

Introduction

Runnin with the Rabbits, but Huntin with the Dogs

On the Makings of an Intellectual Autobiography

After five years of teaching high school, I needed space and time to think through what I had witnessed in the education of the African American and Latino/a youth whom I had taught. I wrote to my college undergraduate mentor, Sylvia Wynter, explaining that I was taking time off to “think my way out of this twilight zone that has become my daily reality.” The personal statements that my graduating high school seniors had written for college were to be a guiding intellectual force for my graduate study in English. These were students I had followed since 1994 when they were freshman at a new high school in the Bronx, New York. I had asked them once to close their eyes and imagine what they wanted from a college education. Why was education important to their lives? One young woman talked about her mother’s heroin addiction and argued that college would show her how to offer guidance and support to other young people living with these experiences, as well as enable her to impact drug rehabilitation in her community. Another young woman wrote about the murder of her brother and the legal system that ignored it. She wanted to understand the world that created such life chances for African American men and then intervene in the judicial system that did not offer them justice. One young man talked about a friend who had a minimum wage job, went on to college, and later started a business. He explained that it was the way that critical literacy, not material success, could offer him a sense of independence and freedom too, just as it had for Frederick Douglass in *Narrative*. These were the stories that I held closely to my side, like they were my human companions, as I reentered the doors of higher education. I felt and knew that my students and I

were connected to alternative histories and definitions of literacies and I wanted to sink myself more fully into those histories.

I was, however, apprehensive about my high school students' images of college because I did not believe that the American university would match their intellectual, political, and social visions, except for the work of the few marginalized professors of color who organically link their scholarship to the political situation of racially subjugated masses. When I enrolled as a master's degree student with a teaching assistantship that allowed me to teach two freshman composition courses per semester, I was met with the very tangible reality of my own apprehensions about higher education in the academic curriculum that was offered to me and my undergraduate students. In the end, I had simply traded one twilight zone for another. My initial goals were to rethink politics of critical reading and literary texts for urban youth of color by using English Studies for curriculum theory, critical pedagogy, and critical literacy. I made the assumption that composition-rhetoric studies would provide a space for this rethinking and I was certainly correct, only I had not imagined that I would have to fight so hard to do that work.

Before my college composition classes began, I attended my first composition-exclusive conference, a day-long conference designed to introduce doctoral students teaching across multiple campuses in the university system to the teaching of composition at the various campuses throughout the city. An overview was first provided of the demographics of the student population, also highlighting which campuses had the largest concentrations of black (making clear distinctions between West Indian and African American students) and Latino/a populations (making no ethnic distinctions). The purpose for this public overview was to offer insight into how "different" the City University of New York¹ looked from "other" college campuses across the country while also stressing that these students were as "mainstream" as any "other" population. We were advised that these students usually wanted the same "mainstream" liberal arts curriculum as "everyone else" and not a "multicultural focus" that many might assume. There was never any mention as to who "everyone else" was or how and why such "wants" had been determined and by whom, particularly since the speaker, a compositionist, did not represent the populations that were numerically cited (nor did the graduate students). We were also told that these undergraduate students were mostly looking to become members of the middle class.

After this opening, a panel of graduate students spoke about the lessons they learned in their first year of teaching college composition.

These included: a reminder that no matter how many times one says the same thing, some students simply will not remember or “get it” so one should plan to repeat oneself often; a suggestion that one simply try to be relaxed and casual, with the example of the speaker asking each New York borough to do “shout-outs” on the first day of class to show the instructor’s humorous side, and yes, you must try to use “their lingo” for these things; and the advice that one always remember that a student might change from the beginning to the end of the semester, followed by a description of a student who wore very scanty “party clothes” to class and yet by the end of the semester, changed her dress to something more “formal” and attended class more regularly. Another panel followed which consisted of tenured professors. One particular panelist described in detail a successful classroom study using the text *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison. One member of the audience admitted confusion. She pointed out that there were various, conflicting perspectives at the conference and, thus, she wanted to know: “Should we be teaching where the students once were, where they are, or where they are going?” At that point, I wasn’t sure what was more surprising: that someone would actually ask such a question or that someone would actually answer. Where exactly were these places that *all* students had been and now were going in their futures?

Of course, it would have been impossible to introduce beginning composition instructors to the field of composition and rhetoric in one afternoon so, in that sense, this mini-conference was a valiant, albeit misguided, attempt. Regardless of the limitations of such an introductory experience, an anti-theoretical, anti-intellectual approach to the teaching of writing was expected of us. I could already see at this conference that there was a distinct discourse about a kind of language education that was reserved for urban, working-class students of color who attended college. Their experiences, at best, were understood as merely torturous journeys into language and identity ambivalence and confusion. Notions of who these college students were and what they needed were very similar to those about my high school students in the South Bronx. It was also very clear that these notions were very different from the aims and goals that my own high school students were articulating for higher education. Schooling and college had been explicitly reduced to the materialist accumulations of the middle class.

The demands and visions of a college education that had been articulated in the social justice movements that had literally “opened the doors” for students of color to attend CUNY in the first place were completely contorted. Even in its most integrationist and bourgeois

variants, the articulation of schooling, literacy, and liberation, in particular for African American populations, has never been a simple, forward march toward middle-class redemption. Yet this is what literacy was being reduced to in every construction of freshman writing that was being offered at this day-long conference. In fact, it seemed that this reduction was the aim of freshman writing where the master trope of academic-discourse-as-material-access was the dominant myth. Academic discourse here is always singular and monolithic, formalism through the back door really, and access always means learning the discursive norms and aesthetic rules of a white middle class, the keys to glory.

A few days after this conference, when I submitted my syllabus for my first composition class, I was told that my focus was much too political and that most of my students would not be interested in my pedagogy. It was the quotation from Carter G. Woodson at the top of my syllabus that sparked this response:

It may be of no interest to the race to be able to boast today of many times as many “educated” members as it had in 1865. If they are of the wrong kind the increase in numbers will be a disadvantage rather than an advantage. The only question which concerns us here is whether these “educated” persons are actually equipped to face the ordeal before them or unconsciously contribute to their own undoing by perpetuating the regime of the oppressor.²

This was obviously too much for that particular administrator to handle, though the students never seemed to have the problems she imagined. And just as I saw when I taught high school students, very few teachers imagined that the kind of writing and literacy that these students “needed” was beyond the confines of prescriptive grammar, skills-based instruction, thesis statement formulas, and the academic-discourse cloning that were the supposed keys for unlocking new middle-class doors.

When I began actually teaching, I immediately noticed the everyday discursive practices of faculty’s casual discussions about students’ inability to speak or write. One group of white male professors once told me that this was “the fault of rap music” since this was really just “second grade baby talk” (who were surprised that someone was at the table beside them who called herself a HipHoppa). I seemed to walk every day into a room full of students for whom speech classes, entry writing exams, junior year proficiency exams, incessant grammar and usage

drills, semester-long topic sentence dissections (even in the “advanced,” 200-level writing classes), monologues about the importance of good grammar over content, and departmental midterms/exams were the norm of college writing instruction. The aim was to create a sort of blockade on any aspect of students’ written or spoken speech that could be deemed “nonstandard,” “incorrect” usage and grammar, “ESL issues,” “dialect interference,” or ethnic rhetoric. To analyze these responses as the racist, ignorant, or pedagogically challenged responses of a few professors on one college campus is too simple. These were not aberrations, but consistent occurrences that are deeply rooted in the history of higher education’s relationship with race. Though the events I describe represent 1998, I have seen very little change. Today, I teach graduate classes related to composition-rhetoric and in each of those classes, I bear witness to the same hostility toward students of color, culturally relevant teaching, and critical pedagogy and have simply come to expect that those graduate classrooms will be as predominantly white as my own were. And, still today, more than fourteen years past my official foray into the discipline, the majority of the faculty who I see teaching college composition, both full-time and part-time/tenure-track folk and exploited adjuncts, have not been required to bear a deep professional relationship to or research expertise in the field, much less a focus on students of color.³

Like I already said, I was trying to think my way out of the political twilight zone of curriculum and instruction for urban high school students, yet I had only entered that twilight zone more deeply. This time, I was going to make sure that I would talk to these material, political, and cultural circumstances shaping my surroundings. This was how I became a compositionist, but I was very hesitant. I would have to locate a different historical trajectory to insert myself and the kind of work that I do in classrooms. In fact, situating myself in a different historiography from anything that I was offered was the only way that I could and would become a compositionist at all.

The Black Freedom Movement, Composition Studies, and the New Century

To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it “the way it really was.” It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger. Historical materialism wishes to retain that image of the past. . . . The danger affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers. The same threat hangs over both: that of becoming a tool

of the ruling classes. In every era, the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it.

—Walter Benjamin⁴

The way that the story of the relationship between composition studies and the Black Freedom Movement is told bears important consequences as it provides an insightful reading into the epistemological breakthroughs and remaining cognitive closures surrounding a continued color line in language and literacy education. While the most explicit institutional and disciplinary focus for this book rests with composition-rhetoric studies and the conference on college composition and communication (CCCC), it is the nested arenas of literacy, language, writing instruction, educational history, and black studies and culture that the fuller project interrogates, arenas that are part of composition studies but obviously not exclusive to it. The story that is told here also has disciplinary correlates in other fields and can be read as the story of the professionalization of departments and organizations as part of the response to 1960s social justice struggles. I hope to connect historiography of Black Freedom struggles with literacy, writing, and language studies.

As Prendergast argues, literacy instruction and theory have been continually invoked alongside the cause for racial justice since the Civil Rights Movement.⁵ If we take Prendergast's argument as a critical point of departure, then literacy in the twenty-first century is not located at the onset of a linearly determined, chronological marking of the year 2000 or, as many theorists might argue, as the result of a now supra-technologically connected world. Instead, literacy in the twenty-first century is located *as* and *at* the onset of new thematic and disciplinary imperatives brought into effect by the Black Freedom Movement.⁶ After this movement, discourses of and polemics around literacy, composition studies, and their multiple contexts would be changed.

Before I move any deeper into my marking of the Black Freedom struggles as a turning axis for twenty-first-century literacy polemics, I need to make clear how I handle the terrain for defining composition studies, literacy studies, and Freshman Composition/Freshman English since these are not three areas that scholars are necessarily always cross-reading. My project places Freshman English into a hotly contested battleground since and because of the Civil Rights Movement, an issue widely agreed upon by compositionists but not taken up by those outside of composition-rhetoric studies as an important lens into race and hegemony in higher education.

Given the dominance of Bain's modes of discourse based on his 1866 book, *English Composition and Rhetoric*,⁷ it seems that writing classrooms have not always necessarily been pedagogically and theoretically aligned with the progressive ideals of teaching and learning found in the 1966 Dartmouth Conference that privileged students' self-expression⁸ or in a work such as Rosenblatt's 1938 *Literature as Exploration*, where literature served to understand one's own responses.⁹ While we have commonly located critical texts such as Rosenblatt's work or the paradigm shifts in intellectual energies such as the Dartmouth Conference, the social-shifting dynamics of African American Freedom struggles are still often rendered invisible as a viable path to imagine from whence and where some of us have come. And yet, as Prendergast further shows in her study, literacy studies, education policies after *Brown v. Board of Education*, and composition studies bear a kind of symbiotic relationship with one another.

For my purposes, I link composition studies and literacy studies, what I would call composition-literacies studies since the linkage is not necessarily a foregone conclusion. For compositionists who have always consciously linked their theory and practices to critical literacy, critical pedagogy, and interrogations of education's maintenance of structured inequalities, broader works related to educational studies in literacy have always played a vital role (scholars such as Berlin, Bizzell, Brandt, Canagarajah, Cushman, Gilyard, Olson, Royster, and Shor).¹⁰ Most often though, literacy studies is confined to K-12 spheres while composition studies gets used exclusively to mark the site of college writing. As composition researchers, many of us obviously overlap with our sister researchers in K-12 literacy studies in scope, methodologies, and polemics; composition studies, however, as I discuss it here in this book, will represent a distinct institutional and disciplinary history because of a location in higher education. For my own political and pedagogical purposes, I think of the teaching of college composition as an activist rhetorical education as captured by the educators whom Kates has described in *Activist Rhetorics and American Higher Education, 1885-1937*.¹¹ When I speak of composition studies, I mean something that moves *beyond* skills-based curricula, calls for political neutrality, or a singular focus on voice, fluency, or style. I mean something that moves *toward* curriculum and instruction that center the ideological investigations of language and simultaneous interrogations of speaking, reading, writing, and designing texts. Today, composition studies might be said to be a subfield of the discipline of English, the university department in which many

compositionist-rhetoricians, like myself, are still commonly housed. In this capacity, I see myself as a scholar who is charged with examining the multiple workings and effects of texts, students' literacies, and theorizing about such texts and literacies. As Harris posits, composition studies has continually made the study of English something more than both "a guild activity" or a set of college skills; instead, composition studies has attempted to change the ways that writing, reading, and literacy are presented to students and teachers.¹² As Pough so passionately asserts in her 2011 Chair's Address at the Conference on College Composition and Communication, we are, at heart, "doers of the word who teach others to do what we do," so much so that we "have an obligation to do it bigger and reach every place and everyone we can reach."¹³

Though composition studies does not deal primarily with Freshman English, that course—and, thereby, the field—is often linked to the nineteenth century as "punishment" for Harvard students who had not yet mastered the most prestigious variety of written English that they were expected to produce as Harvard gentlemen.¹⁴ As such, I cast my ideology in the same lot as those who would see Freshman English as "thoroughly implicated" in an "oppressive institutional history," "intellectual tradition," and "cultural and academic hierarchy" that no longer maintains its punishment, gateway paradigm with Harvard's Great Unwashed, but with the large number of students who are working class and working class/of color in today's postsecondary institutions.¹⁵ Now a longstanding gatekeeper for success in the white, bourgeois literacy codes of college, Freshman English/Freshman Composition is an important lens into the ongoing racialized and political boundaries of who can and should have a right to higher education.¹⁶ For my purposes throughout this book, I will use terms explicitly related to composition studies and rhetorical education to denote a disciplinary paradigm and field and the polemics of access to higher education; meanwhile, I use terms related to new literacies studies and critical literacy to contextualize the politics and social formations relevant to literate lives in their social context.

Because of the combination of its marginalization (and sometimes utter disdain) inside of English/literature departments, its consignment to all entering college students, and its positioning in higher education, Freshman English bears the most dynamic intersection of the competing dialogues and institutional politics that frame how literacy and hegemony have been challenged and maintained for the new century in postsecondary institutions. Freshman Composition, and, thereby, composition studies, collided with all of the policies and protests ushered in by the Black Freedom struggles: student protest movements that linked the disparate

cultures of academia and working-class communities of color; the national, public presence of black student protesters at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and, later, across formerly white universities; sudden changes in racial admissions at what had hitherto been all-white universities; scapegoating, as in being deemed responsible for “threatening” the liberal arts, rather than an incoming corporatization of higher education; competing definitions of purposes of writing instruction for the “nontraditional” student; “canon wars,” and other challenges to what constitutes knowledge and disciplinary boundaries in the academy; rise of new interdisciplinary programs, methodologies, and areas of study; a new body of professors representing racially subordinated groups demanding change not only on their individual campuses but also in their disciplinary, professional organizations; shifts in content, linguistic registers, and discursive styles in published academic and creative writing; and the proliferation of black-audience texts by new black writers. As what might be regarded as its “new” disciplinarity and professionalization, composition studies after 1960 would not only be forced into dialogue with Black Freedom struggles, it would also be literally conceived alongside these struggles, regardless of whether or not the field’s most esteemed leaders and theorists fully welcomed or understood such conversations. It is this forced dialogue that marks the onset and origins of the issues endemic to literacy theory that we mark today as twenty-first-century phenomena: new technologies that enable the connectivity of multiple, unequal groups across space and time; mass economic migrations of poor, nonstandardized English-dominant communities felt particularly by public schools and public institutions; new demands on literacy acquisition alongside an utter inability to achieve large-scale educational equality; cultural and racial distance and conflict between the deliverers of educations and the deliverees; and racialized, massive poverty and inequality on a global scale as the manifestation of new modes of capitalism. The intellectual and political intersections between social justice and literacy that we have inherited today have origins in a multiracial, multiethnic Civil Rights Movement that remains the most protracted struggle for equality that the United States has seen.

Composing Race, Composing Composition Histories

My historical readings are intended to be “a sort of catchment for events”¹⁷ and, thus, are a conscious attempt to achieve an arrangement of the significances and meanings of literacy and writing instruction in the

context of race.¹⁸ Though the focus of this book is on African American communities, it is important to understand that, of course, people of African descent have not been racialized alone. Asian immigrants were excluded for citizenship until 1952 because only free white persons could be naturalized. These classifications can be absurd and changing, since race is not fixed or biological, but a shifting social construct used to fulfill the social hierarchies of a given moment. Such has been the case for Armenians who were legally classified as Asian until they became white in 1909. Syrians were legally white in 1909 and 1910, then nonwhite in 1913, and then back to white again in 1915. As Painter,¹⁹ Roediger,²⁰ Ignatiev,²¹ Brodtkin,²² and Guglielmo and Salerno²³ have shown, ethnic minorities such as Irish, Italians, and Jews have been treated as white, but at the bottom of the hierarchy of whiteness. When I look at race in this book, I am referring to structural racism, the “deeply entrenched patterns of socioeconomic and political inequality and accumulated disadvantage” that are justified for public and private desires.²⁴ Borrowing from Marable, I also define race as the central, power-defining principle of modern states and, today, as a “global apartheid” that has constructed “new racialized ethnic hierarchies” in the context of the global flow of capital under neoliberalism.²⁵ This means that white privilege can be more specifically understood as the historical accumulation of material benefits in relation to salaries, working conditions, employment, home ownership, life expectancy rates, access to professional positions, and promotions.²⁶

By focusing on structural racism though, I do not render African American communities, the focus of this book, as hopelessly oppressed. Though I “comprehend the space of their identity-in-difference,” I am also always interested in how oppression was always “refigured” by “employing expressive counterenergy.”²⁷ I call such counterenergies vernacular insurrections. While my use of the term *vernacular* nods toward the labeling of African American Language (AAL) as a vernacular (AAL obviously looms large in this book), I mean much more than the stock definition of vernacular as the local expression or dialect of a region. I am not interested here, as Ono and Sloop warn against, in simply recuperating and recovering stories of local discourses, which, in and of itself is not necessarily liberatory or positive.²⁸ My notion of what the local is and does is more aptly called “glocal” since global, national, and state oppression is mediated and refracted by local variation and responses.²⁹ By channeling my thinking toward vernacular insurrections, I can see vernacular discourses as not only counterhegemonic, but also as affirmative of new, constantly mutating languages, identities, political methodologies, and

social understandings that communities form in and of themselves, both inwardly and outwardly. Vernacular insurrections then are not merely the bits and pieces chipped off or chipping away at the dominant culture, but a whole new emergence. Institutionalized discourses are always effected by vernacular discourses,³⁰ but the impact that I am going for is when vernacular discourses function as an insurrection, not merely an effect.

I do not offer a chronological listing of yearly, “factual” events in my project here; instead, I engage a self-conscious, systematic interpretation of the political moments surrounding central texts in composition studies that relate to language, access, and the “new students” in the academy. I am not uncovering any new archives that (educational) historians have not already mastered. Instead, the book’s uniqueness and importance come from the way that the Black Freedom Movement is reconceptualized for composition-literacies studies. Marable and Mullings call the struggle for Black Power that dominated the 1960s after the 1950s campaigns for desegregation, the “Second Reconstruction” of America, a “Black Freedom Movement” which “transformed the political contours of U.S. society.”³¹ Similarly, historians Kelley and Lewis explain this era as part of a “protracted war for freedom” where “Black Americans were determined to be architects of an inclusive America, one that championed human rights for all . . . a beacon for the world.”³² Illuminating a line of thought that marries the Black Freedom Movement and composition-literacies studies has required a certain kind of “destructuring” of central texts and figures for “*resurrecting events that have systematically been made to vanish from our intellectual consciousness*” (emphasis mine).³³ Thus, I am attempting to “resurrect” events that have vanished from the site of our composition-literacies theories and to represent “flashes” of the “past” as vernacular insurrections. I treat central texts and figures as what Baker calls “discursive formations” that have political and social origins that “can be traced and whose *regularities are discoverable*” (emphasis mine).³⁴ Such a tracing allows me to unravel “the locations and authorities for discourse . . . rather than the motives, intentions, or transcendent subjectivity of individual speakers.”³⁵

At the end of the day, this book is perhaps the most personal thing I have ever written. Though I incorporate subjective-driven, narrative inquiry into all of my research and scholarship, this work still hits *my personal* the hardest. While I am writing a kind of (revisionist) history of composition studies with the Black Freedom Movement as my guiding force, I am doing much more than that. This book was the process that made me a compositionist and rhetorician. I needed a way into this field

because very little that I had been shown as the canon, as the key moments, as the critical issues, as the seminal edited collections, as “the” history, as the landmarks and signposts, as the categories, or as the inventive engines seemed to include me. Connors thought historical knowledge was essential for a scholar’s personal actions as both a teacher and writer and for imagining the future of composition-rhetoric, and that kind of historical knowledge was precisely something that I didn’t have.³⁶ Baker offers the precautionary warning, however, that one’s intellectual autobiography is often not fascinating to other people; nonetheless, as Baker attests, it can sometimes offer an important story of the emergence and progress of counterstories to taken-for-granted constructs in a field.³⁷ When I think of the past that I am tracing here as my intellectual autobiography, I do not mean a process of simplistic, historical transmission into or stamping onto the present. I mean history as what Phelps has called the “material practice of constituting and sustaining the past as alive in the present.”³⁸

If there is nothing else that I have learned from these long years of schooling that began for me with mandatory Head Start, it is this: you are always right there in the mix, no matter how much you have been written out, spanning much wider than the token representation that you have been allowed. The lesson plan, the vibe of my classrooms, the possibilities and invitation that I extend to my students for their writing, the construction of my academic identity, the way I flow with the pen/keypad and paper/screen, all that starts right here with this history. It was a story I needed to tell because I desperately needed to know it. I say all of this to stress that my need for a history in which to place myself was a need that ran very deep. I wasn’t going to be able to teach, think, or write without it. Intellectual rootedness in your own histories and a scholarly trajectory from which to launch yourself are everything that matter to me.

Discursive Formations

The research that I borrow from in this book spans: education history, secondary education, critical race theory, first-year writing, Africana studies, African American cultural theory, cultural materialism, narrative inquiry, and basic writing scholarship. K-12 educational studies also figure prominently here because if you are serious about the research related to the histories, language policies, social contexts, and critical literacies and lives of students of color, then you cannot afford to rest yourself solely in the scholarship and theories of college classrooms. We have key texts

in composition studies, but simply not enough texts to offer both *breadth* and *depth* into the lives of young people of color.

This book is written in what many might call a kind of cross-amalgamation of many styles and registers. I am high academesic in one moment and high urbanese in another; both inner-personal and outer-historical; as humbled and serious as a triple bypass heart surgery and playfully irreverent, all at once; I got “joy and pain, sunshine and rain.” I use a narrative inquiry of my own teaching, in both high school and college classrooms, as a bridge to the histories of Black Freedom struggles that have made my own education possible. I started my teaching career as a high school educator and have never left the world of secondary educational studies. Thus, my study includes a type of historicization at the same time that it includes accounts of classrooms to serve as polemical connections to the histories presented. My contention here is that the lesson plans and curricular happenings in my classroom and university spaces, if you will, result from the ideological positioning in the history I have laid out. Five teaching interludes are intended to work as a kind of parallel-story to the impact of the histories that I present and stitch together the five chapters of this book. The interludes begin with me as a high school teacher and follow me into college writing classrooms. Thus, teaching is not simply a pedagogical disposition; it is a historical disposition.

In my first teaching vignette, I paint a picture of myself as a high school teacher in the years 1993–98 where one student, Raynard, put me to rhetorical shame, so to speak. Here, I see and witness Raynard as the contemporary body, presence, rhythm, and rhyme to the distinct histories of black students who have always been (re)writing what it means to be literate and to challenge schooling’s foundations. I am purposely going back in time here: as someone who cut her teeth in literacy education in an urban high school serving blacks and Latinos in the poorest congressional school district in the country. In chapter 1 that will follow the teaching interlude, I offer the early history of black educational protest and radicalism in the context of a structured, racist schooling system.

Chapter 1 locates the wave of political activism by black college students in the 1920s through the 1960s as a historical continuum, what Rogers calls the Long Black Student Movement (LBSM).³⁹ If white middle-class and/or immigrant male students were considered alien to academic writing and etiquette at nineteenth-century Harvard, then black students had no chance of even being cast as human. Yet these 1920s

African American college students show us how education and school-based literacies have always been reconfigured by the very people who have been troped as hopelessly locked on the outer margins. By revisiting the Fisk student protests of the 1920s, we see what Richardson has called African American Literacies.⁴⁰ That these students were up against formidable challenges goes without saying, and yet they were able to begin a process for re-creating university education in their own image anyway, evidenced in their protest chants: “Before I’ll be a slave, I’ll be buried in my grave,” words from an African American spiritual. Education and literacy in slavery and emancipation were these students’ literal, social inheritance as they consciously constructed themselves as *the* “New Negroes” of the era, the political charge that we most frequently connect to the movement called the Harlem Renaissance.⁴¹ At the same time, severe racial repression was also these students’ inheritance: state-sanctioned white terrorism under post-Reconstruction, the racism of the Progressive era, the white stranglehold on southern black education, the orthodoxy of 1940s white liberalism as personified by Myrdal’s *An American Dilemma*, exclusionary admissions at white colleges alongside criminal underfunding of black colleges, and the general life-and-death battles incurred for challenging segregation. When we examine the larger ecology of black student protests and accept that work as critically discursive, then we have a new site for understanding the context and purpose of college literacy for the 1920s into the 1960s. Thus, I look at black student protest through two lenses: (1) as the out-of-school literacies⁴² that we have only recently popularized, and; (2) as the rhetorical practices that Logan theorizes are central to the work of African American affinity groups. In this chapter, I stake out the claim that black college students’ protest represents new literacies that have a particular point of reference and home in the field of composition studies.

The second teaching vignette is very much like the first vignette. It is 1999 and this time the setting is an urban university in New York whose student population is predominantly black and Latino/a. I focus here on a student whom I call Rakim. The political activism and rhetorics that have shaped Rakim’s thinking represent a distinct history in which African American students have continually challenged the exclusionary boundaries of higher education, whether it be admissions policies, curricular content, staffing policies, or language paradigms. Instead of the usual cast of characters who have appeared in CUNY’s canon on basic writing and composition, I mark Rakim as student-intellectual-writer, a stance where the politics of race and activism are always centered and

where the model for this centering is informed by out-of-school literacies.

In chapter 2, I focus on the work of the Black Caucus (BC) of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). The Black Radical Tradition must be excavated here to relocate historical examinations of culture, rac(e)ism, political economy, and (literacy) education. In particular, I attempt to reinsert the work of Ernece Kelly and the legacy of NCTE's policy, Students' Rights To Their Own Languages (SRTOL), into a black radical paradigm for critical literacy and social justice. Black Power movements set the tenor and tone for our twenty-first-century referents of "identity, difference, and recognition,"⁴³ and so I check the pulse of Black Power in composition studies via two concurrent platforms: (1) a protracted campaign for social justice and racial equality by African American scholars in and against NCTE as they formed their first Black Caucus, and; (2) a protracted campaign against racism in education where language rights carried the Black Power banners of self-determination, independence, and freedom from white rule.⁴⁴ The work of Kelly and her black college students at the dawn of the BC, thus, offers us an important, historical lens into alternative, professional sites and spaces where the work of composition studies has occurred outside of the racially limited bounds of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC). If we see the work that Kelly was doing as building what Fisher calls Independent Black Institutions (IBIs),⁴⁵ then we can see multiple, institutional sites in which the work of composition studies has been done and can continue to be done where race, literacy, and the experiences of students of color are central.

In the third teaching interlude, I introduce a student from a 2000 composition classroom named Sherrie. With Sherrie, I was introduced to two simultaneous dynamics that have enlivened my writing classrooms: (1) the aftermath of severing AAL speakers completely from AAL in writing under the ruse of a stifled, essentialized view of standardized English, and; (2) the necessity of rupturing students' seeming acceptance of a racialized linguistic inferiority. What is stunningly clear for me in Sherrie's story is that a system of a singular standard is fundamentally a racialized one.

Chapter 3 continues to situate the social world of composition studies in its connections to Black Power, Black Studies, and the Black Arts Movement in the hopes of seeing how such an alternative social world imagined language arts pedagogy and theory in the context of antiracism. Chapter 2 began to chart the work and political stance of the Black Caucus (BC) at NCTE and CCCC. This chapter moves deeper into: how the BC

at NCTE/CCCC demanded that attention be given to the color line at scholarly institutions and disciplinary meetings; how the interdisciplinary field of Black Studies, the most frequent demand made by student protesters in the late 1960s, centered new purposes for black students' education; and how the Black Power/Black Arts Movement influenced students' ideological positions on college campuses as well as new meanings for what writing and literacies could be and do. Smitherman's body of work from 1969–1977, culminating in *Talkin and Testifyin*, will serve as a kind of symbolizing metaphor for the attending politics of composition studies as a profession in its 1960s articulations of Black Freedom struggles. This chapter is intended to function as a political biography of how 1960s social justice struggles impacted a field that could have otherwise maintained racial hegemony through writing instruction. One focus of this chapter is to connect Freshman Composition to 1960s black activism and to suggest that the most radical 1960s Black Language polemics were inspired, not from what is traditionally regarded as educational activism, but from Black Studies and the Black Arts Movement (BAM). Rowe reminds us that Black Studies programs can tell us about the role and meaning of race and social justice in higher education.⁴⁶ I attempt to take up Rowe's intellectual charge and think about the meanings of Black Studies, with BAM as its sister, for composition studies.

In the fourth teaching interlude, I lay the groundwork of an important ideological move in my work that was nested to a critical physical move. In 2001, I began teaching at a black college and was propelled to understand more deeply the historical traditions involved teaching African Americans. Previously, I had come head to head with spaces that had historically carried the weight of open admissions in the United States but there were few moments in that space where my own racial identities and discourses were heard or respected. It was not until I moved to a different setting and saw open admissions and the commitment to educationally underserved African Americans that I found both an intellectual and political home as a woman of color, African American educator, and compositionist. Though this interlude is more personal in its focus on my own migrations between teaching institutions, I hope to highlight that the ways we politicize the institutions in which we work shape how we imagine teaching.

Chapter 4 focuses on 1969, a landmark year because it is the year in which the first group of black and Puerto Rican students would combine forces at the City University of New York (CUNY), the nation's third-largest higher education system, and forward perhaps one of the

most comprehensive efforts in the United States for wider access for students of color through open admissions. The national history of black student activism from previous chapters is carried into this chapter, this time focusing on black and Puerto Rican students at CUNY. This was also the first time in history that there were as many black students at white colleges as there were at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). It was a time marked by the social justice movements and a national definition of the student that had been primarily shaped by the HBCUs and the alternative version of what it meant to be a black student: one who fought white supremacy as central to being literate and educated. The chapter highlights Shaugnessy's *Errors And Expectations*, a canonical text reflecting this moment for theory in basic writing and, thereby, composition studies. Although her work does not deal solely with African American students, the students she encountered got there because of the social justice movements of the 1960s: first by the black and Puerto Rican activists who created the SEEK program and the Civil Rights agenda in New York City, and, secondly, by the black and Puerto Rican student activists who opened that university system even more. The contention here is that the field has missed an important reading and historical definition for this text. A primary function and contribution of *Errors and Expectations* was to offer the field an integrationist discourse as it simultaneously birthed and legitimated the field's canons on basic writing, writing program administration, and pedagogies for nonstandard language varieties. The book communicates particular ideological relationships with integration in the immediate post-*Brown* era.

In my final teaching interlude, I trace the interjections and challenges posed by female students of African descent in a classroom in the context of African Diaspora literacies and language competencies. I want to show how, in just five minutes, my students were story-ing varied histories under colonialism, melding multiple languages and Englishes, spanning numerous land masses and continents, bumping up against competing racialized hierarchies of gender, and articulating many migratory subjectivities, all as if it was just meant to be. It is also this kind of stance that can best capture an ideology in which Black Language is not merely a set of structures and usages to study and quantify, but a polemic from which to challenge the social reproduction of schooling, society, and literacy paradigms.

In chapter 5, *Errors and Expectations* will be more closely revisited. First, a contemporary discussion of the text's presentations of error, grammar, and language is offered alongside rewritings of student texts

that Shaughnessy includes in the book. Second, I pursue an examination of the discourses of “white innocence” that are used to map the terrain of this book’s impact. I continue discussing the post-*Brown* era, guided by critical educational theorists such as Ladson-Billings who remind us that we landed on the wrong note.⁴⁷ Two critical moments in relation to *Errors and Expectations* in one of the field’s premier journals, *College English (CE)*, will serve as the markers. In 1979, John Rouse published an essay called “The Politics of Composition” in *CE* where he launches his criticisms of *Errors and Expectations*. In response to his remarks, Gerald Graff and Michael Allen responded six months later. These arguments would be repeated in 1992 when Min Zhan Lu, like John Rouse, would similarly discuss her disagreements with *Errors and Expectations*. While these two moments in *CE* do not offer the full, extended picture of the “coordinates” that have unfolded the full discourse of “white innocence” as it intersects with *Errors and Expectations*, these moments do provide a lens into an important picture of the domestication and turning back of the antiracist struggles and activism of the 1960s Black Freedom Movement and the relationship to language polemics. Although further criticisms of the iconic discourse of *Errors and Expectations* seem moot since there are already wide and far-reaching points of dissent, *Errors and Expectations* gets figured into my project because of its date of publication and the historic moment in admissions at white universities to which its publication date is wed.

The presence of many different languages in our classrooms means that complex, multiple sets of epistemologies and discursive identities are shaping students’ speaking, writing, and all their ways of being in language. Literacy is always situated, always fulfilling social and cultural purposes. Thus, I conclude this book with a discussion of why discourses of linguistic and cultural diversity in education are ill-equipped to help us confront the structural racism and economic exploitation of racially subjugated young people of color today.

At its heart, I am attempting to write a self-conscious and personal, black vernacular-intellectual history as a compositionist and critical literacies educator who works hard to think and teach from the vantage point of Black Radical Traditions as more than just curricular content delivered in Eurocentric modes. This book represents one attempt to look at when we, as compositionists, have been aligned and misaligned with that kind of black freedom-inspired purpose. When I think of the possibilities for such an alignment and misalignment, it is my grandmother’s expression that comes to mind. Whenever someone did something that seemed

contradictory enough to make them untrustworthy, my grandmother simply called it *runnin with the rabbits but huntin with the dogs*. As a child, I did not understand the depth or significance of what she was saying. However, I did have a very clear sense from her use of the expression that she was making a negative evaluation of whatever phenomenon was in question. American schools and universities, through their scholarship and instructional designs, have often upheld a racial status quo *alongside* a *rhetoric* of dismantling it. These were not the workings of contradictory and confused individuals merely locked within their space and time. My grandmother understood that such contradictions happen inside of a totemic system. And once she pointed out that someone or something was *runnin with the rabbits but huntin with the dogs*, the expectation was that I would question the process and work to achieve an alternative awareness, ideological approach, and set of critical practices.