(2003) fully centers identity politics as he followed four Black Congress members to explore the relational aspects of political representation. Fenno noted that his findings and understanding of Black lawmakers' behavior are filtered through the lens of his identity as a white (cis)male researcher. Yet, Fenno mentions this and then quickly proceeds without systematically acknowledging how this racial-outsider status informs his data collection, analysis, and—ultimately—the final conclusions that he draws. Fenno's work was my model and however problematic, his studies were those that I attempted to replicate. I have written elsewhere that it took me some time to grapple with my identity as a researcher who shares the same raced/gendered group status of my participants (Brown 2012). This was due in large part to my positivist training and limited exposure to both qualitative research (of any type) and interpretivist methods early in my career.

When I finally realized that I could best present the narratives of Black women through qualitative research (primarily due to their small numbers in state legislatures), I was drawn to texts outside of political science that examined how our identity informs the research process. I looked to work by Smith (1976), Ritchie (1996), Collins (1986), Beoku-Betts (1994), and Zinn (1979). More recent scholarship, including Few, Stephens, and Rouse-Arnett (2003), Harris-Perry (2011), and Jordan-Zachery (2007), oriented my positionality as a Black woman researching Black women. Also helpful was Wendy Smooth's sage advice (given in passing during the 2010 Annual Meeting of the National Conference of Black Political Scientists, in a sisterly tone) that "You know you can't publish these women's names in your dissertation, right?" This alerted me to the type of privileged status that I had in interviewing Black women political elites who likely told me things that they would not have shared with a raced/gendered outsider. As such, I needed to practice a Black feminist ethos of care and refer to them only by pseudonyms in published work.

My past experiences interviewing Black women state legislators coupled with Black feminist scholarship and conducting focus groups with Black women citizens prepared me for our November 2019 data collection with members of the Black Women's PAC. Danielle (a Mexican American and Filipina) and I agreed that I would ask the questions and serve as the facilitator for the focus group; she would take notes. We were prepared and I was ready. Yet, I did not anticipate that moment. As a scholar of gender and politics and racial and ethnic politics within legislative studies, I was aware of the scholarly underrepresentation of marginalized groups in research. As a Black woman, I focused my career on opening up the discipline to perspective by groups at the margins—most notably, Black women political elites. However, I was not then and probably will not ever be fully disentangled from how my own identity translates into the emotive research experience. ■

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WRITING FOR MY LIFE

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In many ways, I do not see myself as a legislative-studies scholar. Although I have conducted research in the area, and my next project is largely about legislation, I still do not see myself as part of the field. This is because I entered this area through racial and ethnic politics (REP). As a "race-first" scholar, I consider REP as my research touchstone and conduit to other fields, including legislative studies. It is difficult to state why, but I have always felt like a visitor in this field. Perhaps it is because the issues, legislators, and legislation that I care about have always featured race. I could never rattle off members of Congress or congressional bills and their sponsors and cosponsors with the near-encyclopedic precision as some of our colleagues. As a result, I often felt off-kilter and deeply insecure about my knowledge and ability to contribute to the area.

This was not the result of any individual actors but rather because of the way I thought of the field. Because I am a minoritized person in this discipline, I did not always see myself reflected in the field. As a result of what I was taught, the canonical works of white men became the primary yardsticks for how I measured my suitability for the field. I thought because I did not fully understand Poole–Rosenthal scores that I somehow was perpetrating a fraud by being in this field. Often times, the questions I was interested in were not reflected in the syllabi of my courses. In the words of the late scholar Ronald W. Walters, "What has this got to do with the liberation of Black people?" was neither asked nor answered in the texts I encountered (Smith, Johnson, and Newby 2014). To do this work, I surmised that I would need to find myself in a different intellectual kinship group.

Fast-forward a decade and my next work focuses on the legislative efforts of the Congressional Black Caucus. This body of legislators has been the "conscience of the Congress" since its formation in 1971. Under the leadership of Representative Shirley Chisholm (D-NY), the Congressional Black Caucus became a robust force in the international arena, particularly on issues relevant to the broader African diaspora (Tillery 2011). However, I did not learn much about the Congressional Black Caucus when I was in graduate school, and my only classroom encounter with it and its efforts was in a course on race and ethnic politics in

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America. The fact that research focusing on the Congressional Black Caucus—black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) legislators—is not regularly offered in courses that focus on Congress and congressional policy making reveals how far we still must go in the field. A cursory examination of the comprehensive reading lists in American politics and political institutions yields no discussion of the Congressional Black Caucus and almost never includes any of the work produced by BIPOC scholars, despite the many contributions they have made to enriching my understanding of Congress and the function of this institution. Recent works by Nadia Brown, Megan Ming Francis, Michael Minta, and Katherine Tate—to name only a few—should be a regular part of our vocabulary in legislative studies.

As our discipline clings to canonical texts, most of them penned by majority-race scholars, we must interrogate *why* these works remain the benchmark. This does not mean that these works should be replaced, but it does mean that we show what and who we value when we continue to replicate and disseminate scholarship that does not show the depth and breadth of the field. Consequently, fields—like legislative studies—that do not situate race as a *central* part of their curriculum and syllabi create an "intellectual iceberg," so to speak, that is demarcated by what topics, institutions, and people are deemed worthy of study.

I am unsure about whether the field has changed significantly, but what is true is that I have changed. I no longer care about where my work fits or who in what field may like said work. I do not write with them in mind. I write for those who cannot. I write about things that others may believe are inconsequential, unimportant. Writing on the margins about decentered populations is important for me because it is where I can be free and totally autonomous. At the margins, there is always room to take up space. Perhaps that is why I do not formally engage many scholars in the field of legislative studies. REP is my intellectual home not because of rejection but rather because it is where I find acceptance. I also find intellectual challenge and stimulation from a group of scholars that I respect immensely. Therefore, my academic identity as a REP scholar is not because of scholars of legislative studies but rather because of how I want to move through this discipline. I am trying to write the world I live in *and* the world I want to live in as a black woman. I write the scholarship I want to read for a field that does not view much of the work that I and other political scientists like me do as valuable. I recognize the irony in this, yet I persist because the discipline needs this work and I am compelled to do this research.

Asking questions I care about and about communities that I love is a singular experience. Of course, I often have the joy of collaborating with other scholars, but no one gets to police what I think. I no longer give permission to those who would tell me an idea is unworthy before it has had a chance to be fully formed. Being frustrated is often the cost of this labor. Nonetheless, doing the work itself is a challenge in the best possible ways. The work of completing that complex multipiece puzzle is its own kind of gratification. Moreover, although digitization has made these tasks less onerous than they once were, the mechanics of the project are much easier than the work of conceptualizing a project.

For the next generation of scholars, I encourage you to do the work that makes your heart sing. Many of your colleagues will not "get it," so you must find the people who do understand. More important, go to the people who will encourage you to get the work done and who can see its importance when you no longer can. Although these people may not do exactly what you do, what is most significant is that they help you do the work you want to do. Do not try to anticipate criticism from your colleagues; it is a useless exercise. Do the work and let the chips fall where they may. This, I promise, will not be the most difficult thing that you have done. Once you let go of all the negative self-talk, you will become much more productive. Likewise, go where your work is accepted. This does not mean where your work is not critiqued. Constructive criticism is absolutely necessary to improve your work. What I am saying is go to the places where a prima facie case for your work's importance exists, not where you have to prove the worthiness of the work before you even can establish your argument. I recognize that this is how many of our conferences, graduate programs, and journals operate, but this is an unhealthy practice. The "so what" question is important for all of us to ask, but once you have answered that question, it is time to move on to the next phase of your project.

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People are either going to buy your story or they will not. This is not necessarily about you not doing a good-enough job of making the case. There will be people—especially if you inhabit a decentered body or are writing about marginalized groups and/or identities—who will never be convinced of your arguments. Do not waste your time or intellectual energy on those people. It took me many years to figure that out, and my many mentors in the REP field were integral in helping me move beyond these destructive patterns. Ultimately, the goal is to make sure our ideas are in the world, and that is what matters—where or how it happens is less important than the fact that it happens. REP has been and continues to be that space for me. Do not lose sleep, important relationships, your mental health, or your physical health over any of this work; we are not curing COVID-19. Putting this into proper perspective has helped me immensely, and I hope it also helps others. ■

For the next generation of scholars, I encourage you to do the work that makes your heart sing. Many of your colleagues will not "get it," so you must find the people who do understand. More important, go to the people who will encourage you to get the work done and who can see its importance when you no longer can.

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COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND STATE LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH

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Scholars' engagement with the community can enhance their own scholarship and teaching while expanding the influence of their research for the public good. My experience demonstrates the positive effects of this model of scholarship and the institutional support needed to practice it. Universities under pressure to demonstrate their public value are encouraging more public scholarship "that addresses important civic issues while simultaneously producing knowledge that meets high academic standards" (Bridger and Alter 2011) or scholarship of application in which researchers' engagement with society inspires and produces knowledge for the public good (Boyer 1990). In a *PS* symposium on this same topic, Bullock and Hess (2021) defined "civically engaged research" as "the systematic and rigorous production of knowledge through reciprocal partnerships with people beyond the academy that contributes to the improved governance of social and political problems."

Community engagement is the "collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity" (Carnegie 2015). It is obvious that although this collaboration often occurs at the institutional level, it also can occur at the individual level by researchers and their partners in the community. Community-engagement activities by faculty can include service-learning courses, public forums, civic-education programming, and community-engaged research.

My own community engagement as a state-legislative scholar has taken many forms, including service-learning teaching, community-engaged research, and public scholarship. This engagement has many benefits but also challenges, and it requires substantial institutional support to be successful. This type of scholarship is both incredibly rewarding and labor intensive. This article explores all of these facets so that faculty members who are interested in pursuing this path or are under pressure from their institution to do so are aware of the costs and benefits. Furthermore, I share recommendations from experts about how institutions can reform incentive structures to recognize and value this work by faculty. In addition, extensive work must be done by universities and professional associations to protect public scholars who are threatened by the public or politicians for disseminating their research.

When it is successful, both researchers and community members benefit from an academic project that centers real-world problems that are analyzed using methodically sound techniques and with high ethical standards. My research agenda is invigorated by my civic participation. For example, I serve on the Women's Policy and Research Commission for the State of Louisiana. This commission advises the governor on potential policy solutions to problems that disproportionately affect women. Members of the commission include university researchers, community leaders, state employees, and public officeholders. In 2018, this commission formed a sexual-harassment subcommittee to inform the state's response to high-profile accusations. One of the prominent actions being debated was mandatory training for public employees. Having observed this same debate in higher education and knowing the inadequacy of this response without additional interventions, I was inspired to learn how other states were addressing this issue. Subsequently, I coauthored with two undergraduate students a 50-state analysis of state-legislative sexual-harassment policies. My experience as an insider in Louisiana's response led to an important policy study that I previously had not considered. Involving undergraduate students in this project was particularly valuable because they were able to connect their own study of political science to a real-world challenge in their community.

I also am a member of Women United, an auxiliary group of the United Way of Southeast Louisiana. This nonprofit organization has a robust legislative advocacy agenda. A primary concern is equal pay. Attending many legislative committee

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