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Introduction

Academic Stress

> Though it is conventional wisdom in academe that faculty must either publish or perish, there is precious little discussion about either the process of academic writing or the development of healthy pathways to publication. . . . In short, *how do you publish and flourish?*
>
> —Kerry Ann Rockquemore and Tracey Laszloffy (2008)[1]

Black feminist writing is a mentoring practice. A year before I earned tenure, Kerry Ann Rockquemore and Tracey Laszloffy, two tenured professors, published a stellar mentoring resource: *The Black Academic's Guide to Winning Tenure—Without Losing Your Soul*. Even though I did not have the advantage of their guide for my own career, and would only come to read it years later, I found the book helpful. One question from that book drives *Black Feminist Writing*: "how do you publish and flourish?"

After earning tenure, I became increasingly productive as a writer. Even as I took on a long series of administrative roles, I continued to publish single-authored and coedited books in Black women's studies (BWST). My academic career is rooted in BWST. I earned my doctorate in Afro-American studies (2003) with a graduate certificate in advanced feminist studies (2002). My faculty appointments have all been joint appointments between the departments of African American Studies and Women's Studies with supplemental appointments in history.

I get asked—a lot—about how I have maintained a high degree of productivity while carrying a heavy administrative and service load. But

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the question I really want to answer is: How can we, *collectively*, publish and flourish? How can we—as Black women, as Black queer and trans women, as nonbinary feminists and womanists, as scholars in race and gender studies, as minoritized intellectuals, and as freedom-loving people—publish and flourish? Flourishing does not mean simply earning tenure, winning awards or book prizes, acquiring power as an administrator, or being recognized as distinguished faculty—though those things are nice. Flourishing is beyond material reward. The authors of *The Black Academic's Guide to Winning Tenure* identify the vapid, soul-crushing environment that is higher education. They define flourishing as "not losing your soul." I agree. But flourishing requires practice.

Writing and publishing a book does not have to be a soul-crushing experience. In *Keywords for African American Studies*, Emily Lordi defines the concept of soul as "capacious" and points to a broad tradition of African American cultural and political expressions of soul. From W. E. B. Du Bois during Reconstruction to James Brown in the Black Arts and Black Power eras, *soul* has an expansive meaning in Black life. Lordi focuses on women writers and artists, including Toni Cade Bambara, Toni Morrison, and Audre Lorde, as well as singers such as Aretha Franklin, Odetta, Nina Simone, and Miriam Makeba. Her work perfectly illustrates the ability to write about creative thinkers and art that feeds your soul. In the BWST anthology, *Soul Talk: The New Spirituality of African American Women* (2001) Akasha Gloria Hull explores the spiritual traditions of Black women's soulful writing. The soulful contributions of Black women educators have grounded my practice, enabling me to receive energy and joy from the writing process—despite the arduousness of tasks involved with academic writing and book publishing.[2]

This book connects the heart—and soul—to the brain and body, offering a model of holistic writing in a context—academia—that seldom takes the whole person into consideration. Developing a sustainable writing practice is a struggle, in any context. Ask most professional writers (especially those belonging to a union) and they will tell you that writing is work. My writing is joyous and I'm passionate about the pleasure writing offers. But, mostly, writing is challenging work. I view writing as volition but also vocation. It is both my calling and my profession. And it is hard.

Academic writing presents specific challenges. As a genre, it requires research that is validated by professionals in your field. Publishing books with an academic press requires professional peer review. In addition to the multitude of demands like teaching, campus service, and adminis-

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trative responsibility, book publishing requires a focus that is constantly challenged by personal and professional stressors.

The publishing world, like everything else, is inherently political and stressful, especially for those in race and gender studies. Dynamic factors include the amount of money for-profit presses make from unpaid academic labor, resources allocated (or not) to university presses by their institutional sponsors, lack of diversity in academic publishing leadership, uneven peer review assessments, and whether academics should (or can) get an agent or a publicist. There are different kinds of scholarly publishers, to be sure. All of my own books have been published with university presses. University presses (UPs) are nonprofits with lots of moving parts. They all practice some form of peer review, which is what makes them reputable but also brings challenges. The undercompensated professional service required for peer review can not only extend the lengthy process but can also become a source of exhaustion for the scholars who stand to benefit most from publishing. The corporate model of publishing, like everything else, exploits labor. In addition to facing institutional bias, scholars who write about human rights and social justice issues are either actively dissuaded or can be discouraged by the long wait time to see a book in print. The splintering of BWST factions and cliques who seemingly cling to bitter disputes can make an already hostile terrain downright depressing.

In addition to unequal disciplinary and professional factors, there is the increased politicized public targeting of Black women academics specifically designed to induce stress. The white supremacist establishment is working hard to make Black feminist work impossible by using tactics like hypocrisy, extraordinary scrutiny, abuse (overwork, lies, and character assassination), or double standards. We witnessed these tactics with Nichole Hannah-Jones who was denied tenure in July 2022 (UNC Chapel Hill), the death of President JoAnne Epps at a university event in September 2023 (Temple), the targeting and bullying of President Claudine Gay until she resigned in January 2024 (Harvard), and the suicide of Dr. Antoinette Candia-Bailey in the same month (Lincoln University). These are just the highly publicized instances; writers like professors Monica A. Coleman and Lori Patton Davis note many other lesser-known examples of how Black women suffer uniquely from academic death dealing. But, in the words of Alexander Pope (studied by Eva Dykes in one of the first Black women's dissertation), "hope springs eternal."

Despite the negative aspects of this work, I have grown to love the practice of publishing academic books. It was a challenge for me to

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learn to navigate the publishing process. A good amount of work I have proposed in the past has been incomplete or inadequate, so my writing lessons are as much about my "failures" as my successes. Now that I have a general sense of the world of university presses, I flourish when I write book-length studies, and releasing books is an ever-exciting milestone. With each new book comes an opportunity to gather, celebrate, teach, and either tear down existing structures or build new ones.

If you work in higher education, chances are you feel at the mercy of too many others in decision-making roles. In addition, if you are an academic author from one or more marginalized communities (based on race, class, gender, religion, ability, nationality, or other identity markers), you may struggle with the imperative to "say the thing you came here to say" while operating in overlapping hostile environments. If you are reading this, you may desire to write beyond the constraints imposed upon you by tradition, convention, malice, or negligence. Identifying locations of your stress is the first step in effectively managing it.

Tragic Inevitability: Managing Stress as a Scholar of Race and Gender Studies

> If we are truly fashioned by fate
> And we are modeled by destiny
> Then surely we must concede
> To this tragic inevitability
>
> —Lalah Hathaway, "Tragic Inevitability"

Many things on this earth are designed to kill or oppress Black women. This is not hyperbole. As a Black woman academic, I have witnessed entire structures operate to cage my being, murder my spirit, and outlaw my ideas. I am indebted to Dr. Alexandrina Deschamps, an advisor and member of my dissertation committee, for showing me early on in my career how to challenge academic violence. Her pedagogical excellence and mentoring had an indelible mark on my conviction to move forward regardless of what came my way. So, I'm here to say, not only will I not let the stress of academic writing kill me, but I'm determined to make writing something that gives me life. At best, writing and publishing should give you a little life too. In her song "Tragic Inevitability," Lalah Hathaway laments that

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we must concede the tragedy of being human. Yet the rest of the songs on her album *Self-Portrait* confirm that the tragedies of grief, sorrow, and heartbreak are only a small part of our human experience. While some see writing as a tragic task, I refashion it as a harbinger of hope.[3]

At work, Black women are expected to perform a disproportionate amount of service and, at the same time, denied needed breaks because of the Black Super Woman myth.[4] At home, women are disproportionately charged with child or familial care, cleaning, meal preparation, and other gendered labor. Women and birthing people carry whole human beings in our bodies . . . and write books. Childcare, especially for children with disabilities, requires mental and emotional stamina unknown to child-free people or others not in charge of daily care. In the community, Black women create the infrastructure for change and perform the innumerable tasks that set the stage, lead, and sustain justice moments.

My first book, *Black Women in the Ivory Tower* (which was based on my dissertation), traced these historical patterns from the early generations of Black women academics. Mindful of these patterns, I began to fiercely defend my right to spend my time as I please . . . and will continue to do so. In full transparency, part of my privilege is the relative freeness of my time. Though I am a first-generation and adult-reentry college student, I am child free, did not marry until the age of forty, and am partnered with another higher education professional who values and affirms my writing time. Also, I don't cook. Once a week I'll make a light Sunday brunch, but that's it. I love to eat quality food, so before marriage I mostly ate out, and after marriage, we either share meal preparation (and he is a marvelous cook) or we order prepared healthy meals. Most recently, we rely on meals delivered to our door weekly. That matters. The space I have enjoyed is only the space I demanded. I am also a happy introvert. I enjoy my own company so I can write all day and night without feeling like I'm missing out on anything happening in the streets. I take great pride in teaching and mentoring but I also set clear boundaries.

Despite the privileges I have enjoyed, there are challenges that counterbalanced my relative freedom. Specifically, in my twenty years as a professor, I have not had a full semester on sabbatical or research leave (let alone a full year). I have applied three times for a professional break (at two separate institutions). Each request has been rejected. Additionally, during twelve of the twenty years I have spent as a faculty member, I served as department chair. For a dozen years, I prioritized the needs of faculty colleagues, staff, students, and upper-level administrators as I

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struggled to remain intellectually active. So, I had to learn to multitask, or I would have not gotten any writing done after my first "tenure book." Something so simple as learning to manage my email inbox was an act of desperation to secure more time to write while still ethically handling all my other responsibilities.

Black feminist writers have several distinct challenges. In addition to personal stressors and political stressors, our profession requires that we write in ways that challenge individual and systemic oppression. What is unique about writing in race and gender studies (whether in stand-alone departments or in other disciplines) is that we, generally, challenge systemic conditions while inevitably benefitting from those same conditions. Because we write to agitate for change, our work is often diminished, attacked, or even outlawed. Facing the regular stress of academic writing is compounded by the need to write despite additional burdens of knowing your writing will not always be valued. Producing an academic book takes courage; publishing in Black feminist studies requires absolute conviction.

Regardless of when you begin or complete a book, you will most likely be writing through stressful conditions. It may even seem like some forces conspire to keep you from writing. Challenge. Disappointment. Duress. Crisis. These stressors may be personal, professional, national, or global. To illustrate this point, below is a short list of stressors that I have worked through since I began college in 1994. Each event severely increased my stress level as I struggled to complete college, graduate school, the dissertation, or book projects—including this one:

Locating Stress: Layers of Challenge since 1994

1. Working while entering college (1994): Personal stress
2. Transferring schools to focus on BWST (1995): Professional stress
3. Proposition 209 outlawing diversity in CA (1996): Professional stress
4. CSU system strike (1999): Professional stress
5. September 11 (2001): Global stress
6. Iraq War (2003): Global stress
7. Economic recession (2007): National stress

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8. Threats to cut African American studies (2007): Professional stress
9. Appointed department chair (2010–2022): Professional stress
10. Miscarriage (2013): Personal stress
11. Family deaths (2013–2015): Personal stress
12. Election of the 45th US president (2016): National stress
13. Denied application for research leave (2018): Professional stress
14. COVID-19 (2020): Global stress
15. Black Lives Matter protests (2020): National stress
16. Election of 46th US president (2020): National stress
17. Denied application for research leave (2022): Professional stress
18. Book bans, attack on BWST (2022): Professional stress
19. Spouse health issue (2022): Personal stress
20. Denied application for research leave (2023): Professional stress
21. Passing of Bracey (2023): Personal stress
22. Hair loss (2023): Personal stress
23. Human Rights crises in Ukraine, Gaza, Sudan, Congo, and Haiti (2023): Global stress
24. Threats to cut African American/women's studies (2023): Professional stress

These are mild stressors compared to what you may be going through—or, hopefully, this list is far worse than you might encounter. Either way, know that you cannot control circumstances but you can put them in context and manage your stress response while still moving forward with your writing.

Beyond crises that can impede writing progress, simply trying to navigate routine life events or joyous occasions can twist your emotions

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in knots. When you are facing deadlines, it can be difficult to fully be in the moment for birthdays, graduations, anniversaries, sports events, or other once-in-a-lifetime celebrations. Writing seems impossible when you have to face chores like doing laundry or dishes; caretaking for family; commuting or teaching classes; resisting oppressive institutional conditions; serving your community; agitating for justice; or offering direct service to support a worthy cause. All of these regular-degular activities can creep into your precious little writing time and exhaust you in ways that make it seem impossible for you to meet the demands required to complete a book-length project. Then there are era-defining stressors such as COVID-19 that shut everything down. And don't even get me started on high blood pressure or menopause or global warfare that can fill you with despair. But we do not have the luxury of despair. We got this. Breathe.

Placing your challenges in relation to others (historical and contemporary) might help you move forward with the tasks in front of you each day—even if only in small ways. For better or worse, you are not alone facing the task of writing in dire times. However, there is no need to create the mindset of "no pain, no gain," in order to push through personal, familial, national, or global pain. On the contrary, embracing more creative aspects of your scholarly expression and succumbing to gentleness—tenderness even—can move you further, if more slowly. Learning self-compassion might help you reframe your relationship to writing if it is now oriented in doom, despair, or displeasure. Self-compassion takes courage. It also takes courage to demonstrate compassion for coworkers in and beyond academe. Institutionalizing wellness requires that you have compassion for more than just yourself.

In my mind, flourishing means experiencing wholeness, kindness, professionalism, and wellness, as well as shouldering the responsibility to create space in academia for more people to experience the same. It also means using every possible resource to ensure academe reverses oppressive structures outside our gilded halls. This happens even as we do the hard work of fundamentally restructuring the profession to reflect progressive values, radical movements, and advocate for a less violent world.

I am not a deeply radical scholar. Given my extended time in administrative service, I think it would be disingenuous to claim that position. Yet, there is a role that even administrators can play to mentor, support, and serve the interests of radical faculty who are making necessary demands to fundamentally shift academe in ways that create conditions that do not abuse humans or other living beings. Not everyone has the

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same role to play in resistance movements, and being transparent about your role is important.

As a former administrator and now, with this book, I want to support progressive scholars who are invested in working together to institutionalize wellness. By institutionalize, I mean to find malleable ways to ensure the growth of race and gender studies that defy academic efforts to snuff us out. To be clear, Black feminist writing can never be truly institutionalized because higher education is a capitalist project and can therefore never fully affirm our humanity or answer our questions. Yet, here we are, teaching and grading, attending too many meetings, applying for tenure, getting promoted, conferencing, speaking, and publishing. Essentially, I want my writing to identify sustainable practices that allow us to handle the necessary rigor of scholarly work without making ourselves or other people sick. If our writing is not informed by multiple communities, then illness, irrelevance, and harm are sure to follow. I'm thinking here of Bernice Johnson Reagon's "Coalition Politics: Turning the Century" in Barbara Smith's *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*. When we write, we have to learn to create and navigate healthier home spaces and coalition spaces.[5]

I want to explore how scholars—especially marginalized scholars—can create a more abundant life and enjoy our profession as university educators. How can we do the hard work of creating measurable equity and not mere tokenism? This is not easy work, but BWST is a tradition of writing that facilitates structural transformation, and many people are committed to the cause.

Origins of This Book: The Practice of "Everyday" Writing and Feminist Peer Review

> Black women's experiences, ideas, and practices can inspire contemporary educators to transform the academy.
>
> —Stephanie Y. Evans, *Black Women in the Ivory Tower*

I started this project as the result of a series of dialogues with colleagues in race and gender studies. Within one year, between February 2022 and 2023, I was invited to review twelve book drafts in BWST. Topics ranged from intellectual and educational history to biography and wellness traditions—all

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within the scope of my research. In addition to reviewing this large body of new research, I worked as a thesis and dissertation advisor, provided informal periodic mentoring for a few new faculty authors, reviewed several full professor tenure and promotion dossiers, and assessed multiple submissions in my role as a series editor for SUNY Press.

During this time, I was invited by three faculty fellowship writing programs to serve on book manuscript review panels (University of Notre Dame, Pennsylvania State University, and Syracuse University) in addition to a request from Spain to sit on a dissertation committee (which I could not accommodate due to scheduling). I was thrilled to be exposed to the work of so many emerging scholars at once and happy to share insights where they might help others. The fortuitous convergence of these meetings, consultations, and written reviews in a brief time span was transformational.

Sharing, as an act of giving and receiving, is fundamental to African feminist values. In short, we can publish and flourish by simultaneously focusing our attention on our own voice and harmonizing our voice with others who believe in fighting for human rights, mental health, and wellness. Black feminist writing is a peer review practice.

The energizing experience of speaking with authors about the publishing process in general, and their manuscripts in particular, was a pivotal moment in my career as a writer. Those closed meetings with new faculty who were substantively revising their dissertations to create manuscripts for submission to academic presses allowed me to reflect on my own journey and what I have learned since I undertook the same daunting exercise twenty years ago.

With each assessment, I began to formalize my feedback. I surveyed developmental editing resources to ensure my responses were detailed and complete. During these meetings, I was reminded of the thrill of graduate seminars and the beauty of critical exchange and interdisciplinary engagements. I was more than happy to add my two cents and appreciated learning about nuanced perspectives from other reviewers on those panels. Increasingly, I became clear about my desire to codify and share publicly the lessons I found myself repeating in each private session. I also wanted to apply what I was learning about developmental editing to my own writing process.

In May 2022, I was awarded a Georgia State University Humanities Center Faculty Fellowship to develop a proposal for another book project I was starting, about Black women and the history of tea. The four-week

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"Maymester" program also included periodic meetings during the academic year to read and give feedback to participants. The tea research will take several years to complete, but I benefitted from participating in a formal sponsored writing group that shared short pieces for peer assessment. Unfortunately, during this time, my husband was diagnosed with a serious illness so I worked through tasks as effectively as possible, not able to fully be present, sometimes joining a call or online meeting from the car after doctor appointments. Nevertheless, being in a space of collective learning helped me focus on something other than the panic I felt at the time and helped remind me of how valuable community can be to managing the big and small stressors that inevitably interfere with all of our writing. The fellowship resulted in an accepted book proposal (SUNY Press) and an article, " 'Take No Tea for the Fever': Tea in Black Women's Mental Health History and Traditions of Self-Care as Resistance" for the *Phylon* journal. I benefitted from pointed and thorough critique from some colleagues and kind encouragement from others, while sharing my bullet pointed responses to their work as well.

In spring 2023, I began to enroll in editorial training workshops so I could streamline my feedback to authors and make sure my responses were informed by standards set by professional consultants. What I discovered during this time was something I knew from years of work in BWST but hadn't quite solidified in my mind: writing is not extraordinary—it is an ordinary act of resistance.[6]

Black feminist writing is an everyday practice. In their *Signs* article, "Who's Schooling Who?: Black Women and the Bringing of the Everyday into Academe, Or Why We Started *The Womanist*," Layli Maparyan and Barbara McCaskill recall the impact of learning about the origins of BWST on their collaborative work. Referencing Michele Russell's chapter in A*ll the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, but Some of Us Are Brave*, the authors published a newsletter to gather and disseminate information that places Black women at the center of "making history." They centered themselves and their perspectives, but also recorded their lives as active history makers. Unlike the top-down, exceptional individual model of history, Black women academics center the everyday, common, regular acts—acts of survival that contribute an alternate history to academic settings.[7]

My writing is intimately connected to this tradition. My contribution to Black feminist praxis is to offer a basic, practical "everyday" approach to writing: *write what you can every day*. No more, no less. I unpack the

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details of my writing practice throughout this book, but my takeaway message is that Black women's intellectual history shows academic writing is common. Normal. Plain. Mundane. Quotidian. Black women writers such as Beverly Guy-Sheftall and Patricia Hill Collins reflect on how they steal moments of time whenever they can find them. My everyday approach is not unique. It's ubiquitous. Black feminists understand the struggle for freedom is not completed in one day, but requires a commitment to a daily struggle, and writing is part of that struggle. Every day, whenever you find or make time, you can do one small thing to finish your book.

That small thing may be reading. I count reading as writing. I mean it. Discovering an article on social media, reading the work, then reaching out to the author to share appreciation of the most salient points—all that is writing. Being excited about a new book release, and reviewing that book is writing. Teaching foundational or cutting-edge publications and incorporating your analysis into a lesson plan, then citing those texts in an article counts as writing. Writing can mean researching, collecting data, sketching drafts, editing, taking care of administrative publishing tasks such as gathering permissions, or enjoying other forms of creative expression. While I was writing *Black Women's Yoga History*, I earned a two-hundred-hour certification in Kemetic yoga. That research counted as writing.

You may not be able to write words on a page every single day but developing a habit means making time to think, read, and write regularly. You may write only on weekdays, weekends, or certain days of the week—but without consistent practice you will not improve your writing and will certainly not complete a full manuscript. With regular everyday practice, you can and you will complete your book.

One technique I have used to increase my productivity is to understand the various stages of writing and publishing and identify what piece is at which stage. One article may be in draft form, one book project may be in proofs (the final stage of production before publication), and one book may be out for peer review or have reader reports that I must address. Each task requires a different amount of energy, so "writing" for me looks different at every stage of the publishing process.

You do not have to hold your breath and sit on your hands waiting for editorial responses. You can continue to work on the book manuscript or work on another manuscript adjacent to the one in progress. Not everyone can or should work on more than one project at once. However, if you clearly define your research agenda it can become easier to write (and write multiple things) regularly.

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I write by the spirit. There are usually several options on my daily task list so each day I wake up and decide what I feel like doing or what I'm most excited to write that day. Often, I'll meditate, breathe, and stretch, until I decide an idea is clear enough to get me to the computer. Some days I determine what task I am dreading or least excited about and start there. Usually, I'll exercise (Peloton, yoga, or qigong) and play music to help motivate me for the writing day. Then, when I'm in front of the screen, before I know it, I'm tapping away at the keys like pianist Hazel Scott, who famously played two pianos at once. Most times I exercise at night to recover from a long writing day.

No matter how much you write, you won't finish a book in one day, one week, or even one year so going to the library, a bookstore, a colleague's talk, or a conference also counts as writing. When viewed this way, dancing, digging in a garden, working on a grant, attending a child's dance recital, going to a movie, or getting a massage can also free your mind enough to tackle the tasks when you get back to your desk. Resting is writing. In the end, though, you do have to put words on the page.

I am a writer, every day. I am an everyday writer. I write every day. In some small way I think every day and, for me, thinking is an essential element of writing. Even if I don't increase my word count every day, I advance a part of my writing project. Some days this means I have to reread something for clarity or edit what I have already put down. I am not exceptional. I take periodic writing breaks for much-needed rest. The break may be for a few days or even a few weeks. But I return. Writing is my default. For me, academic writing is not an elite activity or something to gain elite status. Writing is a common practice designed to create common-unity about ideas, positions, or actions. I write to help build and sustain community.

Of course, not everyone writes for pleasure and not everyone experiences pleasure while writing. I do experience pleasure when writing, but do not, generally, write for pleasure. I write for work. For me, academic writing is a choice—how I choose to spend my time in ways that advance my life work. Discussing my writing process with other writers has heightened my awareness of how uncommon pleasure is in the academy and how few people embrace the idea of claiming pleasure in the professional choices we make. When teaching, I have actively tried to create space for my students to experience writing as pleasure.

There is no singular right way to practice academic writing. Some scholarly projects will take three years to complete. Some book projects that will redefine a field can take many more years to research and won't

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see the light of day for a decade or more. Most faculty in the humanities and social sciences are required to produce a scholarly monograph to obtain tenure and promotion to associate or full professor. There is usually a six- or seven-year window for each step, though the second promotion may take longer due to additional service duties post tenure. But publishing academic books does not have to fulfill external goals. Writing is a practice that can stimulate the intellect and produce jewels for the expansive human library. Writing is a practice that can enliven the imagination and push individual boundaries. Writing is a practice that can serve communities and inform policies to advance social movements.

Writing is a practice that authors can define for themselves. But, like Toni Cade Bambara advised, "writing will cost you something." The practice of writing requires your attention . . . and attention to that practice is inevitably a struggle. You will have to sacrifice something. Writing is inherently stressful. Writing takes a toll and requires a tax. Only you can decide if it is worth the price.[8]

Whatever you pay attention to grows. Your attention is valuable. Reading and writing are ways to value your time. Literacy is an act of narrative care—care for self and others. When I started this book, I was awash in manuscripts for a full year and loved it. Of course, the workload and time crunch were sometimes distressing. But it was work I wanted to do with people whose time and energy I appreciated. That year of giving and receiving feedback solidified for me that I wanted to write a book about writing that stimulated collective gain. I hope that my year of peer review and developmental editing with authors eased their pathway to publication in some small way. That hope is the premise of this book.

Book Outline: *Sesa Wo Suban*—Change and Transformation

Black Feminist Writing is part intellectual history, part publishing memoir, and part resource guide. These three areas of historical wellness, learning from my own experience, and prioritizing the goal of community mental health drive the content of this book. Each chapter ends by posing a set of questions and proposing tasks to identify and alleviate a certain type of writing stress. In the course of each chapter, I answer the questions that I pose. Essentially, I demonstrate how approaching the tasks with a calm mind can result not only in a finished a book, but also an enhanced

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appreciation for the course you have charted. My story and the bookwork of other writers are central to charting a course in race and gender studies.

This book is longer than most writing guides for two reasons that are central to Black feminist writing: first, I include my personal writing journey; and, second, I offer expansive references to other relevant work. As a Black feminist writer, my personal writing journey is inseparable from those of the Black feminists I have always written about. Acknowledging my debts and influences via citation is a fundamental component of my practice and foundational aspect of the field of BWST.

The intro and outro of the book (Preface and Coda) pay homage to Professor Bracey and share a sentimental reflection of my affinity for writing, including my lifelong commitment to writing as a means of advocating for freedom and equality. Both sections demonstrate the power of mindfulness practices and the role that compassion (for self and others) plays in changing the academy and transforming the world around us. The introduction and conclusion outline some of the contours of personal and institutional stress that authors face in the writing and publishing process. Specifically, in this introduction (Academic Stress), I outline the mental challenges unique to publishing as marginalized faculty in higher education. In the concluding chapter (Academic Wellness), I advocate for the normalization of well-being in the academy, especially as those in race and gender studies struggle to secure more space in academe while simultaneously dismantling oppressive systems—including academe.

In chapter 2, "Regenerative Writing: Learn, Create, and Teach the Practice of Collective Self-Care," I develop the Black feminist notion of care that undergirds this entire project. I begin with Audre Lorde's call for care and honor her recognition that self-compassion is a political act. I then cite Rosalyn Terborg-Penn's African feminist values to define self-care (survival) and collective care (self-reliance in network) to identify ways Black women have used writing for self-determination. This approach to writing suggests moving beyond writing for an audience to use books as a means to create community.

In chapters 3 through 7, I identify and guide you through five different "locations" of stress. Each of these locations corresponds to an area, or type, of stress-management practice: personal, professional, publishing, public, and political. Each of these areas of stress is also an area where your writing can be transformed and areas where your work can impact change. In other words, each location of stress is also a location

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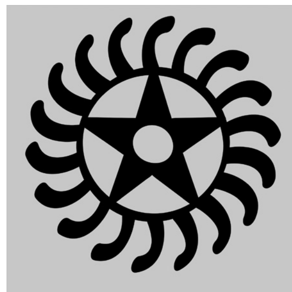
of self-care practice. My thinking about locations of stress and practice is shaped by Gwen Kirk and Margo Okazawa-Rey's social location theory. Social location captures the dynamic and interlocking experiences of disempowerment. For example, a personal illness can be exacerbated by the illness of a family member. If health care is not available due to economic or political restrictions, these stressors have a compounding effect. Stress happens in each of these locations, and stressors vary because they are largely influenced by the politics of social environments. So, it is essential to create culturally appropriate and comprehensive stress-management interventions. This especially holds true in the academy, where oppressive epistemologies are reified and often just reading, let alone writing about, established scholarship can be triggering.

As a guide, *Black Feminist Writing* aims to help you turn your writing into a practice whereby you are able to identify, assess, anticipate, manage, and reduce stress.

CHAPTERS: Five Locations of Practice: Writing Every Day with the Morning Star

The West African Adinkra concept *Sesa Wo Suban* symbolizes change and the transformation of one's life. There are two concepts of applied learning embedded in the symbol: change and transformation. Change and transformation can happen each day with the morning star (the inner part of the symbol). Change and transformation are constant waves of movement (the outer part of the symbol). Together, the symbol summarizes the overarching message of BWST: each new day is a chance to rise and write in ways that improve the quality of life for self and others.

Figure 1. Sesa Wo Suban symbol, meaning "change and transform your life." *Source*: Shutterstock.



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Symbols have meaning, so I have chosen this symbol to indicate a point of pause in each chapter—a moment to breathe and embrace your choice to improve your practice on many levels.[9]

Writing is a way to transform your life, one day at a time. Think of the five locations of practice—and *praxis*—in terms of a star's five points. Each of the five locations of writing practice corresponds to an overarching writing objective:

- Personal Practice. FIND YOUR VOICE
- Professional Practice. STATE YOUR ARGUMENT
- Publishing Practice. EDIT AND ORGANIZE YOUR STRUCTURE
- Public Practice. ENGAGE YOUR COMMUNITY
- Political Practice. INSTITUTIONALIZE BWST

While voice, argument, and structure are common themes in writing guides, *Black Feminist Writing* links them to ancestor acknowledgment, community building, political engagement, and other motifs that are central to BWST. In detail, the chapter outline includes recognizable editorial subthemes.

VOICE: Tone, Message, Reflexivity
ARGUMENT: Thesis, Theory, Intervention
STRUCTURE: Narrative Arc, Organization, Clarity
COMMUNITY: Data, Citations, Peer Review, Audience, Impact
INSTITUTION: Human Rights, Interdisciplinarity, Race and Gender Studies

The chapters show you five locations where you might encounter stressors and within each chapter I share context, insights, and possible solutions to remove any barriers to your writing and publishing processes.

THEMES: Learn, Create, Teach (The Gift, The Lesson, and The Work)

Historians mainly study change over time. Themes of past, present, and future reflect the second part of *Sesa Wo Suban*: change and movement. Within each chapter, there are three key subsections based on changes of

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time. Although the chapters are not all uniform, each chapter contains three constant themes: LEARN: Celebrate Black woman intellectuals (highlighting a historical scholar); CREATE: Care for your self-development (how I have created knowledge from my writing); and TEACH: Find the courage to continue your work despite barriers (tools that teach you how to incorporate wellness into your writing habits). These three sections represent the past, present, and future of Black feminist writing practices and the constant challenge to both measure change and make change.[10]

In the next chapter, I unpack the interconnectedness of these parts and show how individual mental health combines with collective well-being through an intellectual ecology. Basically, Black women's scholarly writing is one way to create a supportive environment that I identify as an academic family tree. Writing is a practice that we learn, create, and teach in order to develop and sustain communities. Black feminist writing is the practice of celebration, courage, and care. We honor the gifts bestowed upon us by elders and ancestors (The Gift), we make meaning from our own experiences (The Lesson), and we share our writing for the benefit of the next generation (The Work).

Developing a writing practice steeped in Black women's wellness helped me change and transform my life. And, as often stated by feminist scholars, the point of freeing oneself is to free others. In each of the five core chapters, I draw on my writing career to provide examples and offer tips for readers to develop sustainable practices of care to address and manage the stresses you face. Classifying particular characteristics of your stress can help you customize a writing plan based on your own specific experiences, skills, and goals.[11]

Reflection Questions and Practical Tasks

I offer key questions and prioritize tasks for a more focused, more balanced, less draining, and more energizing publishing process. These suggestions should be tempered by your own critical self-assessment though. For example, some practices, like exercise or mediation, can function to help you avoid the writing tasks you need to complete or prevent you from dealing with other types of stressors, so make sure you are honest with yourself when assessing what you need. As with any useful tip, one size does not fit all.

At the end of each chapter—including this one—I provide reflection questions and a list of practical tasks. The role of asking questions emerges from a long tradition of Black women asking questions to seek and share wisdom. While some call this approach to cognitive development

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the Socratic method, I consider the practice of questioning a Makedaic tradition. The tenth century Queen of Sheba, also known as Makeda, traveled to Jerusalem to discuss questions of wisdom with King Solomon. Questions are a part of the learning process central to African ways of learning and I am invested in making African epistemologies visible since they have often been erased, coopted, or maligned in the academy. Applying lessons—actual practice—is another required aspect of Black feminist writing. The questions and tasks are simply suggestions, not all of which may be relevant for you personally.

Finding My Writing Groove with Music

Black feminist writing is a soulful practice. Music is central to Black culture and, as evidenced by the very name *soul* music, feeds our mind and our spirit. Concerns like finding time to write, transforming a dissertation into a book project, or feeling intimidated about contacting an acquisitions editor are inevitable for the uninitiated. Art is an African pedagogical tool. Tapping into the creative part of your mind can help you find alternate ways to tackle mundane tasks. Music can help you find your groove and bolster your courage.

In addition to referencing actual writing resources, at the close of each chapter, I share a vignette for inspiration. These takeaway messages constitute a playlist that fulfills a part of the criteria for Anna Julia Cooper's definition of intellectual growth: that collective learning should be joyous. In the Coda, I explore how writing can be a radical act of joy. At its best, writing is liberatory in more ways than one; at its finest, writing becomes as much art as playing music, singing, or dancing.

Not everyone pays attention to Black women's ideas, but for those who do, the lessons learned can help address crises. And crises are never in short supply, whether issues of political injustice (global problems) or stress and mental health challenges (personal problems). This workbook is designed to help you define and solve problems that matter to you while also centering your own vitality. Healing happens in the liminal spaces—breaths we take in between the days, hours, minutes, and seconds where we are active. Care happens in moments of pause and repose. Remember, when you see the *Sesa Wo Suban* symbol, take a moment to breathe.[12]

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As a Black woman, reading and writing has kept me from feeling "hopeless, as a penny with a hole in it." As in the 1990s neo-soul classic "Hopeless" by Dionne Farris, some days when I was a young woman I felt "no less than up to my head in it." But being introduced to Black feminist writing directed me toward a path of wholeness and fulfillment. Farris's *Wild Seed—Wild Flower* (1994) was my favorite album in my first year of college. I was driving from St. John's College in Santa Fe to work as a waitress in Albuquerque, New Mexico, so the album would be in rotation for the duration of the drive. Nonstop repeat. A no-skip record. The breakout hit, "I Know"; the bottom Chakra rocking "Passion"; the melancholy "Now or Later"; the playful "Audition." Her 2011 *Signs of Life* most closely resembles the range of her first album and the song "Every Day" affirms the continuity of her self-hood day in and day out. Like Farris, I have learned to be myself, every day.

Though I was raised in several places, I have made my home in books. In the early days of my career, learning to embrace myself as a "wild flower" was part of my healing and those reflections still elicit celebration. Back then, I began to understand that every day is another day I get to try to improve my writing. Every day for the past three decades, I have practiced the work of writing in order to be me, know me, and do me. And it has been work that has fed my soul.

Sankofa, a Ghanaian term meaning "go back and get it," is a way to connect the past and present to the future. The term "regeneration" is a reference to Anna Julia Cooper that also reflects the principals embedded in sankofa. Regeneration is the guiding principle that I have centered during my writing processes—a way to change and transform higher education. Thus, regenerative writing practice allows us to study both African and African American intellectual history and apply wisdom learned from elders in ways that benefit a diversity of young scholars in the diaspora.

Reflection Questions

Question 1: What does flourishing look like for you?

Question 2: What types of educational stress have you faced? What has been your main source of stress in the writing process?

Question 3: How do you want your writing to change institutions and policy and transform the quality of life for you and others around you?

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