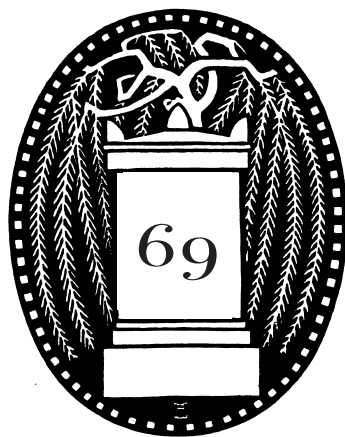


**JOURNAL OF
PHILOSOPHY &
HISTORY
OF EDUCATION**



2019

The Journal of the Society of Philosophy & History of Education

The “Way-Out Actions” of DeVerne Calloway: An Intersectional Analysis of a “Race Woman”

Holly Hick, University of Missouri–St. Louis

Introduction

A “race woman” is not monolithic and cannot be defined in a singular sense. A race woman produces knowledge, disrupting dominant and normative rhetoric. She does the work of the Black intellectual thinker *for her* and *by her*. She is not a sum or a substance; rather she is the quintessence of spirit, vitality, brilliance, and capability. She is pristine and profound; she is a pioneer and a pathfinder; she is a possibility and a pilot. In *Beyond Respectability: The Intellectual Thought of Race Women*, Brittney C. Cooper places the race woman at the center of creating an “intellectual genealogy and geography” for and of the work of other race women “as a practice of resistance against intellectual erasure.”¹ Race women are the *vis insita*, the innate force of matter—a force and power capable of resisting. They are thinkers, theorists, and creators. DeVerne Calloway (1916–1993) is a race woman, the first Black woman voted to the Missouri legislature in 1962 and co-publisher of “*Citizen Crusader*, later named *New Citizen*, a newspaper covering Black politics and civil rights in St. Louis.”²

In this paper I establish the qualities and intersections of transhistoricity—race, gender, class, and sexuality—Calloway’s work embodies, additionally using intersectionality as an analytic tool to examine the organization of power in four domains: the interpersonal [who is dis/advantaged within social interactions]; the disciplinary [how one encounters and experiences society’s “rules,” biases, and privileges]; the cultural [the manufacturing of messages that social inequalities under laws of equality are fairly produced]; and the structural domain [how intersecting power relations cast and frame social institutions].³ The texts for my analysis are comprised of four speeches Calloway delivered, likely in the 1970s, although one speech is undated.

Calloway functioned as an architect for Black and woman politics in the face of multi-faceted power, demonstrating her contemporary strategies as a critical knowledge producer, activist, and educator.

Throughout her life she fully inhabited and propagated race womanhood, while respectfully, defiantly, *and* enjoyably leading resistance efforts.

Background

Born in Memphis in 1916, Calloway was raised in the Jim Crow South, attended segregated schools, and ultimately graduating with honors from Booker T. Washington High School in 1934.⁴ She attended LeMoyne-Owen College, an historically Black college in Memphis, an institution with roots in the education of freed and runaway slaves as early as 1862.⁵ She graduated *cum laude* with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English and Social Science,⁶ going on to do graduate work at both Atlanta University (during 1939–1940, also an historically Black college) and Northwestern University in Chicago (during 1948).⁷ In between graduate school stints Calloway taught school in Vicksburg, MS and Cedartown, GA, volunteered for the United Service Organization (U.S.O.) in 1942, and joined the American Red Cross in 1943.⁸ From 1944–1947, she was stationed in the China-Burma-India (CBI) Theater, where she led a protest against the segregation of Negro soldiers in Red Cross facilities.⁹

Upon her return to the U.S., she sought work that allowed her to continue to push for equitable treatment of those deemed minorities. She temporarily settled in Chicago, IL, working at the Fair Employment Practices Office, Jewish Welfare Fund, and the Chicago Health Department.¹⁰ In 1952 she came to St. Louis, where she did extensive volunteer work for the local NAACP branch, and where her roots in political activism began more firmly to take shape.¹¹ She dedicated full-time effort to organizing for the successful election of Blacks to public office, voter registration campaigns, and was instrumental in helping two Black men—Reverend John J. Hicks and Senator T. D. McNeal—become the first Blacks elected to the St. Louis School Board and the Missouri Senate, respectfully.¹² In 1962, Calloway made her first bid for the Missouri General Assembly and won, making her the first Black woman elected to *any* public office in Missouri.¹³ She was re-elected every two years through 1980, when she retired after her tenth term. She was also an active clubwoman in the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA), League of Women Voters (LWV), Missouri Association for Social Welfare (MASW), the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW), and the National Order of Women Legislators (NOWL), while still making time to serve in other civic, health, and community-service organizations.¹⁴

In 1948, she married Ernest Calloway, a union leader/teamster and organizer, an active member the NAACP (later the St. Louis chapter president) who became professor of urban affairs at St. Louis

University.¹⁵ In 1961, they founded *The New Citizen*, a bi-monthly political newspaper where Mrs. Calloway served as co-editor and publisher.¹⁶

In *Beyond Respectability*, Cooper explains the importance of looking in unexpected places for Black women's thinking as a way of locating their intellectualism and knowledge production. Cooper dubs this process a way of generating an "eclectic archive" to map and then apply Black women's theory production to questions of gender and racial identity, racial leadership, and debates about racial advancement.¹⁷ Throughout her decades of leadership and activism, Calloway was often asked and invited to give keynotes, testimony, and tributes—many of which she accepted, and others she declined when not fully aligned to her principles of raising and honoring voices of those underserved: namely women and people of color. In one instance, the Greater St. Louis Broadcasters Association invited her to speak on "Community Problem Ascertainment," which she declined, taking issue with the title and underlying principle of victim-blaming. However, instead of just saying, "No," she wrote a provocative five-page letter explaining the shortsightedness of such a title and, perhaps more importantly, spelling out her reasons for declining.¹⁸ I offer this as an example of her intellectualism and her readiness to engage, meddle, and provoke thought in an attempt to educate. Whereas she could have simply declined, Calloway instead took the invitation as an opportunity to educate, writing,

I have oriented myself to think there are no problems—only people—people with needs; that when the needs are not met, they become the problems; that when I see the unmet needs and don't try to help meet them—then I become the problem.¹⁹

In other words, Calloway took direct aim at the association's deficit thinking: victim blaming, in this case blaming the community. I situate this example as demonstration of her steadfast dedication to her deep political conviction and as artifact within Calloway's "eclectic archive" of activism.

Embodying true race womanhood, I now turn to Calloway's speeches, which represent not only her voice and her words, but also her knowledge production and her conviction, calling attention to her penchant for dissecting power plays at multiple intersections that historically deeply affected her as well as members of her community.

"Unspeakable, Ridiculous" and "Way-Out Actions"

Eleven years before Calloway was born, another race woman, Mary Church Terrell published an essay entitled, "The Mission of the

Meddler,” in which she describes meddling as a necessary political act.²⁰ Capturing the essence of Terrell’s idea of meddling, Cooper writes, “The United States had an ‘imperative need’ for ‘active, insistent and fearless meddlers who will spend their time investigating institutions, customs, and laws whose effect on any color or class is depressing or bad.’”²¹ Terrell later refined her idea of meddling into what Ida Barnett Wells calls “dignified agitation,” which both women see as “the only way to arouse the public against the evils and injustices of a certain kind.”²² In my work poring over Calloway’s writings, it is obvious she, like race women who came before her, believes in dignified agitation. In an undated speech entitled, “Women in Politics in Missouri,” Calloway draws upon the work of Virginia Minor who, in 1872, made a bold request to a county clerk, demanding to be registered to vote.²³ Although at the local- and state-level Minor’s repeated requests were denied, her dignified agitation inspired women to organize despite being “jeered at, derided, and joked about,” as Calloway puts it.²⁴

Eventually, Missouri would become the 11th state to ratify the Suffrage Amendment, and afterwards Calloway notes the League of Women Voters (LWV) “appears for a long stretch of years to abandon the feminist cause.”²⁵ Seemingly turned off by what she saw as Missouri women’s political complacency, Calloway points out how even female politicians—most of whom typically land their positions out of male interest convergence—are the ones who raise the most vociferous opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment,” quipping, “Ah, yes, they favor equal rights for women, but—!”²⁶ Here Calloway makes a plea, as she so often did in her speeches, to educate and inspire political engagement and action, or, as she herself called it in a speech entitled “Agenda For Change” delivered in 1978 to the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, “unspeakable, ridiculous and ‘way-out’ actions.”²⁷ In her speech to her sorority sisters she names other women, including Bella Abzug, Gloria Steinem, Betty Friedan, and Shirley Chisolm, who, as she describes, dared challenge the *status quo*, referring to them as “way-out gals” who refused to settle.²⁸ She points toward and praises the work of suffragettes, particularly how being a “way-out gal” meant embracing dignified agitation:

In that period of time to identify one’s self as a suffragette—was to lay one’s self open to all sorts of charges—that of being a revolutionary bent on destroying the country; that of being indecent and pushy; that of being part of a conspiracy to break-up the traditional family structure, or that of being just plain nutty in the head.²⁹

Nodding to her sorority's founders, 22 Black women of Howard University whose mission it was to empower college-educated Black women and the Black community, Calloway insists they too "must be labelled as 'way-out gals' who didn't give a hoot about the prevailing customs and taboos."³⁰ Calloway grades them "100," and then asks her sisters how they might grade themselves and their actions toward "the single-most controversial issue affecting women of our time—ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment."³¹ Deeply invested in her beliefs on educating and inspiring women politically to engage, Calloway admonishes her listeners to move beyond simply *saying* they are concerned about challenges faced by women in the Black community, instead to get involved, as the sorority's founders did, in bonding "themselves into a sisterhood dedicated to vital concern for social welfare, academic excellence, and cultural enrichment."³²

Calloway's admonishment demonstrates an important tenet of intersectionality: being critical as a form of critical inquiry. In describing intersectionality's origins with critical inquiry, Hill Collins and Bilge (2016) write, "The term 'critical' means criticizing, rejecting, and/or trying to fix the social problems that emerge in situations of social injustice."³³ Calloway's criticism incites coalitions of women who might tackle how interactions between social inequalities such as race, class, and gender lead to the systematic establishment and maintenance of disenfranchised populations. Prior to the *Civil Rights Act* ending racial segregation, discrimination had been the pressing concern, but Calloway recognizes how promoting equal opportunity for women is fundamentally intertwined because of the ways race and gender intersect in shaping ideas about Black women. For example, are Black women to be considered women, or African Americans? That Calloway, a Black state congresswoman in the 1970s, utilized her platform to speak to college-educated Black women demonstrates not only the intersectionality in her work and the lens through which she views social change, but also her critical praxis in taking a stand, rather than simply describing the problem. Calloway's ERA call-to-action speeches also reveal what and how power relations are at play. The interpersonal domain of power is about how power relations relate to people's lives, their interpersonal relationships, and the ordering of power therein.³⁴ For both advocates and critics, the volatile ERA era coalesced around everyday social interactions that shape relationships, particularly along and across racial and gender lines. While much of Calloway's speech is a call-to-action to assist in ratifying the ERA, she also attempts to relate interpersonally to her Black female audience *and* to inspire their subsequent social interactions, a feat that demonstrates her strategy in using what power she has as a Black woman dedicated to creating social change. Calloway's words plant the seed the ERA enables a world where

women play according to fair rules on a level playing field, for, without the ERA, power and money will surely continue to reside with men. This disciplining of women, especially Black women, is a task Calloway sought not only to highlight, but tackle. The cultural domain of power that Calloway's ERA speeches demonstrate reiterates the message that, without the ERA, men remain winners and women losers, reinforcing messages and legitimizing social practices that marginalize women. When one peels back the layers of the ERA's ebb and flow of support and opposition, a clearer picture of the structural barriers and intersecting power relations blocking the ERA from ratification emerges. That picture is what Calloway aimed to change.

“Black Women Are About as Low as Low Can Go”

In a 1973 speech entitled, “Opinions & Observations on the Problems & Issues Facing Minority Women in the St. Louis Area,” Calloway highlights three specific challenges facing Black women: law, employment, and political effectiveness.³⁵ Calloway cites the historical founding of U.S. laws as “voiding and mocking” constitutional rights.³⁶ She traces the history of the 13th Amendment [to abolish slavery], the 14th Amendment [to extend citizenship to all persons born or naturalized in the U.S.], the 15th Amendment [to give Black men the right to vote], and the 19th Amendment [to give women the right to vote].³⁷ She notes how women, especially Black women, are treated as chattel, criticizing the U.S. preoccupation with maleness as deliberate phraseology.³⁸ Calloway cites the *Civil Rights Act* for finally making discriminatory actions a federal crime, abridging the rights granted by the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments.³⁹ And then, in whimsical prose emblematic of her persona, she chides women on the temptation of complacency, writing, “Very good. That’s that! I can almost hear someone saying—well, that should satisfy the women, Black women included.”⁴⁰

Through inference and anecdotes, Calloway illustrates why the intersection of race and gender matters. To illustrate her points on the marginalization of Black women, Calloway cites St. Louis census data documenting the median family income of a white, female-headed household as about \$700 more than that of a Black, female-headed household.⁴¹ In summation of her point, Calloway retorts, “Black women are about as low as low can go.”⁴² She goes on to describe how even Black women of middle- and upper-income face economic inequity, stating, “A Black woman with a college degree is earning—less than the national average earning of a male High School Drop Out.”⁴³ She discloses how retirement checks barely amounting to \$65.00 monthly are all several hundred Black women retired from the St. Louis school system have to rely upon, and she notes Black women on welfare disproportionately face neglect from social workers, the result of which

has far-reaching and intersecting complications for a Black woman's education, healthcare, housing, and employment.⁴⁴ She even boldly brings up abortion as a form of reproductive justice for Black women, to protect not only themselves, but also the high rate of Black infant mortality, which she says stands at 45% for all Black babies born to mothers with four previous pregnancies, and at a rate four times higher for infants born within 15 months of the mothers' most recent pregnancy.⁴⁵ She goes on to present statistics that show "Black women with three or more children are the lowest paid in the workforce and the most likely to be trapped in poverty conditions—with no upward mobility avenues whatsoever."⁴⁶

Her point is state laws can remedy glaring, oppressive inequities against Black women, but in order for change to happen, her audience of Black women would need to step up. She tells her audience, "We are not with it," and, "I will now candidly—without biting my tongue—conclude that my rating of St. Louis Black women's effectiveness on the political scene is about minus zero."⁴⁷ Out of love for her fellow Black women, Calloway, known for calling things as she sees them, calls them in, not out. Although critics might read it another way, what Calloway does is what she does best: building a coalition for social welfare by educating and rallying the public—an embodiment of true race womanhood. Her words and anecdotes cut through to the very power constraining Black women. Calloway approaches the intersection of race, gender, and class collectively so as to point out that, at any one intersection—race and gender, gender and class, or race and class—, Black women are made the lowest of the low by society's disciplinary and structural framing. Her plea for Black women to coalesce effectively is underscored by examples of social inequity, domains of power, relationality, social context, complexity, and social justice.⁴⁸

"It's [Not Just] Because I'm Black"

The most poignant example of Calloway's intersectionality work may be a speech she delivered to the 1976 Bicentennial Conference on the Woman's Pursuit of the American Dream. Her talk, entitled "The Differences in Challenges Facing Black and White Women," drives right to the heart of intersectionality.⁴⁹ She begins by posing the question, "Are there differences?" and continues by answering,

Right off, the answer has to be definitely, yes. Let's start by ticking off the areas of broadest concern to women and taking a look. Housing. Job Opportunities. Health. Education. Family Life. Legislative Law. Political Consciousness. And most importantly—the Female Role.⁵⁰

With intersectional foresight, Calloway theorizes everyone yearns to be treated as an individual person rather than as a "conglomerate blob"

with a simple identity.⁵¹ In other words, within multiple intersections one can begin to see the forces of power exercised upon us, as well as why no one and no issue are monolithic. In describing how she aims to put liberation into proper focus for Black women, she acknowledges the far-reaching problems Black women face. She notes Black women's experience teach that discrimination can be blamed solely on racial distinctions, making it difficult to see the intersection of race and gender.⁵²

A Black woman teaching in a college and failing year after year to be upgraded or to achieve tenure concludes, "It's because I'm Black." Or maybe her salary is rounded out lower than others in the profession—her blackness is faulted. ... Accused of a crime and being convicted to receive a longer sentence than would a male for the same offense—the Black female offender gripes, "It's because I'm Black they give me all this time." On and on, I could flip up these kinds of examples—in athletics, in the medical and dental labs—in the media—in the factories and industry—wherever, the truth is that when Black women meet discrimination—instinct and experience operate to form a conclusion that discrimination perpetrated against them is solely and singly because of their skin coloring. The fact is that Black women have such an acute sensitivity about race discrimination that it is difficult for sex-sensitivity to surmount it.⁵³

Calloway argues the trouble for Black women is not only race, but is the intersectional and exponential oppressions of being Black and female that result in an unbalanced equation where race is not the sole culprit. The disciplining of Black women in employment, both in status and in income, as well as the cultural power that throws shade on Black women through the perpetuation of stereotypes in the media, to the interpersonal experiences that teach Black women the discrimination they face is due to race, Calloway jumps right to the heart by exemplifying why, despite being hard to see, intersections of race and gender matter.

Calloway does not stop there, though. She explains why Black womanhood in this country is rooted in slave heritage and how Black women have been forced to adopt a dichotomous identity.⁵⁴ She describes how, on one hand, Black women have had to exhibit physical and moral stamina while trying to hold a family together while, on the other hand, they have been forced into playing subservient, yielding roles in order to bolster their Black male counterparts.⁵⁵ She then turns to white women's political organizing, explaining it is much easier for white

women situated in white privilege to demand ERA because they do not suffer from the plight of having to fight for equal treatment by race. As Calloway puts it, "For [Black women], the cry most echoed is 'get me out of the white folks' kitchens.'"⁵⁶

Calloway highlights distinctions across family structures, arguing Black female identity is rooted in the inherent role of the female slave as a child-breeder with a tolerance of rape that has continued to build.⁵⁷ Her comparisons continue true to form in her early description of modern-day plantation politics: how Black family structure is violated by the federal government.⁵⁸ Like slave masters who sold slaves' children despite parents' objections, the federal government robs the Black male of his parental right because Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) policy dictates money to raise children can only be provided when fathers are nowhere to be found.⁵⁹ Calloway goes on to argue, "Today, the Government...desecrates the female personhood of those who opt to bear and raise children."⁶⁰

Calloway illustrates differences previously mentioned in speeches regarding employment, political consciousness, legislative law, healthcare and reproductive justice, and education, in which she specifically points out disparities Black women face in "being put down, distorted and stereotyped according to the male's determination of what she should be."⁶¹ Ultimately, her point is that while white women can band together to increase female power, Black women push for increased power for Black people, not simply Black women.⁶²

Conclusion

Calloway's work meddling in the intersectionality of race, gender, and class occurs during a time when intersectionality was not yet even a coined term, but during the decades from the 1960s to the early 1980s, when social movements catalyzed intersectionality's core ideas, though using different vocabularies.⁶³ In 1940, Terrell used the phrase "double handicap"; in 1970, France Beale used the phrase "double jeopardy"; and in 1989, Kimberlé Crenshaw coined "intersectionality" in "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex," published in the *University of Chicago Legal Forum*.⁶⁴ It was then that intersectionality began to be examined by Black feminists, social justice projects, and within the academy.⁶⁵ That Calloway's timing is situated after Terrell's description of intersectionality by proxy of a "double handicap" in 1940, and before Frances Beales' use of the phrase "double jeopardy" in 1970 or Crenshaw's coining of "intersectionality" in 1989 places Calloway among race women who came before and after her.

Calloway was not only a race woman with "way-out actions," she was also an emissary who knew the value of education and who

characterized the potential of Black women as limitless. Calloway propagated her belief that, through educating the public, she might stand tall and she might bring others to stand tall. She was determined to educate, serve, and uplift communities of Black women, resoundingly refusing to accept inferior status.

Endnotes

- 1 Brittney C. Cooper, *Beyond Respectability: The Intellectual Thought of Race Women* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2017), 26.
- 2 Inventory, DeVerne Calloway Collection (S0551), The State Historical Society of Missouri, University of Missouri, St. Louis, <https://shsmo.org/manuscripts/stlouis/s0551.pdf>
- 3 Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge, *Intersectionality* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2016), 7–13.
- 4 Typescript of “Biographical Sketch,” n.d., S0551, Roll 2, Folder 24, Calloway, DeVerne, The State Historical Society of Missouri, University of Missouri, St. Louis.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 “S0551 Calloway, DeVerne (1916–1993) Addenda, 1929–1989,” n.d., The State Historical Society of Missouri, University of Missouri, St. Louis, <https://shsmo.org/manuscripts/stlouis/s0551.pdf>
- 10 “Biographical Sketch.”
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Cooper, *Beyond Respectability*, 12.
- 18 DeVerne Calloway, “Letter to Greater St. Louis Broadcasters’ Association,” November 9, 1977, S0551, Roll 19, Folder 235, Calloway, DeVerne, The State Historical Society of Missouri, University of Missouri, St. Louis.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Cooper, *Beyond Respectability*, 62.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 64.

²³ DeVerne Calloway, "Women in Politics in Missouri" [Speech], n.d., S0551, Roll 19, Folder 235, Calloway, DeVerne, The State Historical Society of Missouri, University of Missouri, St. Louis.

²⁴ Ibid., 1.

²⁵ Ibid., 2.

²⁶ Ibid., 3.

²⁷ DeVerne Calloway, "Agenda For Change"[Speech], February 18, 1978, S0551, Roll 19, Folder 235, Calloway, DeVerne, The State Historical Society of Missouri, University of Missouri, St. Louis.

²⁸ Ibid., 2.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 5.

³¹ Ibid., 3.

³² Ibid., 5.

³³ Hill Collins and Bilge, *Intersectionality*, 39.

³⁴ Ibid., 7.

³⁵ DeVerne Calloway, "Opinions & Observations on the Problems & Issues Facing Minority Women in the St. Louis Area" [Speech], 1973, S0551, Roll 19, Folder 235, 2, Calloway, DeVerne, The State Historical Society of Missouri, University of Missouri, St. Louis.

³⁶ Ibid., 3.

³⁷ Ibid., 3–4.

³⁸ Ibid., 3

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., 4.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 5.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 5–7.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 6–7.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 7.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

- ⁴⁹ Hill Collins and Bilge, *Intersectionality*, 25–30.
- ⁵⁰ DeVerne Calloway, “The Differences in Challenges Facing Black and White Women” [Speech], September 14, 1976, S0551, Roll 19, Folder 235, 1, Calloway, DeVerne, The State Historical Society of Missouri, University of Missouri, St. Louis.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 1.
- ⁵² *Ibid.*
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*, 2.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 2–3.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 3–4.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁶² *Ibid.*, 6.
- ⁶³ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁴ Hill Collins and Bilge, *Intersectionality*, 64, 66, 76.
- ⁶⁴ Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989, no. 1 (1989): 139–167.
- ⁶⁵ Hill Collins and Bilge, *Intersectionality*, 81.