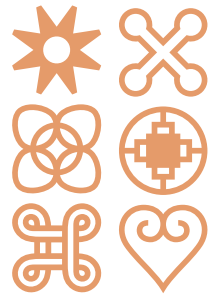


Shaonta' E. Allen

# The Black Feminist Roots of Scholar-Activism

## Lessons From Ida B. Wells-Barnett

Black feminist scholar-activism is a communal process that is fueled by the strength, power and practices of Black feminist foremothers to sustain Black feminists in the present day. Allen outlines four lessons to build a **"sociological toolkit"** (p. 32) that can be carried while "lifting as one climbs" (p. 34). She uses examples from the Black feminist scholar-activism of Ida B. Wells-Barnett to illustrate these lessons on affect, accessibility, justice-focused research, and community connections.



Lesson #1:

### Use Your Body

**Your body is a tool for standing against inequality.**

As Wells-Barnett was unfairly and forcibly removed by a train conductor, she bit his hand. Later, she successfully sued the railroad company for discrimination and assault. By **"wear[ing] our politics on our bodies"** we can utilize affect to generate social and political change (p. 35). When we are attuned to our emotions we can gain insight into how oppression disrupts our lives.

Lesson #2:

### Use Your Platform

**Prioritize accessibility when sharing knowledge.**

Consciousness raising is a principle of social activism; people need **non-dominant frameworks** to understand the injustice of their oppression. Wells-Barnett published an exposé of systemic racism in a Memphis school district in Black newspaper *Memphis Free Speech*, "because in order **to speak truth to power, you must first speak truth to the people**" (p. 36).

Lesson #3:

### Use Your Research

**Use justice-focused practices to scrutinize systemic oppression.**

In response to a friend's murder, Wells-Barnett conducted a qualitative and quantitative multisite, urban ethnography on lynching as domestic terrorism to rethink how knowledge can and should be constructed. Critical and mindful sociological research can illuminate the **"liberative potential"** within communities of color (p. 38).

Lesson #4:

### Use Your Networks & Affiliations

**Create enriching spaces for validation and mobilization.**

Today, Black feminist sociologists and scholars can join sociological organizations and electronic spaces to **connect with others dedicated to sustaining activism and social justice**. Wells-Barnett was associated with organizations like the NAACW and the NAACP that used radical knowledge sources to envision solutions to social issues.

From *Black Feminist Sociology, Perspectives and Praxis* (2022)

[www.blackfeministsociology.com](http://www.blackfeministsociology.com)

Designed by Kaitlin Webster in collaboration with the Black Feminist Sociology Team with support from the American Sociological Association's Howerly Teaching Enhancement Grant.

### Citation:

Allen, Shaonta' E. "The Black Feminist Roots of Scholar Activism: Lessons From Ida B. Wells-Barnett." Pp. 32-44 in *Black Feminist Sociology*, edited by Z. Luna and W. N. Laster Pirtle. Routledge.