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**Our Words (and Actions) Must Grow: Special Issue on
Antiracist Decolonial Teaching and Writing**
**Chy Sprauve, Anna Zeemont, Conor Tomás Reed, and
Sean Molloy, Guest Editors**

In Honor of the Earthworm: Pockets of Air for “Decolonial Riders”
and Activist Literacies in White Settler Writing Programs and
English Departments
Carmen Kynard

Antiracist Rhetorical Praxis in the 1960s-70s *Tech News/*
The Paper at the City College of New York
Conor Tomás Reed, Anna Zeemont, and Sean Molloy

Oil/School: Land and Affiliation in the Age of Fossil Ed
Daisy Atterbury

Community Notes, CUNY & the Bronx County Historical
Society Archives
Vani Kannan and Steven Payne

Activating Legacies of Freedom to Transform Economies of
Prestige in Academia and Ourselves
Javiela Evangelista

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CALL FOR ARTICLES

We seek manuscripts that are original, stimulating, well-grounded in theory, and clearly related to the complexities of providing writing support across contexts. All manuscripts must focus on basic writing and/or must situate settings of instruction or institutional agency in explicit relation to basic writing concerns. A familiarity with the journal and its readership should be evident through an introduction that engages with recent and ongoing debates, open questions, and controversies in and around basic writing.

We particularly encourage submissions that draw heavily on faculty voices, student voices, or student writing as supportive evidence for new observations; research written in non-technical language; and co-authored writing that provocatively debates more than one side of a central controversy. Recent *JBW* authors have also engaged more deeply with archival research. Work that reiterates what is known or that is mainly summative or overly practical will not be considered. Articles must work to substantively add to the existing literature by making explicit their central claims early on and by devising a clear and thorough methodology. Before submitting, potential authors should review published articles in the journal that model approaches to methodology and organization.

JBW scholarship reflects the full range of frameworks applied to composition and rhetoric, two-year college, and literacy studies. We invite authors to engage with any of the following methods or approaches: antiracist approaches; second-language theory; the implications of literacy; first-generation studies; discourse theory; just-writing and access studies; two-year college literature and student support; writing center theory and practice; ethnographic methods and program studies; program histories and critical university studies; and/or cross-disciplinary work. In addition, the journal is in active dialogue with the scholarship of translanguaging and multilingualism, multimodality, digital rhetorics, and justice studies. Authors should be explicit about their choice of framework and its appropriateness to the article's subject matter, including reference to how such choice models or revises a particular theoretical approach.

In view of basic writing history, we value submissions that help basic writing reassess its original assumptions, question its beneficence, and posit new and informed futures for writing support. We invite prospective authors to view the latest issues in our web archive at <https://wac.colostate.edu/jbw>.

Manuscript Submission Information

Submissions should run between 25 and 30 pages (7,500-9,000 words), including a Works Cited, and follow current MLA guidelines. To assure impartial review, include name(s), affiliation(s), mailing and email addresses, and a short biographical note for publication on the cover page only. The second page of the manuscript should include the title but no author identification, an abstract of 250-300 words, and a list of five to seven keywords.

Endnotes should be kept to a minimum. It is the author's responsibility to obtain written permission for excerpts from student writing, especially as this entails IRB review, which should be made transparent in an endnote for readers.

Contributions should be submitted as Word document attachments or Google links to jbwcony@gmail.com. Authors will receive a confirmation of receipt. The next communication will be on whether the manuscript, if geared toward a *JBW* audience, will be going out for peer review. If so, review reports generally follow in six to eight weeks. The editors also welcome proposals for guest-edited issues.

EDITORS' COLUMN

Our Words (and Actions) Must Grow

Introduction

We share this special issue of courageous essays on antiracist teaching and writing methods by US-based educators in a period of entwined war zones—in which antiracism, anti-sexism, solidarity with the people of Palestine and Lebanon and Iran, community defense against ICE abductions and murders, queer and trans life affirmation, healthcare and social welfare access, and much more are under attack by a vicious, neo-fascist regime. As in past roiling generations, the university—and the writing classroom within it—is a contradictory convergence space: it's both a haven for critical thought and action, and a battering ram to demolish these hallowed practices. It's both an engine for collective emancipatory horizons, and an enforcer of colonial extortion and discriminatory differentiation. We recognize that the university is not just its wealthy trustees and administration—many of whom paved the way for Trump's current onslaught with their own repression of campus protests in 2020-2024—but also its students, faculty, staff, alumni, and surrounding communities who share common cause to resist these myriad assaults from above.

It may sometimes feel impossible for our communities to adequately respond to these multiple crises. Overwhelm is indeed part of the far right's strategy to remake the world into a mythic past and an apocalyptic future. But the long arc of global liberation movements teaches us that justice-nurturing practices between learning spaces, communities, and the printed page grow the potential to build alternative approaches to social life. In this spirit, these essays highlight past and present social movement pedagogies and literacies to offer models for how we can get free together. We want to thank our friends and mentors at *JBW* for inviting us to guest-edit this issue, and for all their kind support.

The four of us came together here as current and former educators and students of the City University of New York (CUNY) with a shared commitment to honoring how these activisms play out in writing and classrooms, as well as between the campus and society. We each produced dissertations and related scholarship explicitly centering CUNY and Black, Puerto Rican, and coalitional freedom struggles in the US (Molloy; Reed; Sprauve; Zeemont). When crafting this issue, then, we primarily located our own understand-

ing of writing and education in the work of movement-building. We were particularly inspired by the vibrant counter-institutional legacies of CUNY, through which we have been shaped as students and workers. CUNY's own histories of radicalism and repression offer a prism for navigating this current moment in which the federal government and conservative think tanks are seeking to take over higher education. For instance, in the context of the 1970 Open Admissions struggle, CUNY teacher-writer-activist June Jordan described a philosophy of writing grounded in movement work that resisted the forms and contents of racial capitalism:

Our words must grow. If we abandon language, we will surely abandon the possible meanings of the word humane. . . . Words are the names of history, minute by minute. We must name the history to which we are responsible: We must name ourselves, and we must name the others we must recognize as crucial to the history our lives imply. We stand convicted by the language we employ. We live accessible to love according to the language we invent. We will know each other by our names. Our words must grow. Our eyes have grown. Our words must grow. (37, 42–43)

Sean Molloy is a retired Associate Professor of English at William Paterson University.

Conor ‘Coco’ Tomás Reed is a Puerto Rican-Irish, gender-fluid, street scholar of social movements in the Americas and the Caribbean, and the author of *New York Liberation School*. They collaborate with CLAGS: The Center for LGBTQ Studies and the CUNY Digital History Archive. Coco has been immersed in two decades of struggles at the City University of New York and in New York City around transforming education and public space, anti-imperialism, police and prison abolition, solidarity with Palestine and Puerto Rico, reproductive rights, housing justice, and beyond, and is now based in Philadelphia.

Chy Sprauve is a scholar in Composition-Rhetoric who studies the pedagogical and political impacts of mid-20th century Black literacy movements in the Southern United States. Their pedagogical and political interest in Composition-Rhetoric was nurtured by the insurrectionist literacy activism that occurred in the Sea Island Citizenship Schools and during Mississippi Freedom Summer. One of their main research goals is to develop a monograph that explores the impact of Black political organizing on literacy education.

Anna Zeemont (*she/they*) is a teacher-scholar of composition-rhetoric, American studies, education studies, and queer feminisms and an Assistant Professor of English and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at SUNY Buffalo State.

We are inspired by the expansive understanding of writing put forth by other queer and BIPOC writer-activists grounded in struggles for just education systems and just worlds, even as these names are not always centered in composition-rhetoric (Pritchard).

In formulating the idea for this special issue, we aimed to place students, activists, and communities as the leading forces of innovative writing practices and pedagogies. These participants are not mere objects of study or, in the case of the latter two, tangential or irrelevant to the more “authoritative,” “objective,” or “informed” ideas of established composition professors or writing program administrators. Writing is not defined by institutions but by those doing it (including, but not limited to, those within institutions). Communities and young people in and beyond the university compose, create, educate, and dream together to forge connections with one another and create new worlds.

Weaving Different Narratives Together

The articles compiled in this issue span institutional, spatial, and temporal contexts. However, beyond a broader shared commitment to trans/counter-disciplinarity and social movement work, we see three major threads that tie these five articles together. First, each of these pieces draws on recovered or documented history—whether via archival tracing of insurgent writing of past decades or recent student work—as a rhetorical praxis and methodology. Secondly, each of these pieces frames students not as passive subjects of research or in any way “basic,” but rather as people with political and rhetorical power on the front lines of radical thought and writing. Finally, each of these pieces offers a critique of what we call a “containment-conscious” pedagogy/rhetoric, including predatory inclusion (Seamster and Charron-Chénier; Reed; Taylor). These pieces understand that the academy is by default a carceral space animated by the structural logics of colonialism and anti-Blackness (Rodríguez; la paperson), but that it also gathers the fecund collective energies of people who can overturn these logics. Radical students, educators, and community members use writing and other modes of activism to unveil these structures and open up spaces for real critical work in solidarity with one another.

Indeed, in her piece “In Honor of the Earthworm: Pockets of Air for ‘Decolonial Riders’ and Activist Literacies in White Settler Writing Programs and English Departments,” Carmen Kynard writes:

the irony and contradiction of colonial schooling is that it also produces students who strike the empire back. . . From the moment BIPOC students entered American universities, they have connected

oppressions on-campus with off-campus social realities and have protested and challenged every hierarchical regime. (17)

Kynard traces her relationship with one such student, whom she calls Haven, whose institutional critique of her campus and program's anti-Blackness under the thin veneer of "DEI" created "pockets of air" for herself (33). Interweaving her own experiences of composition-rhetoric's white supremacist logics with Haven's story, Kynard finds that "turning [her] solidarity toward students like Haven isn't a difficult choice because [her] own fate is nested with [Haven's]" (21).

Like Kynard's piece, Coco, Anna, and Sean's article "Antiracist Rhetorical Praxis in the 1960s-70s *Tech News/The Paper* at the City College of New York" centers the rhetorical praxes of radical student writer-activists whose writing operates in contradistinction from the kind of rigidly monolingual, whitewashed discourses lauded by the racial-capitalist colonial university. In our historical case study of the birth of the student newspaper *The Paper* from 1966 to 1970 at CUNY's City College of New York (CCNY), we chronicle how student journalists deployed antiracist forms and content in a sophisticated and effective example of radical Black and Puerto Rican student literacy. With this story of how *Tech News* became *The Paper*—entwined with how CCNY became Harlem University (albeit temporarily)—we signal the institutional and interpersonal shifts that the linguistic praxis of working-class Black and Puerto Rican students can imaginatively conjure. We hope this example can be useful to educators, students, and communities who seek not only to oppose monolingual writing testing and teaching systems, but to reinvent sites of learning and literacy.

Meanwhile, Daisy Atterbury's article "Oil/School: Land and Affiliation in the Age of Fossil Ed" centers a different set of counter-institutional student writing to tell a story of the state's conflicting aims. They trace the work of Two Spirit climate activist and former University of New Mexico student, Jonathan Juarez-Alonzo, who led a series of climate strikes in Albuquerque in 2019, supported by thousands of college students. In a 2022 op-ed, Juarez-Alonzo reflected on their decision to leave the university indefinitely: "Students like myself feel our futures are being held hostage: Do we invest in ourselves and take advantage of free higher education? Or should we even be wasting these last fleeting years of our youth in a classroom when our elected leaders are leading us down a path toward total climate collapse?" (73). Atterbury utilizes Juarez-Alonzo's testimony to underscore that New Mexico offers free tuition (an "Opportunity Scholarship") for all state high-school graduates by relying on the oil and gas industry to bankroll such programs. While activists like Juarez-Alonzo demand that the state protect residents from these industries'

devastating environmental impacts, the same industries create “opportunity” for students. Meanwhile, drilling and fracking are prohibited in wealthy, settler-inhabited areas. Atterbury asks us to examine how, *on the same stretch of land*, ecological crises damage the water, land is preserved and protected from drilling, instructors commute to the university because they cannot afford to live in the vicinity, and students get to attend college “for free”—sponsored by settler colonialism. *The vexed story we must tell about land is the story we must learn to tell about ourselves.*

Vani Kannan and Steven Payne also take up the pedagogical and rhetorical significance of landed histories in their article “*Community Notes*, CUNY & the Bronx County Historical Society Archives.” They outline a vibrant effort to activate students and community members as archival workers to recover movement histories from groups like the Young Lords, El Comité, and White Lightning. They also generate attention via the “Hidden Black Histories of the Bronx” project to an African Burial Ground at Van Cortlandt Park, the former site of a plantation. Reflecting on this project thus far, they observe:

CUNY students and educators have already proven to be incredibly valuable partners in our ongoing efforts to transform the Bronx County Archives into a genuine community archive, not only deeply rooted in community activism and community life but also shaped by and determined by the active contributions and continuing insights of community members. (102-03)

This outward-facing pedagogy and campus-community collaboration is one that may make hierarchical campus faculty feel “compromised” or de-centered—and creates complicities that CUNY administrators may decry as inviting the unsanctioned presence of “outside agitators.” However, this work is vital precisely because it offers an investment in change and community-building that destabilizes neocolonial institutional positionalities in favor of different structures of care.

Finally, Javiela Evangelista’s piece “Activating Legacies of Freedom to Transform Economies of Prestige in Academia and Ourselves” expresses how invested community members, educators, and students can resist within the neoliberal university to embrace relations beyond its limits. For Evangelista, legacies of freedom refer to historical figures, texts, and social justice activism that resist structural oppression, which serve as both a political and pedagogical praxis. She invites us to activate legacies of freedom through “liberation literacies,” antiracist praxis, Indigenous praxis, and fugitive pedagogies (108). In dialogue with scholars Jamila Lyiscott, Lorgia García-Peña, and others, Evangelista deconstructs the power of language in the classroom via the ex-

ploration of liberation literacies. How does our reception of home languages in the classroom as instructors engage or squelch legacies of freedom (115)? Ultimately, Evangelista argues that activating legacies of freedom may require “pause and patience for openings” (117) in the space of the university, which is often invested in the plunder and profit we frequently associate with big business. Though the political (and pedagogical) environments in which we live can feel totalizing, this essay reminds us that together, we can “pause” (117), use our home languages in class, and make emancipatory openings much wider.

Basic Writing’s Troubled History and Painful Legacy

The history and legacy of Writing Studies—including “Basic Writing” studies—are inevitably enmeshed in the flows of revolution and counter-revolution unveiled by the pieces above. The logics of containment that we see in the current-day repression of writing and language are not new, but are grounded in supremacist ideologies of literacy and schooling that emerged in the counter-insurgency of the wake of the Civil Rights Movement. We agree with Kynard’s frustration with “the ways that rhetoric-compositionists are so complacent about the white colonization of writing instruction while proclaiming a commitment to democratic classrooms and progressive pedagogies” (15). With this in mind, as *JBW* prepares to observe its fifty-year anniversary, and as we add our voices to its pages, we also feel we should briefly address *JBW*’s troubled history and painful legacy.

As Sean, Coco, and Anna note in our article in this issue, Mina Shaughnessy between 1967 and 1978 developed and promoted the idea that a distinct pedagogy of “Basic Writing” formalism could benefit some imagined group of “Basic Writers”—often measured by shallow and invalid writing tests focused on small sentence errors. In 1975, “Error” was the theme and the subtitle of the very first *JBW* issue, including Shaughnessy’s argument as editor and founder for the existence of “diverse” basic writers who were so unprepared for college that teachers were required to return to “an old place,” emphasizing sentence errors (“Introduction” 1–3).

But we affirm here Sean and Alexis Bennett’s 2022 conclusion in their archival study (published in this journal) that Shaughnessy’s original 1970s Basic Writing program was

in fact a pedagogical white backlash to integration that segregated Black and Brown writing students into remedial courses, created barriers to their success, and denigrated them as “less than” other students—all in ways that were carefully obscured with euphemisms and codes. Basic Writing falsely equated integration and remediation by simply recasting writing courses for Black and Brown writing

students as the original “basic writers.” In no sense was this terrible harm accidental or truly innocent. Racism was not an accidental, unintended consequence in the original version of Basic Writing: it was instead its principal intended feature. (30)

Moreover, we agree with Sean and Alexis that while Shaughnessy’s specific Basic Writing narrative, “offered in similar forms from 1971 to 1978,” has since “grown larger and more complex. . . core and troubling elements of the original Basic Writing narrative have not changed since 1975—and cannot change within this paradigm” (n.1, 30).

We also recognize the often complex and subtle ways that “Basic Writing” continues to harm us today, as Sean, Silvester Fonville, and Abdus Salam explored in their 2020 archival history, validity inquiry, and case study (published in this journal):

so long as college writing programs and teachers define their work by searching out and measuring student deficits—by finding ways to argue that some incoming college students (like Sil and Abdus) are more “basic,” less able, less likely to succeed, and less valued than others, colleges will fall short of their mission to fight for racial and social justice. The poisoned trees planted four or five decades ago will not be fully rooted out. . . Reduced harm is still harm. Reduced indignity is still indignity. In the end, we must oppose, rethink and reimagine these biased old legacy systems until the day sometime soon when they are all ‘eliminated root and branch.’ (27)

The history and discursive politics of “Basic Writing” reveal the stronghold that top-down, deficit-oriented frameworks have long had on disciplinary conceptions of writing, which has had very real, harmful, material effects for fifty years and counting (Zeemont).

Soon after Shaughnessy’s death in 1978, *JBW* was reorganized into an independent peer-reviewed journal. From then until now, its editorial stance on Basic Writing pedagogies has been open to different views. *JBW* has published some articles criticizing systems that test and label some college writing students as “basic” (Lu; Jones; Shor; Molloy, Fonville, and Salam; Molloy and Bennett). Among these was Min-Zhan Lu’s groundbreaking critique of Shaughnessy’s politics of “white innocence,” which remains one of the most powerful indictments of disciplinary and institutional white supremacy in composition-rhetoric. It was also in *JBW* in 1997 that Ira Shor famously labeled CUNY’s Basic Writing and testing systems as a form of apartheid (Shor).

But *JBW* has also published many articles arguing *for* those very same segregationist premises and systems (see Greenberg; Laurence; Rondinone).

In the backdrop of these *JBW* dialogues, radical students (such as the activist group SLAM/Student Liberation Action Movement), faculty, and community members were engaging in their own conversations and protests fighting the elimination of “remedial classes” and the targeted push-out of students the Black, Brown, and working-class students enrolled in them. Meanwhile, the state, city and affiliated neoliberal think tanks used the rhetorics of minoritized students’ “basic”-ness as a strategy to legitimize pedagogies of containment and racial-colonial dispossession on and off campus (Zeemont). And “an unavoidable implied meta-argument in a journal (and in a field) that still keeps the name ‘Basic Writing’ is that the enterprise of determining which entering college students are more ‘basic’ than others. . . continues to have arguable merit” (Molloy and Bennett 29).

As they contend with the troubled history and painful legacy of “Basic Writing,” we know our colleagues at *JBW* have long rejected the idea that “basic writers” exist. They know that writing pedagogies and testing instruments grounded in racist and colonial formalism are incompetent, biased, and harmful. They teach, research, edit, and write to promote justice in writing instruction, just as we hope to do with this issue. That is why they have supported our issue and why we have agreed to join them here.

Continuations

When thinking of teacher-activists in the fields of critical pedagogy and Writing Studies, scholars may tend to reach for the same handful of names. While these figures are important, when we consider the praxes that inspire us to reshape the form of the writing classroom, we think of those who taught and learned through Black freedom struggles. We think of Septima Clark, a lifelong teacher and member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference; Ella Baker, a field secretary for the NAACP and lead facilitator of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC); and Bernice Robinson, a hairdresser-turned-educator in the Sea Island Citizenship Schools (Sprauve). We think of the student-teachers who traveled to Mississippi in the summer of 1964 to teach in outdoor classrooms, churches, and homes. We think of a young Kwame Ture (Stokely Carmichael) who asked Freedom Summer students to question why they believed their use of Black language was wrong. We think of desks forming a U-shape and students opening up class singing spirituals. We think about how no writing these students produced would be “basic” to them. Such teacher-activists formed a rhetorical educational praxis that is part of the foundation of critical pedagogy, but moreover, their pedagogical and political work serves as a critical launchpad for the social justice work

of today's writing instructors and scholars. The work presented in this issue furthers the political project of these essential educators.

This issue's contributors tangle with the harmful systems described above, grounding some of their theories in essential historical context. Coco, Anna, and Sean describe how the unsung interventions of Black and Puerto Rican City College student journalists altered the political conditions and institutional directions of CUNY, even if their story was obscured by a counter-vailing literacy legacy based on the perceived errors of "basic writers." Kynard discusses how the understanding of humanities in the academy cannot be stretched if institutional anti-Blackness is perpetuated in these spaces, while Kannan and Payne reveal how historical archives often exclude BIPOC and poor and working populations. In both of these pieces, the function of history is clear. For Kynard, these academic fields have traditionally lionized a sliver of (read: white) thinkers and theorists, and "antiracist" methods to address this historical trend fall short, as many administrators and educators in the academy will not commit to a true divestment from pedagogical instruments rooted in racial oppression. Kannan and Payne, meanwhile, underscore the importance of archival recovery in documenting the lives of Black and Brown Bronxites. Because their documentation is community-based, their writing shines a light on lives outside of the classroom. These pieces point to racialized absences inherent in the institution (including in its own chronology of social uplift) and spotlight the theory and praxis that explode these instruments of oppression.

Atterbury reminds us to think about "history as storytelling" (73), while Evangelista asserts that "economies of prestige" present in the university need to be transformed (105). Atterbury—as well as Coco, Anna, and Sean—argue that while some "stories" become enshrined in the academy as theory (73), other narratives (read: narratives by nonwhite storytellers) are relegated to the edges and borders. Atterbury highlights how the university's political (and pedagogical) act of containment often stands at odds with the needs of its students. The stories that exist on the periphery are not "basic" or in need of correction. Instead, they act as a corrective, much like the Bronx-based archive Kannan and Payne offer; the pages of *The Paper* that Coco, Anna, and Sean lift up; and the "endarkened politics" Kynard exhorts us to practice (16). Evangelista underlines legacies of freedom, ancestral and otherwise (108), as an essential feature of liberation within and outside of the academy. She argues that institutional "economies of prestige" can be ruptured via student exploration of legacies of freedom that engages students' immediate communities (109). Like the other contributors, Evangelista understands that the chronicle is key to mapping the stories sitting on the edge; it is the key to recognizing that what has been historically understood to be "basic" is rather complex.

For all of our contributors, historicity operates in the foreground of their work. We too believe that the exploration of history indispensably functions as rhetorical praxis, and is indeed a precondition for developing strategic directions to transform our present catastrophes. In a social and political landscape that is attempting to close the door on thorough “case studies” of all kinds on the path to obstructing all thoughtful approaches to compassionate co-existence, acknowledging the primacy of historical context in our scholarship is more crucial than ever. Those who wish to erase from our curricula the liberation-focused studies that were born out of effective coalitional struggles a half-century ago demonstrate exactly how deeply these movements re-shaped our social consciousness across generations. If the pedagogical and political lineages celebrated in this special issue were not so dangerous to the present neo-fascist regime, why would they be under such intensified attack?

Our work as scholars and teachers of writing is not discrete from these larger political dynamics. In spite of the atmosphere of academic repression and the administrative impulse to curtail our political imagination, becoming silent and capitulating to depoliticized pedagogical and theoretical frameworks “will not protect” us, as CUNY poet-activist-educator Audre Lorde reminds us (40). Now is the time to follow the lead of movement workers and eschew the race- and power-evasive frameworks and theories of change historically entrenched in our very fields of scholarship (Fitzsimmons and Prasad; Kynard, *Vernacular*).

Against the lure of cynical despair about the inevitability of far right fever dreams, or the hollow promise of blinkered solutions to reclaim a social order (or university model) that has dehumanized and impoverished so many, we urge readers to be inspired by these essays and invent new directions for our shared story. With so much at stake, may we embark on different journeys of study and struggle—across our universities and communities—that can grow our words (and actions!) toward transformative collective change.

—Chy Sprauve, Anna Zeemont, Conor Tomás Reed, Sean Molloy,

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Works Incited

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In Honor of the Earthworm: Pockets of Air for “Decolonial Riders” and Activist Literacies in White Settler Writing Programs and English Departments

Carmen Kynard

ABSTRACT: White settler logics show up so deeply in the dailyness of writing programs (especially when housed in English departments) that it blocks our programs from even coming close to reaching equity, antiracist/anti-colonial pedagogy, or even basic, justice-based approaches to writing. In this essay, I offer an endarkened feminist narrative of such white settler workings while I simultaneously position undergraduate students who write and create their own activist literacies as what la paperson calls “decolonial riders.”

KEYWORDS: anti-colonial pedagogy; Black intellectual counterlife; Black rhetorics; disciplinary whiteness; endarkened narrative

After working as a writing program administrator (WPA), I was at my wit's end and couldn't wait to get back into the classroom. In one job interview for a non-administrative faculty position, the hiring committee consisted of both literary-focused and rhetoric-focused faculty, all of whom were white. A white woman asked me how I would adjust to teaching. I was baffled by the (HR-noncompliant) question directed so specifically and aggressively at me. She had obviously researched my time at my previous college, but she didn't fully understand my role there. I was not in a 50% teaching + 50% research position because I was a WPA. The interviewer must have read the confusion on my face because she then gave me very basic information about what it was like to teach multiple sections of first-year writing as if I wouldn't know and hadn't done this my whole career (and just a few train stops away from her at a neighboring school at that). I was annoyed because the kind of teaching the interviewer described was not something the interviewer had ever done herself while my CV provided evidence of multiple such teaching experiences, many times over (after all, I looked her up too as any good interviewee does). My response was simple: “Well, I’m a

WPA. That's much harder. Your teaching load would be much lighter work than what I do as a WPA right now because I'm the one making sure you get it right." It was seriously the first, honest answer that came to my mind. One of the members of the committee, a rhet-comp person, spit out his water. He was trying to laugh but the choking coughed him up too much. He seemed surprised that I would put it out there like that. I really wasn't trying to be contentious (though certainly a little stank-attitude-esque). I was just stating a fact to someone who didn't know better than to ask such dumb questions out loud and to be so non-compliant with the basic hiring protocols of a public institution. What you NOT gon do is school me on my own discipline when you ain't learnt and have no business on a hiring committee anyway.

I am not someone out here cheerleading for rhetoric-composition studies, because I don't bow allegiance to any western discipline, especially when academic disciplines have offered so little epistemological and political challenge to anti-blackness. Ain't no allegiance to Black folx in these PWI-university streets and so I have none to give back. Black feminist praxis teaches me that many things can be true at the same time though (Davis et al.). I can question and rupture the boundaries of western disciplinary confinement in and out of rhetoric-composition studies. I can check someone who paternally/maternally denigrates my discipline and the classroom work that I love. I can full-body whatever fool thinks they can disrespect the body that I do this work with. I can hold onto righteous rage and refuse the white supremacist requirement that I simply forget and co-sign past harms. That's how a Black feminist shows up to rhetoric-composition classrooms, interviews, department meetings, and the institutional hoops and closed doors of our universities.

I suspect that I went from a look of consternation at this interview to one of sheer annoyance (I don't usually fake the funk). *Who is this fool interviewing me who doesn't know jack about rhetoric-composition studies in the 21st century?* Why yall even allow this mess? Today I know that such interview experiences are a sure sign of bigger problems under white settler colonization and the specific ways it targets rhetoric-composition programs. I have

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come to expect this now, but I have never adjusted to the ways that rhetoric-compositionists are so complacent about the white colonization of writing instruction while proclaiming a commitment to democratic classrooms and progressive pedagogies.

Today I am ashamed to admit that I often referred to compositionists who do not challenge their harmful colleagues and racist structures in English departments in a very negative way: as worms. No courage. No spine. No ability to stand up anywhere. Just worms squirming along. I regret talking this way now, not about compositionists, but about worms. My ableism meant that I had pejoratively associated weakness with diverging spinal function, thereby incorrectly and offensively marking resistance as able-bodied. A lie! I should have known better than to talk that way! My total lack of eco-consciousness and relationality further meant that I also dismissed earthworms who have a very vital ecological role. As someone who likes to garden, I take great care of the earthworms who cross my path. And as someone relatively new to Texas, where I now live, I scream for joy and offer motivational mantras to every worm I meet since the dense clay soil here prevents their livelihood. Yes, I talk to worms cuz this life right here in Texas is hard-earth. Literally and figuratively. In ways seemingly unrivalled by anything else, my miraculously flexible friends redistribute all kinds of organic matter as they open pockets of air for everything that comes near them. They decompose and aerate everything in their pursuits of original pathways that, in turn, help everything that they touch. I owe the beauty and sustainability of my garden to earthworms. We would be blessed to have rhetoric-compositionists like that, and I should never have suggested otherwise. Our discipline would be transformed if we all behaved like earthworms. I realize that I am making some serious allegations that might offend many, because of course, it is sometimes easier to criticize my “wild accusations” than the actual goings-on of one’s own institution. But I have seen some things and plan to pour that tea here.

White settler logics show up so deeply in the dailyness of writing programs (especially when housed in English departments) that it blocks our programs from even coming close to reaching equity, antiracist/anti-colonial pedagogy, or even basic, justice-based approaches to writing. And while justice might not be very many scholars’ goals, they should at least acknowledge that an acquiescence to and ignoring of the white supremacist workings of professional settings can never result in democratic classrooms, especially those including BIPOC. In this essay, I offer an endarkened feminist narrative of such white settler workings while I simultaneously position

undergraduate students who write and create their own activist literacies as what la paperson calls “decolonial riders.”

Black Feminist Storymaking as Methodology

The tea spilled in this essay flows as an endarkened narrative of the white settler colonial occupation of rhetoric-composition programs. My notions of “endarkened” come from Black feminist thought, most notably Cynthia Dillard’s now 25-year-old treatise, “The Substance of Things Hoped for, the Evidence of Things Not Seen.” As a challenge to the Enlightenment-born philosophies that nurtured western Europe’s colonization and enslavement of the rest of the world, Dillard proposed “endarkened” work. For me, endarkened politics deliberately challenge western Europe’s narrow, exclusionary definition of humanity that is foundational to the humanities and social science regimes of the university (Jackson; Wynter).

As an endarkened narrative, I also think in terms of Black narrative sequencing as it was theorized by Geneva Smitherman in 1977 (Redd). Central to Black Language, narrative sequencing is not merely counter-institutional critique. It is also wedded culturally and psychically to Black life and survival (Baker-Bell, *Linguistic Justice*). Black narrative sequencing relies on multiple, meandering stories—not a singular and controlling storyline—that take you to and through complicated experiences. It commits to a non-linear understanding of time where the Black past, present, and future are always wedded (Thomas). No singular story exists without the meanings of the others and thereby allows for a fuller sense of Black life and literacies. Narrative sequencing is more than just a writing method, but a way for me to access and verbalize the institutional politics of race, anti-blackness, and misogyny that might otherwise destroy me.

Black Language’s narrative sequence and Black feminism’s endarkened philosophies provide access to what I call Black feminist storymaking (Kynard, “Oh No”). I thereby inherit the language and wherewithal to understand and critique white settler themes that have confronted me at each and every institution where I have worked: Black college, MSI, HSI, PWI; urban and suburban locales; private and public schools; wannabe R1, social-climbing R2, down-and-out comprehensive, or white-canon-loving liberal arts institutions. Every single place promised new, exciting changes. They all said new possibilities were coming. Each and every time. Everywhere. But I stay like Cardi B when it comes to all these claims and promises of transformation and simply retort: “*how come I ain’t seent it yet?*”

“And If Ya Don’t Know, Now Ya Know”

White settler logic may be ubiquitous, but so is resistance and defiance to it. There ain’t never been one without the other and certainly not in classrooms. White supremacy has never won, otherwise it wouldn’t need to keep unleashing suppressive tactics. As theorists like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Aimé Césaire, Cheikh Hamidou Kane, and Walter Rodney have always shown us: the irony and contradiction of colonial schooling is that it also produces students who strike the empire back. This is the crux of how la papierson defines “decolonial riders” and how I locate activist literacies therein. From the moment BIPOC students entered American universities, they have connected oppressions on-campus with off-campus social realities and have protested and challenged every hierarchical regime (Kynard, *Vernacular*). The newest architectural structures of so many universities are now built with student defiance in mind where top administrative buildings/offices/floors are inaccessible, locked up, and hidden far, far away. They know students are eventually coming for them.

Students’ activist literacies are also lodged in the everyday life of classrooms. These are the moments of personal insight, multimodal design, and cultural-rhetorical impact where students are actively, creatively, culturally, and deliberately building a race-radical critique against the whiteness of the institution that is holding them captive. I center race-radicality in this equation because challenging the American university must mean situating its problems in white supremacy, plantation histories, and land-grabbing (Grande; Dumas; Boggs et al.). This everydayness expands the notion of activism past marches and public protests. For students who are caretakers of multigenerational families, disabled, food-insecure, unhoused, or just plain ol’ tired, tired, tired, the notion of activist literacies must be expanded beyond campus protests. By the same token, I am challenging the supposed radicalness of those students marching and chanting up the block but sliding back to class insisting that they are equally radical when their schoolish essay writing is locked into European argument styles and white standardized English.

I can never anticipate exactly how activist literacies will look in my classes in any given semester. I just know to look. Haven,¹ a young Black woman organizer who has now graduated, is the student who helped me see and understand one particular university where I have worked most clearly. She was BIG MAD that her senior year of college was the first place where she learned about Black rhetoric and Black Language as a writing/rhetoric major.

This is a typical reaction that I experience from students every semester, but Haven gave the chronicle of her anger a name in a project that I love: “‘And If Ya Don’t Know, Now Ya Know’: Black Rhetoric and Language and the Politics of Educational Withholding.” This was a multimodal project named with a popular line from rapper, The Notorious B.I.G. AKA Biggie Smalls. Haven shared this project with her classmates that featured her own artwork, quotes from her favorite Black rhetoric and Black Language scholars, as well as videos, gifs, speeches, and music videos that set the critical context of Black rhetorical study in white supremacist schools. In “And If Ya Don’t Know, Now Ya Know,” Haven calls Black Language and rhetoric her “comeback from educational withholding” and thus offers a clear charge to language teacher-scholars: an intersectional, antiracist classroom cannot withhold Black people’s language and rhetorics from them and imagine itself to be on the side of freedom. I immediately loved this coinage of educational withholding and wanted to know how Haven knew so much about the Notorious B.I.G. because she wasn’t born yet when he made the song. This was largely a distraction to the work at hand, so Haven ignored me and stayed focused while I fancifully imagined her first words as an adorable toddler coming from Biggie’s lyrics. I had a good time. Haven may have had fun too, it’s hard to say, because she did not come to play: she was the one who started putting the university’s diversity initiatives on full blast in the course, a process that her classmates pursued the entire semester. I mean they named the names and gave me an introduction to the department and the school that I have never forgotten.

Haven kicked open the door with this first project of the semester and it stayed poppin from there. She locates schooling and the way it practices language education as part of the way that it enacts racism, anti-blackness, and colonization (Baker-Bell, “Dismantling”). In the class where I met her, my students and I study the ways that Black Language is a rule-governed system. I won’t spend time on these linguistic facts here, since Black linguists have covered that so much better, but we must understand that this grammatical system is hundreds of years old (see John Baugh, the Rickfords, Lisa Green, Samy Alim, and Elaine Richardson). So when I routinely say things like: *she be gettin on my last nerve*—I can trace that back to my ancestors across centuries. This is called Habitual Be and it is a tense not found in standardized, white mainstream English. Understanding the rules of Habitual Be or even removing it ain’t hard, but you must ask yourself why Black people would still incorporate this Africanized verb tense into their language after hundreds of years. Why would we choose white language over a defiant Black legacy

like that and act as if whiteness has ever done anything radical like that? The math ain't mathing. Haven started asking the same questions.

I met Haven in an upper division rhetoric seminar at a PWI in the south with eighteen other students where seven of the students were BIPOC women. I hadn't developed any real bonds with colleagues yet since I was still in my first year there, and the earful that my undergraduate students gave me has tainted that possibility for years to come. At one point, I even had to ask students to stop saying folx's names and explained compliance issues to them just to keep us all safe. Inspired by Haven, the BIPOC women dragged one white faculty member so completely that it hurt even my feelings even though I had only ever said hello to this person once in the hallways. As it ends up, their critiques tracked well with the college-wide NSSE data that I saw many years later where BIPOC students reported getting "diversity-related" content outside of classrooms, not from their course curriculum; meanwhile white students reported that they did not seek "diversity"-related activities outside of class and did not feel prepared to address DEI issues in their professional and personal lives after graduation. This was readily accessible data and yet no one in the writing program or department ever discussed it. There was no real need to remove DEI, as is the national tenor, since it wasn't there to start with. Such DEI initiatives have been largely removed across the country now, but they were never antiracist, radically inclusive, or transformative in the first place.

Many years prior to the dissemination of this easy-to-believe data, the major beef of the young BIPOC women in Haven's class was that many of the majority-white faculty left it up to them to challenge racist students while faculty said and did nothing and, in sum, profited from the labor of BIPOC students in their classrooms. Many faculty even comforted and supported white students in their racist or race-limited understandings. These young BIPOC women undergraduates described themselves at length as having to teach faculty's classes for them when it came to the so-called "diversity" topics. As far as Haven was concerned, she was the DEI content and had a more sophisticated background knowledge than the faculty. Imagine then my astonishment when in that same semester, an instructor who talked quite passionately about how she preferred teaching upper division courses because the students were so much more receptive to her DEI visions ended up being the exact same person Haven and her peers shouted down and dissed like a bitter regret every week in my class. Like Sara Ahmed reminds us, DEI was never radically oriented anyway so the stakes are really low here, but even the lowest stakes were out of reach as far as Haven and her

classmates were concerned.

The focus of that course was an advanced seminar in Black rhetoric called *WORD IS BOND: Black Language and Rhetoric* (see <https://www.funkdafied.org/>). On the one hand, it might not make sense for students to be going to town like this given the course topic. But that's just the thing. You can't have young folx reading and studying the rhetoric of someone like Maria Stewart telling them "Why Sit Ye Here and Die?" and think they ain't gon apply that up and down and all around in very real-life ways in every class discussion and in every writing/composing/design assignment they can. As far as many of the students were concerned, if Maria Stewart was sayin this stuff back in the 1830s, then why can't white faculty almost 200 years later get it together enough to offer just basic inclusion? And that was the question from the white students who were just as ready to go there as the BIPOC students. If you are standing against a colonial approach to schooling, then you will land right in the middle of an anti-colonial critique of every micro-working of your school. I never asked students a thing about the college, school, or department. I do, however, place race-critical personal experiences right alongside historical events and published theory in my pedagogy. Students' embodied experiences of racial oppression is as theoretical and academic as the readings I assign.

Interactions with students that deconstruct the colonialism of their classrooms, teachers, and schooling are central to the work of an anti-colonial pedagogy and are the bedrock of what I see as activist literacies. You couldn't stop it if you wanted to. I had never read Maria Stewart's "Why Sit Ye Here and Die?" as a lens into the racial politics of teaching and learning at a PWI. The students did that work without needing my guidance. I was their follow-through, but not their catalyst. The work of anticolonial pedagogy—as antiracist content, non-patriarchal instructional style, anti-ableist structuring, and an anti-western approach to textual design—is the work of writing/rhetoric/composition classrooms. An anticolonial pedagogy is even more immediately "application-based" than how we often think of "vocational" or "skills-based" learning, because an anticolonial pedagogy is a lens through which students are unseeing, acting against, undoing, and talking/writing back to the deliberate organization of their white, neoliberalist learning and lives. Such students are the "decolonial riders" of our discipline.

The Fatal Workings of White Solidarity in Writing Programs

Centering students as “decolonial riders” alongside their activist literacies means, first and foremost, trusting undergraduates. Students are most often interrogated as if they are criminals by compliance officers while faculty call them naïve and denigrate them even further if their criticisms don’t emanate from a language and posture rooted in a white affect. The dispositions of many faculty do not register to BIPOC students as critical of inequity and unfairness, because their white solidarity compromises BIPOC trust. Breaking up with institutional white solidarity is certainly risky, especially when it is so much easier to remain silent or only challenge and question BIPOC faculty and administrators (a tactless practice for both white and non-white folx at universities). I’m old skool Hip Hop though, just like my gurl, Haven, so I uphold the tradition of artists like Whodini. I ain’t looking for racist and/or compromised friends at a racist institution so I know to my core: “Couldn’t trust her with cheese, let alone your keys/ With friends like that you don’t need enemies.”

Because my faculty position where I met Haven came with a distinguished title, I often received emails from undergraduate students who I had never met with complaints about their writing classes. At first, I assumed that they did not understand the administrative organization of the department and were reaching out based on a naïve mistake. It didn’t take me long to challenge my own thinking there. Between my image, title, and biographical description, they were reaching out quite intentionally. I even retained my own legal counsel on when, where, and why I might need to report an instance when students shared things with me that needed to be escalated. Because students’ complaints were coming at me so rapid-fire, I needed some critical context to avoid getting caught up in the willful, illegal ignoring of basic compliance that was all around me. When you must keep a lawyer on retainer based on what students share with you while most faculty just ignore all of it, something is very, very wrong.

Turning my solidarity toward students like Haven isn’t a difficult choice because my own fate is nested with hers. Her anger at the “educational withholding of Black Rhetoric and Black Language” alongside her formidable critique of DEI initiatives is not a request for more diversity hires. It is an indictment of institutions and the disciplines and actors who maintain and replicate social inequity. Deracinated curriculum is not an accident; it must be deliberately and actively maintained so that it can sacrifice students like Haven who are granted no place in the university for a deep, meaningful,

Black intellectual life.

As a case in point, a few rhet-comp faculty at Haven's university once contended that a past hire was promised to them in cultural rhetorics, but a committee erased a real focus on cultural rhetorics in the job ad. The literature and creative writing faculty, of course, denied the allegation and saw the critique as misguided. I was not on the faculty then and so had no idea what happened. When I finally read the job ad, I was stunned by its incoherence and inability to name cultural rhetorics given the ways faculty claimed the ad was so excellent and inclusive of the discipline:

The English Department invites applications for a tenure-track position in Black Studies (African American, Africana, and/or Cultural Rhetorics). Rank open. We are a department that values diversity, interdisciplinary research and teaching in ethnic studies, women and gender studies, and the intersections of literature, technology, rhetoric, and writing. We seek scholars with a sustained research agenda, a strong commitment to undergraduate and graduate teaching, and the desire to join colleagues in contributing to new programs in critical race and ethnic studies and African American & Africana studies.

Adding on "cultural rhetorics" last in a parenthesis that lists things that are nonequivalent and that are all supposed to be synonymous with Black Studies is nasty work. My confusion was further confounded by the fact that there was never a Black studies department or major (and the off-and-on minor was minimally supported). It's hard to tell what this job even is. The relatively new ethnic studies department had three tenure-track faculty members (some with spouses on campus) when I arrived and is now gone. The word "critical" in critical race and ethnic studies was changed to "comparative," because the bogeyman of critical race theory was already alive and well—and this was way before the Conservative Right fully appropriated its meaning. The few brave souls who critiqued this ad were right: this is not a public presentation that imagines Black Rhetorics/cultural rhetorics scholars as an audience or that addresses the exploitation of Black scholarship and praxis. Haven could have written a better job ad that included cultural rhetorics in just her second week of class, but calling the department a place that values "diversity" would have been absolutely diabolical for her. It's an all-around hot mess, no matter how you slice it.

The real clincher came when a white rhet-comp faculty member apolo-

gized to members of the department for wrongly accusing them of erasing cultural rhetorics and this is exactly what I mean by the lure and romance of white solidarity. In my mind, the faculty member should have been apologizing instead to every single BIPOC-focused scholar in the discipline, the founders and main practitioners of cultural rhetorics, for: 1) not knowing how to even name and describe their work with just one sentence, too busy bowing down to senior white colleagues instead; and 2) drawing up an exploitative job ad where a Black Studies colleague would be contractually obligated to one department but also designing and supporting another (all with one paycheck and one appointment) and then saying and doing nothing when it is disbanded. It should be obvious that it takes an inordinate amount of work and strain to get a university to value the college literacies of rigorous reading + intensive writing + digital content creation + multimodal design and support the components of what I see as today's comprehensive writing program: summer "bridge" courses, undergraduate writing program, writing across the curriculum, writing/rhetoric minor and major, writing center, PhD program in rhetoric/writing. It takes even more grinding and outright revolt to maintain a comprehensive writing program that simultaneously challenges the white supremacist indoctrination that college writing has always represented in the United States. I question the commitment to the equal humanity/language/literacy of all if the Black-focused hire must support and rally such writing program work while also designing and helping a whole other department elsewhere on a campus with so woefully few Black faculty. Is the goal to work Black rhetoric-compositionists to death in a program that has never addressed whiteness and racism? Or is the goal to divorce Black studies from the writing program by making its researcher/practitioners in rhetoric do their politics elsewhere? Of course, this particular university and example are not an anomaly since the field's white-washed job ads try to target BIPOC in similar ways. These are not innocent mistakes though. These are the results of allying solely with whiteness and sacrificing the BIPOC-centered scholarship and praxis that has always been right there for the taking in rhetoric-composition studies.

It was as if just mentioning the two words, cultural rhetorics, in this job ad was enough to be awe-inspiring, worthy of deep gratitude, and emblematic of deep inclusion. This might explain why many years after Haven graduated, the suggestion that the undergraduate major be changed from "Writing" to "Cultural Rhetorics, Writing, and Design (CRWD)" was met with resistance from the longest-standing white rhet-comp faculty: wealthy parents wouldn't like it (euphemism for only white parents though, not the

kind of folx who raised Haven); students are not attracted to rhetoric; there are no appeals to the job market, especially publishing; no one on the planet has ever heard of rhetoric; and on and on. And then, there was my favorite excuse and coinage of all: AUDIENCE. At this point, audience is just a screen for folx who won't unravel western conventions and decenter whiteness. Meanwhile, at this time: the existing major only attracted 33 students out of an undergraduate student population of 10,000+ students; I spent hours mentoring the FEW disabled, queer, first-generation, BIPOC, community-college transfers, and/or working-class majors in my advising cohort who all complained about the violence of classroom experiences in their required courses; and first and second-year students in my own rhetoric/writing classes (with a class size of 35—which was, ironically, bigger than the major) had already been turned off from the field based on comp and comp II classes they had taken. This is an undergraduate major that appealed to less than 0.33% of students. Since that's not even half of 1%, it seems there might be some audience problems here. The white rhetorics of the mainstream offerings of the major (titles, sequence, content, purposing) aren't working to attract even a mostly white student population. White students are often merely a convenient scapegoat for white faculty's fear and race-evasion. The educational withholding that Haven so adamantly criticized goes from the job ad to the construction of the major.

Even though white solidarity can get you caught out there on real dumb mess, it remains a siren song. Word on the street is that when I was hired for one of the university positions that I have held, one white faculty member expressed her deep concern about what it would do to their department if someone like me was a member. This is a type of prevalent department talk at colleges where there is no collective of older Black professors, especially Black women professors, who have worked across institutions at the level of tenure for many years (because the university hired no BIPOC faculty in the 20th century). White interlocutors haven't had multiple opportunities to have their racism publicly read for filth by a critical body of senior Black faculty and so have lived a life of unchecked, public, racist discourse in their departments. To this faculty member's dismay and many others, I got the job. By the time I arrived, this more vocal person was an administrator at the helm where less than six months after my arrival, a race-based discrimination lawsuit indicting the department came through. It seems like she was worried about the wrong person and the wrong thing and at the wrong time. She had much bigger fish to fry. I ain't never been the one hauled off for depositions in court, ain't never co-signed folx who are, and ain't never

let that kind of stuff go down on my watch when I was administering any program. All I could do was shake my head and move on. Like I said, they just get caught out there! As Tsedale M. Melaku and Angie Beeman have shown in their qualitative study of the experiences of BIPOC women in academia during and after the crises of COVID-19 and national protests against anti-Black profiling and police murders, Black women's constant managing of racial/gender aggression is considered part of the job requirement. When antiracism in neoliberal institutions is limited, at best, to liberalist pity for BIPOC suffering and refuses material risk and psychic divestment of whiteness, it replicates institutional racism rather than challenges it.

It should come as no surprise that, as of this date, Haven and her close friends were the last mass of Black students in the writing/rhetoric major. In fact, in the fall semester directly following white resistance to changing the major from "Writing" to "Cultural Rhetorics, Writing, and Design (CRWD)," numbers in the major plummeted even more. Meanwhile, the number of Latine students at the university had steadily increased, almost doubling in the past ten years. The same cannot be said of the major. Like Haven's Black peers, her Latine friends have now also graduated, with only three Latine students now in the major (and likely also graduating soon). It is not as simple as scapegoating the general enrollment trends of a PWI. Across thirteen years, the major struggled to keep up with the institution's diversity and has never achieved it. This PWI is thus more diverse than the major. The major is not a microcosm of the PWI's whiteness; it is whiter. The required Comp I and Comp II are obviously also implicated here. With two required courses for all students at the university, taught by the same people who teach in the major and minor, not even 1% of the student population stay with us, and not one single Black student is compelled enough by Comp I or Comp II to pursue this major or minor. After tracing the patterns of Black and Latine major enrollments across the university, they are equally, if not more so, interested in the social sciences and humanities than STEM. It's only this college's version of writing and rhetoric that does not appeal to them. These facts are not surprising when, despite the increase in hiring of BIPOC faculty, no change or even conversation about curriculum has happened. It reminds me of what James Sledd would call "boss compositionists," who "maintain and defend the indefensible while tinkering with an iniquitous system just enough to obscure its iniquities but never enough to change it deeply" (147). It is the same white content, just repackaged from the mouths of BIPOC folk, that doesn't even attract many white students. There is no need for writing programs to lament the "anti-DEI" moves of the administration, state, or

nation when the track record looks like this.

It is truly a wonder that any university would allow a writing and rhetoric major to operate this way and never even ask for a program-wide assessment of Comp I and Comp II. No program, however, could achieve these levels of Black and Brown displacement and ethnic cleansing without large departmental and college-wide, even if benevolent, consent. At the time of this writing, Brown and Black children were chronically absent in K-12 schools. David Kirkland traces these issues at forwardED in “Where Have Our Children Gone? Chronic Absenteeism and the Disappearance of Black, Latinx, and Economically Less Advantaged Students Post-COVID.” Kirkland shares that in places like New York City, chronic absenteeism after COVID rose from 27% in 2019 to over 40% in 2022, especially impacting working-class/working-poor BIPOC students. Meanwhile, in places like Los Angeles, absenteeism among Black students in fall of 2024 was at 57% while districts across the US reported absenteeism spikes (Blume). As Kirkland argues, this absence of BIPOC students sits at the amalgamation of multiple forces: administrative failures; schools’ disconnection from students’ lives; refusals to meet the needs of the most vulnerable populations; social inequities related to housing, hunger, and trauma; lack of safety in schools; ongoing inability to offer a sense of belonging and identity affirmation for BIPOC, queer students, and disabled students; hostility and disregard from a still-too-white teaching force. It is not a coincidence that while K-12 schools have been purging Black students, our writing program was doing the same. I was the only person who noticed and only a few others even expressed alarm.

Haven has maintained not just herself but a deep critique of these spaces in her writing and in her persuasive appeals to her classmates, all with a Black visual and multimodal creative flair, and all with Black Language wisdoms fully in tow. When you consider all the ways institutions co-sign racist everyday life, we must see the work that Haven has done pushing her thinking beyond the models assigned to her as activist literacies. After all, Haven finished a program and system of schooling that was quite literally trying to remove her. Nothing in the academic life of her university or writing program is designed with her in mind and yet she has constructed a rich Black counterlife right up in it anyway. That’s a helluva thing that, quite honestly, most faculty struggle to achieve in a racist academy.

Racism—The Real Reason Why Rhetoric-Composition Studies Won't Stand Alone

Early in my career as a compositionist, my colleagues who did literary theory didn't understand how I, as a rhet-comp scholar, was making connections to cultural studies. I don't really label my work this way, but this is what they said, nonetheless. I've always found these monikers problematic, because it resuscitates a 1990s racist binary between those who look at race/gender/social issues as cultural studies (i.e., BIPOC) vs. those who just do "Literature" (i.e., white people who represent the "real" discipline). I do consider myself intellectually raised by the who's who of folk often connected to cultural studies like Stuart Hall, bell hooks, Gayatri Spivak, Walter Benjamin, and Antonio Gramsci (Dworkin; Morley and Chen; Hall). However, I have always just called myself and my work Black: Black Theory/ Black Feminist/ Black Intellectual/ Black Radical Tradition. Black. The compositionists in that department were quick to tell me about the literature faculty's concerns, but they never shared how they challenged their colleagues' thinking. Because they didn't. And never have. With cultural studies as a field of study that examines expressions of power and social structures in relation to class, ethnicity, gender, race, ideology, sexuality, and nationality, it is indeed sad that no one could understand or defend how cultural studies might relate to schools, literacy, and learning. It sure would have helped the compositionists at that institution understand their department better.

Just a few weeks into the job, as a still-young assistant professor, I felt a real uncomfortable tension between rhet-comp and literature faculty, with the creative writing folks stuck in the middle pretending to stay neutral (but really on the side of literature—I'll just keep it 100% about that cuz it is what it is). I shared my unease with a rhet-comp colleague, and she told me that it was just me, that the literature faculty felt estranged from my work and so kept a distance. In contrast, she described her own wonderful relationship with all the faculty in the department across all the subfields. She denied there was any beef in the department and acted like I didn't know what I was talking about. As the only Black member of the department, she sympathized with me feeling alone, but there were no tensions in the department. Today, I simply refer to this person as someone out of her everlasting mind. Even if it were true that only the Black person was strained, that's still evidence of some tension. But. . . but. . . but. . . that literary faculty hated her, tried to block her tenure, and thought her work was an intellectual sham. Still do. They tolerated me (a compliment since I was a compositionist) but they

talked about her like a dogg and regularly too. She was none the wiser. It wasn't like they were phony about it. They were never particularly pleasant. It's not like I didn't have beef with her too, like when she would do offensive things like suggest graduate students not read about HBCUs because those weren't inclusive programs. Yeah, she said that. Out loud. To a whole class with Black graduate students in it. Ironically, the disdain for rhet-comp seemed obvious to everyone but her.

Folx at the college talked real reckless about rhet-comp, the writing center, and the writing program faculty, whenever and however they wanted. And girlfriend really had no clue. Her own whiteness prevented her from a real analysis of the department, from ever imagining her own marginalization, and from going upside people's heads the way she needed to. Things never got better.

These extreme lengths that folx will travel in a department or program to insist that everything is nice-and-gravy also sustain racism and white comfort. This gets represented as a forced insistence that everyone gets along and is doing the same kind of work, oftentimes with a kind of conservative, white mantra like #AllLivesMatter whose main goal is to silence the specificity of Black/BIPOC protest (Garza). For instance, so many English department faculty, especially chairs, have foolishly said things like *everyone here is a writing teacher* or *we all do rhetoric*. I have yet to get an answer to my follow-up questions: *then why do yall suck so bad at it? And how yall manage to ignore all the theory and praxis from the last 50 years?* Just foolishness: condescending and submediocre at the same time. In this deranged utopia, all sides of the department will construct racial critique as illogical, inaccurate, mean, disruptive, emotional, divisive, harsh, non-collegial, prejudicial, toxic, obstructionist. I provide this long list of words since these racist stereotypes have all been used to describe me at some point, especially 100+ year old universities who haven't hired BIPOC faculty until the 21st century. Since no one knows much about or speaks up for actual, current rhet-comp theory and praxis, white-settler histories and racist labels live on and on.

In many spaces, rhetoric-composition faculty are still heavily outnumbered or have been otherwise repressed in ways that folx might whisper about but never fully analyze. Rhet-comp faculty sometimes represent themselves in such instances with a holier-than-thou martyrdom or missionary self-righteousness. In this masquerade, majoritarian compositionists often act as if they are too incapacitated to address racial injustice or their own disciplinary marginalization. Because #SchoolSoWhite has benefitted whitestream compositionists, even across various other marginalized-while-white social

locations, it is sometimes unfathomable and deeply painful to be so casually regarded as intellectually inferior. I don't expect to be intellectually respected or listened to in the academy as a Black feminist, so I don't get surprised by everyday, routine white supremacy, so I can't relate. Being a compositionist is the least of my denigrations. Racism is never addressed in these martyrdom-convictions, if it is even noticed, and so racism, racialized self-pity, and white dominance just live on and on.

And if that wasn't enough, many of the literary faculty have worked very hard to locate the racism of the department on the rhet-comp faculty's backs. Graduate students, desperately trying to escape teaching the denigrated first-year writing course that fuels departments' budgets and schedules, often fall right in line. Unfortunately, and yet typically, so many rhet-comp faculty stay silent to get along with everyone. I don't have that affliction, so I insist: only a true dumbass who knows nothing about the history of higher education would think that the white racial violence of an English department or School of Liberal Arts anytime or anywhere is the design and fault of a small, disregarded set of rhet-comp faculty in its midst. The math just ain't mathin. I mean, do these folx not read anything at all and just bypass all them books in the library? Big ol' library just sitting right there and got folx walkin right on past? Ain't nobody thought to go in and investigate such claims about the racial history of higher education before talking like they know?

These issues seem like they would catalyze most rhetoric-compositionists to form their own department, but that is rarely the case. I blame whiteness for this, since so many majoritarian compositionists seem to prefer the canonical cover of the longstanding white supremacy and privilege in the age-old English department rather than the self-reckoning work they would need to do in a free-standing rhetoric-composition department. My indictment of whiteness here is not hyperbolic, but part of a theoretical thread in Black studies 100 years in the making (King). Most notably, W. E. B. DuBois chronicled in his 1935 work, *Black Reconstruction in America*, America's transformative Black activism after emancipation and the immediate, white racist backlash to it. In that chronicling, he posited whiteness as its own psychic reward that prevented white working-class/white poor folx from connecting their oppression to Black masses: even if they were literally starving, at least they weren't Black. David Roediger's now infamous 1991 book and phrase, "the wages of whiteness," were directly built from DuBois's *Black Reconstruction*. Both texts challenged traditionalist Marxist thought that argued that racism disappears once capitalism vanishes because the psycho-

logical coveting of whiteness keeps white people from allying with BIPOC and overthrowing their class oppression. This extant literature challenges any notion that critiques of the “possessive investment in whiteness” (Lip-sitz) are new and implicates the reading list and theoretical understanding of scholars who have ignored 100 years of DuBois and 30+ years of popular scholars like Roediger. Drawing from these theories of labor and whiteness, I contend that many white colleagues, to their own detriment, prefer the “wages of whiteness” afforded in English departments and from their white faculty peers to the activism of BIPOC rhet-comp researchers and the equally maligned BIPOC student writers demanding a different university. For many compositionists, whether they acknowledge their disciplinary marginalization or ignore it, their analyses and responses are often tethered to their desire to still maintain their white privilege.

When it all falls down, what does all this mean? These are the contexts in which undergraduate students like Haven must further compose college literacy and writing at our colleges. The presence of any BIPOC student who designs, writes, speaks, and imagines from the cultural and linguistic locations of marginalized and/or racially subordinated BIPOC communities is an act of soaring imagination and radicality, because there is so little in writing programs and English departments that creates such pockets of air for this kind of decolonial rider (Reed).

Earthworms, Air Pockets, Pandemics, and BIPOC Creation

I have had a Haven in every college class that I have taught since I began college teaching in 1998. “Decolonial riders” like Haven take up a race-radical and theoretically informed opposition and make it popular in the classroom. Students like her have certainly created air pockets akin to the ecological magic of earthworms. They move far beyond the political or legal patterns of when/if/how the United States recognizes diverse identities. In contrast, the DEI platforms and liberal humanisms that have shaped Haven’s college education might have been abhorred by the anti-Black violence against her, but it was always an abhorrence without consequence, free from political responsibility, and devoid of real acknowledgement of systemic grievances. Haven understands that she must instead design and reimagine her humanity, objectification, and commodification since her Black “enfleshment” is always object, machine, and unfeeling (Weheliye). Such literacies create what Fred Moten calls a rich “Black topological existence” where Black designers make and preserve alternate spaces under duress. Such Black literate design

also creates entirely different memories of and relationships in classrooms.

Haven and I only got to spend half a semester together face-to-face. By the time spring break came, we were in a full-blown pandemic under COVID lockdowns. Like students across the country, Haven was sent back home to finish out the semester online while wondering what difference school would make if this was truly the apocalypse. After a few days of online teaching mayhem at my college, I knew it was time to revise the course with Haven and her classmates. Some of the students wanted to keep engaging with the content; others were just too overwhelmed for many reasons. These reactions fell along racial lines, so I offered two choices. First option: students who wanted/needed to check out could end the class with a PASS but promise to update me regularly letting me know they were okay and makin it somehow. Second option: students could still learn the content of the course but do so at a slower and different pace and automatically get an A for the class—no pressure, just Black rhetoric and language content in multimedia ways. All the BIPOC students of color and the most radical white allies opted to continue with the content. The rest of the students opted for a PASS and sent me regular email updates, some of which were more like absolutely entertaining journal entries of various escapades with things like burning a souffle. Not all updates were happy, but we got through. I created a discussion board housed on the course website out of view of the university and did some asynchronous and synchronous activities around Black Language and rhetoric. One online discussion got really charged after someone posted: “These professors really took their problematic and dispassionate content from the physical room to zoom and are trying to make the pandemic worse! So many know nothing about technology, and it shows.” After that, I eased up all analog writing and offered multimodal options. When it seemed like students were sinking with deadlines in their other classes that did not translate analog teaching to the digital or to the pandemic, I offered hand-made options that could be snail-mailed to me or photographed. It seemed like hand-crafted projects might help toward some self-care for students who were navigating (and becoming more alienated by) heavy print-based assignments via online learning management systems and in the context of global trauma at that! For those first two months of the pandemic lockdown after spring break, I met regularly online with a group of BIPOC students of color and critical, white allies who posted, emailed, and snail-mailed me some of the most dynamic, creative work I have ever seen in response to Black Rhetoric and Language, a lot of which hangs now in my campus office, including, and especially, works by Haven. We called

it the Corona Remix Cypher. Some weeks, I would go to my mailbox, find student projects there, and an explosion of glitter would erupt right there in my hands and all over the front porch. It was amazing.

Haven lived off-campus and near me, so she would sometimes walk over to the house I was renting, and we would talk across the lawn of my front yard. She couldn't break her lease, so she was waiting for a few months into the summer before she would leave the city for her next destination. We didn't really coordinate anything, but when the mailbox opened or the doorbell rang, we would chitchat outside. After those lawn chats with Haven and the larger Corona Remix Cypher, I understood even better how students work as "decolonial riders" and design alternative spaces. I have lived in and survived because of their spaces.

Life was really life-ing for me before COVID lockdowns, and the pandemic made it worse. In the year prior to the pandemic, my mother's cancer returned with a vengeance. My mother was "my person," as people like to say today, and for twelve months, I was her sole caretaker across multiple bouts of chemo-radiation, numerous seizures, and two strokes during a new job in a new city and new state far away from my family and friends. In March 2020, at the official onset of the pandemic, I was trained in and began hospice services for my mother in my home. Because the rapid spread of the virus at that time meant I would not be able to visit or see her if she had been admitted to a facility, I did hospice caretaking for her alone. Now four years later, I only remember two things: all the exchanges with students in that Black Rhetoric and Language class and my own hospice caretaking of my mother in her final weeks and days. I must have cooked at that time, since I certainly gained weight, but I have no recollection of this. I vaguely recollect the 2020 Great Toilet Paper Shortage but must have managed something since I never ran out. I must have bought groceries and taken care of household chores, because no one else helped me with that, but I can't recall any of that either. When my mother finally passed in late spring, I moved to a different home because I couldn't bear the memories of the one where I had done hospice. I certainly must have packed and hired movers. I must have even unpacked a lot of stuff too, because I managed to fill a three-story Texas townhouse all on my own. I have no single memory of any of it. I only remember the intimate process of my mother's dying. And I only remember those students who chose to create a learning and giving community in that moment and included me in it.

As it turns out, in true ancestral heritage, Black Language and rhetoric are an open door to getting through all the pains and joys that life will throw

at you. Black Language and rhetoric let you get it all down in words, onto the page, into the design, and out in the world too when your “soul looks back in wonder at how you got ovuh”! And while most of my memory loss undoubtedly comes from the trauma of losing my mother while forced to quarantine alone, that moment changed me, my teaching, and my convictions around decolonizing the anti-humanity of schooling in new ways. Any patience and graciousness for white complicity that I may have once held is completely gone. After all, I endured the greatest loss of my life in a global health crisis that forced me to do it alone. Nothing could get worse than that, so why should I give undeserving breathing room to white supremacy and its two-faced practitioners? Since the worst has already happened to me, white supremacy is lightweight work. I don’t intend to be nice about it.

“Decolonial riders” created pockets of air in my classrooms during an epidemic that quite literally attacked breathing and respiration. That symbolism and materiality are worth noting. These are entire other-worlds that match the kind of miraculousness that I have learned from earthworms where care, learning, unrelenting critique, and creative play move us toward alternative pathways and renewed life. Indeed, our discipline could be transformed with this kind of purpose and praxis. I’m tired of waiting for that though. In the meantime, I’m rolling out with my “decolonial riders” to the places that only they will go.

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Notes

1. I have changed this student’s name to Haven, even though the student is not requesting anonymity. If this essay is read by faculty in the attending department, faculty could easily identify who this student is, even if I only offer her first name. Some faculty might reach out to her for further discussion and lunch from the place of white guilt rather than desire for real change, further taxing Haven’s time, mind, and energy. The combination of white liberalist anxiety, arrogance, and racism involves a complete non-understanding that reaching out to Haven in this day-late/dollar-too-short kinda way would be an act of racist, carceral surveillance, not compassion and commitment to doing better. After

all, the possibility of doing better with Black folx has been available for hundreds of years now. I call this fugitive naming. I want to do more than follow the general rule of qualitative/human-subjects research of anonymizing research participants. Haven is not anonymous; narrating her deep critiques of the university while providing a modicum of safety from the white university that harmed her is the fugitive politics of my writing. The name HAVEN is a rhyming combination of the arc of names this student's family calls her. Haven is also a name where she and hers will easily recognize themselves. As always, not all of what she and students shared has been divulged in this essay since some stuff ain't nobody's bid'ness but our own.

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Antiracist Rhetorical Praxis in the 1960s-70s *Tech News/The Paper* at the City College of New York

Conor Tomás Reed, Anna Zeemont, and Sean Molloy

ABSTRACT: *This historical case study of the extraordinary student journalism at the City College of New York from 1966 to 1970 directly answers Keith Gilyard's 2016 call to study these radical Black¹ and Puerto Rican student voices. We hope this example can be useful to educators, students, and communities who seek not only to oppose monolingual writing, testing and teaching systems, but to coalesce antiracist sites of learning, literacy, and action.*

KEYWORDS: *antiracism; City College of New York (CCNY); decolonization; desegregation; Francee Covington; Louis Reyes Rivera; Mina Shaughnessy; Paul Simms; praxis; rhetoric; student journalism; Tech News/The Paper*

It is only when the oppressed find the oppressor out and become involved in the organized struggle for their liberation that they begin to believe in themselves. This discovery cannot be purely intellectual but must involve action; nor can it be limited to mere activism, but must include serious reflection: only then will it be a praxis.—Paulo Freire, 1967

While practice without theory bangs its head against a brick wall, theory without practice lulls itself to sleep.—Assata Shakur, *The Paper*, 20 Feb. 1975

We have united in a struggle to drastically change certain aspects of this college—changes we feel are in the interests of Black and Puerto Rican students.—Paul B. Simms, *Tech News*, 19 Feb. 1967

Antiracist Student Journalism as a Historical Case Study

From February of 1966 to November of 1970, a small group of student journalists and editors at City College of New York (CCNY) in Harlem—including Francee Covington, Louis Reyes Rivera, and Paul Simms—trans-

formed a conservative student newspaper, *Tech News*, into a powerful, transgressive voice for change. In the fall of 1970, they renamed it *The Paper*; CCNY students still publish *The Paper* today.² Covington and other SEEK students (“Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge,” an admissions desegregation and supportive teaching program) also published at least one issue of their own version of “*The Paper*,” just three weeks after the April 1968 assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (*The Paper*; Simms and Simms; Covington, “Oral History” 438–40).

In line with the desegregating, decolonial, community-control demands that Black and Puerto Rican student activists were lodging at the City University of New York (CUNY) in this moment, these publications were intentionally multivocal and multilingual as a creative and political *praxis*. Their actions and writing refused the university’s white-supremacist, western, English monolingual logics that were reified through writing pedagogies and school policies at the time (as discussed further in this issue’s introduction). Here, we celebrate remarkable Black and Puerto Rican student journalism at City College—as an articulation of campus activism—that culminated with the 1969 Harlem University takeover, official birth of *The Paper*, and transition into the City University’s Open Admissions era.

In his 2016 essay “The Rhetoric of Translingualism,” Keith Gilyard concluded that “[o]ne of the strongest moves that” critical language scholars “can make is to document students’ efforts” via “deeper study of powerfu[l]” student activist writing: “We need the stories of struggle. . . and those should include tales of triumph” (288, 284). In this piece, we offer a historical case study of the metamorphosis of *Tech News* into *The Paper* from 1966 to 1970

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as one illustration of praxis by author-activists who are embedded in racial justice and anti-colonial movement work on campus and beyond.

This article is part of a larger archival and interview project to preserve the voices of City College writing teachers and students who both desegregated City College and fought to transform it. In particular, this article is in conversation with our 2021 conversation with Paul Simms (Simms and Simms). Sean has previously used the City College SEEK program as a historical case study in a similar way to examine ecological writing assessment models (Molloy, *Convenient Myopia*, “Human Beings”). Anna has studied and written about CUNY student activist writing, including newspapers and other public-facing literacies in the context of emergent forms of racial capitalism and movement building in the 1990s (Zeemont). Coco wrote a book on the rise of Black, Puerto Rican, and Women’s Studies and movements at City College and in New York City, including the role of student writing and organizing (Reed, *Liberation School*). Coco was also a journalist and editor on the staff of *The Paper* for two years while a CCNY undergraduate from 2006 to 2010.

Our connections to these literacies underscore that the stories we tell here are not abstractions but based in the intellectual, rhetorical and political labor and experiences of real people. Materially grounded in a specific situation of radical Black and Puerto Rican student literacy/action, our essay aims to be useful to educators, students, and communities seeking to not only oppose monolingual writing testing and teaching systems, but to re-envision sites of learning and literacy to transform society altogether by dismantling the linguistic hierarchies it upholds and uses to sanction material dispossession in contexts such as the policing of migrants and global imperialism/militarism (Rose; Rosa and Flores).

To illustrate what antiracist rhetorical praxis can look like on the ground, we offer this historical case study of student writing at CCNY. We believe that expressly antiracist rhetorics always oppose monolingualism in practice and that the student authors of *Tech News/The Paper* demonstrated that opposition in myriad ways. Grounded in political struggle rather than in top-down, institutionally sanctioned literacy pedagogies, these students understood writing as more than a performance of hegemonic whitestream monolingualism. They understood their writing as rhetorically grounded and specifically located in real situations with real audiences and consequences. In the late 1960s, at a historical moment of growing pedagogical shallowness, cruelty, and conservatism on one side of the public university, and the blossoming of an uncharted radical learning process on the other

side, these literacy experimentations and student writing at *Tech News/The Paper* emerged as a pivotal site of sophisticated linguistic and political insurgency at CCNY.

Failures and Possibilities of Recognizing Radical Student Writing

Anti-colonial and antiracist infusions of a range of expressions in the classroom were born of the last apex of social movements in the 1960s and 70s. This included efforts to validate immensely varied African, Asian, Caribbean, European, Latin American, Middle Eastern, and Pacific diasporic and transnational forms of student speech and writing (Conference on College Composition and Communication; Perl; Smitherman, “Raciolinguistics”). These experimental pedagogies were catalyzed by overlapping immigration waves to US urban centers, campaigns to desegregate and decolonize public universities, and efforts to create bilingual learning programs. For decades now, these antiracist interventions—grounded in activism beyond the classroom—have pushed back against monolingual, formalist, and race-evasive writing pedagogies and teaching systems that historically characterized US composition instruction, all often enforced by exclusionary mass writing test systems. Though such interventions took place in pedagogical settings across the globe, they crystallized in unique and powerful ways in the context of CUNY’s transformative movement to desegregate admissions, decolonize curricula, and welcome inside broader social struggles (Okechukwu; Reed).

Beginning in 1965, SEEK Program writing instructors at City College—such as Barbara Christian, Toni Cade Bambara, David Henderson, June Jordan, Audre Lorde, and Adrienne Rich—developed remarkable critical pedagogies with their students, soon catalyzing their college campus to undergo an existential reinvention. Bambara invited her students to determine the subjects and methods of their studies (Bambara). Henderson brought in non-Western texts such as *One Thousand and One Nights*, and urged students to write about their family histories (Reed). Jordan ferried in oratory and journalism honed from collaborations with Malcolm X, Louis Lomax, and Buckminster Fuller in Harlem (Jordan). Lorde marveled at her own learning process about grammar and poetics alongside her students (Lorde). Rich foregrounded Black liberation texts and writing assignments that explored social transformation (Rich). That same year, poet Denise Levertov and dramatists Jack Gelber and Paddy Chavessky initiated a CCNY writer-in-residence program (Volpe, “[1966] Report” 4). A steady stream of

poets, dramatists, and creative writers brought new approaches and complex process pedagogies. In 1967, lecturer Mark Mirsky, having taught in John Hawkes' Stanford "Voice Project" earlier that year, brought that voice writing course model to CCNY, where Mirsky led several "practicing young novelists [to] see what they can do to breathe new life into the teaching of freshman writing" (Volpe, "[1967] Report" 4). Meanwhile, a group of CCNY student journalists were writing and publishing increasingly powerful and sophisticated articles and editorials (more on this below).

Ironically, at the same time that this liberatory arc of writing pedagogy in the classroom and student journalism emerged, monolingual sentence-level formalism recruited a great champion at CCNY. In April of 1967, Mina Shaughnessy was hired as a SEEK writing course lecturer by the CCNY English Department. Shaughnessy's conservative writing pedagogy, which she would soon label "Basic Writing", was quickly embraced by a conservative CCNY English Department, even as many of Shaughnessy's SEEK colleagues engaged in a proliferation of inventive (and non-punitive) teaching and writing pedagogies. In 1969 and 1970, CCNY created and expanded a new deeply error-centric and formalist "Basic Writing" course and testing program. By 1971, Basic Writing courses and high stakes writing tests dominated all writing instruction at CCNY. By 1972, Shaughnessy had complete control over first-year composition courses, a growing list of new timed-writing tests, and a basic skills-focused writing center (Molloy, *Convenient Myopia* 221–308). Of course, basic skills pedagogies were not new. They dated back at least a century. But by the early 1960s, it was clear that they were superficial, biased, and ineffective. By reframing basic skills as "Basic Writing" and by imagining a huge group of "Basic Writers" who would benefit from it, Shaughnessy breathed new life into this old, failed approach—rebranding it as new, sophisticated, and compassionate.

White public college systems from Georgia to Wisconsin, to California to New Jersey, embraced similar Basic Writing course/testing systems during the 1970s (Molloy and Bennett 27). These Basic Writing course/testing systems immediately targeted Brown, Black, multilingual, neurodiverse and working-class students for cruel and abusive treatment. Sometimes administrators were candid about their racist intentions (Molloy and Bennett; Molloy, Fonville, and Salam). Shaughnessy herself admitted privately that the new CUNY basic skills "penalized testing" system would decimate students of color in what would be understood to be a "desperate and educationally irresponsible move." Yet, she pushed it forward (Shaughnessy, note to Murphy 3; Molloy, *Convenient Myopia* 376–86).

In Shaughnessy's shadow, the field of composition-rhetoric has often failed to capture the race-radical nature of multi-discursive modes of student communication born out of social movements of this late 1960s period (Albracht; Kynard, *Vernacular*). Instead, traditionalist basic skills frameworks have abounded—such as those endorsing writing exams, prompted five-paragraph essays, enforced code switching, and formalist and error-centric assessment practices—all of which are inevitably anti-Black and anti-migrant in their confinement to what April Baker-Bell calls “White Mainstream English.” Such traditionalist pedagogical regimes uphold monolingualism in the sense that Bruce Horner and Sara Alvarez define it—as a persistent dominant ideology which:

posits languages as stable, internally uniform, and discrete from one another. Each language is identified with a particular nationality and/or race/ethnicity. . . and language users are expected to have a single such language as their birthright as its “native speakers.” Their ostensible command of that language (as monolith), achieved naturally through advance to adulthood, is posited as the target for others to aim for, however unlikely these others may be to reach that target. (6)

In a US context, the interconnectedness between monolingual supremacy and “nativism”/birthright makes plain that these kinds of language ideologies are settler-colonial and anti-Black in nature, as Indigenous and Black language ways have been deemed antithetical to those of a white, US citizen ideal (Rosa and Flores). These ideologies systematically obscure the reality that literacy, “language and language standards are situational, political, arbitrary, and palimpsestic” (Gilyard 284; see also Smitherman, “Raciolinguistics”; Pritchard). Writing and language beyond the bounds of what Eric Darnell Pritchard calls “literacy normativity” push against and reimagine standard definitions of what literacy can do.

The kinds of radical, linguistically expansive, literacy pedagogies embodied by teachers and students engaged in movement work still have not been fully centered in composition-rhetoric. A key reason may be that teacher-scholars are embedded in a public imaginary that understands students at institutions like CUNY—the majority of whom are Black, Brown, and/or multilingual—as incapable of real intellectual work or sophisticated writing (Kynard, *Vernacular*; Zeemont). Research in raciolinguistics—or, per Geneva Smitherman, the study of “language and/as race” (“Raciolinguistics”)—tells

us that hegemonic language ideologies “conflate certain racialized bodies with linguistic deficiency unrelated to any objective linguistic practices,” with the perspective of a “white listening subject” as default (Flores and Rosa 150). In studies around CUNY pedagogy in composition-rhetoric around and after Open Admissions, there is indeed a history of student writers being conceived of solely or primarily through what Eve Tuck calls “damage-centered” paradigms, often premised on anti-Blackness, with the vantage point of white professors as the implicit default (Kynard, *Vernacular*; Zeemont; Lamos). This can even be the case with scholars who have espoused commitments to linguistic equity (whether labeled as “translingual” or “antiracist”) contradict their praxis and lead them to deem conservative, traditionalist pedagogies as most appropriate for a Black and Brown student population (Kynard, *Vernacular*; Baker-Bell et al.).

Black and Brown students and scholars have always been on the frontlines of clarifying this myopia. In a piece focusing on more recent Black students at CUNY as they multimodally compose in conversation with the Movement for Black Lives, Kynard cites the writing of “conscious and critical Black students” as offering a uniquely brilliant capacity to trace “the intimate, lived experiences of Black people’s struggles over the rhetorical projects of schooling under colonization” (“Black Digital-Cultural”). We are inspired by her idea that critical and activist-oriented rhetorical work marks a sophisticated part of “the daily work they do to actually revise the . . . codes of our universities and social systems” (“Black Digital-Cultural”)—from calling out and demanding the upheaval of anti-Black writing curriculum and classroom practices (Suh 116–17), to creating self-fashioned, race-radical spaces of writing and learning (Kynard, *Vernacular*; Reed; Zeemont).

Both Keith Gilyard and Carmen Kynard call for scholars to attend to the writing contexts of the 1960s and 1970s at the City College of New York in predominantly Black and Puerto Rican Harlem as one vital space to understand literacy as praxis. Indeed, *Tech News/The Paper*’s activist student writers offered a sophisticated and profound epistemology of writing that, foremost, was intimately intertwined with movement-building, centered the lived realities of Black and Puerto Rican communities, and subverted and defied white linguistic and rhetorical norms. These student writers operated in a linguistic space beyond the classroom that we understand as in, “but not of,” the university (to borrow the language of Stefano Harney and Fred Moten). This kind of insurgent movement literacy work came to fruition in spite of the success and growth of education barriers and tiering mechanisms like writing tests and zero-credit course systems, as well as, in a

larger sense, “pernicious language instruction—in some cases the linguistics of white supremacy” (Gilyard 286).

Antiracist Rhetorical Praxis Emerges in *Tech News*

The first *Tech News* issue of the Fall 1965 semester showed it to be a relatively unremarkable newspaper by and for CCNY engineering, science, and architecture students focused mostly on job prospects and starting salaries for graduating engineers. Large ads recruited students to join the US Air Force and IBM, with no mention of how the military-industrial complex would employ their talents in Viet Nam. The *Tech News* staffers were not, however, completely imperceptive to the world beyond their campus. One article noted the pending resignation of Kenneth Clark as the head of a campus “Social Dynamics Research Laboratory” and cited Clark’s important civil rights work (*Tech News*, “Prof. Clark” 1). Elsewhere, an editorial argued:

Our primary responsibility as an urban school is to become a working unit of the community—to work with the existing social agencies, to aid the elementary and secondary school in whatever way we can and to institute programs of self-help and rehabilitation.

Efforts to meet that responsibility, said the editors, would “remain insufficient until the entire student body awakens to the needs of the community and reacts through student participation” (*Tech News*, “Responsibility” 2).

During this time, by one estimate, less than 2% of the entire CUNY student body was Black (Curri van). James L. Hicks, the editor of Harlem’s Black-owned newspaper *The New York Amsterdam News*, repeatedly attacked CUNY’s racial exclusion and anti-Blackness. He argued that its admissions requirements were fundamentally biased because many Black students received “inferior educational training” in the City’s public schools (“Gets Higher” 9). Hicks opined that CUNY would refuse to admit “God himself unless he presents an affidavit showing he is white and able to meet the IQ tests laid down by the Board. . .” and repeatedly called CCNY as “lily-white” as “Ole Miss University” (“Higher Board” 11; “Rescue” 11; “Gets Higher” 9). Only about a year after a July 1964 mass neighborhood rebellion against police who shot and killed 15-year-old James Powell,³ CCNY remained largely indifferent to the systemic racism (specifically anti-Blackness), police brutality, poverty, and injustice afflicting its neighboring communities and many others throughout the country.

In the spring of 1966, Paul B. Simms was a first-year, pre-med Black student at City College with an interest in genetics. One of the few Black students admitted under CCNY's exclusionary system, Simms was soon troubled that his overwhelmingly white college was completely disconnected from the concerns of the Black and Puerto Rican communities of Harlem, West Harlem, Manhattanville, and Hamilton Heights which surrounded it. He soon found two "sites" of activism to "maneuver through" this white system. One site of activism was the Black Science Students Organization ("BSSO") that Simms co-founded. The other was *Tech News* (Simms and Simms).

Immediately upon joining the *Tech News* staff, Simms began to expand the scope, tenor, and purpose of the paper by reporting about Harlem. In February 1966, Simms' first article spotlighted Harlem communities' backlash to a proposed City College expansion project—including a sports stadium that would be built in nearby St. Nicholas Park. Simms also directly challenged CCNY's failure to admit more Black and Puerto Rican students. He interviewed Amsterdam News' Hicks, who opposed the project—and who Simms pointedly quoted as labeling City College a "white Rhodesia." Simms also spoke with CCNY President Buell Gallagher (Simms, "Under Fire" 1). Gallagher cited a new pilot program (later named SEEK) through which the College had recently admitted and supported 114 mostly Black and Puerto Rican students (2).

Even prior to writing in a style that overtly embodied formal features of Black language (which later came to characterize his journalism), Simms engaged in rhetorically effective, antiracist activism both by challenging his college's encroachment on its neighbors and by directly pressing the issue of racial exclusion with several sources, including the CCNY President—and then centering these questions for *Tech News* readers. These moves were mostly substantive, not formal: Simms followed the major surface conventions of a news report in a white student newspaper for a largely white audience. But Simms subverted the conventional purpose of a "neutral" news report as a junior reporter within the existing power structure. He chose a story, found sources, and asked questions, all of which reframed the issues of racial segregation and CUNY land gentrification in a way that directly challenged the white college system and its obligations to both surrounding communities and to the city's high school students. Simms began the piece by outlining the major, politicized concerns of community members: "they should not let an all white school take over a section of a public park" mostly used by its Black neighbors, who also "have no assurance that they will benefit" from its construction—saving a description of what the con-

struction would consist of until the last paragraphs continued on a later page (“Under Fire” 1–2). Simms’ chosen title—“St. Nicholas Park Program Under Fire From Community”—also centered the concerns of the people of Harlem. By comparison, a New York Times article on the same topic was entitled “A Field Is Sought by City College; It Plans to Use St. Nicholas Park for Varsity Teams.” By using passive voice to make “a field” the article’s subject, the *Times* downplayed CCNY administrators’ active responsibility for the proposal’s potential consequences; indeed, the article *only* discusses the various benefits that the expansion would have on the school and its sole mention of the local community is that the park—“[h]eavily dotted with jagged boulders”—“is virtually unused by the neighborhood residents” (“A Field”).⁴ Simms’ very choice to deem this issue as newsworthy, coupled with what may seem like inconsequential morphosyntactic choices, were thus active, critical, and unique rhetorical decisions of embodied writing. Scholar Alexis Pauline Gumbs calls this practice “community accountability,” one rooted in what scholar Eric Darnell Pritchard traces as within a longer legacy of Black activist literacies.

In 1967, Simms conducted an interview series with prominent Black leaders including *The Liberator’s* Dan Watts, Congress on Racial Equality’s Floyd McKissick, Nation of Islam’s Louis Farrakhan, United Afro-American Association’s William Wright, comedian activist Dick Gregory, and Thelma Johnson, the New York City Assistant Deputy Commissioner for Human Resources (Simms, “Dan Watts,” “McKissick Accuses,” “Minister [Farrakhan],” “U.A.A.A.,” “Black Comic,” “Bootblacks”). Across those interviews, Simms platformed a range of strategic and discursive approaches to Black community organizing on issues of nonviolence, self-defense, community control, and decentralization of education. The series was radical enough that the editors felt a need to add a disclaimer that the positions taken by Simms and his subjects did not “necessarily reflect the views of the Managing Board of *TECH NEWS*.” In this series, Simms used a seemingly “conventional” interview format to embed radical shifts in subject, viewpoint, and argument. Across his interviews, Thelma Johnson called for the decentralization of New York City’s deeply segregated and unequal school system (“Bootblacks”). Dan Watts flatly disagreed that access to education was the key to fighting racism: “America has moved too far ahead for education to achieve for the black man his place in this white society. Power must be applied. Violence must be demonstrated” (Watts, quoted in Simms, “Black Rights” 2). CORE leader McKissick decried an “educational system that is teaching black minds to be white puppets.” Like Watts, McKissick refused to rule out violent responses

to systemic racism. “I have been the victim of violence. We at CORE are not going to lie down and get beaten to death. We do not, however, advocate the use of aggressive violence; only as a protective measure” (McKissick, quoted in Simms, “Miseducation” 3). Through his position as a Black journalist, Simms welcomed interviewees to force his collegiate audience to confront polemics about American racism.

Within a campus newspaper that had featured primarily white authors, and privileged monolingual “White Mainstream English” and deracialized perspectives, Simms foregrounded a chorus of new voices to identify the concerns of Harlem residents and its political advocates. He also chronicled how Black and Puerto Rican students deliberately collaborated with each other on their own terms (Baker-Bell). For example, Simms obtained exclusive coverage of a campus meeting between the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) chairperson H. Rapp Brown and Black and Puerto Rican CCNY students—a meeting which white students were prohibited from attending—during which Brown asserted, “Education is not the solution; you must begin to practice the things you learn here” (“Rapp Lectures”).

Simms’ journalism practiced the multivocality of Black radicalism, bringing in wisdom and actions from the community. He chose this approach rather than centering the definitive ideas of a singular writer-subject bound to “campus” concerns of a “typical” student newspaper, as if students and pedagogues were discrete from the era’s political movements rather than in conversation with them. In his writing, Simms highlighted a range of expressive and organizing strategies for Black and Puerto Rican liberation *both within and across* their various marginalized rhetorical groups. Working collectively with other students and faculty to pressure the college (and all-white colleges) into real and fundamental reforms, Simms soon pivoted his writing to urge *Tech News* readers to learn from Black educational experimentations in Harlem to envision how the college’s curricular infrastructure could be reconfigured to include the study and involvement of Black lives.⁵

In 1968, when Simms began to serve as the *Tech News* editor-in-chief, the entire focus and voice of the newspaper shifted. Simms documented the 1968 UFT teachers’ strike and the simultaneous creation of “freedom schools” across Harlem (“Struck Schools”). Simms then printed a series of “From a Black Chair” Op-Eds in which he moved from journalism to direct advocacy and switched to a more openly opinionated, reflective voice. For example, in December of 1968, he laid out blueprints for what an autonomous “Black University” could look like within City College, as the campus administration failed to propose any clear plan to desegregate its studies.

Simms proposed fundamental changes:

The University would have courses in African History, Afro-American History, Black Culture (both African and Afro-American), Black Contemporary Thought, Asian History, Garveyism, The Lives and Works of Malcolm X, DuBois, Douglass, Fanon and Che, Coalitions with the Left, Revolutionary Actions, American Hypocrisy, American Atrocities, Socialism and its Relevance to Black Nationalism, and other similar courses. Some of these courses could be taught by students, others could be taught by outside teachers. A Black student referendum could determine which courses should be given and which were omitted. It would be expected that every Black student on campus, whether enrolled in the university or not, would contribute to the maintenance of this institution. ("Black Studies")

In the racist milieu of the 1968 New York City public school teachers' strike to oppose Black and Puerto Rican community governance, and CCNY's refusal to recognize the legitimacy of Black Studies, Simms showed how an antiracist rhetorical praxis can go beyond classroom writing to alter the operations and curricular infrastructure of schooling within broader social movements.

In a page-long opinion piece, "From a Black Chair: Politics, American Style," published on November 13, 1968—eight days after the 1968 Presidential election—Simms channeled his rage over the election of Richard Nixon and the almost ten million votes cast for the apartheid leader George Wallace. Grounding his writing in the rhetorical tradition of Black language and its features like narrative sequencing and signifying (Smitherman, *Talkin*; Richardson; Rickford and Rickford), Simms meshed together styles, voices, and even fictional dialogue. He quoted the *Declaration of Independence*. He raged at the election of Nixon and white working-class support for Wallace. In the wake of the election, Simms attacked George Foreman for waving a United States flag in a boxing ring. "It really hurts to see a brother bought off like that." Simms even included a fictional dialogue about the election: "'Hey man, did you see that jive honkey gonna stand on the corner of 125th Street and tell me I should go to church, God damn! I'm tired of trying to save my soul; I want to get with my body'" (3). Here, Simms used a variety of registers in combination to express the pain he felt over the undeniable demonstration of American racism. (In addition to Nixon's election, Wallace carried five states and 13% of the national vote.) Rhetorically, Simms' writing

underwent a symbiotic metamorphosis: as these textual experimentations changed the pages of *Tech News*, the historical conditions of his time were also shaping him, as inflected through his writing. Gradually, other Black and Puerto Rican students joined Simms at *Tech News*.

Praxis Intervenes in the 1968 SEEK Version of *The Paper*

As *Tech News* underwent dramatic changes, another Black student literacy project arose that demonstrates the power of student-activated literacies to effect rhetorical and institutional changes in public higher education during this time of social upheavals. This was initiated by Francee Covington, who had arrived at City College in 1966. She recalled, “I had a lot of experience organizing way before entering City College”—after all, “this was still Jim Crow New York” (Molloy, *Convenient Myopia* 29, 82). Covington had been arrested at the age of fourteen when protesting the SUNY Downstate Medical Center’s refusal to hire Black and Puerto Rican construction workers, and in 1964 she had marched on Washington and attended CORE actions to desegregate public schools (Reed, *New York Liberation School* 127). In 1968, Covington started a SEEK student newspaper called *The Paper*, published three weeks after Martin Luther King, Jr.’s assassination. Toni Cade Bambara was listed as the faculty advisor, and Paul Simms received special mention for helping with its production. Although only one issue of this iteration of *The Paper* has survived, its style and scope presaged the transition from *Tech News* to *The Paper* two years later.

Multiple movement reports in SEEK’s *The Paper* traced how Black and Puerto Rican students were mobilizing across CUNY and New York City to “act against racism, war, [and] the draft” (Moreno 3). The issue also reported threats to the \$3.5 million annual funding for the SEEK program itself, which was both the main vehicle for desegregation of CUNY’s four-year colleges and the largest white college desegregation program in the country (Covington, “Expansion” 1). Another article reported a student meeting with Mayor Lindsay demanding community control of the New York Police Department (NYPD) and an expansion of SEEK (“Lindsay Ignores” 1). A special essay by Bambara lauded Covington and other SEEK students’ intellectual and political development as far surpassing the orthodox limits of CCNY’s classrooms: “a sufficient number have become skilled and therefore liberated and are ready to tell me to get out of the way for they have things to do on their own” (“Something” 4).

Here again we see antiracist rhetorical praxis expressed as student

journalist activism. Some of these SEEK students were protest leaders—including Covington, who was the sole woman member of the “Committee of Ten” of Black and Puerto Rican student organizers who would soon lead a springtime revolt. With active assistance from Bambara and other SEEK educators, these students rallied communities at CCNY and across New York City to effect change by publishing stories, voices, and arguments that reshaped the cultures of the campuses and neighborhoods. Their merging of writing and action soon contributed to a tipping point that would transform City College and CUNY.

Movement Literacies and the 1969 Protests

In the spring of 1969, Black and Puerto Rican students, including many in the SEEK Program, coordinated a series of protests at City College, as well as composed Five Demands to change the admissions, curriculum, campus governance, teacher training, and the college’s relationship to Harlem. Under Simms’ helm, *Tech News* actively documented this escalation process. On April 22, 1969, this culminated in a seventeen days-long campus occupation of the South Campus, during which Black and Puerto Rican students renamed the college “Harlem University.” The April 23 *Tech News* issue featured on-the-ground reports by multiple students and a list of critical questions by strike-supportive SEEK faculty to the college president (Simms, “Strike Still On”; Braun et al.; Watson; SEEK English Instructors).

Covington was one of the central organizers of the campus takeover, and Simms closely documented it behind the barricades (Jezebel Productions; Molloy; Reed). Covington later recalled:

I was there the whole two weeks (spent two nights away). I would go home, take a shower, fresh clothes and snacks, and then go back to campus. Couldn’t get any sleep. Some people would be snoring. I have to be ready for what’s coming. We were exhausted. It was two of the longest weeks God created. . . hiding from your mom. . . ‘I’m working on a paper!’ Press coverage was almost immediate—they were surprised it lasted two weeks. We were on the Daily News front page, television cameras each day. (Reed, *New York Liberation School* 132)

Mayoral candidates were forced to weigh in on the takeover. Paul Simms reported that “during the occupation, several thousand dollars was collected from Harlem residents and other Black and Puerto Rican people and now has

been placed in a bank for use in the School of Third World Studies” (Simms, “What Was Behind”). In a larger temporal context of struggles for Ethnic Studies, Black Studies and Third World liberation at institutions like UC Berkeley and San Francisco State University (Okihiru; Ferguson), City College and the Harlem community became a bellwether for community control, Third World Studies, and the desegregation and decolonization of CUNY.

Simms, Covington, Rivera, and *Tech News* Reach Beyond City College

A year after the campus occupation, CUNY adopted an Open Admissions policy that allowed all graduating New York City high schools students to enroll somewhere in the university, and began to implement new Black, Puerto Rican and Latinx, and Asian Studies programs. The pages of *Tech News* astutely narrated the struggles leading from the Harlem University takeover to Open Admissions. By September of 1969, Simms had brought on incoming Afro-Puerto Rican SEEK student and poet-journalist Louis Reyes Rivera to *Tech News*, and they began to recruit a dozen Black and Puerto Rican students, including Covington, to help transform the newspaper. In his first semester at City College, Rivera penned several articles, including on the college’s sudden firing of beloved Black professor Wilfred Cartey from his position in the Urban and Ethnic Studies Department, and a campus visit by a federal agent to seize files of student organizers (Simms and Rivera; Rivera, “Student-Member,” “Student Files”). Simms also reported on a February 1970 student-led “Black Revolutions” class, in which “the entire class felt the need to take over the course and all participated in the development of the curriculum” (Simms, “Black Revolution”). That same month, Rivera reported CUNY announced plans to introduce Open Admissions in the fall of 1970—offering admission to all graduating New York City high school students, but with limited financial and academic support. As many working-class students of color would be funneled into overwhelmed two-year CUNY colleges, Rivera quoted faculty and students who worried that this policy’s unsustainable roll-out would exacerbate the existing race and class stratification within CUNY that the Harlem University’s Five Demands had sought to improve (“Conrad Attacks”). In another May 1970 *Tech News* issue, Francee Covington wrote about a rally in opposition to proposed fee increases and CUNY’s underfunded implementation of Open Admissions, and she was listed in a notice for Black and Puerto Rican students to recommend curriculum for the newly formed Urban and Ethnic Studies Depart-

ment (“Rally vs. Fee”; “Attention”).

Covington, Rivera, and Simms together transcended the error-centric, formalist Basic Writing pedagogy which was then gradually coming to dominate all writing instruction at City with its error-centric formalism and shallow timed tests (Molloy and Bennett). In 2015, Covington recalled: “We were basically on our own, in terms of production of the [*Tech News/The Paper*]; we were on our own. We didn’t have a faculty advisor, we didn’t have somebody who was saying ‘You can’t say this, ‘You gotta do it this way.’ So we invented what we thought would work and it worked well” (Covington, “Oral History”). These student journalists used sophisticated rhetorical and critical methods to grapple with questions of admissions, curriculum, governance, state repression, and the political economy of the shifting university. *Tech News* writer Arlette Ford later recalled that quite “a few of the people at “our” *Tech News* were involved in off-campus local, national, and international political activities, and they, under the leadership of Paul Simms and the subsequent editors-in-chief, collectively brought a powerhouse of organizing know-how, political connections, and writing skills to the *Tech News* enterprise” (A. Ford 527).

Paul Simms and Francee Covington both left City College in May 1970. Their departing salutations in *Tech News* read with the wisdom and grit of seasoned journalists, as their writing reached audiences far beyond the campus walls. The previous summer, Simms’ report on the Black and Puerto Rican students’ campus takeover had been published in the *Harvard Crimson*, radiating strike lessons from Harlem to Ivy League student readers (and their wary administrators). Covington also published an essay, “Are the Revolutionary Techniques Employed in The Battle of Algiers Applicable to Harlem?” in her SEEK teacher Bambara’s landmark 1970 anthology, *The Black Woman*. Assessing the paradigmatic influence of the Algerian revolution on the US Left, Covington dissected how the revolution’s success did not correspond with conditional possibilities for Black radical epicenters like “Harlem, Watts, Howard University,” and elsewhere in the United States. In these two examples, we see how antiracist rhetorical praxis at City College expanded outward to broader audiences.

In 1970, *Tech News* continued to document CUNY affairs in a wider milieu of social change amidst state violence. Soon, *The Paper* began to eschew individual bylines for a collectivist analysis by the editorial team, which signaled their recomposition as a multi-author force and also likely protected them from repression. Features highlighted *Tech News*’ increasing experimentation with photomontage and other collage techniques

that aligned with their collaborative writing ethos. In a visually arresting double-page feature spread on May 15, 1970, *The Paper* mourned the murders of Black students at Texas Southern, Orangeburg, Augusta, Memphis, and Jackson State, and contrasted the public outcry for the four Euro-descended students murdered at Kent State with the more muted response to the cases of the Black students. At the center of the feature sits an illustration of bullet-riddled Black bodies, while a “KENT”-helmeted National Guardsman grins and shakes the hand of a Southern sheriff. In the background, a silhouette emblazoned with the words “JACKSON STATE” recedes into the darkness of social forgetting. The accompanying text charged CUNY officials with complicit silence:

American racism—you can find it in every single facet of life in these United States. From New York to San Francisco, Birmingham to Maine, white people generally act in patterns that are predicated upon keeping Black people down. Only recently, we have seen how the City College administration and the City University have responded to the deaths of the seven brothers, one by prison guards, and six by the Augusta police. There hasn’t been one word out of Copeland or Bowker about the deaths of these Black people. (*Tech News*, “Jackson State”)

The *Tech News* editors increasingly discarded the fiction of journalistic objectivity in favor of an openly partisan approach. They took calls to direct action out of the editorial pages and splayed them across the publication at large. In step with this aim, the “Jackson State” article concludes with a section entitled “What Do We Do Now,” in which the editors proclaim, “Simply the number of cases of brutality and murder committed on the Black peoples of America by this government should force all Black students and Black people to become actively engaged in the struggle for freedom as an oppressed people” (*Tech News*, “Jackson State”).

***Tech News* Transforms into *The Paper* as CUNY Retrenchment Appears**

In the Fall 1970 semester, the *Tech News* team under Rivera’s editorial helm charted an existential reinvention of their newspaper—in which they chose to expand beyond a particular scope of science and engineering “that had outlived its usefulness”—toward a new vision of Black and Third World student journalism under a new masthead. *The Paper* officially launched

first as an October 6, 1970 insert to the *Tech News* intended to document the antiracist and anti-colonial struggles rocking New York City, the country, and the globe. One month later, the November 19, 1970 issue printed *The Paper* aka *Tech News* across its masthead, proclaiming *The Paper* as: “the culmination of an effort to produce a responsible Black journal at CCNY. The concept of *TECH NEWS* has outlived its usefulness. *THE PAPER* aka *Tech News*, will fulfill the purpose of projecting the realities of our world today.” *The Paper’s* transformation demonstrated how an institution (in this case, a student newspaper) can be overturned from within and reconstructed.

From the onset of Open Admissions in 1970-1971 to the end of the 1975-76 academic year, CUNY shifted from being a majority Euro student body to a predominantly Black, Latinx, and Asian student body that finally reflected the ethnic composition of the city at large. Open Admissions and the continued expansion of SEEK dramatically altered the university composition and curriculum so that previously excluded Black, Latinx, and Asian communities’ histories became recognized as worthy of rigorous study and participation. Even so, these democratizing pedagogical gains were attacked by administrators and racist faculty as soon as they had taken shape. The Board of Higher Education announced plans to implement tuition in 1976, a policy demanded by the federal government in exchange for addressing the state’s fiscal crisis. Coupled with the city’s financial crisis and the US defeat in Vietnam, the racist claim that Open Admissions only benefited poor Blacks and Puerto Ricans paved the way for the CUNY administration to impose tuition on all students.

During these same years, staffers on *The Paper* built a city-wide circulation. According to Arlette Ford, who joined the *Tech News* staff in the fall of 1969, “one of the virtues of the ‘new’ *Tech News* was that it did not only concern itself with the reporting of City College events, but evolved into a publication reporting on national and international events and issues from a unique perspective.” Don Ford was a former officer in the Black Panther Party when he returned to City College and joined the *Tech News* staff in the fall of 1969. He would eventually become a co-editor with Al DeLeon. These student journalists were not “frivolous[;] we went to school to change our lives and to improve ourselves” (D. Ford 517). He recalls the “brilliant work” that David Friedlander did for *The Paper* about the Attica Prison riot in 1971, as well as key contributions by “Jerry Mondesire, Bob Collazo, Sekou Sundiata [formerly Bob Feaster], Charles Powell, Ray Frost, Jeff Morgan, H. Rex Linsley, John Bohn, and Maxine Alexander [as well as] Dorothy Randall, Desira Benjamin, Brunilda Pabon, and David Caldwell” (D. Ford 516). *The*

Paper maintained the spirit of the Spring 1969 occupation in written form, even as the university lurched back into conservative governance, structures, and pedagogies. In this way, *The Paper* became an ongoing mobile component of Harlem University, passed hand to hand, issuing sparks for future insurgencies despite the late 1970s CUNY retrenchment period that helped pave the way for neoliberalism (Phillips-Fein).

Amidst these student literacy innovations, Mina Shaughnessy founded *Journal of Basic Writing* in 1975, as she enshrined the imposition of “Basic Writing” philosophies and punitive testing systems. Three years later, 1978, holds a dual tragic significance: Shaughnessy passed away at the age of 54 from cancer, in the same year that CUNY students were now universally subjected to the massive high-stakes CUNY reading, writing, and math testing system—that Shaughnessy had designed and promoted—to assign them a score and a place in the university (Shor, “Our Apartheid”). Over the next thirty-five years, the CUNY Basic Skills course/testing system in its various guises did immeasurable harm to about 1.5 million CUNY students (and to their writing teachers)—until a new generation of writing teachers and WPAs organized their resistance and began to dismantle it (Molloy, *Convenient Myopia* 390).

The painful legacies of Basic Writing as a rationale for writing pedagogy formalism remain embedded today in all levels of American writing instruction and teacher training, in college writing placement tests and certification exams that funnel students into tiered course systems, in SAT and GRE tests that limit college and graduate school access, in formalist pre-packaged K-12 writing curricula and incessant student testing systems, and in mandated “Praxis” grammar tests that block access for multilingual and non-neurotypical applicants to teacher certification programs (ETS). Colleges continue to hurt new students (and their teachers) every time they label any incoming first-year students as “Basic” (Molloy, Fonville, and Salam). For the last 50 years, composition-rhetoric studies has wrestled with these concessions and testing paradigms. Meanwhile, City College’s Black and Puerto Rican students and radical SEEK educators show an alternative emancipatory road that was also taken, a legacy which can still help reconfigure our classrooms, fields of study, institutions, and communities today.

Antiracist Rhetorical Praxis as Literacy in Action

With this story of how *Tech News* became *The Paper*—entwined with how CCNY became Harlem University (albeit temporarily)—we signal

to the institutional and interpersonal shifts that the antiracist rhetorical praxis of working-class Black and Puerto Rican students radically conjured. *Tech News* writers worked collectively and in collaboration with others to be effective advocates and agents for change. *Tech News* writers spoke truth to power, not just outside the campus, but inside it too—where opposition to racial supremacy carried real risks. From 1966 to the present, the collective writings and actions of Black and Puerto Rican CCNY students and teachers (with support from other antiracist students and teachers) changed CCNY, as well as the entire CUNY system and city of New York, in profound and permanent ways.

Although *The Paper* continues to operate as a politically engaged “Beacon of Truth for the Unheard,” it has confronted financial difficulties like those that troubled its early-1970s forebears. Even during the late 2000s, when Coco was an undergraduate writer and editor for *The Paper*, the school’s “Tech Fund” threatened several times to decrease *The Paper*’s operating budget, while *The Campus* newspaper was institutionally buttressed by the Journalism Department. Alumni *Paper* writers seek to address this inequity with a “Paper Scholarship Fund for Social Justice” to support City College student journalist-activists.⁶

We honor those *Tech News* and *The Paper* journalists whose lives and words incited tremendous impacts upon City College, Harlem, and beyond. Louis Reyes Rivera passed away in 2012 at the age of sixty-seven. He had regularly conducted writing and performance workshops at Sista’s Place in Brooklyn, and in Fall 2011 had spoken several times to the CUNY community about the 1969 strike and *The Paper*. Obituaries commemorating Rivera’s life and work were published across CUNY newspapers and movement websites (Reed, “Remembering Louis Reyes Rivera”). CUNY videographers Martyna Starosta and Iva Radivojević produced the short film *Are You With Me?*, featuring a speech by Rivera interspersed with student and faculty mic-checks from a massive education speak-out of tens of thousands of people during an Occupy Wall Street day of action on November 17, 2011. In a beautiful tribute, *The Paper* dedicated its May 2012 issue to Rivera, including previously unpublished excerpts from the 150-page epic poem he completed just before his death, *Jazz in Jail* (Rivera).

When Sean and Coco interviewed Paul Simms in 2021, he and his wife Denise Adams Simms discussed his role at *Tech News/The Paper*, his memories of campus organizing, and how these interventions shaped their lives after City College (Simms and Simms). In July 2022, Simms passed away in Loma Linda, California. At his funeral in September, members of *The Paper* joined

many in paying tribute to his legacy as a “powerhouse of Black health.” Through a brief look at this newspaper’s history, we can see that these radical students’ engagement with the written word—as part of a larger commitment to social justice and Black liberation—provides a different praxis-oriented lens for studying CUNY students’ positions in larger revolutionary struggles.

Francee Covington’s role in this City College story has had a much-welcomed resurgence with the 2023 release of the film *The Five Demands*, which narrates the story of the 1969 Harlem University takeover (Schiller and Weiss). As a member of the “Committee of Ten” who led the strike, with a persistent vision for education movements, she has now inspired younger generations. In the film, she explains the necessity of defending Black Studies and (actual) affirmative action. To counter the presumption that people attend school to adhere to the status quo, she adds, “I went to college to get an education to help change the world!”

The Paper continues to publish at CCNY over fifty years later, including a series of articles that documented the April 2024 CUNY Gaza Solidarity Encampment that, for six days, transformed City College with a new Five Demands for a Free CUNY and a Free Palestine, before it was brutally demolished by the CUNY administration and NYPD (Wood; “Points of Unity & Community Agreements”). More recently, these student journalists have documented the fight for reproductive rights, the formation of the NYC Student Union, and resisting police violence under a new, more vicious, Trump regime. *The Paper* continues to act as a record of radical student composition that speaks and responds to the exigencies of this political moment, in which CUNY students and faculty who engaged in Palestine solidarity activities continue to be suspended or fired from the university (Estrine).

We recognize that these student interventions may look very different in other situations, just as activism and effective rhetoric are different in every situation. Answering Gilyard, our case study approach is inductive, not deductive—offering, we hope, some grounded critical, rhetorical alternative approaches to broad theoretical arguments that are hard to see and touch or old monolingual pedagogies that remain trapped in biased and harmful formalism. We think these are powerful illustrative examples, but we believe more examples and stories will add useful complexity and build a richer definition of antiracist rhetorical praxis that Simms, Covington, Rivera, and others interwove between Harlem and CCNY.

We believe that antiracist rhetorical praxis—illustrated in these ways as a writing paradigm—becomes much more than code-switching, code-meshing, lingual tourism, or a mere loosening of formal constraints. It

directly challenges formalism (i.e. basic skills approaches) and objectivism (i.e. the “unbiased” nature of Eurocentric journalism). It is a means to combat racism, nativism, and embedded privileges within systems of power. To better ascertain how to conduct radical scholarship and movement work in our present cataclysmic moment, our current debates must be rooted in a historical arc of how learning transformations (and setbacks) occurred half a century ago when white universities were challenged and altered by Black and Puerto Rican teachers and students, but then were bureaucratically constrained by wealthy Eurocentric administrators and politicians during “the fires last time.”

Learning from these student writers’ work from almost sixty years ago, we believe that praxis can ground theory in real historicized situations in both our classrooms and surrounding communities. While scholarship in teaching and learning may often place professors and writing program administrators as the focal point, *The Paper’s* writers make clear that young people of color in contexts beyond the composition classroom are incredibly innovative writing pedagogues themselves. By turning our attention to learning from them, our education systems can support and celebrate oppressed voices to use language to act in varied daring ways as we effectively move our audiences to foment social change. May these City College of New York students, and their teachers moving in kinship with them, continue to serve as a beacon for all of our efforts to apply lessons from historic struggles in our pedagogies and actions today.

Notes

1. In this essay, we capitalize “Black” and “Brown” as chosen formal designations by people of African, Caribbean, Indigenous, and Latin American descent whose self-naming was part of their emancipation, while we lower-case “white” to signal that this umbrella term homogeneously designates people of European descent (but also other ethnicities at different periods of political racialization in US history). When people capitalize “white,” this may be misconstrued as harmless, but actually cedes ground to those who intend it as a way to lionize this ahistorical racial category (i.e. White Power).
2. Much remains to be written about *Tech News/The Paper*. (See also *The Paper*, “Our Legacy,” <https://www.ccnycuny.edu/journalism/paper/>.) Gratitude to Maxine Alexander, Dee Alpert, Diane Anderson, Thomas Bell, Desira Benjamin, Sheryl Bernier, John Bohn, David Calwell, Bob

Collazo, Albert DeLeon, Gwen Dixon, Ann Doris, Warren Doris, Eli Dorsey, Faviola Felix, Ted Fleming, Joudon Ford, David Friedlander, Ray Frost, Arlette Hecht, Greg Holder, Steve Holmes, Thomas Holmes, Vicky Hunter, Jane Tillman Irving, Diane Kearny, Bob Knight, H. Rex Lindsey, Marianita Lopez, Dennis Mack, Tom McDonald, Ayad Mohamed, Jerry Mondesire, Jeff Morgan, Ray Nero, Gwen New, Chris Newton, Brunilda Pabon, Charles Powell, Dorothy Randall, Angelita Reyes, Jaime Rivera, Bill Robinson, Cynthia Valentine-Stephens, Tylie Waters, Duane Watts, Eric White, and other participants not highlighted in this article.

3. On the morning of July 16, 1964, James Powell—a fifteen-year-old Black middle-school student—was shot twice and killed by a white policeman outside Manhattan’s Robert Wagner Junior High School where Powell was attending summer classes (Jones). Three days later, residents rallied on 125th Street to protest Powell’s death and a crowd gathered in front of the 123rd Street Precinct. The New York Police Department summoned reinforcements, barricaded the block and fired shots into the air. The protests then erupted into nine days of Harlem riots, all in the shadow of CCNY’s hilltop campus (Montgomery and Clines).
4. Language and coverage choices that play into white-supremacist, colonial power structures continue to be a hallmark of the *New York Times*, as anti-Zionist activists have highlighted regarding the paper’s coverage of the genocide in Gaza. In 2024, community writing emerging out of New York City, such as the pro-Palestine grassroots newspaper the *New York War Crimes*, continues to be a vital site of contestation of these rhetorical norms.
5. Also during the fall of 1968, SEEK teacher Toni Cade Bambara proposed a new Center for Black and Latino Studies and described eight possible courses. In February 1969, the *Observation Post* student newspaper reprinted her proposal (Bambara, “Some” 5). Bambara even suggested course teachers, including Francee Covington (“Some” 5). Barbara Christian wrote that the idea for a Black and Puerto Rican studies program had been raised by students first in the fall of 1968 and had gradually expanded into a demand for a broader “School of Urban and Third World Studies” in the five student demands in spring 1969 (Christian). Bambara also made it clear that the student demands at City College were not unusual, arguing that “at least 90% of the several hundred rebellions” at colleges and high schools since 1964 were driven by dissatisfaction with curriculum, especially “the casual absence or deliberate overlooking of the role the African and Afro-American tradition plays

in our history, our art, our culture in general” (“Some” 4). For more on these histories, see Reed.

6. *The Paper* Scholarship Fund for Social Justice, <https://www.givegab.com/campaigns/the-paper-scholarship-fund/>.

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Oil/School: Land and Affiliation in the Age of Fossil Ed

Daisy Atterbury

ABSTRACT: This essay theorizes oil/school, an institutional formation in which public higher education is materially and rhetorically sustained by fossil fuel extraction. Focusing on universities in New Mexico, it examines the political contradictions embedded in a widely celebrated model of tuition-free higher education financed in part through oil and gas revenue. While such programs expand access for multiply marginalized college populations, they are simultaneously underwritten by extractive economies that shape the ecological and social environments prospective students inhabit. Through analyses of political discourse, extractive landscapes, and cultural narratives of land, the essay traces how petroleum wealth is mobilized to narrate educational opportunity while obscuring the environmental and social costs of extraction. In doing so, it offers oil/school as a framework for understanding how institutions of public higher education become entangled with extractive economies and the contested futures they produce.

KEYWORDS: fossil fuel extraction; higher education; land; oil/school; settler colonialism

“... No land is empty. It must be made empty forcibly and ideologically”—la paperson (also K. Wayne Yang), “A ghetto land pedagogy: an antidote for settler environmentalism,” *Environmental Education Research*

“Proceed to the Route. Upon arrival, pick up loose, roadside threads. Use them to stitch shut the asking mouths.”—Toni Jensen, *Carry: A Memoir of Survival on Stolen Land*

Introduction: Homing Stories

It was August 29, 2022. Driving north from New Mexico through the southern extension of the Rocky Mountains toward the Front Range in Colorado, I was thinking about an op-ed I’d read recently by Jonathan Juarez-Alonzo. Anyone who has traversed this route knows the feeling of being contoured by the land. In the face of the mountains, you’re molded into a new shape, rounded down. You lose your edges. The op-ed was titled,

“Tuition-free college isn’t free when it’s funded by oil and gas” (Juarez-Alonzo). With an oil and gas economy that pays for public funds allocated for social programs in the state, New Mexico owes the ebb and flow of its commitment to public higher education to the price of oil. This story would haunt me in a move across state borders. It asks something of me, now, as I find myself moving between teaching jobs at public universities in the Southwestern US.

Early last year, New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan-Grisham signed Senate Bill 140, legislation known as the “Opportunity Scholarship,” making college tuition-free in New Mexico for resident graduates of any New Mexico high school (“Governor Signs”). On August 22nd, 2022, the ExxonMobil subsidiary XTO Permian Operating was fined \$1.7M for violating oil and gas wastewater disposal rules in New Mexico’s Permian Basin, where disposing wastewater from drilling has been under review because of its potential ties to regional earthquakes (Hedden, “ExxonMobil Fined”). Despite sustained criticism from environmental advocates, New Mexico remains the second-largest oil-producing state in the country. Increasingly, the success of public higher education in the state is narrated alongside, and materially tied to, the success of the oil and gas industry, as political rhetoric grafts the promise of tuition-free college to the revenues of extraction. While tuition-free higher education is emerging as a compelling national policy narrative, in New Mexico narratives about its attainability remain deeply entangled with the ongoing expansion of fossil fuel production. In fact, all across the Southwestern US, oil—its extraction and profitability—is higher ed’s emerging local subtext.

I left my home in Albuquerque, New Mexico to teach in the Department of Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies at The University of Colorado, Boulder. I first grew up in Shiprock, New Mexico, near uranium and vanadium-ore processing facilities and milling operations that produced process-related wastes and radioactive tailings on the Navajo Nation. As a

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child, I later moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico, near Relief Route 599, a highway built for routine shipments of transuranic nuclear waste to bypass the wealthy state capital. According to V. Jo Hsu:

Homing: a critical approach to storytelling that situates individual experiences in relation to relevant histories and events. This approach to narrative deliberately confronts systems of power and representation, paying particular attention to the author's relations and responsibility. ("A New Plot")

My relationship to state- and federally-sanctioned programs of all kinds has been shaped by a settler upbringing, my "homing story": attending school in Shiprock, on the Navajo Nation; moving to Santa Fe, the land of the settler story that never sleeps. Reflecting on the Opportunity Scholarship bill that was passed recently to support tuition-free higher education in New Mexico, I wish, urgently, to elaborate on how the bill resides in a tension around land, which is constructed in and through narrative. Whether New Mexico needs to make tuition accessible for all is not the central question. Rather, the question is how stories about land construct our relationships to place, shape our present and reveal the racialized logics through which settler colonialism is structured. The university must be called to account, through an attention to narrative and a new "homing story," for the land politics its policies sustain and the futures they are imagined to defend.

Land

Driving north on I-25, desperate to hold onto a sense of belonging in my pursuit of teaching work near family and my community in Albuquerque, I told myself: *I-25 goes straight north on contiguous land. I'm not really leaving home.* I traversed the highway pass through the lower Rocky Mountains with my essential clothing, succulent plant, and my girlfriend's neck pillow and arrived at the University of Colorado Boulder, an institution established in 1876. Two cities in Colorado originally competed for the honor to host the University of Colorado: Cañon City and Boulder. The consolation prize for the losing city was to house the new Colorado State Prison. The land surrounding The University of Colorado, Boulder is contested by a number of interests and, in 2020, notably passed the strictest fracking regulations in the state of Colorado (Metzger). At the same time, Boulder County is consistently ranked one of the most expensive places to live in Colorado, with a median home value of \$736,000 in 2022. Most university faculty I meet

at CU Boulder live a long commute from the campus and vie for housing in a real estate rental market characterized by “churn” and “tight inventory” one hour away, in Denver. Real estate interests in maintaining the “pristine” landscapes surrounding Boulder County exemplify what la paperson calls “settler environmentalism,” a framework that describes how environmental protection can operate within, and ultimately reinforce, settler colonial relations to land. As Paperson explains, settler environmentalism draws on the logic of *terra sacer*, or sacred/accursed land, in which certain territories are framed simultaneously as desecrated spaces in need of rescue and as sacred wilderness worthy of preservation (115–30). Within this discourse, environmental protection becomes a mechanism through which settlers claim authority to manage, restore, and possess land, even as Indigenous histories of dispossession remain structurally unaddressed. The result, Paperson argues, is a persistent narrative duality: “land as desecrated, in pain, in need of rescue; and land as sacred, wild, and preserve-able,” a framing that ultimately works to justify new forms of territorial control and “re-invasion” (117). In places like Boulder County, where strong anti-fracking and anti-drilling ordinances protect the surrounding foothills and open spaces, these environmental protections are also entangled with property regimes that concentrate access to protected landscapes among affluent residents. In this sense, environmental preservation can coexist with, and even intensify, forms of spatial exclusion, as only a narrow class of people can afford to live near lands safeguarded from extraction.

In terms of class-based environmental protections, Boulder, Colorado and Albuquerque, New Mexico, which houses the University of New Mexico’s flagship campus, provide a stark contrast. In 2018, the oil and gas industry identified the central Rio Grande Valley, or the Albuquerque Basin, as a potential site for horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracking. A report in the *Albuquerque Journal* that year, headlined, “Area’s drinking water is at risk from fracking,” illustrates the recurring tension between industry expansion and public safety: although a proposal for fracking had been rejected the previous year, another “industry-friendly extraction ordinance” was introduced to the county soon after (Barth). The debate over fracking in the Albuquerque Basin demonstrates whose voices and priorities dominate the governance of land and natural resources. Settler and industry interests often take precedence over Indigenous and local communities’ claims to water, land, and environmental health. In this context, the basin is simultaneously framed as a geologic formation, or a neutral depression of the Earth’s crust shaped by tectonic activity, and as a petroleum province, a resource-rich space to

be exploited for commercial gain. These competing narratives reveal how settler environmentalism structures land governance, by legitimizing interventions by those with economic and political power while marginalizing histories of dispossession and environmental harm endured by Indigenous and other vulnerable communities. The article asks, “Can horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracking be done anywhere in the Albuquerque Basin without endangering our drinking water aquifer?” (Barth). In Albuquerque as in Boulder, one story of land captures the value and legacy of the areas adjacent to the cities, while another describes a region in which petroleum is found in commercial quantities, rendering the land a commercial prospect. Both of these stories describe the same place. Both of these stories persist.

There are many other places, and many other stories.

My students in Colorado pay a hefty sum to attend college, with tuition up more than 16% since 2012. For Colorado resident Arts & Sciences undergraduates in CU Boulder’s 2021-22 Group Q cohort, tuition after the one-time post-pandemic credit was \$5,364 per semester (\$10,728 fall/spring); out-of-state Arts & Sciences tuition after the credit was \$18,273 per semester (\$36,546 fall/spring) (University of Colorado Boulder Bursar’s Office, “2021-22 Undergrad”; “2021-22 Undergraduate”). At UNM Main Campus, 2021-22 undergraduate tuition was \$3,444.06 per semester for full-time New Mexico residents (\$6,888.12 fall/spring) and \$11,970.78 for full-time nonresidents (\$23,941.56 fall/spring) (University of New Mexico Bursar’s Office, “Fall 2021”; “Spring 2022”). The New Mexico Opportunity Scholarship Act with its promise of free tuition stands to change a lot for students graduating from a New Mexico high school. Indeed, by the fall of 2022, more than 11,000 students across all UNM campuses have participated in the scholarship, and cultural diversity in the most recent freshman class of students has reportedly increased, demonstrating a 29.8% increase in African American students, a 25.5% increase in Indigenous students, and a 16.1% increase in Hispanic students in comparison to enrollments in 2021 (UNM Newsroom). According to enrollment numbers, higher education in New Mexico is suddenly flourishing among historically underrepresented students with the onset of the Opportunity Scholarship, fueled in part by a boom in oil and gas.

Jonathan Juarez-Alonzo is a former undergraduate student at the University of New Mexico, and an Indigenous Two-Spirit climate activist and member of the Pueblos of Laguna and Isleta, and Chairmxn of the Board of Directors of Pueblo Action Alliance, a grassroots organization working to combat environmental racism in New Mexico. Throughout 2019, Juarez-

Alonzo organized climate strikes across Albuquerque, in which thousands of students protested local and state climate policies. In 2022, Juarez-Alonzo wrote an op-ed titled, “Tuition-free college isn’t free when it’s funded by oil and gas,” which was published in an independent news organization, *Source New Mexico*, which reports on government policy through a public health and equity lens. The public comment articulates reasons Juarez-Alonzo is “currently on an indefinite leave of absence from the University of New Mexico” (1). In compelling detail, Juarez-Alonzo names reasons for enrolling in the university as a first-generation undergraduate: “I started college eager for my future and the positive impacts an education would bring to me and my family long-term.” Then, Juarez-Alonzo writes about less-spoken, more often whispered, reasons for withdrawing from the program: “As I started paying attention to climate policy and actions, or lack thereof, on a local and state level, all my ambitions for a higher education were eclipsed.” The op-ed elaborates, “Students like myself feel our futures are being held hostage: Do we invest in ourselves and take advantage of free higher education? Or should we even be wasting these last fleeting years of our youth in a classroom when our elected leaders are leading us down a path toward total climate collapse?” Juarez-Alonzo’s questions point to a central tension in the premise of the Opportunity Scholarship, which promises to provide equal opportunity and a bright future to all residents of New Mexico. The Opportunity Scholarship is increasingly framed as a public benefit made possible through the revenues of an expanding fossil fuel industry. This narrative and material tethering raises difficult questions about the conditions under which educational opportunity is produced and the kinds of futures such policies ultimately secure. Juarez-Alonzo’s op-ed frames the choice to attend college and work toward a sustainable, ecologically and economically viable future, or not, as a decision that is lose-lose. For this student, the premise looks like a trap.

Juarez-Alonzo’s brilliant critique reveals an inflection point in the narrative architecture of higher education in New Mexico, exposing how educational opportunity is increasingly tethered to the logics of extraction that shape the region’s land and political economy. If we think about history as storytelling, we can turn to etymology, which suggests the word “history” (n.), in English (late 14c.), is a “relation of incidents,” whether true or false, and derives from the Greek *historia*, meaning “a learning or knowing by inquiry” (Harper). The histories of land and its systems continually inform present circumstances, whether they circulate as accepted narratives or remain contested accounts. History may therefore emerge not only as a fixed narrative but also as a form of inquiry, or a question about how the past is

told and by whom. As Aja Martinez writes in “A Case for Counterstory,” “I believe that we’ve all been telling stories all along” (1-2). The history of land use in New Mexico is one such story, negotiated and contested by communities for centuries. According to Martinez, “Some stories are elevated to the status of theory, scholarship, and literature, while, too often, minoritized perspectives are relegated to marginalized or overlooked ‘cultural rhetorics’ methods or genres.” Within this framework, the question becomes whose stories of land come to constitute the authoritative relation of incidents. In Juarez-Alonzo’s op-ed, the narrative of “tuition-free college” functions as a public-facing narrative that masks another story, one that goes back centuries. In the unfolding story of higher education in New Mexico, funding “through oil and gas” may appear as a recent narrative development, yet this story emerges from a much deeper historical conflict over land, extraction, and the futures such arrangements make possible. In the “story” of higher education in New Mexico, “funded by oil and gas,” might be the most recent rising action of an ever-unfolding conflict around whose future matters.

Juarez-Alonzo’s op-ed arrived on the heels of the announcement by New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham that she was signing Senate Bill 140, the New Mexico Opportunity Scholarship Act, making provisions for any New Mexico state resident graduating from a New Mexico high school to attend public college in the state of New Mexico for free (“Governor Signs”). In her statement in a speech in Silver City (now published at the NM Governor’s official website), Lujan Grisham announced:

For over a quarter of a century, New Mexico has been a national leader in providing free college to its residents. A fully funded Opportunity Scholarship opens the door for every New Mexican to reach higher, strengthening our economy, our families and our communities.

The bill was presented as the first of its kind in a long line of efforts to reduce the cost of education in New Mexico, a triumph for the liberal state and its residents. And it is, in its way, a triumph. In the statement, the governor continued, “Signing this legislation sends a clear message to New Mexicans that we believe in them and the contributions they will make for their families and the future of our great state.” In the governor’s framing, students are invited to “reach higher.” A future is envisioned for “our great state.” And ultimately, a picture is painted of something better, loftier, and more secure for residents of New Mexico.

The interrogation of these narratives is as much the responsibility of faculty as it is that of students like Juárez-Alonzo, but the imperative to critically analyze this story perhaps belongs most urgently to the broad coalition of supporters of public education in New Mexico and to those invested in the promise of tuition-free higher education. Such analysis requires attention not only to policy outcomes but also to the rhetorical infrastructures through which universities frame their commitments to students, communities, and public good. Institutional narratives about opportunity, access, and investment often function as mediating languages that translate complex political economies, such as those linking higher education funding to extractive industries, into seemingly neutral or celebratory terms. Examining these rhetorical structures allows us to see how certain stories about universities and their public missions become normalized, even when they remain disconnected from the material conditions shaping the communities they claim to serve. In addressing institutional rhetorics of community, literacy scholars Vani Kannan, Ben Kuebrich, and Yanira Rodríguez have invoked the importance of infrastructural critique in their advocacy of what they call rhetorical “unmasking,” writing:

Since ‘community work’ in academia can both be seductive and appear to scholars as the only possible avenue for social justice, we have recognized the necessity of unmasking the current infrastructure we work under and upending the logic of infrastructure-building. (Kannan et al. 76–93)

In their case study at Syracuse University, Kannan et al. examine the rhetorics of the “corporate military university,” pointing out that seemingly banal terms like “the student experience” (in this case, slogans like “reach higher”) can operate as codes that embed university values in a system that is actively detached from the present and future needs of students’ (landed) communities and lived experience of systemic infrastructure (76). Corroborating this, Carmen Kynard, in “Teaching While Black: Witnessing and Countering Disciplinary Whiteness, Racial Violence, and University Race-Management,” states, “In this absence of a deliberate critique of power, we ourselves created the very possibility that progressive philosophies of education could be completely co-opted by neoliberalism. . . we may have supplied a much too-neutral language” (11). Combatting this co-optation requires more than critique at the level of language; it demands sustained pressure on the institutional infrastructures through which these narratives

circulate and acquire legitimacy. Such work necessarily unfolds both within and beyond the university, as students, faculty, and community members contest the terms through which institutions narrate their commitments to equity, opportunity, and public good. As Kannan et al. note, “Pressing social justice struggles are not only located on campus, but often against campus,” reminding us that universities themselves frequently become sites where competing visions of community responsibility and political accountability are negotiated (77). This tension may leave faculty and students feeling implicated in institutional structures whose public-facing narratives obscure their material entanglements. Yet it also signals the possibility of intervention. When these narratives are critically interrogated, when their infrastructural logics are unmasked, they reveal the contingent foundations upon which institutional legitimacy rests. In the case of tuition-free higher education in New Mexico, such scrutiny makes visible how the promise of educational opportunity is embedded within a broader political economy of extraction, compelling supporters of public education to confront not only the benefits such policies deliver but also the land-based conditions that make those benefits possible.

At the NM Governor’s Office official website, the administration proposes that the New Mexico’s Opportunity Scholarship, implemented by Lujan Grisham in 2020:

is the only state-funded scholarship program in the nation to include both recent high school graduates and returning adult learners; accommodate part-time students; include career training certificates, associate degrees and bachelor’s degrees; and cover summer courses. In addition to covering full tuition and fees at in-state public colleges and universities, the scholarship lets students stack federal aid such as Pell Grants, local scholarships, and private scholarships so that they can use these funds to pay for books, materials, housing, food, transportation, childcare and other college costs.

Nowhere on the website does the program indicate where the funds for this program originate, and the state’s reliance on revenue from oil and gas industry expansion remains largely visible only to residents who follow the industry closely or track state legislative sessions. The governor’s website directs the public and prospective students to the Opportunity Scholarship information site (“Governor Signs”); the current Reach Higher New Mexico page explains eligibility requirements for the scholarship. The information

sits next to a glossy photograph of Lujan Grisham in a bob haircut and silver jewelry, a juxtaposition that invites multiple readings. Some local liberal publics may interpret the incorporation of Indigenous jewelry as a familiar visual gesture within state politics, a politicized aesthetic signaling an appeal to the broad multicultural coalition that sustains public higher education in New Mexico. Others may read it as a settler claim to belonging in occupied territory. Held side by side, these interpretations invite a movement between readings that unsettles the stability of the official narrative. Such interpretive shifts enact the kind of narrative reworking necessary for destabilizing settler stories of land and belonging. What might initially appear as a misreading of rhetorical intent becomes, instead, an attunement to the simultaneity of stories operating within the same political image.

Oil/School

The link between the success of free public higher education in New Mexico and the success of the oil and gas industry is a narrative that has taken on legislative legitimacy as state rhetoric increasingly grafts the two sectors together. In December of 2021, the New Mexico Oil and Gas Association (NMOGA) reported revenues of \$5.3 billion for 2021, an increase of \$500 million over fiscal year 2020. According to oil, gas and environmental journalist Adrian Hedden, 2021 sets a new record, “surpassing \$5.16 billion generated in FY 2019, and providing \$2.96 billion to the State’s General Fund along with \$358 million in local taxes and another \$1.95 billion state taxes and royalties.” Hedden notes that this increase is likely attributable to expanded oil and gas production in the Permian Basin in Southeastern New Mexico. These outcomes have helped position New Mexico as the second-largest oil-producing state in the United States, behind Texas and ahead of North Dakota.

At the same time, oil and gas industry advocates have pushed back against environmental regulations designed to limit emissions and ban the burning of excess gas, known as “flaring,” measures implemented in 2021 by the Oil Conservation Division. Industry advocates have also critiqued regulatory initiatives by the New Mexico Environment Department designed to limit methane and volatile compound releases that create pollution and contribute to ozone formation. In public statements responding to these regulatory efforts, industry leaders have argued that restricting oil and gas development would threaten the revenue streams that support essential public services, including education and healthcare. Hedden writes, “NMOGA

President Leland Gould said the added revenue would support essential public services like education and healthcare, solidifying fossil fuel as a major driver of New Mexico's economy." Such claims reinforce a broader political narrative in which the fiscal stability of public institutions, among them higher education, appears increasingly dependent on the continued expansion of fossil fuel extraction in the state.

In speeches, Gould has taken pains to link the success of public higher education in New Mexico to the success of oil and gas, stating that "Historic revenue equals historic opportunity, and that is great news for teachers and students, critical first responders and healthcare workers, and each and every New Mexican across this state" (qtd. in Hedden, "Oil and Gas"). This ideological linkage, articulated in terms laid out by Gould and others, prompts me to use the term *oil/school* to theorize the social, activist, liberatory and pedagogical efforts that take place under its regime. The term *oil/school* foregrounds how extractive economies are made to appear as the enabling condition of public goods, producing a form of extractivist governance in which land, labor, and social infrastructure are mobilized to support settler-colonial economic projects. In *oil/school*, the "/" compares and conflates the two terms while resisting the overdetermination of a future contingency. Whether the linkage between "oil" and "school" is mobilized by industry actors and their political allies to garner support from constituencies that historically champion the latter (education and healthcare) but not the former (fossil fuel extraction) remains difficult to determine. As Jodi Byrd, Alyosha Goldstein, Jodi Melamed, and Chandan Reddy theorize in their introduction to the collection *Predatory Value: Economies of Dispossession and Disturbed Relationalities*, settler-colonial logics structure extractive regimes that continuously render land and labor available for accumulation while masking these dynamics as neutral or beneficial (1). *Oil/school* names an assemblage in which extraction economies, state fiscal policy, and public education infrastructures are rhetorically and materially intertwined in just this way. When oil and gas industry leaders themselves repeatedly make the association, the revenue flows accordingly.

Economic reliance on oil and gas, such as in water-scarce countries in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf, does not easily shift in regions facing desertification, water scarcity, and extractive economies, as Eckart Woertz observes in *Oil for Food: The Global Food Crisis and the Middle East*: "Oil and gas revenues supply the bulk of the foreign currency that finances the growing food imports of the region" (Woertz 3). Considering the 2008 global food crisis and the entanglement of food, finance, and energy in the Gulf's

political economy, Woertz further notes, “As Saudi Arabia phases out its own internal subsidized wheat production and moves away from food production at home due to water scarcity, it relies increasingly on global oil exports to maintain food security” (3). This structure, he notes, is not easily shifted. While the geopolitical and infrastructural circumstances of New Mexico differ in scale and history, the state faces analogous conditions in which dependence on extractive industries structures economic, environmental, and social outcomes. This tethering situates students within a paradoxical economy: their opportunity to pursue education without pressing financial burden is produced through an industry that threatens ecological and social sustainability. Access to free education becomes tied to the ebb and flow of a global fossil fuels market, an economy that many students see as a threat to their survival, not only in an imagined, and endlessly delayed future, but in the present. Oil/school relies on the ways public goods are contingent upon extractive economies, thus illuminating the ways in which settler-colonial and extractive logics converge. The result is “opportunity” for some, sustained upon the structural and ecological precarity of others, if not all.

In the 1960s, propelled by the Federal Aid Highway Acts of 1938, 1944, and 1956, the Dwight D. Eisenhower system of Interstate and Defense Highway expanded Interstate-25, carving a line due north through New Mexico and Colorado. This highway extended across so-called “Front Range” cities like Longmont, Fort Collins, Lafayette, Boulder, and Broomfield, many of which dot across existing and proposed oil and gas drilling sites. In Boulder, Colorado, fracking bans and moratoriums have been proposed in the interest of protecting the influx of high-value real estate development, even as the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission works “to establish more stringent setback distances between new oil and gas development and occupied buildings” (“Land Development”). The tension in the region between real estate and oil and gas extraction exemplifies the prevailing political struggles in settler Colorado, where environmental protection, economic development, and property value are entangled. la paperson observes that “land is a predominant concern in settler colonialism” (116), a concern articulated through the triadic social arrangements he describes: settlers accumulate wealth by shaping land, Indigenous inhabitants’ claims are extinguished, and chattel labor is kept landless (116). In this framework, land is structured by hierarchies of race, class, and legality that enable extractive accumulation. In settler economies, where environmental interests are often cited as reasons to protect an area from drilling, real estate is often an underwriter of fracking and drilling bans. In the *Longmont Observer*, a recent

article highlighting the tensions between land development and oil and gas suggests that the industries are on a “collision course”: “In places like North Dakota’s Bakken oil field or Wyoming’s Powder River Basin, there is little competition between land development and drilling for oil and gas. Not so for the Niobrara shales in the Denver-Julesburg Basin” (“Land Development”). In Colorado, the overlap of real estate development and fracking zones illustrates precisely a “disturbed relationality,” wherein land that is valuable for ecological, residential, or aesthetic reasons is simultaneously a site of industrial extraction, and policies, zoning, and infrastructure are mobilized to manage these competing claims in ways that reproduce settler wealth and dispossession. Today, horizontal drilling and fracking account for around 85% of all new wells in Colorado, most located east of the Front Range, north of Denver, where “Interstate-25 runs right through the richest deposits in Colorado. . .” (“Land Development”). Meanwhile, the population surrounding Interstate-25 is projected to double by 2040. The juxtaposition of coveted residential land and fracking zones crystallizes the way settler-environmental and extractive logics operate together, producing both environmental incentives and dispossessions, and illustrating the ongoing material and rhetorical operations of settler-colonial value production.

Affiliation

The deadliness of border crossings is an unspoken context and concern for the oil/school. Migrants between the US and Mexico navigate militarized, climate-altered desert landscapes where heat, dehydration, and surveillance produce conditions of mortal risk. Desert crossings are structured by extractive logics that render land and life precarious, made all the more dangerous under the severe climate conditions that themselves propel migrancy in ever increasing numbers. This is not the only arena in which risk structures fossil fuel extraction, however. Fracking booms generate violent environments in the border towns and rural regions where they unfold. These concerns, those of land, women, migrants, and institutions related to climate crisis and oil and gas extraction, are not discrete phenomena but interrelated formations. These threaded stories receive little attention in political debates about the oil and gas economy. The oil/school emerges within these entanglements.

“I staked my dream into the desert,” Raquel Gutiérrez writes in *Brown Neon*, a collection of essays that wrestles with what it means to inhabit a terrain shaped by the social and political history of migrancy in the Southwestern US Rachel León observes, “An essay can’t listen, but [Gutiérrez’s] comes

close, leaving room for questions left unanswered and realities left unlived” (1). In the essay, “Difficult Terrains: Do Migrants Dream of Blue Barrels?” Gutiérrez reflects, “The border and the imprint of migrants’ deaths left in its hinterlands animate most experiences I have in the surrounding nature” (83). History, particularly the histories of landed violence, displacement, and survival, imprints itself on landscape producing a tension between land as material terrain and as lived, relational and thus politicized experience. The land itself has a story, but these stories are refracted through perception, occupation and encounter; Gutiérrez, a witness and participant, has another story, coloring the sunset with open secrets. “There’s no natural encounter—passing by a mountain range silhouette at sunset—that doesn’t have the uncanny attached to it” (Gutiérrez, “Difficult Terrains” 83). Gutiérrez’s uncanny, here, signals the affective entanglement of land, history and human presence in the borderlands, the land itself alight with the stories of many who crossed under the hot sun.

With “I staked my dream into the desert,” Gutiérrez articulates a relational approach to land, one that acknowledges the violences, pains, dreams, projections and paradoxes of claim tethered to belonging in these border states. “To stake,” as in “to stake a tent,” conveys both claim and provisionality, a metaphor of movement and rootedness, a commitment to inhabit while remaining responsive to environmental, social, and economic pressures. Land in this formulation is active and it responds, resists, and shapes human relations while simultaneously reflecting human histories. While attending to the lived experiences and violent persecutions of migrants crossing the Sonora, Gutiérrez’s writing seems to ask, aren’t we living in a threshold of uncanny relations, affectively bound by our own lived betweenness? The word “staked,” as in *staked a tent*, also implies a necessary availability to migrancy, a readiness for change and an orientation to contingency in an economic system fostering uprootedness under fossil fuels capitalism and present geopolitics. A stake can be pulled up, relocated, and hammered in again. *Yes, I can stake a claim*, perhaps like *I stake my tent for the night*.

One could describe the relationship between the oil/school and migrant precarity with the precise notion of “stakes.” What are the conceptual stakes of the oil/school? What systems does it reinforce and perpetuate? As has been made clear by scientists, fossil fuels are by far the largest contributor to global climate change, accounting for over 75% of global greenhouse gas emissions and nearly 90% of all carbon dioxide emissions (“Causes and Effects of Climate Change”). The precarities faced by migrants crossing the border, their embodied encounters with desert heat, militarization, and

environmental risk, are inseparable from the broader conditions produced by fossil fuel dependency. Entangled with the broader political and ecological conditions produced by extractive energy reliance, migrants are thus inseparable from the oil/school. In another essay, titled "Difficult Terrains," Gutiérrez observes that the effects of climate change land differently for different people: "As 115-120 degrees becomes the new normal for Southern Arizona, indicating a climate change that may not be reversible in years to come, there is another thing one cannot deny—any slight carelessness on your part and the desert will kill you" (Gutiérrez, "Difficult Terrains" 83). The extreme temperatures make living in the border state more deadly, even for those with access to shelter. I recall my prior hometown of Albuquerque, New Mexico, where we'd seen a reported increase of about four additional deadly heat waves per year (Segarra 2). In these regions, the oil/school bears witness to the deadliness of border crossings in militarized zones, and adjusts to increasingly heat-seared worlds.

In the essay, "Women in the Fracklands," from *Carry: A Memoir of Survival on Stolen Land*, Toni Jensen asks, "How many close calls constitute a violence?" (2). In "Fracklands," women in the border zones surrounding men's camps at fracking sites end up missing, dead or disappeared. The influx of transient oil and gas workers into rural extraction regions has been linked to increases in violent crime, sex trafficking and assaults against women living near drilling sites and "man camps." The narrator in Jensen's "Fracklands" confronts this phenomenon, all while thinking about her own proximity to risk as she traces the routes of disappeared women. From the fracklands, Jensen writes in the second person: "You spend those thirty-eight minutes driving around the question of violence, of proximity and approximation" (2). "You" locate a feeling of eventuality in your own "close call," an anticipation of future boundary transgressions or violent encounters. The narrator's "proximity and approximation" is a mental stall tactic, a stage of bargaining against the inevitable violent context of her own present encounter.

Proximity to violence and assessment of its nearness is a problem for women, especially Indigenous women, in the fracklands, where the influx of transient labor coincides with heightened violence and instability. Jensen writes:

The influx of men, of workers' bodies, into frackland towns brings an overflow of crime. In the Bakken at the height of the oil and gas boom, violent crime, for example, increased by 125 percent. North Dakota Attorney General Wayne Stenehjem called this increase in

violent crime ‘disturbing,’ and cited aggravated assaults, rapes, and human trafficking as ‘chief concerns.’ (6)

These “concerns,” of lands, women, and institutions, oil and gas economies and climate crisis, are related, and are now tethered to services their revenues support. Women are thus drawn into the network of consequences generated by extractive booms, which reorganize land and social relations in environments where economic opportunity and intensified precarity emerge simultaneously. What Jensen means by the “close call” is akin to what Gutiérrez means by “the desert will kill you”: the threat always already conditions one’s existence, and as a woman, migrant, or vulnerable person, life is lived in the shadow of these structuring violences. In this sense, violence appears less as an isolated event than as a condition of inhabitation, structured through the political, ecological, and economic arrangements that govern life in extractive borderlands. One scene from the essay lingers with me long after I read, haunting me in my northerly drive. Jensen describes checking out of hotels with photo documentation. She writes:

In each place, each frackland, off each road, you wait until checkout to upload the photos of the rooms. In the year and a half of driving and talking and driving and talking, if you’ve learned nothing else, you’ve learned to wait. Because it is very, very difficult to sleep in a hotel room once you learn a woman’s gone missing from it. (6)

In *Border Bodies: Racialized Sexuality, Sexual Capital, and Violence in the Nineteenth-Century Borderlands*, Bernadine Hernández examines gendered conquest through the stories of women living in the nineteenth-century US-Mexico borderlands, a period marked by the arrival of US settlers interacting with established landholding families. Hernández traces the intersections of race, sexuality, and violence, showing how borderlands shaped by colonial expansion, slavery, and territorial conquest produced racial and gendered hierarchies negotiated through sexual encounters. Sexual and gendered violence in the region functioned as tools of authority and territorial control, even as they were contested and resisted by those subjected to these structures. Hernández’s re-reading of borderlands history reveals sexual violence not as an aberration but as a constitutive mechanism through which colonial land regimes consolidated power. This historical framing resonates with contemporary analyses of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW), which situate gendered violence within the ongoing logics of settler colonialism and extractive development. Contested lands, such as

those surrounding Boulder, Colorado, on the traditional territories of the Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Ute Nations, bear the marks of successive regimes of conquest, from the so-called Mexican Cession to the rapid expansion of the Front Range Urban Corridor and the rise of luxury real estate development. Beneath these transformations lies another geological and economic layer: the Denver Basin, the oil-and-gas region whose first well was completed in 1881, making one of its fields the oldest continuously producing oil field in the United States (Higley and Cox). Any study of social life on these lands must therefore account simultaneously for the infrastructures of extraction that structure the region's political economy.

As of 2016, the National Crime Information Center reported 5,712 cases of missing American Indian and Alaska Native women and girls. The number has certainly increased since 2016, and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention has reported that murder is the third-leading cause of death among American Indian and Alaska Native women (Urban Indian Health Institute). Meanwhile, the US Department of Justice's missing persons database has only reported 116 cases among thousands of known missing persons (Native Womens Wilderness). While several states in the Southwestern US have implemented statewide studies on Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women (MMIW), Native Womens Wilderness, an organization based near Boulder, CO, argues that the state of Colorado has not yet begun adequately addressing this crisis. "Given that Colorado is surrounded by several states with large Native populations and has a 1% Native population density in Denver, there is a practical need for Colorado to investigate the prevalence of MMIWG2 within its borders." I note that this thread, and these efforts, take up almost no space in political debates about the oil and gas economy.

Hernández's work sutures historical and contemporary accounts of land, extraction, and gendered violence, suggesting that sexual violence is not an anomaly but as a structuring force through which colonial land regimes, historically, produced and maintained power, a legacy visible today in the extractive boomtowns and fracking regions where Indigenous and rural women face heightened risks of disappearance and assault. Jensen's return to the fracking camps of the Bakken oil fields is a reminder of the ways extractive booms reorganize social relations, producing environments where women, particularly Indigenous and rural women, experience heightened risks of disappearance, assault, and trafficking around oil and gas industry lands.

The issue, as Jensen suggests, is not the existence of sexual economies, themselves, but their emergence within the hierarchical and coercive structures of the frack camp. Such spaces are defined by gross inequities, limited

protections, and unrestricted access to transient male labor forces. The disproportionate vulnerability of Indigenous women in regions shaped by extraction echoes the longer colonial histories Hernández traces, in which sexual economies were embedded within the political and economic structures of the borderlands. As Jensen writes, “Here the posture is all commerce,” capturing how extractive economies produce social formations where labor, land, and bodies circulate within regimes of unequal power. The borderlands, shaped by colonialism, slavery, and the expansion of US territory, created a landscape of racial and gender-based hierarchies, negotiated through sexual encounters. Sexual and gendered violence in the region has long been a tool of power and control used by authority, and simultaneously resisted and challenged by those subjected to these hierarchical domains.

Together, Gutiérrez, Hernández and Jensen illuminate how racialized and gendered violence in extractive regions must be understood historically and structurally, as part of the ongoing social arrangements that accompany settler expansion and resource extraction. Within these contexts, the oil/school emerges not outside these histories but within them, situated on lands whose economic and social infrastructures have long been organized through the intertwined logics of extraction, settlement, and gendered vulnerability.

Driving from one university to the other, anticipating the unfamiliar sight of the Flatiron mountains sheeting across the windows panes of office views at the University of Colorado, Boulder, I think, can we write a new story?

Fossil Fuel Ed

To produce new affiliative relations, we must claim a story of space in a language with all the lastingness and mobility of “stakes.” Pedagogical practices, whether inside or outside of the university classroom, recalling Fred Moten’s notion that “study is already going on, including when you walk into a classroom and before you think you start a class” (Harney and Moten 112), may foster an attunement to new spatial affiliations in and outside the university. *la paperson* reinforces the notion that even educational practices that set out to address issues of the “environment,” or solely of “climate crisis,” without taking into consideration the wider forces of settler colonialism and its ideological products, fall short of potentially examining their structural investments and provoking a real reckoning (117). Without pedagogies and practices of storytelling that attend to praxes of affiliation, it is impossible to restructure either our materials or our vocabularies, and

we fail in reordering social ways of living on land. According to la paperson, “Environmental education has been largely silent on land, that is, silent on the settler colonial recasting of land into ‘environment,’ and silent on broader Indigenous understandings of land as ancestor, as sovereign, as people-places with their own politics and identities” (117–18). Denaturalizing the university, while recalling Gutiérrez’s “there’s no natural encounter,” only the experience of the “uncanny” in nature, means making transparent its structures of power and affiliation. This supports a more complex attunement to the oil/school’s contexts. Its paradoxes may be unexpected or even arresting, and may be difficult to untangle.

In unfolding a real relationship to space that is not idealized, but is instead infrastructurally integrated and historically and personally attuned, Mishuana Goeman names, contests and counters the practice of the “abstracting of land” that occurs through nation-building under colonialism (34). Where Kannan et al. argue that the co-opting of the word “community” by universities influenced by a corporate or military ethos furthers a sense of disjunction between universities and wider communities (77), Goeman emphasizes that the maintenance of liberal settler nation-states relies on precisely these forms of rhetorical abstraction like the co-opting of words: “community”; “reach higher”; “our future.” Kannan et al. consider the inherent tension in wondering about “the problem of thinking how/whether a discipline could be accountable to a movement” (78), which may be addressed by Goeman’s emphasis on resistance to rhetorical abstraction, a resistance that emerges through political and pedagogical efforts to make transparent the embeddedness of the university in colonial systems. Oil/school might thus be understood as a strategy of transparency that learns from Goeman’s “storied land,” a process thus invested in theoretical and material storytelling, which has the potential to dismantle our most alienating settler ideologies.

According to Goeman, “Storied land is a partial answer to the question, ‘How do we uproot settler maps that drive our everyday materiality and realities?’” (170). As Gutiérrez has demonstrated, place is produced in and through narrative, and thus our spaces are constituted by the stories we tell about their relations. These narratives of place have their specific rhetorics of progress and languages of dominance. Returning to Juarez-Alonzo’s critique of oil/school, students are increasingly asking, *what story are we telling about this space?* The only story to tell of the oil/school is the story that offers a sense of situatedness in lived affiliations and processes, including the very real and direct connections to settler colonial structures and extractive industries.

Fostering student leadership in storying practices is crucial. In January of 2023, the first day of the New Mexico legislative session, YUCCA (Youth United for Climate Crisis Action), an advocacy group formed of youth members from Santa Fe, Española, San Felipe Pueblo, Kiwa Pueblo, Picuris Pueblo, the Diné Nation and Las Vegas, NM, organized die-ins for structural change in the rotunda of the New Mexico State Capitol. YUCCA has activated a coordinated set of demands that lawmakers take action to address the ongoing climate crisis and eschew “chasing short-term profits [for the oil and gas industry] at the expense of long-term climate stability.” Oil/school necessitates listening to students, allowing students, as a foundational pedagogy, to articulate the ways flexing their agency within settler colonial structures achieves their educational aims. A long lineage of Black and Indigenous student activism in higher education has demonstrated that this has always been possible.

Sandy Grande, reading Robin D. G. Kelley’s “Black Study, Black Struggle,” cites Fred Moten and Stefano Harney’s theorization of the undercommons as a framework for the rewriting of institutional stories (Grande 50). Grande understands the undercommons to foment a culture in which “students and faculty work to cleave study and struggle, where they can be *in* but not *of* the university,” demonstrating practiced, salient resistance strategies (50). Silences and refusals are powerful languages of resistance where colonial structures are produced in and through language. As Kannan et al. have demonstrated, institutions derive power from language. Students have the power to refuse, re/narrate, and de/reconstruct these narratives. In “Refusing the University,” scholar Sandy Grande notes that despite the long history of the marginalization of Black and Indigenous students in university systems, “student protest and charges of racism within the settler academy are often met with surprise and disbelief” (48). Yet the YUCCA student die-ins in New Mexico occur in direct response to statements like those by the New Mexico Oil and Gas Association, which boasted at the end of 2021 that “the only obstacle to future growth, production, and revenue [for the oil and gas industry] is policy.” Students well know that policy emerges from storytelling, with themes like “Historic revenue equals historic opportunity,” where oil and gas is said to be “great news for teachers and students” (qtd. in Hedden, “Oil and Gas”). New Mexico’s scholars, educators, writers and policymakers must practice “learning from youth resistance” (Paperson 116), where students advocate for policy change: a new story.

Here’s a story. According to New Mexico’s US Senator Ben Ray Luján, “Millions of Americans live within a mile of an orphaned [oil] well” (“Round

the Roundhouse”). South of the Colorado state border, the same week Jonathan Juarez-Alonzo argued that universities should be honest about their impact on the environment and on the very communities they serve, US President Biden’s Administration moved to approve \$25 million in federal funding for New Mexico, allocated for the clean up approximately 200 abandoned oil and gas wells “in need of plugging” in the southwest Permian Basin and northwest San Juan Basin (Hedden, “\$25M sent”). According to an article announcing the grant approval, “Oil and gas wells are often left abandoned by operators who decide they are no longer financially viable, continually releasing air pollutants like methane when going unmonitored” (Hedden, “\$25M sent”). As the article describes, it is in fact the well operators, in the form of privately owned companies, who are responsible for funding the cleanup of “forgotten” wells with the help of taxpayer bonds to pay for their remediation. New Mexico state officials have noted that the funding allocated for this essential process is inadequate. The Oil Conservation Division (OCD), an arm of New Mexico’s Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department, estimated in 2021 that there are up to 1,700 decaying wells throughout the state posing a present threat to air and water. On August 22nd, 2022, just a few days before the announcement of the Biden Administration funding allocation, the group XTO Energy, an international oil and gas company whose parent company is ExxonMobil, was fined \$1.7M for violating oil and gas wastewater disposal rules. These laws were breached in the Permian Basin, where the disposing of wastewater from drilling has been tied to earthquakes in the region (Hedden, “ExxonMobil Fined”).

Here is another story. Land tells a tale of our present values, inherited ideologies, submerged narratives, and surfaced traumas. It tells the story of who we are and where we are going. As la paperson reminds us, “. . . No land is empty. It must be made empty forcibly and ideologically” (116). Embedded in Juarez-Alonzo’s call for the university to consider the future is an invocation of the present: how land is used now matters. Constructing a story of and through land is therefore a pedagogical project, one that unfolds both within and beyond institutions of public higher education among those willing to participate in its work. Following la paperson and others, this project requires tracing the colonial pathways that bring people into relation with land, acknowledging how our own positions are shaped by ongoing relations to settler colonialism. This project also demands sustained attention to the language systems through which land is narrated and made intelligible. Within oil/school, these rhetorical ideologies reinforce particular narratives of land and belonging. Attending to these dynamics begins with

recognizing the materiality of language itself and the ways our own linguistic practices participate in constructing the stories we tell about land. Practices of narration attentive to place therefore become acts of institutional and cultural reorientation, assembling structures of meaning through new stories grounded in the material conditions of land.

V. Jo Hsu's notion of "homing" offers one such strategy for refusing narrative dominance by foregrounding the contradictions embedded in practices of belonging. Hsu writes that "Homing. . . regards home as the difficult, collaborative, at times contradictory practice of re-placement, re-imagining, and relating across distance and difference" (Hsu 9). As a critical approach to storytelling, homing explores how queer and transgender Asian and Pacific Islander subjects narrate experiences of connection and alienation in order to reimagine ongoing conditions of marginalization. In Hsu's account, home emerges not as a fixed location but as a relational practice constituted through narrative, memory, and collective negotiation: "What family/home will stand on decades of silence and centuries of erasure?" (9). Read alongside the conditions of oil/school, this framework invites attention to the ways youth in the Southwest encounter disrupted notions of home shaped by settler colonial histories and extractive economies. Locating Hsu's questions in New Mexico, one might ask how oil/school engages with youth in the Southwest whose story of history is rescripted by dominant colonial narratives. In such contexts, dominant narratives of land continue to rescript regional histories through colonial frameworks of development and progress. Extractive policies that sustain reliance on the oil and gas industry reinforce these narratives, reproducing the relations to land that *la paperson* identifies as central to settler colonial formation.

Such dynamics operate not only at the level of policy but also through the rituals and symbols of everyday life. In crossing state lines from New Mexico to Colorado, I trade my "Welcome" in the Land of Enchantment for a "Welcome to Colorful Colorado" sign, which hails a congregation of selfie-stick wielding tourists. "Colorado" derives from Spanish, meaning, "colored red," a name chosen by Congress when the area became a Territory in 1861 and named for the red of Red Rock Canyon and the stones of the Garden of the Gods near Colorado Springs. Even the name signals the layered histories through which landscapes become narratively framed and politically claimed. To move across these terrains is to encounter the sedimented narratives that shape contemporary relationships to land.

In traversing the mountain to leave New Mexico, I call into relation the scholars and writers whose work has guided efforts to re-route inherited

narratives of place, those who have directed attention toward alternative affiliations with land and community, and edged me toward unsettling inherited and learned ideologies of space. Such scholarship invites the deliberate unsettling of received stories and the cultivation of new narrative orientations. Reworking these narratives requires acknowledging the institutional and cultural frameworks that have long obscured the colonial histories embedded in the landscapes we inhabit. It also requires developing narrative practices capable of addressing those omissions and re-situating present conditions within broader historical and material contexts. I uproot myself in narrative so I might resource a new story.

An accounting of land demands collective attention to the failures that have shaped dominant narratives of place and the infrastructures that sustain them. Educational institutions, including those embedded within oil/school, participate in these narrative formations. At the same time, they possess the potential to cultivate alternative modes of storytelling grounded in relational understandings of land. Scholars such as V. Jo Hsu, Mishuana Goeman, and others offer frameworks for imagining such alternatives: narrative constellations, storied land, and practices of affiliation that foreground relational accountability. Together, these approaches suggest the possibility of narrative models that move beyond inherited colonial scripts toward forms of landed integration attentive to the histories, responsibilities, and futures embedded in place.

Let's write a whole story of questions: what acknowledgments might we need to address collective failures to narrate a true story of land as the story of our present context? What programs might obliterate teaching from a place of alienation from those infrastructural realities that determine our conditions?

Here's one story: Tuition-free college isn't free when it's funded by oil and gas.

Tell me another.

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Community Notes, CUNY & the Bronx County Historical Society Archives

Vani Kannan and Steven Payne

ABSTRACT: This article reports back on a collaboration between the Bronx County Historical Society Archives and Lehman College Writing Across the Curriculum. Through the collaboration, students and faculty engaged in archival research on Bronx histories and social movements. We situate student and community writers not only as archival researchers, but as contributors to archives and makers of history.

KEYWORDS: archives; CUNY; pedagogy; social movements; writing across the curriculum

Steven and Vani first met at a community speakout event on May Day 2021, a year and two months after New York City entered COVID-19 lockdown. The event was held at a local green space by the North Bronx Collective, a group whose membership included educators, students, and alumni from the City University of New York (CUNY)—including Vani—along with local artists, scientists, and cultural workers. The collective had just published the first of two newsletter issues titled *The Land Back*, highlighting different NYC green spaces and community gardens that had been locked by the city during the pandemic (North Bronx Collective). This included the space where the event was held, Tibbett’s Tail, where the collective had been holding community cleanups since the summer of 2020. At the event, Steven asked if the collective would like to archive its papers and publications at the Bronx County Historical Society (BCHS), where he worked. He had spent the COVID-19 lockdown digitizing the papers from local Bronx social movements, and wanted to engage people in not just studying the materials in the archive but also contributing materials to it.¹

Steven began working as the librarian/archivist at BCHS in January 2020. At the time, BCHS’s archival collections, housed in the Bronx County Archives, were mostly unprocessed and disorganized, aside from some preliminary inventories. One of his top priorities was organizing these collections and creating finding aids for as many of them as possible. When NYC went into lockdown in March 2020, Steven was deemed an “essential worker” by BCHS administration and was the only staff member coming in

on a regular basis for multiple months. Although resistant to this classification and its implications for his own safety, Steven was nonetheless able to do intensive archival work during this period, organizing and creating finding aids for 38 previously unprocessed collections in a four-month period.

This first phase of archival work confirmed what Steven had suspected: only a handful of collections in the Bronx County Archives at the time documented the histories of working-class, Black, Brown, and other oppressed people living in the Bronx. As is often the case with archives, most of the collections that Steven had processed focused on the lives of the ruling class—businessmen, wealthy benefactors, and elected officials, almost entirely male, white, and of northern European descent. Because of the particular history of capitalism in the US, individuals of these class, gender, racial, and national backgrounds are far more likely to have the financial and other resources needed to preserve their material legacies in institutional contexts like the BCHS where they can serve as digitally-accessible educational resources. As of 2023, the racial and ethnic composition of the Bronx was approximately 9% white, 55% Hispanic, 29% Black, and 4% Asian, with the median household income less than \$48,610 (“The Bronx”). Steven began seeking out potential archival acquisitions that would better document the lives of the many working-class Black and Brown residents of the Bronx. One tactic in achieving this goal was reinvigorating BCHS’s involvement in two community-based oral history projects: the Bronx African American History Project and the Bronx Latino History Project. Between 2020 and the present, Steven recorded more than 100 oral histories, both for these projects and for a new one focused on graffiti history in the Bronx. The oral history work allowed Steven to build close ties within various Bronx communities that had little other representation in the archives.

These relationships have been instrumental in the donation of more

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than 50 new archival collections to BCHS since March 2020. To give a sense of the character of these new collections, among them are the Eta Omega Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. records, which document the very active Bronx chapter of one of the US's most prominent Black sororities; the Gil Fagiani papers, which include nearly the entire run of *White Lightning*, a community newspaper published by a white, working-class, revolutionary, antiracist group in the Bronx during the 1970s; and the Esperanza Martell papers, which contain many issues of *Unidad Latina* and *Palante* (newspapers published by El Comité and the Young Lords, respectively) and audio recordings of women of color healing circles in the Bronx, among other items.

One challenge in this work has been technological infrastructure. As of January 2020, BCHS had no digital repository, nor was any portion of its archival collections digitized. Steven thus began digitizing portions of archival collections, with a focus on new acquisitions, set up a dedicated server, and configured an instance of Omeka (a digital content management system for archives and museums).² After Vani and Steven met at the North Bronx Collective event, these digital collections became the primary interface for Vani's classes at Lehman College and the digital publication titled *Community Notes*, discussed below.

Between 2018 and 2023, Vani was a faculty member in the English Department and co-coordinator of Writing Across the Curriculum at Lehman College. When classes moved online in March 2020, she began teaching with the digitized primary source documents of local social movements that Steven had archived, along with the primary source documents housed in the CUNY Digital History Archive (CDHA). CDHA documents the history of CUNY and the central role of student movements in shaping the institution, with numerous archived pamphlets, flyers, news articles, and pedagogical/curricular documents. For Vani, the goal of teaching with materials from both BCHS and CDHA was to highlight the exigencies that give rise to writing in social justice work in a way that would resonate with students across disciplines and to encourage student writing that felt materially tied to the lives and communities of Lehman College students (whom the College website describes as 48% Hispanic, 38% Black/African American, 8% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 6% white) ("Fast Facts"). The majority of Vani's students lived in the Bronx, and in this context, teaching with social movement archives aimed to push back against ahistorical racist, classist renderings of the borough that erase both grassroots social justice movements and the redlining and disinvestment that shaped its geography. Some of the archived histories

are locally rooted around Lehman College—for example, Gil Fagiani, founder of *White Lightning*, once lived on Villa Avenue, right around the corner from campus. To highlight these histories, Steven created a Social Justice Research Collections Guide for Vani's students so they could familiarize themselves with the archive's holdings (Payne).

When COVID-19 restrictions eased up in the fall of 2021, Vani began offering optional field trips to the physical archive for her online first-year writing classes. More and more students started engaging with the archival materials—particularly texts documenting community-led responses to the opioid crisis of the 1970s and the Young Lords-led takeover of Lincoln Hospital in response to horrific health conditions and preexisting conditions that were the result of structural racism and classism (Fernández), leading to the first Patient Bill of Rights. Steven and Vani began to brainstorm how to build a longer-term space for both students and nonstudents to publish their archival research. We formed a simple digital publication titled *Community Notes*³ to encourage people engaging with the archive to recirculate these archived Bronx histories through a flexible variety of creative forms. The call for submissions includes:

- Document overview (putting an archived document in historical context)
- Collection overview (putting a collection of documents into historical context)
- Personal experience (sharing a story from your own life that connects to something in the collection)
- Close reading (analyzing a selection of archival documents)
- Creative work (writing, art, music, or multi-genre work inspired by the collection)
- Teaching notes (sharing a class assignment or educational activity that draws on archived materials)
- Connections (drawing links between the archive and other repositories)
- Localized history (connecting archived documents to specific areas in the Bronx)

While the goal in engaging students in this archival research was initially to uplift and circulate histories of Bronx-based organizing, it evolved into a site for faculty to engage students across disciplines in public-facing writing. In 2022, Vani piloted a *Community Notes* project in two classes and

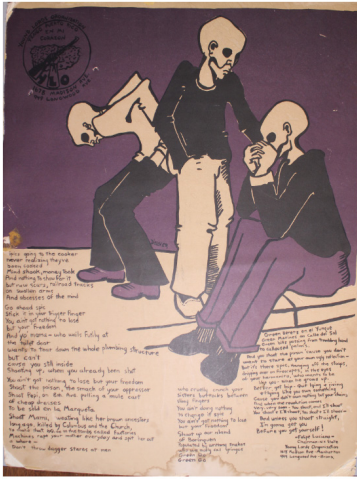


Figure 1. Young Lords poster and poem on heroin addiction.

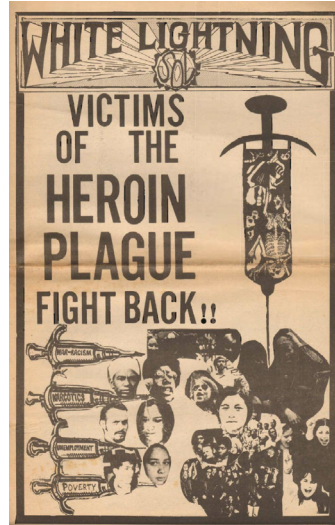


Figure 2. Front cover of *White Lightning* newspaper.

one WAC workshop: a 300-level Research, Rhetoric, and Writing class for English majors (the product of an antiracist curricular revision in the wake of the summer 2020 uprisings), a graduate seminar titled Literacy and Community (with many K-12 teachers working in NYC public schools), and a workshop titled “Writing Community Histories,” which aimed for Lehman professors across disciplines to craft assignments and activities engaging with the archive’s holdings and *Community Notes*. In the two classes, students drew on the archives and responded to the CFP, with the option of submitting their work.

The two-part “Writing Community Histories” workshop (one session on Zoom and one session in the archive itself) engaged an interdisciplinary group of faculty with the archive’s holdings on tenants’ rights, local literary and cultural productions, queer activism, anti-colonial struggle, and health justice movements. Steven and Vani met ahead of time to identify archival materials that connected with faculty interests and teaching goals (for example, a literature professor’s desire to highlight unsung Bronx literary voices; a sociology professor’s interest in local tenants’ organizations), and encouraged participants to craft assignments and course designs that drew on the archives. One journalism professor built her research class around the archival materials the following semester, and her students ended up inviting a longtime community health worker and organizer, Esperanza

Martell, to do a campus event on her health justice work; students in the class published their research writing on a class website, and the instructor is now writing a “teaching note” for *Community Notes*.

This little publication platform was meant to offer a longer-term infrastructure for multi-genre student/community writing. Students have produced videos, poems, visual art, and research essays weaving in personal experience and reflection. Our long-term goal was to find ways to materially support student interns at the archive, who could help with digitizing, cataloging, processing oral histories, and reviewing/editing/posting *Community Notes* submissions. However, in 2025, Steven and Vani decided that to sustain *Community Notes* long-term and create the infrastructure necessary to maintain consistent posts, it should evolve into a CUNY student-run writing project. We’ll share the story of how we arrived at this conclusion.

During the summer of 2023, we collaborated with a group of student researchers affiliated with Lehman’s Campus Honors and Scholar Engagement (CHASE) program working on a “Hidden Black Histories of the Bronx” project (“Campus Honors”). Vani had worked closely with the organizers of this project, and one of the student researchers had been part of her online first-year writing class that visited the archives in person. The “Hidden Black Histories of the Bronx” project, which includes ongoing work at the nearby African Burial Ground at Van Cortlandt Park, seeks to document the lives of the Black and Indigenous people who were enslaved on Bronx plantations (Augustine). Students prepared creative and curricular submissions for *Community Notes* and also indexed their findings with the Northeast Slavery Records Index (NESRI—housed at CUNY’s John Jay College of Criminal Justice), creating a foundation for future student-researchers to build upon.

As part of the Summer 2023 iteration of this project, Steven and Vani took a group of Lehman CHASE student-researchers on a tour of the Valentine–Varian House/Museum of Bronx History, built by enslaved people, and situated the house itself as an archive. For example, Steven’s research has found that the building techniques in the walls of the house—a particular kind of wattle and daub—can be traced to particular communities in West Africa and the Caribbean. For students, details like this were crucial in celebrating both their own Afro-Caribbean ancestry and the creativity and lifeways of Black and Indigenous people that were controlled and channeled through the institution of enslavement.

Projects such as this one are important sites of deconstructing campus/community and disciplinary boundaries and shaping how we think about writing instruction and what it means to write across (and beyond)

the curriculum, in collaboration. Although Lehman is an “open campus,” meaning that it is technically open to community members, it is separated from the surrounding community by gates and security guards, and people can be stopped any time and asked for ID. This securitization only increased during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Vani has worked closely with students affiliated with CHASE since 2018, all of whom live and work in the Bronx; the program is committed to building a new iteration of *Community Notes* that wrangles with the contradictions of doing community-engaged writing work in this institutional context. In the time since we did our Summer 2023 work with students, Steven has transitioned to a new role and Vani has relocated to Atlanta. At the time of writing, we are in conversation with CHASE about the logistics of handing off *Community Notes* to the students who run the “Hidden Black Histories of the Bronx” project. These students have also continued to spend time in BCHA conducting archival research on Bronx Black histories.

Ensuring the long-term material survival of histories that are at risk of being obscured, forgotten, misconstrued, and erased under US capitalism is a worthwhile struggle in and of itself. Still, linking these archived histories with ongoing struggles has a dual effect, both on these histories and on the present. On the one hand, the more obvious point: these archived histories provide valuable insight into how folks survived, fought back, and created alternative possibilities under their own circumstances here in the Bronx. These histories contain strategies and tactics of fightback and modes of creativity for us to tap into right now, while taking into account changed conditions of our own moment.

On the other hand, actualizing archived “pasts” as valuable resources for ongoing struggles sheds new light on these histories and increases the chance of their long-term preservation. Because of the growth and development of ongoing struggles, certain aspects of these archived histories “click” and speak to contemporary conditions. For example, historical Bronx health justice movements speak to the current mushrooming of the medical industrial complex, the nurses strikes at nearby Montefiore Hospital, and ongoing campaigns around reproductive justice and housing. Tapping into these legacies and carrying them forward through material work preserves them in a more robust sense than simply placing them in acid-free folders and boxes. For the kind of archival practice outlined in this paper, actualizing archival collections through a range of public points of engagement—including educational programming, exhibits, community archiving, and more—is part and parcel of the task of preservation.⁴ Finding ways to work closely with

CUNY students, many of whom are intimately implicated in our ongoing struggles through their lived realities, is central to this process. Indeed, of the folks from various institutions of higher learning we work with in the Bronx, CUNY students and educators already have an established record of insightful engagement with and contributions to the archives. In addition to the instances of CUNY Community Notes contributions outlined above, a few further examples are in order:

- 1) The students of a professor from the Journalism Department at Lehman College recorded short oral histories about their experiences with COVID-19 with family members and friends during Spring 2020. The narrators of these oral histories were primarily workers of color in the service and healthcare industries—“essential workers”—and they related their complex feelings and sentiments at the time that otherwise got obscured by the pervasive “heroic essential worker” narrative.
- 2) The library and archives staff at Bronx Community College hosted a BCHS traveling exhibit on the life and activism of Jesús Lebrón, a Puerto Rican Bronxite and one of the most instrumental figures in the marriage equality movement of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Jesús donated his papers to BCHS in July 2022. They were quickly organized and inventoried, and the traveling exhibit went up in the main reading room of the library for National Coming Out Day, October 11, 2022. Students from the LGBTQI+ Resource Room at Bronx Community College hosted a discussion on the exhibit with Jesús and fellow activist Brendan Fay in November 2022.
- 3) The students of a professor from the English Department at Lehman College are currently working on indexing unindexed oral histories in our archives. In addition to honing complex skills of listening comprehension and analysis, this labor-intensive job makes oral histories easier to access for the general public by breaking them into digestible sections and identifying key subjects in each section. Indexing work by students will in turn be incorporated into finished indexes by staff members at BCHS.

These collaborations suggest that archivists can position themselves as *part of* a larger movement—both locally and within CUNY—rather than *doing something for* the movement, and conversely, that CUNY students can

understand themselves *as archivists* and *makers of history* rather than solely students/documenters of it. Given the attacks on CUNY archive spaces like the Morales/Shakur Center at CCNY (“Whose CUNY?”), community archives become crucial sites for doing historical work that deconstructs campus/community divisions and reinvigorates the possibilities for CUNY as a community institution. In short, CUNY students and educators have already proven to be incredibly valuable partners in the ongoing effort to transform the Bronx County Archives into a genuine community archive, not only deeply rooted in community activism and community life but also shaped by and determined by the active contributions and continuing insights of community members. We look forward to seeing *Community Notes* unfold as Lehman students engaged in community-based historical work take the reins and shape its future.

Notes

1. Later that year, Vani overheard a couple people at the neighborhood Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) produce pickup talking about a new archivist at BCHS who was digitizing movement histories and engaging the community in archival work.
2. See <https://digital.bronxhistoricalsociety.org/>. The address was formerly <https://digital.bchslibrary.org>. Due to a server malfunction in August 2023, however, a new instance of Omeka had to be installed at the address listed in the body of this paper, and we are still in the process of transferring everything over from the old repository.
3. At the time of writing, *Community Notes* is in the process of being moved to a site hosted by Lehman students.
4. By “community archiving,” we mean involving community members as constituent partners in the archival process. The *Community Notes* infrastructure outlined above is one such method of community archiving. Others include providing training to community members to record oral histories with other community members, requesting that community members make decisions about how to sort and organize their own archival collections, taking guidance from community members about what to focus preservation efforts on, and much more.

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Activating Legacies of Freedom to Transform Economies of Prestige in Academia and Ourselves

Javiela Evangelista

ABSTRACT: Liberation literacies (Ellis; Lyiscott, “Three Ways”) and antiracist praxis (García Peña; Chavez) help us to find power in technologies that harness legacies of freedom, in communion with resistance, joy, and fortitude. I channel this hope into action in our classrooms through student derived (or guided) measures in order to activate the power of liberation within ourselves, our legacies, and communities. In doing so, we aim to transform damaging economies of prestige, based in exclusion and hierarchy that often undergird academia (Hartman). One of the goals is to challenge such hierarchies by creating and facilitating spaces for students to be entirely themselves and to speak, write, and learn in ways that tap into the power of legacies of freedom. Student contributions in an undergraduate course, The Heritage of Imperialism at New York City College of Technology, and Black Diasporic Visions: (De) Constructing Modes of Power, a graduate course at the CUNY Graduate Center, as well as a brief overview of work under the Futures Initiative (FI) and Transformative Learning in the Humanities (TLH), are featured to support the claim that CUNY is a legacy of freedom itself. Pseudonyms are employed to protect research participants and collaborators.

KEYWORDS: antiracist praxis; CUNY; economies of prestige; legacies of freedom; liberation literacies

“[T]here is no separation between life and writing. . . . No topic is too trivial.”—Gloria Anzaldúa, “Speaking in Tongues”

Legacies of Freedom

Legacies of freedom draw from the cultivation of spaces undefined by or resistive of damaging hierarchies, and those who have and continue to fight against structural oppression, those who fight against accumulation by dispossession, those who make something from nothing (or what appears to be) in the face of dispossession. The legacies may be of the past or unfolding in the present and future. They live in defiance of time.

The Heritage of Imperialism is an interdisciplinary undergraduate course that is either team taught across disciplines or requires a multitude of guest lecturers across specializations. By facilitating student engagement with

imperialism around a range of fields (media, hospitality, technology, biology, history, and mathematics for example), we actively work to deconstruct the oppressive and implicit biases that facilitate imperialism, even as they exist within ourselves and our professions as participants of the course.

We discuss how imperialism is not only historical, but current in continuity with the past. We rethink the spaces that imperialism may inhabit beyond the physical territories impacted by imperialism, how it may include our minds and bodies. We consider imperialism as a global entity that may also reverberate beyond the global and in the local. We also not only interrogate imperialism as top-down and imposed upon, but also both resisted and absorbed, and hence often not quite far away. We reconceptualize imperialism across time, space, place and self-understanding.

How Europe Underdeveloped Africa by Walter Rodney is one of the first reads in The Heritage of Imperialism course in any given semester. It remains a staple because it lays solid ground to understand the centrality of modern capitalism, one of many themes that we explore during the semester together. As class begins, we settle in and think through questions about the material in different media formats (critical essay, lyrics, film, ethnography, ceramics) and then jot down our ideas with supporting evidence or inspiration. Page numbers, timestamps, photos, and other forms of documentation are needed to take the reader down the path envisioned. We then pair up, and talk about our thoughts, and what we're writing. Afterwards, we share one another's perspective, paying attention to the synergies and the moments when there are different ways of approaching it.

In an attempt to break down the walls of our classroom and connect with one another and our community, one of the culminating class assignments, students share a copy of a text from our course that was impactful with someone outside of the class (a family member, friend, colleague, someone met while commuting, or visiting another campus). Then they write about

Javiela Evangelista is an Assistant Professor in the African American Studies Department at New York City College of Technology, CUNY. As a public anthropologist, Javiela Evangelista engages in participatory research that counters inequalities at the intersections of citizenship and racialization in the Caribbean and the African Diaspora. She develops courses and open educational resources including *The Heritage of Imperialism* and earned her PhD in Anthropology from the Graduate Center, CUNY, and her MA from Columbia University's Institute for Research in African American Studies.

why they chose that particular person and text and what evolved from the exchange. Any “why” that is thoughtful and open ended, giving pathways of exploration and growth, is welcome. Then, we ask students to develop a final written reflection inspired by the exchange (in collaboration with those who were a part of it, when possible) guided by questions such as: What did you learn from this exchange in our expanded community classroom? Was anything expected or surprising? Are there ways in which you would expand this experience or assignment?

We sat in a circle on our last day of class for presentations for the culminating reflection and a student named Beltrice (a pseudonym) shared with us,

Here I was, thinking I was going to teach my Mom something. But her earliest memories of how money worked in the world, best practices with her own money, financial literacy, came from her father’s teachings of Walter Rodney.

At first glance, Beltrice’s commentary on her writing about the heritage of Rodney in her family, essentially about something her mama said, may seem negligible, but there is mountainous power here.

Beltrice went on,

Papa used to talk to Mom about Rodney, the multiple attempts to connect the African diaspora and the need to help change the experience of each generation by saving, pursuing education, organizing labor. I was surprised Mom not only knew about *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, but also about Rodney’s other work and life. She told me about his book, *Groundings with my Brothers*.

A while ago, Dr. Lorgia García Peña, founding faculty member of Freedom University¹ in Georgia and an illuminating force like Gloria Anzaldúa, shared with me that she met with women in her family circle once a month to discuss a reading from her course syllabi. Particularly elders who have lived through some of the historical material, who have life experience that goes beyond the text, and who bring an invaluable richness that one professor or even one hundred members of one lecture class cannot hold. There is critical value in celebrating the continuity of our community’s knowledge and resistance within the university (García Peña).

Legacies of Freedom may invite co-teaching across disciplines and ranks, student-centered work, mutually beneficial communal and public work. They create space for metacognition and questioning (the whom,

where, how, what) not only of the material, but of our relationship to it, citing those who have been unjustly marginalized, honoring the activism and love that led to the emergence of departments like mine. These are models that give us possibilities, while troubling the values at hand, challenging the depository banking system that is foundational in education.

Legacies of freedom may be ancestral, or connected to racial or ethnic heritage, but they don't have to be. In my classes, offered in the African American Studies department at New York City College of Technology, City University of New York, legacies of freedom draw from the African Diaspora, but also a range of experiences at the intersection of many in the diaspora and beyond, including the working class, LGBTQIA+, and global anti-colonial and anti-imperial organizing. My personal experience of activating legacies of freedom is grounded in (Black) liberation literacies (Ellis; Lyiscott, "Three Ways"), antiracist praxis (García Peña; Chavez), Indigenous praxis (Long Soldier; Trask) and fugitive pedagogies (Givens). However, powerful conjurings may come from acknowledging, mourning, celebrating, and organizing around the connections that exist between and that cover and protect many freedom legacies—existing despite and along vast borders and eras.

Undoing Economies of Prestige

Inequities in the field of higher education must be examined in order to enact transformations in pedagogy and our classrooms. At its inception, higher education was aligned with the industrial workforce, which led to the development of the credit hour system and many of the current structures of academe (Davidson and Katopodis). Furthermore, "only 0.4 percent of all students in our universities in the United States attend the Ivies, but most books and articles written about higher education and pedagogy seem to assume students from those universities" and a great number of professors have attended Research One universities (Davidson and Katopodis). Essentially, since colleges and universities were established based on maintaining "hierarchy, ranking, and selectivity," how may we best approach changing university value systems (Davidson and Katopodis)? According to Stacy Hartman, previous Director of the Publics Lab at the CUNY Graduate Center², "prestige economies are based in exclusion." Hartman adds, "the universities that are ranked the highest are the ones that exclude the most people. . . and that's how we define excellence in the academy. . . exclusion is the ultimate metric of success." Although university rankings may be changing (Saul and Hartocollis), by highlighting the values of our almost sixty-year-old

university ranking system (Wilbers), the deeply embedded nature of value systems based in exclusion within academia is evident.

However, interventions may be made by altering systems of prestige. Working-class public university classrooms like at CUNY can be a powerful place to unlearn, resist, and reapply energies away from this system of prestige. If academics put student exploration of legacies of freedom front and center and weave them into our rubrics, we can shift the center by encouraging students to value what is already within ourselves and our communities, although not at the center of academe. For example, we can foster conversation on course material with people beyond the class roster—those whom we love, those here and those no longer in the physical form, those whom we connect with in passing (which many New Yorkers who commute may appreciate). Ultimately, we can learn from those who are often outside of academia or from geographic regions not prioritized in academia—conversations which are critical to reversing these systems of academic exclusivity. Such processes can usher in the potential to activate legacies of freedom and alter what is valued in society.

When we reverse the logic of individualized academic prestige to focus on our majority working-class learning communities, another set of communal experiences reveal themselves as worthy of focus and care. In class, we have discovered that communal pedagogies (and, ultimately, rituals) draw our attention to critical questions that may help us to rethink and undo economies of prestige. What legacies of freedom may we use to most clearly care for and conjure power for our students, as well as others in their lives? With whom? Where? How? It solidifies connection to the material, furthers growth, and is an act of metacognition: getting one thinking about their own thoughts. As a practice, it is important to provide credit, citations, for *where* these conversations and activations may take place, for example. At the height of the pandemic, many of us held classroom discussions by way of Zoom, sitting at our kitchen counters as family members walked back and forth, with pictures of beloveds on the wall, children's art or magnets on the fridge in the background, sometimes a blank wall with shadows drifting. These are the spaces where conjurings (that we may or may not even be attuned to) often occur. Likewise, for in-person courses, spaces outside of the walls of academia (home, memory, subway, feet on soil) can remain welcome and present in our classrooms.

We do not always need to reach far in order to connect with the public. May we help facilitate the classroom as an extension of one's living room, or literally invite elders in? May we think about the range of sources (not

just people, but places) that make up legacies of freedom and include them in our citations? Even if some of our time is spent in the classroom, aren't we too a part of this public?

Prestige exclusions cause all involved to lose out on the profound kinds of learning and analysis that we experienced with Beltrice, and that African diasporic and global anti-oppression methods and materials create. During any given semester, in reference to the topics we address within African American Studies, a student may comment, "I wish I had learned about these things before coming to college!" Prioritizing legacies of freedom in our pedagogy offers a fast intervention, an immediate potential opening that is mutually beneficial for all involved—pending the longer-term, bureaucratically-complex goals such as curriculum change.

Freedom legacies must also be cultivated in the context of workplace inequalities. We often work within institutions where the majority of the working force is underpaid and without benefits. Many have heavy course loads, are not paid over holidays, and have little job security. However, it is often not a part of our students' education to know about the ways in which the disparities live. Many students are unaware of unequal treatment of full-time instructors and adjunct lecturers. How may such conversations also nourish a legacy of freedom for many of us as instructors woven into the fabric of institutions of higher education? How can we expand these conversations out into the world, at a juncture when people are coordinating economic blackouts or boycotts against corporations that have rolled back support of their communities? We are seeing how efforts to direct one's money toward small businesses instead, for example, is connected to a critique of the capitalist structure that Beltrice's family introduced her to by reading Rodney. Tapping into legacies of freedom may not only alter economies of prestige in academia but can inspire tangible change in the world.

Praxis at City University of New York (CUNY)

Freedom legacy work is also embedded in the bones, the very purpose of the Futures Initiative at The Graduate Center, City University of New York (CUNY)—a program that supports course creation across disciplines, ranks, and CUNY campuses, and culminates in a public project. As a Futures Initiative Fellow, I developed and co-taught the course *Black Diasporic Visions (De) Constructing Modes of Power* with Dr. Carla Shedd, who was Associate Professor of Urban Education and Sociology at Graduate Center, CUNY at the time. Developing the course together as scholars in different fields, campuses,

and ranks enabled a nourishing collaboration that required the reworking of typical hierarchies. We extended the call to rethink the structure of the classroom with a collaborative student-faculty course syllabus and weekly student presentations (Evangelista and Shedd). In the class, graduate students came from a range of disciplines studying education, race, carceral justice, and more. We invited scholars, activists, and artists within CUNY, as well as from outside (dubbed “village visitors”), who poured their expertise and community-engaged work into our sessions.³

Our final course project was a public open educational resource, *Black Diasporic Visions: (De) Constructing Modes of Power, Reflections and Resources*, available on the CUNY digital publishing platform *Manifold* (Adler, Angela, Chevalier, Brathwaite, Brito, Enobabor, Evangelista, Mina, Poe, Shedd, Reece, Washington, Welch-Scott, and Barrales). Rather than a final project presented within a classroom or handed to the professor who will be the only one to see it, the site features the students’ hopes, visions, and recommendations toward liberatory possibilities—including op-ed abstracts from articles that students submitted to various outlets—aiming to break down the walls of the classroom and have discussion with a wider audience. The collective publication has been well-received and featured in a range of outlets (Butler).

I love visioning—it is the balm that keeps my Black body here on this earth. I think perhaps one of the greatest forms of oppression we can experience as a people is the inability to vision a new way forward.—Black Diasporic Visions Graduate Student

For this multimodal site, we invited user engagement “to break down false divides between theory and praxis,” and outlined terms of collective use to create an intentional safe space. The students’ cumulative public publication on the site fostered “collaboration and work beyond traditional notions of curation” and is a “model of emerging scholar mentoring and training that centers the knowledge and experiences students bring into the classroom to develop community-oriented praxis” (Butler). Students enhanced the definitions of known keywords with an annotated bibliography on terms each chose—such as anti-Blackness, Black reproductive futurity, surveillance, and *malcriada*⁴—which the graduate students grounded in existing research. They then poured in their expertise, expanding references and possibilities in galactic ways beyond the original imaginations of the course. Some work gave birth to new terms likely to change the scope of legacies of freedom, like *blackspotting*, a term proposed “to address the ongoing, deliberate attempts to

reinsert Blackness, Black bodies, lives, thought and presence, in spaces where they have been intentionally erased and obscured” (Adler et al.). There was also a powerful open letter to a niece, breaking down barriers concerning the audience of our academic work (Adler et al.). Tarot card offerings and music with deep historical and current references by Jamila Woods, all curated by the students in this student directed course.

During one of our early sessions, one of the students in *Black Diasporic Visions* insisted with the utmost enthusiasm that we add the work of JJJJ-Jerome Ellis, “a self identified blk disabled animal, stutterer, and artist” (Cole) who implores us to reconsider his dysfluency (stutter) as a call for patience, a space where archangels may sing. “Of himself, he says, ‘I have an ongoing practice of spelling my name JJJJJerome Ellis in certain circumstances. I do this because the word I stutter on most frequently is my name. You can choose which spelling you prefer” (Cole). Through a range of mediums, Ellis “researches relationships among blackness, disabled speech, divinity, nature, sound, and time” (Cole). Ellis prompts powerful conversations about deconstructing how we approach and hear one another, and how we approach and hear ourselves.

Given the many openings it gifted us in *Black Diasporic Visions* at the Graduate Center, I added Ellis’ work to an undergraduate course at City Tech, and one of the students, James, shared that he too experiences disfluency and posttraumatic stress. He ended up featuring Ellis as a part of his final presentation. A requirement is that the presentation is publicly engaged, with an open invitation and located at times in public squares and streets close to campus. The student noted that he had never come across a theorist who aptly and positively spoke to the possibilities in the pauses that he too lives with. Here a student (and the concept of a student-guided syllabus) in a graduate-level course opened up portals for undergraduates at another CUNY campus. What James initially felt was trivial in academe (beyond the technicalities of his accommodations) he then connected to theory and his own writing, as directed by other (graduate) students.

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation’s Transformative Learning in the Humanities Initiative, (or TLH *Movement*, as one of the Faculty Co-Directors, Dr. Shelly Eversley, affectionately calls it) provides further insight into how freedom legacies are carved out and exchanged at CUNY. As a TLH Faculty Fellow, then as Pedagogy Co-Leader, I worked with the TLH Movement directors to coordinate semester-long workshops addressing four goals central to TLH’s mission: 1) Promote equitable, creative, student-centered pedagogical research and methods designed for the rich diversity of CUNY students; 2)

Support greater institutional recognition for the importance of teaching; 3) Advance the role of an urgent and indispensable humanities for the future of CUNY students and a more just and equitable society; and 4) Practice diversity as crucial to learning within and beyond the classroom.

Students and teachers are partners, jointly responsible for knowledge creation.—Felicia Rose Chavez

One of the many strengths of TLH was how it acknowledged, credited, celebrated, and built upon previous work generations- and centuries-long. In preparation for the workshops we read Gloria Anzaldúa and the *Lost and Found: The CUNY Poetics Document Initiative* collection of CUNY teaching archives featuring Adrienne Rich, June Jordan, Audre Lorde, and Toni Cade Bambara. Workshops with Felicia Rose Chavez, Jamila Lyiscott, and Jessie Stommel enabled hands-on explorations of antiracist writing, liberation literacies, and ungrading to get away from problematic hierarchies embedded in academia, alongside other selections from a range of disciplines, localities, and timeframes. When she referenced Rodney, Beltrice was presenting her own public project—engaging with family around a course reading—which resulted from the TLH Movement.

The other Faculty Co-Director of TLH at the time, Cathy Davidson, often opened or closed our meetings with an “entry” or “exit ticket,” a light and open question related to pedagogy, inviting participation and expanded thinking: “Our students are in our classes for a reason. Have you discussed their ‘why’ with them? And what is *your* ‘why’? Why do you teach?”

These questions took my memory back. Under flags from all over the world at my mothers international school, for over 40 years she coordinated a curriculum celebrating the vastness of the Americas (beyond “America” as the North) and the overshadowed contributions of Black and Indigenous communities. My memory took me to a diligently working nine-year-old me, doing homework in the back row of free citizenship classes taught in the evenings by Mom, a third grade Spanish immersion teacher by day. I could vividly see Mom after the sessions, chatting with and hugging her students, lots of empanadas shared and tender moments about proud graduations, or a mothers passing that went far beyond the citizenship curriculum. I saw and felt deeply that “justice is what love looks like in public.” And also that a good education and a community that connects learners to the world and themselves simultaneously, and us with each other, toward the embodiment of concepts like world making, and self-sufficiency, far beyond the

conceptual level, was love.

Intention was embedded in the relationships, structures, and processes of our work at TLH. In a rare opportunity to collaborate and synergize across CUNY campuses, each fellow adopted public projects, provided metro cards, and changed their syllabi to address students with care and incorporate their perspectives. The fellowship culminated in a final public project where fellows collaborated with colleagues across the university to develop an open public conversation or piece. We invited academics and activists from Puerto Rico, Philippines, and Dominican Republic to strategize about pedagogy globally for an “Imperialism, Education, and Resistance” faculty final project.

What do we really think we can learn from them?—*Adrienne Rich*
(*Part I, 16*)

When Adrienne Rich, City College professor, feminist, and pedagogical muse, asked instructors—during the late 1960s Black and Puerto Rican students-led upheavals at City College that precipitated Open Admissions at CUNY—what they really think they can learn from their students, we are reminded here that it is not just about what instructors may learn from students as individuals. With each student and instructor (with all of us in academia) comes a community and lineages which we can learn from, even if we are not directly connected to them. In my classes, there is an invitation to grace all of us with the linguistics celebration of your mama, papa, and cousin’s knowledge, precious foresight, and vision. Nothing is too trivial. The way you speak, who you love and learn from, and where all that is sacred, is a welcome offering, received, valued, and reciprocated that may enrich our engagement with one another if the space is provided. In addition to our calls to cite Black women (Smith et al.), this is an invitation to cite ancestors, cite mamas, cite abuelas, cite Indigenous knowledge, cite other students, cite yourself, cite the pause.

In this current moment when Black Studies, Ethnic and Gender Studies are being erased from school curricula by the current administration, it is dangerous to see liberatory praxis as a fad or something to be added in and taken away at a moment’s notice. By historicizing antiracist pedagogy with research grounded in members of our families and communities who may be unpublished at the crossroads of those who are—Anzaldúa, hooks, and the work of Black, Latinx, and Jewish Feminists, particularly at CUNY (Bambara, Jordan, Lorde, Rich)—let us call attention to the difference between pedagogy that comes from a long history with practices built into legacies of freedom

(CUNY Digital History Archive), as opposed to “progressive” pedagogies that often seem to emerge from thin air, ungrounded.

Within this historically grounded and forward-looking framework of legacies of freedom, we counter the white supremacy that exists in programs that enforce limited, often monolingual assumptions, writing systems, and pedagogies. Grounded references to these long-standing decolonial antiracist pedagogies help us to build upon and create long-standing decolonial antiracist communities in the university and beyond.

A Call to Activate Freedom Legacies Together

Liberation Literacy theorist Jamila Lyiscott analyzes the internal struggle to edit and stifle the power of language in the classroom, as some languages are not equally valued in academia or a part of the prestige economies in this space. Let us relish in the power, the flow, and the structure in the spoken words of patois Kreyol, and in this case, African American English (Rickford). Lyiscott bellows, “Even our language has rules. . . never does the word mad go before a present participle” (“Three Ways”). She croons, “Sometimes I fight back two tongues, while I use the other one in the classroom, and when mistakenly I mix them up, I feel like I’m cooking in the bathroom,” noting her discomfort, her awareness of her pull to exclude central parts of herself, all while in a context where she is being evaluated (Lyiscott, “Three Ways”). This highlights the importance and presence of home-spaces outside of the classroom, in relation to experiences in the classroom. She grounds the historicity of this experience in inequity, and notes that language may be a portal. Similarly, across our CUNY experiences, as a result of a graduate student’s exploration of legacies of freedom, Ellis’s theory of fluency transformed the undergraduate student David’s relationship with his own speech.

A central part of transforming economies of prestige in academia includes creating spaces for students to be entirely themselves, and to speak and write in ways that tap into powers that may not be centrally incorporated in the curriculum. Let us foster the space to include our why, who, where, how, and what of liberatory practice as instructors in student-directed ways that invites in the many parts of who students are and the world beyond the class. This may include the way words are spoken at home, whether locally or abroad, in the past, present, or future, with pauses in speech, or wordless expressions—like a nod that speaks volumes.

I find myself telling my students that I love them now, more than ever. All of my loved ones, really. I’ve been reaching out more regularly, making

calls to my mother and sending texts to cousins. I am not breaking new ground here. This love in and of itself is a freedom legacy. Why else would Harriet go back so many times? What drove the Black Panthers to start the Free Breakfast Program? Why did the New York Young Lords fight to establish a Patient's Bill of Rights? How did we even come to have an African American Studies Department at New York City College of Technology, CUNY from which I teach? Students organized and demanded Ethnic Studies and African American Studies, precisely because they loved their communities, loved their history, loved the idea of creating new futures. Right now, during a time when democracy is in peril and assaults on personhood and dignity are commonplace, saying and hearing words of love, while also creating the space for legacies of freedom and shifting economies of prestige, within our classrooms, in community with one another, provides us with firm ground to stand on, a powerful tool.

Returning to where we began here with Beltrice's unearthing of her mother's theoretical upbringing brings us to Felicia Rose Chavez framing the mothering of students as a decolonial act, again of what else if not love: "As a professor of color I'd 'mothered' my writers from the jump, taking on extra, invisible labor, serving as a mentor. . . A good part of my day was dedicated to listening." Despite the overextension and lack of institutional support for professors of color, another facet of the damaging economies of prestige, Chavez notes why it is important for her to love and listen to students. As a result, she questions, "Why must listening be antithetical when we know they are symbiotic? Why does emotional care undermine intellectual growth in my colleagues' minds?" (Chavez).

We are calling for the support of more spaces where students, all of us, are heard in fullness, without stifling aspects of self, and that welcome community contributions that are anti-oppressive and liberatory—spaces where faculty can shift from what "Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire calls 'banking systems of education' in which students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor" (Chavez). These banking systems, currently most benefit privileged white males who can see themselves in their instructors, thus enabling them to attach to psychic wages of whiteness (Du Bois; Chavez). Instead we move toward "an act of love and humility that subverts the teacher's authority and elevates the students to critical co-investigators" (Chavez 50). This is what we may call a "humanist approach, according to Freire, 'imbued with a profound trust in people and their creative power'" (Chavez 52).

To conclude, legacies of freedom that build upon liberation litera-

cies (Ellis; Lyiscott) and antiracist praxis (García Peña; Chavez) may invite co-teaching across disciplines and ranks, student centered work that can carry greater importance than letter grades, can offer opportunities for communal and public work that builds beyond the course, and can create space for metacognition and questioning with permission for the self and community to enter—citing those who have been unjustly marginalized, and critically celebrating (and thus living) the activism and love that led to the emergence of departments like African American and Ethnic Studies, Gender and Sexuality Studies, and Disability Studies in our pedagogical work.

Much like Ellis, I contend here that activating legacies of freedom may shift values from economies of prestige and instead require pause and patience for openings. Recognizing, celebrating, and creating space for these nutrients in our classroom environment, in a manner that is not extractive or transactional, has greater potential to enrich the experience for all. As such, most significantly, we can activate legacies of freedom and transformation, not only in our classrooms, but in the greater spaces in which we learn, thrive, and love, which can include academic institutions at large, home, and our greater communities.

This is an invitation: a call to ground and activate these freedom legacies as tools and technologies in our classrooms as an act of love. The most powerful aspect of these legacies of freedom is that they are immortal, indestructible. No person, no thing, no solitary confinement, no deportation, no political administration can take away legacies of freedom or our ability to tap into them, or our entitlement to walk the paths we pave. But we must choose to use them, archive them, build upon them.

Notes

1. Freedom University is an award-winning human rights organization and modern-day freedom school for undocumented students banned from equal access to higher education in Georgia. Freedom University provides tuition-free college preparation classes, college and scholarship application assistance, mental health and legal support, and social movement leadership development for undocumented students. For more information, see <https://www.freedom-university.org/history>.
2. From 2018-2023, The Publics Lab provided support for the Mellon Humanities Public Fellows, sponsored events, grants, and fellowships related to public scholarship, and served as a resource for faculty and

students interested in making their work more public. For more information, see <https://publicslab.gc.cuny.edu/>.

3. Standing on the shoulder of village visitors, Zee Dempster, Osagyefou Sekou, Brandye Lee, Stacy Hartman, Camille Fair, Josef Sorret, Simin Farkhondeh, and Emanuel Admassu.
4. A poorly raised young woman.

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