

## 14 Why Do I Have Authority to Edit the Page? The Politics of User Agency and Participation on Wikipedia

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What is the power of Wikipedia for users that frequently consume it but don't feel they have the authority to edit it? Wikipedia's potential to represent the full scope of users' knowledge diversity is inhibited by several barriers that suppress inclusive participation.

My first Wikipedia edit was sometime around 2003. I added a cultural reference that was made during a *South Park* episode. However, when I read the entire article, I decided that it was poorly written and needed much narrative improvement. The style seemed choppy, despite the relative accuracy of content. After providing more transitions and vivid action verbs, I felt as if I had done justice to readers by bringing high-quality writing to the article. I checked the page the next day, and my elegant composition had been overridden by clunky prose full of passive voice and simplistic descriptions. My ego was slightly bruised, but I had learned one of the first major lessons of Wikipedia editing: the community judges whether your edits will stand, and you will need to decide if your work is worth fighting for.

Now, almost twenty years later, Wikipedia is older than my first-year college writing students. It has always been part of their digital lives. Meanwhile, I still have distant memories of the *Encyclopædia Britannica's* large volumes occupying the top row of a dusty bookshelf in someone's living room. Nearly all of my current students are completely unfamiliar with the *Britannica*, with the exception of one or two of them who have casually referred to them as "ancient books" at their grandparent's house. In fact, the word encyclopedia itself is not typically part of the contemporary academic vocabulary. Wikipedia, then, has both displaced a brand of encyclopedias that had defined *the* English encyclopedia for over three centuries and endured almost two decades of criticism about its legitimacy. However,

despite Wikipedia's widespread use, its potential as a living archive that is capable of representing the full scope of distributed global knowledge remains untapped. Although it is one of the most popular websites online, the vast majority of its users don't edit the page. This chapter examines the implications of this problem by drawing on my experience as a Black Woman editing Wikipedia—both as a first-time user and as a college writing teacher.

### **Wikipedia Participation Is a Novel Literacy**

Wikipedia was very novel in that 2003 postmillennial scene. I was a queer Black Woman sophomore at a predominantly white college in the rural Midwest with all the time in the world to think. The United States was still panicking about September 11. Deployments to Afghanistan were steadily increasing, and George W. Bush was clumsily selling the idea of an Iraq war to the US Congress and the general public. His plan worked since almost everyone was eager to show their patriotism after the fall of the twin towers. The country muted discussions about race, amplifying color-blind slogans like “We are all Americans” to quell and silence a rise in anti-Muslim violence. Further, it was still very taboo to be out of the closet in America. Gay marriage was still illegal; so too was sodomy under the legal precedent of *Bowers v. Hardwick*.<sup>1</sup> The violent deaths of Matthew Shepard and Brandon Teena were part of national headlines that were putting a spotlight on the prevalence of hate crimes against LGBTQ people.<sup>2</sup> Brown wasn't part of the rainbow.<sup>3</sup> Pride celebrations weren't as commercial or joyously attended by straight people. Conversion therapy was a typical response to coming out in the evangelical Christian household. Some of my gay and lesbian friends who waited to come out of the closet until college were being disowned by their families. In this scene, it was unfashionable to be an antiwar, pro-gay, feminist, and/or an environmental activist, but I was highly visible on campus as part of the leadership board of our campus's small but growing LGBTQ organization—PRISM. As I compose this article, a banner boldly celebrating Pride is inscribed in Wikipedia's top-level header alongside a call for editors to develop LGBTQ content. It is a sight to behold because I never imagined that public attitudes toward LGBTQ identities would transform so rapidly. These details matter because my formative experiences with Wikipedia did not include a focus on making it “equitable” or have an

awareness that being a Black Woman editor made much difference at all. In other words, Wikipedia's recognition of social issues was simply not part of a general conversation about user participation in 2003. I will return to this point later in the chapter because the issue of editorial authority depends on the extent to which prospective Wikipedia editors feel as if the community recognizes their knowledge as notable enough to be represented in the space.

My best friend at the time, let's call him Dean—a gay white male computer science major—would implore me to join him for his daily ritual of marveling at Wikipedia. In fact, I was looking up information for my mass communications class when he introduced me to the dynamic and free reference site. Astounded by its growth and mesmerized by a clean, organized interface, we found ourselves always using it. We noticed how the uniformity inspired by the graphic user interface (GUI) made any article *seem* true, but we resisted being tricked into believing false information. For example, when we checked Wikipedia for seemingly innocuous stuff like descriptions of a *South Park* or *Queer as Folk* episode, we would notice errors or missing information about intertextual cultural references. So we edited the page! However, neither of us would have identified as Wikipedians. We didn't create usernames to edit or make editing part of everyday life. Yet, we were both children of the Web 1.0 internet where anonymity was valued and deliberation with strangers was part and parcel of most online communication. We probably took for granted that our sociocultural experience with the internet sponsored our willingness to feel free enough to edit Wikipedia. After all, this was a world before the “nerd revolution” and the highly visible dominance of tech giants like Steve Jobs and Mark Zuckerberg. We were social misfits for being into computers and the internet, so editing Wikipedia hardly seemed risky. It was an occasional—highly contextual—thing to do since we were primarily connected to Wikipedia as consumers. We knew others labored there for free, and we appreciated how useful it was.

Nevertheless, contributing to Wikipedia felt satisfyingly subversive because it was easy and meaningful. In the United States, we have been socialized to navigate bureaucracy's mazes of processing requests—which consists of seemingly never-ending streams of forms to fill out, showing and obtaining government and institutional identification, waiting for the “appropriate person” to verify and authorize documents, submitting your

inquiry to the other “appropriate persons” before waiting for any number of business days before you obtain a response that confirms or denies the completion of your requests. As Jean Anyon argued almost forty years ago in her widely cited article, “Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work,” the education system tacitly prepares us to accept that we will be socialized into similar occupations as our parents and learn how to be managed in ways that perpetuate class inequality.<sup>4</sup> However, Wikipedia afforded users more autonomy than formal education spaces. I didn’t need a username; my internet protocol (IP) was sufficient. I didn’t need to have endless credentials or degrees to correct records that people would come to rely on, even if my edit(s) were reverted within seconds.

Wikipedia was clearly shaking up the education system back then, and it continues to be taught as a forbidden space. Throughout my undergraduate studies, my peers and I noticed and discussed that our professors were increasingly issuing threats and warnings about using and citing Wikipedia. They feared that their authority could be undermined by anonymous novices mischievously or haphazardly editing pages. But we weren’t stupid. We knew that there was a time and place for Wikipedia, and it wasn’t in a college research paper.

Instead, Dean and I thought Wikipedia editing illustrated the liberatory potential of the internet. Both of us, also Harry Potter dorks, spent hours discussing MediaWiki’s magic. Wikipedia was spell casting for the masses. Anyone could edit the page *quasi-anonymously*. IPs can be tracked and traced back to identifiable users, of course, but these were the pre-Facebook days when internet users cared a lot more about keeping online and offline identities separate. We knew that editing the page meant far more than just tinkering with some text. Back then, no “what you see is what you get” (WYSIWYG) editor existed. From the ability to choose whether to “sign up” with a username to spending numerous days tracking edits to a page, editing meant that you were coding.<sup>5</sup> With MediaWiki, coding was brought down to such an accessible level and made any novice editor feel like a badass. However, we knew more was happening than that, and we did research about how MediaWiki does what it do. The AMP (Apache—MySQL—PHP) stack ensures an archive of your edit. Even if you entered a flame war and got reverted repeatedly, your edit would be part of the site’s retrievable history. Moreover, the ability to store those edits on an unprecedented scale and sort through such a vast trove of robust documentation through a

navigable interface were novel experiences afforded by these applications. For those of us who grew up taking high school courses like business computer information systems and telecommunications (where Microsoft Windows was your only operating system option, MS Office software was the only way you were taught about data management, and HTML was all it took to make a website), Wikipedia provided access to an entirely different information architecture. As a new type of website, Wikipedia increased our curiosity about the dynamic, distributed possibility of different kinds of code, application systems, and online communities.

Further, the power to tamper with even a millisecond of someone's perception about the truth of any subject could have massive repercussions for education. No longer were generations going to take for granted who or what could count as notable enough to be part of a reference. No longer could educational institutions exclusively centralize student knowledge vis-à-vis textbooks. Wikipedia interrupted the gatekeeping mechanisms of academe, lateralizing who could have a say and opening up a frontier of deliberation that expanded upon the news groups, discussion forums, and Java-powered chat rooms by which Web 1.0 internet users were accustomed. The library's restricted section was now available to any magician seeking to make and break knowledge. Indeed, Wikipedia editing was and continues to be taught as a dark art.

### Teaching Wikipedia and Student Resistance

These formative experiences with Wikipedia informed my understanding of writing in the "new digital age." When I started teaching college composition as a first-year graduate student at the University of Oklahoma in 2006, nothing about Wikipedia or the burgeoning Web 2.0 felt that new to me. By that point, we were deep into George W. Bush's war on terror, the recession was about to hit people hard, and uncertainty inspired a lot of us graduate students to avoid the workforce and prolong reckoning with the reality of our further descent into student loan debt. During required teaching assistant workshops and seminars as well as break-room lunches and happy hours, anti-Wikipedia attitudes could inspire long self-righteous conversations about banning this resource in the classroom. Despite their claims to want more social justice in higher ed, nearly every writing teacher I knew—regardless of their political affiliation, gender, religion, and so

on—seemed to loathe Wikipedia and take pleasure in talking about their tactics for catching students plagiarizing or even thinking about citing the resource.

Meanwhile, I was hoping my students would have a different experience with Wikipedia. Teaching with digital technology was still not fully institutionalized despite repetitive institutional calls for improving students' digital and information literacy. I took advantage of these pedagogical appeals and started including various opportunities for students to edit Wikipedia. For example, I included a small activity during the first semester I ever taught—when new instructors were discouraged from deviating from the standard curriculum. It was a research assignment, in which I asked students to look at Wikipedia to see if there was an article about their hometown. We utilized government census data as well as state and city websites and print reference entries to update articles with current information. During this process, students noticed when major businesses, educational institutions, places of worship, and traditions (e.g., local festivals) were missing from Wikipedia. Students from rural Oklahoma and those representing different Native American tribes were surprised to discover the absence of their communities.

These knowledge gaps taught them important lessons to transfer to their general academic experience. Everyone in the room had a distinct and valuable experience. Everyone knew something that they could contribute. Everyone should feel free to participate (in editing) because it was mutually beneficial to themselves, to the knowledge they added to the space, and to those who could build on it over time. Some students were excited to edit Wikipedia, but most of them were scared. They didn't want to do it wrong, or they challenged my authority to assign such a forbidden act of knowledge production. My Wikipedia editing assignments caused them to ask many questions about whether what I was doing was acceptable or whether their other instructors were wrong for not including Wikipedia editing in their courses.

To address the depth of their concerns, I weighted Wikipedia assignments as "homework" or "participation" with pass/fail credit. They got an "A" for even attempting to complete it or an "F" for not doing it. With no tutorials available or Wiki Education to provide me with scaffolding materials, I had to teach them how to edit based on my experience. Showing them the site's functions—like the history, talk, and sandbox features—as well as

the importance of using a hacker name and drawing on our institutional library resources for secondary research took at least two weeks. Nevertheless, I continued this instruction throughout my teaching at the University of Oklahoma and throughout 2009–2011 when I was obtaining my PhD at the Pennsylvania State University. When teaching at Penn State, I had far less room in the standard syllabus to deviate with my own assignments because instructors were routinely surveilled. I relegated Wikipedia editing to “extra credit” assignments except during summer courses. At that time, I thought that if students learned about the ethics of knowledge production they might be motivated to take responsibility for editing Wikipedia, especially if they understand editing as a civic duty. It wasn’t until I started working at Spelman College a few years later that I would be able to more fully understand that race, gender, and social class directly impact students’ relationship to editing Wikipedia.

### **The Liberatory Potential of Wikipedia Editing**

From 2011–2014, I took a break from Wikipedia editing in the classroom because I worked in the Writing Center and secured a tenure track position at Spelman College, a small private historically Black college (HBCU) for women. When I started teaching honors composition in 2015, I resumed Wikipedia editing as part of my writing pedagogy. Since my last teaching experience, I was pleasantly surprised to discover that Wikipedia had become a hot topic for those working on the intersections between race, gender, geography, and technology.<sup>6</sup> I learned about FemTechNet, an ambitious collective of academics, artists, and activists dedicated to improving the internet for marginalized communities. Their website taught me about wikistorming and the herstory of Art+Feminism—a distributed global event designed to diversify Wikipedia’s coverage of women in the arts (discussed in chapter 15). I also discovered Wiki Education, which offered instructors numerous technical and content resources for teaching Wikipedia editing (discussed in chapter 20). Equipped with Wiki Education’s sleek course management system and motivated by the intellectual challenge of representing “notable” knowledge from individuals and communities that are too often invisible in disciplinary sites of scholarship and teaching, I felt considerably more prepared to teach writing Wikipedia than ever before.

However, this time my inspiration for teaching Wikipedia editing was even more complicated. From 2006–2008, I wanted students to be more critical users of technology by understanding that political movements like Free/Libre Open Source Software make sites like Wikipedia possible. In 2015, I was much more aware of the racial and gender politics that affect computing cultures. To be sure, I have deep gratitude for the programmers like Richard Stallman, Linus Torvalds, and Steve Wozniak, who have labored for free to make GNU/Linux/Unix software free and available to all, as well as hacktivists like Aaron Swartz who paid the ultimate price for leaking closed-access scholarship and whistle-blowers like Chelsea Manning who spent years in prison for leaking the Iraq and Afghanistan war logs. However, all Women—regardless of race—face numerous barriers if they attempt to participate in the male-dominated cultures of programming and gaming.

Intersecting the liberatory potential of both open source practice *and* racially diverse gender inclusive participation could be fully realized at Spelman College.

Within this educational space of an HBCU for women, I crafted a syllabus that situated Wikipedia as both capable of preserving and erasing Black Women's intellectual and cultural herstory.<sup>7</sup> By encouraging Black Women students to edit, I strongly believed that they could lead efforts to diversify editor demographics. I also wanted them to understand Wikipedia as far more than an easy, popular place to casually browse for information about entertainment or as a general reference for any topic.

Few, if any, students had actually edited Wikipedia. I underestimated the extent to which these students would resist Wikipedia editing due to several fears that reveal the difficulty of equity work. For instance:

1. Editing Wikipedia to improve content gaps *sounds* good, but editors are often too unfamiliar with the Wikipedia community to fight for the knowledge they seek to represent.
2. Editing Wikipedia involves numerous literacies that present barriers for first-time editors:
  - Deciding whether to be anonymous/choosing a username
  - Gaining technical experience with the Wikipedia website
  - Identifying areas of improvement without being too overwhelmed by the choices available



- Learning how to navigate public and proprietary library resources for secondary sources
- Experimenting with incorporating research into articles within the boundaries of Wikipedia’s “neutral style”
- Starting conversations on the talk page with strangers and subjecting oneself to the possibility of harassment or endless dialogue
- Reflecting on the editing experience in a supportive learning community

After teaching with Wikipedia for the first time at Spelman and failing to successfully acclimate most of my first-year honors students to the editing experience, I decided that my efforts would be more successful if I invited more faculty at my institution to participate in this unique teaching endeavor. Few instructors at Spelman teach about Wikipedia in any capacity, only warning students not to ever cite it in a paper. Further, when I introduce Wikipedia to my students, it takes several discussions to encourage them that they will not be penalized for editing Wikipedia since nearly all students’ experience with Wikipedia in an educational space has centered on it being an unacceptable resource. This issue is intensified by the fact that they are Black Women students who have made it to the college-level because they have demonstrated their ability to fluently speak and write in standard white English as well as adopt social behaviors that make white people in authority less uncomfortable around Black people. Openly challenging authority is simply not an option for these students because they know that their “success” will be thwarted if they publicly appear to be “too angry” or have a “bad attitude.” Their fear of harsh penalties is well justified and needs to be carefully considered when introducing them to Wikipedia editing.

Ultimately, my students became highly motivated to edit Wikipedia when they realized that its content fails to accurately represent significant cultural and intellectual contributions of Black Women, Spelman College, and HBCUs in general. To transform both student and faculty resistance to Wikipedia editing then, they would need the space and opportunity to recognize the importance of editing with **purpose**. Inspired by a Black History month edit-a-thon that Howard University organized in 2015, I began seeking other Atlanta University Center (AUC) instructors interested in the digital humanities and teaching writing with technology.<sup>8</sup> If more instructors

taught Wikipedia editing, students would feel more comfortable with the complex and novel experience.

Therefore, in summer 2016, Professor Jamila Lyn—a colleague formerly employed at Morehouse College—and I collaboratively applied for an Associated Colleges of the South (ACS) grant to create an extensive three-day cross-institutional interdisciplinary faculty development event entitled “Integrating Wikipedia into Writing-Intensive Courses.”<sup>9</sup> In addition to twelve on-site faculty, we opened select parts of the symposium for free, with remote participation being available to any interested instructor or Galleries, Libraries, Archives, and Museum (GLAM) staff and faculty. All of our on-site attendees were first-time editors and faced similar challenges as students editing for the first time.

Jamila and I decided that both faculty and students in the AUC might decide to engage Wikipedia if they could collaboratively connect over the problem of race and gender content gaps outside the classroom. Thus, we followed up on the 2016 ACS symposium in spring 2017 by co-organizing a Black Women’s Herstory Wikipedia Edit-a-thon. Our event took place alongside hundreds of other similar events as part of Art+Feminism. It was, to my knowledge, Spelman’s first-ever Art+Feminism Edit-a-thon and culminated in at least fifty new Black Women Wikipedia editors.<sup>10</sup> As previously discussed, the vast majority (at least 85 percent) of Wikipedia’s editors are (white) males.<sup>11</sup> We were determined to change that, recognizing that Wikipedia offered a rich educational and activist opportunity for students and faculty in the AUC. We wanted to harness the power of discovery, debate, and documentation to diversify Wikipedia coverage. Our objective was to more broadly conceive of the word “Art” in Art+Feminism. By adding more articles about notable Black Women in the arts, media, and advocacy, we aimed to show that Black Women’s fight for representation and control over our own individual and collective images has been both an artistic and political struggle. The 2017 Spelman Art+Feminism Meetup Wikipedia Page provides more details about the event, editing approaches for making herstory, and selected articles for development.

Moreover, I used the edit-a-thon as an opportunity to strengthen my efforts to teach Wikipedia editing in both introductory and advanced writing courses. I also used the event to strengthen partnerships in and across campus. We acquired significant financial support from Morehouse Academic Affairs (\$1,000), Spelman Honors (\$500), the Spelman English

Department (\$300), Art+Feminism (\$100), and the Wikipedia Foundation (\$500 worth of swag). In addition, the Spelman Comprehensive Writing Program offered us space to hold the event inside our campus writing center, and the AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library offered a few librarians to help staff the event. Aleta Turner, a local Wikimedian and circulation supervisor at Athens-Clark County Library, also attended and assisted. Additionally, several on-campus units and organizations helped actively promote the event. These included the African Diaspora & the World Program, the Bonner Office of Civic Engagement, the Office of the Provost, the Office of Undergraduate Studies, and the Women's Research and Resource Center.

On the date of the event, March 5, 2017, we conducted a two-hour training session with approximately forty mostly young Black Women students in attendance with a few Black Women faculty and several librarians representing various genders and ethnicities (white, Black, Latinx, etc.). Early in the session, several students asked, "Why do I have the authority to change the page?" This question about whether one ought to be editing Wikipedia on the grounds of ability and/or agency highlights one of the core problems that affects human potential for knowledge production along every boundary of teaching and learning across media, geographies, and institutions. Surely, as these suspicious students recognized, Wikipedia editing (especially as a Black Woman) comes with some kind of risk. Online harassment is one well-known challenge, but to willingly publicly expose the reality of the limits and sum of one's own knowledge also comes with a considerable psychological burden within the sociopolitical context of a patriarchal adversarial culture that incentivizes proclamations of certainty over truth.<sup>12</sup> I bore witness to this problem during my prior experience teaching Wikipedia editing, but the problem was spelled out with brutal clarity among prospective Black Women editors. When I bring this chapter to conclusion, I will continue to contemplate how racial and gender politics affects new editors' sense of authority and, thus, how I interpret Wikipedia's impact at its twentieth anniversary.

The issue of authority always deeply unsettles Spelman students, whether they are writing with pen, voice, and/or computer. These Black Women bravely engaged Wikipedia—the website that anyone can edit—as often as any user but with little sense of duty to contribute to the space—even when they see poorly written or inaccurate information. As we know, Wikipedia is frequently used and relied on as a reference, despite many teachers' typical

ominous warning: don't use Wikipedia as a source. Nevertheless, Wikipedia is easier to use than many traditionally educational materials. The free platform continues to work its way into formal education through Google's algorithmic power as a major broker in the knowledge economy—its powerful search engine juts Wikipedia entries to the top of results, obtaining automatic trust from users through its familiar and well-organized GUI.<sup>13</sup>

Further, Wikipedia serves as a subtle but powerful form of information warfare against colonized populations. The colonial act of erasing cultures includes the psychological condition of feeling as if you cannot and should not “disrupt” the information architecture. The dominance of white male editors correlates with a severe lack of participation and coverage about people representing historically disadvantaged groups, especially women of all races and ethnicities.<sup>14</sup>

Fortunately, Wikipedia's homogeneity is not destiny. Due to its radically open platform design, *anyone* can technically edit. Even if a user's change is overridden or reverted, the wiki architecture enables the archiving of any and all user activity. We also need to continue to critically analyze the extent to which we can accurately determine the cultural backgrounds of editors. In fact, some studies critique estimates of user demographics.<sup>15</sup> What appears on Wikipedia depends on the knowledge users choose to represent there. Editors, regardless of experience, must be willing to engage the community and make compelling arguments in defense of one's edits.

Nevertheless, participants' anxiety about editing Wikipedia funks up the how-to tutorial approach or the idea that attending a single edit-a-thon could sustain their motivation to continue editing Wikipedia. During Spelman's first Art+Feminism edit-a-thon, students conversed about editors' authority throughout the entire event. One of the most memorable discussions was about how students did not feel the classroom space alone would be capable of enabling them to edit Wikipedia with confidence. They admitted that their fear of failing and the instructor's watchful eye was hardly the kind of environment that sponsors meaningful digital activism. In fact, students would need to *feel free* to edit Wikipedia—not as a required class assignment and not being unprepared to handle a hostile response from entering a digital space dominated by white males. Their concerns revealed that our communities need to take radical action to reckon with the historical and present problem of Black Women recovering and documenting our intellectual and cultural history. Certainly, a distributed

global event designed to diversify Wikipedia's coverage of (Black) women in the arts can provide the context for recruiting new editors, but more opportunities for engagement are necessary. The prospect of increasing Black Women editors on Wikipedia will be more likely with structural support from social movements that connect digital activism and higher education (like #CiteBlackWomen), campus and community support for edit-a-thons focused on knowledge equity, and Wikipedia instruction in writing-intensive courses across the disciplines. Toward this end, I strategically connected the Art+Feminism edit-a-thon to three writing courses, collaborated with our office of civic engagement to get Wikipedia editing to count as an activity that students could use to fulfill their service requirement at the college, and provided faculty development for instructors willing and able to teach Wikipedia editing.<sup>16</sup> This approach required exhaustive effort, but if educators are committed to social justice, they will encourage students to edit Wikipedia as a practical method for learning how to be leaders that advocate for equitable knowledge production in the twenty-first century.

### **Wikipedia, Inclusion, and Digital Citizenship**

As Wikipedia turns twenty, nearly all of my students, regardless of their classification, have been trained to believe that Wikipedia editing is not a possibility available to them. However, since 2006, one of the major shifts in attitudes toward Wikipedia is that it has become an object of critique for reproducing social inequality. In particular, grand narratives about Wikipedia's unreliability have expanded to include the issue of editor demographics and social justice. One of the dominant arguments against Wikipedia's legitimacy was that it would be prone to misinformation because user anonymity would encourage deceit. Although this continues to be a popular critique of Wikipedia, the problems of diversity and inclusion has increasingly drawn global attention from artists, scientists, activists, librarians, curators, and educators. WikiProjects like *Women in Red* and the *African Diaspora* focus on expanding race and gendered content. Feminists like Adrienne Wadewitz increased public awareness about the problem of gender inequity on Wikipedia. Jacqueline Mabey, Siân Evans, Michael Mandiberg, and Laurel Ptak founded the first Art+Feminism in 2014.<sup>17</sup> These initiatives, led by experienced Wikipedians, have globally expanded through the growth

of both Art+Feminism and Wiki Education, which are both officially non-profit organizations with staff and structured program support.

Wikipedia as a site of social justice work redefines its potential uses in formal education. Directly involving students in knowledge production actualizes the bedrock of their freedom to participate in our contemporary information economy—can they be motivated to use Wikipedia to learn how to fill gaps in knowledge that our communities know (or what we ought to know), do credible research, sort through the data dumps, and mark their authorship in a public collaborative writing space?

Indeed, one of my major motivations for teaching Wikipedia editing since 2006 is that I have observed its vast potential for deeply engaging our students with twenty-first-century knowledge production and intellectual service. Wikipedia editing can align student, faculty, and staff goals in a distinctly womanist method—through edit-a-thons, for example, everyone was invited to participate, regardless of “expertise,” because we all know something. By coming together to share our knowledge, we all benefited from the exchange. The social aspect of knowledge production and learning strengthens our spirit and our will to seek wisdom in the honor of both our individual excellence and our ancestors—to whom a great cognitive and emotional debt must be paid for our ability to tell the “herstory” of Black Women’s intellectual and cultural legacies.<sup>18</sup>

## Notes

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9. For more information and resources, see: Alexandria Lockett, “Teaching with Wikipedia (Open Resources),” Google Drive, accessed October 14, 2019, [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1uNnzqiWmGMneEeDi-FOFT7BdIZ785DxKIOk\\_FIJAGMI/mobilebasic](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1uNnzqiWmGMneEeDi-FOFT7BdIZ785DxKIOk_FIJAGMI/mobilebasic), and the “ACS Symposium Webinar Packet,” Google Drive, accessed October 14, 2019, [https://issuu.com/alexandrialockett/docs/webinar\\_copy\\_of\\_2016\\_acs\\_symposium\\_](https://issuu.com/alexandrialockett/docs/webinar_copy_of_2016_acs_symposium_)

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16. At Spelman, first- and second-year students are required to complete ten hours of service per week through our Bonner Office of Civic Engagement. Convincing its director to authorize the edit-a-thon as a service event significantly increased Art+Feminism Edit-a-thon participation and radically transformed the institutions understanding of service.

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