed off by systems
favoring rigidity in complete defiance of organic, tectonic shifts. When a reliance on stability and rootedness is perverted, artificially imposed commitments to continuity result in the extremes of financial redlining, gerrymandered political districts, and other practices that stifle place’s ability to shift (Lennertz, 2000; Rea, 2022; Safransky, 2020; Sidney, 2012). Maintaining place artificially is the kind of colonization that closes off the beauty of a naturally shifting landscape.

Chirindo (2018) further problematizes this kind of top-down intervention that rigidly defines the way we read place as location. In his argument, Chirindo challenges the colonial, Western frame shaping the way places are defined and borders (problematically) established. African nation-states are an example of locations crafted without regard for existing communities and borders. The colonizers’ attempts to recreate place as if place did not exist before Western intrusion testifies of the ways Whiteness and patriarchy color any reading of place. Chirindo speaks against the colonial remnant disrupting people’s ability to define place (and places) for themselves. His work reminds us that those who recapture the stability of place against the backdrop of their oppression do so because they operate within their own delineations, not those superimposed by their colonial oppressors. The act of self-definition is necessary for those daring to push back against White, Western, patriarchal, colonized readings of place (Collins, 2000).

**Problematizing Memory Devoid of an Identity**

The problems of place do not end with our reading of place as location. There is also the problem of place as memory and the still-too-common disregard for matters of identity. Notably, this problem reinforces the concern articulated above regarding the inclination to separate readings of place as if there is not a compounding effect. Anytime we approach a discussion of place without acknowledging all the ways other aspects of our identity shape our experiences with place, we revert to a standardized reading of place that privileges Whiteness and patriarchy.
Place is far too complex to operate as if disparate readings never intersect. When we complicate place with other variables like gender and class, the challenge of untangling place becomes more apparent.

Place’s connection to memory is expressed through the study of museums, memorials, monuments and event sites (Atwater & Herndon, 2003; P. G. Davis, 2016; Dickinson et al., 2010; Endres & Senda-Cook, 2011; Ewalt, 2011; Landsberg, 2018; Moss & Jackson, 2017; Said, 2000; Tell, 2017, 2019). Despite the wide reach of place as memory, there are still voices excluded from historical narratives. As a result, we often get a narrative of place that advances a singular narrative as a master narrative (Armada, 2010; Atwater & Herndon, 2003; Corey, 1998; P. G. Davis, 2016; Hayward & Larouche, 2018). The master narrative ultimately promotes a dynamic where the one who frames memory effectively defines place.

Cooper illustrates the problematic connection/disconnection between memory and identity through a simple proverb: “The devil is always painted black—by white painters” (1998, p. 159). With just a few words, Cooper critiques the idea of a master narrative, while simultaneously acknowledging the importance of the archivist. Her simple proverb acknowledges the relationship between who controls a narrative and which memories are ultimately preserved and presented to others. Cooper’s work, for example, helps us explain the reason Africa is often presented in a negative light and rarely ever presented as a place of sanctuary. In other words, when an oppressor continually marks a place as a site of death and deficit, they also paint the picture for the rest of the world. Africa and its inhabitants are often framed in a negative light. The continent and its sons and daughters are usually painted as subordinates by her colonizers. This example underscores the point that Africa was not just economically underdeveloped as suggested by Rodney (2018). Africa’s underdevelopment is
apparent within the rhetorical tradition, too. Therefore, just as marking negativity, death and
deficit onto Africa is a reality, so too is rhetorically etching negative symbolism onto people of
African descent. We are called to a mindfulness that when we recreate memories associated with
a place, there is an opportunity to do more than decolonize a material location. (Rhetorically
liberating people out of a place out of bondage is a possibility, too.) Taking these arguments
together, we begin to see that Cooper does more than identify the problems of place. She gives us
the solution to the problem as well: If the one painting is the one archiving, then the one who
archives defines the memory captured. In other words, when we accept different painters, we
benefit from this diversity because the record reflects a broader reality. Tuck and McKenzie
(2014) speak to the importance of capturing “disparate realities” by suggesting “disparate
realities determine not only how place is experienced but also how it is understood and practiced
in turn” (p. 46).

The Possibilities of Place

Despite the problems associated with traditional readings of place, the concept of place
has possibilities that make it a useful access point to sanctuary. The possibilities of place offer us
a rhetorical launching pad through which we begin to see sanctuary as the imagined site beyond
the imposition of place.

The oppressed often secure access to sanctuary rhetorically before accessing sanctuary in
physical ways. Wilson (2002) helps us see the rhetorical possibilities of place as he speaks to
place as location and identity and then steps outside of the box of place. He accomplishes this
move when he subdivides traditional distinctions of place into individual and communal
perspectives on place’s reading. Wilson adds, “place determined the spaces that a person could
occupy and how one could interact, privately or publicly, with others” (2002, p. 12, emphasis
Wilson’s work represents a critical turn in the study of place. That is, while acknowledging place’s problems, his argument quietly speaks to the possibilities of place too. Refusing to stop with the longstanding issues in traditional readings of place, Wilson makes a small but impactful rhetorical move. His use of the word “could” provides a glimpse of place’s potentiated power hidden in the shadow of place’s oppressive imposition. Wilson carves out a narrow path to radically reimagine place. Sanctuary typifies the imagined place that hails the enslaved, the exiled and the excommunicated. Sanctuary is the picture of place unlimited in its articulation of where a person should be because it is rhetorically liberated by where and what a person could be. The possibilities of place do not end with Wilson.

Rai also helps us see the possibilities of place through her discussion of topoi. She points out topoi’s etymology and its reference to “the places one goes to discover the available means of persuasion” (2016, p. 36). While a rhetorician’s first inclination might include attuning to her mention of the “available means of persuasion,” Rai’s reference to the site (or place), “one goes to discover” draws me. Shifting my focus makes it easier to understand place’s foundational role in the construction of sanctuary. Moreover, this shift makes the symbolic appeal of sanctuary so much more alluring. If we envision sanctuary as a site of retreat, covering and protection, the imposition of place reflects an absolute departure from its core tenet as an open site of discovery. In other words, one cannot discover place if their place is already predetermined by another’s ascription of race, gender, nationality or even presumed ability to reason. If place is supposed to be the site where one can thrive and freely discover oneself, any space that operates outside of this exists in contention with one of the foundational objectives of place and sanctuary. Thus, when Black women use self-definition in safe spaces, they do so to “resist the dominant ideology promulgated not only outside Black civil society but within African American institutions”
Black women play an active role in making right the wrong of being placed into place.

The closure of place to discovery is antithetical to the term’s original meaning; likewise, it is antithetical to sanctuary. The freedom to discover is a liberty, one whose exercise should be openly available in the place of sanctuary. This reminder that the concept of place, or *topoi*, extends to sanctuary is noteworthy because there is a connection between place and discovery. Place forms the foundation of sanctuary, a point that extends further to Rai’s argument against the use of *topoi* in a universal sense. She affirms the importance of viewing place as unique experiences and representations when she asserts, “one invents by immersing and orienting oneself within the rhetorics of particular places” (Rai, 2016, p. 36, emphasis added). Rai’s argument goes against a universalized, one-size-fits-all understanding of place in favor of the particular. Moreover, because place is sanctuary’s foundation, it follows that sanctuary is best understood through the particular as well. This lends even more credence to the intentional engagement of place and sanctuary from historically underrepresented standpoints. The “rhetorics of particular places” calls attention to a richness uncaptured through a singular approach to place as the only interpretation of place. Furthermore, since a particularized approach summarily cancels the universal, it is imperative that we move away from the closed, myopic rendering of place that boxes out the possibility of sanctuary. In the next section, I build on the insight garnered from this review of place as preparation for a similar review of the primary aspects of sanctuary.

*Reviewing Sanctuary*

From the stranger in ancient history seeking a place of refuge to the modern immigrant looking to cross national borders, the ones seeking sanctuary are often left at the mercy of those
who have sites of refuge to offer. However, beyond the gatekeepers and the imposers of place, the possibilities of sanctuary abound. This section presents a review of relevant literature on the subject of sanctuary. I subdivide the possibilities of sanctuary into two realms—the sacred and the secular. The sacred is an abbreviated representation of religion and hierarchy and the secular makes room for the discourse of sanctuary in governmental and political realms. Before examining the two realms of sanctuary, I advocate for first discussing the origins of sanctuary.

**Origins**

Understanding current interpretations of sanctuary begins with looking back to the concept’s origins. In the origins of sanctuary, we find 1.) explanations about sanctuary’s design as a site for protection, 2.) its role in labeling the Other through the creation and solidification of a hierarchy and 3.) its insight into the enduring rhetorical power of language. In short, hidden in sanctuary’s origin story are the delineations of place as location, place as identity, place as hierarchy, and place as an imagined site beyond the limits of someone else’s imposition. These interlocking elements of place that shape our understanding of sanctuary are discussed below.

Derived from the Latin word *sanctus*, sanctuary was first used to designate. Instead of leaving strangers and criminals vulnerable to injury from those persecuting them, some offered the provision of sanctuary so the excluded could be included.

**Saving the Sacred: Religion and Hierarchy**

First, sanctuary is primarily marked as a site of protection. In fact, strangers and criminals would often turn to places of worship in search of refuge. The worship site offered some safeguard against vigilante family members seeking retribution on behalf of their loved ones (Bau, 1985; Rabben, 2011, 2016). These early sites of sanctuary align with the Latin roots of the word *sanctus*, a term referring to a holy, consecrated, or sacred place (Lewis, 1890). Sanctuary’s
early roots are the reason the concept maintains a rhetorical link to religion and houses of worship. However, the significance of sanctuary’s origin story does not end with its rootedness in the offer of protection usually provided in a place of worship.

Second, sanctuary’s origins also explain the hierarchical relationship with the Other common in some constructions of sanctuary. In the early expressions of sanctuary in places of worship, certain parts of the structure were closed to strangers and only open to celibate clergy (Wynter, 1984; 2003). These distinctions in the broader place of sanctuary inadvertently reified demarcations between those who belong and those who do not. Only those deemed holy, clean, pure and sinless were given full access to the place of worship. Those deemed “fallen,” unworthy, profane, and guilty were admitted, but with a different degree of access (Wynter, 1984). This means that even though inclusion was the goal, offering or seeking sanctuary resulted in an unequal relationship between the forager and the one offering refuge. This power dynamic produces a version of sanctuary with status inequity at its core. Unfortunately, contemporary searches reify distinctions between those in authority and those in need. Because sanctuary remains steeped in the traditions of the past, new searches bring some of the same determinations of Otherness and criminality normalized with the earliest requests for sanctuary (Villazor, 2008).

The early instantiations of sanctuary normalize an association of Otherness with criminality. Additionally, early creations of sanctuary normalize the use of hierarchical arrangement to determine who gets access to a place. This creates a simultaneous connection between ordering and location. Furthermore, it normalizes systems that monitor and enforce entrance into particular spaces. This means sanctuary’s earliest provision created conditions for surveillance and exclusion in ways that maintained a standard of separation. The literature
reveals the way the benevolent impetus for sanctuary shifts into a system standardizing who belongs and who does not (Qabaha, 2018; Said, 1993; Zorić, 2016). For all of the reasons just noted, a place of exile cannot wholly satisfy a person’s need for sanctuary as long as there is a power discrepancy lorded over them by the party offering sanctuary. Black women have often discovered that the only way to experience the full hope of sanctuary is to create sanctuary for themselves.

Finally, sanctuary’s origins offer insight into the enduring rhetorical power of language. Burke notes the sacred/secular connection in language and reminds us that theological principles are “shown to have usable secular analogues that throw light upon the nature of language” (1970, p. 2). Additionally, Burke helps clarify how concepts like sanctuary function as both a god term and a devil term (Burke, 1970; Weaver, 1953). Depending on its deployment and by whom, sanctuary can symbolize good or bad, exclusion or inclusion, access or restriction, hope or fear. Hicks also speaks to the rhetorical possibilities of sanctuary describing it as, “a state of being and becoming” (J. M. Johnson, 2006, p. 156). Pennington adds another layer suggesting Black women’s discourse advances “the notion of spirituality as epistemology, that is, spirituality as a way of knowing and of validating knowledge claims” (2003, p. 304). When we consider Burke, Hicks, and Pennington’s ideas together, we begin to see how the symbolism of sanctuary becomes a rhetorical shortcut, especially for Black women. This shortcut shows us how seeking and creating sanctuary is an act of faith, worship, service and resistance, all wrapped together by the belief that something better is possible. Golden and McConnel capture sanctuary’s hope which they describe as “a prophetic platform… a strategy of action, a plan of struggle.” (1986, p. 15). This review demonstrates why sanctuary’s rhetorical construction is inseparable from its historical and religious origins. Still, it is difficult to dismiss the fact that national, political and
cultural contexts inform our understanding of sanctuary as well (Bau, 1985; Rabben, 2016; Villazor, 2008). In the following section, I discuss the way governmental and political influence shapes the concept of sanctuary, too.

**Signaling the Secular: Government and Politics**

Despite sanctuary’s early connection to religious discourse and places of worship, the concept of sanctuary is not exclusive to the rhetoric of religion. Its symbolism extends to matters of legal and political significance, too. Villazor captures the transitional relationship between the sacred and the secular as he discusses the “Sanctuary Movement” of the 1980s. Explaining the crisis bearing the mark of its religious foundation in its name, Villazor notes the interconnectedness between religion, the government and the law. He records “efforts by churches and cities to provide various forms of assistance to asylum applicants” and points out the “sense of moral and ethical obligation that churches and, to some extent, the local governments aimed to evoke” (Villazor, 2008, p. 135). Moreover, he documents the ways houses of worship push the ethical, legal, and political boundaries of sanctuary. In his depiction, the sacred and the secular collide, indicating sanctuary’s rhetorical progression beyond religious frames.

We see the rhetorical power of sanctuary as a symbol rooted in the sacred morph into the basis of a political movement along secular lines. A reference to *asylum* instead of sanctuary, for instance, highlights the linguistic evolution of sanctuary into the political realm. A search for asylum (instead of sanctuary) rhetorically announces the influence of the law on the search for a place of refuge. As legal and political interests reshape the symbolism of sanctuary, there is often a sharp turn from sanctuary’s earliest beginnings as a tool of inclusion. Rabben (2011, 2016) even suggests the legal and political expressions of sanctuary are punitive and exclusionary in
design. This war of words behind rhetorical choices in naming is displayed anytime we consider the conflict around supposed sanctuary cities.

Ultimately, references to sanctuary in the contemporary vernacular increasingly diverge from the earliest references to sanctuary. The rhetorical progression of the concept of sanctuary transitions from a model of inclusion and protection to one of exclusion and ordering. Deviant expressions of sanctuary lead me to a simple conclusion: If a supposed safe haven does not allow its occupants to experience freedom from place, then the so-called place of sanctuary is nothing more than a prison named amiss. That is, either sanctuary is an exclusive site that reifies the delineations of place, or it is a site that encourages liberation. It is an utter fallacy to think that a site or experience that keeps place in place could ever live up to its full potential if the imposition of place remains. When the religious archetypes of yesteryear (i.e.-celibate clergy) are replaced with a different set of standards—Whiteness, Eurocentrism and patriarchy, the power dynamics are clear. The sinner is replaced with any depiction of an Other, particularly a person or group socially situated as a subordinate. Despite the hegemonic functions that traditionally maintain place to the detriment of the oppressed, there is still hope in the decolonized sanctuary.

Three themes drive this review of sanctuary: 1) Place plays a role in the establishment and the breakdown of sanctuary, 2.) the search for sanctuary is motivated by rupture and 3.) one only searches for the benefits of sanctuary because the benefits of sanctuary are unavailable in a present place. When considered alongside the marginalized’s quest for something better, a more complete understanding of sanctuary emerges. The more complete depiction unseats a universalist approach to sanctuary. Thus, while sanctuary has potential as a tool of Black liberation that may be as old as the concept of sanctuary itself, the imposition of place stunts this potential. This review suggests there is a path forward for the oppressed. However, dismantling a
harmful construction of place is essential for progress toward sanctuary. To understand the path forward and make progress toward a liberating place of sanctuary, it is imperative that I situate this project within the broader rhetorical tradition. I move to do just that in the discussion that follows. In the following section, I situate sanctuary in the larger rhetorical tradition as I privilege historically marginalized voices and shift attention toward voices we rarely hear as authorities on place. I conclude with an introduction to the rhetors and the rhetorical artifacts discussed in subsequent chapters.

**Seeking Disciplinary Sanctuary**

Despite changes in the discipline, rhetoric still omits the voices of the marginalized. Black women remain underrepresented in rhetoric as rhetors and rhetoricians. Researchers including Atwater (2009), Houston (2000; Houston & Davis, 2002), O. I. Davis (1998, 1999), Logan (1999) and Royster (1996, 2000) were early change agents in the cause for Black women rhetoricians. A new generation of Black women rhetoricians like Ore (2020; 2019), Pough (2007; 2015; 2016), and Carey (2014, 2016, 2020) pick up the mantle of the matriarchs before them. However, there is still room to grow the roster of Black women in Rhetoric while also increasing the depth of the subjects addressed. Plus, as Collins suggests:

> Oppressed groups are frequently placed in the situation of being listened to only if we frame our ideas in the language that is familiar to and comfortable for a dominant group. This requirement often changes the meaning of our ideas and works to elevate the ideas of the dominant groups” (2000, p. ix).

In short, rhetoric needs more voices and more culturally minded frameworks because extending the breadth of voices and frames simultaneously extends the field. As an example, Black women searching for sanctuary helps us expand the discipline’s territory by directing attention to the
matter of place. This discussion of Black women’s journey to sanctuary through place answers the petitions of Black women rhetoricians before me. This includes Davis’ call to value insight from Black women’s everydayness. Davis’ work seems a fitting response to Atwater’s appeal for Black researchers to “extend, go beyond our academic walls, permeate our total existence in our efforts to resolve our dilemma and find new and relevant rhetorical tools” (1984, p. 68). Pennington’s call asks for paradigm development, theory formulation, and assessment tools for “African American women’s religious and spiritual discourse” (2003, p. 304).

Since the rhetoric of place does not have a theoretical framework making a decidedly intersectional contribution, I offer this dissertation project as a means of changing that reality. This current project calls attention to those defining their own place in the discipline instead of simply adhering to the place assigned to them. This project also advances Hobson’s call for viewing Black women as historical actors and “agents of change turned feminist subjects” (2021, p. 4). This project on Black women’s rhetorical strategies for finding sanctuary advances the tenets of Afrocentrism and Black feminist thought. Additionally, this work responds to insistent appeals for critical work that acknowledges and elevates the experiences of the marginalized (Chavez, 2015; Collins, 2000; Flores, 2018; hooks, 1992; Wanzer-Serrano, 2019). I merge all of these elements, so we move from a type of academic show-and-tell to an engaged, pedagogically-significant discussion of Black women’s rhetoric.

Framing this Project

This chapter provides an opportunity to discuss the rationale for the broader project, review relevant literature, discuss the problems and possibilities of place and sanctuary, and address Black women’s unique insight about place. This preliminary groundwork reminds us to look backwards to the ways those before us survived experiences of rupture. Black women who
survive multiple, layered instances of rupture produce their own roadmaps for managing contemporary moments of crisis. With the reward of sanctuary as inspiration, I use this project in three primary ways: 1.) As a means of capturing Black women’s cross-generational search for sanctuary, 2.) as a platform fostering a better understanding of Black women’s mastery of place, and 3.) as a vehicle challenging rhetoric’s snub of Black women as rhetors and rhetoricians. To this end, I turn to the rhetorical artifacts of Black women who challenge the limits of place as a part of a rich legacy of survival.

Even with a randomized set of texts and rhetors, a set of limiters is necessary. I considered the ways Black women are placed by legal, political, social and religious systems. I also considered the chasm between the servitude of slavery and the promise of emancipation. I concluded the principal guideline driving my search for study participants is the rhetor’s personal investment in their own liberation. My search for texts then focused on Black women creating sanctuary by boldly challenging place during the persistent ruptures of the 19th century. With ruptures ranging from the social, legal, political and moral challenges to slavery, the fight for women’s rights, the discord leading up to the Civil War, Emancipation and Reconstruction, I realized texts produced by Black women of this period are themselves pictures of survival. Black women of the 1800s lived in a time when it was still illegal for them to read, write or teach others to do the same. Those who make themselves known with lasting rhetorical contributions despite ardent limitations certainly warrant deeper consideration. From this frame of thought, I selected texts from three formerly enslaved, intersectional figures. I specifically turn to the work of Sojourner Truth, Anna Julia Cooper and Hannah Crafts. These women speak from history and fill an intersectional void on matters of place in the rhetorical tradition.
In this dissertation, I focus on Sojourner Truth’s cartes de visite, Anna Julia Cooper’s speeches and writings and Hannah Crafts’ novel/semi-autobiography. Individually and collectively, these women carve out bodies of work that critique the very politics of race and gender put in place to maintain their marginalization. It is important to note considering these rhetors is not just about historicization. The uniquely intersectional perspective extends beyond a historical timeline and provides a sound foundation for a contemporary Black feminist approach addressing the imposition of place in the academy and beyond.

This project responds to the call of Black women who do more than search for sanctuary. These women also flip the narrative of place and who gets to teach us about place. In the same way that Black women refuse ruptures’ right to have the last say, this project also commits to repurposing rupture. As a part of repurposing rupture, this project seeks to minimize “the violences of erasure that have constrained and limited our thinking and that of those who have come before us” (Flores, 2018, p. 353). With this mandate in mind, I commit to answering the following research questions in this dissertation:

1. How do Black women use rhetoric to challenge readings of place?
2. How do Black women’s experiences with rupture expand the meaning of sanctuary?
3. How can Black women find sanctuary in a discipline that is historically complicit with their placement and (re)placement?

As I explore the work of three influential Black women with a record of resistance to the limits of place, I recognize my positionality as a participant observer in the cross-generational fight for sanctuary. To that end, I acknowledge how my own positionality as a Black woman colors my mission.
1. Just as the women chronicled in these pages wrestle with the imposition of place, I too wrestle with the imposition of place. As I tell the story of Black women who refuse the limits of place, I also tell my own story.

2. As I critique and chronicle, I do so through a lens that celebrates Blackness and womanhood equally. That means this work epitomizes intersectionality at its core from project inception and methodological framing to analysis, conclusion and implications.

3. I expand the rhetorical landscape of the discipline by expanding the roster of voices welcomed in the place we call rhetoric. This work makes a place for Black women, so we find sanctuary in the rhetorical tradition that symbolically hails us without making place for our bodies or our bodies of work.

4. Completing this project from the relative place of sanctuary left for me by the matriarchs at the center of this work, I enact the strategies uncovered during my study. As a result, I leave liberal space for Black women to liberate themselves from their historical categorization as mammies, jezebels, and tragic mulattoes. I stand in agreement with other Black women—past and present—creating their own place in the academy as rhetors and rhetoricians.

**Chapter Summaries**

Though this dissertation begins with the stories of images of Black people who were left without sanctuary, this project is not limited to lynched bodies. This project is bigger than Black women’s rising death rates during childbirth in the United States or the disproportionate number of Black women and girls who go missing each year. This project picks up on an enduring conversation about women’s cross-generational search for sanctuary, the rhetorical artifacts that document this struggle, and the lessons from matriarchs reframing place to get to sanctuary.
I turn to the rhetorical artifacts of Black matriarchs from the 19th century whose relative betweenness informs their perspective on the problem of place. Using visual images, written speech texts, and semi-auto-biographical works, I move toward an understanding of the ways Black women transform the meaning of place for themselves. Moreover, some move their own stories from the margins to the center. As I focus on the creations of Anna Julia Cooper, Sojourner Truth, and Hannah Crafts, I recognize their texts as subjects for study and as ancestral muses. Despite their erasure and under-acknowledgement in the rhetorical tradition, Cooper, Truth and Crafts rupture the way we see place. I explore the ways these women challenge our longstanding beliefs about place, sanctuary, intellectual property, voice and memory. Considered together, the women noted teach us that sometimes the only way to build is to destroy. That is, as we tear down traditional readings of place, we move closer to realizing the hope of sanctuary.

I make progress in this broader work by outlining the methodology for this project. Observing notable absences in the literature on place from a decidedly intersectional perspective, I use chapter two to discuss my methodology. I also use this chapter to address disciplinary and theoretical voids while framing the theoretical underpinnings guiding this study. I maximize the idea of betweenness by bridging an Afrocentric approach with a Black feminist approach.

To understand the liberatory potential of defining a place of one’s own, I use chapters three, four, and five to interrogate texts from Black women determined to define their own place. Chapter three begins my transition from conceptual framing to the analysis of my texts of study. In this chapter, I look back in history to offer proof that resistance to place is not a new cause for African American women. For this chapter, I pull texts from rhetor and critic, Dr. Anna Julia Cooper. As one of the earliest scholars to write about the intersectional realities of African American women—and only the fourth African American woman to receive a doctorate in the
United States, her commitment to education and advocacy is noteworthy. Though she encounters resistance, Cooper steps out of her socially assigned place in the late 1800s and breaks the limits on what a Black woman of her time could do and become. Her work not only defies the boundaries used to contain her, but also speaks to the safe places found through education and enfranchisement. Cooper records her dislocation from the place she was supposed to occupy because of the social realities of race, gender, and class in her book, *A Voice from the South* (1998). Through a close reading of the chapters in section 1 of the text including “The Higher Education of Women,” “Status of Women in America” and “What are We Worth,” I explore Cooper’s work to defy the limits of place.

In chapter four, I use visual analysis to explore the cartes des visites of Sojourner Truth. An illiterate, former slave counted as one of the earliest intersectional thinkers, Truth gained notoriety contending against the boundaries of place readily imposed on her. I explore how Truth finds a place of relative safety by speaking as an advocate and successfully selling her own image. I use this space to call attention to the ways she contests texts *about* her that were not designed by her.

I use chapter five to analyze Hannah Craft’s creation of place and sanctuary through an originally unpublished text, *The Bondwoman’s Narrative* (Crafts, 2002). I consider the ways a formerly enslaved, Black woman of the mid-1850s who was not supposed to read or write continues to draw attention from historians and literary scholars alike with her posthumously published text (Gates & Robbins, 2004; Hecimovich, 2023). I use Hannah Craft’s work to study one woman’s journey from enslavement to recognition as the author of the first novel written by a Black woman. I argue that at every turn, the woman born Hannah Bond repeatedly challenges and teaches others how Black women challenge the conventional expectations of place.
This project is a layered attempt to elevate Black women’s voices out of the doldrums of subjugated knowledge (Foucault, 1980). I use the final chapter to pull together my case studies and offer a cogent argument about the role of Black women in redefining how we study place. I recognize that a small sample has limitations. There is merit in securing theoretical generalizability or transferability through case studies instead of relying on broad but shallow samples. Using this small selection of intersectional scholars as guides, I get to a deeper picture of place and sanctuary. Thus, the last chapter of this dissertation concludes with ideas for an intersectional approach to place and a map for understanding sanctuary from a Black feminist perspective. From conception to conclusion, this dissertation reimagines place beyond the traditional limits of place.
Chapter Two

(Re)Placing Theories of Place

“Theory is important because it directs us to the proper questions to ask and the methods to use to acquire data that can be interpreted in a way that makes cultural, psychological, and literary liberation more certain” (Asante, 2005, p. 201).

Place is an inescapable part of Black women’s search for sanctuary. Yet, place is conceptualized in grossly oversimplified terms; that oversimplification has a host of interlocking repercussions. First, place is often broached as if readings of place do not intersect. Blanketed, generalized assumptions about the way place works disregard the reality that place is not experienced by all in the same way. This leads to a second problem of place: Those with intersectional identities are the same ones likely to suffer under the imposition of place. Historically marginalized people are likely to incur stacked readings of place that reify their subordination. As an example, consider Black people once relegated to plantations or housed in ghettos. Then consider the communities changed by gentrification or the redlined communities marked by extreme poverty. For Black people, there is an undeniable intersection between place’s reading as location and place as identity. Whiteness, patriarchy and colonization shape people’s experiences with place, and those with intersectional identities live with the repercussions of these interactional readings of place. Lastly, the problems of place are amplified further by the absence of marginalized voices in the study of place. When the narrative of place maintains its exclusivity, the broader rhetorical tradition also maintains its exclusivity.

Thinking the problems of place are solved by greater inclusion is an erroneous proposition. The inclusion of more texts from those with intersectional identities is a promising start. However, this kind of move does not address the heart of the problem. Chavez (2015) blasts over-simplified atonement for the sin of exclusion when she declares inclusion is not
enough. Flores reminds us, “Again, never just inclusion. Not inclusion in lieu of transformation. But inclusion as fissure” (Flores, 2018, p. 352). Semati and Zambon (2021) extend the argument against inclusion as the ultimate marker of progress as they contend, “The goal is not only to expand representation but also to generate stronger theory” (p. 160). In other words, inclusion as a solution at the level of texts does not address the foundational problem of place. If the push for change does not extend into our theorizations of place, any work towards progress is performative. Until the discourse of place reflects the voices of the marginalized at the level of theory, the work of the discipline merely upholds dominant-subordinate relationships and keeps marginalized people locked out of place.

This study highlights the need for a framework that privileges the knowledge and experiences of the ones historically overlooked in the study of place and in the broader rhetorical tradition. In keeping with the call-and-response tradition of the Black community, this work is a rejoinder to an ongoing cry for a decolonized reading of place. This present work offers a disrupting theory of sanctuary that: 1.) addresses the colonized readings of place blocking access to sanctuary, 2.) chronicles the ways Black women tell their own stories of sanctuary, and 3.) reintroduces Black women’s contribution to a rhetorical tradition that has long ignored them.

**Rupturing the Rhetoric of Place**

Rupture is not always welcome, but rupture always demands a shift. In the case of an area of study that still overlooks voices and perspectives that fundamentally change the way we read place, the time for rupturing the rhetoric of place is now. Moreover, the rupture must happen at the level of our theorization. Asante (1998) captures the problem with an approach to theory and method that supposes a general appeal, but instead, only represents the ideology of the dominant group. He challenges the discipline for
overlooking the knowledge and experiences of those from marginalized groups when he writes:

Rhetoric must transcend ideologies, whether political or racial, in order to perform the task of continuous reconciliation. Even now, when the demise of the old rhetoric has been proclaimed for at least a quarter of a century, the "white" journals still publish tribe rhetoric, rhetoric that can have meaning in its theoretical content to only one group of people (Asante, 1998, p. 183).

Despite a dearth in formal recognition, Black women have long committed to challenging the limits of place. Their contributions to the study of place deserves a place in the discussions of theory and method in this rhetorical sub-discipline. This chapter offers solutions to the problems of place by examining Black women’s search for sanctuary and the challenges to place they launch on their journey to freedom.

To be clear, this project is not about essentializing race and gender. That would relegate this work to a substitutionary proposition. Trading seats of power as an alternative centering of minoritized race or gender group is equally counter-productive. Instead, this work places a demand for more accurate theorization because it looks at place from a broader perspective. This dissertation calls attention to overlooked hierarchies embedded within the rhetorical construct of place. Without challenging hierarchies within the study of place, a construct that could be useful to even more people succumb instead to being nothing more than some other hegemonic project. The study of place must do more than ask the marginalized to remain complicit in their own oppression. Otherwise, the study of place is just one more hierarchical system of oppression where the imposition of place alters the narrative. Theories of place that are just as damaging to liberation projects as physical bondage cannot stand. In this work, I advance a theoretical
perspective that fills some of the existing gaps in the study of place. I use Black women’s experiences with place and sanctuary as the playground for this work.

This project proposes rupturing the traditional understanding of place in three ways: through a commitment to 1.) decolonization, 2.) visualization, and 3.) creation. The first commitment, decolonization, sits at the heart of an intersectional theory of place. This project is a potent reminder that decolonizing place extends beyond physical, material locations. It extends through language choice and the design and application of theory. Next, rupturing the rhetoric of place means envisioning new ways of defining sanctuary. This move asks us to consider what sanctuary looks like when it is conceived outside of Whiteness, patriarchy and colonized ways of viewing people and their relationship with place. Additionally, this project offers a different perspective of sanctuary for those who have only known place in an oppressive light.

Finally, this commitment to rupturing the rhetoric of place taps into the importance of creation. That is, in the absence of sanctuary, Black women create their own sanctuary. Likewise, without a relevant theory, we look to create an applicable theory that asks previously unconsidered questions. We also create relevant tools in the absence of appropriate methods of analysis.¹ This project is fertile ground for creating or expanding strategies for critiquing texts from an intersectional perspective on place.

In the sections that follow, I frame a discussion of theory by highlighting Black women’s betweenness as a gift to an intersectional theory of place. Next, I take up related frameworks shaping a more accurate theorization of place. After discussing the frameworks, I introduce a strategically deployed tool that honors the voices of the Black women who have much to teach

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¹ This project explores the commitment to creation through our discussion of an appropriate method of analysis. The theme of creation surfaces again later in this chapter.
us about place. These ideas come together as concluding thoughts, preparing us for the analysis conducted in subsequent chapters.

Theory

Just as colonizers maintain a presence through their control over knowledge and language, they also maintain their colonizing presence through the advancement of closed theoretical lenses (Asante, 2005; Cesaire, 2001; Fanon, 2008, 2018). We must intently consider the ways archaic approaches to theory keep place colonized. Otherwise, we commit to theories that prevent equitable access to place, thwart any hope of sanctuary, and prove unfit for a project of decolonization.

The call for different frameworks is not a determination against progress. There are advancements in rhetoric beyond classical rhetorical conceptions. The contemporaneous inclusion of marginalized voices is a part of this turn. However, there are still some rhetoricians who ignore Black women’s disciplinary contributions. Even when Black women’s contributions are considered, the rhetor and her artifacts are often analyzed in problematic ways. As Flores (2016) points out, we abide somewhere “between abundance and marginalization.” Taking Black women’s rhetorical contributions into account is necessary to continue the work against the same place-based limits on Black women observed in any other social institution. Thus, including Black women in the study of place extends the rhetorical tradition in social, disciplinary, and theoretical realms.

Until Black women secure a place in the rhetorical tradition and in the theoretical understanding of place, their search for sanctuary is perpetually stalled. Change is only possible when the critical scholar challenges the scope of any theoretical premise that limits or completely erases the voices of the marginalized. Flores suggests, “Theory happens, as women of color have
long argued, in our insights and reflections and with our willingness to center ourselves, not in the all-knowing voice of white masculinity or the fragile tears of white femininity but in the intersections of insistent—critical—vulnerability (2018, p. 354). As Black women challenge the erasure of their contributions, they do the work that assures others’ voices are not overlooked or forgotten. Thus, in their work to reclaim place, Black women alter the rhetorical landscape. As they usher in change rhetorically and theoretically, they extend the meaning of place in the process. Moreover, while liberation strategies vary, one thing is clear: For those from historically oppressed groups, the freedom of sanctuary hinges on the ability to find place beyond White, Western, patriarchal readings of place.

In what follows, I outline the frameworks instrumental to a reimagined view of place as a Black feminist construction. To begin reframing the record of Black women’s agency, I turn to Afrocentricity and feminism. I use these frames of thought to color my reading of W.E.B. DuBois’ (1965) double consciousness, Entrikin’s (1991) concept of betweenness and Bernard-Donal’s (2016) discussion of displacement. When considered together, this work sets me up to offer my own intersectional theorization of place from a Black woman’s perspective.

**Coming Together at the Intersections**

Black women’s intersectional perspective, persistent encounters with rupture and regular confrontations with the imposition of place strengthen them as advocates against the imposition of place. Additionally, Black women’s sordid history with the imposition of place makes them well-positioned guides leading us on a journey to sanctuary. Because of their race and their gender, these women are often trapped into place by place and denied the full measure of their humanity. Wavering between the chains of captivity and liberation and between hope and disappointment, Black women’s search for sanctuary is spurred by institutionalized racism,
sexism and classism. However, across spatial and temporal boundaries, Black women are the answer to their problems with place. We are assured of this by Cesaire's finding that the oppressed are aware of their own power. He declares, “the colonized know that they have an advantage over [the colonialists]. They know that their temporary ‘masters’ are lying. Therefore that their masters are weak” (Cesaire, 2001, p. 32). Recognizing someone else’s attempted construction of sanctuary is questionable at best and completely unsound at worst, Black women use their keen insight to strategically create something that escapes their oppressor's intentions (Etoke, 2019; Ladner, 1971). We see these realizations and creations play out as some of history’s most oppressed make a place for themselves in history, in the field of rhetoric, and in our understanding of place. When Black women define place for themselves, their strategy for survival challenges the rhetorical constructions of sanctuary that keep the marginalized at the margins. When we study the agency, inventiveness and rhetorical resistance of Black women on their journey to sanctuary, we uncover opportunities to expand our understanding of place. Our understanding hinges—in large part—on our ability to embrace and displace.

**Embracing the In-Betweens**

One of the earliest frames to capture Black intersectional positionality was DuBois’ (1965) concept of double consciousness. He notes the Black person “ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (DuBois, 1965, p. 215). Though penalized for being both Black and American, the impact of double consciousness for Black women is much more complicated. Their intersections also necessitate a consideration of gender identity as an idea equal to their racial identity. Their sense of double consciousness is complicated further by aspects like the unsettled divide between the sacred and the secular. The
only certainty for Black women is that these concepts continually operate in ways revealed through their rhetoric.

DuBois gives us specific language to name the Black American struggle with matters of intersectionality. Audre Lorde (1984) adds to this with a similar sentiment in her discussion of the outsider-within (1984). As a Black feminist scholar, Lorde’s work specifically accounts for the unique perspectives of Black women expected to function within the confining limits set by their oppressors. I am moved by another frame that lends itself to a more accurate accounting of the Black woman’s experiences with place.

Entrikin (1991) gives us reason to embrace our twoness through what he calls the “betweenness of place.” His insightful take on betweenness proves instructive for this discussion detailing the value of an intersectional approach to place and sanctuary. He reminds us that, “From the decentered vantage point of the theoretical scientist, place becomes either location or a set of generic relations and thereby loses much of its significance for human action. From the centered viewpoint of the subject, place has meaning only in relation to an individual or a group’s goals and concerns” (p. 5). Entrikin’s arguments help us draw the conclusion: “Place is best viewed from points in between” (p. 5).

The beauty of betweenness is that the marginalized are not forced to choose. Betweenness stands out as a solid rationale for leaning into the perspectives of Black women as they challenge ascriptions of place. Still, leaning into “betweenness” more than “double consciousness” or the concept of the “outsider-within” is strategic. It is not a choice made in haste. Though the “outsider-within” construct was coined by a Black feminist, the term lies in stark contrast to the picture of sanctuary. It emphasizes the position of exclusion, not the obtainment of unfettered access to place. Likewise, double consciousness takes on a slightly
negative tenor when used to describe the Black experience. Entrikin's label offers a perspective on double consciousness that distinguishes itself further because of the attention afforded to matters of place. Best of all, with betweenness, one does not have to choose which part of oneself to embrace. All aspects of one's identity are equally embraced. The person is not at war with self. If there is any hope for a more complete picture of place, we must accept the Black woman’s profoundly layered insight cultivated from the betweenness of place.

Whether one chooses to embrace the language of betweenness, double consciousness or a similar framework, what matters most for Black women is that authentic experiences with sanctuary are predicated on the full affirmation of their Blackness and their womanhood. If there is any hope of a decolonized reading of place, rhetoricians must adopt a perspective that embraces a standpoint of betweenness. Otherwise, we consent to an unending cycle where we are either the colonizer or the colonized. Those who use the betweenness at the epicenter of their historical subjugation are the ones most likely to find sanctuary.

**Displacing Place**

In rhetoric, displacement is generally a reference to the ways bodies and memories move (Armada, 2010; Bernard-Donals, 2016). While this is useful to the discussion of place and sanctuary, it may be more helpful to think of Bernard-Donals’ description of displacement as “a point of departure” (p. 4). For the Black woman historically placed by place, displacement is more than movement. That is, in part, because the idea of movement is not necessarily liberating. Movement can still leave us trapped in bodies, locations, identities assigned by others, and in the hierarchical systems that maintain oppression. However, the idea of departure gives us room to do more than simply move within established systems. The concept of departure also creates a
rhetorical place from which we reject assigned locations, identities, and placement. If there is hope of securing access to sanctuary, displacement is essential.

For Black women, displacement is a function of agency exacted in response to the imposition of place. Operating in their betweenness, displacement becomes the tool to get beyond the often-myopic perspective of their oppressors (Collins, 1997; Wood, 2005). The ability to rhetorically displace themselves out of place is part of the reason Black women do not demand their centeredness at the expense of others. Instead, they offer what O.I. Davis describes as “a voice which redefines rhetoric from a perspective of differences as constructive and complimentary, rather than antagonistic; it is a voice of African-American women's consciousness that avoids replacing one essentialist discourse with another to maintain hegemonic assumptions” (1998, p. 83). Indeed, it is not an issue of replacement; it is more accurate to work toward displacement.

Black women’s stories of place often stand in direct opposition to historical records and contemporary instances of placement because they are a departure from White, Western, patriarchal constructions of place. Resisting people, systems, and structures of oppression is itself an assertion of place and agency. Still, without a place in the study of place, Black women’s notable contributions are often overlooked. In contradistinction, when we introduce the voices of those with intersectional identities, the landscape of place is extended to make place’s possibilities attainable for all.

Displacement is an act that extends the landscape of place. This is significant for two reasons: 1.) Departing from traditionally imposed readings of place requires rejecting readings of place as strictly White, Western and patriarchal, and 2.) When we find ways to circumvent traditional readings of place, we enter the possibility of something new and better. Still, there is
more. When Black women learn to operate outside of traditional readings of place, their displacement moves them out of another’s place and into sanctuary. Those who consciously displace themselves are the ones who move beyond the colonized rendering of place working to keep them enslaved in their Blackness and their womanhood (because of their Blackness and their womanhood). Black women’s innovative escape to sanctuary from place is also an escape from the circular logic that keeps them in place. This kind of movement creates a blueprint for the theoretical decolonization of place. Indeed, as Anna Julia Cooper (1998) suggests, Black women tell us “when and where to enter.” In the case of place, Black women find their own place to enter and point others to their place of entry.

Place’s decolonization rests on this displacement outside of colonized readings of place. In other words, decolonization hinges on one’s ability to step outside of place and set place for themselves. Baker captures this when he posits, “If one, however, is constituted and maintained by and within boundaries set by a dominating authority, then one is not a setter of place, but a prisoner of another’s desire” (1991, p. 104). Coleman and Collins capture the impetus for challenging the boundaries of place, explaining, “the boundaries around [places] have become deeply problematized as connections between culture and territory, identity and fixed community, are challenged” (2006, p. 2). Baker, Coleman and Collins’ sentiments are a reminder that captivity and liberation are mutually exclusive. It is impossible to experience the freedom of sanctuary while simultaneously constrained by the boundaries of place defined and assigned by another. The woman who uses her own agency to designate a place of her own accord liberates herself by rhetorically inventing and reinventing place. This is in part because the one who defines place often retains the power to place and keep in place. Thus, at Baker’s urging, it is easy to conclude that the setter of place is the only one with the power to experience the fullness
of sanctuary. Moreover, it is imperative that we view sanctuary as a place of exile away from the host of White, Western, patriarchal readings of place (Gounard, 1974; Wright, 1951). Sanctuary, in this instance, is not a place to which the Other runs upon banishment (Qabaha, 2018; Said, 1993; Zorić, 2016). It is exactly the opposite; sanctuary is the chosen site for departure. It is the retreat where the ones Othered in someone else’s conception of place define, center, and ascribe value to their own place. The place that centers and values Black lives and experiences in resistance to the assumptions of Whiteness and patriarchy is sanctuary.

Therefore, perched from a perpetual position of betweenness, some Black women challenge the boundaries of place that keep them at the margins. When the Black woman defines her own place, place becomes more than a site solely operating under another’s constraints. Through notable displays of their agency, Black women rhetorically expand the meaning of place. In essence, Black women’s betweenness not only gives them a unique perspective, but it is the very thing that helps them challenge the strongholds of place keeping sanctuary as an impossible attainment.

The Black woman’s blueprint for challenging place primes us to understand sanctuary’s liberating, restorative, and creative power. Still, decoding this blueprint for sanctuary as a liberation strategy requires a carefully articulated recovery plan. It must be a plan that rejects the centering of Whiteness and patriarchy as the standard. Following the path outlined by generations of Black women before me, I push back against archaic impositions of place that simply repeat a cycle of oppression. I push back by highlighting the creative ways Black women use rhetoric to reject, resist and reconstruct a place of their own. However, the only way for a Black woman to successfully draft a blueprint for her liberation is to craft something that takes all aspects of her being into consideration—especially her Blackness and her womanhood.
Related Frameworks

There are two primary tracks through which Black women situate themselves theoretically in the rhetorical tradition—around matters of race and the other crafted around feminist sentiments. An intersectional approach pairs the race and gender concerns so the oppressed are not forced to find sanctuary for one aspect of their identity only to find themselves outside of the safety of sanctuary because of another aspect of their identity. The next sections allow discussions of two frameworks with particular importance to the epistemological and ontological assumptions influencing Black women’s search for sanctuary—Afrocentricity and feminism. This discussion then brings Afrocentricity and feminism together under the guise of Black feminist thought.

Afrocentricity & Feminism

The persistent, theoretical voids within the rhetoric of place mandate a critical response. It is the kind of response that comes from asking the right questions. It is also the kind of response generated when equal value is ascribed to all contributors. This includes finding value in the voices traditionally overlooked and undervalued. Supporting this contention from a feminist guise, hooks reminds us: “feminism is not simply a struggle to end male chauvinism or a movement to ensure that women have equal rights with men; it is a commitment to eradicating the ideology of domination that permeates Western culture on various levels—sex, race, class, to name a few” (1981, p. 194). Asante expands this message to matters of race noting, “the Afrocentrist is interested in centeredness as opposed to marginality, being as opposed to nonbeing, and an active instead of a passive role for African culture and ideas in the world” (2005, p. 200). Asante pairs the theme of agency with Afrocentricity again when he declares,
“Afrocentricity liberates the African by establishing agency as the key concept for freedom. I am most free when I am most active on the basis of my own volition. Even if I am active and believe myself to be free under the will of another, I am not truly liberated” (1998, p. 21). Asante’s sentiments align with Baker’s notations about place and agency:

Under the displacing impress of authority even what one calls and perhaps, feels is one’s own place is, from the perspective of human agency, placeless. Bereft of determinative control of boundaries, the occupant or authorized boundaries would not be secure in his or her own eulogized world but maximally secured by another, a prisoner of interlocking, institutional arrangements of power (1991, p. 104).

Afrocentricity is also useful as a framework for uncovering overlooked instances of place. For instance, language is a colonizing tool of oppression that remains entrenched unless some intentionality toward departure is exerted. More specifically, the power of language is redirected through the practice of naming within an Afrocentric worldview. As an example, great forethought went into ensuring this project does not blindly commit to the language of the oppressor. The decision to continue with Entrikin’s use of betweenness over double consciousness and the idea of the outsider exemplifies this commitment. The decision to move forward with the language of betweenness only comes after great contemplation about whether this language returns the oppressed back to the margins or somehow perpetuates the myth that “White is right.” In this example, cultural mindfulness and reflexivity are key. Intentionality prevails, not a colonized mindset. Applying Afrocentrism, feminist beliefs, and other culturally relevant frames to an analysis is central to the decolonization of placing language. Still, this

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2 The practice of naming is also significant to Black feminist thought, exercised under the guise of self-definition.
example is just one indication of the ways Afrocentricity and feminism lead us to a more inclusive worldview. However, we avoid the essentialist claims against Afrocentricity and feminism when we combine the strength of these frames together. There is even greater potential to meet unmet needs when wholly independent frames are brought together under the guise of Black feminist thought. I propose introducing Black feminist thought to the study of place as a quintessential frame of thought for rupturing the normative structures of rhetoric.

**Black Feminist Thought**

Questioned whether it is better to be ignored or caricatured, Smitherman (2002) concludes being ignored may be the “lesser of two evils.” I believe settling for the lesser of two evils is an untenable position. This project is an effort to ensure Black women are neither ignored nor caricatured nor left to rest at the margins. Black feminist thought provides a theoretical lens to rupture a hegemonic relationship with place.

Shaped by an Afrocentric compass and an enduring commitment to parity, Black feminist thought marries critical approaches to race with feminist approaches to gender (Collins, 1986, 2000; duCille, 1994a; hooks, 1981, 1989, 2000). Black feminist thought further enhances our worldview by offering other intersectional perspectives (Collins, 1987, 2019; A. Y. Davis, 2011). These perspectives pave the way for decolonization because they alleviate the threat of an unfair advantage for competing interests. That is, because parity is built into the betweenness, one aspect of the struggle is not privileged over another. Houston and Davis offer additional strengths observed in frameworks centering Black women explaining:

Black feminist and womanist ideologies are not monolithic, essentialist views of African American womanhood, but are derived from African American women’s varied, historically rooted patterns of experience, including our lived experiences of multiple
interdependent identities and our traditions of resistance to multiple, interlocking oppressions” (2002, p. 7).

Using Black feminist thought to study Black women just makes sense. However, when you put betweenness, Afrocentricity and Black feminist thought together, there are even more possibilities available. Considering the sustained need for sanctuary, the continued imposition of place, and the need for a decolonized understanding of place beyond location, it is time to take a new path and reimagine the ways Black women and the historically oppressed repurpose rupture.

**Redirecting the Violence of Rupture to Decolonize Place**

A decolonized representation of place is an instrumental part of Black women’s journey to sanctuary. Yet, this pathway is not without challenge. The transition to a decolonized reading of place redirects the violence of rupture and instead employs disruption for those working to get outside of place. Before moving further into a discussion of the methods employed later in the analysis of texts, I pause in this section to address the way violence is wielded as both an agent of bondage and a tool of liberation.

The idea of violence may seem drastic for a discussion of theory and place. However, violence is often enacted to maintain place (Fanon, 2018). Thus, violence must be noted as a motivating factor for the search for sanctuary. Conversely, disrupting the imposition of place requires a kind of violence as well. That means violence is also an element that brings sanctuary close. As Waligora-Davis (2011) notes, violence sits at the heart of the search for sanctuary.

Before discussing the redirection of rupture as a part of the solution, we must concede that the imposition of place is rooted in violence. There is violence associated with place, whether place is enacted locationally, hierarchically, or by ascription of a group identity. Indeed, all disruption carries the potential for violence—especially when considered in relationship to
memory (Balzotti & Crosby, 2014; Dunn, 2010; Vivian, 2004). However, not all violence and disruption are equal.

We often consider overt acts of violence that lawfully and unlawfully maintain oppressive power structures. These oppressor-enacted instances of violence include everything from lynching, flogging, and bodily mutilation to rape and crimes against the mind (Browne, 2015; Douglass, 1968; Fanon, 2008, 2018; E. J. Ore, 2019). Some acts were intended to kill and maim while others were intended as acts of intimidation or tools to squelch resistance in thought or in deed. Unfortunately, those blatant acts of violence did not end with American slavery or colonial departure. It continues with police violence and vigilante justice. It also continues in quiet acts of violence like those exacted by the judicial system (through laws and the carceral imposition of place) and economic systems (through unchecked poverty and redlining practices). Violence in our educational systems proliferates through various erasures, exclusions, and invalidations. This includes the violence of banning books and teacher intimidation but also includes more subtle acts of violence like curriculum restrictions and outright erasure from subject matters.

To achieve the displacement that supersedes a failed search for sanctuary, rupture is necessary. Yet, just any rupture will not do. Within this light, I am moved to consider Chavez’s assertion that “projects of inclusion don’t rupture oppressive structures; instead they uphold and reinforce those structures by showing how they can be kinder and gentler and better without actually changing much at all (2015, p. 166). The immediate question that should spring to mind is, “What is strong enough to rupture oppressive structures if projects of inclusion prove inadequate?” Luckily, Chavez does not leave us in limbo. She suggests we look to “alternative ontologies and epistemologies” as the strategy for rupturing “the normative structures of Rhetoric” (2015, p. 166). The Black woman’s approach to sanctuary is an exploration of an
alternate response to disruption rooted in unique epistemological and ontological assumptions. Indeed, failure to do something disruptive is an agreement to accept the status quo. Therefore, anything short of disrupting our understanding of place at the theoretical level is an agreement to let closed readings of place remain in place. For Black women searching for a place of sanctuary, rejecting closed readings of place means “departing” and taking a different path. This is a path that leads beyond the confines of Whiteness, Eurocentrism, and patriarchy. To successfully carve out a new path, disruption is necessary.

I use this project to disrupt and to capture the early disruptions of others. With a better understanding of the reason decolonization is its own kind of violence, there is an opportunity to see how the strategic use of theoretical violence is enacted through the rhetoric of sanctuary. In the following section, I describe the way the Sanctuary Cornerstone Tool makes room for the rupture of traditional ways of understanding place through White, Western, patriarchal lenses that reinforce colonization.

**Method**

There are bold challenges to the discourse of place and its reinforcement of longstanding systems of oppression. However, these challenges—and the one's leading the challenge—remain largely overlooked and uncelebrated. Extending the narrative of place so it encompasses a more diverse perspective means reconsidering Black women’s contribution to the study of place. Unfortunately, when we apply the same, broken colonized lenses of investigation, securing a place in society or in the discipline is nearly impossible. The Black woman’s sanctuary is proof there are alternative paths of resistance. The rhetoric of sanctuary is an answer to the theoretical void in the study of place. To get to sanctuary, we must employ a critical lens that liberates place, allows a reclamation of lost agency, and grants sanctuary.
O.I. Davis speaks to the Black woman contributions to a critical lens as she calls these women forward as rhetorical critic. Though she does not use the language of sanctuary or place, Davis prophetically announces an important thematic intersection:

The land of promise is symbolically realized when we dialogically create meaning between "self" and "other" to begin the process of healing from divisiveness. A Black woman rhetorical critic, then, engages discourse to locate a rhetoric of response that places our collective humanity at the center of critical inquiry. The rhetorical tradition of African-American women establishes this and transforms us by celebrating the human will to survive in the face of adversity. That is our greatest feat (1998, p. 88)

Sanctuary is the land of promise of which Davis speaks. I add my voice to the chorus of Black women before me who alter the landscape of place. I advance a new theoretical approach to place through the development and application of a culturally mindful method of analysis. Rooted in a Black feminist epistemology, decolonization and liberation are central missions. In the following pages, I deconstruct a framework privileging the lived experiences of Black women in the ways we examine texts and in our choice of texts for analysis. I answer all these challenges with the “Cornerstones of Sanctuary”—a culturally-minded frame for thoughtful, intersectional considerations of place. In the remaining chapters of this project, I explore these cornerstones discussed henceforth by the abbreviated moniker—The Sanctuary Cornerstone Tool or SCT.

**Introducing the Sanctuary Cornerstones Tool**

Before elaborating on the particulars of The Cornerstone Method (TCM), I turn to the matter of intentionality once again. The intentionality of language must carry over to every detail under consideration, including the name of this method. Such choices foretell the significance of
language with TCM as a tool of decolonization. The first step is understanding why the concept of the cornerstone is consequential to the decolonization of place. A part of architectural and ceremonial traditions for millennia, relatively few texts specifically explore the significance of cornerstones. When they are discussed, it is typically limited to their historical use as devices for informative and commemorative purposes, or to a discussion of the religious significance of the cornerstone within the Christian tradition. (Architectural Cornerstones, 2019; Morel & Germonprez, 2012; Whittaker, 2019). However, I believe there is a strong case to connect Black women’s creation of place through Whittaker’s (2019) suggestion that cornerstones function as markers of “building orientation, history, and celebration.” Considered from Whittaker’s perspective, the metaphor of the cornerstone easily aligns with a Black feminist approach to the study of place. Additionally, the way cornerstone’s foundation in religious folklore spills into the secular application of the concept is very similar to the way sanctuary’s origins in religious tradition seep into legal and political discourse.

The second part of understanding TCM’s role in a deeper exploration of place comes with considering the influence of named and unnamed Black feminist giants—especially the influence of bell hooks. Though she is widely recognized as a major thinker on topics of Black feminism and pedagogy, I hope to appease hooks’ own call for more attention to her work on matters of place (hooks, 2009, p. 22). TCM emerges from bell hooks’ work on place in the text, Belonging: A Culture of Place. The crux of her position in this text is surmised in a single sentence: “In remembering my childhood and writing about my early life I was remapping the territory, discovering myself and finding homeplace” (hooks, 2009, p. 16).

When the historical understanding of cornerstones is partnered alongside bell hooks’ position on place, TCM’s rich contrast to theories and methods reinforcing a colonizer’s
oppression is readily apparent. TCM works to uncover the rhetorical moves that liberate place and make sanctuary a reality. With the hauntings of Afrocentrism suffused in Black feminist moorings, TCM prescribes an approach to the study of place that looks past hollow, colonizing words and deeds that camouflage the real problem of place and the imposition of place. Offered in response to the forced nomadism of Black people across the diaspora, TCM is anchored by an intentional reframing of language and experiences. The cornerstones do more than identify the culprits of colonization; instead, they challenge the traditional elements of place and the imposition of place against those with intersectional identities. The cornerstones are essential to decolonizing place because they frame a new foundation at the theoretical level, a foundation that tackles systemic breaches of Black women’s agency. Thus, TCM helps me address Black women’s violent erasure from place and from the rhetorical discipline. Like the Black feminist matriarchs before me, I use TCM to alter the rhetorical landscape by creating place for others. In this place of sanctuary, I join with the resounding chorus of Black women rhetors and rhetoricians undermined by the discipline. In this altered place, “A Black woman rhetorical critic locates self and violates the space of otherness through an African-American women's rhetorical tradition” (O. I. Davis, 1998, p. 77). This labor also makes room to address similar erasures within other social institutions. I engage each of four cornerstones to: 1) explain homeplace, 2) remap territory 3) appeal to memory and 4) encourage imagination and self-discovery. I use the remainder of this chapter to expound on the role of cornerstones in the Black woman’s creation of place and search for sanctuary.

**Cornerstone #1: Creating and (Re)creating Homeplace**

Sound structures begin with a sound foundation. The solid foundation starts with the first stone, piling or concrete slab; it continues until the physical creation is complete. Just as it is true
that the strength of the foundation is of paramount concern with the physical design of any structure, so goes the material and abstract renderings of sanctuary. The first stone laid is critical because it sets the foundation for everything else built upon it. From a Black feminist perspective, the chief cornerstone or bedrock of sanctuary is the creation or reference to homeplace (Dangerfield, forthcoming). More than a rashly considered, individualistic path to sanctuary, “This task of making a homeplace…has been shared by black women globally, especially black women in white supremacist societies (hooks, 2014, p. 70).

The interest in homeplace persists across the diaspora. Still, it is up for debate whether the fascination with discussions of home and homeplace are in spite of the tragic reality of the transatlantic slave trade or because of these crimes against humanity robbing the nativity of scores of kidnapped Africans. Considering the millions dispersed across the diaspora after removal from their first home, it is no wonder the concept of homeplace remains a common theme across narratives of oppression and projects of liberation. I rely on bell hooks, a central figure in the development of TCM, to set the tone for this discussion of homeplace. While she uses the term in other texts, her writings about homeplace in the book *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* are quite consequential to this present study. hooks richly describes homeplace throughout this text, but one phrase arguably captures all of her rich description. She defines homeplace as “a place that evokes the ‘feeling of safety, of arrival, of homecoming’” (hooks, 2014, p. 68). As the chief cornerstone of sanctuary, the Black woman’s homeplace serves two primary functions: it operates as 1) a place of refuge and 2) a site of resistance (Dangerfield, forthcoming; hooks, 2014).

Patricia Davis articulates a relationship between homeplace and its offer of refuge when she insists place conveys “a sense of home, communal belonging, and most importantly, identity
hooks captures homeplace’s function as a place of refuge when she describes homeplace as:

“…a safe place where black people could affirm one another and by so doing heal many of the wounds inflicted by racist domination. We could not learn to love or respect ourselves in the culture of white supremacy, on the outside; it was there on the inside, in that “homeplace,” most often created and kept by black women, that we had the opportunity to grow and develop, to nurture our spirits (hooks, 2014, p. 70).

The view of homeplace (and by extension, sanctuary) as a place of refuge aligns with common readings of sanctuary. However, the depiction of homeplace as a site of resistance is not as common. Again, I turn to hooks as she describes homeplace’s function as a site of opposition:

…one could freely confront the issue of humanization, where one could resist. Black women resisted by making homes where all black people could strive to be subjects, not objects, where we could be affirmed in our minds and hearts despite poverty, hardship, and deprivation, where we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied us on the outside in the public world (hooks, 2014, p. 70).

Collins adds to this conversation noting the importance of Black women’s resistance to another’s imposition of place. She declares the places we create, “are not only safe—they form prime locations for resisting objectification as the Other” (2000, p. 111).

Finally, it seems important to note that for Black people, the search for refuge is a lifelong search. We see this experiential truth play out in Black communities where people reference death as going home. In the same spirit, the event commemorating the deceased person’s life is traditionally called a homegoing celebration. The rhetorical power behind these language choices is more poignant than religious symbolism alone because this practice
supersedes religious denominationalism. The language of home captures the successful culmination of a person’s lifelong search for sanctuary. Additionally, for those subscribing to religious traditions, death stands as the last struggle against place. Living is resistance, death is victory, and the ultimate place of sanctuary—heaven—is reward. This rhetorical wordplay helps explain why Black believers often describe making heaven their home when they die. Theorizing sanctuary in alignment with Black faith traditions attests there is no sanctuary without the cornerstone of homeplace.

**Cornerstone #2: Remapping the Territory**

In Cixous’ treatise on women’s writing, she connects the imposition of place to the one who names territory when she writes:

As soon as they begin to speak, at the same time they’re taught their name, they can be taught that their territory is black; because you are Africa, you are black. Your continent is dark. Dark is dangerous. You can’t see anything in the dark, you’re afraid. Don’t move, you might fall. Most of all, don’t go into the forest. And so we have internalized this horror of the dark (1976, pp. 877–878).

Cixous’ observation is important because it provides justification for a move beyond the first cornerstone. That is, homeplace must have an element of resistance because the territory into which Black women are cast is set up to keep them locked in place. Thus, for the Black women who carve out a homeplace for refuge and resistance, there must be a next step; they must remap the territory.

Part of the impetus for remapping the territory is that we have tried to make change at the wrong level. Sylvia Wynter (2006) offers an explanation for this error as she vehemently reminds
us the map is not the territory. She links the creative expressions produced in periods of rupture with the call for remapping as she asserts:

…in the context of their challenge to this over-representation that not only the texts cited earlier but also the range of essays, poetry, fiction, and creative writing produced by black writers in the 1960s and early 1970s must now be returned to, re-examined, and reclaimed, as the first stage, however then incomplete, of our coming to grips with the real issue (the territory rather than its map) with which we are now urgently confronted” (Wynter, 2006, p. 161).

Remapping the territory is the conscious choice not to blindly accept that which has been overrepresented as the standard. It is refusing to focus on biology (as in race and gender constructs) but to instead consider the way ideas are socially constructed. Regarding the matter of place, it is Baker who offers the answer to remapping the territory when he proclaims:

“For place to be recognized by one as actually PLACE, as a personally valued locale, one must set and maintain the boundaries. If one, however, is constituted and maintained by and within boundaries set by a dominating authority, then one is not a setter of place but a prisoner of another’s desire” (1991, p. 104).

Each of these texts underscore the point that securing sanctuary rests on one’s ability to resist “the normalization of otherness through alternative readings of place. It is only in new renderings of territory that the places of sanctuary present all along are made visible to those relying on the wrong map” (Dangerfield, forthcoming).

“Cornerstone #3: Appeals to Memory

Cudjoe suggests “a person is not complete until she locates herself fully in her time (history) and her place (geography.” (1990, p. 79). I believe memory is the essential
link between time and place, history and geography. Without memory, history is fleeting and place is negated. Patricia Davis uses this connection to affirm, “Rhetorics of place operate most powerfully when they evoke the history and memory of a site” (2016, p. 97). The triangulated relationship between place, history and memory are critical components of a Black feminist paradigm.

Still, there are uniquely Afrocentric elements that make TCM an affront to Whiteness. This includes an almost dogmatic concern for the liberation of others in one’s own community, the penchant to look back to advance forward, and the unending regard for the ancestors (Asante, 1998; Daniel & Smitherman, 2004). These uniquely Afrocentric elements make TCM right for this project of decolonization. Indeed, there is no decolonization or liberation where a people’s memory and culture is erased or essentially negated. In fact, in a discussion of memory in a different text, I argue memory does at least 3 things: 1.) “memory re-marks places and situations with the symbolism of the past,” 2) it “ties the past to the present through the cross-generational rehearsal of stories of survival,” and 3) memory operates as a “powerful tool in the Black feminist’s arsenal [because] there is no separation of past from present in African traditions” (Dangerfield, forthcoming). While I offer the significance of memory in a Black feminist approach to place and sanctuary, it is O. I. Davis who succinctly captures the importance of memory to Black women asserting their place in the rhetorical tradition. She explains, “the rhetorical critic locates her work between the past and the present lives of Black women and how they responded dialectically and dialogically to oppression in order to liberate, transform, redefine, and re-claim the distinctive rhetorical tradition of intellectualism of Black womanhood for future generations of thinkers within and
without the academy” (O. I. Davis, 1998, p. 80). Taking these ideas together, it is easy to surmise there is an intrinsic link between place and memory. When memory is stolen, place is stolen; when memory is restored, place is restored. When place is restored, sanctuary is near.

Cornerstone #4. Freedom to Imagine and Discover

There is a loss of freedom spawned by the loss of one’s agency. However, being locked in place physically is far less consequential than the loss of one’s freedom to imagine, discover, create or invent. This is in part because shackles and physical constraints may be removed, but the enduring loss of other freedoms causes inordinate damage. It is within this frame of thought that I approach Etoke’s suggestion that unless we are “planning our becoming, we confess a desire for eternal servitude…allocate the responsibility of our destiny to the Other…[therefore] signing our own death sentence” (2019, p. 57). I read this as a warning against remaining complicit with the theft of our stolen agency. For victims of violent assaults on their agency, creation or invention is the self-administered cure for the enduring pain of stolen agency.

In many ways, this antidote for stolen agency falls in line with the discipline’s preoccupation with invention. Indeed, rhetoric is replete with the language of invention. From Cicero to Burke, rhetoricians’ attention to inventio is well-documented. Considering the heavy praise lauded on invention in classical Greek rhetoric, it is no surprise the inventive potential of those pushed into a position of subordination (because of their race, gender or other aspect of their identity) is disregarded or violently apprehended. Whether the apprehension of another’s agency is discussed in terms of their inability to invent, create or some other term, acknowledging the acts that counter the violence of colonization, erasure, exclusion, and muting
is key. Getting free from the restraints that keep them bound to another’s place is what matters most.

For scores of unnamed Black women, reclaiming agency is largely about using one’s own inventive or creative power to proverbially claim a place of her own. Asante supports this suggesting there is an Afrocentric imperative that drives the oppressed to seek agency and action (2005, p. 200). Cixous masterfully captures the danger of being locked in when she declares: “They have wandered around in circles, confined to the narrow room in which they’ve been given a deadly brainwashing. You can incarcerate them, slow them down, get away with the old Apartheid routine, but for a time only” (Cixous, 1976, p. 877). While she does not directly call out the Black woman, Cixous’ discussion of Apartheid and use of descriptive statements like, “you are African, you are black” alleviates speculation of whether her arguments include the realities of Black women’s oppression.

There is ample documentation of the challenges to Black women’s agency (Atwater, 2009; Barnett, 1993; Collier-Thomas & Franklin, 2001; Collins, 2000; hooks, 1981; Lomax, 2018). Additionally, the perception of reclaimed agency is often limited to speeches, written works, or displays of sexual empowerment. While I do not contest these expressions of Black women’s agency, I submit that Black women are robbed of their agency afresh when limited to the acts of agency expected by the very oppressors who stole their agency in the first place. To fully grasp the significance of Black women creating sanctuary by first creating place, it is important to consider that these women often reclaim agency in ways that force us to reevaluate what White, capitalist patriarchal systems deem acceptable declarations of agency.

The Black woman is empowered to resist another’s imposition of place when she creates. Black women creators of sanctuary stand in stark contrast to the depiction of the victim who
quietly accepts her oppression. The belief that Black women are docile acceptors of their oppression rails against the creative and decisive ways Black women reveal their agency. O’Neale chastises the naïve onlooker for underestimating Black women’s ability to resist and reclaim her agency in rather creative ways. She is unrelenting in the way she sees it:

That a black woman will stay put and let any man pulverize her without lifting a foot, finger, skillet (of boiling water, lye, or ever-available hot grits), chair, knife, or some other handy instrument of self-defense, is indeed a neohistory of some other believer in passive resistance (O’Neale, 1986, pp. 140–141)

The failure to identify or consider Black women’s agency because it does not conform to White, patriarchal prescriptions of agency is one more act of violence on a very long list recorded over ages. It is a choice that once again usurps the Black woman’s agency. O’Neale gets it right when she astutely confesses, “Maybe we don’t always win, but at least we do always fight back” (1986, pp. 140–141)

For Black women pushing back against the theft of their agency, creation is a powerful response. Whether referring to an act of resistance that looks like a creative rhetorical work, the creation of place (outside of traditionally oppressive readings) or the creation of a place (within the discipline), Black women’s strategic use of creativity must be considered. Davis tells us why Black women’s creative/rhetorical power is important when she notes:

“Rhetoric provides Black women symbolic entrance into a discourse of humanity. The act of writing became an act of resistance, for at once it proclaimed their intellectual prowess and disclaimed the myth of their non-humanness. Black women's rhetoric informs a new vision of what humanity could be if the lived experience of the historically oppressed becomes a standardized part of our study of place and human communication broadly
considered. Writing became a symbolic act of redefining themselves in opposition to the dehumanizing images of Black women as breeders, chattel, and illiterate non-beings” (1998, p. 85).

It is consequential that the freedom to imagine is the fourth and final cornerstone; this cornerstone marks Black women’s agency and seals their place in the rhetorical tradition. It is a necessary move that amplifies voices muted to maintain silence and systems of oppression. With such careful attention directed towards the voids and framework for this present study, I now turn to resolve outstanding questions about the method of inquiry.

**Contextualizing the Method**

Resisting place is its own accomplishment. However, Black women’s victories over place do not end there. These women achieve new victories by leaving records of their resistance. In other words, the initial victory won by securing place and sanctuary is amplified when Black women document their innovative strategies for posterity. I take up the same cause of rejecting traditional notions of place in similitude to earlier generations of Black women. The only difference is the strategic methods used to accomplish the work of progenitors from days gone by.

Collins reminds us that within the rich legacy of Black feminist thought, the record of Black women’s standpoint “has been oral and has been produced by ordinary Black women in their roles as mothers, teachers, musicians, and preachers” (1986, p. S16). She adds, “Since the civil rights and women’s movements, Black women’s ideas have been increasingly documented and are reaching wider audiences” (Collins, 1986, p. S16). In the spirit of those ancestral defiers of place documenting their resistance before this present moment, I use case studies to document the always already fights for sanctuary undertaken through a rejection of place.
Case studies are ideal for this project of recovery and reframing because the studies let participants speak for themselves. That means not only do the muted speak through this tool of inquiry, but this particular approach ensures the kind of rich rigor and thick description necessary for sound qualitative inquiry (Hancock & Algozzine, 2016; Tracy, 2010). Stewart adds to this argument noting case studies operate as “an exploratory form of inquiry, providing an in-depth picture of the unit of study” (2014, p. 145). Hancock and Algozzine laud case studies as, “richly descriptive” and “grounded in deep and varied sources of information” (2016, p. 16). Further, since case studies can include “quotes from key participants, anecdotes, narratives…and other literary techniques to create mental images that bring to life the complexity of the many variables inherent in the phenomenon being studied,” they are an invaluable tool to capture the richness of the texts considered (Hancock & Algozzine, 2016, p. 17). I especially embrace the intertextual depth from this compilation of rhetorical artifacts because unearthing Black women's voices from the recesses of history is worth the work involved.

I note the importance of historical depth with this project because capturing responses during times of rupture brings a trans-temporal element to this project. This is befitting for a project steeped in Black feminist thought and Afrocentric sentiments. That is, members of the Black community often take cues from the experiential knowledge of the ancestors who not only faced incessant rounds of crisis, but often left record of their survival for subsequent generations to use as guidance (Daniel & Smitherman, 2004). Though past, experiential knowledge is often undervalued as marginalized, subjugated knowledge (Collins, 1986; Foucault, 1980), the records of past victories teaches successive generations to take a measured response to the immediate rupture at hand. As the voices and experiences of the past inform this current moment, this work
elevates long-ignored challenges to place by Black women. Our ability to successfully meet the current moment is predicated on our ability to look back.

Looking backwards for a better understanding of the paths to sanctuary is the heart of this project. My curiosity about the strategies for displacement undertaken by the likes of Sojourner Truth, Anna Julia Cooper and Hannah Crafts leads me to the rhetorical artifacts these women left behind. Their record of confrontations with White, Western, patriarchal ascriptions of place remains as roadmaps to sanctuary. Their maps are blueprints awaiting those looking to the lived experience of others for guidance. This project ascribes unquestioned value to the voices and experiences of Black women who create a place for themselves and others.

Each of these women use rhetoric to show people how to secure a place beyond another’s imposition of place. Their self-produced texts are a primary way to witness the measure of agency wielded by women whose actions and words were not always considered important enough to be recorded by others. Moreover, for women whose race, gender, condition of enslavement, educational attainment, and/or geographic location should preclude them from speaking for themselves, the fact that they still managed to make themselves heard is especially noteworthy. Thus, this project is as much about the women who created the rhetorical artifacts as it is about the texts they left for us. The three women chosen—Truth, Cooper, and Crafts—represent lives lived amid rupture. Their stories and their creations speak to the ways Black women live and work around social, legal and political systems to get to a place of their own. Therefore, as we study visual and written works from Sojourner Truth, Hannah Crafts, and Anna Julia Cooper, we witness Black women’s audacious display of agency amid bookending periods of rupture.
While the rhetorical artifacts of Truth, Crafts and Cooper provide a rich body of work to consider, I acknowledge there are still limitations to this list. Simply put, three case studies cannot capture all the ways Black women resist place and create sanctuary across the diaspora. My cases are limited to Black women in the United States even though I intentionally use the label “Black,” not “African American” throughout this text. I made this rhetorical choice to honor Black women across the diaspora. I strongly considered expanding the list of rhetors and artifacts thinking of the importance of representation from other nations and conditions of citizenship. This includes immigrants, those in exile in the United States, or those from the United States exiled abroad. However, taking this perspective would introduce other variables beyond aspects of identity like race, gender, and class already at play in this project. I concluded an intersectional approach to place is big enough to encompass nationality, condition of exile, and the influence of international politics without intentionally introducing these variables to this project. I thought it was important not to overextend myself beyond what I can reasonably address in a single document. Still, I am satisfied that this thoughtfully chosen group allows inductive navigation from the specific to the general.

Conclusion

There is much to learn from those who evade the imposition of place to operate as both the student and the teacher. When we reflect on the ways these women strategically challenge archaic notions of place, we witness how those without a place in the study of place socially and physically transgress the limits imposed on them. Whether initiating this transgression for personal or collective survival, Black women’s creations carve out places for personal and generational advancement.
In subsequent chapters, I respond to theoretical voids and the social realities of place by applying the cornerstones of sanctuary. Analyzing texts from Sojourner Truth, Hannah Crafts, and Anna Julia Cooper gives me the opportunity to document the ways this small sample of Black women found sanctuary. It is my hope that through this discussion of what it takes to decolonize place, this project brings Black women one step closer to finding disciplinary sanctuary, too.
Chapter Three

Sanctuary from the “Unbearable Wrongness of Being”:

Dr. Anna Julia Cooper’s Voice as a Challenge to Place

Dr. Anna Julia Cooper is an early Black feminist advocate and a central figure among Black women intellectuals. She is also a visionary thinker who uses her voice to call attention to the plight of Black women from the South (Alexander, 1995; Cooper, 1998; Fox, 2017; Guy-Sheftall, 2009; Wilburn, 2014). Those interested in Cooper’s influence give particular attention to her work advocating for Black women’s right to speak. However, we commit an injustice when we overlook the breadth of Anna Julia Cooper’s interests. That is, if we focus on the power of the voice without harkening to the voice's cry, we miss the fullness of what it means to have a voice. Sylvia Wynter (2006) names this problem when she declares the map is not the territory. That is, a singular focus on securing Black women’s right to speak leaves us working at the map-level. It is important to have Cooper’s voice as a map, but if we are not vigilant, we miss the territory revealed by the map. I argue that Anna Julia Cooper’s voice is not only a map; her map points us to sanctuary.

Cooper’s sanctuary is not just a physical structure, though. Cooper and her vision of sanctuary are far more nuanced than anything captured by a generalized approach to this concept. Cooper’s approach to sanctuary must be nuanced because Black women’s need for sanctuary is equally nuanced. Anyone facing what Wynter (2006) calls “the unbearable wrongness of being” cannot rest in an overly simplistic rhetorical construction that does not fully meet their needs (p. 118). Wynter reminds us that “because the negative connotations placed upon the black population group are a function of the de-valORIZATION of the human, the systemic
revalorization of black peoples can be fundamentally effected only by means of the no less systemic revalorization of the human being itself” (p. 119). The revalorization of Black women is found only when these women reclaim their humanity. Indeed, the sanctuary of Black women’s humanity protects and restores them from the brokenness of another’s estimation that their very being is wrong. Cooper’s response to the unbearable wrongness of being and de-valorization is a defiant rejection of someone else’s imposition (or mapping) of place. Cooper uses her text, *A Voice from the South*, as a new map pointing us to the decolonized place of refuge where humanity is equitable and self-definition prevails over the limits of place. In short, Anna Julia Cooper’s voice/*Voice* is the map that points us toward unmapped territory of sanctuary within humanity.

Sanctuary *hidden in humanity* should not be confused with *humanitarian* sanctuary. The latter is akin to the creation of refugee camps in contested territory. From this perspective, the marginalized person is still confined to a place of someone else’s design. If sanctuary’s accessibility rests on the instability of beliefs or public opinion in a singular moment in time, place controls the reading of sanctuary. There is danger in leaving one’s access to sanctuary in the hands of an oppressor. In this reading of humanity as mankind, “The black would come to be emplotted at the bottom of the racialist Euromodern hierarchization of being; the black is, in a word, the consummate barbarian, one who is speechless and therefore, anti-political” (Chevannes, 2023, p. 3). Those castigated by humanity as mankind cannot enjoy the peace of sanctuary. Anna Julia Cooper’s voice calls us to a higher humanity. This rendering of humanity as a systemic revalorization does not rely on man’s recognition (Monahan, 2006). Rather, it hinges on someone knowing the power of their voice (Arendt, 2018; Chevannes, 2023). Cooper’s mapping is a revolutionary challenge to traditional readings of place because she does not leave
her fate in the hands of other people. Her voice attests that she is not speechless and moreover, she is not subject to a Euromodern reading of humanity that maintains a colonizing impulse.

This chapter is a testament to Anna Julia Cooper’s interest in being much more than a mouthpiece. Anna Julia Cooper lives out Davis’ premise that “Rhetoric provides Black women symbolic entrance into a discourse of humanity” (O. I. Davis, 1998). In fact, Cooper schooled us on this point when she penned the enduring sentiment: “Only the BLACK WOMAN can say ‘when and where I enter, in the quiet, undisputed dignity of my womanhood without violence and without suing or special patronage, then and there the whole Negro race enters with me’” (Cooper, 1998, p. 63). Cooper throws open the doors of humanity using her own speeches, response letters and articles as a testament to a Black woman’s engagement in the rhetorical discourse on her behalf. She is the voice from the South and gives herself back to us in the text, A Voice from the South (by a Black Woman of the South). Using her life and this text as guides, Cooper launches a direct challenge to place by warring against the imposition of place. This exploration of Black women's persistent battle for sanctuary is the subject of this dissertation. However, as the leading case study of this project, Anna Julia Cooper offers a starting point toward a Black woman’s unique understanding of place. She re-maps our thinking around three of the most common readings of place—place as identity, place as hierarchy and place as location. She does this by offering Black women a way to map a path to sanctuary. This chapter the situates place within two overarching topics relative to sanctuary: the map and the territory.

The first element, the map, discusses Black women’s experiences with rupture and the voices emerging out of those moments of rupture. Mapping names the way rupture shapes Cooper, her voice, and her search for sanctuary. Edney (2019) adds,
“Performative mapping practices…are a function of humanity” (p. 40). This section also addresses how she redirects rupture to regain control over crisis. The second element of this chapter deals with Cooper’s push for sanctuary (or territory) through a declaration of her humanity. Glenn (1995) speaks to the work of remapping rhetorical territory by describing the third element of this chapter, place, as the link between the map (voice) and the destination (sanctuary). This section is grounded by a discussion of the way Cooper thwarts the imposition of place. After exploring these foundational aspects of Cooper’s work, I move to the fourth element of this project a review and analysis of the text, *A Voice from the South (by a Black Woman of the South)*. Finally, I conclude this chapter with a summary of my findings.

**Rhetorically Mapping Rupture**

Edney (2019) compliments Cooper’s work with his insight on maps and mapping. He helps differentiate what maps are and what they are not. Beginning with the part that falls outside of the purview of map, Edney notes, “Maps are not just graphic images or things but are variously integrations of words, graphics, numbers, gestures; installations of multiple objects; and even intangible artifacts. Maps are not simple, self-contained “objects” but multicomponent “things”” (p. 40). Conversely, he explains that a map is a text representing, “a complex of signs that has been assembled through a process of semiosis; those signs can variously include words (oral and written), graphics, physical installations, and performances” (p. 41).

Still, while Edney’s work provides a helpful first glance, McKittrick (2006) speaks directly to the case of black women and cartography declaring, “if we pursue the links between practices of domination and black women’s experiences in place, we see that black women’s geographies are lived, possible, and imaginable. Black women’s geographies open up a
meaningful way to approach both the power and possibilities of geographic inquiry” (p. xii). McKittrick helps us draw a link between mapping and possibility as well as mapping and rupture. hooks (2009) gives a hint of this relationship while discussing her search for a central aspect of sanctuary. She explains, “the condition of feeling split was damaging, caused a breaking down of the spirit. Healing that spirit meant for me remembering myself, taking the bits and pieces of my life and putting them together again” (p. 16). For some Black women, rupture occurs so frequently that it becomes a part of their norm. Cooper’s life testifies to more than a century of surviving the kinds of crisis described by hooks. She describes the times at the end of the nineteenth century as “transitional and unsettled”—a fitting description of Black women’s experiences with rupture across time (Cooper, 1998, p. 112). As we consider Cooper’s experiences with the ordinariness of rupture, three intersecting themes of rupture emerge: collective interruptions, personal interruptions, and repurposed interruptions.

First, there is the matter of collective interruption or the common experiences of rupture. For Black women, the question of collective rupture includes social, legal, political and cultural experiences with interruption that keep the oppressed shackled in place. Cooper speaks of the common-place nature of rupture for Black women when she writes:

“To be a woman in such an age carries with it a privilege and an opportunity never implied before. But to be a woman of the Negro race in America, and to be able to grasp the deep significance of the possibilities of the crisis, is to have a heritage, it seems to me, unique in the ages (Cooper, 1998, p. 117).

The list of ruptures of the late 1800s and early 1900s is extensive. Lemert, the editor of one of the broadest compilations of Cooper’s work, captures several of these ruptures as he describes Cooper’s most productive periods of scholarship. Lemert (2000)
describes the unsettledness during her lifetime as “anything but uncomplicated” (p. 4). He lists notable periods of collective interruption in Cooper’s life explaining:

She began her work barely twenty years after Emancipation and a short decade after the collapse of Reconstruction in 1877. She continued it through the rise of Jim Crow; through the era of the northern and urban migrations, of which she herself was a pioneer, through the early-twentieth century struggles between Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois…and through the Harlem Renaissance…She died in 1964 just when the Civil Rights Movement was turning toward its final agonal transformation into the Black Power phase (p. 4).

Alexander adds to the list of ruptures, reminding us, “Lynching, legal disfranchisement, and court-sanctioned segregation were in place and on the rise” (Alexander, 1995, p. 336). She also references economic depression and court cases as additional examples of rupture. Alexander and Lemert’s lists chronicle the broad social and political ruptures shaping Black people during the latter half of the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century. They situate Cooper’s work within significant periods of crisis and opportunity. Additionally, these authors move beyond chronicling the collective experiences of a lifetime of rupture. Their list helps us see how collective experiences of upheaval bleed into more intimate experiences with rupture.

Therefore, the second level of rupture deserving consideration is Cooper’s personal experiences with rupture. Cooper was born into rupture around 1858 as the daughter of an enslaved mother, Hannah Stanley. Her father is presumed to be her mother’s enslaver. Of this matter, Anna Julia Cooper writes that her mother, “was always too modest and shamefaced ever to mention him” (Cooper, 1998, p. 331). Stanley’s evasiveness about her daughter’s paternity suggests Cooper may have been the product of
rape. Beyond the less-than-ideal circumstances of her birth, one must also consider that though Cooper married at an early age, she is a widow after only 2 years of marriage. She also went back to school twice as a non-traditional student and raised a deceased family member’s children. Collectively and personally, rupture’s impact on Cooper’s life is profound.

Yet, there is a final layer of rupture revealed in Cooper’s life. These repurposed interruptions are strategically redirected on behalf of the oppressed. Black women’s rhetoric fits within this understanding of rupture and best explains why the voices of the oppressed are critically important. Cooper captures Black women’s ability to effect change as she professes, “The American woman of to-day not only gives tone directly to her immediate world, but her tiniest pulsation ripples out and out, down and down, till the outermost circles and the deepest layers of society feel the vibrations” (p. 90).

As we follow Cooper’s story, we see her commitment to overcoming. In the face of domino-like experiences of disruption, Cooper survives; she also demonstrates mastery of the very system, keeping others in similar conditions in their place. In the context of a century’s worth of rupture, Cooper chronicles Black women’s pregnant potential by blending collective, personal and repurposed rupture. In other words, she is not an anomaly.

Claiming Humanity at the Center of Sanctuary

If sanctuary is the territory, it is imperative that the parameters of the territory are clearly defined or better yet, redefined. Glenn (1995) advocates for this work even as she acknowledges a shift in the way territory is defined. She takes up the cause of remapping rhetorical territory observing, “Postmodernism…demands our awareness of situatedness,
our angle (in my case, reading as a woman). And postmodern angles help us identify previously unseen and unconsidered problems of ‘foundational’ knowledge” (p. 288). Glenn captures reason remapping is an imperative in the discipline when she announces, “we can chart and account for previously unseen and unmeasured contours of the landscape. Through angular lenses we catch fragmentary glimpses of the previously unconsidered variations that had been smoothed over by the flat surface of received knowledge” (p. 289). However, it is McKittrick (2006) who once again captures Cooper’s unique addition to this conversation suggesting:

If these hierarchies are spatial expressions of racism and sexism, the interrogations and remappings provided by black diaspora populations can incite new, or different, and perhaps more just, geographic stories. That is, the sites/citations of struggle indicate that traditional geographies, and their attendant hierarchical categories of humanness, cannot do the emancipatory work some subjects demand (p. xix).

Because the mapping of place onto Black bodies is indeed the expression of racism and sexism, new maps are necessary—even if the territory remains the same. Still, maps are not just about identifying what is known. Maps are also useful for those seeking hidden places. Humanity is one of those hidden places resting in the bosom of sanctuary. Ferguson (1990) captures the elusiveness of hidden power when he writes:

“The place from which power is exercised is often a hidden place. When we try to pin it down, the center always seems to be somewhere else. Yet we know that his phantom center, elusive as it is, exerts a real, undeniable power over the whole social framework of our culture, and over the ways that we think about it” (p. 9).
McKittrick (2006) offers an example that speaks to hidden power from a different vantage point. She addresses the power of the hidden thing but does so through the example of a slave ship. She explains, “the slave ship is not simply a container hiding his displacement. It is a location through which he articulates hardship and human cruelty, in part mapping and giving new meaning to the vessel itself” (xii). Just as the slave ship is a container that maps new meaning, sanctuary is a container that maps new meaning as well. Sanctuary holds humanity at its center and undoes the damage wrought by the unbearable wrongness of being.

Anna Julia Cooper understands the power of this work. She captures the impetus for seeking a hidden place of sanctuary when she writes, “With all the wrongs and neglects of her past, with all the weakness, the debasement, the moral thralldom of her present, the black woman of to-day stands mute and wondering at the Herculean task devolving upon her (Cooper, 1998, p. 62). Cooper expresses why there is a voice that refuses silence, but she goes a step further. She insists Black women must participate in their own liberation noting, “No other hand can move the lever. She must be loosed from her hands and set to work” (p. 62). That means Black women do more than tell us when and where to enter. They construct maps that lead us to the front door.

Lending voice to one’s humanity is central to the Black woman’s experience of sanctuary. This is the work that allows one to claim the humanity that is their birthright. Anna Julia Cooper shows us the humanity at the center of sanctuary in at least three ways. She calls us to bolster the oppressed’s humanity by 1.) showing common honor or regard, 2.) valuing presence over erasure and 3.) treating others well as an act of benevolence.
First, Cooper’s words, adorning every American passport, speak to Black women’s humanity. These words, which now travel places Anna Julia Cooper would never get to go, declare: “The cause of freedom is not the cause of a race or respect, a party or a class,—it is the cause of humankind, the very birthright of humanity.” (Cooper, p. 106). From the phrase “cause of freedom,” Cooper rightfully draws our attention by identifying freedom as a universal cause. However, the argument for freedom hinges on the central premise that freedom is a “birthright of humanity.” This birthright is problematic for the Black women relegated to a place of subordination where their intersectionality is used against them. Without sanctuary, the only birthright is the right to live under another’s oppression. Cooper reminds us that the only way to enjoy the birthright of freedom rests in circumventing the limitations of place. Cooper explains it best when she declares that for a birthright fully restored, “You do not find the colored woman selling her birthright for a mess of pottage” (Cooper, 1998, p. 114)

The Power of Presence over Erasure

The second consideration in highlighting one’s humanity is ascribing value to presence over erasure. Cooper calls upon Black people to know their worth, but she goes further by calling for the recognition of the very “substance of life” (p. 108). What we see as an elevation of the voice as a hallmark of humanity is just the beginning of an affirming presence. Alexander (1995) supports this sentiment when she notes, “Using the voice is a physical act, one that first announces the existence of the body of residence and then trumpets its arrival in a public space. The physicality of that metaphor asserts corporeal presence in the space of imagined absence” (p. 345). Alexander’s point helps
us see that the value of the voice in declaring one’s presence must carry over to include bodies, experiences and similar causes. Asserting one’s humanity requires the power of presence, no matter what form that presence takes. Presence is itself resistance. According to O.I. Davis (1998), writing as resistance helps debunk what she calls “the myth of their non-humanness” (p. 85). Showing up—whether in writing, speech or physical presence—is a potent expression of one’s agency. The push for presence is yet another element of the systemic valorization that affirms one’s humanity.

Cooper (1998) digs further still and extracts the material out of a more ethereal description of humanity suggesting humanity exists:

When the rights of the individual is made sacred, when the image of God in human form, whether in marble or in clay, whether in alabaster or in ebony, is consecrated and inviolable, when men have been taught to look beneath the rags and grime, the pomp and pageantry of mere circumstance and have regard unto the celestial kernel uncontaminated at the core (p. 108).

Cooper directs our attention to the rights of the individual and the image of God in human form. She also asks people to look beyond clothing (rags) and the appearance of the body (grime). Her reference to the celestial kernel gets to the element of the soul that separates man from any other living creature. Cooper builds her argument against erasure by highlighting all the reasons one's presence qualifies them for humanity as their first birthright.

Benevolence

Once a regard for life is paired with a regard for presence, we move to the third prerequisite for putting humanity at the center of sanctuary. The intersection of regard and
presence leaves one remaining task—affirming one’s humanity through our extension of benevolence. We bolster our humanity when we master what Cooper calls the *science of politeness* and the *art of courteous contact*. She reminds us:

> when race, color, sex, condition, are realized to be the accidents, not the substance of life, and consequently as not obscuring or modifying the inalienable title to life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness,—then is mastered the science of politeness, the art of courteous contact, which is naught but the practical application of the principal of benevolence, the back bone and marrow of all religion (Cooper, 1998, p. 108).

The science of politeness and the art of courteous contact are more than colorful niceties flowing from an awareness of the substance of life. Her words are more than the glib suggestion that the world should be kinder, gentler and more religious. Cooper’s rhetoric calls us to recognize the humanity of the oppressed through our benevolence. However, affirming the humanity of the oppressed is just the beginning of Cooper’s push to sanctuary.

**Claiming Territory by Challenging Place**

If we agree that Cooper fights at the level of the map (through her voice) and that the territory is sanctuary achieved through the reaffirmation of Black humanity, we must consider the point of connection between the map and the territory. Cooper shows us that the shortcut to sanctuary rests in denying the imposition of place. In other words, we cannot freely access sanctuary without challenging Black women’s placement in terms of their 1.) identity, 2.) ascribed hierarchy or 3.) location.

Cooper’s personal and professional accomplishments showcase her ability to rupture traditional readings of place across multiple lines of demarcation. In a society where living under
the unbearable wrongness of being is normalized, Cooper defies the traditional place carved out for Black women of her day. She rhetorically reframes her own place through acts of resistance, and then steps forward and performs the same work on behalf of others. As she takes a rhetorical stand against being placed by another, Cooper reminds us that Black women’s strategies of resistance are as varied as their skin tones. Using every element at her disposal from creating, writing and speaking to teaching and loving, Cooper reframes place in ways that reject another’s limits on what constitutes resistance (Arendt, 2018; O. I. Davis, 1998; Etoke, 2019; McCullough, 2018; McGee et al., 2019). After considering the ways Cooper resists another’s imposition of place, one can consider the realms from which she resists place.

The first way Anna Julia Cooper resists place is in the realm of identity. Her primary defiance is resisting outside forces who suggest one aspect of her identity must carry more weight than another. Cooper protests that Black women should not face a choice of which identity is more salient because choosing limits the ability to honor the fullness of their identity. Thus, as we consider Cooper’s positionality, we are thinking through a text that stands as “the first systematic working out of the insistence that no one social category can capture the reality of the colored woman” (Lemert, 2000, p. 14). Sojourner Truth and others considered the intersection of race and gender before Cooper. However, Lemert suggests, “What set Cooper apart from others who were engaged at the time in a similar sort of work was that she, virtually alone, gave precise and unflinching voice to a theoretical attitude that today is very well known” (p. 14).

In addition to resisting another’s limit on place through acknowledgment of her intersectionality, Cooper also resists the readings of place by defying social, political, and even religious limits on what a Black person or woman of the day could accomplish.
Cooper claims the fullness of her identity by refusing the bondage of Whiteness and patriarchy. As a former slave, Cooper is the living embodiment of this defiance. Her insatiable pursuit of more education and completion of advanced degrees pushes the limits of place that should keep these accomplishments out of reach. Even more, Cooper demonstrates another degree of liberation that lets her balance notable accolades with her identity as a widow, nontraditional student, and single (foster and adoptive) mother.

Anna Julia Cooper’s nontraditional move into motherhood as described above provides yet another opportunity to address the way she challenges place as identity. For Black women whose bodies were forcefully used to sustain the institution of slavery, moving from historical placement as a breeder and commodity for a slaveholder’s benefit to mother is significant. Having any say over her home, her body, or her children marks a major transition from the common expectations of the day. Moreover, advocating for such a move during a time when Black women’s womanhood and motherhood rights were far from settled is a radical move.

However, amid this radical work, Cooper is accused of succumbing to the cult of true womanhood (Lemert, 2000; Washington, 1988). Washington explains this position suggesting Cooper falls back “on the true womanhood premise that women need not possess any actual political power in order to effect political change” (Washington, 1988, p. xlvi). However, even a cursory glance at Cooper’s work shows that Washington’s statements do not align with the overarching arguments made in A Voice of the South. Cooper makes radical moves in her conversations about motherhood and home. She explains her reason for addressing themes of motherhood as follows:

Woman, Mother—your responsibility is one that might make angels tremble and fear to take hold! To trifle with it, to ignore or misuse it, is to treat lightly the most sacred and
solemn trust ever confided by God to human kind. The training of children is a task on which an infinity of weal or woe depends. Who does not covet it? (Cooper, 1998, p. 59).

Instead of conforming to a place that was once pre-determined or completely withheld from Black women, Cooper calls for a weaponization of womanhood and motherhood. From this perspective, motherhood is not a taxing duty without reward. Rather, motherhood is one of the highest honors because shaping the next generation is its reward. Additionally, “By redefining civility, and precisely who can and cannot occupy such a domain, Cooper contests raced and gendered asymmetries of power, creating alternate ways of achieving freedom” (Fox, 2017, p. 105).

Wrongly judging Cooper as a conformist to the cult of true womanhood is an assault against her liberty that (re)places her back under another’s imposition of place. Cooper even challenges the pushback she receives noting:

While the women of the white race can with calm assurance enter upon the work they feel by nature appointed to do, while their men give loyal support and appreciative countenance to their efforts, recognizing in most avenues of usefulness the propriety and the need of woman’s distinctive co-operation, the colored woman too often finds herself hampered and shamed by a less liberal sentiment and a more conservative attitude on the part of those for whose opinion she cares most” (Cooper, 1998, p. 113).

The Black woman’s right to frame her own identity and those of her children is paramount. Accusing Cooper of copying Whiteness and conforming to respectability politics is the ultimate disregard for a Black woman’s right to have her say out of fear it looks like something someone else does. Instead of resting in doubt though, Cooper moves forward with new pathways for
Black women robbed of their agency and historically put into place. She commits to displacement by defining herself on her own terms.

Still, Cooper does not stop resisting with a challenge to place as identity. She also uses *A Voice from the South* as a challenge to place as hierarchy. She vehemently defends Black women’s right to have a say throughout the text. She gives careful attention to a woman’s right to an equal education in her writing, a position she takes up in her own experience as a student. Still, one of her most impressive challenges to place comes as she resists pitting one subjugated group against another subjugated group. In a response to a paper delivered by Rev. Anna Shaw at the 1891 meeting of the National Women’s Council, Cooper questions, “Why should woman become plaintiff in a suit versus the Indian, or the Negro or any other race or class who have been crushed under the iron heel of Anglo-Saxon power and selfishness?” (p. 108). Her questioning centers around whether or not one’s progress must come at the expense of another. She writes, “woman’s lesson is taught and woman’s cause is won—not the white woman nor the black woman nor the red woman, but the cause of every man or woman who has writhed silently under a mighty wrong” (p. 108). Cooper’s conclusion is clear: Complementarity stands as the ultimate challenge to a hierarchical reading of place.

Cooper’s last challenge to place is a challenge to place as location. She begins her assault on place as location from the title of the text. On the heels of American Reconstruction, Cooper takes a radical position implying that there is value in a voice from the south. Her authorial attribution challenges place further because Cooper’s byline implies there is a Black woman who wants to claim her southern heritage and the dark history that is a part of that heritage. Her byline also presumes that people would heed the
voice of a Black woman from the South. In essence, Cooper resists the expected reading of place by claiming her right to the land of her cross-generational oppression.

**The Text**

One of the greatest challenges in the search for sanctuary is properly placing the text in a way that enables a thorough and accurate analysis. Understanding Cooper’s approach to matters of place rests on a close reading of the writings she makes available to posterity. Anna Julia Cooper compiles the original text, *A Voice from the South* (1892), from a collection of her own speeches, response papers, and essays (Cooper, 1998, p. 46). The original text was published thirty-three years before the completion of her doctorate at the Sorbonne. The text presents Cooper’s earliest thinking on matters of intersectionality. Additionally, the value of the text as a reimagining of place cannot be underscored enough. However, because this text falls early in Cooper’s career, there is a strong likelihood that it does not reflect the totality of her thinking on matters of voice and place. Today we read an expanded version of Cooper’s text entitled, *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper* (1998). This version includes Cooper’s original text of *A Voice from the South*, additional commentary about Cooper that also contextualizes the original work and several previously unpublished documents from Cooper’s larger body of work (Cooper, 1998, pp. 198–200). For this study, I use the expanded, updated version of the text because it puts even more of Cooper’s work at my disposal. This allows a more thorough analysis because it takes into consideration the entire lifetime of Cooper’s scholarship. However, because my primary focus lies with the sections Cooper originally included, I continue to refer to the original title to maintain consistency.
Signaling Significance

There are several noteworthy points that help contextualize the significance of Anna Julia Cooper’s work. First, the fact that we have a published collection of such breadth from a Black woman of the late 1800s is important. A woman born into slavery that writes, constructs theory, advocates for the rights of others, and regularly speaks before audiences is a treasure. The wealth of her influence is only enhanced by her ability to archive her own work for posterity. Second, Cooper forecasts another reason for the book’s significance in her printed ascription of authorship. Instead of claiming A Voice from the South using her own name, Cooper announces the book was simply written by a Black Woman of the South. Before getting to a single speech or essay, the author announces her commitment to a project that amplifies the voice of Black women. Simultaneously, the project proclaims a southerner’s right to speak on matters of universal significance. Finally, A Voice from the South represents a Black woman archiving her own intellectual property and securing ownership over that work. That is, Cooper does not stop at publication. Following in the footsteps of women like Sojourner Truth, Cooper shows us that her agency extends even further. By invoking the law and taking legal ownership of her work, she declares that no one speaks for her, and further, no one gets to claim ownership over her or her ideas.

In the sections preceding this description of the text, our attention rests on contextualizing Anna Julia Cooper’s thinking about voice, place and humanity. In the sections that follow, I deploy the kind of systematic revalorizing that gets us closer to sanctuary. The analysis that follows asks for a reconsideration of Cooper’s work through a Black feminist lens.
Analysis

Thus far, this project’s exploration of Anna Julia Cooper and *A Voice from the South* addresses the far-reaching implications of place. The text also considers the steps Cooper takes in place’s decolonization. I am cognizant of two things as I move into this work: 1.) Imposing an analysis ascribing rightness to Whiteness reifies a White, Western, patriarchal lens and 2.) Persistent disregard for the social and political realities common to the Black experience necessitates a Black feminist lens. In the remainder of this chapter, I extend Cooper’s work on place by analyzing her self-edited text, *A Voice from the South*. Heeding the cry for a more accurate reading of the Black woman’s approach to place, I apply a lens crafted in the Black feminist tradition—the Sanctuary Cornerstone Method (SCT).¹

**Cornerstone #1: Creating and (Re)creating Homeplace**

Homeplace is a foundational cornerstone that helps redefine place in the Black woman’s search for sanctuary. The idea of homeplace carries particular significance for members of a community of people taken from their native land and dispersed across the globe. Couple this historical placement with generations of rupture and trauma attached to race, gender, economic disempowerment and condition of enslavement and you begin to see why there is a strong desire for homeplace in the Black community. In this section of the analysis, we explore Cooper’s Black feminist approach to creating and (re)creating homeplace. There are two aspects of Cooper’s reading of place that warrant attention: unlocking the functions of home and claiming the South as homeplace.

¹ The Sanctuary Cornerstone Method (SCT) was initially developed for the publication, “No place/like home: Building a Black feminist mentoring paradigm on the cornerstones of sanctuary.”
Unlocking Home

To begin, it is nearly impossible to discuss Cooper’s view of humanity as sanctuary without discussing her position on home as sanctuary. Lemert (2000) asserts: “Everything [Cooper] did seemed always to issue from or return to her homes. Nothing better expresses Cooper’s sense of her life’s work than the ways she used and effectively redefined her home” (p. 7). This sentiment tells us almost everything we need to know about her commitment to finding and establishing homeplace for others. However, hooks gives even more insight because she suggests searching for homeplace is an act of resistance and a global cause shared by Black women across a range of oppressive structures (2014, p. 70).

While it is not clear that there is a single motivating factor prompting Cooper’s position on homeplace, one must consider how her personal experiences shape her stance. For example, her living situation during her time at Oberlin is described as “an entirely satisfying arrangement for all concerned” (Cooper, 1998, p. 21). Still, it is hard to imagine undertaking such a drastic change without any complications. After all, Cooper embarked on her time at Oberlin as a widow after only two years of marriage. Moreover, she attended Oberlin as a nontraditional student in every sense of the word. Homeplace undoubtedly took on new meaning while living without financial support and diversity in someone else’s home (Lemert, 2000, p. 21). Therefore, while Cooper’s personal dwelling after living in the home of an Oberlin professor likely represents her own site of retreat for a host of personal reasons, it is understandable why her home quickly becomes a place of retreat for her foster kids and her students at Frelinghuysen University, too (Cooper, 1998, p. 306). Whether creating a homeplace for family or strangers, Cooper opens the doors of her home to those in need of physical and emotional sanctuary. Her homeplace is the
site where we might consistently see displays of common regard, the power of presence, and benevolence.

Unlocking a Region

If homeplace is “a place that evokes the ‘feeling of safety, of arrival, of homecoming’” as hooks (2014, p. 68) describes, then it seems unlikely that Black people would ever identify the south as their homeplace (P. Davis et al., 2021). Yet, a transformation occurs in Cooper’s capable hands. The rhetorical transformation of the South into homeplace for the Black woman begins early in the text. Cooper paints the picture of the south as a place no longer solely under the auspices of White men and women. Lanham captures a key reason why those living with the recurring violence of Southern memories remap a traditionally unwelcoming and downright inhospitable place into their home. He acknowledges, “that first place I knew as home will always be locked within” (Lanham, 2016). Though it still carries the blood of slavery in its soil, the American South is the only home many generations of Black people know. Even those who move away from places widely recognized as the geographic south often trace their ties back to the South for several generations (P. Davis et al., 2021).

From the title through each chapter of A Voice from the South, Cooper demonstrates her commitment to rehabilitating place through place’s decolonization. She rhetorically frames a New South and writes herself within the borders that once kept her out. Cooper makes it clear that other rejected daughters and sons of the South have rights. The unclaimed children of the south are encouraged to remap the territory and gain their full inheritance. A Voice from the South shifts away from controlling master2 narratives of the South. More importantly, “By

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2 The use of the word “master” here is quite intentional. The term refers to the messaging that aligns with a broader, intentional agenda. However, this word also acknowledges the hierarchical, hegemonic relations between the races in the South.
claiming the South as her space, Cooper latches onto region as that which is, in a sense, beyond the arguments that threaten self-definitions of personhood. (Alexander, 1995, p. 344). I believe creating or identifying homeplace—particularly identifying the South as homeplace—is the first step towards remapping territory.

**Cornerstone #2: Remapping the Territory**

It is difficult to separate what Cooper does for our understanding of place into a single cornerstone. On the one hand, the SCT’s cornerstone of homeplace creates an initial means of resisting inhumane treatment. Homeplace becomes a gateway ensuring the historically oppressed draw closer to sanctuary. Yet, creating a homeplace requires a second cornerstone. Analyzing *A Voice from the South* using SCT provides poignant lessons about remapping territory. Cooper demonstrates remapping on two levels: 1.) in terms of location and 2.) in terms of one’s identity. She uses *A Voice from the South* in ways that challenge boundaries and sets place for Black women of the South by a Black woman of the South. Cooper repetitively exemplifies her agency and ability to master place.

Cooper's ability to remap territory foreshadows Baker’s later assertion that the one who sets boundaries is also the one who sets place (Baker, 1991). Cooper artfully demonstrates the second cornerstone as she carefully remaps the South as homeplace for a race of people stolen from Africa’s shores. She speaks for people in desperate need of a different kind of repatriation—a homeplace in the land (the South) within a land (the United States). Still, without full access to the benefits of a place, sanctuary remains elusive.

Cooper demonstrates her mastery of place as she locationally remaps territory. This is apparent in her commitment to homeplace. However, remapping location is about more than identifying homeplace. Cooper troubles our locational understanding of the South by challenging
what constitutes the South. As Alexander notes, “Cooper places herself squarely in North Carolina and Washington, D.C…. a voice to be heeded as any other (Alexander, 1995, p. 344). In other words, though Cooper is born in North Carolina and spends her early years there, she writes as a woman of the South on contested southern soil. From the locational and social periphery, Cooper centers herself as she remaps the borders of the South. She crosses the socially constructed borders of the South and declares Washington, D.C. is still a part of the South. For anyone challenging Washington, D.C place in the region, Cooper makes it clear that one does not lose their southern identity by migrating further north. She reminds us that southern identity does not hinge on one’s confinement to a limited geographic locale. She remaps the South so that a part of this place goes with her no matter where she travels. This kind of identity work flips the concept of bordering as Cooper knowingly—and quite intentionally takes her southern identity with her wherever she goes. Cooper ultimately demonstrates the fluidity of geography, identity and borders.

Cooper also masters place and remaps territory at a second level. She rhetorically remaps territory by redrawing the borders of the South, but she also redefines who qualifies as a southerner. She takes up this subtle though important rhetorical exercise using the book’s full title, *A Voice from the South (by a Black Woman of the South)*. Cooper makes a compelling case for her inclusion as a southerner through her choice of a particular preposition in her signature. Cooper announces that she is both *from* the South and *of* the South. The linguistic boldness of including herself as a part of the land tilled by her enslaved ancestors is compelling. Yet, she demonstrates a second measure of significance by renouncing singular authorship. She shares credit for *A Voice from the South* with her Black sisters by attesting they too are *of* the South, not just *in* the South. Cooper rhetorically redefines herself and other Black women as decidedly
Southern. They are one with the land—not just inhabitants on the land. Black women are not just historical caretakers of someone else’s place. They are not mammy-figures waiting for direction from their oppressors. Cooper and her sisters in the struggle are not just daughters of Africa; they are daughters of the South. Furthermore, these women uphold the South’s history and hope.

Cooper’s efforts at remapping geography and identity in *A Voice from the South* have important implications. As a precursor to Cooper’s dissertation three decades later, Cooper articulates points about the American South that are foundational for any discussion of the Haitian revolution in the global South. What starts as a project about amplifying the muted voices in America foregrounds questions about the importance of doing the same kind of work in the global South. As Shome notes, “The dispossession of the South is intimately linked to geopolitics (colonialisms—past and present) and global capitalism. Thus, however local the South might be, it is always the ‘global’ South (Shome, 2019, p. 204). If Cooper’s work is not locally limited to Black women’s voices in the American south, there is also room to hear the chorus of forgotten people speaking from other parts of the world. We understand the significance of Cooper’s work and its broad appeal when we turn again to Shome’s reminder that, “populations in the Global South are not even recognized as legitimate…for to be granted “rights” is to be first “recognized” as citizenly beings or be recognized as an injured population deserving rights” (Shome, 2019, p. 202). If Black women successfully argue their case as southerners, then it is easier to make the case for granting the rights of citizenship to (all) other southerners (Wilson, 2002).

Throughout *A Voice from the South*, Cooper marks herself as a Southerner and leaves room for other Black women to do the same. In the process, Cooper sets the framework so other subordinated people groups of the global south position themselves for the same kind of
displacement. Because Cooper spends so much time remapping territory throughout the text, it makes sense to examine her strategy for remapping territory in greater detail. This reality makes room for the third cornerstone: an appeal to memory.

**Cornerstone #3: Appeals to Memory**

The third cornerstone of sanctuary is the appeal to memory. Within the Greek rhetorical tradition, the canon of memory receives limited attention, comparatively speaking (Reynolds, 1989). However, within Afrocentric and Black feminist traditions, memory carries far more significance. From remembering the ancestors and preserving an oral history to inspiring future generations to achieve greatness, memory is an important part of the Black community (Clark, 2013; Daniel & Smitherman, 2004; P. G. Davis, 2016). Jahn (1961) even acknowledges memory’s place in the African classroom when he shares, “In the Cameroons…they call the blackboard ‘that black wall where one speaks with the dead’” (p. 190). In his example, knowledge that brings the hope of a brighter future is still tied to the past. bell hooks also situates the role of memory when she writes:

The act of remembrance is a conscious gesture honoring [Black women’s] struggle, their effort to keep something for their own. I want us to respect and understand that this effort has been and continues to be a radically subversive political gesture. For those who dominate and oppress us benefit most when we have nothing to give our own, when they have so taken from us our dignity, our humanness that we have nothing left, no “homeplace” where we can recover ourselves (2014, p. 71).
Whether in terms of recalling the past, archiving knowledge, or honoring others, Cooper taps into memory in important ways. As a rhetorician and historian, Cooper is intimately connected with fields of study where appeals to memory are foundational. We see this from her earliest years as a student and teacher at St. Augustine’s Normal School and Collegiate Institute to her time as a doctoral student at the Sorbonne. Even her time as president of Frelinghuysen University attests to her interest in preserving that which she holds sacred. With a distinguished pedigree and well-rounded, cross-disciplinary exposure, it is unlikely that Cooper published her ideas as a whimsical choice without intentionality. Her knowledge of the importance of memory means she compiled her artifacts after thoughtful consideration of what her choice to do so means for others.

Still, Cooper does not rely on her readers to deduce the importance of memory. She directly declares memory’s importance in the speech/essay, “Womanhood: A Vital Element in the Regeneration and Progress of a Race.” She states:

It is well enough to pause a moment for retrospection, introspection, and prospection. We look back, not to become inflated with conceit because of the depths from which we have arisen, but that we may learn wisdom from experience. We look within that we may gather together once more our forces, and, by improved and more practical methods, address ourselves to the tasks before us (Cooper, 1998, p. 61).

Now that we know some of the driving factors behind Cooper’s commitment to memory, we can consider the ways memory plays out in A Voice from the South. For example, Cooper initially taps into the power of memory by compiling a body of her own work. Unlike other illiterate Black women of the time, Cooper not only gives speeches and writes letters. She
No one can misquote her. Her commitment to literacy in days past impacts the way she is remembered now. Additionally, Cooper maintains her agency by framing her own narrative instead of allowing her critics to do so. Then, in an unprecedented move, she shares credit with other Black women in the way she signs her text. We give Cooper credit for writing *A Voice from the South*, but she gives that credit away to others who are also in search of sanctuary. Despite finding a creative way of sharing space with other Black women, Cooper astutely makes sure the copyright for this work is her own, not the publishing company’s or some White benefactor (Cooper, 1998, p. 49). Once again, Cooper steps outside the common practices of the day by laying claim to her own work and ideas in print and in the eyes of the law (duCille, 1994b).

Cooper’s commitment to aspects of memory demonstrates why she is both an activist and a griot, an educator and a historian. She invokes memory as she recalls challenges and victories of the past and then makes her case for equity and justice. She does not stop there, though. In an ingenious move, Cooper makes herself a part of the historical archive. She becomes a part of a layered appeal to memory that outlives her first speech or the first reading of her essays. The initial act of speaking and writing is for the primary audience. However, the later immortalization of her words in print enshrines her vision long beyond the immediate moment.

While Cooper vehemently calls our attention to memory, she explains why we cannot rest in memory. Cooper chides, “this survey of the failures or achievements of the past, the difficulties and embarrassments of the present, and the mingled hopes and fears for the future, must not degenerate into mere dreaming nor consume the time which
belongs to the practical and effective handling of the crucial questions of the hour” (p. 61).

Historically situating Anna Julia Cooper in this project honors her contributions and upholds her displacement out of someone else’s vision of what her place should be. Thereby, this work ushers in new thinking about the concept of place from a Black feminist perspective. Cooper’s admonishment is a reminder that dreaming without action is a waste of time. Yet, dreaming still sits at the base of imagination and discovery.

**Cornerstone #4. Freedom to Imagine and Discover**

A Black feminist analysis of *A Voice from the South* reveals Cooper’s commitment to a fourth cornerstone—the freedom to imagine and discover. Access to a decolonized place of sanctuary hinges on the ability to imagine something beyond one’s own limits or the limits set by others. That means sanctuary hinges on one’s willingness to discover new paths outside of existing hegemonic relationships. Intent on discovering new paths to sanctuary, Anna Julia Cooper acknowledges, “our satisfaction in American institutions rests not on the fruition we now enjoy, but springs rather from the possibilities and promise that are inherent in the system, though as yet, perhaps, far in the future” (1998, p. 54). The institution Cooper tackles most vehemently in *A Voice from the South* is the educational system. When considering the connection between the arguments in the text and Cooper’s life experiences, the role of imagination and discovery becomes clear from three unique perspectives: 1.) the student, 2.) the educator and 3.) her supporters.

To begin, the first way we see Cooper’s commitment to imagination and discovery is as a student. Of the three women chosen for further study in this broader
project, Cooper is the only one with a formal education. Cooper was not just any student, though. Her learning knew no bounds, a point reflected in the broad swath of classes she teaches over the span of her career. Not only was Cooper a committed student in her earliest years, but she continued learning throughout her lifetime. In fact, she did not earn her doctorate until she was 66 years old. At an age when must people are looking towards retirement, Cooper was still looking for more. She lives out Jahn’s suggestion that, “The Africans’ zeal for learning…is not the zeal of an illiterate people, to whom writing comes as a revelation. It is the zeal for learning of a civilized people whose own script has been destroyed” (Jahn, 1961, p. 190). Cooper’s thirst for knowledge is yet another reminder of her humanity in her battle against the unbearable wrongness of being.

There is yet a second way Cooper reveals her commitment to imagination and discovery. This commitment is visible in the way she challenges a traditional reading of place as an educator. She continually insists that Black women pursue higher learning. However, she not only insists on advanced training; she insists on equality within educational institutions. As an educator who first demanded equality in her own education, Cooper brings a unique perspective to her demand for the same thing for other women. She articulates the problem, identifies the solution and then expresses the way the solution yields the desired outcome. She begins her press for change proclaiming: “So long as woman sat with bandaged eyes and manacled hands, fast bound in the clamps of ignorance and inaction, the world of thought moved in its orbit…with one face (the man’s face)” (Cooper, 1998, p. 76). She persists with her prescription for change as she calls for equal access to higher education for women. Cooper writes:
Now I claim that it is the prevalence of the Higher Education among women, the making it a common everyday affair for women to reason and think and express their thought, the training and stimulus which enable and encourage women to administer to the world the bread it needs as well as the sugar it cries for; in short it is the transmitting the potential forces of her soul into dynamic factors that has given symmetry and completeness to the world’s agencies (p. 76).

Cooper concludes access to education changes the trajectory of women: “Let our girls feel that we expect something more of them than that they merely look pretty and appear well in society.” She continues, “Teach them that there is a race with special needs which they and only they can help; that the world needs and is already asking for their trained, efficient forces” (Cooper, 1998, p. 87).

The final way we see Cooper’s commitment to imagination and discovery is apparent in the bold ways she asks others to support women in their pursuit of higher education. Cooper undoubtedly recognizes that her battle for change cannot happen without advocates supporting the women who will change the world. Cooper explains:

The men of our time have asked with Emerson, “that woman only show us how she can best be served”; and woman has replied: the chance of the seedling and of the [microorganism] is all I ask—the chance for growth and [self-development], the permission to be true to the aspirations of my soul without incurring the blight of your censure and ridicule (1998, p. 81).

Cooper then makes her request:

Don’t stand from under and leave her to buffet the waves alone. Let her know that your heart is following her, that your hand, though she sees it not, is ready to
support her. To be plain, I mean let money be raised and scholarships be founded in our colleges and universities for self-supporting, worthy young women, to offset and balance the aid that can always be found for boys” (p. 87).

Whether showing off her insight as a student, an educator or an ally, the unifying thread here is a willingness to imagine an educational system that is open to women. Imagination is necessary because it opens possibility and then grounds that possibility in a particular place. hooks affirms this promise as she explains, “Understanding marginality as position and place of resistance is crucial for oppressed, exploited, colonized people. If we only view the margin as [a] sign marking the despair, a deep nihilism penetrates in a destructive way the very ground of our being” (hooks, 2014, p. 215). Instead of remaining stuck in the sorrow of our oppression, we must view the margins as an opportunity to reimagine. Cooper repeatedly demonstrates education as an imaginative strategy for challenging place and solidifying one’s place in the body of humanity. Cooper also reveals her commitment to imagination and discovery as she dares to speak, write, and record her artifacts for posterity. Imagination stands as the first level of resistance to another’s placement. Conversely, suppressing one’s imagination is the beginning of their colonization. Again, it is hooks who notes:

It is there in that space of collective despair that one’s creativity, one’s imagination is at risk, there that one’s mind is fully colonized, there that the freedom one longs for as lost. Truly the mind that resists colonization struggles for freedom one longs for as lost. Truly the mind that resists colonization struggles for freedom of expression (hooks, 2014, p. 215).
In short, in restoring the Black woman’s ability to imagine, her ability to create place is bolstered. Further, in the place she creates through her imagination, access to sanctuary is found.

**Conclusion**

In *A Voice from the South* and again in this chapter, Anna Julia Cooper answers the question of whether the subaltern speak (Spivak, 1988). Cooper lets us know the answer is a resounding, “Yes.” Muted voices still speak even if there is difficulty hearing what is said. Cooper goes a step further noting, “Her voice too, has always been heard in clear, unfaltering tones, ringing the changes on those deeper interests which make for permanent good” (Cooper, 1998, p. 114). Unfortunately, in our hasty celebration that the subaltern dare speak, we are sometimes guilty of overlooking what is said. Remembering that you can never get the right answer if you continue asking the wrong question is key. Therefore, instead of asking, “Can the subaltern speak?” we may need to look again and ask, “Since they dare speak, what are they really trying to tell us?”

Anna Julia Cooper’s journey to sanctuary starts with owning her own voice, continues with the audacity to depart from another’s imposition of place, and moves through her efforts at affirming her humanity. The legacy she leaves is a roadmap for those seeking the humanity at the center of sanctuary. The consummate voice from/of the south speaks to us from history through speech texts and ideas captured in the pages of her book. Her voice does not end there, though. Anna Julia Cooper speaks as an image on a U.S. postage stamp and through her wisdom printed on every American passport. Even from the grave, Cooper continues her assault against the imposition of place. As a result of one woman’s voice, there is a place of sanctuary for those still warring against the
imposition of place. The map is not the territory, but thankfully we get to return to archived maps from women like Anna Julia Cooper to find our way to sanctuary.
Chapter Four

Seeing Sanctuary: Visual Rhetoric and Sojourner Truth’s Lessons on Place

Sojourner Truth, a Black, illiterate, formerly enslaved woman, is an unlikely pedagogue. However, in this chapter, I show how an improbable trailblazer teaches her students about sanctuary and place. Though historically limited because of her race, sex, illiteracy, physical appearance and condition of enslavement, Sojourner refuses to let other people have the last word about who she is, what she does, and why she does it. Instead, she speaks for herself. Sojourner does not defy another’s imposition of place by limiting herself to words and written texts. She pushes against the limits of place. She ruptures thinking about a Black woman’s place while also rupturing our thinking about the way technology could challenge place’s imposition. Using technology considered novel 150 years ago, Sojourner makes herself seen in ways that continually shape the historical record of her life, her contributions to feminism and her contribution to our understanding of a rhetoric of liberation. Additionally, she forces an acknowledgment of the ways Black women extend the field of rhetoric into visual spaces. I am interested in the ways Sojourner Truth’s visual rhetoric helps her navigate the pitfalls of place. I am also interested in the ways this work fills a void in a field of study where Black people are primarily mentioned as the subjects of visual texts for another’s consumption and critique (Olson, 2007). Thus, while I primarily use the record of Sojourner Truth’s push past place to explore the roadmap to sanctuary, her visual texts also give us a glimpse of the ways a Black woman’s shift to textual producers is yet another means of circumventing the imposition of place in Rhetoric.

Sojourner Truth anchors her lessons on place as she reveals her roadmap for finding sanctuary. When we look through a catalog of her personally commissioned photocards known
as cartes de visites, we witness texts birthed by someone craftily navigating the constraints of place. The cards are also proof that another writer can never tell Truth’s story better than she can tell her own story—even if she must resort to images to make her point. Today, Truth’s texts stand as lessons from days gone by, memorials to her agency, and testaments to her refusal to rest in the places assigned by her oppressor. These cards are open invitations imploring us to learn from their photographic and text-based composition. I look to Truth’s texts for lessons about challenging a White, Western, patriarchal understanding of place and in the process find that Truth talks back to us and offers up various ways to approach place and decolonization.

This current project is not the first one exploring Sojourner Truth’s contribution to the discipline. Several research projects focus primarily on Truth’s speeches (Fitch & Mandziuk, 1997; Mandziuk & Fitch, 2001; Painter, 1994). Other projects address the ways Truth get remembered and memorialized (Mandziuk, 2003; Painter, 1994) while still others concentrate on one aspect of her image or another (Grigsby, 2015; Mandziuk, 2014; T. Zackodnik, 2005; T. C. Zackodnik, 2004). There are also texts that make legal arguments about Truth’s choice to secure a copyright for her cartes de visite and her ability to use the same legal system supporting her enslavement (Gormley, 2020; Harris, 1996). Though the legal perspective more closely aligns with my discussion of place, overall, the texts fall short in addressing the rhetoricity of place. The sum of these research projects add to our knowledge of Truth, but we must be intentional about studying her as more than an interesting subject delivering feisty texts.

By examining Truth’s texts within a discussion of place, I hope to show that Sojourner Truth is not just a rhetor. She is also a rhetorician questioning and challenging the way her identity is chronicled and critiqued by others (O. I. Davis, 1998). Truth astutely flips the discourse surrounding her life and her work by changing places in her own narrative. She takes
first-person ownership of her image instead of relying on a third-person report by others. In the process of shaping her own narrative, Sojourner Truth carves out a place for herself in our memory. In other words, Truth upstages her radicality as a rhetor with her audacity as a rhetorician. As we study Sojourner Truth’s record of rhetorical agency, her role as a game changer in studies of place becomes more apparent.

This chapter is a part of a broader research project honoring the legacy of Black feminists collectively seeking sanctuary. Yet, in this case study, I focus on Truth’s navigations of agency over White, Western, patriarchal and colonized constructions of place. I address three areas of pointed interest in this phase of the project. First, I identify the problems shaping Sojourner Truth’s historical placement and (re)placement. I show why her race, gender, condition of servitude and inability to read or write are just the beginning of her problems. Second, I hold up a Black feminist lens for a culturally minded analysis of Truth’s cartes de visite. I specifically employ the Sanctuary Cornerstone Tool (SCT) to decode the ways Truth pushes back against White, Western, patriarchal instantiations of place. Finally, I consider the implications of Truth’s displacement from traditional instantiations of place. I take up the cause of displacement by calling attention to Truth’s improbable influence over her own narrative. While Truth’s journey to sanctuary and displacement is arduous, it begins in this text as it has in her actual search for sanctuary—with first figuring out the obstructions standing in her way.

**Truth’s Problems**

Before exploring the ways Truth’s creations speak back to us on her behalf, outlining the problems prompting her response seems necessary. The problems in question are interrelated and not easily separated. However, I believe getting to the heart of her problems means considering matters of place from a vantage point that is not White, Western or patriarchal in design. That is,
Truth is limited by the ways aspects of physical and social location intersect to create the imposition of place as well as the ways people continually try to put Truth in her place through the imposition of place. In the sections that follow, I unpack the way the imposition of place impacts Truth’s story. I also address the way Truth gets held in place by oppressive actors who feign support for her only to rob her of her voice.

**The Imposition of Place**

It is remarkable that history maintains record of a woman like Sojourner Truth. The factors supporting erasure combine her identity as an illiterate Black woman born into 19th century American slavery with the realization that she does not conform to White standards of beauty or womanhood (Collins, 2000; duCille, 1994b; Welter, 1966). These factors reveal how easily women with intersectional identities like Truth are trapped in place (Crenshaw, 1991). Additionally, for those bearing multiple marked identities (Tannen, 1993), the trap of place is never singular. Furthermore, for those marked by an intersectional identity, place is rarely chosen of their own accord. Whether referring to place as identity, social position, or physical location, place is traditionally imposed by hegemonic and governing powers. Thus, the imposition of place—or placement—refers to the ways social and locational identities intersect to keep the marginalized at the margins. The powerful intersection of identity, social position and geographic location for Black women like Sojourner Truth means without intentional acts of resistance, place becomes an inescapable, hegemonic loop.

When considering the imposition of place from this perspective, understanding Sojourner Truth’s life as a study on the circumvention of place makes more sense. Tragically, Truth still faces the threat of being put back into place or (re)placed. In the section that follows, I address some of the ways others continually put her in place.
Put in Place (Again)

It is tragic that some people are locked into place socially while others are locationally fixed into place. When social and locational limits occur simultaneously, subsequent problems are amplified. The resulting imposition of place becomes even more of a problem when placement is reinforced through systems and structures. The problems of place are revealed in Truth’s life as her story is chronicled by other people with their own selfish ambitions.

When we pause to reflect on Truth, we are forced to acknowledge most of what we know about her comes from someone else’s report about her life and her accomplishments. Even the first printed text about Truth's life comes from someone else’s pen, not directly from Truth herself. Still, we know Sojourner Truth was born a slave in upstate New York and never learned to read or write (Gilbert, 1850; Painter, 1996). We know she eventually won her freedom from slavery and spent the rest of her life advocating for women’s rights and slave emancipation (Grigsby, 2015; Painter, 1996). However, we also know there are simple errors in the record of Truth’s life that mingle with intentionally manufactured details (Grigsby, 2015; Painter, 1996; Stowe, 1863). Representations coloring the truth about Truth include the text broadly received as her autobiography, *Narrative of Sojourner Truth* (1850). This book is based on aspects of Truth’s life retold by her biographer, Olive Gilbert. Since Truth could not read or write, the decision to let someone else record her story does not stand out as a questionable choice. The publisher even acknowledges possible errors on the opening page of the biography. However, almost in the same breath, those errors are summarily dismissed. We see an example of the problem in the original version of the *Narrative of Sojourner Truth* when the publisher confesses:
“It is due to the lady by whom the following Narrative was kindly written, to state, that she has not been able to see a single proof-sheet of it; consequently, it is very possible that divers errors in printing may have occurred, (though it is hoped none materially affecting the sense,) especially in regard to the names of individuals referred to therein” (Gilbert, 1850, p. xii).

Immediately after suggesting that an error in a person's name should not impact one’s reading of the text, the publisher adds one other line. Almost as an afterthought the following appears: “The name of Van Wagener should read Van Wagenen” (Gilbert, 1850, p. xii). At first glance, this is little more than a typo. It may even signal a mispronunciation by Truth. However, considering the surname in question is the name of the family who purchased Truth’s freedom and is consequently, the name she uses just before assuming her infamous moniker, this error carries more weight. Just as an error in the primary subject’s name could be an oversight, it could also signal limited attention to detail on behalf of the illiterate slave who could not pick out the errors on her own. This error leaves room to question if there were other oversights or blatant liberties taken along the way.

There are even more examples of Truth’s placement in the written texts of others and each time, her placement is initiated by someone else’s attempt to speak for her. In fact, most of what we know about Truth is filtered through Whiteness, patriarchy and a host of personal agendas. Cooper says it best when she suggests, “…of the writers who have hitherto attempted a portrayal of life and customs among the darker race…they have all, more or less, had a point to prove or a mission to accomplish, and thus their art has been almost uniformly perverted to serve their ends (1998, p. 139). Stetson and David add to Cooper’s contestation observing another consequence of relying on others to tell us about Truth: “Because her words were so often
recorded in somebody else’s garments, we have lost most of the music of Truth’s performance…Every attempt to textualize Truth is a sort of performance in itself. We cannot expect to recover some unified original text as if it were the woman” (1994, p. 21).

The greatest example of someone else putting Truth in her place comes with the retelling of her well-known speech from the Ohio Woman’s Rights Convention in Akron in May of 1851. Two vastly different accounts of the speech remain. (Sojourner Truth Memorial Committee et al., n.d.). The version of Truth’s speech published by Marius Robinson is markedly different from the version offered by Frances Gage. Robinson seems the more reliable source since his record was published shortly after the actual speech (Painter, 1996; Truth, 1851). Additionally, because he knew Truth as a friend, he was “used to her way of speaking,” (Painter, 1996, p. 125). Respected Sojourner Truth historian Nell Irving Painter even observes the ease with which Robinson avoids placing Truth in his work. Painter suggests, “Robinson introduces Truth as an ex-slave, but without the use of dialect or other rhetorical techniques to emphasize her blackness” (1996, p. 126).

Gage’s version of Truth’s speech, on the other hand, places Truth in ways that completely (re)frame her for the immediate audience and prospective audience members relying on someone else’s written record of Truth’s Akron speech. Gage’s version imposes the kind of broken slave dialect more common from an enslaved person hailing from the deepest parts of the American South—not a slave from the North. The contrived twang written into the text is a far cry from Truth’s New York-Dutch accent. Even though Truth’s enslavers and the location of her enslavement were much stronger influences, Gage shapes a new voice and a whole new image for Truth in the process. She conveniently erases central elements of Truth’s identity and replaces them with depictions more helpful to her cause. Gage rhetorically moves Truth to the
south with an altered version of the speech she publishes long after the original event. Truth is cast as the victim of the harsher record of slavery common in the American South. Gage’s rhetorical placement of Truth aligns with the place generally ascribed to enslaved Black women of the south in the 1800s. However, Gage’s placement of Truth is inaccurate. Instead of highlighting Truth as the product of a Dutch-holding enslaver from the north, she is depicted as a sassy, southern Black woman. What we read as Truth’s voice is a version of the original speech obscured by a drawl that does not align with the rhetor’s background. Gage presents Truth in a more palatable light for her readership. We end up with a version of Truth in the “dialect of a skilled feminist writer” (Painter, 1996, p. 174). Through Gage’s framing of Truth as a formerly enslaved, harshly treated, illiterate southern-sounding woman, Truth’s image becomes a more valuable commodity for the suffragist/abolitionist movements and for the consuming white gaze satiated by these movements (hooks, 1992b). Gage’s version of Truth’s speech remains even though it was drafted and printed more than 12 years after Truth delivered the speech. Gage’s version fails the test of accuracy on too many levels to maintain any credibility. Still, for over a century, Gage’s version of the speech was more readily accepted and more commonly recalled. Painter (1996) contends, “Truth’s modern admirers almost universally prefer the account that Gage presented twelve years after the fact. It fits far better with what we believe Truth to have been like” (p.174).

Gage’s rendition of Truth’s speech continues the tradition of white women speaking for Truth and putting her in her place based on limited knowledge and ulterior motives. Grigsby adds another example of this kind of placement when she discusses Harriet Beecher Stowe’s caricature of Truth as a Libyan Sybil (Grigsby, 2015; Stowe, 1863). This reference to Truth by an acclaimed novelist results in Truth’s placement in Africa and Rome, but most prominently in
the American south. Grigsby finds Stowe “ventriloquized her own dialogue from Uncle Tom’s cabin in her performances [of Truth] in Rome. And she was rehearsing them yet again in her essay of 1863”—a reference to the Libyan Sybil article Stowe published in two different outlets in the same year (Grigsby, 2015, p. 43). Much like Gage, Stowe adds details to her reframing of Truth that upholds her Southernization. As an example, Stowe recounts an encounter with Truth and suggests she liberally uses the word “honey” as a term of endearment. Though the memory is largely contrived, the continuous rhetorical placement of Truth in the south stands as an enduring part of Truth’s legacy. Grigsby reminds us that, “Truth was accustomed to writers’ reliance on southern dialect to describe her unusual Dutch-accented speech, and while some scholars argue that she was resigned to this misrepresentation, there is also evidence that she resented it” (2015, p. 43). Without agency, Truth remains regionally locked in place by an enduring southern mythos. The persisting lock of southern regionalism has social and cultural implications. One of the primary implications is that we become complicit actors in Truth’s (re)placement whenever we let a southern identity creep into our memory of her. Truth’s cartes de visite stand as a visual denouncement of the southern identity White women imposed on her through their publications about her. Truth’s cards are a lasting reminder of her agency, and her rejection of the shackles of place keeping her bound. Sojourner Truth’s cards are a roadmap for circumventing place. They speak for her in ways that outlive the architect of this defiance. I outline the impact of Truth's defiance by pulling together the implications of Truth’s stolen agency in the section below.

**Placing Stolen Agency**

The examples listed here are reminders that any discussion of Sojourner Truth must include discussion of the various ways her agency is either challenged or completely stolen.
Though we see Truth’s stolen agency through her enslavement and her son’s sale into Southern slavery, these acts were just the beginning of her violation (Gilbert, 1850; Painter, 1996). Biographers, novelists and journalists used altered speech texts and recollections to stake a claim to Truth’s story (Painter, 1994). Several people recorded falsified details of Truth’s life and story for their own political, social and economic gain. For example, Gage’s version of Truth’s speech invents a version of Truth that supports the abolitionist cause (Painter, 1994; Truth, 1851).

According to Painter (1994), Stowe’s writing about Truth was a financially lucrative choice earning her approximately $200 per news story.

Efforts to control Truth’s story persist. We do not have to venture to another discipline for a contemporary rehashing of the systemic oppression Truth worked her whole life to escape. Campbell (2005) robs Truth of her agency in the article, “Agency: Promiscuous and Protean.” In this text, Campbell contends:

…agency (1) is communal and participatory, hence, both constituted and constrained by externals that are material and symbolic; (2) is “invented” by authors who are points of articulation; (3) emerges in artistry or craft; (4) is effected through form; and (5) is perverse, that is, inherently, protean, ambiguous, open to reversal (2005, p. 2).

Despite an articulation that operationalizes agency, Campbell misses the lessons of her own argument. For instance, while she acknowledges agency is “constituted and constrained by externals,” Campbell’s work is itself constituting and constraining. By connecting herself to Frances Gage’s reinvention of Truth’s Ohio Woman’s Rights speech, both women are rendered guilty of placing Truth into an identity of Gage’s design. Thus, while Campbell expresses her intentional celebration of women’s agency, she only ends up celebrating the fruit of some women’s agency. Truth is victimized by Campbell in the same way she is victimized by Gage.
Once again, Campbell fails to move the needle beyond inclusion (Biesecker, 1992, 1993; Chavez, 2015). By choosing the version of the speech created by Gage, Campbell robs Truth of her agency afresh. Thus, while Campbell espouses the importance of a woman’s agency, she (re)places Truth in shackles in the same way her enslavers did in days past. Ultimately, Campbell makes an argument to benefit the cause of women broadly speaking, but she does so at Truth’s expense. Campbell’s efforts toward elevating the cause of women rhetors is admirable. However, her assessment of Truth’s agency is problematic. I stand in complete agreement with intersectional thinker Anna Julia Cooper who observes:

This criticism is not altered by our grateful remembrance of those who have heroically taken their pens to champion the [B]lack [person’s] cause. But even here we may remark that a painter may be irreproachable in motive and as benevolent as an angel in intention, nevertheless we have a right to compare his copy with the original and point out in what respects it falls short or is overdrawn; and he should thank us for doing so” (1998, p. 140).

Sojourner Truth’s experiences detailed here demonstrate it is impossible to separate the act of placing from the dispossession of someone’s agency. The body of literature portraying Truth over the years often camouflages her oppression. This is largely because the people telling her story never realize they are part of the problem. Even the time Truth spent on stage before large audiences as a compelling orator could not save her from placement. Each time her speeches are retold, a little more of the truth is lost in the retelling. When we consider the systems and structures keeping marginalized figures in their place, it is easier to understand how someone else’s writings place and (re)place Truth.
I contend Truth pushes back against misrepresentation and the continued imposition of place. What we see in her cartes de visites are our record of Truth’s efforts to reclaim her stolen agency. Indeed, her response is a powerful reminder that Truth and other Black women like her take measures to resist another’s placement. In the next section, I direct our attention to the ways Truth takes back agency and (dis)places herself out of the place created for her by her oppressors. She does not launch a singular line of defense. Instead, she gets out of place using a multilayered display of agency.

**Getting out of Place**

Sojourner Truth’s agency bridges the gap between place and identity. Alcoff and Mohanty make room for this possibility when they suggest, “Identities are markers for history, social location, and positionalities. They are always subject to an individual’s interpretation of their meaningfulness and salience in her or his own life, and thus, their political implications are not transparent or fixed” (2006, p. 6). The lack of fixity is important for those interested in pushing beyond the limits of place. Though robbed of their agency and the benefit of self-definition, some Black women take full advantage of the possibilities for alternative interpretations. As long as there is room to impact another’s interpretation, there is reward in resisting the imposition of place. This is why Sojourner Truth and scores of Black women like her confront the unending loop of bondage. Their responses to the systems of oppression that both reify and conveniently justify their subjugated place in society are reminders that place is not final.

A Black woman’s only hope for sanctuary is finding ways to creatively challenge Eurocentric and patriarchal standards meant to keep her in place. We see this kind of resistance playing out when we give careful attention to Truth’s cartes de visite. Even from the grave, her strategic defiance of place in life continues shaping our memory of her in death. Her continuous,
conspicuous defiance of White, Western, patriarchal standards is a reminder that Black women’s resistance to the imposition of place must have a place in memory and in the rhetorical discipline, too. I discuss an under-theorized argument for Black women’s resistance in the next section.

**Indignant Agency as the Only Appropriate Response**

Answering Truth’s problems of place with greater agency seems like an obvious response. Yet, the uniqueness of the Black woman’s intersectional plight means there should be a customized/intersectional response to her oppression. Carey (2020) captures some of the unique ways instances of disrespect move Black women to action. She offers the concept of rhetorical impatience as a framework. Her framework speaks to the “necessary adjustments” Black women make when encountering challenges demanding expeditious interruption. While her work proves insightful, I am especially intrigued by a term she only mentions in passing—that is, the idea of *indignant agency*. Carey never defines this concept, but I see this oversight as an opportunity to add the element of place to the discourse surrounding Black women’s agency, the urgent need for change, and the imposition of place at the root of it all.

The essence of indignation is captured in the prologue for Paulo Freire’s posthumously published work, *Pedagogy of Indignation* (2015). Describing the motivation behind her husband’s letters, his wife describes Freire’s indignation as ”legitimate anger” and “political anger” (Freire, 2015). A discussion of Black women’s anger leads me to Lorde (1981) who declares: “I have lived with that anger, on that anger, beneath that anger, ignoring that anger, feeding upon that anger, learning to use that anger before it laid my visions to waste, for most of my life” (p. 6). While there is no question that her anger is legitimate, the rhetorical emphasis with a discussion of anger alone centers on emotion. When the conversation stops with emotion,
the action prompting the anger and the response to the anger are too easily overlooked. Bromell (2013) brings the argument of legitimacy and the political nature of anger together as he asserts, “indignation is a political emotion with potentially powerful consequences for democracy and democratic citizenship” (p. 3). Indignant agency captures a response generated by political emotion. Indignant agency erupts at the intersection of the spatial (the “right here”) and the temporal (the “right now”) of rupture. In other words, indignant agency is not merely generated at the point of rupture. For Black women in particular, rupture is both the catalyst and the response. Moving forward, I frame the rhetorical agency displayed by Black women desperately searching for sanctuary as indignant agency.

Indignant agency artfully describes Truth’s response to unending placement. It is her exasperation coupled with her refusal to remain in place. Whether handling her attackers verbally on stage, relying on others to pen response letters and editorials, or using cartes de visite to speak and go where she could not, Truth astutely managed her public image while displaying indignant agency. Sojourner Truth is not alone, though. Moved by indignant agency, other Black women push past the limits of place obstructing their access to sanctuary. After surveying the incessant instances of stolen agency faced by Truth (and countless others like her), there is no need to wonder why Truth did not hold her response. In fact, the change in style for Truth’s cartes de visite shortly after the less-than-flattering publications by Stowe and Gage signal to us that Truth’s work is both a timely and timeless visual clapback (Carey, 2020; Grigsby, 2015). Truth is not a woman waiting in place; her indignant agency pushes her to make her voice heard so she has access to the security of sanctuary.

To be clear, the content engaged thus far is more than a retelling of Truth’s history. I take the calculated risk of (re)placing Truth back into her historical place to ultimately push her
beyond the limits of place once again. The very fact that the details of Truth’s life are chronicled by others testify of her placement. Moreover, her agency is stolen with each retelling. This work pushes pause on the vicious cycle of placing and (re)placing regularly pushed onto Black women like Sojourner Truth. As Truth pushes her way beyond the constraints of her race, gender, condition of enslavement, record of illiteracy, and the limits of location, she reclaims her agency. Indeed, Truth’s radical declaration of her agency through a collection of cartes de visite helps us see why Black women’s indignant agency undergirds an ongoing search for sanctuary. Before analyzing the byproduct of Truth’s indignant agency generated in response to her continuous placement, I offer a description of Truth’s cartes de visite below.

**Text of Study**

Relying on your oppressor to tell your story is a problematic proposition. Recognizing the problems that surface from this arrangement, Sojourner Truth moves to tell her own story. However, she does not rely on the written medium used by her antagonists. Truth was aware the transcript of a speech could be coopted, and a conversation could be utterly perverted. With the obvious options coopted, she speaks to posterity in the only way an illiterate person in the mid-1800s could—through photographs. Truth’s cartes de visite speak loudly on her behalf without her ever raising her voice. They also help her travel to places the traditional limits of place would never allow.

In solidarity with Truth, I resist leaning exclusively on texts written about her but not by her. As my own form of resistance, I turn to a selection of Sojourner Truth’s commissioned photocards as my primary texts for this study. There are at least 28 recovered cartes de visite and photographs housed in private collections and museums across the country (Grigsby, 2015). These texts offer a powerful visual record of the way Truth successfully displaces herself out of
the place created by biographers, journalists, foes and a host of other oppressors. Truth’s cartes de visite testify on her behalf. They visually mark one woman’s move beyond the limits of place meant to keep her bound.

It is impossible to analyze the specific nuances of all of Truth’s cartes de visite. The challenges begin with the recognition that her catalog is likely incomplete. We owe this uncertainty to the fact that there was not a formal archiving system in place that esteemed the works of an illiterate, formerly enslaved, Black woman at the time these cards were initially created and disseminated. Additionally, the cards from the later years of Truth’s life (and certainly those produced after her death) showcase her undermined authority. Thus, I am particularly interested in the cartes de visite first appearing in 1864. From approximately 1864-1868, the standardization of her cards meant they all contained both visual and written elements. In this study, I consider at least 10 different poses from Truth’s collection of photocards.

Taking the common elements of the cards in 1864 under consideration, there are 2 primary parts of Truth’s cartes de visite to consider: the photograph and the text. On the photo portion of each of the cards, Truth is present as the singular subject of interest. Truth sports various outfits but sticks to a few classic poses. The presence of chairs, tables, curtains, or even yarn all suggest an indoor setting. Only one recovered card depicts an outdoor scene. In all of the cartes de visite from this era, Truth looks at the camera—and thus, at the viewer—with a proud and piercing look. She is not cowering or depicted as a broken figure. She is the personification of the oppositional gaze (hooks, 1996).

While we can extract a lot of information from the photo portion of the cartes de visite, the photos do not tell the whole story. Portions of text enhance Truth’s cartes de visite. The text includes a personal declaration (“I sell the shadow to support the substance.”), record of Truth’s
chosen name, and proof of copyright. The limited but powerful bits of text included on these cards are a poignant reminder that a lot is often said with very few words. After considering the problems facing Truth, her impetus for action, and the general details of the cartes de visite she left behind, the slate is clear for an analysis of those texts.

**Analysis**

It is not enough to give a platform to marginalized voices just to undercut the power of the platform. For a project that centers recovery from rupture as an essential part of a Black feminist approach to place, it is important that the voices of the marginalized are not muted after inclusion. That means the texts presented for analysis matter as much as the subjects of study. Likewise, the tools of analysis deserve as much consideration as every other factor in this work. I take all of these points under consideration as I analyze Sojourner Truth’s cartes de visite using the Sanctuary Cornerstone Tool (SCT). This instrument of intersectionality honors the knowledge and experiences of Black women challenging archaic notions of place. This tool also sheds light on the ways Truth’s cartes de visite operate as expressions of resistance. I believe these cornerstones enhance our comprehension of Truth’s photographs, especially when the photos are coupled with the printed text on the front and the back of the card. I ultimately put the central components of the cartes de visite in conversation with the cornerstones of sanctuary in search of a decolonized path to displacement. In the pages that follow, I outline the four foundational cornerstones of SCT and explain the ways Truth 1.) creates and (re)creates homeplace, 2.) remaps territory, 3.) appeals to memory, and 4.) showcases her imagination using cards that testify of her resistance.
Cornerstone #1: Creating and (Re)creating Homeplace

Homeplace is not a luxury for the slave, the formerly enslaved, or any other marginalized figure. As the foundation of sanctuary, homeplace meets necessities left unmet elsewhere. hooks signals homeplace’s significance to Black women when she clarifies what homeplace is and what it is not:

Home was the safe place, the place where one could count on not being hurt. It was the place where wounds were attended to. Home was the place where the me of me mattered. Home was the place I longed for; it was not where I lived (2009, p. 215).

Both Dangerfield (Under review) and hooks (2014) add to the ways we conceive of homeplace in our homelife and in our professional lives as mentors. Lanham (2016) enhances this discussion by affirming homeplace’s role in the way we understand and recapture self (p. 15). Calafell goes even further as she suggests, “Within this homeplace, personal experience is valued as are other forms of knowledge production and representation. This space creates a space of possibility” (Calafell, p. 106). Together, these writers helps us see that homeplace 1.) is aspirational, 2.) exists as a place of respite, recovery and recognition and 3.) is a site of resistance. I explore each of the functions of homeplace in the section below.

Hopeing for Home

Aspiration is the first function of homeplace revealed in Truth’s cartes de visite. However, since the expectation of something that may not already exist is a part of this function, a critical analysis of the text requires a certain degree of reflexivity. In Truth’s past, we find the events and experiences invoking the aspirational function we see revealed later in her cartes de visite. I turn back to events and circumstances external to the text for two reasons. First, the regard for the past that is foundational to Afrocentricity and Black feminist thought are key to a
more accurate reading of the text. As discussed in the original conception of SCT (Dangerfield, Under review) and again in chapter two of this dissertation, Afrocentricity and Black feminist thought are guiding frameworks for an intersectional approach to Black women’s rhetoric.

Second, including Truth’s personal experiences with the aspirational aspect of homeplace means she gets to have her say in how we read a text she created for our consumption. My actions align with Calafell’s desire to engage with communities “on their own terms, often by not simply looking at a text and its rhetorical properties, but understanding the communities in which these texts are situated as a way to move beyond the false divide between text and context” (2010, p. 117). When we look backwards, it is easy to see how Truth moved forward by crafting a picture of homeplace. Indeed, long before she posed for a single photo, a symbolic picture of homeplace pushed her out of the shackles of slavery and into our collective memory.

Truth’s early hope for home in her personal life carries over to her cartes de visite. Details in her earliest printed narrative give us a brief glimpse of her desire for homeplace away from the shackles of slavery. It is easy to see why an enslaved person would want to flee the harsh hand of an oppressor. However, Truth’s eventual escape only tells one part of her unfulfilled need for a sense of home. It is more telling that Truth’s earliest search for freedom meant she also left the house she shared with her spouse and some of her children (Gilbert, 1850; Painter, 1996). She was so desperate for homeplace that she took the risk of losing what little an enslaved Black woman of the mid-1800s could call her own. When you add to the risk of loss the threat of violence awaiting a run-away slave woman, the audacity of Truth’s departure is clear. These consequential details of Truth’s lived experience help us see that homeplace is far more than a physical address, a place for sleeping and eating, and even more than a gathering place for family. The aspirational function of homeplace is the reason some pursue it against any risk or at
any cost. Truth’s personal search for sanctuary makes it clear we cannot divorce her own search for homeplace from her (re)creation of homeplace in the images used for her cartes de visite. In other words, Sojourner Truth uses her cards to show that in life and in photographic record, she is a homemaker in every sense of the word. However, even as she embraces her role as homemaker, her physical embodiment and marked identities remind us she was never a viable candidate for the cult of true womanhood anyway (Welter, 1966).

The elusiveness of homeplace for someone like Sojourner Truth makes her visual construction of homeplace significant. Apart from one bust-length cartes de visite (with 2 different poses) and a separate pose using an outdoor backdrop, all the rest of Truth’s cartes de visite convey some since of home. Across more than 24 different images, Truth is commonly depicted seated near a table or at least standing indoors. Such a backdrop conveys the normalcy in the everydayness of Black women. Truth could be anywhere and represent anything in these photos. She chooses to recreate a place of familiarity to those who would purchase her cards. Though modest (especially as compared to the props used in the photographs recovered near the end of her life), her props paint a depiction of home that is decidedly different from the slave shanties and shotgun houses often associated with Black people in the 1800s. With something as simple as chairs, tables and curtains, Truth paints the picture of a Black woman in her own place—at home.

Healing at Home

The second function of homeplace is as a site of respite, recovery and recognition. It is not lost on me that each of the descriptors here nod to the violence that makes homeplace necessary. In this capacity, homeplace is a site for physical, mental, and emotional healing. When considered in this light, Truth’s seated position speaks loudly. She is not a sojourner bent on
changing the world as her name suggests. In her homeplace, she can rest and recover. Moreover, she can engage in the simple recreation of knitting for her own enjoyment—not necessarily because she is trying to be like White women of her day. She no longer has to work as hard as a man as she famously proclaimed during her speech at the Ohio Woman’s Rights Convention (Truth, 1851). In fact, the depiction of Truth casually knitting suggests that she does not have to work at all. In his discussion of the period of Reconstruction, Wilson makes a statement that adds credence to this conclusion. He explains, “Many freedwomen stayed at home, enjoying a domestic life that slavery had denied them” (Wilson, 2002). When we observe Truth’s cartes de visite, we are looking at her aspirational homeplace. Indeed, it is the one place where a sojourner can sit still or stand in place without concern about her next move.

While the two functions of homeplace noted here are significant, there is a third function of homeplace discussed by hooks—homeplace as a site of resistance (hooks, 2009, 2014).

Building up Resistance

Homeplace is both aspirational and a site of respite, recovery and recognition. When these primary functions of homeplace operate as they should, they transform an ordinary site into a place where agents of change can stand in resistance. Homeplace becomes a staging ground where its inhabitants prepare for the horrors beyond the safety of home. Truth’s cartes de visite are powerful rhetorical texts, in part, because her cards invite us to reimagine the Black woman’s homeplace through the technology of photography.

Wallace and Smith point out, “photography helped advance a readjustment of racial ideas and identities” (2012, p. 2). Truth takes full advantage of this opportunity by choosing photography as her platform for rehabilitating her image (and the image of countless other Black women in the process). It is noteworthy that one of Truth’s cards captures her as an elderly
woman, sitting in a chair, knitting. This hardly seems a depiction of resistance. However, from her seated position, we are invited to look at the woman historically described as grotesque (Mandziuk, 2014). Truth is not on display as a spectacle in her cartes de visite. Instead, when we rhetorically analyze her image through a Black feminist lens, we see “the theoretical significance of the ‘ordinariness of everyday life’” in a move that captures “Black women’s ways of crafting identities within an oppressive, socially-constructed reality” (O. I. Davis, 1998, p. 77).

In addition to Truth’s physical embodiment as a site of resistance, aspects of her attire and her physical setting also reveal another layer of resistance in her reconstruction of homeplace. Cobb (2015) acknowledges, “Common studio props such as tables, chairs, and vases appear in these images to ground the subjects in furnished, home-like-settings” (p. 2). Truth’s portrayal of the normalcy of home is a far cry from the caricatures of Blackness revealed “on theater stages, as well as in cartoons, print ephemera, and sheet music” (Cobb, 2015, p. 4). Truth’s strategic choices for her photos remind us that resistance in the homeplace is more than the use of weapons to protect home. For Truth, daring to recreate and archive a depiction of homeplace in the early days of photography—and before the end of slavery—is a deeply radical act.

It is important to note that Truth’s depiction of homeplace is not about conforming to an image of Whiteness. Record from Truth’s daughter confirms the personal interest behind what we see in the cartes des visite under consideration. Painter (1996) provides record of an interview with Sojourner Truth’s oldest daughter that attests:

…her mother used to sit with her children on the floor in their cabin…and mend her clothing, and talk with them. This was Sojourner’s dream. She told the children that some day they would have a home of their own, and that the family would all be together (p. 20).
Even during her enslavement, home was always Truth’s aspiration. She did what she could with what little she had. When telling her story through photography, she chose to show us home. The depiction of that we see on her cartes de visite are antithetical to any suggestion that she is simply trying to fit into someone else’s narrative. Sojourner remains a rebel intent on redefining what the Black woman’s homeplace can be. The images on her cards mark a renegade agent depicting the possibilities available to Black women unrestricted by place. From this vantage point, Truth is not performing the picture of White womanhood; she is asserting the hope and the humanity of Black women. In other words, in her cartes de visite, Truth visually creates a narrative of humanity using the symbol of home.

Even with all that Truth accomplishes around the theme of homeplace, finding or creating homeplace is only the first cornerstone of creating sanctuary. Truth also demonstrates her mastery of the next cornerstone, remapping the territory. I expound on the ways she demonstrates this mastery in the section that follows.

**Cornerstone #2: Remapping the Territory**

The second element of the SCT involves remapping the territory. This aspect of the tool calls for a recognition that while change is necessary, agency is the kindling for that change. Truth displays indignant agency that begins with something as simple as a piece of cardstock. Those who only notice a photo miss a more complex strategy for overcoming her social placement. Truth is a Black, formerly enslaved woman without voting rights or citizenship. Yet, she navigates the limits of place with a stunning degree of effectiveness. As a part of this navigation process, Truth creates a place of sanctuary for herself, her family, and those willing to follow her lead. To be clear, she does more than offer a few uplifting words displayed over a nice
photo. I argue Truth remaps territory through the rhetorical practice of naming herself and her property.

Before discussing what Truth names, it is important to uncover the significance of naming to Afrocentric and Black feminist approaches. Jahn asserts, “Naming is an incantation, a creative act. What we cannot conceive of is unreal; it does not exist. But every human thought, once expressed, becomes reality” (Jahn, 1961, p. 133). Collins adds another layer to the concept of naming. She points to the importance of self-definition suggesting Black women’s survival hinges on “a self-defined, group derived Black women’s standpoint” (Collins, 2000, p. 109). With this acknowledgement of the cultural significance of naming, we can more accurately assess the ways Truth uses the text on her cartes de visite in support of her efforts to remap the territory.

First, Truth begins remapping territory by naming or rather renaming herself. The choice to use her name may seem inconsequential since she wore 3 different names over the course of her life. Plus, the name used—Sojourner Truth—is the name adopted three years before its regular inclusion on her cartes de visite. Why is it significant that she used that name on the cards? I suggest including her chosen name in print carries rhetorical, cultural, religious and legal significance. Truth remaps her social place by making a formal refusal of her slave name (Isabella Bomefree). She first takes on an identity separate from the first person who owned her as property. She then rejects the last name assumed after her escape from slavery (Van Wagenen). Gilbert explains the problem encountered by taking on the name of the person purchasing her freedom. She suggests that though Isaac and Maria Van Wagenen’s purchase was a ruse for Truth’s benefit, Isaac was still considered “her last master in the eye[s] of the law, and a slave’s surname is ever the same as his master” (Gilbert, 1850, p. 43). The decision to change her name
once again signals Truth could not rest in another’s efforts to secure her emancipation. She had to free herself from a cycle of violence where someone else held the right to name her, claim her, and place her. Liberation could only be her portion if she cast off both names holding her to a place of bondage. By assuming another name and immortalizing that name in print, she makes it clear she is not beholden to anyone other than the God to whom she freely submits. This would have been in accordance with her deep, Christian beliefs. As a final point of note, the person viewing Truth’s cartes de visite operates as a witness to Truth’s naming. Since she could not read or write her name, commissioning her name in print is likely the closest she would ever come to writing her own name. Committing the name Sojourner Truth to print in this manner is Truth’s way of making her own statement about place. Each time we acknowledge Truth’s name as connected to her cartes de visite, we echo our agreement with the place she chose over the place she rejected. Without uttering a single word, we participate in the time-honored Black tradition of call and response.

While the work of naming herself includes the physical placement of her name on her cartes de visite, the work of naming continues with Truth’s efforts to name her property. Broaching the topic of property is decidedly complex when it involves a person once held under the thumb of slavery. Still, because slavery exists as the ultimate example of the imposition of place, it is worth pressing past any related challenges. Slavery exemplifies the intersection of place in terms of one’s confinement to a location (ex. a plantation in the South), place as identity (ex. slave versus property owner or overseer) and place as hierarchy (ex. field slaves verses house slaves). Truth understood each of these treatments of place because she was once owned as property. Because she was intimately aware of the intersections between place and property, it is no surprise that she brings the power of naming to these areas as well.
Therefore, in addition to naming herself, Truth also demonstrates the power of naming her property as a strategy for remapping the territory. She accomplishes this in two ways: She uses her name in lieu of the photographer’s name, and she offers proof that the document is protected by copyright. We see the two ways she names property based on the text printed on the front of her cards versus the text printed on the back of the same cards.

First, we consider the ways Truth engages in the practice of naming on the front of her cartes de visite. Truth’s name appears immediately after the phrase, “I sell the shadow to support the substance.” While she obviously uses her name, her naming work is much more complex. The appearance of Truth’s name is important, but posting the name of the subject is not an unusual practice for cartes de visite of that era. What is different is the exact location of the subject’s name on Truth’s cards. I argue that even the location of Truth’s name signals an act of defiance. Truth’s name is located where the photographer’s name usually appears. Going against tradition, Truth demands her name appear in the place usually reserved for the photographer. In short, Truth visually flips the order of things by imposing place in this instance in the same way place was imposed on her. By deciding where she fits locationally, she takes control of the narrative about her body and who has the right to own and sell her image. Truth does not leave it up to someone else to make the call. Starting in 1864, she decides against handing over her authority, even to a photographer. She decides against allowing someone to superimpose their name onto her image. When she puts her name instead of the photographer’s name, she overcomes the standard conventions of the day. More importantly, she pushes against instruments of white, Western, capitalistic, patriarchy set on keeping her in place. Thus, by choosing herself over the photographer, Truth displaces herself. As we view her cartes de visite, we bear witness to Sojourner, the subject of the piece of art and owner of her own work. She
accomplishes all of this through the rhetorical practice of naming so she can displace herself out of another’s imposition of place.

The second way Truth names her property is by ensuring her work is protected by copyright. When we view the backside of Truth’s cards, we find the following message: “Entered according to act of Congress in the year 1864. By SOJOURNER TRUTH, in the Clerk’s Office, of the US. District Court, for the Eastern District of Mich. (Truth, 1864).” With this imprint—and a penchant for using the law as a means of challenging place, Truth identifies her cartes de visite as her intellectual property. She supports her claim of ownership through a legal process. Truth uses this naming process as protection from the grips of anyone who might try claiming her property as their own. Securing copyright protection for her image is arguably one of Truth’s strongest shows of indignant agency. Her assertion of her own place beyond the grip of White, Western, patriarchal systems of oppression demonstrates her transformative power. With something as seemingly unthreatening as putting her name on the front and the back of her cartes de visite, Truth steps out of tradition and into the history books on her terms. My amazement over Truth’s rhetorical and legal genius is echoed by Grigsby who notes, “This is highly unusual: very few cartes de visite are imprinted with the sitter’s name or captions, and as far as I know, none have copyrights in the sitter’s name. This bears repeating: I have found no other card from the period that features a copyright in the name of the sitter (Grigsby, 2015, p. 139). Truth’s ability to name herself out of place is even more fascinating when we remember that the rules of place for a formerly enslaved, illiterate Black woman should have prevented any self-definition or property ownership. It is yet one more reason Truth stands as a prototype for circumventing the imposition of place.
A review of Sojourner Truth’s cartes de visite shows that she remaps the territory through naming. She challenges the imposition of place by first taking ownership of her name. She then names her property through the physical location of her name. This move alerts us to the way she wrestles creative rights away from her photographer. Her actions symbolically recreate the oppressed’s fight for freedom from oppression. Finally, Truth names her property using copyright. This act of indignant agency brings with it the force of the legal system. Sojourner Truth challenges standardized readings of place and flips symbols of Whiteness and patriarchy so they work for her—not against her. Truth’s actions help us see that Black women cannot get beyond the place assigned to them until they alter who gets to name them and their property. Thus, there is no displacement or access to sanctuary if someone else names people, places, boundaries, expectations, and who can use existing systems for their own benefit. While the challenges against her displacement persist, it is clear Truth finds creative ways to remap the territory. However, her appeals to memory keep Sojourner’s successful examples of naming before us. With such a strong connection between these elements, it is fitting that we next explore the cornerstone of memory.

**Cornerstone #3: Appeals to Memory**

Appeals to collective memory are a significant part of the Black feminist tradition. hooks even cautions us that, “Within white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, forgetfulness is encouraged” because “Memory sustains a spirit of resistance” (hooks, 1992, p. 191). Sojourner Truth builds on the cornerstone of homeplace and its support of resistance by showing us the ways indignant agency connects with memory. She uses memory to sustain a spirit of resistance in two ways. Her cartes de visite are a tool of (re)membering and memorialization as well as a tool of counter-memory.
To begin, cartes de visite are a tool of re/(re)/re-membering. Recall is only one part of the way Truth uses memory. Truth, also turns to re-membering or pulling together disparate memories, parts, experiences, and ideas (Dillard, 2012; Yu et al., 2022). Her cartes de visite show us how she re-members herself by reclaiming control over her narrative. However, she does more than reclaim a narrative. Truth reclaims the broken pieces of herself torn apart from the violence of placement and (re)placement. The image we see is Truth’s (re)presentation of herself after (re)collecting herself.

Truth’s memory work continues through (re)membering. Yu et. al (2022) remind us that (re)membering involves, “challenging master narratives by drawing on ways of knowing and understanding from the past” (p. 205). Truth ensures we (re)member her by making her image was available for public consumption in life and in death. In fact, because of Truth’s active involvement in the images she left behind, she ensured every memorialization of her looks back to an image she already approved. While Truth’s involvement in her future memorialization is profound, the Black woman’s use of memorializing gestures shows up in other (everyday) ways.

Once again, I turn to hooks remembrance of a simple gesture affirming the relationship between memory and place. hooks notes:

In their honor and in their memory, I speak a word of homage and praise for the valiant ones, who struggled and suffered so that I could and do live where I please, and I have my porch a small everyday place of anti-racist resistance, a place where I practice the etiquette of civility (2009, p. 150).

In this example, hooks moves us beyond a modest connection between place and memory. She establishes a connection between place, memory and counter-memory as
well. I share this example to show how Truth’s cartes de visite serve the same role as hooks’ porch—offering a kind of memorialization through counter-memory.

Counter-memory is a powerful means of resisting the imposition of place. Lipsitz asserts, “Counter-memory focuses on localized experiences with oppression, using them to reframe and refocus dominant narratives purporting to represent universal experience” (1997, p. 212). Brown expands the discussion of counter-memory describing the ways Black scholars like Carter G. Woodson “challenge the normative constructions of African American life, and not simply the historical, dialectical placement of African American histories and achievements” (2010, p. 63). However, Ohl and Potter (2013) make a connection between counter-memory, photography and the broader discussion of sanctuary (or the lack thereof). They argue that the photo book, “Without Sanctuary produces countermemory that opposes traditional narratives of lynching” (Ohl & Potter, 2013, p. 187). I believe that in the same way the Without Sanctuary (2000) photobook pushes back against established ideas about lynching, Truth’s cartes de visite are a tool in the fight against well-established understandings of place.

Indeed, in many ways, Truth is the exact opposite of the lynched body held in place by a rope, the piercing gaze of onlookers at the scene of the crime, and the hesitant gaze of those looking back at the memory preserved in the book. Truth offers a counter-memory—the body that is not bound by ropes, chains or the expected limits of place that constrain her contemporaries. Her photocards create a counter-memory to the way Black women of the 1800s are remembered. When juxtaposed against the image of slave garb, inhumanity, and incivility, Truth’s cartes de visite are an assault on white, Western, patriarchal standards of beauty. Truth reframes the image of Black womanhood as she
challenges what gets immortalized in print. Just as the postcards memorialize the bodies of slain victims, Truth’s cartes de visite memorialize her body. Yet, she helps us to see that her resistance extends beyond the physical body. The body can be bound; a shadow cannot. She proclaims the usefulness of something more powerful than the physical form—an accessible representation that lives beyond her life.

As a final point of comparison, we are not confined to a physical location like the onlookers depicted in Without Sanctuary (2000). Unlike the lynched victims who have no say over their audience, Truth commands her audience of yesterday and today. In true Afrocentric tradition, she realizes her audience is past, present, and future. With each cartes de visite, Truth represents the ancestors, defies her contemporaries, and challenges posterity (Daniel & Smitherman, 2004). We move her out of her historically imposed place each time we return to these images.

With a photo and an assemblage of phrases on cardstock, Truth tells her story the way she wants it told; her version of the story remains thanks to technology considered advanced at the time. A simple Google search or visit to the Smithsonian and today’s viewer witnesses the same, unfiltered image Truth created for us nearly 160 years ago. Thus, what began as a simple photo is Sojourner Truth claiming her place in history. She is not erased by death or the passage of time. Even though her body is subject to decay, her shadow is not. Indeed, the way Truth used photography not only speaks to the way she appeals to memory as a cornerstone of sanctuary. It also transitions us to the fourth cornerstone which allows us to see Truth as an agent of imagination and discovery.
Cornerstone #4. Freedom to Imagine and Discover

The appeal to memory is a foundational cornerstone of Truth’s cartes de visite. However, a traditional reading of place remains largely unaltered without the final cornerstone—freedom to imagine and discover. Even though Truth was trapped between the bondage of slavery and the closed doors ending the period of Reconstruction, her ability to imagine is unparalleled. Black women of the 1800s were especially limited in the places they could go and the things they could do. Still, Truth operates beyond the options commonly available to Black women of her day. I distill her imagination and penchant for discovery down to two categories: 1.) Truth’s cartes de visite as an early instantiation of Afrofuturism, and 2.) Truth’s cartes de visite as a means of reimagining her worth.

Back to the Future

Analyzing Truth’s cartes de visite means situating her as a part of the Black feminist past, present and future. She rests in our history but does so as the vanguard of a modern movement. I contend Truth’s work fits within an Afrofuturistic orientation for 3 reasons: Her cartes de visite 1.) represent a reliance on technology, 2.) enable a narrative’s reframing, and 3.) offer an invitation to imagine and discover. I begin with Truth’s use of technology as an Afrofuturistic revelation of imagination.

Truth and Technology. Long before anyone coined the term Afrofuturism, Truth’s imagination made her a standout. Her insightful use of the technology of the day reveals an Afrofuturistic orientation. The photo portion of Truth’s cartes de visite are indicative of a technology of remembrance. Truth uses her cartes de visite in the same way celebrities or public
figures use headshots and social media accounts today. In fact, Truth often sold her cartes de viste along with her written narrative as a means of supporting her livelihood (Painter, 1996, 1996). Painter (1994) surmises that Truth “appropriated the power of the American gaze and used it in her own mimesis” (p. 488). Moreover, Truth adopted photographic technology as an access point for the marginalized. Her early turn to this technology is reminiscent of the way members of marginalized communities searched for sanctuary in digital spaces. As McIlwain notes, “black people have taken technology not originally designed with our concerns in mind. It is about black people using that technology to further our own personal, communal, and political interests” (2019, p. 7). Truth artfully controls the technology of remembrance as a secondary use of her imagination. As she reframes her narrative through technology, she brings truth, transparency and technology together under an Afrofuturist banner.

Reframing the Narrative. While technology speaks to how Truth accomplishes work that is Afrofuturistic in design, we must continually consider why Truth engaged in this work. Truth’s cartes de visite created an outlet so a poor, illiterate, Black woman could take a role in reframing her own narrative. I see a relationship between Truth’s mission of narrative reframing and the narrative reframing mission of Afrofuturist texts. Peattie helps me draw this link by suggesting:

The imagery Afrofuturists create is designed to shift the narratives that influence African-Americans’ lives from the existing narratives of oppression and deficit to narratives that re-imagine a future that celebrates African diasporic culture and portrays a world in which people of color are prominently positioned in social life (2022, p. 162).

Wozolek echoes this when she shares, “Afrofuturisms can be understood as a kind of imaginative assemblages through which futures are considered in ways that are
counternarratives to contemporary injustices” (2018, p. 849). In each of these assessments of Afrofuturism, the recurring theme is the use of imagination to create a counternarrative. In similar fashion, the centrality of imagination in Truth's battle against placement warrants attention. There is no other way to explain how a Black, elderly, disabled, illiterate, formerly enslaved woman could ever dream of selling photographs of herself—especially in 1864. The unlikelihood is complicated further by Truth’s failure to conform to traditional standards of beauty and femininity (duCille, 1994b; Mandziuk, 2014). It is a stretch to think that she could ever find success selling her photographs. Certainly, she could not do so in a way that would supplement even the most simplistic lifestyle. Indeed, under a White, Western, patriarchal understanding of place, the idea of Truth selling her image on a carte de visite is preposterous. Yet, her vision for her future strategically challenges the status quo. Moreover, her vision for the future does not end when she adjusts the way she is personally framed. Truth’s reframed narrative creates a path to alter the way her story is told while simultaneously altering who gets tell her story. Likewise, her narrative creates a place for others to do the same kind of work.

**Extending an Invitation.** A final element of an Afrofuturistic text is an invitation to imagination and discovery. In other words, the text is not fully realized until it goes beyond conveying a singular narrative. Invitations to share and expand the narrative are key. Indeed, this is a foundational part of Afrocentric thought as it asserts an individual is inherently tied to the advancement of the larger community (Daniel & Smitherman, 2004). Moreover, as Peattie notes:

Afrofuturist art invites audience members to join its creators in reflecting on current social injustices in the lived experiences of African-Americans by
envisioning different worlds that conceivably could exist, at least in some form, in the near future (2022, p. 162).

Sojourner’s cartes de visite exemplify the transition from the personal to the collective. This idea sits as the foundation of Afrocentric and Afrofuturist perspectives. These perspectives encourage witnesses to respond to Truth’s personal narrative. Whether the response ends with simply agreeing to Truth’s presentation of her story or encourages the purchase of her cartes de visite, these texts open a pathway to discovery. As a result of this pathway, there is also the chance that Black women’s experiences with place shift right alongside Truth’s movement into the collective memory.

Thus, Truth’s campaign to change her narrative is victorious on two fronts: 1.) It demonstrates that a Black feminist approach to place with Afrofuturistic leanings does not end with imagination and 2.) Truth’s cartes de visite demonstrate that one woman’s mission of self-definition has the potential to impact others directly and indirectly. This leads me to the second example of Truth’s commitment to imagination and discovery—the use of her cartes de visite as a way of reimagining her worth.

**Selling the Shadow, not the Substance**

It is befitting for this discussion of imagination and discovery to call the reader’s attention to the final, text-based element of Sojourner Truth’s cartes de visite. The text in question is printed on the front of Truth’s cards and reads: “I sell the shadow to support the substance.” Several scholars tackle this small but powerful statement (Grigsby, 2015; Mandziuk & Fitch, 2001; Painter, 1996). However, there seems an inordinate amount of attention on Truth’s use of the term *shadow*. While I agree that her discussion of the
shadow concept is important, there is equal (if not greater) significance in how Truth uses the term *substance*. Motivated by a curiosity about the unequal attention given to shadows and an Afrofuturistic invitation to imagine and discover, I search out missed opportunities to see Truth in the proper light. I look again through the lens of Black feminist thought with a particular regard for imagination and discovery. This time, I see Truth’s futuristic call to reimagine the limits of Black womanhood. In this section, I address Truth’s radicality for daring to reimagine her worth. I deconstruct what is said and put it in conversation with that which is unspoken.

Truth begins with what appears to be a simple announcement: “I sell.” She utters the first two words and positions us for her radical points of clarification. The phrase is radical because of the place she historically occupies. The woman once sold as property is now the one selling. She operates in direct contradiction to her historical placement as an enslaved person. Furthermore, unlike narratives written about her that allow others to keep her in place, Truth has her say in this text. She does not have to rely on an intermediary. She lets us know she is the one who speaks. Yet, she does more than speak. She clarifies that she is actively in charge. She is not passively waiting on someone or something to act upon her. Truth is set on making her agency and her voice known to others, too. Moreover, unlike in times past when her enslaver sold her body, her biographer sold her book, or someone else sold copies of articles, this time Sojourner is the one who sells. While this unusual exchange may seem a stretch for someone from Truth’s background, it is not beyond her imagination.

Truth continues by offering the details of the exchange: “I sell the shadow.” As the seller, she is the one controlling the flow of production. She is not the product, and
her body is not for sale. Further, those looking to make a purchase can only have her shadow—something that is fleeting and disappears with exposure but is craftily captured in print. We are witnesses to the way Truth carefully avoids the pretense that she is exchanging one system of slavery for another. In her displacement, even her shadow has worth.

For proof that Truth avoids the trap of place already set for her, we consider her photograph and the language of the text. To prevent the erroneous assumption that her body is for sale, she avoids the emblems and language of trafficking. Truth does not present herself as one ever held in the shackles of slavery or paraded on an auction block. She banishes from our imagination the image of some enslaved woman listed for sale or hunted using a tragic image affixed to a wanted flyer. Truth’s appearance in the photographs is carefully cultivated. Her props and the overall setting are simple. However, she is not the modest, polished lady of her home trying to live up to the standard of White womanhood. Likewise, she is no longer Isabella Bomefree. Instead of a reflection of consumption and bondage, Truth’s cartes de visite depict the Afrofuturistic Black woman of 1864 and beyond. The one who views this photo and sees Sojourner Truth finds her resting in a place of her own design.

This revelation leads to the final part of her text-based mantra. She finally reveals that she sells the shadow “to support the substance.” The common mistake is incorrectly decoding the site of fixation. This makes it exceedingly difficult to see Truth’s priority. I start by reconsidering the way the shadow gets decoded.

Since it is the height of hypocrisy to presume a formerly enslaved woman would offer her body for sale, I contend Truth’s only concession is offering the shadow of her
substance. Her body is not an option. However, she allows people to purchase a representation of something connected to her as a means of progressing the greater work of claiming a place of her own. Taking on the ethereal nature of the shadow, Truth fulfills what Peterson describes as “resistance to commodification” (1995, p. 44). From this vantage point, I am inclined to read Taft’s identification of cartes de visite in a new light. No longer are they simply the “‘green-backs’ of civilization” as in a form of capital (Green, 2003; Peterson, 1995, p. 40). Truth’s cartes de visite force a reimagining of our use of the terms green-backs and civilization. When she sells her shadow, she gives her cartes de visite as green-backs. When we “buy in,” we support the substance—the restoration of stolen humanity. Truth’s shadows are the rate of currency exchanged for her right to define her own place. In a Black feminist reading of Truth’s cartes de visite, the capitalistic system that once held her in bondage is reimagined as a model for individual and collective liberation. Out of the abundance of Truth’s imagination, we get to witness a situation where neither her body nor her substance are compromised. We discover Truth’s value is in her own substance and self-worth. Still, we never get to discover any of this if we are not first willing to imagine a Black woman having worth beyond her body. Sojourner Truth’s cartes de visite are emblematic of a woman who knows her worth and is not afraid to announce it to the world. Even more, she manages this reworking of place without compromising her body or her beliefs.

In many ways, Sojourner Truth is the epitome of imagination and discovery. Her cartes de visite are tangible displays of early Afrofuturist thinking. Additionally, her cards reflect a woman who knows her worth. Sojourner Truth offers more than nice photographs. She offers a visual representation that stands in contention with the image created through words by Frances Gage,
Harriet Beecher Stowe, or even Olive Gilbert. With each new reading of her cards, we observe the ways Truth fulfills her personal mission of reframing and liberating.

As a true abolitionist though, she cannot stop until others enjoy the same kind of communal, liberative impact she sought for herself. Her imaginative, Afrofuturistic work offers a roadmap for other Black women looking for a path to displacement. We are left with a new vision of Sojourner Truth and of Black womanhood.

Still, there is obvious pushback on reimagining Truth’s place. Even with all of her imagining at play, she still functions in a capitalistic system. Additionally, while there is freedom revealed in Truth's cartes de visite of 1864, there is a clear shift in her cards by the time we get to the 1880s. This marks the timeframe when Truth’s photographers returned to using their names on her cards again. In doing so, they often reduced the size of her printed statement, and increased the display size of their own names. In other words, even though Sojourner Truth uses her cartes de visites to successfully displace herself, she is (re)placed when her photographers return to the practice of putting their name on her cards. In life and in death, Truth cycles from placement to displacement to (re)placement. Her story raises the point that for Black women like Truth, displacement is never complete. The search for sanctuary continues.

Still (a) Sojourner

This chapter is about a woman, a journey and a photo. Yet, it encompasses so much more. A careful survey of Sojourner Truth’s cartes de visite teaches us how traditional readings of place operate. More importantly, her cartes de visite help us understand why the search for sanctuary is ongoing. Truth sets out to define herself for herself. On the journey, she moves from another’s placement to displacement. Her cartes de visite are a record of her search for sanctuary and of the many ways she continually moves beyond traditional readings of place. From the rhetoric of
Sojourner Truth, we glean insight that still rings true today. This insight has social, political and disciplinary implications.

Cobbling together those implications begins with recalling the impetus for Truth’s work. Her texts were born out of her desire to speak for herself. While her speeches were powerful, we know that it was impossible for her to duplicate those speeches beyond the immediate moment. Truth creates a new place for herself and others by visually telling the story of her journey. The illiterate former slave needed a text to extend beyond a single rhetorical situation. In the process of building her own image, Truth reframes possibilities for herself and scores of other Black women, too. She uses her name, her photo, her statement and her copyright to push against place and the idea of Black women as property.

Truth’s cartes de visite show us all the ways she was ahead of her time. She rejected the trope of White, Western beauty that reasoned against keeping her record in photographs. She commissioned those photographs and embraced the technology of her age. She operated as her own marketing agent and rejected another’s imposition of place. She even memorialized herself as she showcased the possibilities of Black womanhood. Her calling cards beckon us to see her beyond the narrative constructed by others. We are left to conclude that if there is any sanctuary, it exists in the cartes de visite that remain to speak on Truth’s behalf. Truth accomplishes all of this by using her own image, relying on texts strategically layered onto the cards, and selling the cards as a way of supporting various aspects of her welfare. When we study these elements using the foundational cornerstones of SCT, it is easier to see homeplace, remapping, memory and imagination on full display. Truth’s life and her cards testify that someone else’s determination of place is not final. If place is not final and (re)placement is still possible, Black women like Truth must continue in the hunt for sanctuary.
Chapter Five

Writing/Righting the Wrongs of Place: Hannah/Bond/Crafts

And why don’t you write? Write! Writing is for you, you are for you; your body is yours, take it. I know why you haven’t written…Because writing is at once too high, too great for you, it’s reserved for the great—that is, for “great men”; and it’s “silly.” Besides, you’ve written a little, but in secret. And it wasn’t good, because it was in secret, and because you punished yourself for writing, because you didn’t go all the way; or because you wrote irresistibly…Write, let no one hold you back, let nothing stop you: not man; not the imbecilic capitalist machinery…and not yourself” (Cixous, 1976, pp. 876–877).

Writing is a gateway that holds people in a place of subjugation and marginalization. However, we see the potentiated power of writing as a gateway to sanctuary when we explore texts from Black women like formerly enslaved author, Hannah Crafts. Her text, The Bondwoman’s Narrative by Hannah Crafts, A Fugitive Slave Recently Escaped from North Carolina, retells a woman’s journey from bondage to freedom. Yet, Hannah Crafts and her text are so much more.

Hannah Crafts’ work stands as a testament to the way writing literacy liberates the oppressed. Crafts carves out a place for herself when she produces an original, handwritten manuscript in the mid-to-late 1850s. Her manuscript remained obscure for 150 years until its posthumous publication in 2002 (Crafts, 2002, p. 4). Her work, now identified by the abbreviated title, The Bondwoman’s Narrative, is a reminder that even a forgotten text can ensure a life is not forgotten. There are many lessons awaiting us when we take the time to carefully consider Crafts’ text. However, parsing through The Bondwoman’s Narrative requires several baseline considerations.

For instance, Hannah Crafts is inseparable from her characters. Just like the protagonist of the text, Crafts is a Black woman born into slavery in the southern region of the United States. Both the author and her manuscript’s main character live in a time and place where legal and
social restrictions are common. Both women are literate, but Crafts’ writing acumen is more impactful than her character’s reading ability. In fact, the primary reason we know many details of Crafts’ life is because she reclaims her right to literacy in the same way she reclaims her right to liberty. Indeed, Crafts demonstrates that writing is an act of resistance just as important as a physical escape from captivity (Anzaldúa, 2017; Atwater, 2009; Bunch-Lyons & Few, 2007; O. I. Davis, 1998; Logan, 1999).

Another careful consideration for this project involves the way Hannah Crafts shifts our reading of place. Crafts and the main character in her text reject traditional readings of place by defying the literacy laws of the day. Both women escape behind characters and words, but it is Crafts’ writing that moves her in and out of place.

A final consideration driving this discussion is a regard for the author’s cultural identity. When we miss the nuances of intersectionality, we miss Crafts’ radical reimagination of place. That is, Crafts provides the text, but she also provides the inspiration and guidance for rupturing the limits of place. Therefore, Hannah Crafts does more than teach women like her about the sanctuary that escapes them; Hannah Crafts’ writing helps us see how Black women’s writing facilitates place’s decolonization.

Nearly 175 years after Hannah Crafts first put pen to paper, *The Bondwoman’s Narrative* stands as a living, breathing document that can reshape our thinking about place. The author and her main character remind us that writing literacy in the hands of the oppressed pushes back against place and creates an access point to sanctuary. This essay challenges the discourse of place by first discussing the complex ways the author’s identity shapes this discussion. After decoding aspects of Hannah Crafts’ identity, I highlight the reasons writing literacy is both an open and closed gateway to sanctuary using Hannah Crafts’ story and her text, *The*
Bondwoman’s Narrative, as guides. Once I contextualize Hannah Crafts’ work, I move into the analysis of her published manuscript. Finally, I conclude with the implications of a new reading of Hannah Crafts’ work. With a complete outline of this search for sanctuary, I pause to offer greater insight into Hannah Craft’s decidedly complex identity.

Identifying Hannah

Before analyzing The Bondwoman’s Narrative or considering the rhetorical agency of the text’s creator, I must clarify the guiding voices for this project. History teaches us there are three iterations of Hannah connected to the text under consideration. We initially meet Hannah Crafts. This is a pseudonym that mildly obscures the author’s real identity. Hannah Crafts introduces us to Hannah, the central character in The Bondwoman’s Narrative. Unlike Hannah Crafts, the character Hannah never gets a last name. The absence of a surname is the only immediate line of demarcation between Hannah the author and Hannah the fugitive slave and star of the text. The third Hannah hides in plain sight. She is Hannah Bond. Her identity is nearly erased by her condition of enslavement and her choice to take on a pseudonym. Time further erodes Hannah Bond’s identity. However, the confirmation of her existence in historical texts stands as proof that Hannah Crafts is not a fictitious identity created by a sympathetic, white, ally (Crafts, 2002, pp. 21–23). Unfortunately, Hannah Bond also represents the enduring tie that forever links Hannah Crafts—the freed author—to a life of bondage.

We learn even more about the mononymous character, the liberated author, and the enslaved woman by simply considering her commitment to naming and renaming. For instance, Crafts’ pseudonym helps her obscure her identity. Taking on a different name decreases the likelihood of recapture, rape, or other acts of physical violence wielded as punishment on those who dare escape bondage (Douglass, 2013; Franklin & Schweninger, 1999). Since the one
threatening brutality against a fugitive slave could very easily carry out that threat—and do so at any time without any repercussion, remaining hidden was often a matter of life or death. As Rohrbach explains, “Writing made this person an author; not publishing kept her free” (Gates & Robbins, 2004, pp. 13–14).

While the pseudonym helps Hannah Crafts hide, the same pseudonym helps ensure others see her as more than someone else’s property. With the subtle influence of a name, she creates an identity that showcases her agency and the power of invention. As Hannah masters self-definition, the surname she chooses also signals the importance of acknowledging ancestral trailblazers (Asante, 1998; Collins, 2000). Gates explains that the surname Crafts may be the author’s homage to the runaway slave, Ellen Crafts (Crafts, 2002, p. 35). If Gates’ theory is correct, Hannah Crafts’ name choice is yet another way she takes control of her narrative.

Naming and renaming are a show of agency, an act of self-definition and a way of claiming one’s own liberty (Asante, 1998; Collins, 2000; hooks, 2015). However, naming also sustains the imposition of place. The secondary impact of naming reflects just how easily enslaved Black women are trapped in place. In the case of Hannah Crafts, the same pseudonym that helps her escape is the same mechanism allowing Hannah Bond's deeper slide into obscurity. Hannah undoubtedly finds some liberty in relinquishing her first enslaver’s surname (Crafts, 2002, p. 7). Yet, she maintains her first name in all instances. Keeping the name Hannah is a small, but powerful indication of the way she maintains a say over her own identity.

There are several explanations for Hannah Crafts’ use of the name Hannah in her pseudonym and as the name of her manuscript’s protagonist. To begin, according to Gates, Hannah Bond shares the name Hannah with her mother (Crafts, 2002, p. 8). Buell suggests there is a link between the name Hannah and the Biblical figure Hagar, a bondwoman with importance
in Biblical lore (Gates & Robbins, 2004, p. 16). There is a greater likelihood that Hannah Crafts’ keeps the name Hannah as a reference to the Biblical character bearing the same name (Parry, 2010). Because the Biblical Hannah is not a servant, we prophetically announce the enslaved Hannah’s liberation each time we utter her name. Therefore, by keeping this part of her name, Crafts maintains a say over her own identity and calls us to participate in her displacement.

Still, honoring Hannah Crafts’ right to choose her own name weighs against the equally daunting challenge of recognizing Hannah Bond’s existence. Erasing Hannah Bond is an affront to the one who pressed her way into sanctuary and paved the way for Black women writers following her lead. Since naming liberates and sustains the imposition of place, an important question remains: How do we celebrate Hannah Craft’s liberation without (re)placing her back into the grips of slavery?

With great intentionality, I reject the complicity of erasure. Therefore, in the instances where the enslaved party is of primary concern, I use Hannah Bond or just Hannah. When I reference something shared in The Bondwoman’s Narrative, I use Hannah or Hannah Crafts. When I make a point about the author of this manuscript, I use Hannah Crafts. In the instances where aspects of her identity are not easily compartmentalized, I use Hannah/Bond/Crafts. This choice also lets me acknowledge that the author, the character, and the once-enslaved woman all bring something to the discussion. With more clarity on the ways this text represents distinct and interrelated identities, discussing Hannah/Bond/Crafts’ search for sanctuary now seems more fitting. In the next section I address the problems and possibilities of place for an enslaved/formerly enslaved, Black woman.
Recognizing the Problems of Place

Place and the imposition of place shape the author, the text and the characters in the text. Additionally, the problems of place shape Hannah/Bond/Crafts’ commitment to displacement in her own life and in the fictional world she creates through her writing. Still, when we tell Hannah/Bond/Crafts’ story or analyze The Bondwoman’s Narrative without discussing matters of place, it becomes clear there are gaping holes in our knowledge. This section fills some of these holes by addressing: 1.) the ways place is imposed on Hannah/Bond/Crafts, 2.) the ways she writes her way out of place and 3.) the ways Hannah/Bond/Crafts is (re)placed.

The Imposition of Place

Many Black women remain subject to closed readings of place as either location, identity or hierarchy (Moss, 2020; Wilson, 2002). This problem of place stands above the rest because closed readings ignore the reality that for some, place is not singular. Place is collectively shaped by locational boundaries, identities and hierarchical placement. For those with intersectional identities, the convergence of the disparate readings of place results in the imposition of place.

The second set of problems stemming from a singular reading of place are the reinforced frames of whiteness and patriarchy. The uniform application of place across rhetors and rhetorical artifacts limits the likelihood of a full understanding of place. It is only when we critique the way place folds in on itself like an ouroboros that we see why there is need for a radical reimagining of place. The radical work of Black women revolutionaries like Hannah/Bond/Crafts hastens the reimagining of place.

The Bondwoman’s Narrative lets us study this imposition in several ways. The first way this text helps us understand the imposition of place is through the physical and geographic aspects of location associated with the text. The chief example of the connection between the
enslaved and place lies in the confinement of enslaved bodies to the plantation. The plantation stands as a physical representation of bondage. However, even with the primary character’s escape from the Lindendale and Wheeler plantations, respectively, fugitivity means the enduring threat of a return to bondage. Thus, for the characters and the author, the rhetorical power of the plantation is that it keeps the Black body in perpetual bondage to a location equated with enslavement.

Still, if the locational power of place was the only problem, the enslaved person’s escape from bondage or another’s relocation to economically affluent neighborhoods would completely eradicate the problem of place. Experiences with place are also colored by the imposition of racial and gendered identities. People’s experiences are complicated further by the social, political and economic realities of oppression and bondage. Because there are so many variables at play, intersectionality necessitates a broader reading of place.

Hannah/Bond/Crafts’ writing reveals some of the ways the imposition of place impacts our reading of identity and hierarchy. She writes of the inseparable link between race and hierarchy in her description of two life stories—the story of the protagonist Hannah and her unnamed mistress from the Lindendale plantation. As a part of the unwinding plot of the text, we learn both Hannah and her mistress have similar complexions and both women are racially Black.

Crafts makes it clear why we must reject a singular, myopic reading of place through the careful juxtaposition of the protagonist with the mistress she befriends. Both women have similar complexions (Crafts, 2002). However, each woman leads a different life because of the racial classification assigned at birth. The character Hannah explains the impact of the imposition of place for the reader when she notes, “I soon learned what a curse was attached to my race, soon
learned that the African blood in my veins would forever exclude me from the higher walks of life. That toil unremitting unpaid toil must be my lot and portion, without even the hope or expectation of any thing [sic] better” (p. 66).

On the other end of the racial spectrum, Hannah’s White-passing mistress knows a life of ease. Easy living ends abruptly, however, the moment an outsider discovers her birth mother was a Black, enslaved woman—not her father’s White wife. Through a storyline that includes illness, switches at birth and the sale of a doting birthmother, Crafts reveals how the mistress escapes the intersectional imposition of place for most of her life. Crafts’ story reminds us that it is not the one-drop rule alone that shapes the women’s earliest life experiences. Instead, it is the meeting point of intersectionality and place that endows the one-drop rule with determining power of social hierarchy. The diverging storylines in The Bondwoman’s Narrative remind us that one’s identity is tied to the lenses that shape where, how, and on whom place is imposed.

This present work invites consideration of the way Hannah/Bond/Crafts repeatedly interrupts place’s imposition through her writing. Crafts stands as a proxy for others with intersectional identities and offers her written work as a guide for pressing beyond the trap of place. In the next section, I examine the way Hannah/Bond/Crafts’ pushes back on the guarded gate of sanctuary by challenging place’s limits through her writing.

**Write/Right Past the Guarded Gate**

Writing literacy is a gateway to sanctuary. However, history reminds us that literacy remains a guarded gate. During slavery, the law was a tool of control policing would-be writers out of the path of emancipation. Today educators and editors police what constitutes good writing (M. Allen, 2003; Jordan et al., 2003; O. L. Taylor, 2014; Wanzer-Serrano, 2019).
Understanding writing as a gateway requires several considerations. First, we must contend with the fact that writing is historically esteemed more highly than orality (Dorson, 1964; Thane, 1999). Second, written communication is not confined to the West as often suggested (Asante, 1998). Third, policing reinforces the oppression of those long-denied equal access to education (Cooper, 1998; Wollstonecraft, 2009). Whether this resistance is tied to assumptions about limited rationality or maintaining their subordinate status, pressure on women’s writing literacy continues. Just as Cixous (1976) calls our attention to the trepidation that often consumes women as they write, we must also consider historical and contemporary instances of policed literacy rooted in racial oppression. Literacy was not simply frowned upon. It was illegal for Black people to read or write for a significant portion of American history. Just as some Black, enslaved people crafted their own slave passes to get to a place of liberty then, some Black women get to places of sanctuary today by rhetorically crafting their own slave passes. Each of the forenamed considerations help us understand the gates blocking this woman’s search for sanctuary. The following section documents the contrary elements pushing back on her displacement.

(Re)Placing Hannah

Pushing back against archaic readings of place is not new. It is often necessary work for those seeking sanctuary. Black women’s written texts are testaments of those who actively resist place’s imposition. As historically subjugated people push against the limits of place, oppressors also push back against their liberation. The constant resistance on both sides means decolonizing work is ongoing.

From the creation of *The Bondwoman’s Narrative* to every aspect of its criticism, efforts to (re)place Hannah Crafts abound. This kind of (re)placement shows up in many ways, but I will
focus on two primary examples here. The first example regards questioning the author’s authenticity and the second example concerns the placement of *The Bondwoman’s Narrative* within literary genres.

**A Question of Authenticity**

Some effectively tarnish Hannah/Bond/Crafts’ agency questioning if the former slave authored *The Bondwoman’s Narrative*. With a text already verified through public and private records, the incessant push to authenticate the author raises a red flag. Hannah Crafts’ authorship comes down to a question of who is considered an acceptable writing authority. This kind of policing is more than a disbelief about a formerly enslaved woman’s ability to craft such a text. The quest for authentication becomes a user-friendly pretext for placing and (re)placing Hannah Crafts. Instead of hearing and accepting what she says about the slave experience, the fixation shifts to her identity instead. The presumption that the writer of *The Bondwoman’s Narrative* must be a White abolitionist using the cover of a formerly enslaved person adds insult to injury (Crafts, 2002, pp. 21–23). This kind of rhetorical placement works to delegitimize the author and her work. Those who undermine Hannah’s authorship of *The Bondwoman’s Narrative* subtly announce a preference for an author who aligns more closely with the image of history’s great (White) storytellers. The quest for authentication is not the only way Hannah gets (re)placed. She is also (re)placed as scholars try to place her work.

**Generalizing the Genre**

Questioning the author’s authenticity brings to light Hannah’s (re)placement because of the content of her text. However, a generalization of the text’s genre speaks to the way Hannah's work gets (re)placed despite the content of the text. This distinction lets me call academics to
task for locking the woman and her text in place. When writing created as an act of resistance to
place is placed into literary genres, the liberated writer is (re)placed.

There are clear instances of (re)placement where we witness the power of Whiteness,
patriarchy, and Western classificatory assignments at work. A primary example of this kind of
classification occurs when *The Bondwoman’s Narrative* gets lumped in with slave narratives. For
example, Stauffer tells us that Crafts’ work “departs from the tradition of slave narratives”
(Gates & Robbins, 2004, p. 56). However, she quickly lets us know Crafts “follows the formula
of slave narratives by saying that she doesn’t know her age, birth date or parents. Her natal
alienation stems from her bondage and race (Gates & Robbins, 2004, p. 56).

The problem is that the designation as a slave narrative results in an a priori classification
of texts based on the race of the author and the period, not the author’s condition of enslavement
at publication. Once a text is categorized as a slave narrative, the author or subject’s condition of
enslavement at birth supersedes every other thematic reason for placing a text as a slave
narrative. According to this line of thought, any span of a person's life spent in the grip of slavery
is enough to make the *slave* portion of the *slave narrative* accurate. Hannah Crafts is rhetorically
replaced by Hannah Bond. When Hannah Crafts is (re)placed, she is no longer a formerly
enslaved person or even a fugitive. Instead, she is Hannah Bond in perpetuity. This kind of
labeling suggests freedom is completely elusive for any Black person ever held in bondage. The
moment we limit the formerly enslaved to the slave narrative genre, freedom is snatched. This
kind of placement overrides their past rebellion and even mitigates posthumous resistance.

*The Bondwoman’s Narrative’s* designation as a novel represents a second instance of
Hannah’s placement by labels of another’s choosing. Texts addressing liberative themes are
sucked back into place without careful attention to this cycle of placement. Consider Rohrbach’s
suggestion that by, “Refusing to remain within the sanctioned boundaries offered by the factual narrative, [Crafts] leaves that literary ghetto behind as she strikes out towards the novel. By claiming the writing and the forms of free whites as her own, she expresses her own sense of freedom” (Gates & Robbins, 2004, p. 10). Rohrbach is correct in suggesting there is freedom in a novel that is absent in the slave narrative. However, we ignore the creative license of the novel when we ask for the authorial authentication of the narrative. Miller (1984) explains the problematic nature of generic classifications noting, “Studying the typical uses of rhetoric, and the forms that it takes in those uses, tells us less about the art of individual rhetors of the excellence of particular texts than it does about the character of a culture of an historical period” (p. 159). Miller presses further asserting, “genres can serve both as an index to cultural patterns and as tools for exploring the achievements of particular speakers and writers” (p. 165). In other words, the one applying a label and ascribing a genre must be ever mindful of the way their own entrapment by Whiteness and patriarchy makes texts and authors subject to traditional readings of place.

My observations about genre are not intended as an argument against the categorization of texts. I agree with Miller’s contention that “classification is necessary to language and learning” (1984, p. 151). However, I question how a formulaic categorization of a text as a slave narrative or novel limits the creative freedom of the writer and invites oversimplification. This kind of limitation means even the boldest acts of resistance are bound by Whiteness and patriarchy. Thinking past these limitations, I move toward framing or (re)framing the text of study. My framing work entails outlining the journey of The Bondwoman’s Narrative from the desk of an enslaved woman to its reception as a literary and historical gem.
Text of Study

Gray (2017) reminds us, “meaning is always contextual, relative, and situated in a particular place and time” (2017, p. 196). Because no text exists in a vacuum, we must consider the author’s perspective and the social context shaping text. In the section below, I discuss the journey of The Bondwoman’s Narrative to this present moment. I also consider factors influencing the historical and contemporary significance of the text.

The Manuscript’s Journey

In the preface of The Bondwoman’s Narrative, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. shares details about the manuscript’s journey from development by an enslaved writer in the 1850s to its station atop the New York Times Best Seller List (Crafts, 2002, p. 4). In the century and a half between the text’s authorship by Hannah Crafts and its eventual resting place in the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library at Yale University, the unpublished, handwritten manuscript changes hands at least three or four times. The earliest known location of this manuscript was a New Jersey attic. Howard University librarian Dorothy Porter Wesley bought the text in 1948 from Emily Driscoll, a manuscript and autograph dealer, (Bosman, 2013; Crafts, 2002; Kirkpatrick, 2001). Dorothy Porter Wesley’s personal estate presented the manuscript for sale in 2001. The manuscript originally purchased for $85 sold to an agent of Henry Louis Gates, Jr. at an auction for $8500 (Crafts, 2002). Gates set out to authenticate the manuscript alongside literary scholars like Hollis Robbins and Greg Hecimovich (Crafts, 2002, p. 4). Hecimovich compares details from Hannah/Bond/Crafts’ work in The Bondwoman’s Narrative to other related artifacts and uncloaks the author’s identity as the formerly enslaved woman, Hannah Bond. (Bosman, 2013; Crafts, 2002; Hecimovich, 2023). The original manuscript launching a
cross disciplinary search for more about the writer’s identity now rests in repose as a gift from Gates to his alma mater (Yale University).

Those reading the printed version of The Bondwoman’s Narrative encounter a text that maintains its integrity. The text is not compromised by the oppressive voice of an editor or the strong-arm of an overpowering ghostwriter. Slight writing errors and the author’s strikethroughs offer proof of the text’s enduring purity. The strikethroughs give us a clear sense of Crafts’ thoughts and machinations, her propensity for self-editing, and hints of her literary boldness. Gates calls our attention to the published text’s fidelity to the original as he points to the way Hannah discloses her last enslaver’s identity. After including only a few letters of his surname—"Wh——r,” Crafts eventually circles back and writes out the full surname—"Wheeler” (2002, p. 9). This single act demonstrates Crafts’ boldness, in part, because this detail removes her anonymity and names her oppressor. A century and a half later, the name originally unwritten is the detail that cracks open the case of Hannah Bond’s identity. From the grave, Hannah demonstrates that she is her own best editor.

The rarity of a text from the mid-1800s, written by a Black woman and printed with limited editorial intervention points to a historical truth with contemporary significance. Ann duCille captures the same point as she describes the ease with which the Black woman’s voice is often usurped in the editing process. duCille describes a case study from the 19th century, but the broader implications of her findings are clear:

One hundred thirty years ago, former slave Harriet Jacobs was able to publish her life's story only with the authenticating stamp of the well-known white abolitionist Lydia Maria Child as editor and copyright holder. ‘I have signed and sealed the contract with Thayer & Eldridge, in my name, and told them to take out the copyright in my name,’
Child wrote in a letter to Jacobs in 1860. ‘Under the circumstances your name could not be used, you know’ (1994b, p. 598).

There is a casualness in the theft of Jacob’s voice and her right to own and edit. Yet, the violation of Black women writers does not stop there. duCille also captures the infantilization of Black women writers when she notes, “Now, as then, it often seems to take the interest and intervention of white scholars to legitimize and institutionalize African American history and literature or such ‘minority discourses’ as postcoloniality and multiculturalism” (duCille, 1994, p. 598). The absence of a White benefactor may explain why Crafts’ work was not published in her lifetime; out is noteworthy that this same absence also explains the purity of the published text.

This overview of Hannah Crafts’ narrative highlights the faults and the promise of a text with historic and contemporary significance. Gates concludes, “That this unprecedented autobiographical novel was preserved, passed on, and finally authenticated speaks to the tenacity and vision of its author and to the vitality and commitment of African American literacy scholarship in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (Crafts, 2002, pp. 5–6). With the same tenacity and vision as Hannah Crafts, I bridge the discussion of Black women’s writing literacy as resistance with a critique of the traditional study of place. In the remainder of this chapter, I use a Black feminist model of sanctuary to analyze the ways Hannah Crafts decolonizes place in The Bondwoman’s Narrative.

Analysis

The previous section introduces Hannah Crafts’ text, The Bondwoman’s Narrative. However, if there is any hope of Crafts’ work providing insight into the ways Black women defy the limits of place through their writing, we must move beyond discussing the mere act of writing as
liberation. We must pay careful attention to the content shared through writing. Furthermore, we must tap an appropriate lens for analyzing the text. In this section, I make a thoughtful turn to a framework that centers the author and her work. I center Crafts’ resistance to the imposition of place by turning to the work of scholars of Afrocentricity and Black feminist thought.

I begin with Asante because he directly establishes a useful connection between Afrocentricity and place. He advises us that, “location carries with it the concept of place, or stand, or position, of terms; and to be centrally located within one’s cultural and historical context is to know what particular terms and frames are necessary for negotiating the condition” (2005, p. 180). Asante further admonishes the critic to situate themselves accordingly. At Asante’s urging, I acknowledge my positionality within the Black feminist tradition—a perspective that colors my reading of *The Bondwoman’s Narrative*. From this historically overlooked and undervalued perspective, I challenge the problems of place by opening the gateway to sanctuary. I carry out this work so the voices of the excluded are not just included, but rightfully displaced.

Taking a Black feminist stance means challenging readings of place that do not center Black women. Taking such a stance also means embracing disruption as resistance to oppression, erasure and colonization. This kind of rupture rejects Whiteness and patriarchy as the only approaches to reading place. Therefore, on top of choosing a text long overlooked within the rhetorical tradition, I double-down with a tool of analysis that reframes our reading of place. In the sections below, I outline the four cornerstones of sanctuary using the Sanctuary Cornerstone Tool (SCT) as my frame of analysis (Dangerfield, Under review). I examine Hannah/Bond/Crafts challenge to historical readings of place as she 1.) creates homeplace, 2.) remaps territory, 3.) appeals to memory and 4.) demonstrates the freedom of imagination and discovery.
Cornerstone #1: Hannah’s Homeplace

Hannah Crafts’ search for sanctuary begins with the first cornerstone of SCT—the creation and (re)creation of homeplace. Any reading of homeplace that ignores the particularities of the person behind this creation is inherently flawed. In fact, erroneously naming homeplace on Crafts’ behalf is yet another way of stealing her agency. I turn to Cucurella-Ramon’s errant assessment of homeplace in *The Bondwoman’s Narrative* for proof of this problematic analysis.

Regarding the significance of home in Crafts’ text, Cucurella-Ramon argues:

“The ultimate reward as a proper African American citizen is to be given the familiar space of a house and a home which symbolizes the model of American life…Home equates [to] Americanness” (Cucurella-Ramon, 2019, p. 158)

Though Cucurella-Ramon’s original slights are problematic, he continues:

“…the idyllic ending of [Hannah Crafts’] novel resonates with [John] Winthrop’s disquisition in a wily move to assert herself as a perfect (African) American…to procure herself a sense of place and home that can guarantee the rehabilitation of her identity as both black and American” (2019, p. 159).

Cucurella-Ramon is correct in his assessment that home is a significant theme in *The Bondwoman’s Narrative*. He is also correct in asserting that the pinnacle of this project is the task of securing a sense of place and home. However, because Cucurella-Ramon starts from the wrong underlying premise, there are profound errors in this assessment. For instance, the suggestion that Hannah’s desire is wrapped in being the “perfect (African) American”—or even the idea that her identity needs “rehabilitation”—bears witness to this misreading. Additionally, Cucurella-Ramon’s reading rhetorically places Hannah Crafts back under another’s dictates. Cucurella-Ramon misreads *The Bondwoman’s Narrative* because he assumes place is the same
for all people. Whiteness and patriarchy blind him from seeing homeplace is not the same across social groups. He leaves me with two burning, unresolved questions: 1.) “What constitutes a ‘proper African American citizen?’” and 2.) “If home equates to Americanness as Cucurella-Ramon suggests, are we complicit with robbing people of homeplace when we fail to equally acknowledge their assertions of Americanness?”

Ultimately, Cucurella-Ramon’s assessment of homeplace in *The Bondwoman’s Narrative* falls short. He misreads the text because he assumes all people come to an understanding of place from the same place. Whiteness and patriarchy blind him and many others from the realization that the impetus for homeplace is not the same across social groups. His closed assessment of Hannah Crafts’ commitment to homeplace demonstrates what happens when an analysis of a Black woman’s writing begins amiss. Because the analysis of her work is not rooted in Afrocentricity or Black feminist thought, the interpretation quickly goes awry. The errors in Cucurella-Ramon’s analysis heighten my interest in getting my analysis right. I refuse the option of (re)placing Hannah/Bond/Crafts at the margins. Instead, I center her in my reading of what constitutes home. My analysis benefits from a Black feminist characterization of homeplace that explains Black women’s actions when homeplace and sanctuary are not readily available. Further, I am moved by Asante’s assessment that, “I am all that I need to be in my literary life within the framework of my own culture” (2005, p. 182).

With the failings of Cucurella-Ramon’s analysis of *The Bondwoman’s Narrative* at the forefront of my thinking, I reject locating Hannah or Hannah Crafts in a place of captivity at the margins. My analysis benefits from a characterization of homeplace from a Black feminist orientation that explains the actions Black women take when homeplace and sanctuary are not readily available. In the following segments, I explain why successfully analyzing homeplace
requires an appropriate lens. I also examine the significance of considering homeplace’s function for a particular audience.

*Homeplace and Black Feminist Thought*

From a Black feminist perspective, homeplace is far more than a place of shelter or a distribution site for basic provisions. bell hooks suggests homeplace is “that small private reality where black women and men can renew their spirits and recover themselves” (hooks, 2014, p. 76). Homeplace is more than just a site of renewal and recovery, though. For Black women, homeplace is also a site of resistance (Dangerfield, Under review; hooks, 2009, 2014). hooks adds to the view of homeplace as a site of resistance when she cites Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hahn who contends:

“…perhaps, resistance means opposition to being invaded, occupied, assaulted and destroyed by the system. The purpose of resistance, here, is to seek the healing of yourself in order to be able to see clearly… I think that communities of resistance should be places where people can return to themselves more easily, where the conditions are such that they can heal themselves and recover their wholeness” (Berrigan & Hanh, 1975, p. 129).

Hahn’s sentiments capture homeplace’s function as a site of resistance, while offering an unending connection to renewal and recovery. Calafell adds yet another layer to homeplace’s function when she expresses the significance of historically marginalized ways of knowing. She contends, “Within this homeplace, personal experience is valued as are other forms of knowledge production and representation” (2010, p. 106). The scholars above mark homeplace as a point of renewal, recovery, resistance, respect and representation. Moreover, homeplace is
most effective when it empowers and emancipates. A home, or reading of home, that does not support these interests does not align with Black feminist thought.

**Functioning as Homeplace**

Hannah Crafts reveals the functions of homeplace throughout *The Bondwoman’s Narrative*. The clearest example of homeplace comes in the opening portion of the text. Our introduction to the character Hannah is tied up with our introduction to the characters, Aunt Hetty and her husband, Uncle Siah. These secondary figures are not Hannah’s biological relatives, and their property is not the place of her enslavement. Still, through the power of homeplace, a cottage belonging to an older White couple near a plantation becomes Hannah’s home.

First, Hetty and Siah’s cottage constitutes a homeplace because it is a site of renewal and recovery. Describing her first encounter with Aunt Hetty, Hannah recalls: “I returned home that evening with a light heart. Pleased, delighted, overwhelmed with my good fortune in prospective. I felt like a being to whom a new world with all its mysteries and marvels was opening” (Crafts, 2002, p. 67).

The second way Hetty and Siah’s cottage functions as a homeplace is through its service as a site of resistance. It was illegal for an enslaved person to learn to read and write. Inviting an enslaved person into one’s home for reading lessons was a fantastic act of defiance, especially in the mid-to-late 1850s near a plantation in the South. It is important to note that Hannah was not an innocent bystander duped by an elderly couple with an agenda. She was complicit in this resistance from her first encounter with Hetty (Crafts, 2002). Working together, these three figures resist a system of slavery and illiteracy in the cottage that doubles as homeplace.
There is yet another reason the cottage functions as homeplace. Indeed, each of the other functions are possible because of Hetty and Siah’s commitment to respect and representation. We see evidence of this function of homeplace in the way Hannah is warmly welcomed into their home. Hannah acknowledges their regard for the enslaved as she describes the couple’s daily routine. She recalls: “In their morning and evening sacrifice of worship the poor slave was always remembered…They loved to think and to speak of all mankind as brothers, the children of one great parent, and all bound to the same eternity.” Together, Hannah, Hetty, and Siah foster an environment for mutual respect, empowerment and emancipation.

For all the reasons that the cottage functions as homeplace, it is not the only site of homeplace. Hannah created her own place of recovery, renewal, resistance, respect and representation for herself and those she encounters. She often carries out this work in unlikely places. Hannah creates homeplace on inhospitable plantations and in an empty shack, a prison cell and a cave. She gives herself to self-renewal and a renewal of others—mind, body and spirit. Hannah’s second escape also gives insight into the regenerating power of homeplace. In one of the narrative’s plot twists, Hannah finds her way back to Aunt Hetty. Fate and good storytelling reunite the two women on the banks of a river (Crafts, 2002, pp. 205–206). The women are older and far-removed from the seemed simplicity of homeplace felt in the cottage during Hannah’s childhood. This time, the women are flanked by death. They are restored by their reunion at the riverside. The healing that occurs over weeks at Hetty’s cottage is a continuation of something started years earlier. Through Hannah, Hetty and a host of other characters, Crafts shows us homeplace is not about the location. Homeplace is all about finding or creating a place that offers the inhabitants what they need most for survival and liberty.
There is an obvious exception to the successful functioning of Hannah’s homeplace. Hannah and her mistress have vastly different outcomes and different experiences with homeplace. The sites that function as homeplace for Hannah do not operate in the same way for her mistress. The disparate experiences between the two women remind us that not all readings of homeplace are created equally. While Hannah turns unlikely sites into her homeplace, her mistress never finds the version of homeplace she knows before learning of her Black ancestry. The very thought of being (re)placed because of her race means the plantation she might own one day ceases being her homeplace. Homeplace is only a distant memory.

The mistress’ failure to find homeplace is not an indictment against Hannah’s ability to successfully (re)create homeplace. It is not a statement about homeplace’s fragility. Rather, the mistress’ failure to experience the benefits of homeplace speaks to the fragility of the one who could only see place through the lens of Whiteness. The mistress’ is not destroyed because everyone finally learns she is really a White-passing Black woman. Her ultimate demise is the threat of being (re)placed into society as a Black woman. Her mortal fear is experiencing the world outside of her Whiteness. Even Mr. Trappe, the character threatening the mistress’s undoing, asserts that his threats were, “only to try [her]. I had not the remotest intention of so doing, and should not have done it had not [her] precipitate flight rendered such a course necessary” (Crafts, 2002, p. 126). Hannah's homeplace and preparation for a new life could never benefit the mistress whose witness is tied up in her Whiteness. She could not bear living in a world where instead of the presumed heir to her husband’s property, she is his property. As property, the mistress occupies the same subordinate role as every other person with a drop of Black blood.
Ultimately, Hannah/Bond/Crafts’ creation of homeplace in *The Bondwoman’s Narrative* represents more than good storytelling. Homeplace is a formerly enslaved Black woman’s assertion of her place, a demonstration of her indignant agency and a claim to rights of which she is robbed. However, homeplace’s fragility makes it subject to outside pressure. This fragility helps explain why Black women like Hannah are in a perpetual search for sanctuary. Moreover, homeplace’s fragility explains why it cannot stand as the solitary cornerstone of sanctuary. Hannah/Bond/Crafts taps into a secondary cornerstone undergirding sanctuary’s foundation when she remaps territory.

**Cornerstone #2: Remapping Territory**

While a commitment to creating and (re)creating homeplace is a central theme in *The Bondwoman’s Narrative*, Hannah Crafts builds sanctuary using another cornerstone of the SCT. In this section of the analysis, I consider Hannah Crafts’ commitment to remapping territory and the carefully weaved storylines broadcasting this commitment. I start this phase of the analysis by addressing the theoretical underpinnings for Crafts’ challenge to a master narrative. Then I address the way Black women resist the constraints of place by remapping a colonized reading of place.

First, there is a theoretical impetus for remapping territory. Corey reminds us that “through the performative dimensions of the personal narrative, the individual is able to disrupt—and, dare I say rewrite—the master narrative” (1998, p. 250). The name of the text under review is our first clue to the clever juxtaposition of a narrative from a bondwoman measured against the so-called *master* narrative. However, the contrast here is much more than crafty wordplay. From a theoretical perch, we get to see how Crafts resists the prevailing narrative that all people, times, and spaces are represented by a closed reading of place. As she
problematizes the very idea of a master narrative, Crafts calls attention to excluded voices. She helps us see that the so-called master narrative is in all truth a particular narrative. Henderson lends her support to this argument when she notes:

This rupture is followed by a rewriting or rereading of the dominant story, resulting in a "delegitimation" of the prior story or a "displacement" which shifts attention "to the other side of the story." Disruption—the initial response to hegemonic and ambiguously (non)hegemonic discourse—and the subsequent response, revision (rewriting or rereading), together represent a progressive model for black and female utterance (2013, p. 14)

As an essential contributor to the canon of Black women writers, Crafts ruptures the master narrative in ways that challenge traditional readings of a Black woman’s place. Additionally, the authorship of a manuscript by a (former) bondwoman gives voice to others historically and contemporaneously. Asante (2005) adds to Corey and Henderson’s call for culturally based theory by asserting, “Location is the principal metaphor of an Africalogical analysis” (p. 180). From Asante’s perspective, Crafts’ discussion of her location is more than a hegemonic tie to the way she is physically and socially placed as an enslaved person. We observe this Afrocentric chord each time Hannah names her location in the text. Together Corey and Asante help us see how Crafts’ use of an Afrocentric or Black feminist approach to place is indeed a disturbance. In fact, Hannah Crafts sustains the work of disturbance by introducing an oppositional gaze to literature that is akin to the oppositional gaze hooks identifies in film. That is, Crafts challenges and reframes the way we look at the rules of place for Black women. She uses Hannah to shift our gaze, and as hooks reminds us, “There is power in looking” (hooks, 1992, p. 115). Because of this shift, we cannot read Hannah solely as a victim; she is an
empowered woman taking control of her own narrative. As Crafts takes control of the narrative, she offers a shared narrative. That is, as we learn of Hannah’s story, we learn of Hannah Bond’s story. The fictional character Hannah also becomes a proxy for other Black women as their stories are written onto her story. For these reasons and more, *The Bondwoman’s Narrative* exemplifies the kind of multivocality common in Black women’s writing (Henderson, 2013; Royster, 2000).

Refusing to wait for a more appropriate time, the formerly enslaved bondswoman-turned author writes her way into history. We get a front row seat as her main characters (and those they represent) defy the limits of place to get to sanctuary. Through a text that is part narrative, part autobiographical novel, Crafts challenges the standardization of a singular, guiding narrative. She does not offer a generalized tale that privileges the White gaze. Her writing represents the place where Black women have their say.

Still, Crafts does not stop at literacy for the sake of literacy. She remaps place in *The Bondwoman’s Narrative* as a declaration of Black humanity. As Royster notes, “Literacy is a human experience” (2000, p. 44). It is not just an experience for Whites, the wealthy or those who are born free. Crafts’ uses her narrative as a demonstration and a call for personal and collective liberation. Alongside the theoretical and humanistic grounding of *The Bondwoman’s Narrative*. I contend Crafts’ work is largely driven by her decision to remap place through a representation of Black love and community.

**Remapping Territory through Black Love**

Since escaping territory in the physical sense was not an option for most enslaved people, remapping territory in the interim was the next best thing. The first cornerstone of the SCT helps us understand what territory gets reframed as homeplace and why. It is important to avoid the
trap of only seeing territory as location. Thus, Hannah Crafts’ pivot to the second cornerstone of SCT helps us see how territory gets remapped. One of Crafts’ strategies for remapping territory happens through her humanization of the enslaved. Crafts accomplishes a degree of humanization through her depictions of Black love.

At first glance, it seems counterintuitive to think of a depiction of love in a tale of enslavement and plantation escapes. Yet, through Crafts’ storytelling, we get to see the plantation as a site of Black love. Turner and his colleagues. (2022) extract two central components of Black love from bell hooks’ text Salvation: Black people and love (2001). They point out that “love is ‘the fundamental source of our power and strength’ and a necessary dimension of liberation” (Turner et al., 2022, p. 549). Crafts provides examples of some of the ways love empowers the enslaved so they can survive unthinkable atrocities. As Gates observes, “For Crafts, slaves are always, first and last, human beings, “people” as she frequently puts it” (Crafts, 2002, p. 29). In The Bondwoman’s Narrative, Crafts uses her manuscript to present people as more than their race or condition of enslavement. As a result of her positionality and her disposition towards those of whom she writes, Crafts’ work is stylistically different from other works from this period. Gates even notes that a major clue that the text is written by a Black person and not a white person with some ulterior motive is the humanity conveyed in The Bondwoman’s Narrative. He concludes, “Whereas black writers assumed the humanity of black characters as the default, as the baseline of characterization in their texts, white writers, operating on the reverse principle, used whiteness as the default for humanity, introducing even one-dimensional characters with the metaphorical equivalent of a bugle and drum” (Crafts, 2002, p. 25).

Crafts remaps the landscape by homing in on the humanity of the enslaved and the everydayness of the love shown for one another. For instance, as Hannah recounts her role on the
planted, she carefully describes how she helps people survive the trauma of the slave experience. She shares:

“…the weak, the sick, and the suffering came to me for advice and assistance. Then the little slave children were almost entirely confided to my care. I hope that I was good and gentle to them; for I pitied their hard and cruel fate very much…if I could so discharge my duty by them that in after years their memories would hover over this as the sunshiny period of their lives I should be amply repaid” (Crafts, 2002, p. 69).

Her display of love spans age groups and carries immediate and long-term significance. A deep reserve of this kind of love was the only way the enslaved were empowered to get through a lifetime of bondage and parades across auction blocks.

Luckily, remapping the territory through displays of Black love does not end with Hannah. Crafts uses the plantation as a backdrop for another storyline extolling Black love. For instance, there is the storyline of the enslaved couple initially forced to live life apart on two different properties (p. 139). Rather than being sold and forced to live a life further apart, Charlotte and her husband William decide to run away together. They conclude the threat of capture was worth the opportunity to live and love freely. In contrast, the urgency prompting Hannah’s second escape is the threat of a forced marriage to someone she did not know or love. Hannah describes this motivation when she writes:

“Had Mrs Wheeler condemned me to the severest corporeal punishment, or exposed me to be sold in the public slave market in Wilmington I should probably have resigned myself with apparent composure to her cruel behests. But when she sought to force me into a compulsory union with a man whom I could only hate and despise it seemed that rebellion would be a virtue” (Crafts, 2002, p. 194).
Hannah’s profound disdain for Bill, the man she would be forced to marry, is a notable part of her choice to run away. However, Hannah’s sense of urgency is also colored by her resignation against perpetuating slavery. Her determination to escape is tied to her “unalterable resolution never to entail slavery on any human being” (Crafts, 2002, p. 194). Though she never knew her own biological family, Hannah knew enough of love to shun the prospect of bearing kids in a union solely designed to uphold slavery. For Hannah, the ultimate display of Black love is refusing to lend her reproductive capability to a hegemonic system of oppression. Her actions are a reminder that self-love and the defense of a future generation are both displays of Black love.

Beyond the love shared between a couple, self-love, and love for the next generation, we also see familial love in the caring relationship between siblings escaping the ravages of slavery. In *The Bondwoman’s Narrative*, Crafts writes about a fugitive man and his sister. The man, Jacob, tells Hannah that he and his sister escaped from their captivity because he could not bear his only (remaining) relative being sold away from him. Jacob’s love for his sister meant carrying her in her weakness and nursing her on her death bed (Crafts, 2002, pp. 199–200). The writer beautifully captures the fugitive’s love and affection as she notes, “Her brother sate [sat] beside her on the ground, holding her hand in his, while tears that were no shame to his manhood streamed down his face” (p. 200). Not even the vile horrors of slavery or death could strip away the love, humanity and tenderness shared by siblings. While Jacob’s relationship with his sister is

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1 This correction to Crafts’ wording is an example of the way editorial choice polices the text and the one producing the text. Correcting an old English rendering of the verb *sit* seems odd in a text from the mid-1800s where this was an accurate use of the term. Introducing such a correction is even more baffling in a text that keeps the author’s strikethroughs from the handwritten version of the text as a way of honoring Crafts’ voice. Altering her vernacular here is just a tiny reflection of the kind of editorial gatekeeping challenged in this chapter. This subtle change is a reminder that even in a project quite intentional about maintaining the author’s voice, editorial prerogative still prevails.
primarily an example of Black love, his brotherly care for Hannah\(^2\) is a reminder that the enslaved often remapped place by extending their family beyond biological lines.

**Remapping Territory through Family and Community**

The second way Crafts remaps territory is through her representation of extended family and community. Extended family and community are necessary because slavery often severed nuclear family ties and normalized natal alienation (Patterson, 2018). Because Black people largely represent a conflation of collectivist cultures, many turn to familial and extra-familial relationships as a means of surviving their oppression and restoring harmony (Asante, 1998). Familial relationships include those formed through biological and extended family ties, those formed through geography and racialized lines of community, the Black church as well as social clubs and organizations (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Turner et al., 2022).

The absence of family impacts the protagonist from the very first page of *The Bondwoman’s Narrative*. By the second paragraph of the original manuscript, Crafts identifies the problem profoundly shaping the protagonist and the direction of the text. Hannah tells us she does not know her biological family. Additionally, she believes no one cares for her. She explains, “Of my relatives I knew nothing. No one ever spoke of my father or mother” (Crafts, 2002, p. 66). Despite humble beginnings, Hannah makes a family from a host of strangers. By the end of a 301-page manuscript, the reader gets to see how she goes from a life with no relatives to situating herself as a member of a broader community.

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\(^2\) Crafts begins chapter 19 of *The Bondwoman’s Narrative* suggesting the fugitive slave Jacob never determined that Hannah was disguised as a man. Crafts writes, “He learned to love me, however, as a younger brother, and his society and gentle care greatly relieved the difficulties of our toilsome journey. When we encamped for the night he would insist on my setting down to rest, while he went off to look for food.” This description offers some indication that Jacob was likely aware that she was a woman in disguise. However, what is clear is that whether he saw her as a man or a woman, he provided for Hannah in some of the same ways he cared for his own biological sister before her death.
This section started with a recognition of Hannah’s brotherly relationship with Jacob. However, in this text, we also witness the potential for an extended familial bond in Hannah’s relationship with the mistress of the Lindendale plantation. Both Hannah and the mistress are Black women that happen to be light enough to pass for White. One woman—the mistress—unknowingly passes; the other woman—Hannah—only passes as a part of her escape from slavery. The women end up sharing a friendship strong enough to convince the other to leave the plantation. Still, despite their closeness and an invitation from the mistress, Hannah keeps up the wall of demarcation. She never refers to her mistress as a “very dear sister” as per the mistress’ request (Crafts, 2002, p. 93). At first glance, Hannah’s failure to identify her unnamed companion as a sister seems a reminder of the stubborn nature of traditional readings of place. However, the rigid lines of demarcation between the bondwoman and the mistress may also represent a subtle reminder from Crafts of the African American adage: “Not all skin folk are kin folk.” In other words, family and community are more than sharing the same skin color.

Crafts reaffirms this adage about kin folk while outlining Hannah’s relationship with Hetty and Siah. Their close relationship is marked by the descriptions of their interactions. However, the honorifics assigned to their names tell us just as much as descriptions of their time spent together. We get to know the couple as Aunt Hetty and Uncle Siah. Throughout the text, Aunt Hetty shows up for Hannah (almost as a mother figure.) Whether teaching her to read or leading her in the Christian faith, time spent together in Hetty and Siah’s modest cottage is the closest experience Hannah has to a traditional family unit as a child. Even as an adult, it is Aunt Hetty who comes to Hannah’s rescue after an escape goes awry. Hannah recounts that Aunt Hetty and Uncle Siah’s faith contributed to their sentiments regarding the enslaved. This relationship is a careful reminder that the impetus for remapping the meaning of family and community is
rooted in the brutality of the slave experience. Personal fulfillment for the enslaved was often tied to the relationships created to counter what the institution of slavery set in place.

By the time we get to the end of *The Bondwoman’s Narrative*, the shift from the opening lines of the text is 180 degrees from the way Hannah’s story begins. By the end of the book, Hannah lives with her mother and her husband. She finds extended family in old friends and children from the school where she teaches. Her story comes full circle and so does Hannah. Hannah’s journey teaches us that some people create family in the same way they create homeplace. For all that remapping accomplishes, though, remapping is deeply tied to memory. Crafts also reveals a connection between remapping territory and the third cornerstone—appeals to memory.

**Cornerstone #3: Appeals to Memory**

Memory is the third cornerstone of the SCT and it is an inexhaustible part of securing sanctuary. Asante (2005) captures memory’s centrality in Black writers’ relationship with place when he suggests:

…the writer, to be located properly must find his or her resources from the recesses of the people’s memory. As a writer, I am a reflection of my people, of their sufferings, their joys, their victories, and their myths. Without them, I am nothing and could have no particular reason to speak or to write (p. 184).

Asante establishes a profound connection between memory and a collective Black identity. He presses his point further by suggesting:

The African American writer can never be outside of the circle of memory and remain relevant. To be outside of the circle of memory means that you might misunderstand
some very important messages that are fundamental to appreciating the culture or revealing it (2005, p. 184).

Author Toni Morrison adds to this conversation by detailing the role of memory in Black women's writing. She likens memory to the power of the Mississippi River as she argues:

All water has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was. Writers are like that: remembering where we were, what valley we ran through, what the banks were like…and the route back to our original place (Morrison, 1998, pp. 98–99).

The rich images and culturally sculpted contributions from Morrison and Asante explicate Hannah Crafts’ use of memory as a cornerstone in The Bondwoman’s Narrative. While there are several strategies for tapping into memory, two of those strategies are key: Appeals to memory through intertextuality and memory’s connection to location.

The first way Hannah Crafts taps into memory is through her use of intertextuality. Some point to Crafts’ sampling of texts like Dickinson’s Bleak House as proof of the fictionalized nature of The Bondwoman’s Narrative (Crafts, 2002; Gates & Robbins, 2004). However, Crafts’ use of intertextuality is much bigger than a question of fact or fiction. By referencing texts encountered during her enslavement in the Wheeler home, Hannah reveals the memories of her youth as she appeals to her readers memory of the same texts (Crafts, 2002; Gates & Robbins, 2004). By including popular texts from this period, Crafts creates a timestamp for a text hidden for 150 years. Further, Crafts’ seamless references to the Bible throughout her text infuses spiritual wisdom in the reader while showcasing the faith previously imparted into the author. Finally, through intertextuality, Crafts offers witness to the rich bounty taken through her theft of “the art of literacy” (Crafts, 2002, p. 5).
Crafts also uses memory to map and remap her connection to location. Dickinson, Blair and Ott remind us that “rhetoric, memory, and place form complex and important relations” (2010, p. 1). We see the rhetorical power of Crafts’ complex connections to location, for example, in her detailed description of the North Carolina plantation owned by the Wheeler family. Through her characters, Crafts describes locations with clever attention to detail. Even in a fictionalized text, there is enough accuracy that an audience looking backwards finds Hannah Bond—the mastermind behind the physical and rhetorical escape from place. Even after her death, Crafts’ locational recall brings added credibility to her work. Hecimovich affirms that Crafts’ novel is useful in the search for Hannah Bond. He notes, “A careful examination of extant property records, wills, and land deeds reaffirms unique details provided in the novel (Crafts, 2002, p. 13). Hannah Crafts’ writing makes a fugitive slave relevant, but her strategic use of memory and location keeps her memory alive.

Establishing a connection to a particular location may seem contrary to Hannah/Bond/Crafts’ fugitivity. However, if we recall that metaphorically remapping location is Afrocentric defiance of another’s imposition of place, we find that Hannah’s memories are a portal. Through this portal, Hannah Crafts travels back in time and revives the long-dashed memory of Hannah Bond. In other words, although staying off her enslaver’s radar is imperative, including details about her enslaver and the place of her enslavement allows Hannah Bond’s resurrection with the passage of time. Still, it is impossible to ignore these records are a double-edged sword. They keep Hannah Bond in our collective memory, but they also tie Hannah Crafts back to Wheeler and his property. For all the effort toward securing her liberation, the plantation holds Hannah Bond in place. Her hope of liberation rests in the freedom to imagine and discover. The intersection of memory and imagination represents the fourth cornerstone of the SCT.
Cornerstone #4. Freedom to Imagine and Discover

Sanctuary’s fourth cornerstone is a commitment to imagination and discovery. Morrison suggests imagination is an ideal complement to memory because “no matter how ‘fictional’ the account of these writers, or how much it was a product of invention, the act of imagination is bound up with memory” (1998, pp. 98–99). Any time imagination is paired with literacy, there is the potential for something powerful. *The Bondwoman’s Narrative* is proof of that power.

The significance of the fourth cornerstone is readily apparent in this analysis: *The Bondwoman’s Narrative* started in the imagination of an enslaved, Black woman. We cannot ignore her audacity. She not only escapes in real life. She gives the reader an escape through the character, Hannah. Through bold imagination, she births a heroine and an author. There would not be a manuscript for *The Bondwoman’s Narrative* or a daring author willing to take on anonymity if there was not an enslaved woman interested in discovering what was on the other side of her bondage to illiteracy. Crafts also demonstrates her commitment to imagination and discovery through her choice to draft a novel instead of an autobiography. Hecimovich echoes the significance of Crafts work by suggesting, “The novel itself bears witness to what Hannah Bond could do when she trained her imaginative gifts on the prize of freedom” (p. 8). Royster further extends our understanding of the intersection of literacy and imagination as she announces:

We make meaning with whatever creativity we can muster and to the extent that contextual constraints will allow, and we demonstrate our abilities to operate not just as speaking subjects within community but as intellectual beings, capable of learning and capable of exercising the knowledge that we have acquired (2000, p. 51).
Imagination is not just the final cornerstone. For Hannah/Bond/Crafts, imagination and discovery are the impetus for her escape. Imagination is foundational to her strategy for unlocking the limits of place and moving through the gateway to sanctuary.

**Still Craft(ing) Sanctuary**

For a formerly enslaved Black woman who was never supposed to read or write, the posthumous publication of *The Bondwoman’s Narrative* is the pinnacle of personal and professional achievement. A contemporary consideration of Hannah Crafts’ work helps us see that her story did not end with a handwritten, unpublished text four or five generations ago. Over 175 years after writing herself into a place of her own choosing, Hannah/Bond/Crafts is still pushing against the systems intent on keeping Black women in their place. She leaves several lessons for our consideration.

Through her writing, Hannah/Bond/Crafts reminds us how important it is to name oneself instead of allowing another to do so. Since self-definition is an essential strategy for rebuffing place, one’s oppressor should not have sole or primary influence. Hannah/Bond/Crafts also reminds us that the imposition of place influences how place is understood. An appropriate theoretical lens reveals the tedious work of getting out of place into sanctuary. The SCT is an essential tool for understanding Black women’s agency against another’s imposition of place. By framing homeplace using a Black feminist lens, remapping territory, and relying on memory and imagination, we see how Hannah/Bond/Crafts disrupts place and keeps her own memory alive.

In conclusion, a text that could cost Crafts her freedom is the very text that helps ensure she is not thrown back into bondage. *The Bondwoman’s Narrative* speaks louder than it could in Crafts’ lifetime. We return to this narrative now and find all the layers of insight once tucked away in someone’s attic and another’s file cabinet. When we consider the text, we see the ways
Hannah/Bond/Crafts’ uses her writing as a challenge to the rules of place that once kept her bound. Like Hannah/Bond/Crafts, there is room for other Black women to escape the clutches of bondage. Each time a Black woman picks up a pen or writes at her computer, there is another challenge to the gateway blocking access to sanctuary. *The Bondwoman's Narrative* is a powerful reminder that there are other overlooked and undervalued manuscripts awaiting discovery in metaphorical attics just like the work of Hannah Crafts. For those who daringly write knowing their work may not get published in their lifetime, Hannah/Bond/Crafts’ work is a reminder to write anyway. The challenge is ensuring that it will not take another 150 years for another bondwoman's narrative to reach the masses. Until the narratives of the oppressed freely reach their intended audience, the search for sanctuary continues.
Chapter Six

Sanctuary Found?

“Rhetoric never told my story and did not really seem to have any desire to do so”

(B. Calafell, 2010, p. 112).

Black women’s search for sanctuary usually begins with tragic experiences or moments of rupture. Their stories about these moments of fissure remind us that sanctuary is not just a luxury. For some, sanctuary is a necessity. However, because Black women’s stories of struggle and perseverance are often excluded or minimized, many of these women remain alienated from the discipline and the places others call their home. Rhetoric’s unwillingness to tell the whole story means there are blind spots in our approach to the study of place. This dissertation addresses some of the blind spots in the rhetoric of place. I turn to a distinguished group of formerly enslaved Black women who tell and (re)tell the stories that others did not tell, could not tell or simply would not tell. By centering the experiential knowledge revealed in their search for sanctuary, these women show us how they move themselves out of place at the margins to the center of the study of place. The work of expanding our conception of place begins with expanding Black women’s place in the rhetorical record.

This dissertation recovers, recenters and reimagines Black women’s journey to sanctuary. This work begins with an acknowledgement that the same obstacles blocking Anna Julia Cooper, Sojourner Truth and Hannah/Bond/Crafts from their freedom 130 years ago are many of the same obstacles blocking Black women from the safety of sanctuary today. Time and space may separate their stories, but the struggle for sanctuary unites these women across time. The cross-generational struggle for sanctuary helps us see that though the details change, the search for sanctuary remains largely the same.
In the following section, I bring the disparate parts of this project together and draw preliminary conclusions about Black women and the White, patriarchal, colonizing practices that are always working to hold them in place. Throughout this concluding discussion, I focus on answering the question: “Can Black women find sanctuary?”

The Sum of Its Parts

As I draw this dissertation to a close, it seems appropriate to bring together the disparate elements prompting this survey of Black women’s search for sanctuary. In this section, I 1.) summarize the ways Black women experience rupture, 2.) highlight the problems of place and 3.) underscore a reading of sanctuary that offers Black women something greater than mere refuge.

First, when rupture is more than a once-in-a-lifetime event, securing adequate sanctuary is even more consequential. Black women across history reject inadequate instantiations of sanctuary as an acceptable response to rupture. Actress Kerry Washington addresses the commonplace nature of ruptures that makes sanctuary necessary for Black people when she notes: “This is not a moment of revelation…but this is what has been the reality—this level of danger and anger and fear. Maybe trauma and lack of safety—this has been the reality of Black Americans since there were Black Americans” (Merrett, 2020). Washington speaks broadly of Black Americans, and yet her positionality as a Black woman makes her description of rupture even more poignant. Black women know all too well that rupture is not rare. Because members of the Black community face chronic experiences with rupture, waiting idly for someone else’s charitable extension of sanctuary is tantamount to a death sentence.

Second, the problems of place are an inestimable part of the search for sanctuary. Indeed, Black women’s strategic response to oppression begins with rupturing the systems of oppression
aimed at keeping them in their place. Those who take an active role in their own salvation are the ones who learn to navigate the limits of place. Therefore, this work comes with a reminder that Black women are not only guided by rupture. In moments of chaos and in periods of calm, Black women are also guided by their peculiar understanding of the unspoken rules of place (hooks, 1981; Lindsey, 2022). Black women help us see there is no sanctuary without place, there is no place without agency and there is no agency when an oppressor keeps people in their place. The vicious loop continues even as Black women challenge place and the imposition of place.

Third, the only way sanctuary substantially benefits those at the margins is when sanctuary offers something more than mere refuge. For Black women, the search for sanctuary is only fulfilled through persistent challenges to the readings of place. Their persistent challenges to place include highlighting Black women’s contributions to the rhetorical tradition. When we consider their contributions, we start to see that mapping helps these women reclaim their agency, challenge place, and eventually, find sanctuary. When we return to the stories of Black women from days past, we aid in their displacement from oppressive systems of placement and erasure. Moreover, when we learn the strategies of the past, it paves the way so modern Black women can experience the freedom of displacement as well.

**Findings**

In the previous section, I briefly contextualized the central parts of the rhetoric of sanctuary. In this section, I put the sum of the parts together and share insight from close readings of texts from Anna Julia Cooper, Sojourner Truth and Hannah Crafts. Then, I consider how insight drawn from the texts enhances our thinking about Black women’s relationship with place and sanctuary.
This dissertation relies on a small sample of overlooked visual, verbal and written texts. The selection of texts from three Black, formerly enslaved women of the 19th century helps me examine challenges to patriarchal, colonized readings of place. My findings center around three questions: 1.) How do Black women use rhetoric to challenge readings of place? 2.) How do Black women’s experiences with rupture expand the meaning of sanctuary? 3.) How can Black women find sanctuary in a discipline that is historically complicit with their placement and (re)placement? I satisfy these questions by extracting key themes from the texts under consideration.

**Challenging Readings of Place**

First, this dissertation reveals the ways Black women rhetorically challenge readings of place. Their rhetorical challenges show up in three modes: 1.) through a record of spoken texts, 2) through visual artifacts and 3.) through written texts. It seems worth noting that while each case study and related mode of communication stands alone, each text analyzed here builds on the preceding analysis.

Anna Julia Cooper’s work on voice is foundational to rhetorical challenges to the imposition of place. Cooper does not resign to one mode of delivery to amplify her voice. Instead, she makes the case for Black women’s use of all available modes of communication. She issues a righteous call on behalf of Black women, particularly on behalf of the Black women of the South. Using her voice as a map, she points her readers and listeners towards unclaimed territory. The unclaimed territory in question is Black women’s humanity. Thus, Cooper moves beyond merely advocating for Black women having a voice. Instead, her work is much more complex because she also advocates for Black women’s humanity.
Though the territory in question is a birthright, Cooper explains why a closed reading of place obscures access to the fullness of sanctuary. Cooper’s position on voice and humanity support Sojourner Truth’s use of cartes de visites to control her narrative (as discussed in chapter four). Using the visual strategy of communication, Sojourner Truth reclaims her voice and her humanity. More importantly, she assets her own place in the historical narrative of women’s rights and Black liberation.

The connection between the texts does not end there. Cooper’s position on voice and humanity provides support for Hannah/Bond/Craft’s writing as a rhetorical gateway to sanctuary (as discussed in chapter five). Through their disparate bodies of work, each woman asserts her humanity and makes a case for an alternate reading of the Black woman's place. Their projects are individual and collective strategies for creating sanctuary.

**Expanding Sanctuary**

Second, the findings of this study expand the meaning of sanctuary beyond an apparatus that sustains life and physical well-being. Black women’s experiences with rupture remind us that a site of refuge is only transformed into sanctuary when it meets the unique needs of those seeking its provisions. In other words, Black women's experiences with place remind us that even when there are life-sustaining provisions, there is no sanctuary when someone else defines your place. Place must extend beyond the imposition of White, Western, patriarchal ideals of what it means to live as a Black woman. Don Mitchell (2003) contends:

Space, place, and location are not just the stage upon which rights are contested, but are actively produced by—and in turn serve to structure—struggles over rights…Rights have to be exercised somewhere, and sometimes that “where” has itself to be actively
produced by taking, by wrestling, some space and transforming both its meaning and its use—by producing a space in which rights can exist and be exercised (p. 81).

Black women’s sanctuary stands as both a tool for producing liberation and a memorial to the same liberation. This explains why there is sanctuary in the affirmation of one’s humanity. Simply put, for Black women, the goal is not to see sanctuary as place; for those with intersectional identities, sanctuary is place. Black women do not have a place until they get to a decolonized reading of place. That decolonized reading of place is sanctuary.

Still, the most audacious expansion of sanctuary comes amid the discussion of Anna Julia Cooper’s search for sanctuary within humanity. The hidden aspect of humanity in sanctuary corresponds with the hidden aspect of power. Cooper ultimately maps out sanctuary rooted in humanity as a birthright. Political theorist Sheldon Wolin (1986) sheds light on Cooper’s foundational argument that sanctuary is not new territory, but rather unclaimed territory. Wolin defines the birthright as “an inherited identity and implicitly an inherited obligation to use it, take care of it, pass it on, and improve it” (p. 179). The moment we put Wolin’s work in conversation with Cooper’s cartography, we see that the territory of sanctuary is a hidden gem for grabs by the ones who recognize it as their birthright. The appeals to humanity from Anna Julia Cooper, Sojourner Truth, and Hannah/Bond/Crafts align with the conception that the birthright “conceives the person as preformed, as an incorporation of elements of family, cult, and community. It asserts that we come into the world preceded by an inheritance” (p. 180).

Ultimately, there is a place of humanity hidden in sanctuary. The one who secures sanctuary also secures the right to their humanity. Therefore, for those marked by an intersectional identity, securing sanctuary is imperative because sanctuary is the gateway to humanity. Conversely, humanity is the gateway to sanctuary. Finding one guarantees the liberation of the other.
Finding Sanctuary in the Discipline

The third finding of this study regards the search for sanctuary in the rhetorical discipline. This finding clarifies the project’s contribution to the field. There are at least four contributions: 1.) The project increases an awareness of Black women rhetors, 2.) it forces a reconsideration of Black women as rhetoricians, and 3.) it challenges a singular reading of place. Upon considering the first three contributions together, a final contribution emerges: 4.) an intersectional, decolonizing theorization of place that decenters Whiteness and patriarchy.

Calafell (2010) captures the significance of theory-building to the most commonly excluded voices when she notes, “In doing work in rhetoric, it always seemed as if I was always contributing to knowledge of others and never myself or people like me. I needed to make sense of my own place” (p. 112). This dissertation is my attempt to make sense of my own place while contributing to the knowledge of those with similar histories and experiences. The discipline’s complicity in withholding sanctuary is not absolved in a single act of inclusion. We must execute resistance at the level of our theorization. We must decolonize place as a part of our ongoing praxis, and this praxis cannot stop with returning or restoring physical locations.

Even at the foundational level of theory, the marginalized are overlooked. This study demands new theoretical considerations that ask the right questions and include the right voices. When we prioritize decolonizing rhetorical theory—specifically in the study of place, it becomes more apparent why unique perspectives are necessary. Instead of traditional readings of place upholding the rights of the colonizer, this theoretical foray into sanctuary empowers women forgotten by society and the discipline. The women in this study did not rely on another’s affirmation of their humanity or another’s permission to act. Indeed, there is agency in their audacity to speak, but their agency does not end there. The greater power of the Black woman’s
voice is that from the grave, these women still speak (Dangerfield, Under review). This research project affirms that muted voices are not completely silenced voices.

The findings of this research support help us see Anna Julia Cooper, Sojourner Truth and Hannah/Bond Crafts as prototypes for creative resistance and critical imagination (Kirsch & Royster, 2010; Royster & Kirsch, 2012). Further, this project reminds us that we (re)place these women and heap on violations when we apply theory that asks the wrong questions or use lenses that hinder our ability to see what is right before us.

**Implications for Future Research**

The fetters of a dissertation naturally impose limits on the scope of the work. However, a limitation for this project is an opportunity for future research. For example, there is an obvious limitation in the number of case studies included in this study. However, a simple strategy for extending this project involves adding case studies with the same parameters as the original study. A different study with the same demographic markers (ex.- Black, formerly enslaved women of the 19th century, who composed their own rhetorical artifacts) brings added validity to the findings of the current study. Moreover, a researcher could easily expand the reach of this project by going beyond the population considered for this dissertation. Therefore, while this study only explores the experiences of formerly enslaved women in the United States, future research might explore the rhetoric of free Black women or Black women enslaved in another part of the world. One might also take on a related project that considers the impact of nationality on discussions of place and sanctuary.

The options for exploring intersectionality and place are endless. However, I am cognizant that expanding the scope of this work may come at the expense of the Black women centered by this project. In other words, there is a real danger that others will use the insight but
overlook the very women prompting this conversation about the need for sanctuary. Black women’s stories and strategies of resistance could be coopted for use by others without regard for the trauma behind this intersectional theorization of place. The danger of telling stories that show the path to sanctuary is that once the path is revealed, sanctuary is not safe from the threat of outsiders trying to get into a place that was never created for them in the first place.

**Conclusion**

In the book *My Bondage and My Freedom*, abolitionist Frederick Douglass offers a formula for contented slaves. He declares:

To make a contented slave, you must make a thoughtless one. It is necessary to darken his moral and mental vision, and, as far as possible, to annihilate his power of reason. He must be able to detect no inconsistencies in slavery…the slave must know no Higher Law than his master’s will. The whole relationship must not only demonstrate, to his mind, its necessity, but its absolute rightfulness. If there be one crevice through which a single drop can fall, it will certainly rust off the slave’s chain (Douglass, 1968, p. 20).

Anna Julia Cooper, Sojourner Truth and Hannah/Bond/Crafts epitomize discontented slaves. They would not sit in the place mapped for them in silence. They observed the problem and determined to be a part of the solution. McKittrick (2006) observes, “social practices create landscapes and contribute to how we organize, build, and imagine our surroundings. Black subjects are not indifferent to these practices and landscapes; rather, they are connected to them” (p. xiv). Placing is a powerful example of the way social practice creates institutional and disciplinary landscapes. Black women do more than rest in a landscape of someone else’s creation. They change the landscape and build their own caverns and places of refuge. In other words, they create sanctuary.
McKittrick (2006) captures the heart of this current project when she suggests:

Black women’s histories, lives, and spaces must be understood as enmeshing with traditional geographic arrangements in order to identify a different way of knowing and writing the social world and to expand how the production of space is achieved across terrains of domination” (p. xiv).

The findings of this dissertation add further support to McKittrick’s position. Both bodies of work are reminders that Black women have always already challenged the readings of place. As we consider Black women’s ways of knowing place, these rhetor/rhetoricians show us that they understand the power of mapping and the power of creating sanctuary. Anna Julia Cooper, Sojourner Truth, and Hannah/Bond/Crafts also remind us why unchecked and unquestioned readings of place do not qualify as sanctuary. More importantly, these women demonstrate their commitment to reclaiming the territory of humanity that is their birthright. Still, though Black women invoke change through speech, written texts, and visual texts, this dissertation reminds us that the rhetoric of sanctuary is in constant contention with the rhetoric of place. The contested meaning of place means that even though the voices of Black women resound from the recesses of history, their search for sanctuary persists.
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