

7 College-Writing Instruction and African-American Rhetoric

The labels Rhet/Comp and Comp/Rhet, which are common designators in American colleges and universities, represent the fusion of rhetoric studies and composition studies. African-American scholars and practitioners have long had a major presence in and influence on the field. They have sometimes been proponents of a prescriptive, analytic paradigm in which the focus is on finished texts and textual features with little regard for the circumstances of their creation and against an inflexible standard of correctness. Termed the product approach, this mode of instruction dominated the composition landscape for several generations, and it was predictable that, because ruling education constructs prove to be cogent across various segments of the professoriate, many African-American instructors adhered to it. Dialect was seen as deficit, and the message to students was that they must get standardized right away or get out. Many students failed writing courses—and college—on that basis. On the other hand, African Americans have valiantly contributed to the development of alternate conceptions of composition teaching, approaches that consider, as Clark and Ivanič (1997) outlined, politics, purpose, and process, as well as product (p. 17). This more progressive and enabling pedagogy values African-American language practices and is the superior approach to producing large numbers of educated, critical, and astute African-American students. It is the tradition with which we are presently concerned.

Important forerunners in this latter movement include elocutionist, activist, and educator Hallie Quinn Brown (1880, 1910, 1975) and historian Carter G. Woodson. Brown, the most notable African-American college language educator at the beginning of the twentieth century, included material written in African-American Vernacular English in her reciter text *Bits and Odds* (1880). She exhibited such cultural and linguistic sensitivity throughout her lengthy career, which included the teaching of numerous sections of Freshman English. Woodson agreed with Brown's basic technique. In *The Mis-education of the Negro* (1933/1990), he observed,

In the study of language in school pupils were made to scoff at the Negro dialect as some peculiar possession of the Negro which they should

despise rather than directed to study the background of this language as a broken-down African tongue—in short to understand their own linguistic history.

(p. 19)

He argued furthermore that African-American students should be exposed in school to African folklore and proverbs as well as to the works of African-American writers (p. 150).

Following Brown and Woodson, who passed away within months of each other at mid-century, African-American practitioners and scholars pushed further on the issue of relevant pedagogy. For instance, Juanita Williamson (1957) published "What Can We Do About It?—The Contribution of Linguistics to the Teaching of English" in *CLA Journal*, the organ of the Black-founded and Black-run College Language Association (CLA), which was the main organization where African Americans debated writing pedagogy. Williamson addressed the inadequacy of popular and prescriptive handbooks. Instead of favoring skill-and-drill techniques, she understood that student motivation—another way of saying politics and purpose—is a crucial factor in education. Asserting the worth of contrastive language analysis, she wrote with regard to the students she taught, "If we show him the structure of standard English and the structure of his own dialect, he will see what change he should make, and if he wishes, he will do so" (pp. 26–7, emphasis added). Of course, instructors could play a role in shaping students' dispositions, and never is there only one way to do so.

At the 1958 CLA Annual Convention, Nettie Parler of South Carolina State College described a detailed program for teaching African-American students. In response to the sharply rising enrollments of students from working-class backgrounds, her institution had replaced traditional English courses with communications courses and established the Communications Center, which offered remediation in addition to college composition courses. The center had a decidedly eradicationist mission, as Parler described:

I do recognize nevertheless that incorrect language habits are amoebic in nature. They grow prolifically and vigorously on our college campuses, and they are most difficult to control. Although a strong, determined drive against them should be spearheaded by the English staff of each college, control can only be accomplished through the vigilance and efforts of the entire faculty, with each instructor unequivocally demanding that the students of his classes speak, listen, read and write correctly at all times. In this manner not only shall we dissipate the widely accepted rumor that good English need merely be written and spoken in the English class, for the English teacher; but we shall raise the level of our students in the communications areas to an inestimable height.

(p. 50)

Immediately following, however, Parler urged a more nurturing, developmental approach:

I, therefore, exhort all who teach to follow the golden rule of education which states that we must begin with the learner where he is. That is the only way to educate. Any effort to superimpose upon the learner subject matter for which he is not prepared is a waste of time and energy for both the student and the teacher.

(p. 50)

She demonstrated in one good-hearted but conflicted presentation the major terms of the debate about composition instruction among African-American educators and others as well.

By the late 1960s, much of the scholarly deliberation had shifted to the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC). CCCC was sort of the desegregating White university analog alongside the HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) role of CLA. Several CLA members joined the younger organization while retaining membership in the former. In the pages of *College Composition and Communication*, Ernece Kelly (1968) spoke out against racist curricular practices and against racism throughout the profession. Along with noting the virtual exclusion of Black participants from the 1968 CCCC annual convention, she expressed dismay over "the awful resistance of white participants to the challenges to recognize their biases and to work to defeat them" (p. 107). Several issues later, Marian Musgrave (1971) expounded on class, caste, and racial bias in American colleges and universities. In one of the earliest essays to consider jointly Black and non-Black colleges, Musgrave argued that many Freshman Composition courses were disabling for students. Recognizing that American education historically reproduced inequity, she scolded teachers for ignoring the findings of linguistics and challenged the assertion that Black English was damaging to African-American students. She proposed that composition teachers resist their tendencies to reject African-American Vernacular English and the students who speak it: "Black teachers have had to slough off their old attitudes quickly under the new black militancy, whereas whites have often hurried to find a new rationale for their old evil. I assure you that sloughing is better" (p. 29).

Meanwhile, in *CLA*, Jessie Brown (1968), who would head the Black Caucus inside CCCC, advanced a complementary argument and stressed a personal-growth model for Black students that, unlike the prescriptive aspects of Parler's proposal, would emphasize the resources of their native language varieties. In "Advanced Composition," Brown spoke of students increasing their language power as a means of extending their selves, the necessity of focusing on student writing as the primary texts of instruction, and the efficacy of constructive teacher and peer criticism. The essay emphasized, too, that composition students should experiment with various nonfiction genres and purposes, and that the field of composition should embrace insights made available by literary

analysis, generative grammar, rhetoric, and logic. Brown's article can be seen as an African-American equivalent of, or even response to, the famous Dartmouth Seminar held in 1966,¹ though Brown was predictably critical of the lack of African-American participation at that event. Also in *CLA*, Melvin Butler (1971) of Southern University addressed the subject of Black dialect and teaching English relative to HBCUS, and, like Musgrave, he lambasted African Americans who denied their own heritage for the sake of culturally dominant formulations. As he wrote,

any English program that claims as its model Harvard, Yale, or Princeton but enrolls as its students sons and daughters, sisters and brothers, babies and knee babies, friends and lovers of Harvard's, Yale's, and Princeton's janitors is a program with a built-in margin for failure that staggers the mind.

(p. 239)

In November 1971, Butler was named by the CCCC Executive Committee to head a group that would compose a position statement on students' dialects.² A year later, the Committee adopted the resultant resolution:

We affirm the students' right to their own language—the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style. Language scholars long ago denied that the myth of a standard American dialect has any validity. The claim that any one dialect is unacceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another. Such a claim leads to false advice for speakers and writers, and immoral advice for humans. A nation proud of its diverse heritage and its cultural and racial variety will preserve its heritage of dialects. We affirm strongly that teachers must have the experiences and training that will enable them to respect diversity and uphold the right of students to their own language.

(Corbett, 1974)

CCCC membership eventually accepted the measure in 1974, and the organization devoted a special issue of *College Composition and Communication* both to disseminate the resolution and to provide elaboration about the document's premises and implications.

"Students' Right" remains controversial. How is such right to be granted in colleges and universities? How is writing in "their own language" to be evaluated? These questions continue to be discussed, and various proposals have been proffered. For example, in 1985 the Black Caucus published *Tapping Potential*, the first major all-Black book in language arts and composition. Not only a response to "Students' Right," the book is in some ways a tribute to Carter G. Woodson; his thoughts about language and literature as well as his focus on African-American identity and self-knowledge resonate

prominently in lead editor Charlotte Brooks's foreword and throughout the collection. Delores Lipscomb edited the section on writing, which includes entries such as Janis Epps's "Killing Them Softly: Why Willie Can't Write," Jacqueline Royster's "A New Lease on Writing," Paul Ramsey's "Teaching the Teachers to Teach Black-Dialect Writers," Vivian Davis's "Teachers as Editors: The Student Conference," and Edward Anderson's "Using Folk Literature in Teaching Composition."

The most certain long-term result of "Students' Right" is that serious composition teaching and scholarship reflect a favorable view of language variety. Such diversity is considered an opportunity and not simply an obstacle, challenge, or reason to disqualify students or recycle them through suspect remediation programs. This line of reasoning has been consistently articulated by linguist and rhetorician Geneva Smitherman, who served on the committee that produced "Students' Right" and emerged as the central African-American figure in composition studies. In *Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America* (1977), she explained:

Communicative competence, quite simply, refers to the ability to communicate effectively. At this point, however, all simplicity ends. For to be able to speak or write with power is a very complex business, involving a universe of linguistic choices and alternatives. Such a speaker or writer must use language that is appropriate to the situation and the audience. He or she must be able to answer such questions as: who can say what to whom, under what conditions? who is my audience? what assumptions can I make about that audience? What are its interests, concerns, range of knowledge? in a given act of speaking or writing, what examples or details will fit best and where? I am here talking about aspects of communication such as content and message, style, choice of words, logical development, analysis and arrangement, originality of thought and expression, and so forth. Such are the real components of language power, and they cannot be measured or mastered by narrow conceptions of "correct grammar." While teachers frequently correct student language on the basis of such misguided conceptions, saying something correctly, and saying it well, are two entirely different Thangs.

(pp. 228-9)

By commenting expansively about rhetoric and championing the rigorous pursuit of rhetorical power over slavish adherence to "correct grammar," she tried to ward off the criticism that embracing linguistic diversity necessarily entails a relaxing of worthwhile standards.

Smitherman reaffirmed her approach to writing instruction in an essay titled "Toward Educational Linguistics for the First World" (1979):

Writing instruction should be geared toward the recognition of audience, context, and situation, and students should be given opportunities to

experiment with the various kinds of communication in their linguistic bags. Reports and memos are not the same as directions for workers, which are not the same as letters to friends. Development of communicative competence requires knowledge of the efficacy of different registers and forms in different contexts and an understanding of how language works in its natural social settings.

(p. 210)

In 1994, Smitherman published the results of a significant study, "The Blacker the Berry, the Sweeter the Juice," which demonstrated a positive correlation between African-American discourse patterns and high marks received on a large sample of student essays examined as part of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (p. 93). She concluded that, "regardless of rhetorical modality," the expressive qualities of the African-American verbal tradition enable students, granted ample rewriting and revision, to produce essays that are "lively," "image-filled," "concrete," and "readable" (p. 95).

Elaine Richardson (2003), Smitherman's student and protégé, vigorously responds to her mentor's work. In *African American Literacies*, she reflects on her affecting sociolinguistic journey, which has included her roles as a college composition student, language theorist, cultural critic, and education researcher, and she describes how that journey has fueled her scholarship. As a student, because of a prose style closely reflective of her upbringing, surroundings, and experiences in 1960s and 1970s urban Cleveland, she encountered more difficulty with writing teachers and tutors than with completing writing assignments. Eventually, she figured out that she could succeed in class, which to her came to mean the unenthusiastic reception of a "C," if, in that context, she submitted to "Whitization" and relinquished her "language variety, history, experience, culture, and perspective" (p. 2). "Ah, the price for a 'C' was high," she ruefully reminisces, "the subordination of my experience and the erasure of my voice paralleling the absence of Black voices and culturally relevant material and instruction in the curriculum and the classroom" (p. 2). Richardson knew that she was not alone but shared a situation, if not necessarily outcome, with numerous African-American students. As an academic, she has proposed a solution to alienation that was not available to her in her circumstance: an African American-centered writing curriculum.

Rejecting the idea that language could ever be taught in colleges legitimately without faculty and students consciously considering power and politics, Richardson wants the substance of what she terms White-supremacist and capitalist-based literacy instruction made plain—its emphasis on detachment, objectivity, positivism, conformity, and a mythic meritocracy (p. 9). These are pretty unappealing options in the Black rhetorical tradition, and, in fact, Richardson blames White-supremacist, capitalist approaches for much of Black literacy underachievement. Thus, her countering pedagogical

move, African American-centered composition theory, is based on four assumptions:

1. Form and content are inextricably bound
 2. Black Discourse is an Academic Discourse in constant flux, in negotiation with other discourse, including the dominant discourse
 3. Contrastive analysis of AAVE syntax and discourse against standardized syntax and discourse will result in students' improved critical language facilities
 4. Increased historical and cultural self consciousness and critical awareness can be realized in writing and discourse showing Black discourse features.
- (p. 97)

Although all four premises are important, Richardson perhaps considers the first, the form-content link, or the field dependency presented as a Black discourse style by Smitherman in her NAEP study, to be the most intriguing. Field dependency is defined as "involvement with and immersion in events and situations; personalizing phenomenon; lack of distance from topics and subjects" (Richardson, p. 156), and Richardson reflects, "I would argue that field dependency is the hallmark of the Black style, a signature feature . . . [it] epitomizes the person-centered assumptions of AAVE culture. It helps a writer to engage more deeply with the subject" (pp. 109–10). Responding once again to the vexing milieu in which she once participated as an undergraduate, she concludes, "Generally, field dependency is in opposition to traditionally conceived 'objectivity' and 'neutrality' that characterizes academic discourse" (p. 110).

As to the specifics of her research, Richardson collected data from fifty-two students whom she taught in several sections of her African-American-centered course at a Big Ten university. Driven by the query "is writing enhanced by African American methodology?" (p. 100), she had students read a background statement about language, racism, and the experiences of writers of African descent (p. 100) and then respond, as a pre-test, to a prompt: "What does it mean to be Black and write or to be Black and literate?" (p. 101). The students were not asked to try to produce Black discourse styles, but they were invited to do so if they wished. They were only required to give the assignment their best shot. Using several statistical measurements, Richardson found no significant correlation between test scores and AAVE syntax features like *zero copula* (the movie good), *habitual be* (she be in the gym), or *ed morpheme* (he look for it already). However, there was a significant negative correlation between essay length and AAVE syntax: the longer the paper, the less frequent appearance of AAVE syntax (p. 103). There was a significant negative correlation between AAVE syntax and Black discourse features: the more discourse features, the less AAVE syntax (p. 103). Therefore, her findings matched those of Smitherman and suggested that when students were encouraged to tap into all of their linguistic resources without worrying about being

detached-objective-good-English-perfect, or without fear of "error" or penalty, they flow better, produce less "error," and perhaps encounter less penalty. In any event, AAVE usage was not an impediment to student writing (p. 105). Most important, in her analysis of post-test results, a barometer of her actual teaching, Richardson saw better performances and additional positive correlations among Black discourse, essay length, and rater scores (p. 105). She had brand-new empirical justification for her curriculum.

Near the end of her discussion of this phase of her research, Richardson opines, "I think by integrating the speech styles, rhetorical, and literacy traditions of African Americans into academic writing, we invite students to have a fair fight with discourse" (p. 113). And at the close of her book, she writes, "Black discourse and rhetoric helped to evolve and revolutionize the meaning of equality in this country. We cannot afford to continue to subjugate this discourse in the classroom" (p. 149). She means, of course, that we must squarely confront the history and politics of literacy, recognize the arbitrary nature of language standards, and refuse to use Black language as a reason to fail Black students.

Closely aligned with Richardson's scholarship, Kermit Campbell (2005), in *Gettin' Our Groove On*, speaks to and illustrates the value to African-American students and perhaps to all students of rap or, more precisely, of "writing imbued with rap sensibilities" (p. 133). He has encouraged students to produce such writing because he finds that its analytic power, its literate representation, and inspection of personal, cultural, and political tensions, are crucial to the further development of critical perspectives and preferable to a string of expository assignments that privilege the illusions of authorial distance and objectivity. This does not mean that he totally wants to displace thesis-driven academic writing. His book, though hip-hop inflected, is primarily of that type. Thus, he acknowledges,

Of course, students should learn how to write, say, effective arguments (the mantra at my old, old job), but our personal lives are in fact arguments, are embedded in argument. And besides, an argument is so much more meaningful when the writer's personal knowledge and experience, her subjectivity, suffuse it.

(p. 140)

Campbell wants students to speak back to the academy and help push it toward greater equity and vitality rather to settle only for the stamp of the status quo. He only hints at a critique of White hegemony (p. 143), but he is clear that promotion of rap-imbued writing and its engagement with texts and ideologies of the so-called mainstream potentially improve discourse for all. In other words, the curriculum he advocates produces new student insights that we would do well to consider. Drawing inspiration from Mary Louise Pratt and her influential essay, "Arts of the Contact Zone," Campbell conceives of classrooms in which activities flourish relative to, following Pratt's

recommendations, storytelling, the forging of identifications, the consideration of vernacular forms, and the redemption of the oral. Rap is a ready medium for all of that activity and is, in Campbell's view, an integral aspect of the verbal repertoires of many African-American students as they experiment with options for producing rhetorically powerful texts.¹

Vershawn Young (2007) agrees with Campbell's approach and, like Campbell, he provides, in *Your Average Nigga*, a masterfully written, poly-vocal book that models the writing that we could be helping students produce. Working out of a framework that he terms the "sociolinguistics of racial performance" (p. 3), Young advocates the promotion of code meshing as the best pedagogical strategy in writing classrooms. He affirms the critique that schools largely have functioned to reproduce the status quo, allowing sporadic individual mobility but not yet facilitating much group elevation. Of course, like several of his intellectual predecessors, Young understands that a key aspect of social management has been to designate language varieties such as AAVE to be illegitimate vehicles for expression and instruction in schools. That teachers accede to such demarcation is, in Young's account, the explanation for many of the struggles and much of the so-called failure experienced by African-American students in first-year writing courses. Even as language researchers establish an unequivocal case for linguistic equality, teachers and administrators, unable to refute research logically, often offer code-switching pedagogy as a concession to it: Use code switching as a way to bridge, say, AAVE and Standardized American English, but make sure assessments are only of written performance in the standardized language variety. Rejecting that dictate, Young argues,

True linguistic and identity integration would mean allowing students to do what I call code meshing based on what linguists have called code mixing, to combine dialects, styles, and registers. This technique meshes versions of English together in a way that's more in line with how people actually speak and write anyway.

(p. 7)

Although "code meshing" is an admirable addition to the field's critical vocabulary, it is not necessarily the opposite of code switching in strictly linguistic terms. We make this comment to lower the temperature of some of the contemporary mesh vs. switch debates. After all, language, for all practical purposes, is a monophonic instrument; we can only say one word at a time. Whether an ensuing word, say functioning as part of a standardized construction, is part of a mesh pattern or switch pattern can only be determined by extending the utterance. What length or timeframe regarding utterances determines whether we are meshing or switching? The answer can become very detailed and take us far afield. Our point is that we should focus on practice rather than debates about terminology, especially when the debaters share pretty much the same pedagogical orientation. Therefore, the value of Young's coinage lies not in the linguistic distinction it tries to make but in

the unmistakable clarity it brings to purported progressive expectations set by teachers. If they are not inviting students, particularly, for Young's purposes, poor African-American students, to submit papers that feature the range of their linguistic versatility, then they are cooperating in a systemic project of political suppression and disqualification no matter how they explain their curriculums. Moreover, Young knows that experimenting with hybrid discourses could make for better writing (p. 121). You have to master several language varieties to be a master of the written mesh.

Although he details no overarching political vision, Young remains an invigorating voice in composition studies and clear in his critique. Opposing a narrow utilitarian or marketplace imperative, he declares, "We should prepare students for societal change, not merely to fit in" (p. 112). He does not mention the other N word, neoliberalism, as does Vorris Nunley (2011), who argues that "neoliberalism as a political rationality functions as pedagogy that normalizes a constellation of values around market logics" and alongside that observation contends, "my personal goal in the composition classroom is to develop more effective writers, critical thinkers, critical citizens, more competent users of literacies, and fewer citizen subjects as *Homo economicus*" (p. 158). Yet Young believes, as he remains sympathetic to the plight of students, "we should stop hating on the playas and start assessing the whole game" (p. 145).

Absorbing various lessons of the Black Freedom Struggle, Carmen Kynard, in *Vernacular Insurrections* (2013), performs the most explicitly Black-radical intervention in composition studies. She does so in two ways. First, through a stellar project of revisionist historiography, she extends the boundaries of origins discourse about modern composition studies, or since the beginning of the "Students Right" era, by arguing compellingly that protesting students and intellectuals were the primary agents who brought modern composition studies into existence. They were not tangential to the field in the 1960s, and, in fact, Black student activists and radical intellectuals from the 1920s onward, particularly those connected to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUS), never had been. Kynard thus posits the Black Freedom Struggle and its imperative to democratize higher education overall as necessary preconditions to the creation of the composition programs we now see at predominately White institutions. Kynard's narrative counters a story of liberal uplift efforts by well-meaning White faculty. To be clear, Kynard does not contend that well-meaning White faculty members were unimportant. She simply wants the historical record to show that well-meaning activist students of color were the most important factor in the development of writing pedagogy responsive to their needs.

Kynard's second challenge to composition studies orthodoxy is pedagogical. In her view, anyone who is teaching from a conception that does not incorporate the Black Freedom Struggle is doing students a disservice because such teaching does not encourage the most insightful view of the contemporary world. Kynard's teaching mission is one of "activist rhetorical education" (p. 7). She privileges deep investigations of reading of texts, pushing for clarity

about how texts function in relation to political networks. This is akin to what some know as critical pedagogy and the goal of having students become critical language consumers and producers. But what distinguishes Kynard is her bold embrace of Black radicalism, partly expressed in five “breakdowns” or expressed consolidations of her desire to promote anticapitalist, antiracist teaching and research that specifically address the lives of working-class African Americans:

1. Can you get down with some good ole-fashioned political economy rather than just peppering the words *capitalism* and *class* here and there? Can you locate class as superstructure rather than merely an “identity” that enables the ignoring of whiteness?
2. Are you trying to get everyone to move on up like the Jeffersons or can you critique the displacement and exploitation that them “deluxe apartments in the sky-high” create?
3. Are you forever and a day talking about using the master’s tools to get into his house, or are you trying to move to new land?
4. Do you talk about black folk as objects of study without ever sitting at the table with them, living beside them?
5. Are you doing something other than writing books and articles, going to conferences? Who and where you be on and off the academic plantation?

For Kynard, progressive responses to these questions reflect the best aspects of the legacy of “The Students’ Right to Their Own Language”—and of Smitherman, one of her sources of inspiration (pp. 100–1).

Although we know her political disposition, Kynard is not domineering in classrooms. In the “teaching interludes” that she presents, we detect no dogmatism. It is not specific syllabi or assignments that matter much. But essential to Kynard is some, however flexible, engagement with ideas about structural racism, U.S. education history, the long Civil Rights Movement, Black Power, the rise of Black Studies, the role of HBCUS, vernacular cultures, the Black Arts Movement, and sociolinguistic knowledge of African-American Language, among others. “All that ain’t a lesson plan,” she declares; “it is a political disposition that shapes what and why you do what you do in the classroom.” Paraphrasing Zora Neale Hurston relative to the value of broad experience, she advises, “*You gotta go there to teach there.*”⁴ The light at the end of the tunnel is this: we have precedents, examples, and inspiration if we clear out what has gotten in the way” (pp. 247–8).

One of the precedents that Kynard acknowledges is subsequently explored in detail by Rhea Lathan (2015) in *Freedom Writing*, as she examines the history of the South Carolina Sea Islands Citizenship Schools (later dubbed Freedom Schools), which were established as a modest entity in 1955 by Septima Clark, Myles Horton, Esau Jenkins, Bernice Robinson, and others. Citizenship schools eventually were formed throughout the South and involved more than 60,000 participants (p. iii), who understood for the most part that literacy

was essential to constructing the lives they desired to live. This was clearly a political understanding. They grasped the idea that who was encouraged to write and who was doomed *not* to write was a product of power relations, and they knew that for African Americans to claim literacy during the era of Jim Crow represented a radical act. Although voter registration obviously became a focus of the schools, the literacy vision was broader. An excerpt from an instructional manual, *My Citizenship Booklet*, reads, “But there is involved in the mechanics of learning to read and write an all-around education in community development which includes housing, recreation, health and improved home life” (quoted in Lathan, p. 77).

To deepen her comprehension of the citizenship-schools phenomenon, Lathan employs an epistemological frame that she labels “gospel literacy” (p. xvii), a concept that follows from her observation that many civil-rights activities occurred in churches and prayer meetings and that gospel consciousness (sacred) and the literacy outpouring of the Freedom movement (secular) evolved together, influencing one another within a Black cultural formation that animated both (p. xvii).

Gospel literacy contains four dominant precepts:

1. acknowledging the burden
2. call-and-response
3. bearing witness
4. finding redemption.

(p. xvii)

Lathan illustrates each idea by referring to the everyday actions of participants in civic contexts. For example, to accept the burden was to honor the sacrifice of courageous forbears and rise to the challenge of transforming society for the better.

Call-and-response was evident in the back-and-forth flow between pupils/organizers and instructors/administrators/organizers as they continually modified curricula and political agendas in response to personal needs, differing on various occasions and on some initiatives but remaining united organically in a liberating struggle (pp. 66–72). Bearing witness, the expectation that provides testimony to aid in social transformation, was exemplified by the numerous letter-writing campaigns whereby students conveyed their perspectives to outlets such as major media (p. 79).

Redemption in Lathan’s model is not the religious quest for eternal salvation but a fierce commitment to “right-here-right-now liberation” (p. 24). Bernice Robinson stands as a prototype; she taught directly or indirectly, as Lathan notes, every teacher associated with the educational efforts of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the Congress of Racial Equality, and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (p. 111). It is little wonder, as Kynard suggests, that there was no shortage of Black activists ready to push for greater access and fairness in higher education and within the composition enterprise in particular.

As part of reimagining the landscape or textscape regarding African-American involvement with composition studies, we cannot ignore express concern for Black LGBTQ students and teachers, who within any sizeable assemblage of students are present—sometimes passively or actively but always *definitely*. This is a key message that Eric Darnell Pritchard (2017) conveys in *Fashioning Lives*. Grounded in his own lifelong encounters with both enabling and disabling aspects of literacy, and fortified by interviews with 60 LGBTQ subjects about their literacy practices, Pritchard theoretically shatters the paradigm of *literacy normativity* and cogently illustrates the need for a “framework through which literacy, composition, and rhetoric may see Black queerness generally and the theory [he develops] from the life stories of [his] participants in particular” (p. 13). For Pritchard, literacy normativity, the imposition of unjust standards, inflicts harm in its assault on the subjectivity of the designated “other.” He advocates instead for *restorative literacies*; these consist of practices by Black queers that support “self-definition, self-care, and self-determination” (p. 24). Speaking to a disconnect between scholarship in literacy, composition, and rhetorical studies and Black LGBTQ experiences, he announces that part of his quest is

to address the tyranny of literacy normativity as that thing that perpetually treats African American, LGBTQ literacy, composition, and rhetorical studies as mutually exclusive, which effectively makes it difficult, if not impossible, to speak to the intersections of these scholarly discourses in a way that gets us beyond what is a clear impasse so that work at the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and queerness can be fully seen, heard and taken up.

(p. 33)

With respect to writing classrooms, Pritchard suggests that race and sexuality be jointly considered in curricular design and course operation (p. 46). Matters to anticipate or attend to include homophobia in texts and teacher response, as well as the intersection of homophobia and race; the phenomena of sexuality and gender identity disclosures in student writing, or “coming out” by students or faculty; and the inclusion of materials that specifically reflect Black queer experiences so as not to perpetuate historical erasure (p. 45.). Like Kynard and Lathan, Pritchard views the Black Freedom Struggle as invaluable source material but has no use for a narrative of that valiant fight that continually elides Black queer contributions. Pritchard charges composition researchers with the responsibility to conduct sexuality studies whether or not LGBTQ people are the focus; this is necessary he contends so that we don’t treat sexuality as “other people’s business” (p. 45). The best critical lens is the one that best aids our collective wisdom. The rigorous intersectional approach of a progressive “Black Queer Literacies” is for Pritchard, following the phrasing of poet Pat Parker, “a revolution” (p. 252).⁵

Of course, we have not been passive beings amid all this philosophizing and practice that gesture toward struggle and liberation. We have, in fact, both headed CCCC, the primary professional organization for college-writing studies, and we have been colleagues, acquaintances, or friends with every scholar featured in this chapter whose work dates from the 1960s onward. In addition, our own intellectual contributions run parallel to many of the scholarly developments described in this chapter and are complementary to them (Gilyard, 1991, 2011, 2016; Banks, 2006, 2011, 2015).

Gilyard, a transdisciplinary scholar, is known in composition studies for championing the idea of critical language awareness,⁶ theorizing about race, identity, and politics; and stressing the value of African-American expressive culture, particularly African-American Vernacular English, in writing classrooms. In his education memoir *Voices of the Self* (1991), he argues that, across the length of the curriculum, schools should refrain from extracting severe psychic payments from students by trying to trap them in monolingualist ideology, thereby promoting “failure” for many. One of the ways that he assesses formal language instruction is through the frameworks of eradicationism, pluralism, and bidialectalism (pp. 70–4). He judges eradication, with its focus on extirpating so-called deficient language varieties, and bidialectalism, with its emphasis on role-playing, to be insufficient, if not catastrophic, responses to language diversity. Both approaches ultimately lend credence to deficit models and needlessly penalize students. For Gilyard, pluralism is the best path forward given its commitments to linguistic equality in schools and to social change beyond. However, Gilyard realizes that pluralism has not become a dominant pedagogy, not even among practitioners who share progressive language views. From his perspective, what has transpired instead is the code-switching paradigm, characterized by the following six tenets:

1. speech is a strong predictor of writing
2. codes are rather self-contained language systems linked to race and ethnicity
3. student identity is tied tightly to these codes
4. there are career benefits to switching between codes
5. this skill of switching can be taught
6. this skill of switching can be taught or at least facilitated in school

(*True to the Language Game*, 2011, p. 114)

He neither rejects the paradigm nor embraces it fully. Rather, he has focused on analyzing its strengths and weaknesses to guide further research.

In *True to the Language Game* (2011), Gilyard provides expansive remarks on language and politics, including an assessment of *Students’ Right* and its reception (pp. 93–11), an intervention into the Ebonics controversy (pp. 52–7), and an interrogation of the link between Whiteness and composition studies (pp. 77–85), and the proffering of a vision of authentic democracy to which informed, critical, independent, and culturally sensitive student voices

are central (pp. 12–21, 33–43, 258–69). He also provides glimpses of his work in classrooms as he pursues a critical-language-awareness agenda (pp. 172–8, 186–206). Moreover, because of his appreciation of transcultural conversation, he has interviewed a multicultural array of notable figures about a wide range of issues in Rhetoric and Composition, including, for example, Cornel West (2008, pp. 101–19). The list includes Steven Mailloux, C. Jan Swearingen, Jaime Armin Mejía, Haivan Hoang and LuMing Mao, Bronwyn Williams, Gwendolyn Pough, Jack Selzer, and David Kirkland (in Gilyard and Taylor, 2009, pp. 30–51, 54–71, 74–92, 106–24, 126–40, 142–55, 170–85, 224–43).

Banks has always spoken passionately about the value of African-American discursive traditions. Moreover, given his acute interest in design and technology issues, as well as in progress for African-American students and the communities from which they emerge, he has theoretically and practically blended African-American rhetoric, techno-discourse, critical pedagogy, and community work. In *Race, Rhetoric, and Technology* (2006), he suggests that if Rhetoric and Composition were construed as a community network, or perhaps “freenet,” it would work against the tendency to valorize Standardized English at the expense of other valuable forms of expression (p. 85). Eschewing a deficit model, Banks believes that writing courses should be responsive to local situations and to various avenues to rhetorical excellence (p. 85). He also urges writing teachers to experiment with technology in their courses and provides concrete suggestions for how to do so (pp. 139–42).

In *Digital Griots* (2011), he ponders how African-American rhetorical traditions can best inform multimedia writing courses (p. 2) and settles on the figure of the DJ as the model for contemporary digital griots, who, in turn, are the embodiment of Black rhetorical virtuosity because of their commitment to craft and their abilities to carry and reinvigorate the old stories as well as to synthesize print, oral, and digital communication (pp. 25–6). He offers a list of specific writing practices that the work of DJs signify:

1. the shoutout as the use of references, calling the roll, and identifying and declaring one's relationships, allegiances, and influences as tools for building community and locating oneself in it
2. crate-digging as continual research—not merely for the songs, hooks, breakbeats, riffs, texts, arguments, and quotes for a particular set or paper but as a crucial part of one's long-term work, of learning, knowing, and interpreting a tradition
3. mixing as the art of the transition and as revision in the Adrienne Rich sense of writing as re-vision⁷
4. remix as critical interpretation of a text, repurposing it for a different rhetorical situation as 2010 Conference on College Composition and Communication chair Gwen Pough challenges the field to “remix: revisit, rethink, revise, renew” in the conference call⁸
5. mixtape as anthology, as everyday act of canon formation, interpretation, and reinterpretation

6. sample as those quotes, those texts, those ideas used enough, important enough to our conceptions of what we are doing in a text (or even in our lifelong work) to be looped and continually repeated rather than merely quoted or referenced.

(p. 26)

Furthermore, Banks illustrates his pedagogical commitments in his description of a community-based, digital-griot writing curriculum that he orchestrated (pp. 55–85). In short, he has extended the progressive and enabling qualities that we mentioned at the outset of this chapter.

Notes

1. The conference, held at Dartmouth College, was a gathering of British and American educators. It was funded by the Carnegie Endowment and organized by the Modern Language Association and the National Council of Teachers of English.
2. The members of the committee, along with Butler, were Adam Casmier, Ninfa Flores, Jenefer Giannasi, Myrna Harrison, Robert Hogan, Richard Lloyd-Jones, Richard Long, Elizabeth Martin, Elisabeth McPherson, Nancy Pritchard, Geneva Smitherman, and Ross Winterowd.
3. For a second book-length treatise on the efficacy of rap for composition instruction, see David F. Green's doctoral dissertation, *It's Deeper than Rap: A Study of Hip Hop Music and Composition Pedagogy*.
4. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), the character Janie, reflecting on the merit of her own travels, tells her best friend Pheoby Watson, “Course, talkin' don't amount tuh uh hill uh beans when yuh can't do nothin' else. And listenin' tuh dat kind uh talk is jus' lak openin' yo' mouth and lettin' de moon shine down yo' throat. It's a known fact, Pheoby, you got tuh go there to know there. Yo' papa and yo' mama and nobody else can't tell yuh and show yuh. Two things everybody's got tuh do fuh theyselves. They got tuh go tuh God, and they got tuh find out about livin' fuh theyselves” (p. 285).
5. Pritchard is drawing on Parker's words in Battle et al. (2002): “If I could take all my parts with me when I go somewhere. And not have to say to one of them, “No, you stay home tonight, you won't be welcome,” because I'm going to an all-White party where I can be gay, but not Black. Or I'm going to a Black poetry reading, and half the poets are anti-homosexual or thousands of situations where something of what I am cannot come with me. The day all the different parts of me can come along, we would have what I would call a revolution” (p. vi).
6. Romy Clark, Roz Ivanič, and their colleagues at Lancaster University coined the term *critical language awareness*.
7. See Rich's (1972) essay in *College English*, “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-vision.”
8. In her “Greetings from the 2010 Program Chair,” Pough announced, “After decades of innovative teaching and cutting-edge scholarship, the 2010 conference is a space for us to revisit, rethink, revise and renew our vision for the future of the field” (p. 5).