

# WCC

WRITERS: CRAFT & CONTEXT

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# Cover Art



**Swarm. Decolonizing Street Art Festival. Montreal, Canada. August 2014. (PHOTO © VÕ THIÊN VIỆT)**

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# Editors' Introduction

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**T**he selections in this issue circle around the tension between control and vulnerability. If the past few years have taught us anything, it is that control is an illusion. Though we may pursue it doggedly, we never really have control—over our environments (the objects, routines, and spaces in which we write), over the ways others perceive and mis/understand us, over how our often conflicting identities as writers and humans intersect, collide, reinforce, and chafe. Yet as these contributors remind us, to be human is to be vulnerable; indeed, we find strength, camaraderie, and collective resilience in our shared vulnerability. To be vulnerable is to honor individuality, our own and others', to seek out and protect difference by holding ourselves accountable to one another and surrendering to the generative tumult of unpredictability. To be clear, vulnerability is not weakness. Through reflexive praxis we move in and through vulnerable positions, resisting systems and structures that misconstrue vulnerability as fragility or helplessness. We gather transformative power in community and leverage it to challenge dominant forces that would have us armor up, wasting precious energy and resources to conceal the soft center, the fleshiness of our bodies, blood, sweat, tears, all that makes us who we are, all that makes alternative futures possible.

The authors in this volume take up these themes from various perspectives and different genres: through poetry, through narrative braiding of scholarly and personal voices, through counterstory, and through research writing. In "A Record of Revision," poet Rosanna Vail explores the vulnerable space of revision that compels writers to grapple with issues of agency and accountability. Who are we to write and read, and what if we get it wrong? Like broken bodies on an operating table, hearts at the mercy of medical machines, we lay bare our desires and delusions, our fears and failures, open to the violence and inspiration of our own self-assessment.

Jayne Stone considers the illusion of control over writing environments, particularly as experienced by single-mother graduate student writers (SMGSWs). Extending Alex Hanson's 2021 *WCCJ* article "Making Space for What Lies in the Interstices: The Composing Practices of Single Moms," Stone's narrative weaves research and personal narrative, using a materialist lens to analyze in situ writing scenes of SMGSWs. In "Putting It All on the Table: Making Visible the Material Realities of Single-Mother Graduate Student Writers," Stone argues that SMGSWs do, indeed, have preferences, objects, and routines that shape their writing environments and practices, and, importantly, their children's preferences, objects, and routines (or lack thereof) also shape their writing environments and practices, often in unpredictable ways.

Like Stone, Erin Green resists dominant narratives, in this case narratives that erase the historic and progressive activism of Black queer southerners. In her contribution, "The South Ain't a Lost Cause: A Counterstory," Green leverages counterstory methodology to expose racist power structures and advocates for investing politically in



Our Open Journal System (OJS) platform is maintained at the University of Oklahoma, in a state that is home to 39 tribal nations, each of which has a distinctive culture, history, and government. We acknowledge that the history of the university and the state represents settler colonialism and remains in tension with what we now understand about the lands proclaimed "unassigned" and opened for white settlement in 1889.

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marginalized communities. In the words of one reviewer, this counterstory about a Black queer community organizer “contributes to our development of (1) a clearer and more rigorous understanding of the experience of Black (Black queer, Black youth, etc.) southerners, (2) techniques of oppression, and (3) the dominant narratives and self-righteous attitudes one might experience while engaging in coalitional or activist efforts.” Indeed, Green’s piece illustrates the power of community to resist stock stories and amplify marginalized voices.

In a slightly different vein, Tabitha Espina blends research writing and narrative to examine how complex stories of the United States move across the country and the globe and intersect with the work of teaching writing. In “Bringing a Burden to Bear: Resistance to Colonial Power in the Writing Classroom,” Espina tells her story as a third-generation Filipina from Guåhan who has taught rhetoric and composition across contexts. She considers how her position as a multiply marginalized scholar teaching within vastly different spaces—including a neocolonized island territory of the US with a minority majority student population; rural, land-grant, and predominantly (overwhelmingly) white institutions on the West Coast; and a private urban campus in one of the original US colonies—prompted profound reflection on her responsibilities and complicity in carrying and confronting the complexity of “America.”

A new addition to our journal, which we hope will continue with your contributions, is a section including shared assignments, student writing, and teacher reflections. These pieces provide a window into what students are currently thinking and writing about and highlight the kinds of timely and relevant assignments writing teachers are creating.

The first collection is from Professor Debbie Mix and five graduate students from a fall 2021 Writing in the Profession course at Ball State University. Their researched article takes the form of a collaborative dialogue that grew out of conversations they had as a class over the course of the semester. In addition to their shared experience in the course, all authors have taught writing at some point in their careers. Along with excerpts from their course portfolios, the authors share questions and insights around core issues that emerged in the course, including (1) conflicting/conflicted identities as both writers and students; (2) tensions between concealing and celebrating individuality and vulnerability; and (3) the transformative power of writing in a community.

Aja Y. Martinez, Robert O. Smith, and students present content from a course on Critical Race Theory (CRT) conducted during a harrowing spring 2023 semester in Texas. In March 2023, the Texas state legislature presented several bills aimed at Texas state public institutions of higher education, bills proposing bans on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) and CRT, in addition to provisions for denying/stripping tenure or outright dismissing professors ensnared in student and public complaints. Working within this context, the course included learning about the humanized

and storied history of CRT and crafting student projects that illustrate that when learners are presented the stories of CRT—content beyond merely extracted key terms, facts, definitions, and dates—they are able to develop a better understanding that nullifies rampant disinformation while fleshing out what CRT is and what it can be.

Will Kurlinkus offers a look into the potential of AI in composing for technical and professional writing, specifically for grant writing. His assignments, and the student work, are generous contributions to the growing bank of pedagogical strategies for critically engaging with AI tools and leveraging their value for teaching and learning. In addition to intentionally teaching students to use ChatGPT, the activities are designed to foster critical evaluation of the tools while developing potential affordances. In other words, what can it do for writers and should it?

As we enter our fourth year of publication with V4.1, we thank readers for spending time with *Writers: Craft & Context* and warmly invite readers to submit work that is creative, experimental, and genre pushing into places you didn’t think you could go with your writing. Again, we’re excited to feature for the first time in *WCC* the work of teachers in context and the writing their students develop. We are eager to be in community with you as you develop your ideas and drafts of counterstories, personal narratives about writer identity, course designs, student writing, or research on writers’ experiences in a complex world. And if you, like us, are sustained and invigorated when you are in conversation with courageous writers taking risks and pushing limits, send us a note so we can add you to our growing community of reviewers.

**Thank you -  
Reviewers V4.1**

Tamika Carey  
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# A Record of Revision

## Rosanna Vail



Rosanna Vail is a Ph.D. student in Technical Communication and Rhetoric at Texas Tech University with research interests in health advocacy rhetoric and social justice. She works as the managing editor of an open access science journal and serves as the technical editor for various monograph projects. In her community, she volunteers as an English language tutor and board member for a literacy nonprofit organization.

Writing is the oscillating fear and relief  
Of moving articulations to remixed rhythm, seeking harmony—  
Just who am I to make the writing sing from  
Lyrics of theories and data and  
Positionality in research?  
And who am I doing this for, really,  
And what do they need, really,  
And how do I do it, exactly?  
And what if it's wrong and I'm wrong and I'm composing and listening and  
Bearing with the discord that this is not about me,  
Yet always already was?  
I am part of it, the beat imprinted—  
When the writing turns sideways, there are signals in the words  
And silences, showing the heart of the researcher on screen through the  
Ethos of electrocardiogram, a measured display  
Of meaning at the mercy of technology,  
And myself, if reflexivity renders me  
A worthy assessor,  
Interpreter of lines and prescriber of my remedies—  
But what if it's wrong and I'm wrong and I'm stepping back and failing forward  
In the clamor and blur, tethered to my blinders?  
Will you read it to me,  
The electrocardiogram,  
And tell me, quietly, the truth  
Of what you see even faintly in the pattern?  
And I will practice reciprocity,  
Attuning to the melodies,  
Our records kept open  
For accountability at the expense of privacy, pendulum swinging and  
Voltage now too much for machinery to measure the  
Fear and relief, rhythm and beat,  
Of writers in revision.

## Acknowledgements:

*Thank you to the reviewers and editors of Writers: Craft & Context for their time and thoughtful feedback, which helped me to focus my ideas and improve my work.*

*I also thank Dr. Rebecca Rickly for telling me that my writing was brave during our Positionality in Research class. That semester, I came to terms with a lot about myself, finding the willingness to wear my vulnerabilities on my sleeve and the support to send my words into the world.*

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# Putting It All on the Table: Making Visible the Material Realities of Single-Mother Graduate Student Writers

Jayne Stone



Jayne Stone is a third-year PhD student of Rhetoric and Composition at University of Cincinnati. Her research interests include revision, complex writing environments, and agricultural rhetorics. She is a co-editor of *Revising Moves: Writing Stories of (Re)Making* (forthcoming from USUP), and her writing has appeared in *Peitho*.

**A**t 4:00 a.m. on a Monday morning, the alarm on my phone wakes me with a gentle tune that increases in volume with each passing moment. I reach for it without much trouble, for I had been anticipating the alarm even as I slept; after all, obeying it is vital for catching a couple of hours of what I hope will be uninterrupted writing time while my five-year-old stays sleeping. After turning it off, I rise and make my way into the living room where a soft light illuminates the dining table that will, for this morning, become my writing table. On it, there is still a drinking glass and a crumpled napkin stained with spaghetti sauce, left over from last night's dinner; these objects were missed by that sleeping child who, the night before, had been tasked with clearing the table. I collect the missed objects and bring them into the kitchen, where I also boil water for coffee.

As the water heats up, I set up my regular but always temporary writing station—I wipe down the table, then remove my laptop from the laptop bag, plug it in, and place it on the table. When I pull out a chair to sit down, I find my son's latest literary obsession, the LEGO DC Comics Super Heroes Visual Dictionary, on the seat, covered in dozens of LEGO pieces. Carefully, I pick the book up and place it on the coffee table nearby, noticing the unemptied Star Wars lunch box from the previous Friday is there, too. The kettle clicks off in that moment. The water for coffee is ready. I grab the lunchbox and head back into the kitchen. It's 4:15.

By the time I sit down to write—now that the chair is cleared; the lunchbox is emptied, cleaned, and ready to be filled with that day's lunch; and my coffee is ready—it's 4:30. In the next moment, I'm consumed in a hushed flurry of activity as I open books and printed articles that have been scribbled all over in my purple-inked handwriting; I click open documents and type addresses in the navigation bar as I take intermittent sips from the first of very many cups of coffee I'll surely have that day. The writing can finally begin now, but I already sense the imminent end, and I distract myself with reminders to be quiet lest I wake my son any sooner than necessary. I wade through some forced and uninspired writing for about an hour until, at 5:45, I hear a soft voice

## Abstract

In this autoethnographic article, I argue that the recent and trending new materialist focus within composition studies—which tends to assume the privilege of agency and unmitigated choice on behalf of writers regarding their writing environments (Prior and Shipka, 2002; Alexis, 2016)—doesn't necessarily hold space for writers whose writing environments regularly yield to and are shaped by the preferences, habits, and material effects of actors outside of themselves—namely, their children. In making my argument about the particular effects of such multiagent writing environments, I use a materialist lens to reveal and analyze my own and other single mother graduate student writers' (SMGSWs) scenes of writing, hoping to invite reflection on what assumptions we may hold about the writing environments of our students, our colleagues, and ourselves.

## Keywords

graduate student writing, writing environments, single mothers, new materialism

*make an undeniable request from the other room: "Mommy, will you come snuggle me?" Of course I will, and I do. On this morning, an hour of writing is all I'll get. I leave the sentence unfinished, sure I will remember my train of thought when I again sit down to write—whenever that might be.*

This narrative glimpse into my life depicts the scene that comes to mind upon reading Cydney Alexis's "The Material Culture of Writing," which she begins by inviting readers to imagine their own writing environment (83). Following this prompt, Alexis provides several examples of different writers and their respective writing environments, implying that writing environments are as varied as the writers who inhabit them (83). Ultimately, however, she suggests that despite their inherent differences, there is a common thread among *all* writers and their environments: "No matter what environment you typically write in, one thing is fairly certain: you have developed preferences around it, you have populated it with objects, and your behavior within it follows some sort of routine" (83). Underpinning her argument, then, is the assertion that writers have unmitigated agency in "creat[ing]" their writing environments (84).

However, as evidenced by the vignette that opens this article, such an assertion doesn't hold true for all writers. It shadows the complex nature of *multiagent* writing environments<sup>1</sup> in which the writer is but one actor whose preferences, objects, and behaviors shape a writing environment. Still, Alexis offers a description of writing environments that helps me see where multiagent writing environments might find a fit adjacent to her argument. In a helpful reconceptualization of "writing environments," Alexis adapts the concept of "writing habitats" (83), using it "to describe the rich, constructed environments that *writers create* to work in" (84; my emphasis). Moreover, she suggests that writing habitats are "complex systems" and that "[t]hinking of our writing spaces as habitats changes our perception of their ecologies" (84). Though I am making a divergent point, Alexis's reconceptualization is instructive for my purposes of exploring the nuances within multiagent writing habitats, particularly the way those writing

habitats are shaped by the larger ecology of which they are just a piece. As Marilyn M. Cooper articulates, "An important characteristic of ecological systems is that they are inherently dynamic; though their structures and contents can be specified at a given moment, in real time they are constantly changing..." (368).<sup>2</sup> Therefore, in this article, I aim to "forward" (Harris) Alexis's conceptualization of writing habitats by considering how these habitats may be affected not just by the writer's preferences but also by other human actors and *their* preferences, and, in turn, how the multiagent ecology of a writing habitat affects a writer's work.

Ultimately, while I find Alexis's primary claim compelling and instructive for helping me better understand my own writing environments, I intend to complicate her thesis by pulling back the curtain on the writing environments of a particular group of writers—single-mother graduate student writers (hereafter referred to as SMGSWs).<sup>3</sup> These writers' writing habitats often yield to the concerns, material effects, and preferences of other agents—namely, their children. In short, though members of this group do, indeed, have preferences, objects, and routines that shape their writing environments and practices, these elements are never without the ever-present influence (sometimes ethereal, sometimes physical, sometimes material) of their child/children and their child's/children's preferences, objects, and routines (or lack thereof), all of which may also shape these writers' writing habitats and often in unpredictable ways.<sup>4</sup>

Taking a close look at the moments in which SMGSWs write and the materiality of the environments in which that writing happens reveals unseen aspects of the unique position they occupy. In this way, this project also attempts to fill gaps in research on graduate student writers *and* on graduate student single mothers. While the work of making visible mothers' positionality within academia generally (see Yoo Nora et al.), and mothers in graduate school more specifically (see Eisenbach; Grenier and Burke; Schriever), continues to gain traction, the distinct voices of single-mother graduate students—with rare exception—continue to be folded into other accounts within the research on motherhood in academia,

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1 This phrase—*multiagent writing environment*—is not of my own making; it was offered by one of the generous reviewers of this article, and it defines so well the writing environments of focus in this article that I adopted it during revisions. I want, here, to express my gratitude and give credit to that reviewer.

2 Cooper uses a social constructionist framework; however, this more generalized description of ecological systems is useful for seeing a multiagent *material* (rather than explicitly social) writing environment as something larger than the sum of its individual parts.

3 The identifier *single mother* is not singularly definable; it is a catch-all identifier that highlights being partner-less while raising a child as a female-identifying person. However, the shape of individuals' lives—their material and relational circumstances—are multiplicitous and, thus, create a wide range of what single motherhood looks like in real time. Some single mothers are the sole parent while others co-parent. Likewise, the parenting schedules of single mothers vary widely. Despite the inherent differences, considering the ways SMGSWs balance parenthood and academic-writing work promises to complicate our assumptions about writing environments.

4 It is not, of course, just single mothers who experience complicating circumstances in graduate school. While this essay is explicitly focused on SMGSWs, there are also accounts of single fathers navigating graduate school, and academia more broadly. See, for example, Charles Bane's "Balancing Diapers and A Doctorate: The Adventures of a Single Dad in Grad School" and Eric H. Du Plessis's "Single Dad in Academia: Fatherhood and the Redemption of Scholarship." Scholars are also writing about the complicated nature of being a partnered father and an academic writer. See, for example, David Haven Blake's "On Writing and Rearing," Alex Vernon's "It's a Chapter-Book, Huh: Teaching, Writing, and Early Fatherhood," and Martina Dickson and James Dickson's "'Story Time is My Duty': Expatriate Academic Fathers' Experiences of Balancing Their Work and Home Lives."

causing an oversight of their unique position. Alex Hanson makes this point in her piece “Career Killer Survival Kit: Centering Single Mom Perspectives in Composition and Rhetoric,” writing that “the challenges and experiences of a single parent can get lost in the challenges and experiences of parents more generally” and that single-mother graduate students are among the “various identities [that] get erased in that conflation [of parenting identities]” (34). Unfortunately, such an erasure keeps hidden the “unique challenges” (Ellis and Gullion 151) graduate student mothers, particularly single mothers, face.

These unique challenges stem from the frictional intersection of disparate identities. Erin Graybill Ellis and Jessica Smartt Gullion, in “You Must Be Superwoman!': How Graduate Student Mothers Negotiate Conflicting Roles,” write,

Graduate students are expected to treat their graduate study as a full-time job, especially if receiving funding from their departments. Meanwhile, [graduate student mothers] face expectations from the dominant culture to be “good mothers” and practice intensive mothering. The full-time demands of motherhood and graduate school are incompatible idealizations graduate student mothers must negotiate. (151)

Though Ellis and Guillion are focused on graduate student mothers in general, these cultural scripts are true for single-mother graduate students, as well. Moreover, single-mother graduate students shoulder the additional burden of negotiating “cultural stereotypes of single mothers as bad mothers” (Duquaine-Watson 38) while also facing precarious circumstances relating to “financial matters, child care, [and] time constraints” (37). It is not my explicit goal to reattend to these broader issues, which undoubtedly have a significant and unique impact on single-mother graduate students; however, keeping in mind the fact of their unavoidable influence on a single mother’s quotidian experience as we look at SMGSWs’ scenes of writing further contextualizes the experiences of these women, as these broader concerns are seldom far from her mind.

To be sure, others have already started doing the work of calling attention specifically to single-mother graduate students with an emphatic call for wider attention to the detrimental effects institutionalized norms and expectations often have on this population. In a collaboratively written piece titled “(Re)Producing (E)Motions: Motherhood, Academic Spaces, and Neoliberal Times,” Alexandria Hanson, Alejandra I. Ramírez, April M. Cobos, Heather Lishartke, and Skye Roberson highlight an underrecognized reality: “As single-mother graduate students, we work against stigmas of single motherhood in the neoliberal academy to prove ourselves as dedicated, capable, and innovative scholars” (2). They assert that “neoliberal assumptions about the ideal graduate student”

cause “academic institutions [to] often miss out on the strengths of single mothers!” (2). Such assumptions include “mental flexibility, competitive nature (not just with others but themselves), an entrepreneurial spirit, adaptability to precarious environments, and the ability to remain emotionally detached” (2). For single mothers, these “idealized neoliberal worker” norms are untenable.

Unfortunately, much of the reason the academy “miss[es] out” on what single-mother graduate students have to offer—strengths not necessarily associated with neoliberal standards—stems from single-mother academics feeling the need to stay silent about their circumstances. Ruth Osorio, in “Constellating with Our Foremothers,” calls attention to this silencing, writing that “mothers [in the academy] who deviated from the heteronormative, partnered, white scripts for motherhood faced increased pressure to keep their family roles discrete in the workplace. Their stories, therefore, were shoved into the darkness, leaving only the whispers passed among mothers and mothers-to-be desperately seeking stories, all while writing their own.” This “strategy” of staying silent about one’s motherhood within academic spaces is termed “maternal invisibility” by Karen Danna Lynch, who argues that staying “invisible” as a mother in academic spaces “allows student mothers to appear to be ‘just students’, preserving a cultural form in which a graduate student is 100% committed to their work, 100% of the time” (596). However, as noted, remaining silent works against the success of academic mothers, including single-mother graduate students whose existence is underrecognized and not well understood.

By revealing private and complicated scenes of writing, I am working to fill the gap in understanding Summer R. Cunningham articulates about her experience as a SMGSW. She writes, “[A]lthough it was widely known that I was a single mother, I got the impression that most people did not really understand what that meant; they could not really see what that meant. The complexities and nuances of the actual relationship and the socio-economic and temporal implications of that position were not visible to them” (“Experiments” 38). For this reason, I follow the scholars who are “making space” (Hanson, “Making Space”; Osorio) for and bringing visibility (Cunningham, “Experiments”) to this population by adding my own story to those already shared—stories of mother academics whose very presence in the academy challenges institutional norms and expectations.

My own experience as an SMGSW provides me a valuable perspective for speaking about this reality,<sup>5</sup> and it also demands that I not stay silent. Though it has been established that “[g]raduate student mothers are at a higher risk of attrition than almost any other group in American universities” (Ellis and Guillion 153) and that “[t]he worst situation is

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5 I consider myself very fortunate, for my son’s father is a present, engaged, reliable, and trustworthy parent who occasionally keeps our son outside of our agreed-upon parenting schedule so I might have some “extra” time to write uninterrupted. Many SMGSWs, I recognize, don’t even have that option available to them.



to be a single academic parent with children” (Ballif et al. 182), statistics regarding graduate student *single mothers* are sparse.<sup>6</sup> These two facts combined—a high risk of attrition for graduate student mothers and statistical underrepresentation of graduate student single mothers—doesn’t suggest to me that I am “special,” some anomaly in the academy. It also doesn’t suggest to me that there is just a lack of single mothers with the intellect and desire to earn graduate degrees; rather, it reaffirms that as an institution, we have set up unrealistic expectations, ignored the material realities, and silenced the voices of those with marginalized identities in the academy, and that single-mother graduate students are included under that umbrella. To be a single mother *or* a graduate student is to manage a barrage of overwhelming expectations, so much so that the number of those who occupy an arguably unthinkable position at the intersection of those identities may be presumed too insignificant to even report on. And yet, *we are here*.

Moreover, this unfortunate oversight has resulted in the “gifts” of aspiring single-mother graduate students being “buried or aborted,” a circumstance alluded to by Hanson et al. and one I pick up from Adrienne Rich in “When We Dead Awaken”:

An important insight of the radical women’s movement, for me, has been how divisive and how ultimately destructive is this myth of the special woman, who is also the token woman. Every one of us here in this room has had great luck—we are teachers, writers, academicians; our own gifts could not have been enough, for we all know women whose gifts are buried or aborted. Our struggles can have meaning only if they can help to change the lives of women whose gifts—and whose very being—continue to be thwarted. (21)

Rich’s words here inspire me to make my own experiences “have meaning” by “help[ing] to change the lives” of others who have been left behind by the academy. I hope I can do so simply by sharing my experiences as a SMGSW and analyzing them through a materialist lens. It is my intention to reveal my own private moments of writing in an unpredictable and dynamic space shared with my child so as to join the project of making space for marginalized parents in the academy by bringing awareness to previously unconsidered aspects of the lives and work of SMGSWs: the in situ writing scene, the multiagent habitat in which it often occurs, and the complexity of its ecology.

At the heart of this project, then, are several aims. The first is to encourage a shift in the academic atmosphere regarding graduate

student parents, particularly single mothers. However, I do this not by calling attention to the systemic problems already attended to by numerous studies on motherhood and academia but by calling attention to the minutia, the quotidian, the otherwise unseen realities of these women. An additional aim, then, is to encourage more research that investigates the multiagent writing environments of student writers more broadly. That is, while I am exploring the multiagent writing habitats of SMGSWs, employing a similar analytical framework to investigate the multiagent writing habitats of other academic-writer populations holds potential for deepening our understanding of what faculty, graduate, and undergraduate writers face as they navigate the academy.

To this end, what follows is my attempt to heed, in part, the call for researchers “to learn more about the experiences of [other graduate student parents] at the ‘margins,’” including single parents (Murphy and Cloutier-Fisher 38), as well as the call for more research that considers the way different familial circumstances, including single parenthood, affect mothers specifically in rhetoric and composition (see Hanson, “Career” 35; Nora et al. 142). Hanson, too, reminds us that “representations of single mothers are largely absent from academic scholarship more generally and from composition and rhetoric in particular” (“Career” 35) and that scholars “need to look at how the field has represented single motherhood and how the material conditions and embodied experiences of single mothers [in the field] are rendered invisible” (36). Indeed, the work of revealing SMGSWs’ experiences has already begun. For example, Hanson et al. describe, in a unified voice, their standard morning routine, one that accurately describes my own quotidian experience:

The five of us are in different time zones, but we are all awake by 6 a.m., and the first things on our minds (unless we were also dreaming of them!) are our children, our dissertations, writing projects, and side hustles. As emergent domestic intellectuals, we have our schedules, alarms, and writing spaces sharpened, rehearsed, and repeated hundreds of times over the course of a typical day. By 9 a.m. we have all eaten breakfast, gotten our seven children dressed, checked and responded to urgent emails, got some dissertation writing in, commuted (approximately an hour), dropped our kids off at their schools, and arrived on campus ready to teach. (2)

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6 The National Center for Educational Statistics reports that in 2007-2008, of all master’s degree students (both male and female) with dependents, 25% were married and 10.5% were unmarried, while 48% were unmarried with no dependents. In the same year, of doctoral students with dependents, 22.5% were married and only 5.9% were unmarried, while 54.3% were unmarried with no dependents (Chen et al.). Keeping in mind the contextualizing fact that the majority of single parents are female, these data tell us that while there is only a slight decrease in the percentage of students married with dependents between masters and doctoral programs (10%), the decrease in students unmarried with dependents from masters to doctoral programs is much more stark (56%). Meanwhile, the percentage of those who are unmarried with no dependents increased by 13%. Attending to the material realities of these student groups is an important step towards making sense of these statistics.

The unified voice these SMGSWs use here is effective for its connoted tone of solidarity. As I read their words, I know my voice is in chorus with theirs.

However, while recounting common SMGSW experiences in a unified voice is necessary and useful, so too is exploring the more nuanced, shifting, multifaceted experiences these academic mothers have as they do the actual writing in private spaces. On that point, I follow Cydney Alexis and Hannah Rule when they write in the introduction to their 2022 edited collection, *The Material Culture of Writing*, that “a material culture approach foregrounds and maintains focus on the everyday artifact as meaningful and as a revealer of culture and history, as a way to account for the experiences and lives of particular people, as well as communities, in situated contexts” (5). It is my hope that by narrowing in on particular scenes of SMGSWs writing and thereby highlighting individual experiences, we can begin to see how a concept as seemingly indisputable as “writers create their writing environments” often does not reflect the lived realities of SMGSWs. Such a revelation may allow us to begin to understand the material effects of occupying this marginalized identity not only within rhetoric and composition but also within disciplines across the academy. It is my aim to bring awareness to this positionality just as other scholars are seeking to understand the material effects of other marginalized folks braving our field, including LGBTQ+ populations (see the work of Stacy Waite, Jonathan Alexander, and Eric Darnell Pritchard), racial minorities (see the work of Carmen Kynard and Aja Martinez), and those with disabilities (see the work of Jay Dolmage, Elisabeth L. Miller, and Brenda Jo Brueggemann). My goal here is not to equate my own experiences with—or otherwise flatten—the experiences of individuals within these varied marginalized groups but instead to add to the rich complexity of representational narratives in hopes of helping further develop theories of writing that may help us better understand the material complexities shaping a variety of writers’ writing habitats.

Thus, inspired by Rule’s approach to looking at “writing’s rooms” in situ, I analyze scenes of SMGSWs’ moments of writing in order to complicate Alexis’s notion that writing environments necessarily reflect the preferences of the writer. At times, I quote narrative accounts from academic-mother writers who are not single mothers but who have revealed scenes of writing in which they are the sole adult available to give care to their child who is in the room as they are writing. This choice is reflective of the fact that there are so few in situ accounts of SMGSWs writing. I hope, then, that this study will prompt other SMGSWs to share their own experiences. Ultimately, attending to the materiality of these SMGSWs’ scenes of writing allows us to better understand how very material a writer’s identity outside being an academician can be in shaping their performance as an academician.

In order to build on previous work on mother-scholars in the field and offer an additional perspective on this familiar topic, I use a materialist lens to highlight just how unpredictable, unstable, and complicated writing habitats can be for SMGSWs and argue that research in the field of rhetoric and composition ought to expand the focus of learning how writers write to include the oftentimes complicated material realities shaping the writing environments of writers occupying marginalized identities across the academy. To that end, I analyze my own experiences, as well as those scant few that have been documented within previous work, and I find a thinking partner in Linda Brodkey, who is interested in “disrupting the scene of writing through acts of the imagination that revise the scene to accommodate our students and ourselves—as writers and as readers” (60), and, I’d like to add, as single mothers. I intend to make visible the otherwise unseen (and therefore unrecognized) complex set of circumstances that make scheduled, uninterrupted writing time in a stable and preferred environment an unattainable and idealized “scene of writing” (60) for many SMGSWs. More important, by highlighting the particular material limitations single mothers face in private spaces (where they are mothers and writers) as they attempt to compose texts that will determine their level of success in public arenas (where they are academics), colleagues, mentors, and employers might better understand that what is needed as much as, if not more than, encouragement and praise is patience and flexibility dictated by an ethics of care on both an interpersonal and institutional level.<sup>7</sup>

Integral to making my argument that SMGSWs have a unique and unpredictable set of circumstances surrounding their writing practices is Sara Ahmed’s concept of “orientations,” which allows me to show how the dual identities of single mother and graduate student writer are constantly being oriented toward and away from each other, largely influenced by the presence of children and/or children’s material objects. Equally important to establish is my own argument’s situatedness in the materialist theories Stacey Pigg collectively describes as “lines of inquiry focused on environments, materialities, and infrastructures [that] emphasize how ‘everything else’ beyond students’ brains and bodies play a significant role in practices like reading and writing” (6). Working from this framework allows us to see the intense effect single parents’ quotidian experiences have on their writing lives.

#### AN AMBIVALENT ORIENTATION TO OUR WRITING/ CRAFTING/DINING TABLE

*I go into my son’s room and duck under the sheets and blankets draped around his bed and binder-clipped to the chairs missing from our table (the “fort fairy” had made a visit the night before my son turned five just a week prior). I climb into his bottom bunk where he lies. He is cocooned in a Spiderman sleeping bag,*

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<sup>7</sup> For lists of recommendations on how to make academic spaces more inclusive of single-mother graduate students, see Hanson et al. and Hanson, “Career Killer Survival Kit.”

*having refused to sleep between his actual bed sheets the night before, so I pull the ignored Minion comforter over my own body as I snuggle up next to him. This is our SOP: he wakes up and calls for me. I go in. We talk for a minute about dreams and sleep before he inevitably asks me one of two (or both) questions: What are we having for breakfast? and Do we have time to play? On this morning, he asks me both. Until this moment, I hadn't considered either, but at the crux of each is our table, presently strewn with articles and books that are open, face down, and stacked on top of one another. These writing artifacts surround my open laptop, the light of which illuminates the living room. And though I cannot see it now, I know there's an open document on the screen, and I can almost feel the cursor blink where I stopped writing midsentence when Elwood first called for me. Regardless of what we eat or if we play, the table will have to be cleared and repurposed for the second time that morning. It will shift from my writing habitat to our breakfast table.*

My son's and my table has become the cornerstone of our two-person household—it's where we eat, where we make art, and where we build with LEGOs, conduct science experiments, and take inventory of rock collections. It's also where I do nearly all of my writing. For this reason, our table is not only the lynchpin of our household activity but also the lynchpin of my "writing habitat" and, therefore, will serve as the primary object under analysis while considering the "chronotopic lamination of [my] literate activity" (Prior and Shipka 181). Paul Prior and Jody Shipka define "chronotopic lamination" as "the dispersed and fluid chains of place, times, people, and artifacts that come to be tied together in trajectories of literate action, the ways multiple activity footings are simultaneously held and managed" (181). When, how, and why I become oriented towards or away from that writing/crafting/dining table is seldom dictated solely by my own needs or desires. However, it is, more often than not, related to the two primary identities I hold: a single mother and a graduate student writer.

Ahmed, in her discussion of "how orientations matter," focuses on "the table" as an "orientation device" (235). She analyzes German philosopher Edmund Husserl's orientation toward his own writing table—a central object for his endeavors in establishing the discipline of phenomenology—and makes the point that Husserl "attends to the writing table, which becomes 'the table' by keeping the domestic world behind him. This domestic world, which surrounds the philosopher, must be 'put aside' or even 'put to one side' in his turn toward objects as objects of perception" (249). This description of Husserl's writing table and his ability to orient himself towards it by turning away from the domestic serves Alexis's argument that writers do indeed create their environments.

However, Ahmed poses some productive questions that help me complicate that notion: "Who faces the writing table? Does the writing table have a face, which points it towards some bodies rather than others?" (250). These questions prompt a different understanding of the table's place in particular writers' writing habitats,

one largely dependent on managing one's multiple identities—or, to put it in the words of Prior and Shipka, one's orientation to the table is dependent on "h[olding] and manag[ing] multiple activity footings [simultaneously]" (181). Drawing on Rich's account in *Of Women Born*, in which Rich is trying to write a letter with her young children in the room, Ahmed presents a valuable conclusion: for some—namely mothers—there is no "putting aside" the domestic world while attending to the writing table:

We can see from the point of view of the mother, who is also a writer . . . that giving attention to the objects of writing, facing those objects, becomes impossible: the children, even if they are behind you, literally pull you away. . . . For some, having time for writing, which means time to face the table upon which writing happens, becomes an orientation that is not available given the ongoing labor of other attachments, which literally pull them away. So whether we can sustain our orientation toward the writing table depends on other orientations, which affect what we can face at any given moment in time. (250)

This excerpt from Ahmed characterizes well the shifting and unsustainable orientation I have towards my son's and my writing/crafting/dining table when I approach the table as a writer. For me, to "face the table upon which writing happens" is to first face the table as a mother and as a domestic laborer, for the table is the center of domestic activity.

Ultimately, there is no putting the domestic aside, for even after I clear the remnants of the previous night's dinner and establish my writing station, my sleeping son's presence dictates, from across the house, the parameters of the shape my writing act can take: I must be quiet and work quickly, for as soon as he wakes, I will be "pulled away" from my writing. I am reminded here of Hanson's account of her own experiences as an SMGSW: "I could no longer count on getting any work done after my daughter went to bed because when she woke up, I was her only means of support" ("Career Killer" 34). Likewise, for me, knowing my son's needs and desires may at any moment interrupt my writing makes my orientation to the table as a writer unsustainable and tenuous, for I am the sole parent in the house. My orientation to the table, for this reason, is never fully as an unimpeded writer *even* in moments of writing so long as my son is physically present.

Identifying the parameters of how my writing is allowed to get done in these moments is part of understanding the layers within the chronotopic lamination of my writing environment. In taking up "discussions of embodiment" in relation to writing, Prior and Shipka posit "that acts of writing are themselves issues of managing a body in space and that embodied literate activity is woven out of profoundly heterogenous chains of acts, scenes, and actors oriented to diverse ends" (230). My own embodied writing practice must be altered when holding the simultaneous positions of single mother and graduate student writer. My writing body must be managed

in that space around the writing table. Typing loudly, talking ideas out or reading aloud, pacing the house while I think—all habits of my unhampered writing practice—must be eliminated, or at least tempered, for any of these embodied activities associated with my writing could cause my son to wake sooner than he might if the house was completely quiet, devoid of my writerly activity. Thus, even when my son is not literally pulling me away—even when he is sleeping and in a completely different room—my writing habitat, constituted only in part by my preferences and habits, yields to his presence.

## THE OBJECTS ON OUR WRITING/CRAFTING/ DINING TABLE

*It is now 4:45 p.m., and we have just arrived home from our days at our respective schools. In the eleven-hour interim since my child pulled me from my morning writing session, I have made lunches for both him and myself; fed, dressed, and otherwise prepared him for his school day; dropped him off at preschool; commuted an hour to my university; prepped for and taught an adjunct class; eaten lunch while grading; signed Elwood up for swim lessons; finished reading for just one of the two graduate seminars I attend on Tuesdays; consumed four cups of coffee to my one glass of water; and made the hour commute back home just in time to pick Elwood up. He seems as ready to rest as I feel.*

*As soon as we walk in the door of our house, Elwood asks if he can play on his tablet for a little while. I pretend to mull this over for a minute. “Well, I don’t know, bud. Maybe we can sit and play together first,” I respond, the academic in me hoping he rejects my offer and the mother in me hoping he takes me up on it.*

*“No, thank you,” he says, laying the manners on thick. “I just want to have some screen time.” We are both silent for a moment before he exclaims, “I know! Let’s both have screen time!” I am both relieved and disappointed, but mostly relieved. I agree, and we take up our respective positions—me at the table, he on the couch—and for ten glorious minutes, it is silent except for the game music coming from his tablet, a noise I learned to block out long ago. I attend to the blinking cursor, picking up where I left off midsentence nearly twelve hours prior, but the thought I’d had is gone. I reassure myself it will come back if I just read what I have written from the top. I begin reading, revising small bits along the way, but only make it half-way through before he asks for a snack.*

*I get up from the table to slice some apples for him, and by the time I return, he has migrated onto the floor and has begun building with his PlusPluses (little plus-shaped building blocks). As soon as I reenter the living room from the kitchen, he asks me if I can play with him, and my heart sinks. I hesitate. “I thought we were having screen time,” I say.*

*“We were, but my tablet ran out of batteries.”*

*“Oh, okay. We can just plug it in, and you can sit at the table with me.”*

*“That’s okay, Mommy. I changed my mind. Can we just play?”*

*Negotiation ensues, and he agrees to let me have twenty more minutes of screen time while he begins playing. We set a timer, and I assure him I will join him just as soon as the timer goes off.*

*I sit back down to my laptop and pick up where I left off reading my draft. Another few minutes pass, and I begin to focus again despite the soft noises from Elwood who sits on the floor beside me, building. Before long, he stands up and approaches our table. Upon it he places a rainbow he’s made from his PlusPlus pieces (fig. 1). “Look, Mommy!” he says. “I made you a rainbow!”*

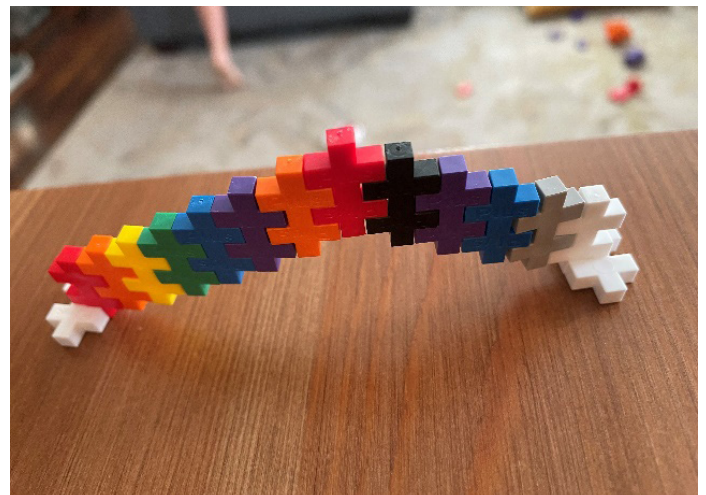


Figure 1. E’s PlusPlus rainbow he made for me, which becomes an agent in my writing habitat.

This narrative slice features not only the table but also the objects that collect on the table, all of which become objects within my writing habitat (regardless of my preferences and with no regard for my routine). Also crucial to this scene is, of course, my son, who is very much awake and actively engaged in the room. He is an agent populating my current writing habitat and one whose age makes him particularly prone to doing and saying unpredictable things that inform the ecology of this habitat. His presence and its material effects are all part of “the dance of agency” (Pickering 78), a concept I pick up from Andrew Pickering and adapt for my analysis. In explaining this concept, Pickering uses “agency’ . . . to refer directly to action, doing things that are consequential in the world” and asserts that humans are no more agents than the material nonhuman entities within an environment (78). Following this, the human agents—my son and me—and the nonhuman agents—the tablet, the table, the computer, the rainbow, the apple slices—all have agency with the potential to influence the writing-habitat ecology in unpredictable ways. After all, agency is



“emergent,” as Pickering asserts (78). He writes, “The world is too lively. We can interfere performatively with it, and it will respond, but there is no guarantee whatsoever that the response will be what we expect” (79). This observation resonates well here, for nothing in the scene played out as I had hoped. The dance of agency at play is influenced by Elwood whose 1) suggestion that we have screen time together and 2) “promise” to me that I can have twenty uninterrupted minutes are malleable and fleeting, his feelings about these circumstances subject to change in a moment’s notice without any concern for me as a writer. But it is also influenced by his tablet (which runs out of battery and consequently influences Elwood’s course of action), the rainbow he creates (which I accidentally knock off the table while using the mouse to navigate through my essay on screen, causing momentarily hurt feelings), and the apple slices (whose presence required the initial separation of writer from writing), still uneaten and hiding behind my laptop. The domestic permeates the writing habitat. Far from a stable and predictable writing environment curated by me according to my preferences, this is, nonetheless, the environment in which I sometimes successfully and sometimes unsuccessfully get writing done (fig. 2).

This dance of agency can also be seen in one of the few published in situ accounts of writing from another SMGSW, Alex Hanson. Her account provides a “snapshot of [her] composition life” (“Making Space” 31) in which she describes what is, to me, a very familiar scene. In this snapshot, Hanson’s 5½-year-old daughter, Olivia, is competing for her attention while Hanson sits at the dining-turned-writing table, attempting to finish transcribing an interview. Despite being given permission to “do whatever she wants until [Hanson] is done” (words I, myself, have said to Elwood plenty of times), Olivia instead “integrates herself into the workflow” (31). Hanson describes the scene: “Instead of going off to do her own thing, she climbs under the dining table and into my lap, listening to the audio and quickly picking up on how my Esc key is my Play and Pause button” (31). Olivia joins in pushing the keys and, eventually—after a minor incident that requires Hanson to shift fully from academician to mother and put out the fire of her young child’s hurt feelings—Olivia becomes Hanson’s “assistant,” an agent within Hanson’s writing habitat.

In this “snapshot,” Olivia’s curiosities, energy, and courage to experiment with her mother’s writing machine result in a material reorientation of Hanson’s writing habitat—of her relationship to the stopgap writing table and the writing objects upon it. When Olivia becomes a part of the writing practice, she becomes another agent in the dance of agency taking place between her mother/cowriter and the writing objects. This reorientation is sustained until the two human agents, along with the nonhuman agents (the table, the computer, the keyboard) finish the work *together*: “And after half an hour of this,” Hanson writes, “of her and me pushing keys, of her asking questions about the voice coming from my computer, of her trying to match the words from that voice with the words on my computer screen, we finish and move away from the computer and into the world of her kindergarten classroom” (31). The domestic concerns, present throughout the writing scene, finally take over completely. The writing is left behind as the two recent cowriters “move away” from the objects of writing—the table, the computer, the keyboard—now oriented by Olivia’s needs and wants for playtime and engaged imagination.

The dance of agency and its unpredictable effect on the ecology of our writing habitats is summarized well by Loren Marquez in “Narrating Our Lives: Retelling Mothering and Professional Work in Composition Studies.” Marquez, though not an SMGSW herself, describes a scene reminiscent of Hanson’s and my own in which she tries to get some writing done as the only caretaker in the house with her young son. She sits beside her son (whom she hopes will be busied enough with his toys)—he in a gated area and she on the couch—until his persistent protestations land her on the floor inside the gated play area with her laptop in tow. Despite the fact that an actual writing table is not present in this scene, the space she shares with her son becomes her writing habitat, one in which she is unable to turn fully towards the writing and away from her domestic world. For Marquez then, the metaphorical writing table is the gated floor area in which she sits typing while her son plays—the multiagent, multiuse habitat where she juggles her multiple identities simultaneously. She writes, “This picture is representative of being a mother with small children in academia: oscillating back-and-forth between academic work and your children’s needs, problem-solving, multitasking, and in the end, realizing this is the reality in which you must accomplish your work” (78). Sometimes that reality includes a physical table in relation to which we can work to orient ourselves. Other times that “table” is the steering wheel of our cars where we sneak some writing in during a soccer practice, our laps on which we take a minute to jot down notes or ideas for revision while waiting with a sick child for the pediatrician, or the kitchen counter while we wait for the pasta water to boil as a child begs for a snack. When moments of writing happen in the same space as another agent, especially one’s child, a mother’s orientation to a writing habitat is seldom stable. And with no expectation of relief by another parent, the likelihood of maintaining a stable orientation to a writing habitat as a writer is even less likely.

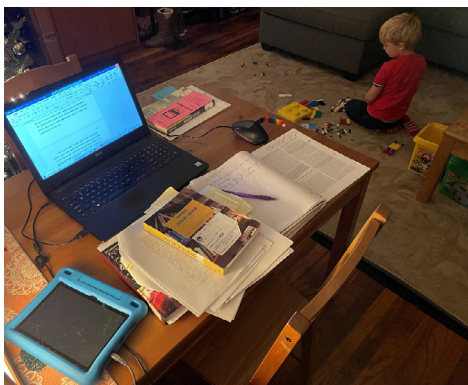


Figure 2.  
A glimpse at  
my multiagent  
and often  
unpredictable  
writing habitat.

## THE ROLE OF THE CRAFTING TABLE

*The timer goes off. I keep my promise and close my laptop. It is time to build LEGOs and play whatever game Elwood has constructed today. I follow his inconsistent and nonsensical rules, and, at least in this instance, I don't mind doing so. I'm glad to be required to reorient myself to the table as a mother and a playmate; there is very little, if any, room for the writer here. And that is a gift. Instead of wondering how I will incorporate materialist theories into my writing, I play the role of Yay (fig. 3) as I think about what we have in the house that might pass as dinner.*

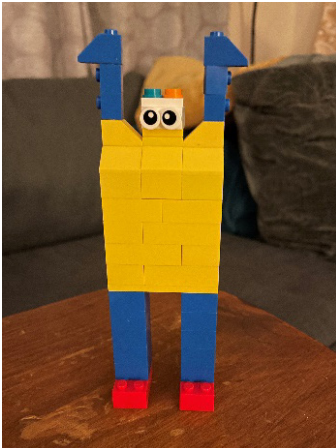


Figure 3. The character of Yay, built by Elwood and assigned to me. Yay becomes an agent in my writing habitat, a result of the needs and desires of another agent—my son. But Yay also serves my writing by helping me mentally disengage from it.

If I were able to create a writing habitat that reflects my preferences, includes my objects, and honors my routines, I would require a timer that signals when it is time for a nonnegotiable break. After all, my writing process requires that I completely “disengage” (Frankel) with the writing at hand, that I “put aside” the writing and turn *towards* the domestic (or other) world(s). It requires that I mentally engage with something outside the theories and concepts and texts I am working with. It requires that I step out of my writerly identity and embody other identities I cherish and depend upon for my sense of self. One of those identities, is, of course, that of being a mother. In oscillating between identities, the table remains, but my orientation to it shifts; in these moments it is no longer my writing table but my son's and my activity table. So, despite the fact that my writing habitat is often made unpredictable and unstable, the human agent at the root of that instability who forces a reorientation to the writing table is also the agent at the root of what saves me from complete SMGSW burnout. In this way, his influence on my writing practice is vital to my success. After all, though this analysis has thus far focused on the physical writing habitat, our relationship to that physical habitat is influenced by our mental writing habitat, our mental state being a crucial actor shaping the ecology of a writing habitat.

Angelica Duran, in her article “One *Mamá's* Dispensable Myths and Indispensable Machines,” expresses similar appreciation for her children's role in her success as an SMGSW. She writes, “Combined, graduate school and parenting create intense levels

of stress, but I learned from my kids that what I call ‘exercise’ they call ‘fun.’ Riding bikes, swimming, swinging, and such—especially when done in the company of the under-twelve crowd—created a happiness and peace that energized my other activities” (83). By engaging with her children, her mental state improved and her readiness to engage in PhD-related work increased. For Duran, the dual identities of single mother and graduate student writer, alongside her identity as a “low-income, first-generation Chicana,” positively influenced one another.

Likewise, Cunningham describes her sincere gratitude for the benefits of being a single mother to her son throughout her education from the time she was still a high-school student and found out she was pregnant. She begins her essay, “‘Mom’s School’ by Ben: An Epistemology of Falling Objects,” by describing in honest and moving detail the profound effect her earning a PhD had on shaping her son's reality, his feelings finally made clear to her through a comic he titled “Mom’s School” in which “Mom”—clearly stressed out—is yelling about her missing book and “Ben” bears the brunt of it as Mom’s school book, titled “Big Words,” falls directly on his head in the final panel. However, soon after the production of this comic, Ben leaves an acorn he is fascinated by on her desk. When she comes across it later, she is moved to see things through Ben’s eyes, providing a much-needed shift in perspective. She writes, “I stare at the acorn and I remember. I remember how beautiful it is to see the world through a child’s eyes, not just any child’s eyes, but this child’s eyes. Benjamin’s eyes. I suddenly realize I cannot remember the last time that I stopped long enough to do so, to see with him. To see him” (172). Ultimately, it is these and other lessons along the way, learning prompted by Ben, that help Cunningham keep perspective and remind her that “not all things worth learning come from books of big words” (174). Stopping to experience the world *with* our children reorients us to our own learning and work. We return to our writing reenergized and with new perspectives, and, in turn, the ecology of our writing habitats, as well as the writing itself, benefits.

The stories of these SMGSWs and their children that detail struggles and experiences similar to what I now face remind me to see the value parenthood can provide to an SMGSW. For this reason, as we continue to investigate the material reality of writers and how that reality influences their writing, let us remember to attend not only to the struggles but also to the benefits of this unique position. After all, it is not every graduate student writer who is required to spend a Saturday afternoon playing with LEGOs instead of sitting at their writing table. Personally, I wouldn’t trade the LEGO requirement for any level of an accommodating and preferable writing environment.

Ultimately, revealing these intimate scenes of writing works to push back against the notion that writers are alone in creating their writing environments. While complicating this notion feels, to me, especially important for considering the material realities of SMGSWs, it is also my hope that this article offers a helpful

framework for investigating the nuances of other unpredictable and dynamic multiagent writing habitats. I hope it helps scholars and teachers within our field consider the wide range of writing habitats students across disciplines and education levels might be working in.

## ORIENTING (THOUGH NEVER FULLY) AWAY FROM THE WRITING/CRAFTING/DINING TABLE

*It is 8:35 p.m. The table has been cleared (I think). Elwood is bathed, and his teeth are brushed. He has tucked himself back into his Spiderman cocoon and I lie beside him, exhausted from the day yet knowing I have a couple more hours of writing I must get done before I slip between my own sheets. From inside the sleeping bag, which has consumed his whole body, I hear, "Mommy, will you read Horton Hears a Who!?" It has recently become a bedtime reading favorite of his. I respond, "Sure, buddy." And I do. From inside his cocoon, he "reads" the lines he has memorized along with me. As expected, this read-along peters out as he gets sleepier. Finally, around the time Horton insists that the Whos of Whoville really do exist and that they can prove it to the naysaying jungle animals, Elwood falls silent except for the sound of his gentle breathing, which has deepened and slowed; I'm almost certain he has fallen asleep as I read:*

*"Mr. Mayor! Mr. Mayor!" Horton called. "Mr. Mayor!  
You've got to prove now that you really are there!  
So call a big meeting. Get everyone out.  
Make every Who holler! Make every Who shout!  
Make every Who scream! If you don't, every Who  
Is going to end up in a Beezle-Nut stew!"*

*Though I am almost certain he is asleep, I decide to read one more page just in case. As I begin to do so, I can't help but think of all the single-mother graduate student writers—former, current, aspiring, prospective, and future: those who, despite their best efforts, never made it or never will—feeling unseen and struggling to get the writing done when and where they can amidst the insurmountable expectations and among the toys and needs and smiles and tears and preferences and calls of their children. I read quietly, slowly, so as not to wake Elwood if he has, indeed, fallen asleep. I read to him and I read to myself and I read to those women and I read to the academy:*

*And, down on the dust speck, the scared little Mayor  
Quick called a big meeting in Who-ville Town Square.  
And his people cried loudly. They cried out in fear:  
"We are here! We are here! We are here! We are here!"*

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# The South Ain't a Lost Cause: A Counterstory

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## INTRODUCTION TO THE SOUTHERNER IDENTITY

When I think of the South, I think sweet tea, grits, New Orleans, hip-hop and rap, queer communities, the Civil Rights Movement, and the New Migration of young Black people moving to the South. I think about the place I call home and about my loving family. I think about the wonderful friends I made in college who have become just as close as family. I think about the educators who made an impact on my life. I think about all the customs and traditions embedded in Southern culture—saying “please and thank you,” wearing church hats for Sunday Best, and serving deviled eggs at every family gathering. While these are the things I consider when thinking about what it means to be a Southerner, it's not necessarily the dominant narrative. If I were to ask non-Southerners about the South, they might say they think of religious indoctrination, hillbillies, incest, conservative ideologies, and it being the embarrassing part of the country. While these may be the images that come to mind to non-Southerners, they aren't the images I immediately think of.

A fond memory I have about being a queer Southerner is when I was the president of my college's LGBTQ organization and I was tasked with organizing trips to Pride in Atlanta, Georgia. What was so special about organizing this trip was recreating the feelings I felt when I attended my first Pride event—feelings of radical love, acceptance, family, and total self-expression. While the political rhetoric and policies in the South may seek to silence and erase queer people, these attempts do not refute the existence of queer Southerners and the love and acceptance we have for one another. Because Southern Right-wing rhetoric and policies seek to silence and erase us, Pride is that much more important. Growing up in the closet in the Bible Belt led me to believe I was one of few queer people living in the South; however, attending a Southern Pride festival and parade disillusioned that belief. I sought to recreate those feelings in other Southern queer college students, especially ones who had never been to Pride—and many who had grown up in Right-wing religious households never being able to express their queerness or see other queer Southerners. When I saw the look

### Abstract

With so many dominant narratives about the South being “the embarrassing part of the country” because of its seemingly conservative politics, it's easy to think of this region of the United States as a place beyond redemption. In this piece, I describe the current state of Southern politics (e.g., voter suppression, gerrymandering, and other Right-wing attacks), and how these policies have led to a misleading narrative of the South that ignores the political work of Black queer Southerners. After an analysis of Southern political discourse, I craft a story about a Black queer community organizer tasked with amplifying the voices of marginalized Southerners during a presidential election for a campaign that wants to write off the South for its conservative policies. My counterstory not only rejects the majoritarian narrative that erases the progressive work of Black queer activism, but also provides a heuristic for exposing racist power structures and politically investing in marginalized communities.

### Keywords

critical race theory, Southern politics, counterstory, activism, Intersectionality

in those first-year college students' eyes that said, "We have *this* in the South?" I knew I had not only countered the narrative they had heard about our region but had also provided them a space to experience the very love and acceptance queer Southerners show each other. Even though these experiences are integral to forming queer Southerners' identities, they are overshadowed by the more Right-wing political discourses of the South.

Southern politics tend to make headlines for their conservatism. After Virginia Republican governor Glenn Youngkin's inauguration, he "signed 11 executive orders on his first day in office, including one . . . banning the teaching of critical race theory" (Dress). Georgia passed a new election law that would "require a photo ID to vote absentee by mail, cut the period to request an absentee ballot and place limits on ballot drop boxes . . . It would also make it illegal to hand out water to voters [in] line. In recent elections, Georgia voters, particularly those in Black neighborhoods, have waited many hours in line to vote" (Berry). In Alabama, "Another bill seeking to restrict teaching on race, gender and religious concepts in Alabama public institutions is now under consideration in the state legislature [and] also prohibits higher education institutions from promoting or advancing those concepts and allows instructors to be fired if caught doing so" (Griesbach). A lot of people tend to think of the South as beyond repair, or for a lack of better words, a lost cause. My use of "lost cause" bears no connection to the pseudohistorical denialism that promotes the idea that the Confederacy was fought for heroic reasons and not slavery. My use of "lost cause" when referencing the South is about the ever-growing mentality of Southern progressives and Leftists who do not see the South as a place of failure. My use refers to a movement of Southerners who are actively working to enact racial justice and counter the discourses about the South not being worth fighting for. With Southern politicians attempting to ban critical race theory, Black history, and LGBT information, countering dominant narratives is crucial for social justice.

## POSITIONALITY STATEMENT

I come to counterstory as a Black queer Southerner with the intent to purposefully counter majoritarian narratives about the South that not only erase the work and culture of Black Southerners but also continue racist laws and policies like voter suppression. I have had several conversations with people who view the South as an inherently racist place void of progressive and antiracist ideas instead of a place in deep need of political investment. Whenever people inform me that the South is a racist place, I like to remind them that the Civil Rights Movement was born out of the South and that several of our civil rights leaders are Southerners. I argue that the South is not a place of only white people but a place where Black queer voices are often silenced, erased, and in deep need of amplification. This silencing is why counterstory is so crucial in conversations like the one about voter suppression. These majoritarian narratives that the South is an inherently racist place void

of progressive people prevent political engagement necessary to dismantling systems of oppression that continue to silence and erase nonwhite, non-cis-heteronormative voices and experiences. Counterstory allows me to take those experiences of Black queer Southerners—such as my own—and amplify them as a way to not only counter the majoritarian narratives that exclude us but also to use them as a heuristic for what we should be doing to dismantle the very systems silencing disenfranchised Southerners.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In *Counterstory: The Rhetoric and Writing of Critical Race Theory*, Aja Martinez defines a dominant narrative as "a majoritarian story [that] distorts and silences the experiences of people of color and others distanced from the norms such stories reproduce" (23). Stereotypes about the South lead to these kinds of majoritarian narratives that erase the very marginalized communities people assume the South seeks to oppress. In their YouTube video, AJ+ quotes H. Gibbs Knotts, an academic researching and writing about Southern politics: "Six years ago it [identifying as a Southerner] would have meant probably you're a white southerner and probably you are a supporter of the current racial structure where African Americans were relegated to second-class citizens" ("What Makes The South" 00:48-01:01). With so many conversations about Confederate flags and statues representing "southern pride" or "southern heritage," acknowledging and understanding the identities of Black Southerners is key to countering these dominant narratives seeking to erase Blackness and queerness in the South. Countering these dominant narratives would include amplifying the cultural impact Black and queer Southerners have had on the South. Additional countering would include reiterating the social justice and political work enacted in the South that seeks to further liberate Black and queer people.

Because "more than 55% of the country's Black population" lives in the South, I argue that the South is not a lost cause ("What Makes the South" 05:03). Additionally, to address the sociopolitical concerns happening in the South, we must first counter the dominant narrative that the South is a place of whiteness, heteronormativity, and conservative ideology. For this essay, I have decided to counter this narrative via a critical race theory (CRT) methodology and method known as *counterstorytelling*. CRT itself is a legal framework used "to focus legal discourse on issues of power, race and racism to address power imbalances, especially as these are racialized" (Martinez 6-7). Martinez also asserts that CRT attempts to "develop a jurisprudence that accounts for the role of racism in American law and that works toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of eliminating all forms of subordination" (7). Stories about the South being a lost cause directly ignore the conditions that silence people of color. Voter suppression laws, gerrymandering, de facto school segregation, mass incarceration, and poverty are all structures of racism that potentially lead to red states. To perpetuate the narrative that the South is a lost cause

would completely ignore the work of “organizers in Georgia, many of them Black women, who have spent years trying to get people to the polls” and the “restrictions designed to keep Black voters away” (North). Because racist structures like voter suppression directly lead to majoritarian narratives about the South, providing counterstories will decenter whiteness and better expose the structures that lead to these majoritarian narratives.

In *Counterstory*, Martinez explains the different tenets of CRT. The tenets of CRT that engage with the South being a lost-cause narrative are “challenge[s] to dominant ideologies,” “intersectionality and antiessentialism,” and “centrality of experiential knowledge” (9). A challenge to dominant ideologies “questions arguments against policies [. . . and] practices that claim neutrality . . . while justifying a passing over of people of color” (11). The problem with challenging dominant ideologies about the South “resides in the resistance met from those who invoke abstract liberal concepts like equal opportunity” (11). Assuming states vote red because they vote against their own interests proposes the idea that everyone has the right and access to vote to begin with and ignores racist structures like voter suppression, mass incarceration, and gerrymandering. Concerning intersectionality and antiessentialism, Martinez states that “CRT denounces essentialism, countering culturally racist assumptions that attempt to describe or explain socially constructed racial groups as homogenous in the way they think, act, and believe” (14). I apply this tenet to narratives that categorize the entirety of the South as a racist place filled with uneducated people, which completely ignores populations of educated Black people doing antiracist work. Finally, Martinez states that because

white people do not often acknowledge the experiences of people of color, the critics recognize and developed the methodology of counterstory to relate the racial realities of people of color while also providing methods for minoritized people to challenge “the myths, presuppositions, and received wisdoms that make up the common culture about race.” (15)

I argue that the narrative of the South being a lost cause stems from both the non-Southern Left’s assessment of people of color’s political work and experiences and the Right’s seeming ownership of South. Both sides propagate this erasure. Counterstories rely on the “centrality of experiential knowledge” from people of color, and my counterstory relies on my experiential knowledge as a Black queer Southerner participating in sociopolitical work. Counterstory operates as both methodology and method. As a methodology, it is “the verb, the process, the critical race theory-informed justification for the work” (2). Counterstory as a method is “the noun, the genre, the research tool” (2). She notes that as methodology, counterstory “exposes research that silences and distorts epistemologies of people of color” and “recognizes that experiential knowledge of people of color is legitimate and critical to understanding racism that is often well disguised in the rhetoric of normalized structural values and practices” (3). Martinez claims that the “rubric for counterstory resides in whether the story is informed by the tenets toward advancing a better understanding of how law or policy

operate; it is “not to vent or rant or be an exhibitionist regarding one’s own racial struggle” (qtd. in Martinez 16).

My counterstory as method is a narrated dialogue featuring composite characters. Like many other scholars using counterstory, my characters “represent more than just a single individual and are intentionally crafted as composites that primarily embody an ideology as informed by a “*trensa*” of personal experiences” (Martinez 25). My composite character Laura embodies white feminism, performative activism, and northern liberals, and in the dialogue, she represents the student. My composite character Haven embodies Black feminist epistemologies and Southern Leftist organizers and is the teacher—outside the traditional classroom setting—in the dialogue. Both composite characters are used to understand the concept of intersectionality, specifically the power relationships among race, class, and gender, by showing how their different and intersecting identities inform their politics. Furthermore, the characters are contextualized with the labor of Black women organizers—the community from which intersectionality was originally coined. I choose narrated dialogue as my method for counterstorytelling because it allows me the “opportunity to develop [my] ideas through exchanges between characters that represent and voice contending viewpoints about contemporary issues” (34-35). Because counterstory should be theory informed, my counterstory can be analyzed through intersectionality and Tamika Carey’s rhetorics of impatience. The exigence for rhetorical impatience is the discursive process known as *temporal hegemony*, which Carey defines as “a system . . . where ideological and material structures converge into a culture of hostility that pushes equity for a group further out of reach” (270). Rhetorics of impatience are

performances of frustration or dismissal and time-based arguments that reflect or pursue haste for the purpose of discipline. Enacted through bodily, tonal, and verbal indicators and arguments of exasperation or displeasure, they reveal how rhetors perceive self and community interpretive mandates or black feminist/womanist ethics. They reflect knowledge making traditions and discursive practices that, among Black women, involve “talking back,” “turning it out” and “calling a thing a thing,” or radical truth-telling, and they reveal a distrust of circular discussion, deflection, or distraction. (270)

Additionally, my counterstory subscribes to the following CRT tenets: permanence of race and racism, challenges to dominant ideologies, intersectionality and antiessentialism, and centrality of experiential knowledge and/or unique voices of color.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In 2017, when Roy Moore ran on the Republican ticket to become the Alabama US senator during the special senate election, plenty of non-Southerners had something to say. This special election between Moore—who had been accused of sexual misconduct by multiple women between the ages of fourteen and

twenty-two—and Doug Jones, a former US attorney for Alabama who prosecuted two Ku Klux Klan (KKK) members for bombing the 16th Street Baptist Church, caused quite the controversy. Several called on Alabama to do the right thing and not elect an alleged pedophile. For example, on *The View*, Sunny Hostin stated, “History is watching. Don’t be on the wrong side of history” (“Roy Moore’s Wife Kayla” 02:50-02:54). *Vice News* organized a GOP focus group of 12 Alabama republicans and questioned why they were supporting Roy Moore despite the allegations. Comments under the video say things like, “And yet without fail the people of that state continue to put the exact same people in power. I don’t even know if they expect change or if they’re just comfortable living in what is continually statistically one of the worst states you could live in,” and “You are now entering Alabama . . . turn you clock back 100 years” (“Why These Alabama Voters”). *AJ+* released a similar video to determine why some Alabamians supported Moore. The title of the video is “Why Alabama Supports Roy Moore,” and one comment under the video answers, “Inbreeding and Jesus is my guess?” Other comments include, “People in Alabama can’t think for themselves. I’m glad I live in Virginia,” and “Its Alabama folks. They are not exactly the sharpest tools in the shed folks. Generations of inbreeding will do this” (“Why Alabama Supports Roy Moore”). Many were not hopeful that Alabama would elect Doug Jones, the Democratic candidate, because Alabama has historically been a red state, and before Jones won the election, no Democrat had held that senate seat in 25 years. Even *Saturday Night Live (SNL)* parodied the special election, noting the ridiculous idea that Alabama would elect an alleged pedophile over the attorney who prosecuted two KKK murderers. In an *SNL* cold open, Kate McKinnon plays Jeff Sessions, and Mikey Day plays Roy Moore. In the skit, McKinnon says to Day, “I’m Alabama, but you sir, are *too* Alabama” (“Roy Moore & Jeff Sessions” 03:28-03:33). This narrative perpetuates a stereotype of the South, specifically that Alabamians can excuse Jeff Sessions’s controversies of election campaign violations, ties to Russia, and racist history as an attorney general even though prominent Black legislators advocated against his appointment during Trump’s administration because Sessions “used the n-word and joked about the [KKK]” (Sakuma). Roy Moore is not the only politician who had people thinking the South was a lost cause.

While Jones was able to win the special election, he did not win re-election during the 2020 senate election against Tommy Tuberville. In fact, Jones did much worse than he did against Moore. In the 2020 election, Jones was only able to collect 39% of the vote, whereas in the 2017 election, he collected 50% of the vote. Even though Tuberville opposed abortion, denied the science of climate change, and allied himself with Donald Trump, he did not have any sexual misconduct allegations. Additionally, he and Jones campaigned in the middle of a pandemic, which was certainly affected by people dying from COVID and the complications of mail-in voting. Once Tuberville was elected, and he began speaking more to the public, his lack of political training was clear, which only exacerbated the “South is a lost cause” narrative. Even Stephen King

perpetuated this narrative, writing on Twitter, “Tommy Tuberville wouldn’t even debate Doug Jones. Hey, Alabama, do you know a chickenshit when you see one? Or—ha-ha—when you DON’T see one?” (@StephenKing). Someone replied to King’s tweet, saying, “They almost voted in a child molester so I doubt they care about cowardice” (@ruberryfinn). The tweeter, @ruberryfinn, implies Alabamians do not care about cowardice or child molestation. This narrative that both King and the replier perpetuate is one that situates Alabama as a state of immorality and ignorance. Narratives like these incorrectly overgeneralize and essentialize the South and help extend the myth that it is an inherently white-supremacist and politically ignorant region.

This essentialism of course ignores the fact that 96% of the Black vote went to Doug Jones and that Black people make up 26% of Alabama’s population. This distinction is important to note because in some northern states that have the same, or close to the same, population as Alabama, Black people do not even make up 3% of the population. In a Facebook video, Trae Crowder, author of *The Liberal Redneck Manifesto: Draggin’ Dixie Outta the Dark*, asks a question Southerners hear often: “Why [do] people where [we’re] from vote against [our] own self-interest?” This question, which Crowder investigates, is a question fueled by ignorance of Southern politics and by a blatant disregard for the work people of color, women, queer populations, and other marginalized communities engage in to amplify silenced voices and to promote progressive politics. Additionally, this question, and all the discourses surrounding Alabama politics, is reflective of a larger issue: the dominant majoritarian narrative circulating about the South.

## COUNTERSTORY

*Y’all d’ve Been Flipped These Southern States Had Y’all Listened to Black Folks*

My eyes drifted to the projector screen as I watched the slideshow change from the title slide to the “introductions icebreaker” slide. It called for us to pair up with a person sitting next to us and briefly introduce ourselves. I looked around the room—predominantly white—full of campaign staffers working for the Biden campaign. The campaign staffer leading this workshop encouraged us to spend a few minutes introducing ourselves and told us we would come back as a larger group to discuss our first assignments.

“Hi,” said a soft voice. I turned to see a white woman with brown eyes and long, straight, dark brown hair in a “Nevertheless, She Persisted” t-shirt. On her shirt were three buttons: a “Joe Biden 4 President” button, a “Love is Love” button, and a “BLM” button. “I’m Laura. My pronouns are she/hers.” She held out her hand for me to shake.



I took her hand and shook it. “Hi, I’m Haven. My pronouns are they/them.”

“Oh, cool! Are you nonbinary?” she asked in a more excited tone.

I chuckled and nodded. For most people it would be obvious I was queering my gender expression. I was a tall Black person wearing a “Biden 2020” t-shirt with a black pencil skirt. My scruffy beard sat below my large pink eyeglasses. “Yes, I am.”

“That’s so great. I love that for you.” Laura crossed her legs. “So, have you worked on a campaign before?”

“I actually haven’t,” I said to her. “I recently graduated college—degree in political science—and right out of college I got a job working as a community organizer for an advocacy group in my home state.”

Laura’s eyes widened with more excitement. “Oh wow! I also just graduated with a degree in political science from Columbia University. While I was in college, I worked on Hillary Clinton’s campaign as well. Where did you attend?”

“I went to the University of Alabama.”

Laura seemed perplexed. “What made you decide to attend that college?”

“Well, I’m originally from Alabama,” I said. “It’s where I currently work. I took a flight here to DC.”

“Oh wow, you’re from Alabama. What is that like? I can only imagine.” She let out a sigh and shook her head. “That last election you guys had was rough. An alleged pedophile? I mean, come on, that’s wild.”

I wanted to roll my eyes, but I contained myself with a grin. “I like it there. All of my folks currently live there, so whenever my job flies me out to DC, I get a li’l homesick. The food there is great, and so is the culture.”

She nodded, looking somewhat concerned. “That’s good to hear. I guess I was more so thinking about all the racist religious stuff happening down there, especially since Trump was elected.”

I slowly nodded, wanting to know what exactly she was trying to imply about my home. We were speaking about two different aspects of Alabama. I didn’t get a chance to ask any follow-up questions about our conversation because our attention was redirected towards the projector screen that had once again changed slides. Now we would be focusing on our assignments—canvassing. Laura and I had been assigned to a group to work on canvassing in the state of Alabama. As we were gathering our belongings to leave the workshop, Laura tapped my shoulder.

“Have you ever done canvassing before?” she asked.

“I have for the advocacy organization that I work for, but never for a political campaign.”

She shrugged. “I’ve done it before with Hillary Clinton’s campaign. I had a friend who was canvassing in northern Alabama, and she told me it was a complete waste of her time and eventually she just gave up.”

“Why’s that?” I inquired as we walked towards the door.

Laura chuckled. “Oh, I don’t need to *whitesplain* it to you, Haven. Alabama’s a red state. It was never going to Hillary anyway. It’s nowhere near being close to being a swing state, so there’s not even a good rationale for us doing canvassing work there. We should be focusing our attention elsewhere.”

I sighed softly to myself. This was certainly going to be a long canvassing assignment, but maybe it would also be a learning moment for Laura.

“Well, I for one am excited about getting the opportunity to canvas in Alabama. There’s a huge queer population and Black and brown population, and it’ll be good for them to know that there are people on Biden’s campaign who care about them.”

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Returning to Alabama would certainly be nothing new for me, as I was born and raised there. As we took a plane to Alabama, I reflected on Laura’s friend who had campaigned for Hillary Clinton in northern Alabama. I knew from the election map that most of the counties notably went to Donald Trump. Laura told me she had known about Cullman County being labeled a sundown town and wondered how 1% of the population was made up of Black people. As I was eating my complimentary pretzels on the flight, her comment made me think about my biracial college friend Jared, who was born and raised in Cullman. As I gazed out the plane’s window, I thought about that 1% of Black people—those two hundred something Black people (United States). I too wondered why they lived in Cullman. Was it family? Was it a job? Was there some other socioeconomic factor not allowing them to move somewhere else. Jared was half Black/half white and had been raised by the white side of his family in Cullman, and despite being raised in a city noted as being a sundown town and voting overwhelmingly for Trump in the 2016 election, Jared was one of the most politically active Leftists I knew. He hadn’t been living in Cullman during the 2016 election, but if he had been, I’m sure he would have been pissed to know a group of canvassers skipped over his town because it was historically red. He also would have been offended if someone had claimed he voted against his own interests or that he almost elected an alleged pedophile simply because of his location.

When the plane landed and we walked through the Birmingham-Shuttlesworth International Airport, Laura began telling me about her career. "I work as a policy director for Planned Parenthood. It just seemed like the most reasonable job to go into. At Columbia, my junior and senior year, I was the president of College Democrats, and I did a lot of work for that organization to help make school policies at Columbia more equitable."

I smiled as we reached baggage claim. "That's great! I didn't get involved in many clubs in college, but I did help protest to stop Milo Yiannopoulos from speaking on our campus. We had an alt-right group start at UA, and they wanted to book him to speak."

"That's terrible," she said. "Where did you say you worked again?"

"Sorry, I didn't tell you. I work as a community organizer for the Southern Poverty Law Center."

"Oh neat," she said. "I think I've heard of them! What kind of work do you do?"

"I mainly work with the lawyers and civil rights cases occurring in different Southern states," I said. I grabbed my suitcase off the conveyor belt. "My own work with the center is helping litigate white-supremacist cases while also promoting racial-justice educational programs."

"Wow," Laura replied. "I didn't know the work was that extensive."

"The center was founded in the 70s and started as a law firm to prosecute the KKK and has since expanded," I said as we were exiting the airport.

Our first activity for that day was a meeting in Montgomery, the state's capital. Laura and I were sharing a hotel in Birmingham, but we had a driver who was working for Biden's campaign in Alabama. He picked us up at the airport. I felt the wet humid air grace my face as we exited the terminal and got into the car. Our drive to Montgomery was about an hour and a half. We listened to 95.7 JAMZ.

"It's nice to meet you," said our driver. "Where are y'all coming from?"

"I'm originally from New York. I work as a policy director for Planned Parenthood in the central New York area," Laura said, looking out the window. "I previously worked on Hillary's campaign."

"Oh cool," our driver said. "I volunteered for her. What about you?"

I saw his eyes in the rearview mirror. "I'm originally from here and still live here. I fly back and forth to DC because of my job with the Southern Poverty Law Center."

"Nice. So do y'all think Biden has a good chance of winning?"

It was late January, but it still felt too close to call in my opinion. After suffering four years of Donald Trump and seeing the growing emergence of his supporters and white nationalists, I wasn't too convinced.

"I really think he has a good shot," Laura said. "Our goal for this campaign is to inspire people that he's going to heal the soul of America. Trump has obviously done a horrible job as president, and I think our job as campaigners is to ensure that the more moderate Republicans who don't like Trump don't vote for him. That's our best shot at getting Biden elected."

I was still looking outside the window at other cars as we sped down the interstate. "I think his best shot at getting elected is getting the Black vote (Ray). Granted, I'm a little uncomfortable about his past and about how Democrats think Black folks are obligated to elect them since we, historically, tend to vote blue."

I could see Laura slowly nodding in my peripheral vision. "I agree the African American community is immensely important in helping elect Democrats, but I think the real concern are the never-Trumpers. We know, just based off history, statistics, and polls, that African Americans are going to vote for Joe Biden. He has *that* part of the vote." She paused, trying to choose her words carefully. "But I think it would still be unclear on who would win if Biden didn't at least try to reach out to that large voting bloc that is moderate Republicans and conservatives or Independents who don't normally vote blue but also don't want to vote for Trump. Studies show they're likely to stay home. We're here to get out the vote—encourage them to vote for Biden."

Laura waited for my reply, but I had spent so many years in college arguing on social media with conservatives from my home state on AL.com that I didn't have the energy to even reply to Laura about my disagreement. I felt our goal should be ensuring voter access for the many communities of color who were facing voter suppression, but after battling conservatives about voter suppression, I was exhausted from trying to get any white person—liberal or conservative—to understand the significance of getting communities of color to participate in civic engagement like voting.

She continued. "While I was in college, working towards my degree in political science, I took a course on voting and American politics and we talked about the effects of the 2016 election and how more Democrats should reconfigure their campaign strategies for more middle-of-the-road voters, specifically people who may be Independents but vote red."

I finally looked away from the windshield of the car. "I disagree," I said. "I feel like the largest voting bloc are people who don't even have the right or access to vote to begin with. My sister works an hourly-wage job. I don't. I'm salaried, so whenever I take off to go

stand in line at the polls to vote, I still get paid. My sister has to request off, and because she's not on the clock, she doesn't get paid. Because she doesn't want to lose money, she usually ends up going after work, the time most hourly workers go vote. During the 2016 election, she stood in line for three hours. And if so many polling places in communities of color hadn't been closed down, she wouldn't have had to wait that long in line to vote, whereas some white people can vote in like six minutes" (Fowler).

"Well, I guess I didn't think about it from that perspective," said Laura.

"I took a Black feminist theory class," I told her. "In it we talked about a lot of different progressive movements leaving out Black women because the movements don't account for the overlapping identities Black women possess. Sometimes white feminists don't account for race, and antiracist activists don't account for gender. When feminists don't account for race, they don't help women of color, only white women. When antiracists don't account for gender, they don't help women of color, only men of color. Even though they're progressive movements, they can still preserve racism and sexism (Crenshaw 1242-1243). When you took your voting class, did y'all discuss Kimberlé Crenshaw?"

"No, I don't think so," said Laura. "But I know of her from social media. She was cited as one of the people feminists should read."

I nodded. "Crenshaw is someone I would recommend reading whenever you get around to it. She has a lot to say about the relationship among gender, race, and class—all of which, when considered, can help ensure more equitable voter access."

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Laura and I met some higher-ups in the Biden campaign staff who were specifically working in Alabama. Then we went back to our hotel and got a good night's rest. The next day, we got up pretty early in the morning, 7 a.m. to be exact—or as we Southerners call it, the ass crack of dawn—and our first stop was canvassing in Jefferson County. We started knocking on doors in a predominantly white neighborhood. The houses were fairly large, a lot different from what I lived in growing up. We walked over to our next house, which was a tall two-story home with bright red bricks. The front lawn was perfectly cut, and the giant front door was a soft yellow—truly a spectacle of wealth. The doormat had "The Smiths" written on it. So far, we hadn't had any luck in this neighborhood. Most of the people told us they would be voting for Donald Trump in the election. We skipped over the houses that had "Trump 2020" signs in their front lawn. Laura made gagging sounds as we passed them.

"Hello, can I help y'all?" a woman asked after answering the door. She smiled at Laura, but then looked taken aback when she saw my mixing of masculinity and femininity.

"We're with the Biden for President campaign," Laura said.

"Could we have a few moments of your time to ask you a few questions?" I asked.

"I'm sorry hunns," the woman said. "My husband and I have already made up our mind on who we're voting for—Trump. Have a blessed day."

She closed the door and Laura let out long groan. We started to walk down the driveway, and Laura pressed her fingers against the bridge of her nose. I could see her body tensing. "I know this is only our first neighborhood, but I just feel like this is a waste of our time—a waste of our energy. Look at this!" She pointed to some of the houses we hadn't canvassed yet that had Trump signs in their yard. She opened the app on her phone that we were told to use to collect data on the voters.

"I know you're frustrated," I said to her, trying to calm her down, "but the South ain't a lost cause." As we were reaching the midafternoon, I could feel the humidity starting to strike back up, despite it being January.

"I know your family still lives here, Haven, but I don't understand why you continue to live here. Once I graduated high school, I would have gone to college somewhere less," She paused. "Somewhere less racist, less oppressive. Somewhere that at least voted blue in the 2016 election." She checked her phone to look for the next house for us to canvas. "I would have gotten the fuck out of the South as quickly as possible if I were in your condition."

I frowned. "What condition are you talking about, Laura?"

"Look, I have a friend who works with me in New York and he's originally from Mississippi. He's gay, and he told me once he graduated from college he moved straight to New York because he was tired of dealing with the South's homophobia."

I couldn't tell if my body heat rising was from the humidity or my uncomfortableness with what Laura was saying. Of course, being a native Southerner, I knew it wasn't the humidity. It was Laura's words.

"I believe every Southerner who's marginalized who *wants* to leave the South should be able to," I told her. "I'm glad your friend is happier in New York, but just because he moves there doesn't mean he's not going to face discrimination as a gay man."

She looked as if I had stated something factually incorrect. "New York is a lot more LGBT friendly than Alabama."

"Laura, have you ever even been to Alabama before this trip?"

"No, I haven't."

"So how could you possibly know how LGBT friendly Alabama is?" I sighed. "Central Alabama Pride, a nonprofit organization that promotes queer pride, has been celebrating for about 43 years. There are also queer organizations like AIDS Alabama that help with housing, sex education, and STI prevention. Equality Alabama is a nonprofit civil rights organization advocating for queer rights. Not to mention, culturally, that a lot of Alabama colleges have LGBTQ student groups. We even have high schools with Gay-Straight Alliances. Hell, I just attended a board meeting about opening the first LGBTQ-affirming charter school in Alabama. And that's *just* in Alabama without considering other Southern states."

We both stood on the sidewalk of the street staring at each other. Laura began fanning herself with the *Biden for President* pamphlets we were supposed to be handing out. The humidity must have been getting to her. She also started to frown, which I assumed was because she was becoming frustrated with my defense of the South.

"Well, have you been to New York?"

"No, I haven't," I responded.

"Okay, so how would *you* know that New York *isn't* more LGBT friendly?"

"I never made the claim that New York wasn't more LGBT friendly, like you did with Alabama. I asked how would *you* know how LGBT friendly Alabama is, but that's my point—you don't know because you didn't grow up queer in the South." I crossed my arms. "You do know that the South has the biggest LGBT population, right?" (Hasenbush, Flores, Kastanis, Sears, and Gates 7). "And you also know that queer people are more likely to be Black and brown than cis-het people, right?" (Hasenbush et al. 8).

"Haven't you almost elected a *pedophile* as its senator. Your state still has Confederate flags flying around and Confederate statues erected! Last year the United Nations said Alabama has some of the worst poverty in the world for a first-world nation. This state has notoriously been red for decades now, and I don't see why we have to spend time canvassing a state we know will go to Donald Trump when we should instead be focusing on more important battleground states. Yes, there are Black people here that will vote for Biden—I get that, but it'll never be enough to make up enough votes for the state to go to Biden. I know you don't think the South is a lost cause, but if I were Black . . ."

"Girl, please stop talking! Please stop talking right now!" I interjected. I was becoming impatient, and my previous approaches didn't seem to be working. I needed an instructional and discursive [performance] of urgency, a way to disrupt this form of misogyny that was going to lead to my—and other Black queers'—disrespect (Carey 270).

Her mouth was still open, shocked at my interruption. "Why are you going off on me?"

"I didn't go off," I said. "I stopped you from saying something you would undoubtedly regret." I crossed my arms. "I stopped you because what you were about to say was disrespectful to me and several other Black people. I stopped you because your disregard for work Black women organizers in the South conduct to fight voter suppression is a form of misogyny. I stopped you because you clearly either don't understand or don't care about the racist structures in our society that make it much harder for Black people to vote in this country, so someone needs to check you, and that person is me" (Carey 270). "Please don't listen to respond. Listen with the intent to understand. Don't listen to just what I'm saying and how I'm saying it. Listen with an understanding of my positionality as a Black queer Southerner and all of the contexts and discourses about me and what I'm saying to you" (Ratcliffe 205).

I knew this response might not be the most respectful way to respond to her, but this interaction necessitated a time-based response because of the temporal hegemony white supremacy employs to halt racial equity, specifically voter suppression (Carey 270). Truthfully, I had become impatient with not only Laura's dismissal of the South but also with the lack of progressive political investment in Southern communities who truly need it. My impatience as a Black queer person prompted me to repossess and redress the situation. My impatience later led—unbeknownst to me—to an act of indignant agency. By repossessing the conversation with Laura, I was not only combatting her deflection, but I was also enacting a sense of political self-care, by stopping something that could deplete me (283). Now that I had repossessed the conversation, I needed to confront this disrespect with purpose (280).

As I took a deep breath, I thought to myself: *Nah, I got time today*. I looked at Laura and spoke: "The South has a lot of flaws, I will give you that, Laura, but one of the main reasons it continues to go red is because of things like voter suppression. I gave you a very light version of voter suppression when mentioning my sister. Voter suppression is when lawmakers pass bills criminalizing providing food and water to voters standing in line, especially when we know that polling lines are notoriously long in communities of color (Ray). Voter suppression is felon disenfranchisement, especially when we know people of color face harsher sentences than white people and that the United States has been in a process of mass incarceration since the 70s (Fortis). Voter suppression is when lawmakers are redrawing district lines they gerrymander to manipulate the outcome of an election. Voter suppression is the passage of voter ID laws that require voters to have specific and sometimes restricted forms of ID to vote, which disproportionately affects people of color. These are all things happening in Southern states that are preventing people, especially people of color, from being able to vote and change states from red to blue. There are people here who don't want to leave because they have built families, friendships, careers, and lives in the South. Others

are just completely incapable, because of socioeconomic reasons, of leaving the South, and the more we simply decide not to help dismantle these structures grounded in racism, the more we help continue legacies of white supremacy.

So, no, I don't think advocating for progressive candidates and policies in the South is a waste of my time because there are people in the South who need them. I don't judge marginalized Southerners for leaving, but I don't want to turn my back on people who need my help. Even if I'm not here physically all the time, I'm still helping in any way I can to mobilize racial justice. Telling people of color they should leave the South isn't helpful, and it ignores the cultures and families we've facilitated here. It also ignores the financial burdens of having to move to a new state. The work I'm doing here is truly changing people's lives, and we have to remember that some of our civil rights icons came from the South—MLK, Rosa Parks, Ida B. Wells, and John Lewis.”

I could see that both of our facial expressions had calmed down now and that Laura was genuinely listening to what I was saying. “And what did everyone say when we didn't elect Roy Moore? Everyone was talking about how Black women saved America. Black women did not save America—they saved themselves. Black women organized and voted in their own interests, despite the narrative that southerners vote against their own interests (Ray). And it just so happened that these interests Black women voted for were interests that addressed equity at the intersections of gender, race, class, and more. And guess what? Black women and communities of color were able to do all of that despite the voter suppression they endured (Ray). So, I say this to you, Laura. It might do y'all northerners good to stop thinking about the South as red states beyond repair and more as states of voter suppression—states that need less stereotyping and more community organizing. And I'll say this for the final time: the South ain't a lost cause. It's worth continuing the work to change; moreover, we owe it to the Southerners whose voices are silenced by several systems of oppression.”

Laura stood there, reflecting on everything I had said. Eventually, she nodded, seemingly in agreement with what I had said. “You're right, Haven. I was totally not considering how my racist assumptions could impact elections. I'm sorry.”

I smiled at her. “It's fine. What's important now is that you acknowledge you were making those assumptions. Your next step in this process for racial equity should be aiding in the political investment of marginalized Southerners.”

She nodded and looked at the app on her phone to track voter data. “Maybe we should start looking at neighborhoods in this area that are especially low income or communities of color? Make our presence known that we're here for Joe Biden?”

I nodded. “I think that's a great idea. And while we're at it, let's also be sure to ask them if they know their polling locations for the election, and then we can also ask if they need assistance getting to their polling locations.” We both began to walk back to the rental car we had gotten for our trip. “And we gotta make sure they're registered to vote, first of all, and if they're not, we can help them get registered.”

I finished canvassing that day with Laura with no more mention of how it was a waste of our time. The night we finished campaigning I got in contact with Black Voters Matter, an organization dedicated to voter registration and getting out the vote as a means to empower communities of color. I knew they had played a significant role in helping elect Doug Jones in the 2017 special senate election and were also helping with the 2020 election. I smiled to myself in the darkness of the hotel room as I reread my application for a state organizing manager position in Alabama. I shrugged. “Fuck it, I'll do it” (Carey 277), I said, and clicked “submit.”

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A few months later I had started working as a state organizing manager for Alabama's chapter of Black Voters Matter. My goal was to increase voter registration in communities of color and to work alongside my colleagues at the Southern Poverty Law Center to legally end voter suppression. A lot of the work I had done with the Center was geared towards educating people about topics like racial justice, but with the Black Voters Matter job, I was now educating the public about justice-oriented issues on the ballot. I provided free community programs to the public whenever there were state and local elections. These programs made legible the difficult political language and legalese in proposed amendments or candidate platforms. Not only was I aimed at increasing voter registration within communities of color, working with legal professionals to prosecute instances of voter suppression, and educating the public on state and local issues, but I was also working to counter those same narratives about the South Laura had been socialized to believe.

I was traveling across the country as a community organizer to spread the word about Southern Leftists. I was giving lectures to colleges and universities and facilitating workshops with other activists and organizers seeking national change. My goal when I facilitated these workshops was not only to counter the assumptions and narratives these activists and organizers already held and spread about the South, but to also provide them with a set of strategies. These strategies could be used to stop the silencing of marginalized voices, such as gerrymandering, voter ID laws, and other restrictive voter laws. Restoring communities' access to voting was a way to ensure the amplification of their voices in political discourses.

One of the most recent workshops I was at was for a nonprofit seeking to address issues of poverty in the South—particularly Alabama. I was standing in front of a projector screen with a



slideshow to my right. I was explaining to these northern organizers ways to get out the vote to ensure that that piece of legislation seeking to raise the minimum wage would pass.

An organizer raised their hand. “I think what’s confusing to me, and might be confusing to others on our team, is the reason for allocating our resources and energy to people who don’t seem to want it.” He paused for a moment. “For example, we’ve gone to the Alabama State Legislature several times to advocate for this very bill, to get representatives to sponsor it, pass it, and do the right thing. More times than not, these representatives refuse to take us up on our offer, and every time it happens, I have to think to myself, why do I keep doing this if they don’t want our help? These representatives obviously don’t care about their constituents and the constituents are obviously continuously voting for them, so they support their policies. I mean . . . am I wrong?”

Silence filled the tiny conference room we were jammed into. I sat with the question for a while, truly trying to understand where this organizer was coming from. I must admit, it would have also made me angry if I had tried to organize and advocate for something that was going to make the lives of Southerners better just to be ignored. I knew that frustration he felt—I had been there before in my early days of organizing. Before I responded, I listened because I wanted to understand where he was coming from and why he was making this claim.

I crossed my arms with a slight nod. “I understand what you mean. I had those same feelings when I started organizing. In this context, we gotta remember it’s easy to blame the constituents for the situations they’re currently in, but we shouldn’t. People in the South don’t deserve to live in poverty just because some people voted for representatives who don’t want to raise the minimum wage. There are progressives there who vote for people who would sponsor your bill. We owe it to those people to advocate for their rights just as we do for states that have less voter suppression” (Crain).

He sighed. “Right, but I don’t get how we’re supposed to get them to care?”

I frowned. “That’s a good question.” I looked at the slideshow on the projector screen, which was currently showing a statistical breakdown of election results by race. “The good thing about doing this particular work is that there are a lot of people out there who already *do* care. Not only that, but a lot of people also want to express how they care by voting for politicians with progressive ideas who want to make their lives better. The issue here is less about them not caring and more about them lacking the access to show how they care—voting.” I crossed my arms. “We, as organizers, cannot continue putting out the same campaigns expecting more people to vote in our favor when they don’t even have the right to vote to begin with. We have to start supporting initiatives aimed at increasing civic participation. I’m coming to y’all today from both

Black Voters Matter and the Southern Poverty Law Center. My work is getting people who have been disenfranchised the right to vote and providing them an adequate political education to be prepared for the election.”

An idea popped in my head, and I sat down at the table with the other organizers. “So, let’s think about a scenario real quick, okay? Your nonprofit has a bill you’ve brought to the legislature several times, right?” Most of the organizers nodded. “And your complaint is that these same politicians—who were elected by their constituents—don’t wanna pass a bill to increase the pay of their constituents. Alabama doesn’t have any current state minimum-wage laws, so it adheres to the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 (United States). Now let’s just think about election day. Most of the people who would want to raise the minimum wage would be working a minimum-wage job, right? So, they know the reality of how difficult, nearly impossible, it is to live on seven dollars an hour. The systemic issue with elections right now for hourly workers is that they have to take time off work—unpaid time at that—to go vote. Usually, people of color are the ones working these poorly paid jobs (Cooper). And knowing that communities of color are usually ones with intensely long lines at polling places (Fowler), we can make an educated guess that it would be quite difficult for them to vote for people who have their best interests at heart when their current representatives make it so hard for them to vote to begin with. Supporting initiatives like Black Voters Matter can increase voter turnout so constituents can vote for politicians who would want to pass your bill.”

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By June, I had been working my ass off helping marginalized communities get better voter access and helping create counternarratives about the South. Doing both at the same time, in my mind, was important. Knowing June was Pride Month meant I would be able to celebrate with my queer friends in my home state of Alabama. Even during a month of celebration though, I still had to do the organizing work I felt was helping so many people. I registered to have a table at a Pride festival among other merchants. I came with several iPads to get young queer Southerners registered to vote and provided them with pamphlets of candidates who would be working to provide them a better future. At the festival I was able to register a few hundred young queer people. Many of the ones who told me it was their first Pride event told me the upcoming presidential election would also be their first time voting in an election. They told me they were happy to see me there helping others get registered to vote and providing political education.

Later that night I coordinated with a local gay bar for drag queens to raise money to pay for a shuttle bus on election day to provide transportation to people who needed it. I stood in the back with my other queer Southern friends watching a drag queen jump into a split to a classic 90s pop song. We had raised well over our expectation for the shuttle bus and would be able to put that extra money towards more fundraising.

My friend Jared danced along to the song. "I'm so happy to have this queer community here in the South, and I'm so glad we're working hard to fight for a place we call home."

I nodded. "It's a constant battle for us, trying to tell people we matter, even if we live in a gerrymandered state with voter suppression."

"You're right," Jared said. "All us queers met in college and formed a family that, for some of us, is a stronger bond than our biological family. If anyone knows what it's like to have to build a found family in a place where we're silenced, it's queer Southerners of color."

"And we know our stories better than anyone," I replied. "We know what it takes to fight for our home, and it's *because* of our bonds through oppression that we know equity comes from making an effort to fight for the people here who can't do it themselves."

"Yes ma'am!" he shouted, and we toasted our drinks. "Now let's go tip these queens some more."

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# Bringing a Burden to Bear: Resistance to Colonial Power in the Writing Classroom

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**A**s a woman of color who is a teacher of writing, I carry the weight of Victor Villanueva's call in "On the Rhetoric and Precedents of Racism" to write frankly, sympathetically about matters concerning racism and about what matters to students of color ("On the Rhetoric" 358). Some days this burden, this compulsion, feels heavy, laden with complexity, complicity, and connections. I am a third-generation Filipina from Guåhan who has taught rhetoric and composition on a US territory that is my island home and in the US on both the West and East coasts. In these multiple contexts, I have considered my position as a multiply marginalized scholar teaching within vastly different spaces—in the colonial legacies of US unincorporated status, with a minority majority student population; in rural, land-grant, and predominantly White state schools on the West coast; and on a private urban campus in one of the original US colonies. I think deeply about my responsibilities, my complicity, and what it means to carry this weight, truly, across America, in order to confront the complexity of what "America" is.

Because of this burden, this compulsion, this responsibility, I looked to Indigenous and Amerindian rhetorics for language to articulate how the colonial condition relates to my own life and teaching across these geographic and ideological spaces of America. I am struck most by how this burden is configured through various historical moments in the Americas, how this legacy of burden is manifested and articulated, and how this burden affects how I teach in the American classroom. As Ellen Cushman affirms in her monumental work "The Rhetorician as an Agent of Social Change," I am particularly interested in the "need to take into our accounts of social change the ways in which people use language and literacy to challenge and alter the circumstances of daily life" (12). I am hopeful the languages and literacies within colonial systems can be used

## Abstract

In this essay, I consider my position as a multiply marginalized scholar teaching within vastly different spaces—in a neo-colonized island territory of the US with a minority majority student population; then to rural, land grant, and predominantly White institutions on the West coast; to a private urban campus in one of the original US colonies. I think deeply about my responsibilities, my complicity, and what it means to carry this weight, truly, across America, in order to confront the complexity of what "America" is alongside my students. To address this complexity of contexts, I look to the ways Amerindian and American Indigenous rhetorics bear against colonial injustice through language.

## Keywords

colonialism, global identity, multilingual rhetorics,

critically to both challenge and create. Damián Baca, in “*te-ixtli*: The ‘Other Face’ of the Americas,” explores how these rhetorical strategies are due to the burden of cultural resistance to colonial power (2). In turn, what do these rhetoricians bring to bear on history, on rhetorical theory, and on writing pedagogy? Indigenous and Amerindian rhetorics can be read in ways that reveal how this burden propels each rhetorician toward action and how this burden reveals interrogations of place, identity, and community. Christa J. Olson and Rubén Casas, in “Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala’s *Primer Nueva Corónica y Buen Gobierno* and the Practice of Rhetorical Theory in Colonial Peru,” put it succinctly: “[A]ll attempts at persuasion within the colonial context must clamor for something it cannot provide: a remedy for the endemic violence of colonialism” (473). Indigenous and Amerindian rhetorics, while burdened by colonialism, bring that burden toward some semblance of remedy, bring it to bear on colonial power in a multitude of shifting contexts.

An historical figure within Indigenous and Amerindian rhetorics who is quite striking to me is Guaman Poma. His story is a vivid example of the act of carrying this burden and bringing it to bear on an audience; he walked hundreds of miles sometime in 1615, carrying his 1,200-page *Primer Nueva Corónica y Buen Gobierno*, a fully theorized transcultural colonial communication of the Americas, to deliver it to colonial authorities in Lima (Olson and Casas 459-60). Olson and Casas argue that the point of Guaman Poma’s rhetorical action was not to persuade those in power but to prove the necessity of the argument even within the impossibility of “questioned status, recalcitrant audience, imperfect forms, and almost certain failure” (478). Olson and Casas nevertheless claim that this “recursive act of making and repeating the argument is the fundamental work of rhetoric” (478), and something as “fundamental” is certainly not “failure.” Guaman Poma carried the burden because it was both inevitable and necessary; his act of carrying and bringing is what he thought might carry out change.

When I read Guaman Poma’s story—his imbrication within a colonial regime; his displacement due to colonial forces; the vulnerabilities of his community; his language and literacy affording him degrees of privilege and authority, as well as opportunities for resistance; his skepticism of this privilege and his own complicity in perpetuating colonial systems of oppression—so much of it resonated with my experiences. Like Guaman Poma, I too have traveled. My own communities are vulnerable. I, too, have a burden. Yet I wonder what I bring to this conversation and even what credibility I carry. When I come into the classroom, I feel the weight of the responsibility. I read my syllabi and assignments and look at the language, considering how my teaching of rhetoric and writing is less about forcing students to complete learning objectives and more about looking at how our work together within the classroom forces us to consider the inequities that bear upon how we think about and use language, and perhaps even to consider how our work acts as a force to resist unfair, oppressive power structures. I also consider my complicity in maintaining and sustaining these

power structures, even in my attempts to confront them. I do this in a variety of ways, but in my first-year and multilingual classes, I ask the students to use their own language to “define America” in order to define their positions and literacies within it.

The fact that I come from an unincorporated territory and that my claiming of it as home, despite being Filipina, is an acknowledgment that generational complicity in the violences of colonial settlerism is never far from my mind or heart. “Where are you really from?” “What is Guam? Is that America?” “Do you have a visa?” “How is your English so good?” “What makes you think you can teach me English?” The answers are just as complicated as my thoughts and feelings about these questions that are both heard and felt. I think of my own vulnerabilities, limited energies, and stretched capacities that make more tiresome the burden of responsibility to enact the types of changes and movement I want to see in the reading, teaching, and applications of English in composition classrooms. How can I teach a language that was used to subjugate the Filipino people of my ancestry and justify their oppression? How can I uphold the knowledges of imperialism that continue to colonize my own people and Indigenous peoples all over the world? How can I even work within a system that has historically seen people like me as different, deficient, and less deserving? This work is complex, requiring me to think deeply about the different rhetorical practices that interplay in the expression of who I am, where I come from, and what I do. I remain critical of who is speaking, what is being spoken, for whom, and at whose expense. Moreover, how can I effectively and ethically guide students in doing the same? How can I allow students to see for themselves that learning a colonial tongue is for the purpose of delinking and dismantling colonial systems, rather than a measure indicative of the linguistic differences and disadvantages that they have been disciplined to believe? Then, there is the complexity of thinking through issues of inequality alongside students who come with their own burdens that look different and do not have the same weight as my own. What lands and waters have they crossed? How much do they carry? How is this burden expressed in their languages and literacies? What empires do they want to confront? Because I am a Filipina from Guåhan, living through the legacies of Spanish imperialism and US imperialism are burdens I share with Indigenous and Amerindian rhetoricians. Together we acknowledge that Guaman Poma is not alone in this responsibility of speaking and acting.

The burden of Guaman Poma and contemporary Indigenous and Amerindian rhetoricians attests to the lasting effects of colonialism on how cultures confront, collide, and communicate within and across borders. Gloria Anzaldúa, in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, portrays the burden as tension of the borderland experience, gripping those within like a virus with ambivalence, unrest, and death (4). This tension prompts her desire for “an accounting with all three cultures,” and she in turn brings this burden to bear by claiming that if denied, she will construct her own space and culture in *una cultura mestiza* (22). Anzaldúa expresses the



complications of cultural collision, of bringing multiple burdens together and sharing the weight of pain. She also carries agency and insistence in her colonial condition within her borderlands. While she admits that the clash of cultural voices results in mental and emotional states of perplexity, insecurity, and indecisiveness, she also says the result is a restlessness—one that is not disempowered but that sustains contradictions and is compelled to turn the ambivalence into something else (78-79). I know from my own experiences, however, that borders are not just geographical; they are also ideological. In “Indigenous Environmental Perspectives: Challenging the Oceanic Security State,” Tiara Na’puti and Sylvia Frain discuss how discursive representations of Oceanic borders, such as “ocean nation,” “archipelagic state,” and “Insular Pacific America,” rhetorically function to territorialize the ocean, impose colonial concepts of *terra nullius*, or empty land, and use the language of manifest destiny to convey that the oceans, cultures, ecosystems, and peoples of the Pacific are empty space for the United States’ possession (115).

My identity as a colonial settler often speaks to how I move through and manage issues of erasure in the spaces, places, and languages I inhabit, including those within the writing classroom. Moving beyond representation, I think of how reading writers of color must move beyond simply including and instead must involve challenging the linguistic and ideological mechanisms that wish to sustain silencing and erasure. Ralph Cintron’s *Angels’ Town: Chero Ways, Gang Life, and Rhetorics of the Everyday* is epideictic rhetoric that still bears the burden of responding to a lack of visibility. Cintron’s treatise uses writing as one of many kinds of attempts to come into consciousness or self-consciousness, to interrupt, shape, and map these *topoi* before they are externally interrupted and a shape is imposed (231). Cintron displays the ways the Mexican Americans of Angels’ Town create “respect under conditions of little or no respect” through their daily speech and actions, countering the invisibility with real, palpable narratives of colonial resistance. In this way, Cintron brings the Mexican American “rhetorics of the everyday” to bear on the consciousness of people who do not see or acknowledge them. When consciousness and self-consciousness are combined with solidarity, new shapes are formed. In “Ti Siña Ma Funas Ham: Shapes of CHamoru Erasure in Guam,” Kenneth Gofigan Kuper describes community writing work I did with my organization, Filipinos for Guåhan, as the type of rhetoric wherein change takes shape: “When I first heard this particular program, I knew there was something special about it . . . non-CHamorus being completely comfortable imagining a future for the island that does not neatly fit within the political family of ‘America’” (215). Kuper affirms that critical conversations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples are “respectful responsibilities [that] need to continue, and to be amplified and multiplied.” While the collective burden is heavy, we can begin to see how it can be shouldered in solidarity and community. Getting people to see is Karma R. Chávez’s burden in *Queer Migration Politics: Activist Rhetoric and Coalitional Possibilities*, as they carry the load of the predominant form of LGBTQ politics being profoundly normative

and inclusionary in aim (6) and endeavors to reveal the interlocking oppressions of LGBTQ individuals who must speak against several systems of power at once (98). Chávez brings queer migration politics to bear on LGBT politics by challenging normative, inclusionary perspectives at the intersection of queer rights, immigration rights, and justice (6). Differences are then used as resources, and activists draw these resources together toward building rhetorical imaginaries and possibilities of livable lives (9). Just as these works inform how I see language and literacy as holding the burdens of the colonial condition, writing classrooms and community practices can uphold the responsibilities of respectful communication, connect our understanding of cultural resistance to real lived experiences, and bear out the complexity of colonial power working historically in and through language.

These rhetorics and the kind of work in self, in communities, and in classrooms that they inspire illustrate Donald C. Bryant’s definition of rhetoric as “the function of adjusting ideas to people and of people to ideas,” with the act of rhetoric as a coming to, a bringing to, a relating to, and a mobilizing (413). While the ideas have been shaped by colonial power, through these rhetorics, colonial power is confronted with new shapes and new ideas. I think of Guaman Poma and his bold staging of confronting King Philip, which he illustrates in *Primer Nueva Corónica y Buen Gobierno* (Olson and Casas 472). In one hand he is holding his words, his ideas, his burden. With the other, he points, recounts, instructs, even condemns the colonial power that caused this burden to be. His posture, while seemingly reverent, positions him directly in front of the colonial power, facing the King, seeing him face to face. At the same time, Guaman Poma’s own face, his desperation, his indignation, his *te-ixtli*—face of the Other—stares unflinchingly right back at the colonial power, to be clearly seen. This posture is memorialized in and through his manuscript. As a scholar and teacher, I am also struck by how his responsibilities are held within his two hands: his responsibility to write in one hand and his responsibilities to teach in the other. This is a posture I hold as my own, and we stand as a challenge to an uncertain future and are resolute in response to silence and erasure. We both see “colonial exchanges as symbolic action with world-making intentions . . . negotiating, usurping, and reimagining the power of colonial discourse, but also theoriz[ing] rhetoric by conceiving the possibilities for symbolic action within colonial contexts” (Olson and Casas 460). The rhetorical strength is in the interplay, the bringing, the moving, and the holding fast. Together, though we bear this burden as the result of colonialism, we bear it out in and through our languages and literacies to expose it. This bearing is an act of resilience, showing the ability to not just endure but to overcome.

This all bears out Villanueva’s assertion that we must break from the colonial mindset and recognize there is worth in learning from these thinkers of our own hemisphere (“On the Rhetorics” 659), such as in my own defining of “America” as I have carried the writing of my community across its borders of land and ocean. Breaking from colonial discourse entails interrogating the attitudes

that we revere and that are woven into the discourse we inherit (Villanueva, "On the Rhetorics" 362). If "breaking away from an ideology begins with words" (Villanueva, "Lecture: September 28"), then what place holds more possibility and promise for engagement with words that will break colonialist ideology than the rhetoric and writing classroom? This engagement moves beyond ensuring students are simply exposed to texts and discourses of different cultures. Engagement means actually helping students to see the ways these cultures speak in order to be heard so students, particularly those of color, are not themselves silenced: "We teach students to notice racism by allowing them to look at other places [to] allow them to see patterns of what is happening" (Villanueva, "Lecture: September 28"). This is how they question what the burden is, how it is shouldered, and what it reveals about cultural resistance to colonial power. This is how they begin to craft language that responds to and challenges power in a variety of contexts. By guiding students to engage with rhetorics across the Americas, writing teachers can cultivate a critical consciousness that invites students to see how a burden is brought to bear and also to question, "Why do we bear it, and how long should we have to?" This critical consciousness brings a new perspective, a new lens that examines the multiplicities of rhetorical practices and reveals the competing yet inextricable histories from which these rhetorics emerge. Students can begin to see, as Baca in "Rhetoric, Interrupted: *La Malinche* and *Nepantlisma*" explains, the "multiple histories and memories coexisting" within rhetorics that emerge from the Americas but do not follow the Western trajectory. Maybe students can then begin to surmise and imagine an America that is more dynamic, more pluriversal, more connected, more complex, and therefore full of possibilities. The need to persist against oppression, I believe, matters to students of color, who are affected by the lasting legacies of colonialism. They bring this burden to the classroom along with them, as I bring my own. Teaching these rhetorics to confront ideas of "America" brings students to experience more fully the magnitude and responsibilities of this burden, to witness the potentials this burden lays bare, and, most importantly, to imagine futures their burdens reveal and bear out.

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# Writing in the Profession

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Troy Andrews is an assistant professor of English at Ivy Tech Community College in Indiana. He is also a PhD student in Ball State University's Rhetoric and Composition department. Before teaching in higher education, he spent ten years teaching in the Indiana public school system. With a passion for teaching and people, he continues to explore and research multimodal assessments strategies for composition students at various levels of education. A lover of the Chicago Cubs and Bears, he also has a deep passion for being in the woods and on the water, as well as playing video games with his friends. Troy continues to live close to his hometown in rural Indiana with his wife and two daughters, who are the true source of all his power.



Cameron Becker is a fourth-year PhD student in Rhetoric and Composition at Ball State University, where she also serves as Graduate Assistant Director of the Writing Program. She is a graduate of Indiana University Kokomo and Indiana University East, where she studied Humanities, English Literature, and Composition Studies. Her scholarly interests include disability studies, online writing instruction, counterpublics, and rhetorics of craft. Cameron's dissertation research is a qualitative study examining how and why theories of embodiment are enacted in undergraduate online writing pedagogy. When she's not writing or teaching, she enjoys romance novels, Fall Out Boy, textile art, and spending time with her spouse and two dogs.



Mary Gilmore (she/her) is a fourth year PhD student in English Literature currently working on her dissertation in the field of nineteenth-century adaptation. She served as the chairperson for the 2022 Practical Criticism Midwest conference and has reviewed grants for the Ball State University Sponsored Projects Administration (SPA) since 2022. She is currently the Graduate Assistant Director for the Creative Writing Program at Ball State as well as the Managing Editor of Beautiful Things, a weekly online micro-essay magazine published by Ball State University.



Steve Lively is a graduate student working toward a doctorate in literature at Ball State University. He has been an Assistant Professor of English at Ivy Tech Community College in Fort Wayne, Indiana since 2016. Before that, he taught English/Language Arts at a rural public school in southern Indiana for seventeen years. His academic interests include pedagogical approaches for literature, composition, and creative writing courses; and contemporary American literature, with special interest in protest texts and the portrayals of masculinity in multiple text media. He has presented at CCCC (Pittsburgh, 2019) and the International David Foster Wallace Studies Conference (Austin, 2022). He and his two children live in Fort Wayne, Indiana.



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Elizabeth Aderola Osifalajo is from Lagos, Nigeria. She obtained her bachelor's degree from Northern Kentucky University and in May 2023, she earned a dual master's degree MS in Chemistry and MA in English at Ball State University. She is currently working as a Research Assistant III at Cincinnati Children's Hospital. She believes her educational journey has been unique because she was very intentional about enjoying the process while also looking forward to each goal's final destination.

### ***ENG 693: Writing in the Profession***

***Directed writing in some of the modes required in the academic profession of English studies, with a view toward producing effective, publishable prose.***

When we came together in our class in fall 2021, we were a small but diverse group. I am a tenured and fully promoted faculty member who has watched the profession change considerably in the past two decades as I've guided a variety of students through their own graduate programs. Four students in the course were doctoral students, two studying literature (Mary and Steve) and two in rhetoric and composition (Troy and Cameron); the other three students were enrolled in master's programs in literature or English studies. Two of the doctoral students held full-time teaching jobs in our state's community college system (Troy and Steve); another doctoral student and two of the master's students held graduate assistantship positions in the English Department (including Cameron); a fourth (Elizabeth) held a graduate assistantship position in chemistry, where she is pursuing a master's degree alongside her English master's. Mary and Elizabeth are certain they want to pursue nonacademic career paths, but the others hope to stay in academic positions. Two of the students, including Troy, had taught in secondary schools, and one planned to return to that work after graduate school. Elizabeth and another student grew up outside the United States, while the other five students had been educated only in US institutions. Some of us had had careers outside academia—in addition to being secondary educators, Cameron had been a public librarian for nine years and Mary had worked in the corporate world—while others had been affiliated with academia, as students or teachers, almost exclusively.

In addition to the academic writing they were doing in our course and their other courses, some of the students were also engaged in other forms of writing, including fiction, blogs, and podcasts. And of course many of these students were teaching, tutoring, editing, and mentoring friends and family members in their own writing. They brought these ambitions and experiences into our class in a variety of ways, sharing their experiences and offering advice to one another. Our work for the semester revolved around creating a series of portfolios: a Conference Portfolio, a Journal Portfolio, and a Professional Identity Portfolio (see Appendix). My purpose in creating these assignments has always been to facilitate students' successful participation in the major discourses of academic life, but in recent years that purpose has expanded to include building students' confidence in navigating the professional world outside academia.

In the process of creating these portfolios, we found ourselves returning to some core issues: (1) our conflicting (and sometimes conflicted) identities as both writers and students; (2) the tensions we experience between concealing and celebrating our individuality and vulnerability; and (3) the transformative power of writing in a community. We share some of those conversations here.

#### **BEING STUDENTS AND WRITERS AND TEACHING STUDENTS TO WRITE**

Debbie: How does your identity as a student shape your sense of yourself as a writer? If you're also teaching (or have taught) writing, how does that affect the way you think of your own identity as a writer?

Troy: I've thought about this quite a bit, and I think I've got some preconceived notion that an academic or expert cannot simultaneously exist in the mind of a student. Sometimes it feels difficult to do the things I know I need to do as an academic while still being a student, but I'm trying to break that barrier down. Interestingly, a class that adapts itself to discussing that exact problem has been a wonderful catalyst.

Cameron: I totally agree! Karen Kelsky's description of academia's "collective overinvestment in impossibly high standards of expertise" really stands out to me (396). It feels like if we don't know *everything*, we don't know enough. And since it's impossible to know everything, it's easier to say we're not yet ready to write the piece of scholarship we want to write. The identity of a teacher or a student is much easier to embody than that of a writer or disciplinary insider. Megan E. Cowie, Logan J. Nealis, Simon B. Sherry, Paul L. Hewitt, and Gordon L. Flett have investigated this kind of "[p]erfectionistic self-presentation" and the way it falls on graduate students in particular (224). We think we have to be infallible, which isn't healthy for us psychologically or professionally. This perfectionism makes us vulnerable in ways that can keep us from putting our work out there or even from seeing clearly that other scholars or other articles aren't perfect.

Mary: Cameron's sentiment about the impossible standard of knowing everything, especially while pursuing a graduate degree,

is so applicable to me! Just the thought of what it would take to achieve total expertise in my field can diminish my confidence in a matter of seconds. As an emerging scholar and teacher, I know this type of thinking is toxic to the writing process and to the classroom environment. In an attempt to remedy some of these feelings, I have been reading the work of scholars who believe meaningful reader and student engagement is possible without “knowing it all.” For example, in *How Humans Learn*, Joshua R. Eyler discusses (through a neuroscientific lens) the role of curiosity in the learning-acquisition process and how lecture-based instruction can shut down curiosity in ways that inhibit memory, and thus retention, in the brain (38). Reading Eyler (and others) has recalibrated my intense feelings of academic stage fright (on the page and in the classroom) by reinforcing the idea that being the “sage on the stage” isn’t the goal of writing or teaching. Rather, it’s the exchange of knowledge with readers and students that makes the work meaningful.

Elizabeth: I also think it can be difficult to simultaneously be the student, who is expected not to know everything, and the teacher, who is expected to be the expert. The dynamic is especially difficult in graduate school, where graduate students are expected to be learning everything. Of course, as Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle point out, there’s a lot of “gatekeeping” and apprenticeship at work in academic writing. They write, “The extent to which we align ourselves with a particular community . . . can be gauged by the extent to which we are able and willing to use that community’s language, make its rhetorical moves, act with its privileged texts, and participate in its writing processes and practices” (51). This gatekeeping adds to my struggle with being heard as the writer who does not know everything and still wants to learn but has to put on the façade of an expert. It’s no surprise that impostor syndrome—sorry, phenomenon!—will trickle in uninvited.

Debbie: Thank you for shifting your language, Elizabeth. Calling it a phenomenon rather than a syndrome avoids pathologizing what are very natural worries. Natalie M. Houston argues that “phenomenon” helps us see “the larger structural contexts in which individuals are situated and the discursive frameworks through which they perceive their experience” (75). We’ve been talking about those kinds of frameworks—especially the way perfectionism and unrealistic ideas about expertise can paralyze us so that we don’t even try to publish.

Troy: You’re absolutely right, Debbie. I had never considered the word “syndrome” in context with my own (or anybody’s) academic insecurities as a negative term prior to the class where it came up. What I think is perhaps telling is that we did consider and implement that shift, and we did so through collective and thoughtful reasoning. Signs to me that suggest we are all doing just fine. I also find Houston helpful here. She states, “One of the hallmarks of impostor phenomenon . . . is the attribution of one’s successes to luck or connections rather than one’s qualifications” (77). I think a lot of us wrestle with this tendency, but research suggests this

struggle is not unusual. I appreciate knowing a lot of us have that experience.

Debbie: Troy is right that naming and talking about our fears around academic writing and expertise seemed cathartic. Houston’s advice to test the story we’re spinning—“Is it true?”—has been useful to me. She points out that “the impostor mind will try to persuade you that it is, of course, true that you are a fraud,” in which case we can try imagining the reverse: “What if the opposite were true? How would I support that claim?” (79). I ask those questions a lot when students or friends confess they’re doubting themselves. I’m not always as good about posing those questions to myself when I’m feeling like a fraud, but I’m working on it.

Mary: For me, impostor phenomenon surfaces in two main ways: What if my colleagues realize I’m a fraud because my idea is unoriginal or has already been written about, or what if my students think I’m a fraud because my syllabus reveals my academic weak spots? Mostly, these feelings are internal and revved up by negative self-talk. This cycle, in part, goes back to the idea that we should (or could) know it all, but I also feel an intense responsibility, especially as a teacher, to make sure I have thought of *everything*. How do I choose course texts when the canon is full of hegemonic potholes? How do I design assignments that lift all student voices and encourage the development of student citizenship? How do I navigate the politics inside and outside the classroom? How do I engage the learning styles of my students and encourage them to flex their metacognitive muscles during my class and beyond? You get the picture. It turns out that asking my doubt to politely go away is ineffective, so I try to remind myself we are all doing the best we can, and—like Debbie—I’m working on it.

## INDIVIDUALITY AND VULNERABILITY

Steve: I wonder where the dynamic of control comes into our conversation about feeling like an impostor or not. What about situations where I’m the arbiter of what’s acceptable or legitimate? As an educator, even if I’m taking into consideration what a student might need from a composition class, I’m still the authority in the room and have the power to classify something as satisfactory or otherwise. But as an academic, I’m waiting for someone else to validate my work, to accept it or publish it, which takes the control out of my hands. But even though I feel less authoritative in those contexts, I do not usually show that side to my students.

Mary: Steve brings up a great point. Control is such a loaded topic, especially in academia. Even in the most student-centered classrooms, students intrinsically understand the teacher controls the curriculum design, attendance policies, assessment criteria, etc. So, there is already some slippage in the idea that the power dynamic can be absent from the classroom. In fact, Steven D. Brookfield believes pretending it doesn’t exist only creates suspicion since “experience has taught them [students] that teachers



who act as if power isn't in the room often use it in subtle and insidious ways to penalize and reward" (239). Maybe it's useful in our context to think about how the power is wielded (by us or towards us) rather than who holds it?

Elizabeth: Steve, I like your point about control since if I can believe I have some control in a situation, I can take more responsibility to bring things to completion. This is what Kelsky means by taking control of your CV—to control the aspects of your career you can control (93). The place I feel like academia romanticizes control is in the idea that you need to be an expert to have control. But that's not true. Being an expert requires embracing change and growing with it, and that can mean letting go of control as needed.

Steve: That reminds me of a couple of conversations I've had with students lately that make me think my role is less writing expert and more writing motivator for my students. But when it comes to being a writing motivator for myself, I get stuck worrying about being an expert. I want to add to the conversation and not just repeat what's already been said about a subject, but then how do I make sure I'm not repeating something? I feel obligated to make sure I've read all the existing material before I can write my own. Maybe I'm taking us back to impostor phenomenon.

Cameron: I like that you bring up mentoring here as part of your scholarly and writerly identity, Steve. I feel most like a writer when I'm working in community with others, giving and receiving feedback. Being a good writing motivator or facilitator is an important part of our role as teachers. Even though I write every day, I need a human sounding board for my writing to feel real.

Troy: There is always this sounding-board idea to take into consideration, Cameron. I think what is most important to me is that as my role as a writing instructor evolves, so too does my life as an academic. It was hard to make the transition from being a teacher of writing to being a student again, maybe because for about a decade, I was in charge of up to a hundred students' writing at any given time. It's that control issue Steve mentioned—I was their sounding board, but they weren't mine . . . but maybe they should have been? Next fall ('23) I will begin my fifteenth year teaching English, and if I have learned one thing in that time, it is that students come with remarkable backgrounds, gifts, ideas, and perspectives that are always useful in some capacity. I wonder what I left behind by not writing alongside them? I wonder if I had been more transparent in my own writing, and especially my failures, would that have sparked something for them?

Elizabeth: I have seen myself as a writer since I was young—my friends would take turns reading the stories I wrote. I have never seen myself as a scholar and only occasionally seen myself as a teacher. If I'm honest, I don't feel like I belong in academia because I don't aspire to be a scholar.

Debbie: Elizabeth is reminding us of the role of pleasure, isn't she? We've been talking about control and expertise, but what about the fun side of reading and writing and teaching?

Troy: I came to English studies late after a wild battle with chemistry, and I often felt behind in most of my classes as a result. This feeling lasted well into my MA, and distance and time got the best of my confidence. It just felt like everyone was talking about theories and authors I had never heard of before. I feel like I've caught up quite nicely, but finding that sense of belonging was frustrating and occasionally came at the cost of finding pleasure in my work because I was more set on proving I belonged than simply learning. Fear of failure is no joke at any level. In the book *Naming What We Know*, Adler-Kassner and Wardle say that "students are more likely to avoid risking failure for fear of damaging their grades, and this fear works against the learning process" (63). I truly felt that fear, and sometimes I still do.

Cameron: Yes—the time and resources we commit to graduate education can make it feel like our work has to be super formal and steeped in theory. But writing studies scholarship like bell hooks's *All About Love: New Visions* and Sami Schalk's pleasure activism remind us we can find joy and pleasure in writing to explore vulnerable, personal aspects of our shared interests, identities, and experiences. I've been working on a project on the pandemic-era boom in self-published alien romance, and part of my argument is that there's a lot of value in playfulness and healthy escapism during difficult times.

Mary: Cameron's idea really resonates with me. When I feel overwhelmed by grad school, I try to remember what it felt like to be a kid—like Elizabeth—who just loved to read and write before the anxieties of earning money, publishing, and deadlines entered the equation. When I can tap into those feelings, it's easier to keep going. One of the things I love about being in grad school is being in community with other writers. It gives me life to hear people talk about their interests with such passion!

Elizabeth: I totally agree that enjoyment can come from learning with others. In *How to Write a Lot*, Paul J. Silvia emphasizes the importance of having a writing group: "If you're a grad student, you probably have a lot of friends facing the same challenges, so why not found a group? Starting a student-only group is a great way for students to stay focused on their long-range projects, lend each other support, and justify buying the bigger box of doughnuts" (49). Personally, I believe the sense of belonging that comes from a writing community brings the type of happiness I can enjoy no matter where I am in my writing process.

## WRITING IN/AS COMMUNITY

Debbie: Virginia Woolf famously argues a writer must have a "room of one's own" and an income to make writing possible. What do

you know about what you want or need in your life to be a writer or creator?

Troy: In the past, I would have said I needed accountability just to get the planning process started. The roles of student, instructor, administrator, husband, father, and so forth just overwhelmed my time. But I've been reconnecting with the idea that accountability comes from within, although I fully understand the notion of group accountability as well. Silvia says that "[a]ccountability is all that most people need out of a writing group" and that "many of us could use a nudge to stick to our schedule" (50). I think I need a little of both, and I'm still wrestling with which has the greater impact.

Cameron: Yes. I think something I learned about myself as a writer is that I'm more confident and generative when I have someone to bounce ideas off of, or someone who's regularly responding to my writing. I never thought of myself as a collaborative writer before, but I've realized a collaborator—or even just an accountability partner—can function as a friendly, informed audience, which helps me get into the right cognitive and emotional space for taking risks and engaging with new ideas in my writing. Sue Wilson and Jennifer Cutri point out that for graduate students, "writing networks provide solidarity and a rewarding forum for transactional learning processes within a community of like-minded experts" and that there's "moral support and understanding of similar experiences" in those groups (59). That's absolutely been true for me.

Debbie: We tried what Jackie Grutsch McKinney calls "proximal writing" in our class last fall. According to a forthcoming article by Grutsch McKinney, proximal writing is "writing done purposefully in the presence of others who are writing." It's different from a draft group, where people are exchanging and commenting on one another's writing, which is what Silvia recommends. Wilson and Cutri seem to be talking about both the kind of exchange that happens in a draft group and the kind of community that can emerge through proximity. Proximal writing can be a way to make the solitary work of writing feel a little less lonely.

Cameron: Mary and I have kept up our twice-a-week proximal writing meetings since our class together ended. We're in different areas—rhetoric and composition and literature—so I initially thought our meetings would mostly be just about accountability. But we've been surprised by how often we find connections. Writing for me has often been a solitary endeavor, so I wasn't expecting how much growth I would experience, both in my understanding of my work and in my ability to articulate my ideas, once I started writing with a partner.

Mary: I really enjoyed the proximal-writing exercises in class, so I knew it could be a generative practice. What I didn't expect when Cameron and I started meeting outside class was that my definition of a productive writing session would expand to include things that didn't necessarily end up on the page. Many of our (seemingly disparate) conversations have worked themselves into

my thoughts and my writing. Sometimes we sit side by side and write, and other times, we brainstorm together for hours—without judgment if we get off topic—staying open to the creative possibilities that might (and often do) emerge. I have to say it feels a little meta right now writing in this article about writing with Cameron, who is also writing about our process.

Elizabeth: The value of proximal writing depends on where I am in my writing process and what I want to achieve. While brainstorming, I've gotten used to isolating myself when I need inspiration—that's what works for me. But writing alongside others is highly beneficial when I have an idea outlined or drafted and I need the motivation to keep going. This is why I believe people like me benefit most from what Silvia calls "proximal goal setting": "a concrete [short-term] goal . . . such as making an outline, finishing a section of a manuscript, reading a book, or writing 1,000 words. These are tangible—you'll know if you didn't do it" (51).

Steve: At the end of an advanced creative-writing class I taught this semester via Zoom, I was completely caught off guard by one of my students. She mentioned how much she had enjoyed the weekly discussions and workshop sessions due in large part to the number of ideas the entire group shared for each submitted work. Then, a second student suggested we continue meeting online (via social networking) to continue this type of support. In short, I was instantly reminded of the value of being active in a writing community. For too long I have isolated myself and all but hidden my works in progress because they were never ready. This approach, I've of course learned, is simply not an effective strategy to build confidence in my own writing. I would never encourage a student to hole up in that manner and simply hope for the best. Between the graduate course and leading my own writing community as a college course, I have finally let go of the isolated writer I once was.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

Debbie: I'm wondering where we are here at the end of this conversation? Steve, I know you submitted a paper to a conference and had it accepted—congratulations! Cameron's putting the finishing touches on a couple articles and a collaborative book chapter. Mary's just finished her comprehensive exams, and Cameron, Troy, and Steve are all heading for exams in the coming year. Elizabeth's retooling her website and will be writing her master's thesis. Troy, Cameron, and Steve will continue teaching, too. What advice do you have for each other or yourselves?

Troy: For me, what was once rather murky has filtered into something fairly clear at this point when it comes to pressing on, which is that we must . . . keep . . . writing. Do it as much as you can, and consider doing it in different ways. For example, while I still lean on the late-night deep dive on my PC (everybody else is asleep at this time in my house so it just works for me), the proximal-writing

exercise we completed, as inspired by Grutsch McKinney's research, was far more wonderful than I expected. There is truly something special about writing in the company of so many great minds, and it almost felt borderline spiritual ("where two or three gather together . . ."). The energy was palpable, and I'll never forget it, and it is something I hope to recreate this summer as I begin work on another project with a colleague and a mentor. There are of course a lot of factors here, such as pondering audience or targeting a particular journal if you're looking for publication (Silvia 76), and while I will emphasize the importance of these suggestions, my main point here is to write in whatever way you can and do it as often as you can.

Steve: I'm planning to present my paper in early June in Austin, Texas. The conference coordinator also encouraged me to submit the paper to their society's annual journal publication for consideration. As Debbie pointed out, we as writers need to remember the worst thing that can happen when we submit a conference paper or article—a rejection or "We appreciate your submission; however . . ." email—will leave us exactly as we were *before* we submitted it. As for general advice, I will share the analogy I have used as a teacher, which is something along the lines of continuously tossing darts at a dartboard. Some hit the wall at first, but with practice and persistence, one of those darts will eventually hit the center. Also, and this is perhaps the best advice I have gained in the past year: rejection is never personal.

Troy: That's such a great point about rejection, Steve, and I think it applies to other facets of this academic process as well. The imposter phenomenon we've described here is unlikely to be a concept that disappears as another set of students take our place, so if there is a chance a message like this can reach those writers, I think they'll be much better off because of it. I also know this mentality will be useful as I consider my next steps in academia (or outside it) in terms of a career trajectory. Alex Galarza says about his own journey, "[I was] determined not to let my success or failure in securing a tenure-track position impact my long-term happiness" (216). Considering I just finished as a runner-up for such a position, it is easy to get down, but the right mentality towards the rejection you mention here is essential. No, I did not get the job, but I beat out an awful lot of folks in my very first tenure-level application, and a lot of them already have their PhDs. I was able to experience my first campus visit and the eight-or-so-hour interview process that went along with it. Sure, I am sad I did not get the job, but what I learned from that rejection will be eternally valuable for me. I will, to quote Galarza once again, keep working on "transforming the inevitable despair and grimness into something positive and productive" (220). As dreary as that sounds, the smile on my face suggests otherwise.

Cameron: I really needed to hear what Troy and Steve are saying about failure and rejection. Given the demands on our time and energy as graduate students, it's hard to find time for low-stakes, personal writing. So I think my best advice is to guard the things

that bring you joy. It's tempting to turn personal writing into another aspect of your academic hustle—and that can be really rewarding, too!—but there's value in writing for pleasure and just for yourself. It's writing that you can't fail at, or that can't be rejected, because it's an act of self-care and self-expression.

Elizabeth: In addition to what my peers have already mentioned, I believe community is an essential part of the writing process, and this can mean a proximal-writing group for some or a draft-exchange group for others. Whatever the case, I highly recommend becoming a part of a community where you can be encouraged to serve. Also, imposter phenomenon is real, and I can say with confidence that each of us has had our own fair share of it, but it is important to recognize you are not alone. As you make the decision to step out of your comfort zone, believe you have what it takes and give yourself enough time and space to grow and evolve. Thank you very much, Debbie, for this conversation. This has been a great conversation, and I wish everyone the very best in all their future endeavors!

Mary: For me, Debbie's course was transformative. There is a reason we still have plenty to say about it nearly a year later. We produced several academic and professional documents that will be invaluable to our endeavors for years to come. Within this supportive group environment, people generously gave (and received) feedback that resulted in the type of revisions I, no doubt, could not have done on my own. Since this class has ended, I have said yes to all manner of campus writing challenges, started working as the managing editor of a campus publication, and (as you know) continued my proximal-writing practice with Cameron. I will start writing my dissertation soon, and have been warned it can be a lonely endeavor, but I feel this course has helped equip me with the tools I need to avoid some of those writing pitfalls. As we go in different professional and academic directions, my advice would be to continue to build on all the valuable writing practices we learned in class and to say yes to the writing opportunities that come along.

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## Appendix

The work in this class builds on existing writing done for previous courses in the students' graduate programs. Students are asked to choose a paper or project they are pleased with and that relates to their professional aspirations as the basis for these assignments. These portfolios have also evolved through collaboration with other faculty members who have taught this course at Ball State, including Kristie Fleckenstein, Jennifer Grouling, and Jackie Grutsch McKinney, and feedback from the graduate students who have taken the course with us over the years. Assignments for our class were gathered into three portfolios:

Conference Portfolio: includes a list of potential conferences with submission information and identification of a target conference; an abstract appropriate for submission to the target conference; the conference presentation itself; and the delivery of the presentation to the class.

Journal Portfolio: includes a list of target journals and submission information; analyses of articles from recent issues of the target journal; drafts in progress for the journal; and a future-steps letter identifying the remaining work to be done before the article is ready to submit.

Professional Identity Portfolio: includes a CV or resume as appropriate to the students' professional goals; a list of transferable skills; a report on an informational interview; a grant application or professional website; a diversity statement; and a three- or five-year plan.

The contents of each portfolio were developed recursively and in conversation with one another and with a number of articles and other resources shared in class.

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# Conference Dossier for #ActuallyAutistic: Rhetoricity, Self-Advocacy, and the Emergence of a Counterpublic

## Cameron Becker

Course Design: Conference Portfolio

Professor: Deborah Mix

Course: ENG693



Cameron Becker is a fourth-year PhD student in Rhetoric and Composition at Ball State University, where she also serves as Graduate Assistant Director of the Writing Program. She is a graduate of Indiana University Kokomo and Indiana University East, where she studied Humanities, English Literature, and Composition Studies. Her

scholarly interests include disability studies, online writing instruction, counterpublics, and rhetorics of craft. Cameron's dissertation research is a qualitative study examining how and why theories of embodiment are enacted in undergraduate online writing pedagogy. When she's not writing or teaching, she enjoys romance novels, Fall Out Boy, textile art, and spending time with her spouse and two dogs.

## CONFERENCE LIST

1. **Computers and Writing 2022: Practicing Digital Activisms\***
2. RAW 2022: Research, Art, & Writing Graduate Student Conference
3. Disability at the Intersection of History, Culture, Religion, Gender, and Health
4. MCLLM 30: "Tough But Necessary" Conversations
5. SESAS 2021: ...and Reimagining, Recentering, Reconstructing a Broken System...

\*I presented this paper virtually at Computers and Writing 2022.

## COMPUTERS AND WRITING 2022: PRACTICING DIGITAL ACTIVISMS

1. Conference Information  
[Computers and Writing 2022: Practicing Digital Activisms](#) will be held at East Carolina University in Greenville, NC, from May 19-22, 2022.
2. Submission Requirements  
C&W 2022's [call for papers](#) requires individual presenters to submit a 75-100-word abstract and a 250-word proposal,



## Abstract

#ActuallyAutistic is a controversial activist hashtag which spans multiple social media sites and is intended for the exclusive use of autistic individuals to share resources, build community, and engage in self-advocacy. The hashtag was created as a direct response to ableism and abuse from mainstream autism advocacy organizations like Autism Speaks and online environments like #autism. A prominent demographic in the #ActuallyAutistic community is late-diagnosed autistic women who use the hashtag to learn about resources and coping strategies that are otherwise inaccessible to them.

By exploring the history of the hashtag, I argue that #ActuallyAutistic functions as a digital counterpublic, described by Nancy Fraser as "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs," because of the identities of the participants, the subaltern nature of autism self-advocacy, and the characteristics of the discourse occurring on the hashtag. I also analyze Tweets from #ActuallyAutistic community members using M. Remi Yergeau's framework of neuroqueer rhetoric to further argue that this community merits more thorough academic study as a site of rhetorical invention by minority rhetors which can help scholars develop new ways of documenting, studying, and understanding disability self-advocacy rhetoric. Finally, by connecting the rhetorics of self-advocacy on #ActuallyAutistic with the recruiting and lobbying activities of organizations like Autistic Self-Advocacy Network and Autistic Women and Non-binary Network, I explore the tangible positive effects of the autism self-advocacy counterpublic on the lived experiences of autistic individuals.



as well as any content warnings and accessibility considerations for their presentation. C&W 2022 also asks that potential presenters specify whether they plan to attend the conference in person, or if their presentation will be given virtually/asynchronously. Interested parties should submit their abstract and proposal by November 1, 2021, through [this link](#).

### 3. Rationale

The theme for this year's conference is "Practicing Digital Activisms," and one of the topic questions was, "In what ways can or do memes, videos, Facebook posts, images, tweets, video games, GIFs, or hashtags contribute to digital activism?" The call for papers also states that the conference will "welcome all kinds of examples and projects that explicitly practice, promote, and analyze digital activism toward social justice." Because my conference paper analyzes the digital counterpublic #ActuallyAutistic as a site of rhetorical invention for minority rhetors and the organization of autistic people for the purpose of advocating for autistic rights and representation, this conference seems to be a good fit.

## RAW: RESEARCH, ART, & WRITING GRADUATE STUDENT CONFERENCE

### 1. Conference Information

The University of Texas at Dallas will host the hybrid conference [RAW: Research, Art, and Writing Graduate Student Conference](#) on February 12, 2022.

### 2. Submission Requirements

The [call for papers](#) for the RAW academic conference requires a title for the submission, a 250-300-word abstract, three to five keywords, a brief biography, and an indication of whether the presenter will attend virtually or in-person. Submissions are due by November 19, 2021, via [this link](#).

### 3. Rationale

The RAW academic conference is described as a being "organized by and for graduate student scholars to engage in scholarly and creative conversations with peers across the various fields of the humanities." The theme in 2022 is "Perceptions on Time, Space, and Subjectivity," and the call for papers requested "scholarly papers and creative projects that address how we engage/disengage with reality, see ourselves and the world around us, and look to the past to understand our present and/or future." Because my paper includes themes of self-representation in digital spaces and environments, and because it traces the autism self-advocacy movement through its brief history, I felt that it might qualify. The conference is being presented in a hybrid format in 2022, which is excellent for my accessibility needs; however, I am from Dallas and have a lot of family in the area,

so if I am well, I would be tempted to brave the nightmare that is commercial travel to attend in-person.

## DISABILITY AT THE INTERSECTION OF HISTORY, CULTURE, RELIGION, GENDER, AND HEALTH

### 1. Conference Information

This [conference](#) is being hosted by Marquette University in Milwaukee, WI, on March 3-4, 2022. The conference is being offered in hybrid format.

### 2. Submission Requirements

According to the conference's [cfp](#), "Abstracts up to 300 words in Word format must be submitted through [the electronic system](#) by October 31, 2021."

### 3. Rationale

This conference encourages graduate student submissions and specifically requests papers "dealing with normalcy narratives, discourse, and issues of stigmas evolving around disabilities in marginalized communities with an emphasis on the intersection of disability (as an identity and minority) with gender, culture, and religion." My paper studies a counterpublic intended to challenge neurological normalcy narratives and stigma via self-advocacy discourse, so I believe it would be a good match for this conference. To address their prompt about the intersection of disability and gender, I could also make some edits to my paper to discuss the fact that women and girls with autism go undiagnosed for much longer than men due to gender bias in diagnostic criteria. The counterpublic I'm studying is invaluable for autistic women and nonbinary people because the way autism presents in women is misunderstood and poorly documented, so community-based research and crowdsourced coping strategies are often the only resources at their disposal. The hybrid nature of the conference is a bonus for me.

## MCLLM 30: "TOUGH BUT NECESSARY CONVERSATIONS"

### 1. Conference Information

The 30th annual Midwestern Conference on Literature, Language, and Media will be held in hybrid format in DeKalb, Illinois. Surprisingly, neither the [cfp](#) nor the [conference website](#) shared the date of the 2022 conference.

### 2. Submission Requirements

According to the call for papers, proposals should include a cover page with the applicant's name, institutional affiliation, status, email, and phone number, as well as a 200-500-word proposal and information about whether the applicant would

prefer to present online or in person. Proposals are due to [this email](#) by December 18, 2021.

### 3. Rationale

This conference seemed more established and like a bit of a long shot, but I was intrigued by the theme and believe that my paper addresses some of the suggested topics like “rhetoric in relation to social justice” and “marginalized voices and challenges to the canon.” The cfp asks for papers that “address socio-cultural or political issues as they relate to matters of social justice and how language, literature, and media work for, with, or in some cases against the ideals of social justice.” My examination of the relationship between public and counterpublic autism advocacy rhetorics seeks to accomplish that goal. I like that this is a hybrid conference, although it’s not too far to drive.

## SESAS 2021: ...AND REIMAGINING, RECENTERING, RECONSTRUCTING A BROKEN SYSTEM...

### 1. Conference Information

[Students of English Studies Association Symposium 2021](#) will be held on Zoom on Thursday, December 9, 2021, and Friday, December 10, 2021.

### 2. Submission Requirements

The [cfp](#) states that abstracts of 200-300 words and short biographies are due on Friday, November 5, 2021, to [this email address](#).

### 3. Rationale

This conference seemed like an excellent fit for my paper because it’s a free conference on Zoom and some of the suggested topics include “Rhetorical movements in the social, cultural, and political space” and “Social and Digital movements.” The call for papers says that the organizers “aren’t looking for solutions to problems, but rather a way to visualize a future *reconstructed*.” I thought that worked well with my discussion of the Neurodiversity Movement in particular because the movement (and the counterpublic, as a part of the movement) resists the idea that autism is a disease to be cured (or a problem to be fixed), and seeks to reconstruct our social and cultural understanding of what autism and autism advocacy look like.

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# Journal Analysis Letter Update

## Troy Andrews

Course Design: Journal Portfolio

Professor: Deborah Mix

Course: ENG693



Troy Andrews is an assistant professor of English at Ivy Tech Community College in Indiana. He is also a PhD student in Ball State University's Rhetoric and Composition department. Before teaching in higher education, he spent ten years teaching in the Indiana public school system. With a passion for teaching and people, he continues to

explore and research multimodal assessments strategies for composition students at various levels of education. A lover of the Chicago Cubs and Bears, he also has a deep passion for being in the woods and on the water, as well as playing video games with his friends. Troy continues to live close to his hometown in rural Indiana with his wife and two daughters, who are the true source of all his power.

Dear Dr. Mix,

This article has come a very long way since its inception. In what started out as a seminar paper for another course, this article has dropped from nearly 8,000 words down to 5,000, and now down to around 3,000. Considering most of the articles I've used in this activity live in the 2,500 or so word mark, I feel like I'm very close to where I want it to be length wise. The process of revision and peer editing has been exhausting, to be honest, but I feel like my peer group has given me some strong suggestions that have allowed this content crush to work without taking away too much meaning.

That said, there is quite a bit to do yet, though not necessarily items that will take a ton of time. In fact, I hope to submit this to WCC over break and go from there. Before I do, however, I will take the following steps:

1. As noted by my peers, right now the essay is making serious strides to fit into the realm of WCC desired content, especially as it pertains to inclusivity. That is the good news. The bad news is that, if I compare my essay at present to the journals I studied for this assignment, **it feels less personal on my end and more of a commentary on rural agrarian sponsorship**. I want the latter to exist, but by the journal's self-described "about

me" page, I need to get it a little more aligned with my own experiences as a writer if this essay wants a chance. I don't find this to be a great challenge, but when you've already cut down the content by over half, you find yourself constantly battling for what goes in and what doesn't make the cut. Also, there is task of suggesting how this changed me as a writer, too. With that addition, which I think I can complete easily enough, I feel like I am getting quite close to a permissible submission.

2. I have created an abstract for this piece, and it is a highly edited and largely condensed version of what I used for my earlier project in this course. I simply used what I found in the WCC articles to help me align it appropriately. It's not done yet, but close.
3. While the document is in line in terms of style, formatting, length (as non is presented as a limit), etc, it is in a *dire need of basic editing*. To accommodate this, I have two people, one a classmate here, the other an instructor with many submissions to their name, ready to read over it. They have agreed to provide an extra set of eyes for me before I submit to WCC.
4. I need to find an appropriate picture to send in. I have a basic profile picture I use for school, but I'm not sure it's what I want here. Professional pictures are great, but I almost want something more...personal for this.

In short, all of these matter to me, but I have my current priorities set on #1 and #4. Again, I feel like I can do this and have a submission in over break and before we return to spring classes, and I am so very thrilled to take this jump.

Lastly, I know you wanted this to be a "polished" as possible, but where it sits now is where it must sit for at least another week on my end. In full transparency, the last four months have been the most challenging four months of my life in terms of education and work...even more so than when my oldest had her open heart surgeries. Those were at least somewhat predictable, and I had a singular occupation where I was able to rely on many others to let me focus on my child. Now, I have so many other responsibilities. I teach at two different colleges, I'm trying to finish another degree,

both my children have special needs, we are single income, etc.... In short, the pressure can be quite daunting. It has been absolutely relentless, be it my own health, my kids, or something else. I had almost convinced myself to take the spring off, but, for better or for worse, this class has given me the energy and focus to keep going. I started this journey **for me** and for me alone. I'm here to

prove something to myself. I have a lot of work to do on this journal article as of yet, but I'm aware of the steps, and I am prepared to complete it by a set date.

Thank you,  
Troy Andrews

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## Journal Analysis\

### LIST OF POTENTIAL JOURNALS

- *Writers: Craft & Context* (Target journal)
- *Nation Council of Teachers of English: Teaching English in the Two Year College*
- *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education: English/Language Arts Education*

### WRITERS: CRAFT & CONTEXT

EDITORS: JOURNAL EDITORS: MICHELE EODICE, AJA MARTINEZ, SANDRA TARABOCHIA

EMAIL:WRITERSCRAFTANDCONTEXT@GMAIL.COM

- The Journal does not list a size limit for submission, but does request a letter that includes an introduction of yourself, the genre you're submitting, and "context" about yourself, including demographical information •
- Abstract is not required. No acceptance rate listed. Must be original work not submitted elsewhere.
- Submission must be Word/PDF. URLs in references if possible. Double spaced, 12-point font. Illustrations/figures/tables within the text. (alt options available upon approval)
- Digital submission. Single issue sent inside "submissions." Sponsored by Oklahoma University Writing Center.
- No specific omission suggestions, possibly due to the nature of the journal. In fact, each of the three journals I read for this assignment even include author images.
- To submit, register on the "submissions" link in the "About" tab

- Note: Users must email the editorial team first (info in "contact" link under "About." Perspective user will be sent temporary login.

### Recent Issue Analysis

- For this journal, as it is built upon the experiences of writers, the topics and style range quite a bit. That said, there is certainly a level of counterstory present, and there is a strong effort to publish work from writers of different kinds of backgrounds. In the essays I scanned ("Refusing to Kill My Darlings," "Five Pictures of my Son," and "On Becoming a Research Geek"), each provided deeply personal aspects of the lives of a writer, how this kind of context can affect a writer, and how others might learn from and/or navigate this for themselves. In short, these very personal articles (which even contain dialogue) offer an angle of approach that makes a great deal of sense for my own article as a former K 12 teacher. I believe my article addresses some left out and otherwise ignored potential learning content for students, and while it is not as directly representative of me (like the articles mentioned above), it has changed my approach as an educator.

### TEACHING ENGLISH IN THE TWO YEAR COLLEGE: NCTE

EDITOR: DARIN JENSON

EMAIL:TETYC.EDITOR@GMAIL.COM

- 4000–7000-word scholarly articles in all areas of English, specific to TYC, published by NCTE. Also 750–4000 word notes on approaches and activities, 2000 3000 word review essays on a theme are also possible, and symposiums at 2000 4000 words. Published in September, December, March, and May
- Pages must be numbered, and under article title must be a single sentence description of article. MLA 8th edition style required. Author's name/institution should not appear on any

pages. There are special instructions available for the need to include student work samples/references

- 3–4 month review process. Encourages first time authors. Must be original work. Differing rates on acceptance, ranging 15% (not dated) to 12.9% in 2019 for first time submissions. Revisions up to 60%, per their website (annual report overall for NCTE)
- A \$75 fee for access for nonmembers, \$25 for members (NCTE). I cannot find exact acceptance rates or return on submission information other than the return timeline varies per call and ranges pending when the journal is published. The webpage containing some of this info “does not exist,” as linked here: <https://ncte.org/resources/journals/teaching-english-in-the-two-yearcollege/>

- Length varies, ranging from two pages to 50, with 30 a suggested limit. Longer articles should have subheads. No title sheets. No hard copies.
- Must be original work not submitted elsewhere. Include a 75–200 word abstract.
- Must follow most recent APA edition style. Word or RTF only. 12-pt font, double spaced.
- Very strong warning on proper English, including a reference to assist nonnative English speakers. No style options, such as strike through/comments/etc.
- Double blind review, no name included anywhere. Submissions will be reviewed “as promptly s possible,” and this usually takes around five months.

### Recent Issue Analysis

- The most current issue of TETYC contains articles on student feedback, diverse teaching approaches, corequisite models for courses, and antiracism. Different than *WCC*, these articles differ in their structure and even in their authorship, as here we see several articles authored by several cowriters. In terms of content, it is specifically linked to the practice of teaching, ranging from active feedback techniques (“Transforming the Feedback Paradigm”) to more theory based support (Review: “Linguistic Justice: Black Language, Literacy, Identity, and Pedagogy”). The latter of the two is still clearly bound in pedagogy, but more specifically lensed in theory/ counterstory than more qualitative data feedback ideas in general course pedagogies. Not all articles are free/open access and some require a registered user to read. Several had subheadings and data charts (“The Teaching Zone: Square Pegs in Round Holes”).

### Recent Issue Analysis

- This Journal, which does largely ask its writers to focus on some aspect of technology in addition to ELA and teaching, unsurprisingly has a lot of articles on teaching with technology, distance education, and using “computational” skills to more effectively engage in professional development. Like TETYC, articles are often coauthored, but unlike TETYC (and *WCC*), the presentation of the English articles, while categorized together, are clumped in with all other disciplines as well (located at the top above Math and Science). As such, only two articles are in the current issue. Per these English/English education articles, the focus is not on rhetoric and composition, but either on literature or basic literacy courses. Both articles are quite large, contain a lot of citations, and also they suggested subtitles (and both include data references for the technology aspect). Older issues contain articles on marginalized voice and other similar areas.

### CITE JOURNAL: CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN TECHNOLOGY AND TEACHER EDUCATION: ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS

EDITOR: T. PHILIP NICHOLS

EMAIL:PHIL\_NICHOLS@BAYLOR.EDU

- Content must reference ELA, Technology, and English Teacher Education. Published by The Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education.
- Online format encouraged, including links/videos/sound/ other interactives. Instructions provided on how to do it. Published in March, June, September, and December. Acceptance rate of 29%.

### WRITERS: CRAFT & CONTEXT

#### Zeroing In: Single Article Analysis

- Article: “Refusing to Kill My Darlings” by Lisa Lebduska
- Lebduska’s article, which begins very frankly by addressing the nature of the article’s title, using a past tense recollection of a graduate school experience, using very detailed imagery to set a scene for a clearly significant event in her life. Addressing the “deep voiced, tall white man,” a scene she describes as all too familiar, she talks about how she fit the mold of what was “successful” and addresses her known privilege in being white. Naturally, she takes this man’s advice to “kill her darlings.” She questions her career choice



versus what her family wanted. She wants to be seen as “hip” by students. Privilege allows her to “avoid thinking about what revising takes out of writers,” especially diverse writers. Killing your darlings only marginalizes them further, then. She then provides some scholarship to back that up. If we aren’t careful and act in counterstory, we allow bad tradition to “reproduce itself.” So rather than kill the darlings, she looks to engage in conversation. “What do you think?” Learning about “whiteness” took time for her. Exposure. Ego is harmful and we must always revise. Very conversational, honest, somewhat frustrated/embarrassed. Ranges from personal background to some of the current research on the issues, including current events too. CRT essential to essay. College Writing Program director Wheaton College. Women. Subjected to misogyny.

### Three Article Introductions

- Articles: “Refusing to Kill My Darlings” by Lisa Lebduska, “Five Pictures of my Sons” by Rita Malenczyk, and “On Becoming a Research Geek” by Paula Schumacher

### Introduction Scrutinization: Part 1

- All three begin with a personal bit of backstory, with Schumacher and Lebduska telling very personal stories about themselves, whereas Malenczyk telling a story about her late son. As this is the genesis of their respective contexts, it makes sense. Two are telling a story very specific to them and their own evolution from their own experiences, whereas one is doing the same, but with a more focused attitude on a close but not internal conflict (even if it internally changed everything for Malenczyk). In terms of gesturing, Schumacher invokes a list of questions and quick rebuttals, almost in a Q&A move. Mostly it’s about background, and while not deeply personal to her own life, it is personal to her work story. Lebduska on the other hand was very personal, and it sets up some of her recognition of both a big problem, and her, while in a lesser sense, also being a part of that problem. This is essential to her story, being one of realization and recognition of the “other,” and the counterstory that goes with it. Lastly, Malenczyk offers a little context, which without the suicide warning in the title, could very easily be read as a positive memory of something good she will share as opposed to the incoming tragedy the reader experiences with her. It is very endearing and paints a strong picture of the subject of her essay in a positive light, which is essential to understand her story.

### Three Article Introductions

- Articles: “Refusing to Kill My Darlings” by Lisa Lebduska, “Five Pictures of my Sons” by Rita Malenczyk, and “On Becoming a Research Geek” by Paula Schumacher

### Introduction Scrutinization: Part 2

- In this manner, all three authors make a gesture towards the journals intention, which is to understand the “lived experiences of writers” (WCC). While that experience could be conceived as a positive one, these particular articles all express some various impediment that created unique challenges for them as people, and consequently, as writers. Be it a move that is deeply personal to our own experiences because the “thing” happened to us individually, or whether it is because something near and dear to us instead, all of these events deeply influence the writer, their cognition, and eventually, our awareness. Each writer, while experiencing some manner of frustration or tragedy learned to not ignore the pain, but to understand it as best they could that these kinds of problems are likely affecting other people and other writers, potential and already accomplished.

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# Informational Interview Report

## Mary Gilmore

Course Design: Professional Identity

Professor: Deborah Mix

Course: ENG693



Mary Gilmore (she/her) is a fourth year PhD student in English Literature currently working on her dissertation in the field of nineteenth-century adaptation. She served as the chairperson for the 2022 Practical Criticism Midwest conference and has reviewed grants for the Ball State University Sponsored Projects Administration (SPA)

since 2022. She is currently the Graduate Assistant Director for the Creative Writing Program at Ball State as well as the Managing Editor of *Beautiful Things*, a weekly online micro-essay magazine published by Ball State University.

### INTERVIEW 1: PUBLISHING

On November 29, 2021, I interviewed Jill Christman, a senior editor for *River Teeth: A Journal of Nonfiction Narrative* and executive producer of the podcast *Indelible: Campus Sexual Violence*. She teaches graduate and undergraduate classes in creative nonfiction writing and literary editing at Ball State University. We talked about her fortuitous path to editing a national nonfiction journal, her goals for the future, and her advice for students considering a career in publishing.

After experiencing a personal tragedy as a young adult, Jill has been driven to do what she loves from an early age, understanding that life is short. At first, she believed the myth that she couldn't make money as a writer. She makes sure to dispel this myth to her students, so they understand that the skill of writing is valuable in almost every discipline.

Most of her opportunities have been a result of the people she has met and worked with throughout her career. At one point, she worked in a cognitive psychology lab, and now, several years later, is collaborating on a book with her boss from that job. She never takes for granted the relationships she makes in the writing world and beyond.

"Follow the thing you love" isn't just a random saying for Jill. She believes that the more you love something, the more you will do it/practice it and the better you will become at it. This dedicated practice can turn into expertise and, with any luck, an actual paying job.

Jill has won many awards and published two memoirs, but her career took on a new meaning when she inherited the *River Teeth* nonfiction journal in 2019 when Joe Mackall and Dan Lehman, professors at Ashland University, retired. The nationally renowned journal, now housed at Ball State University, continues to thrive under her and Mark Neely's direction as senior editors. She looks at this opportunity as more than just a feather in her professional cap. She sees it as more of a legacy project and an important learning tool for students in a supportive hands-on environment. Jill is constantly paying forward those opportunities that were afforded to her and champions authors whose voices have traditionally been marginalized.

Jill's career path has not been a traditional one, but she trusted that if she continued to put herself in positions to do the things she loved, the rest would follow. As a current *River Teeth* intern, I'm happy to say that I will continue to learn from Jill next year when I take over as managing editor of *River Teeth's* online affiliate magazine, *Beautiful Things*.

### INTERVIEW 2: GRANTS ADMINISTRATION

I met with Sarah Lee on December 2, 2021, to discuss her role as Senior Proposal Manager in The Office of Sponsored Projects Administration at Ball State University. Like Jill, Sarah was extremely generous with her time and shared a lot of career information with me. I asked her how one "breaks in" to the grant world since the majority of online job posts require ample experience in the area. She explained that her path started in a psychology research office, which she got after earning a degree in Psychology. She got experience there putting together major research proposals and so the job at SPA came naturally, yet somewhat unexpectedly because she didn't realize she had been acquiring so many transferrable skills in various positions she had

held over the years. She also said that people without experience can get knowledge and practice about the field by going through their certifying body (CRA) and earn a certification in research administration.

Although grants administration is a fairly structured job that adheres to federal, state, local, and university guidelines, she never finds it tedious because she gets to learn about new research ideas all the time and work with really passionate faculty members. This is what has kept her interested in the job for ten years. She is on the pre-award side, which means that she makes sure everything is in order before the grant is submitted. There is also a post-award team in her office that works with the details of the grants once they are awarded to make sure the funds are allocated and spent according to the grant guidelines.

We talked about what happens in the big picture campus-wide when someone applies for and/or wins a grant as well as some of the minutiae that goes into making a grant really viable. Things like a specific budget, including indirect costs, must be considered on the micro level as part of the many puzzle pieces that need to be seamless before the grant goes out for consideration.

It was really interesting to think about working in an alt-ac career that is still connected so closely to the university. At the end of our meeting, Sarah offered me the opportunity to be a student reviewer on her internal grants team next semester (spring 2022). This would entail reading and scoring grants (2-5 pages each) from both students and faculty members. After each grant is scored (on a scale from 1-5), a short rationale is added to the review. Another helpful hint she gave me for finding more opportunities in this area was to use the search terms for “Research Administrator” or “Contracts Administrator”. When I searched for these titles on both [www.higheredjobs.com](http://www.higheredjobs.com) and [www.usajobs.com](http://www.usajobs.com), I came up with dozens of results (versus searching for “Grant Writer” – a search that yielded inconsistent results of freelance and part-time positions).

Both interviews yielded a wealth of knowledge, valuable contacts and opportunities/experience in the publishing and grants administration fields.

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*Three Year Plan*

	September	October	November	December
<i>Academic</i>	Submit Doctoral Committee Assignment Form	Fill Out Request Form and Register for DOC700 for SP22 \$75 fee – find link in Grad Handbook		Complete Pedagogy Portfolio Requirement for the Comp Exams
	Set up regular writing appointments in the Writing Center – attend grad writing retreat if offered	Get permission from Jill to intern again at River Teeth		Set up library carrel times for completing pedagogy project
<i>Professional</i>	Start Dissertation research grid in ENG 702			Complete Pedagogy Portion of Comp Exam over Winter Break
	Attend Adaptations in the Humanities Conference 9-10	Look at transferrable skills and resume writing doc in Grad Handbook under Doctoral Student Career Planning Guide	Start meeting with PCM team to start making decisions about the conference	Complete professional documents for employment search
	Attend Strategies and Resources for Funding your Scholarly Activity —Student Edition (Online) – 9-24-2021	Attend BSI Trust Lecture via Zoom Oct 2nd at 2pm	Attend Safe Zone Training on Thursday, November 4th, 5:30 - 9:30 PM (VIRTUAL).	

*Three Year Plan (Continued)*

2022	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
<i>Academic</i>	Start DOC 700 and set up a regular study/ writing time at Writing Center or library.	Apply for 2022-2023 Graduate Assistantships	Apply for Rippy and Voss Scholarships (BSU)	Comp Exams April 11-17	Oral Exam May 6 from 10am-12pm	Start writing Dissertation Proposal		6 hours of DISS 799 to complete proposal	Connect with Michael Keen (Sherlock Holmes scholar) about adaptations	Submit DISS Prop		Start applying for jobs
	Check in with Dissertation Committee and Rachel about next steps			Review Dissertation Guide, Formatting Rules and Deadlines in Grad Handbook and Dissertation Resource Folder	Submit Admission to Candidacy and Approval of Dissertation Proposal Form online	Design research and writing schedule for dissertation	Interview Jennifer Blackmer re: Alias Grace stage adaptation					
	Complete Pedagogy Portion and Study Binder for Comps				Reconfirm committee availability for dissertation process – propose dates for completion							
<i>Professional</i>	Read submissions for PCM	Confirm venue and speakers at PCM	Finalize program for PCM PCM Conference March 17th		Transition into Managing Editor Position for <i>Beautiful Things</i>			Take over Managing Editor Position for <i>Beautiful Things</i>				

*Three Year Plan (Continued)*

	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
<i>2023</i> <i>Academic</i>	6 Hours of DISS 799	Contact U of New Brunswick about research materials (I or Us)	Present at PCM Conference	Submit Chapters 1-2 to DISS committee	Start Summer RA position with Jill	3 hours of DISS 799 SU session	Submit Chapters 3-4 to DISS committee	3 hours of DISS 799 (last)?	Submit Doctoral Plan of Study to WQ203 (must be signed by JH)	Complete and Submit DISS		Graduate?
	Submit to PCM Conference											Defend DISS? Confirm with JH
<i>Professional</i>	Set up a professional online profile	Work on Novel	Coordinate In Print Book Festival with Jill		Renew or finish Managing Editor Position for Beautiful Things			Apply to alt-ac and U admin jobs			Interview for jobs	First Draft of Novel



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## Transferrable Skills

### ACCOUNTABILITY:

Meeting deadlines, handling confidential information, and planning events are just a few of the responsibilities required in a professional academic setting. None are possible without accountability, and that's one of the best attributes I offer to any organization. No matter the task, I consistently show up on time and prepared and feel an obligation to bring my best to any project or team of which I am a member.

### PUBLIC SPEAKING:

As a teacher, of course, speaking to a group of people is a daily part of the job, but I have also spoken at professional events and conferences, chaired countless meetings, led advising sessions and registration orientation sessions (at University of Iowa), and I am currently organizing an academic conference in March 2022 at which I will host and introduce scholarly work. I am grateful to have had so much practice learning how to verbally communicate my ideas clearly and effectively as public speaking has become one of the activities I enjoy most.

### EDITING:

Editing, one of the most useful (and accidentally acquired) skills in my toolbox, has evolved throughout my career into a practical competency in which I am now proficient. While I have been hired under the title of editor; curriculum editor, manuscript editor, and recently as managing editor of *Beautiful Things*, an online affiliate magazine of *River Teeth: A Journal of Nonfiction Narrative*, my editing skills have played a significant role in all the positions I have held. In my roles as an English teacher, Writing Center tutor, and research assistant, I came to truly understand the value of being able to edit other people's written work and provide constructive feedback.

This first set of transferrable skills was derived from Chapter 60 (p. 398) of Karen Kelsky's *The Professor is In*.

### RESEARCH AND COURSEWORK:

- Quickly reading and processing large amounts of complex material, often while writing summary notes

- Framing: breaking down information, sequencing it, and creating an organizational framework for it (writing my dissertation)
- Concentration: Intense, sustained focus on a particular task or subject
- Fairness: Looking at an issue from multiple perspectives (serving on the ethics committee)
- Synthesizing: Finding connections among disparate ideas or viewpoints
- Weighing: Assessing evidence for its soundness and its relevance to a particular argument
- Navigating ethical considerations, as in securing institutional review board approval (passing comps and oral exams)
- Public speaking: Both as a specialist to an audience of specialists, and as a specialist to a general, multidisciplinary audience of educated listeners (led advising and registration orientation sessions at U of Iowa, hosted PCM, spoke at conferences, taught)
- Information gathering: Locating and navigating databases, archives, or other appropriate sources of information (taught ENG:104 Composing Research)
- Writing quickly and concisely
- Managing multiple deadlines and meeting them
- Editing others' written work (as a curriculum copyeditor, Writing Center tutor, River Teeth intern, teacher, graduate assistant for VSTOP, research assistant for faculty member)
- Revision of one's own writing: The task that, according to rhetoric scholar George Gopen, is one of the greatest intellectual experiences there is
- Critiquing peers' work, as in a writing group or workshop
- Storytelling: Creating a meaningful narrative by artfully selecting and arranging facts
- Ability to format Microsoft Word documents (it can be lucrative to do this for others)
- Facilitating communication among multiple stakeholders (for example, committee members)

### TEACHING:

- Motivating groups and individuals to complete projects
- Facilitating group discussions
- Running purposeful, efficient meetings
- Preparing people for future learning by teaching foundational concepts and skills
- Public speaking as an expert who translates specialized knowledge to a general audience
- Course design, curriculum design

- Content development: Gathering and organizing facts into information on a given subject
- Identifying training objectives
- “Reading” an audience to determine their knowledge and interest level in the subject your discussing
- Coaching, tutoring, mentoring subordinates (for example, in office hours)
- Peer mentoring (helping fellow teachers)
- Managing mini-deadlines on the route to a major deadline
- Finding and nurturing others’ strengths
- Articulating overall goals for other people and creating a realistic schedule of mini-goals to structure the people’s pursuit of the goal
- Assessing others’ writing quickly and thoroughly

#### SERVICE:

- Navigating a bureaucracy (which forms need to be signed by whom, and sent where, and by what date)
- Collaborating with a team to produce something tangible (“deliverables”)

#### INTANGIBLES, EXTRACURRICULARS, AND MISCELLANEOUS:

- Finding humor in a dire situation
- Working under pressure
- Working without supervision

The following list of skills are from the [NACE Career Competencies](#) website.

#### PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT:

- Seek and embrace development opportunities.
- Voluntarily participate in further education, training, or other events to support one’s career.

#### COMMUNICATION:

- Clearly and effectively exchange information, ideas, facts, and perspectives with persons inside and outside of an organization.

#### CRITICAL THINKING:

- Identify and respond to needs based upon an understanding of situational context and logical analysis of relevant information.

#### EQUITY AND INCLUSION:

- Demonstrate the awareness, attitude, knowledge, and skills required to equitably engage and include people from different local and global cultures. Engage in anti-racist practices that actively challenge the systems, structures, and policies of racism.

#### LEADERSHIP:

- Plan, initiate, manage, complete, and evaluate projects.

#### PROFESSIONALISM:

- Act equitably with integrity and accountability to self, others, and the organization.
- Maintain a positive personal brand in alignment with organization and personal career values.
- Be present and prepared.
- Demonstrate dependability (e.g., report consistently for work or meetings).
- Prioritize and complete tasks to accomplish organizational goals.
- Consistently meet or exceed goals and expectations.
- Have an attention to detail, resulting in few if any errors in their work.
- Show a high level of dedication toward doing a good job.
- Build and maintain collaborative relationships to work effectively toward common goals, while appreciating diverse viewpoints and shared responsibilities.

#### TEAMWORK:

- Listen carefully to others, taking time to understand and ask appropriate questions without interrupting.
- Effectively manage conflict, interact with, and respect diverse personalities, and meet ambiguity with resilience.
- Be accountable for individual and team responsibilities and deliverables.
- Employ personal strengths, knowledge, and talents to complement those of others.
- Exercise the ability to compromise and be agile.
- Collaborate with others to achieve common goals.
- Build strong, positive working relationships with supervisor and team members/coworkers.

#### TECHNOLOGY:

- Navigate change and be open to learning new technologies.
- Use technology to improve efficiency and productivity of work.

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# Critical Theory, Critical Race Representations: Counterstory as Literary Intervention

Aja Y. Martinez

Robert O. Smith



Aja Y. Martinez (she/her) is Associate Professor of English at University of North Texas. Dr. Martinez is author of the multi-award-winning book *Counterstory: The Rhetoric and Writing of Critical Race Theory* and is co-author, with Dr. Robert O. Smith (UNT History), of several forthcoming titles on the storied histories of CRT.



Robert O. Smith (Chickasaw) is Assistant Professor of History at the University of North Texas, specializing in religious history, Indigenous studies, and critical race studies. Smith, an enrolled citizen of the Chickasaw Nation, is the author of *More Desired than Our Own Salvation: The Roots of Christian Zionism* (Oxford, 2013) and editor, with Göran

Gunner, of *Comprehending Christian Zionism: Perspectives in Comparison* (Fortress, 2014).

We wrote this course design in May 2023 in the great state of Texas. At that point, Texas educators like us were two months into what had proven a harrowing conclusion to our spring semester. Near the beginning of March 2023, we were informed the state legislature would soon present several bills<sup>[1]</sup> aimed at Texas state public institutions of higher education—bills that mimicked and echoed many of the other anti-Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) and anti-Critical Race Theory (CRT) bills already instituted within our K–12 systems. With higher education now in the legislature’s crosshairs, tenure was under threat; these proposed bans on DEI and CRT included provisions for denying/stripping tenure or outright dismissing professors ensnared in student and public complaints. This is the context in which we have built and taught our course: Critical Theory, Critical Race Representations: Counterstory as Literary Intervention.

This course was prompted by two visits the previous year to CRT founder Derrick Bell’s papers, archived at New York University. This archival adventure presented so much content, and so many unexpected forks in our research path, that we didn’t take a break during winter break—we wrote until we completed a book proposal and a couple of sample chapters for a new project on the storied history of CRT. Our work with Bell’s historic papers has provided a pathway for us to connect with other CRT founders such as Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, who have proven to be invaluable friends and mentors in our development process of this new project. Conversation with them also contributed significantly to the construction of this course, which teaches the content of this developing book. With the combined foundation of Bell’s archival

documents, Delgado and Stefancic’s oral histories, and the rich and sprawling literatures throughout the over five decades CRT scholars have been writing and speaking, we had everything we needed to craft a course that instructed students on a storied history of CRT, a history humanized with stories—the many *interwoven stories*—of CRT’s founding and development through the people and their relationships that breathed life into this movement.

The premise we are working from within our books (forthcoming with University of California Press and New York University Press) and this course is that there is a real need, now more than ever, to tell a new story about the founding and development of Critical Race Theory. While the course presents a history of this movement within our contemporary moment of culture-war attack, it is also a chronicle of the human experiences, relationships, and interconnections that give the movement its spirit and resolve. Through this history, students learn how CRT’s founders came together, what they created, and why. Much of what is already known and generally taught about CRT from the movement’s own perspective is couched in academic discourse that boils CRT down to key figures, key dates, and theorized tenets. While this approach has provided important insights for scholarship, the academic style of much CRT writing and teaching has often presented more of a barrier than an invitation for other audiences who might benefit from accessing the rich insights of CRT. In this current moment, academic concepts have (often spuriously) been weaponized to instill fear and disinformation.

This course humanizes CRT, a movement that has been flattened and demonized by opponents at every turn. We have visited the archives. We have read deeply in sources not often referenced. We have engaged in conversation with many CRT founders.

Through this effort, we have gathered the strands of people's stories in order to weave the tapestry of CRT's founding history. The idea that eventually became CRT was always about people and their relationships. As we progress through the course, learners engage stories of how the people who informed CRT's founding period cared for one another as they navigated the intersecting injustices of US institutions, all while encountering the same broken record of resistance to CRT work and ideas. Through these stories, this course trace timelines and characters unknown or previously unassociated with CRT, lifting up the hidden figures foundational to CRT. In all, this course demonstrates how immensely human CRT is, with a beating central heart dependent on story and a storytelling tradition.

Within this course-design portfolio, we present the following:

- Course Syllabus
- Course Reading Schedule
- Assignment Sheet: Critical Analysis
- Assignment Sheet: Seminar Project

- Student Examples: Critical Analysis
  - Emily Bailey
  - Cat Blackwell
  - Nicholas Durham
  - Grace Leuschen
  - V. Manuel Muñiz
  - Mari Newman
  - Eva Thor
- Student Examples: Counterstory Seminar Project
  - Josephine Collins
  - Natali Coronado
  - Kaley Johnson
  - Samantha Pray
  - McKenzie Shoemaker
  - Alaia Snell
  - Sam Thiersch

In all, this course, as pedagogical representation of our developing research into the humanized and storied history of CRT, demonstrates that learners at the undergraduate level can indeed engage and comprehend an accurate representation of this academic field and movement. As the student projects illustrate, when learners are presented the story of CRT—content beyond merely extracted key terms, facts, definitions, and dates—they are able to develop a better understanding that nullifies rampant disinformation while fleshing out what CRT is and what it can be.

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## *Critical Theory, Critical Race Representations: Counterstory as Literary Intervention*

### INSTRUCTOR CONTACT

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**Catalog Description:** 3 hours. Specialized, focused study of a particular topic, theme, figure, practice and/or theory within the fields of literary studies, rhetoric and writing studies.

**Prerequisite(s):** none

Core Category: English Composition and Rhetoric

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

In our fraught political moment scholars from the Humanities—English Studies, and Rhetoric and Writing Studies, particularly, have the tools to recognize the most recent attack on Critical Race

Theory (CRT), for the marketing and branding exercise that it is. As scholars of rhetoric, we know it is insufficient to point out facts concerning how the opposition is getting it wrong. Their story about what CRT is (lies and inaccuracies that they are) has already been more persuasive. As rhetoricians we know how this works. In this fraught political moment, we know that we must fight story with story. More to the point, we must fight tall tales, myths, and pre-suppositions with the truth only stories can reveal.

Through their stories, legal storytelling exemplars such as Richard Delgado, Patricia J. Williams, and Derrick A. Bell tell us, but also their field and any other field or person who has read their work that *story* is how to do this work—story is the way. Telling stories is how we invite a multiplicity of audiences into the conversation, how we build opportunities for points of access to the content, be it the Constitution, theory, legal precedent, etc. The rhetoric of story in turn informs how we as teachers of writing *teach* people to write their stories, inclusive of all the methodological considerations our fields within English studies (Literature and Creative Writing

inclusive) contribute to concepts such as worldbuilding, dialogue, character development, style, diction, etc. We have the tools, the equipment, the training, the lens, to engage this conversation on counterstory, the counterstories that will counter the stories the racist, radical right would weave and tell to disinform the public about CRT.

In the past two and half years of this mainstream and hot-button national fight, the urgency of storytelling through the methodology of counterstory has been underutilized by those seeking to defend and promote Critical Race Theory. In this course we will study how scholars in the Humanities—scholars of Rhetoric and Writing Studies in particular—can heed the call for collaboration issued by CRT founders and legal storytelling exemplars Delgado, Williams, and Bell. We will think through ways artists and activists are working to take back the narrative from those who would promote distortion and disinformation. We will explore the ways counterstory-tellers in the Humanities are extending the storytelling legacy of CRT, writing their own stories so others can be told.

## REQUIRED MATERIALS

Delgado, Richard and Jean Stefancic *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. New York UP, 2023.

Martinez, Aja Y. *Counterstory: The Rhetoric and Writing of Critical Race Theory*. NCTE, 2020.

Williams, Patricia *Giving a Damn: Racism, Romance and Gone with the Wind*. Harper Collins, 2021.

All additional course readings available as PDF files or links to e-books

## COURSE SCHEDULE OVERVIEW

Week 1: A Case for Counterstory  
Week 2: Interest Convergence and Legal Storytelling: Two Sides of the Same CRT Coin  
Week 3: The Civil Rights Chronicles  
Week 4: CRT's Origins (his)Stories  
Week 5: Critical Analysis Writing Week  
Week 6: Bestselling Bell: A Legal Storytelling for the Masses  
Week 7: Delgado: The Rodrigo Chronicles  
Week 8: Williams: Diary of a Mad Law Professor  
Week 9: Critical Analysis Writing Week  
Week 10: Giving a Damn: Racism, Romance and Gone with the Wind  
Week 11: Against Formalism: Stefancic and Delgado's Storied Past toward a Storied Future  
Week 12: Counterstory Tool Kit: Choose Your Method  
Week 13: Counterstory Project Writing Week

Week 14: Counterstory Performances/Readings/Presentations  
Week 15: Counterstory Performances/Readings/Presentations  
Week 16: Final Seminar Project Due

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

Learning objectives for this course are broad. Discussions responses online will be aimed at modeling these objectives and giving students an opportunity to see them in action; discussions, activities, assignments, and papers represent opportunities for students to practice these objectives and receive feedback that will be useful in improving as scholars. These objectives will be framed around the content of this particular course and reflect the contemporary and ongoing conversations concerning literary studies, rhetorical and writing studies and its applications and implications in relation to legal studies, particularly the academic field of critical race theory. The broad objectives are that students will:

1. Demonstrate proficiency in critical and constructive thought.
2. Demonstrate proficiency in communicating complex ideas through writing.
3. Possess a basic understanding of critical and rhetorical theory and an applicability of rhetorical and literary analysis and criticism.
4. Comprehend basic theories concerning contemporary conceptions of race and racism.
5. Understand application of basic rhetorical concepts for framing discussion/analysis and in problem solving.

## MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

### Questions and Quotes (Q&Qs):

This assignment will be due at the beginning of each class period from week 2 through week 11. Each week you will submit one typed question and two typed quotes from the assigned readings. You should pose open-ended questions that generate conversation and cannot be answered with a "yes" or "no." Your question can address a specific reading or a theme running through several readings. Quotes may be anything from the readings that resonate with you. Along with the quote, write a paragraph or two explaining why you find the quote significant. Personal reflections that relate to the readings/discussions are perfectly appropriate for this assignment. **Value: 20%**

**Rhetorical Precis (RP):** Due five times throughout the semester, you will submit a typed 2-3-page document that rhetorically analyzes a course reading of your choice on your assigned RP group date. Additional details forthcoming. **Value: 25%**

**Critical Analysis:** Due at the end of week 5 and the end of week 9, you will write a 5-6-page Critical Analysis short essay that will build toward your Counterstory Seminar Project. Each essay will

undergo a writing process in which you will submit a first draft to me and your peers for instructor and peer feedback. **Final drafts will not be accepted without documented submission of first drafts**, and grades are determined based on evidence of significant revision between first and final drafts. **Value: 30%**

**Counterstory Seminar Project:** At the conclusion of the semester, you will compose a project which will build on your arguments and

writing from your Q&Qs, RPs, Critical Analysis assignments, and other forms of discussion and documentation utilized throughout the course. In this assignment you will weave together references to our course texts, your writing and documenting, and course discussions to form a project that will comprise your final course submission. Additional details forthcoming. **Value: 25%**

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## Daily Reading Schedule

### Professor: Aja Y. Martinez

#### WEEK 1 A CASE FOR COUNTERSTORY

Q&Q: #4 due

- Tuesday  
Delgado and Stefancic from *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*  
"Preface to the Fourth Edition"  
"Introduction"
- Thursday  
Martinez "A Case for Counterstory"

#### WEEK 2 INTEREST CONVERGENCE AND LEGAL STORYTELLING: TWO SIDES OF THE SAME CRT COIN

- Tuesday  
Martinez "Derrick Bell and Counterstory as Fantasy/Allegory"

Q&Q: #1 due

- Thursday  
Bell "Brown vs Board of Education and the Interest Convergence Dilemma"

Q&Q: #2 due

#### WEEK 3 THE CIVIL RIGHTS CHRONICLES

- Tuesday  
Bell "Foreword: The Civil Rights Chronicles" pg. 4-43

Q&Q: #3 due

- Thursday  
Bell "Foreword: The Civil Rights Chronicles" pg. 43-83

#### WEEK 4 CRT'S ORIGINS (HIS)STORIES

- Tuesday  
Crenshaw "The First Decade: Critical Reflections, or 'A Foot in the Closing Door'"

Delgado and Stefancic "Rodrigo's Reappraisal"

Q&Q: #5 due

- Thursday  
Delgado "Liberal McCarthyism and the Origins of Critical Race Theory"

Q&Q: #6 due

#### WEEK 5 CRITICAL ANALYSIS WRITING WEEK

- Tuesday  
**\*\*Due for in-class peer feedback: A draft of your Critical Analysis 1 assignment\*\***

- Thursday  
**\*\*Due to BB no later than 11:59PM: Final draft of your Critical Analysis 1 assignment\*\***

#### WEEK 6 BESTSELLING BELL: A LEGAL STORYTELLING FOR THE MASSES

- Tuesday  
Bell "The Real Status of Blacks Today: Chronicle of the Constitutional Contradiction"



Q&Q: #7 due

RP Group 1

- Thursday  
Bell "The Space Traders"

Q&Q: #8 due

RP Group 2

#### WEEK 7 DELGADO: CHRONICLES AND DIARIES

- Tuesday  
Martinez "Richard Delgado and Counterstory as Narrated Dialogue"

Delgado "Rodrigo's Chronicle"

Q&Q: #9 due

RP Group 1

- Thursday  
Delgado "Metamorphosis: A Minority Professor's Life"

Delgado "Groundhog Law"

Q&Q: #10 due

RP Group 2

#### WEEK 8 WILLIAMS: DIARY OF A MAD LAW PROFESSOR

- Tuesday  
Martinez "Patricia Williams and Counterstory as Autobiographic Reflection"

Williams "A Brief Comment, with Footnotes, on the Civil Rights Chronicles"

Q&Q: #11 due

RP Group 1

- Thursday  
Williams "On Being the Object of Property"

Williams "Alchemical Notes: Reconstructing Ideals from Deconstructed Rights"

Q&Q: #12 due

RP Group 2

#### WEEK 9 CRITICAL ANALYSIS WRITING WEEK

- Tuesday  
*\*\*Due for in-class peer feedback: A draft of your Critical Analysis 2 assignment\*\**

- Thursday  
*\*\*Due to BB no later than 11:59PM: Final draft of your Critical Analysis 2 assignment\*\**

#### WEEK 10 GIVING A DAMN: RACISM, ROMANCE AND GONE WITH THE WIND

- Tuesday  
Williams *Giving a Damn: Racism, Romance and Gone with the Wind*, chapters 1-5

Q&Q: #13 due

RP Group 1

- Thursday  
Williams *Giving a Damn: Racism, Romance and Gone with the Wind*, chapters 6-9

Q&Q: #14 due

RP Group 2

#### WEEK 11 AGAINST FORMALISM: A STORIED PAST TOWARD A STORIED FUTURE

- Tuesday  
Stefancic and Delgado "Panthers and Pinstripes"

Q&Q: #15 due

RP Group 1

- Thursday  
Delgado "Storytelling for Oppositionists and Others: A Plea for Narrative"

Q&Q: #16 due

RP Group 2

## WEEK 12 COUNTERSTORY TOOL KIT: CHOOSE YOUR METHOD

- Tuesday and Thursday (Choose **one** counterstory from each of the provided genres: Fantasy/Allegory, Dialogue, and Vignette)

### *Fantasy/Allegory:*

Martinez "The Politics of Historiography, Act II"

Martinez "An Allegory About Immortality"

Martinez "On Cucuys in Bird's Feathers: A Counterstory as Parable"

### *Dialogue:*

Martinez "On Storytelling and Perspective, or, The Road Trip"

Martinez "A Plea for Critical Race Theory Counterstory: Stock Story versus Counterstory Dialogues Concerning Alejandra's 'Fit' in the Academy"

### *Vignette:*

Martinez "Quisieron enterrarnos, pero se les olvido que somos semillas" A Counterstory Afterword in Vignettes"

Martinez "Alejandra Writes a Book"

Martinez "Diary of a Mad Border Crosser"

## WEEK 13 COUNTERSTORY PROJECT WRITING WEEK

- Tuesday

**\*\*Due for in-class peer feedback: Brainstorms/Outlines/ Proposal for Counterstory Projects\*\***

- Thursday

**\*\*Due for in-class peer feedback: Draft 1 Counterstory Projects\*\***

## WEEK 14 & 15 COUNTERSTORY PERFORMANCES/ READINGS/PRESENTATIONS

## WEEK 16 FINALS WEEK

- Thursday

**Due: Final Seminar Project Due to Canvas, no later than 11:59PM**

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## *Critical Analysis Essay: Contextualizing Concepts Professor Martinez*

In this essay, your goal is to figure out how key issues/concepts covered to this point in the semester can frame, interact with, and be in discussion with the development of CRT as an academic field and/or social movement. How does the key issue/concept you've chosen work toward explaining or better understanding this aspect of CRT's history? Your basic task is to identify and define the key issue/concept and explain how this key issue/concept interacts with CRT as an academic field and/or social movement.

Your starting place will be with the selection key issue/concept as put forth by any of the texts we have surveyed in class to this point in the semester (rely on the pre-writing you've done in Q&Qs and RPs here, particularly the good questions you've already asked!):

- Counterstory
- The Tenets of CRT
- Brown vs Board of Education
- Interest Convergence
- Black and African American Literary Traditions

- 3<sup>rd</sup> Wave Feminism
- Intersections of Race/Class/Gender
- Blaxploitation and Cultural-Media Artifacts
- The Constitutional Contradiction
- Liberal McCarthyism
- Origin Stories and Contending Histories

After choosing your key issue/concept, continue your process of critical analysis with these steps (this is the pre-writing/drafting part of the assignment):

1. Construct a brief and contextualizing review of your chosen key issue/concept.
2. Place your selected key issue/concept in conversation with CRT as an academic field or social movement and conduct an analysis that seeks to understand this key issue/concept in relation to CRT.
3. Formulate a research question for which the analysis you have just completed is the answer. Remember to avoid

being too broad or generic with your question, do not ask a yes-or-no question.

4. Write the essay.

After you have selected and analyzed your selected key issue/concept you will be ready to begin your essay that includes five major components (not necessarily in this order—also avoid confusing these five components with five distinct paragraphs, as it may take several paragraphs to cover each component):

1. An introduction, in which you discuss the research question and introduce your chosen key issue/concept and discuss its significance.
2. A more detailed description of your chosen key issue/concept (provide author names, context, main argument, etc. You can rely on your Q&Qs to complete this part of the assignment.)

3. A description of CRT and its context (key figures, era, place, etc.).
4. A critical analysis of CRT with your chosen key issue/concept as the framework.
5. A discussion of the contribution your analysis makes toward better understanding how this key issue/concept helps us better discuss or understand CRT, or how CRT helps us better understand this key issue/concept.

Assignment Parameters:

- 5-6 pages or 1,500-2000 words, double-spaced.
- MLA format, including in-text citations and a Works Cited page.
- Draft 1 due Tuesday for in-class peer review.
- Revised final draft due Thursday.

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### *Seminar Project:*

### *The Craft of Counterstory/Crafting Counterstory*

*25% of total grade*

The goal of your seminar project is to account for the skills you have acquired throughout the semester concerning the craft of counterstory and application for analysis of a tenet-informed critical race theory framework. You will apply these skills toward either the analysis of a counterstory text or crafting a counterstory of your own.

#### 15% OF GRADE: COUNTERSTORY ANALYSIS

If you choose the analysis route, consider all nine tenets of critical race theory to construct your analytic framework:

- Permanence of Race and Racism
- Challenge to Dominant Ideologies
- Interest Convergence
- Race as Social Construct
- Intersectionality and Anti-Essentialism
- Interdisciplinarity
- Centrality of Experiential Knowledge and/or Unique Voices of Color
- Commitment to Social Justice
- Accessibility

For your artifact of analysis, you will have the option to choose a counterstory text from this course (Bell, Delgado, Delgado & Stefancic, Williams, or Martinez) or you can select a text (any genre is acceptable—written works, visual works, sonic works, etc.) of your own choosing that you believe represents a good artifact of counterstory.

After you have selected your text/artifact, your CRT analysis seminar project must contain the following **THREE** sections:

- **SECTION ONE:** offer a well-grounded description of counterstory. If you were describing and explaining what counterstory is to an unknowing audience, what would you say? Whose work (Bell, Delgado, Williams, Martinez) would you invoke/cite to support this explanation?
- **SECTION TWO:** next, describe—in detail—your chosen counterstory text/artifact. Be sure to discuss the genre of the artifact and include discussion of why this text is of interest to you. Also, introduce your chosen CRT tenets that constitute your analytic framework.
- **SECTION THREE:** The Analysis. Use your SECTION TWO description to analyze to text/artifact, by way of your chosen CRT tenets as a framework.

Assignment Parameters:

- 5-6 pages or 1,500-2000 words, double-spaced.
- MLA format, including in-text citations and a Works Cited page.
- First drafts due for in-class peer feedback Thursday, Week 12
- Presentations Weeks 14 & 15
- Final polished drafts due to Canvas Thursday, Week 16

## 15% OF GRADE: CRAFTING COUNTERSTORY

If you choose to craft your own counterstory, you will first choose an issue you wish to address (current or historic, domestic, or international), and will gather the researched sources being used to describe, discuss, and disseminate information about this issue. Data can include media sources such as newspaper articles, video clips, music, print advertisement, images, social media postings (i.e., tweets, Snap stories, etc.) and blogs. Data can also include social commentary as viewed through speeches, art, literature, comedy, and other sources that certainly have overlap with the above-named media sources. Keep in mind these data suggestions are by no means exhaustive as there are a variety of researched sources that can apply to the issue you will choose.

After you have selected your issue, your counterstory seminar project must contain the following **THREE** sections:

- **SECTION ONE:** offer a well-grounded description of counterstory. If you were describing and explaining what counterstory is to an unknowing audience, what would you say? Whose work (Bell, Delgado, Williams, Martinez) would you invoke/cite to support this explanation?
- **SECTION TWO:** next, describe—in detail—your chosen counterstory genre(s), context, and characters. Note that your genres of counterstory will vary depending on the issue you have chosen to discuss, so be aware that you can and likely will approach this project with a “mix-methods” approach that combines any elements from the counterstory genres we have explored in class to this point in the semester: **Counterstory as Allegory/Fantasy, Counterstory as Dialogue, Counterstory as Autobiographic Reflection, Counterstory as Book Review, Counterstory as Vignette**
- **SECTION THREE:** The Counterstory. Use your SECTION TWO description to craft a counterstory that delves into the aspects of your chosen issue.

### Assignment Parameters:

- Page length/word count varies based on chosen method/genre, double-spaced.
- MLA format, including in-text citations and a Works Cited page.
- First drafts due for in-class peer feedback **Thursday, Week 12**
- Presentations **Weeks 14 & 15**
- Final polished drafts due to Canvas **Thursday, Week 16**

## 10% OF GRADE: PRESENTATIONS

- There will be 7-10-minute presentations of your seminar projects in-class Weeks 14 & 15
- Use multimedia sites such as WordPress, Tumblr, or programs such as iMovie, Movie Maker, Prezi or Power Point to form a basis to contain your work. I will not grade

down if you are not a good public speaker (as we all have difficulties in this area from time to time) but will grade down if it is obvious you did not take this portion of the assignment seriously.

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# Critical Essay 1

## Emily Bailey

Course Design: Critical Analyses

Professor: Dr. Aja Martinez



Emily Bailey was born and raised in Keller, Texas. She recently finished her undergraduate career with a Bachelor of Arts in English with a Concentration in Writing and Rhetoric from the University of North Texas (UNT). While in school, she also received her Technical Writing Certificate from the Technical Communications Department at

UNT. In addition to these two fields, she also has an interest in education. Due to this interest, she has an academic background studying equity, literacy, and representation in schools. Other educational passions include harmful LGBTQIA+ legislation, mental health awareness, and fighting against the growing issue of book bans in schools. In the future, Emily hopes to pursue a career in the fields of publishing, marketing, or technical writing. In her spare time, she enjoys cooking, trying new restaurants, spending time with her partner, and playing with her two dogs.

It is no question that counterstories and allegories offer different modes of sharing information to readers than other forms of communication. Professor Derrick Bell is well-known for his use of allegory in illustrating the tenets of critical race theory in easily comprehensible ways. In his unpublished short story titled “Dependent Status,” Bell outlines various lessons throughout the plot, but it is important to identify the main tenet of critical race theory the essay was written to produce – interest convergence.

Interest convergence is the tenet of critical race theory coined by Professor Derrick Bell. He believed since “racism advances the interests of both white elites (materially) and working-class whites (psychically), large segments of society have little incentive to eradicate it” (Delgado 34). Bell’s most well-known example of the concept of interest convergence is the 1954 landmark court case *Brown v. Board of Education*. He believed this case “may have resulted more from the self-interest of elite whites” (Delgado 34) than from a moral desire to further the Civil Rights movement. Bell argues this decision was reached because white people who held policymaking positions saw the “economic and political advances” that would happen with an “abandonment of segregation” (Bell 524), and decided it was in the white elite’s best interest to

pass this decision. Instead of passing the decision because they had a firm goal of progress, they only chose to pass it for their own benefit.

A major advantage for white elites from this decision, was that it gave credibility to America during their struggle with Communist countries and helped show third-world nations that the United States was making progress. The decision also reassured Black Americans the freedom received during World War II efforts could be seen at home, too. Another reason this decision benefited white people was that segregation became “viewed as a barrier to further industrialization in the South” (Bell 525). These three reasons illustrate how the decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* furthered the interests of the white population. Therefore, their interest in the decision converged with the interests of Black Americans, causing the decision to be passed. Bell determined all these facts point to the conclusion that this court case was a prominent example of his interest convergence theory, which eventually became one of the main tenets of critical race theory.

Critical race theory (CRT) began in the 1970s with the writers “Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado” (Delgado 4) while others eventually joined in. Broadly, CRT is a “collection of activists and scholars engaged in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power” (Delgado 3). The movement focuses on conventional civil rights issues from a larger perspective while also questioning the liberal order and other principles. The first formal workshop of CRT was held in 1989 near Madison, Wisconsin. The CRT movement builds upon past movements, such as critical legal studies and radical feminism, while also containing ideas from many well-known theorists and philosophers. A prominent figure of the movement includes Derrick Bell, who was eventually called the father figure of the whole CRT movement. Other key figures are Alan Freeman, “Kimberlé Crenshaw, Angela Harris, Cheryl Harris, Charles Lawrence, Mari Matsuda, and Patricia Williams” (Delgado 6) along with many others. Many of these key figures have identified some of the basic tenets of CRT, which can be used when applying the theory.

While not everyone might support all these as main tenets, a variety of theorists have agreed that they serve to set up the basic idea of CRT. The first tenet is the idea that racism is ordinary, not aberrational – racism is simply a common experience for people of color in America that is not acknowledged or recognized by a lot of people. Challenging dominant ideologies, the second tenet of CRT, challenges “liberal claims of racial neutrality, equal opportunity, objectivity, color blindness, and merit” (Martinez 11). The third tenet of CRT is the idea of interest convergence, a theory created by Derrick Bell, as defined previously. The fourth tenet of this theory is race as a social construct, which holds that race is “[n]ot objective, inherent, or fixed” but rather race and “races are categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient” (Delgado 9). The fifth tenet is the idea of intersectionality and antiessentialism, which is the idea that everyone has multiple identities that intersect and overlap in various ways, so no one occupies one singular identity. Antiessentialism, the second part of this tenet, goes against the idea of essentialism and asserts that “individuals within groups maintain rights to heterogeneity of perspective, experience, lifestyle, and identity” (Martinez 14). The sixth tenet of CRT, interdisciplinarity, is where the boundaries of disciplines are crossed in order to document and convey the experiences of people (Martinez 14). The seventh tenet of CRT is the need for a centrality of experiential knowledge, where counterstory is used to share the realities of people of color so that white people can acknowledge them. The eighth tenet of CRT is the commitment to social justice, wherein narrative methods of counterstory are used to expose stereotypes and injustice by offering truths through personal experiences. These eight tenets make up the main parts of CRT, defining the movement’s main goals and theories.

CRT’s tenets might be hard for people to fully grasp, so it is important that they are written about in easily comprehensible ways. One method of sharing CRT concepts in a more accessible way for everyone is with allegory, which Derrick Bell is known for. This fits into the tenets of CRT related to the centrality of experiential knowledge and commitment to social justice since the goal of telling a counterstory is to share experiential knowledge and explain concepts such as the tenet of interest convergence in terms of the situation. While Derrick Bell is known for using counterstory and allegory in his “Civil Rights Chronicles” and his classroom, it is less well known that he wrote a short story that identified some of the CRT tenets in 1979. This story is titled “Dependent Status” and although it is unpublished, it is one of Derrick Bell’s earliest attempts at writing counterstory for CRT. While this work was never published, it shows that Bell was focused and committed to writing in a form that would easily outline tenets of CRT for everyday readers, not just people that were already part of the field. This use of allegory to share stories that identify with tenets of the CRT movement allows for more accessibility within the field, which leads to more people learning about the movement. This unpublished piece proves that Derrick Bell was an essential facet in the development of counterstory material in this field.

As Derrick Bell is the theorist who first published the idea of interest convergence, it makes sense that he utilizes it within his stories. The ideas of this tenet are woven throughout his “Civil Rights Chronicles,” but there is now evidence that he was writing about it years before then in other unpublished works. His work titled “Dependent Status” shares the meaning of interest convergence throughout the plot, most notably in one particular quote. The main character in this short story, Professor Motley, says, “Everything has to be compromised to meet standards that are often the very opposite of what our people need” (“Dependent Status” 24). This quote is referring to a Black-run institution, and it shows the reader the basic idea of Bell’s interest convergence concept. The idea that white elites make progressive moves only to further their own agendas while leaving the actual needs of people of color out of the decisions illustrates his theory. This short story was written a year before his 1980 “Brown v. Board of Education and the Interest-Convergence Dilemma” article, showing that he was working on this idea for quite some time before he coined the term for it. Although this piece is not as advanced as his “Civil Rights Chronicles” or other articles, it shows that he was working on his use of counterstories for years before he eventually began publishing them.

Derrick Bell’s use of counterstory is integral to the CRT movement, as it keeps racism visible to everyone and allows for accessibility. Bell’s commitment to social justice is shown throughout all his contributions to the CRT movement, but especially with his stories that reflect his theory of interest convergence. His story “Dependent Status” is an early work in the field of CRT that utilizes counterstory to fight for social justice and centralize experiential knowledge, which are two important CRT tenets. These tenets and the use of allegory are what allow more people to be aware of the social injustices going on in the world, leading to the continuing growth of the CRT movement. This was made possible by Bell fighting for his right to use counterstory methods in his classroom, which led him to also publish those counterstories that he built. His own interest convergence theory is accessible to so many people because of the style in which he wrote, and that is imperative for the CRT movement.

### Works Cited

- Bell, Derrick A. “Brown V. Board of Education and the Interest-Convergence Dilemma.” *Harvard Law Review*, vol. 93, no. 3, 1980, pp. 518-533. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1340546>, doi:10.2307/1340546.
- “Dependent Status” with Derrick Bell handwritten Revisions. 1979. Box 23, Folder 3. Derrick A. Bell, Jr. papers. New York University Archives, New York University Libraries, New York, NY. 15 December 2022.



Delgado, Richard, and Jean Stefancic. *Critical Race Theory (Third Edition) : An Introduction*. New York University Press, New York, 2017, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/unt/detail.action?docID=4714300>.

Martinez, Aja Y. *Counterstory: The Rhetoric and Writing of Critical Race Theory*. National Council of Teachers of English, 2020.

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# Waiting for History: Interest Convergence as Applied to the Transgender Question

**Cat Blackwell**

Course Design: Critical Analyses

Professor: Dr. Aja Martinez



Cat Sylvia Blackwell is a trans woman and activist who has spent the majority of her life in rural Central Texas. She recently graduated from the University of North Texas with a BA majoring in English with a concentration in Rhetoric and Writing and a minor in Social Science. She is currently preparing to move

to attend the English MA program at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada. Her work focuses on the intersection of rhetorical studies, trans studies, and the study of social movements with notable influence from Critical Race Theory, Marxist, and Postcolonial schools of thought.

Assimilation, legal equality, equal rights, full citizenship, whatever the name used, these civic ideals have always had a more nuanced meaning to the oppressed. On its face, full legal equality sounds like the end goal of any of the contemporary movements for civil rights but as the last sixty years have proven, getting rid of most explicitly legal discrimination does not end the social hostility and violence that led to such legislation in the first place. One of the most studied and perhaps clearest example of this is discrimination against Black Americans and the end of legal segregation and its replacement with a defacto form of segregation supplemented with the constantly expanding military-police-state apparatus. Observing the clear contradiction between the supposed “end of racism” and its clear lasting presence legally and socially led theorists such as Derrick Bell and other scholars within Critical Race Theory to conclude that the decrease in the *explicit* violence of the system is not due to the moral fiber of white people who had a change of heart about *that whole racism thing* or even necessarily because of the masses of people who fought against it. Instead, the end of explicit legal segregation that occurred following the Civil Rights Movement was largely due to the converging interests of Northern capital and white elites who could expand their profits and markets by allowing the formation of a Black bourgeoisie, thus allowing most of Black America to ideologically participate in the idealistic American Dream of upward mobility for the first time. In the process, this legal first step towards equality stopped a lot of the costly rebellion (including

boycotts, rioting, the revolutionary Black Power movement, and the costs of civil instability generally) that was expanding throughout the 1950s and 1960s and beginning to threaten the system of American capitalism and global hegemony as a whole. Much like how a driving factor in the Northern rejection of slavery before the Civil War was simply that it was no longer meaningfully profitable under an industrial and factory system, segregation lost a lot of its economic value under the emerging neoliberal, post-industrial, and globalized economic order that relied on a degree of cooperation with African and Asian countries as opposed to the sheer force that dominated the relations between the Global North and South before. To accommodate the neoliberal, globalized, and emerging multi-polar world order, social liberalism is by-and-large the standard of the day. This is compounded by how multi-party democracies tend to conglomerate interests: American Klansmen vote for the mainstream Republicans and British imperialist-nostalgists and Apartheid-reminiscers vote for the Torys, despite both parties officially holding lines that claim to be (more or less) non-racist, pro-immigrant, and pro-LGBTQ.

While looking at how socially liberal and color-blind ideals came to dominate mainstream politics in America and allows injustice to continue, it is striking how trans rights, instead of reaching a similar phase, appear to be actively moving backward extremely fast in many states and nations while the liberal establishment does little to combat it (often encouraging it, even). We will return to this question later, but looking at the current attack on trans people; is it a last violent gasp of legal oppression against trans people similar to the expansion of rightwing violence that formed in response to the succeeding Civil Rights Movement before colorblindness took the political mainstream, or is it more similar to the establishment of Jim Crow in the first place? To simplify my point of concern: considering past examples of interest convergence, are trans people looking at potentially many more decades of brutal and legal oppression or are we approaching a point of liberal integration into capitalism (that is nonetheless still extremely exploitative)?

The converging interests that helped make Black America economically and politically influential enough to end segregation are simply not there for trans people. This is not to say that it is a more

dire situation than were posed by Jim Crow laws, but that the situation is fundamentally different enough that the avenues of interest convergence that ended Jim Crow do not appear open to trans people. Similarly to Black America, transgender people tend to be disproportionately very poor and very often must turn to sex work to survive. Compounding this, trans people are more likely to be young and BIPOC than the general population. Both groups have a very negative reputation to much of white America and are seen by a substantial portion of the population as exceptionally likely to commit crime (notably pedophilia in the case of trans people, thanks to recent groomer rhetoric taking off in right-wing media). Even those that are sympathetic to the group (white liberals) only express support in a characteristically cautionary and politically expedient sense, usually unwilling to take hard stands to defend the group. To a greater extent than Black America, trans people are extremely geographically diverse, only making up around 1% of the general population, with places like Missouri having only 0.3% of the population identifying as trans.

Taking all these factors into consideration, trans people do not make up a substantial economic power block outside of a few select neighborhoods across the country. Therefore, the oppression of trans people is not rooted in economic control to the main perpetrators of it; on the contrary, it is a battle of the culture war in which making money seems secondary to purely inflicting pain against perceived ontological enemies. To the political right, trans people represent all that is wrong with modern society and are simultaneously the symptom and cause of modern decadence, capitalist excess, and economic decline. Trans people become the physical embodiment of what must be fought and suppressed, should you desire to *secure the existence of our people and a future for white children*. What exactly this will mean in the long term is unclear, but I cannot help but be reminded of the situation of European Jews before WWII. Calls for the erasure and destruction of “cultural Marxism,” “Judeo-Bolshevism,” Critical Race Theory, and “gender ideology” all run parallel. I am not insinuating that industrial-scale genocide against any group is imminent as I do not believe it is; rather that a geographically dispersed, extremely small minority group that is deeply unsympathetic to the vast majority of people (and therefore unable to meaningfully fight back on their own or exert enough economic influence to stop oppression) and the current go-to scapegoat for a rapidly growing and resurgent fascist movement that is ideologically in sync with mainstream conservatism is a profoundly worrying combination that historically can spiral beyond what many would think imaginable. It is becoming clearer every day that militant transphobes in charge of the international conservative movement are willing to force the question, which is proven by the recent intervention into Scottish politics by Westminster to stop a small bureaucratic trans rights bill from passing. This marks the first veto against Scotland in history. While the Tories led this, the Labour Party did little to stop it and the leader of the Scottish National Party that initially stood by trans people quickly stepped down after the incident. It is hard to imagine the national Democratic Party, i.e. Joe Biden, doing anything other

than a similar capitulation under the same circumstances. Both Donald Trump and Ron DeSantis have made clear stopping transitioning from being allowed further and introducing felony charges against doctors who perform gender-affirming care are some of their top legislative priorities should either be elected President in 2024. In the past few weeks and months, over a dozen states have banned gender-affirming care for minors altogether and reinstated anti-queer obscenity laws. Florida has banned gender-affirming care for adults altogether. (It should be noted that this legislative assault has happened so fast that different drafts of this section have had to be revised numerous times as the number of states enacting these policies and their severity has only grown.) Both Texas and Florida have attempted to create lists and registries of transgender people. In the case of Florida, at least six major public universities seem to have handed over lists of their transgender students to the state government. While Texas has attempted to compile this information through DMV gender changes in the past, it seems extremely likely they have already gotten this information through other means or will soon. Hundreds of anti-trans bills have been put forward in state legislatures this year, and there has been barely a peep out of most mainstream American media who seem significantly more concerned with Chinese weather balloons or daily updates on whatever zany antics Donald Trump is up to this afternoon or something equally as unimportant to the daily life of anyone who could accurately be called “working class.”

This situation contrasts how (mostly white, middle-to-upper class) assimilationist gay men were able to successfully lobby for the right of gay marriage in many blue states, undoubtedly expedited by a liberal Supreme Court culminating in the 2015 national victory of gay marriage. Although even this victory didn’t come until after tens or even hundreds of thousands of queer people were murdered by Reagan and adjacent administrations during the AIDS crisis. Cis gay people make up a larger and much more sympathetic group in the eyes of most people and have firmly integrated into the power structure of liberal capitalism at this point. It is not uncommon to see gay men that are CEOs, billionaires, or politicians. Oftentimes, these most prominent gay figures are firmly integrated into the most predatory and inhumane aspects of capital and American politics. (Peter Theil’s fascist funding, RuPaul’s fracking investments, Pete Buttigieg’s imperialist military experience, and George Santos’ virulent transphobia are just a few examples.) None of these men challenge the assumptions the general public has about queerness that trans people must live with. Due to being cis, their relationship to society “outside of the bedroom” has not changed, despite the fact each is gay. These men represent a queer bourgeoisie: examples that the *right* gay people (almost always white, cis, and generically conservative in aesthetic and politics) are perfectly able to succeed in capitalism; it’s the personal fault of everyone else for not doing as well. Contrasting this, trans woman will likely never be able to fully hide being trans in that way. The very sight of a trans woman walking down the street often challenges the emotions of cis people in a way someone like Pete Buttigieg never does. To RuPaul, women’s

clothes are a fun, theatrical costume that he can take off when he goes to the store or takes a walk. This is not the case for trans women. The exception are trans women who fully pass as cis women, although that often takes many years of transitioning, extremely restrictive and expensive surgery, or the privilege to transition at an early age which is actively becoming illegal. Boldly assuming that the current movement of militant transphobia slows down or ceases to be a driving force in mainstream politics (eventually, somehow) this slow integration into neoliberalism seems like one of the most likely routes trans people will go down in the next few decades. But as with Black and gay integration into capitalism and political society, it will undoubtedly mean more blood than anyone is willing to take responsibility for and trans people will still face severe transphobia until things change at a much more systematic and societal level.

Looking at other potential avenues for a legalistic version of trans liberation, the Supreme Court stands out. As previously discussed, the key factor in the end of segregation was not the change of heart of Southern racist white people, but instead, pressure from Northern capital as manifested in the liberal Supreme Court. For most of modern history, civil rights are not measured by bills passed by Congress but by Supreme Court decisions. Obergefell, Roe, and Brown v. Board stand as progressive triumphs to many but, as most queer Americans are well aware, the current Court's hard conservative majority has already overturned Roe v. Wade and is actively threatening Obergefell and other more well-established legal precedents. As Derrick Bell wrote, even a victory as cemented as Brown v. Board was a deeply inadequate solution that merely reflected converging, bordering on coincidental, interests of white capital and Black Americans. The interests that aligned leading to Roe v. Wade in 1973 seem to have retracted, but it remains to be seen just how far they will retreat. For the previously discussed reasons of a lack of converging interests between capital and queer people, the current Court has mostly avoided taking up cases involving trans people and seems to have a strict attitude of "leaving it up to the states" for now.

It is exceptionally hard to imagine any past endings of legal and explicit right-wing violence ever happening in the Deep South had the federal government (representing liberal capitalism) not repeatedly forced its hand. Slavery, segregation, Jim Crow, abortion rights, and gay marriage: all of which the South was dragged kicking and screaming to adopt using Civil War, the National Guard, divestment from Northern capital, or the authority of the Supreme Court. None of these seem willing to be utilized in favor of even basic legal protections of trans rights in red states anytime soon. The trans people stuck in hostile places will have to spend their time waiting for history to change that, for better or worse.

## QUITTING SMOKING: WHAT HAPPENS TO A LIFE DEFERRED?

"The public health authorities never mention the main reason many Americans have for smoking heavily, which is that smoking is a fairly sure, fairly honorable form of suicide."

Kurt Vonnegut, *Welcome to the Monkey House*

With the previous section considered, what are the options? When trans existence and healthcare become illegal in the South (as Florida has recently made reality), what is to be done? Staying while maintaining an open trans-identity at a time when such a thing is punishable by felony is akin to a death sentence for trans women, should they be imprisoned. The clearest option and the one all trans people in the South are wondering about is whether we should simply *leave*. I mean this in a Camusian sense, as I see three fundamental choices the trans community of the South faces in the near future. Many of us have already made the choice. Do we commit suicide and end the cycle of cruelty we endure; do we stay and have faith that existing democratic systems will protect us (eventually), or do we recognize the situation and abandon our homes and move to more welcoming land and continue the struggle there? I argue the final option is, more or less, the correct choice given the current circumstances, but the others need to be discussed first due to their popularity.

## SUICIDE: DEATH BEFORE DETRANSITION

Before class recently, I and several trans friends sat in a nook near campus under a mural dedicated to a trans girl who took her own life. As we sat under this mural, we all acknowledged it, but we had no interest in discussing us. To address such a thing is almost unnecessary, as we are already familiar with our shared death drives which we have all had years to confront, often in solitude. We're reminded of them every time we see the scars on our thighs, look at the news, or are subject to daily examples of casual transphobia. After years of isolation in adolescence, the last thing most trans women want to do is linger on such things when we have achieved the conditional freedom of adulthood. Under the mural, we took drags off our cigarettes and talked about the things that make us smile. We did not leave flowers at the mural; we left cigarette butts. The mural has since been painted over, but the cigarette butts remain. They will stay there long after I have moved away from Denton, Texas.

Due to the obvious restrictions most people have on completely uprooting their lives and starting a new one, the urge to leave manifests for many as suicidality. Candidly, I can say most trans women I know have had suicide attempts before and many have persistent issues due to adjacent substance abuse, either past or current. We all have scars; some literal, some mental, some faded, some fresh. Recently, among other trans women, we realized

three out of the four of us had HPPD, or hallucinogen-persisting perception disorder, due to past drug abuse. Those with HPPD have vision that is altered, often including constant visual fuzz or persistent minor visual hallucinations, almost like a mental/visual form of psychedelic tinnitus. The perceived hopelessness and want of escape that prompted this excessive drug use and parallel suicidality is not found on this scale in any other group: no other demographic seems to have a suicide rate as high as trans people (around 40% have attempted it). Most trans people will make clear the reason for this is not internal, such as the idea we are just depressed and mentally ill. It is externally driven; it is our environmental, familial, socio-economic, and political situation that prompts this. Trans people, with their geographic and social isolation, are entirely detached from political power in any meaningful sense and we all know it, to speak it aloud is just a grim reminder of that reality. On the topic of the political agency of the marginalized, critical race theorist Patricia Williams wrote, "We live in a society in which the closest equivalent of nobility is the display of unremittingly controlled will-fulness. To be perceived as unremittingly will-less is to be imbued with an almost lethal trait". Our political powerlessness is not changed by the fact that the Biden Administration will appoint an occasional trans person to a prominent position. (In fact, the massive inevitable backlash for doing so usually becomes all that is remembered of such appointments, i.e. Sam Brinton or Rachel Levine). While many persecuted groups have had large and influential organizations fighting for their rights and freedoms, trans people have no such *distinct* movement; at best being a "+" or added to the end of LGBT as "and transgender." There are no common examples of transgender agency in which we can find solace. One of the only examples that people actually know about, the Stonewall Riot, has been so thoroughly co-opted by bourgeois-assimilationist forces and removed for their original contexts that an exhibit titled "Rise Up: Stonewall" at the Dallas Holocaust Museum can be sponsored by Wells Fargo and Texas Instruments with much of the exhibit dedicated to people like Ellen DeGeneres and Pete Buttigieg.

## FAITH: ONE NATION, UNDER GOD

Trans people don't tend to be very religious or very big fans of liberal democracy. Obviously, these two concepts have a long history of directing energy toward the oppression of trans people and so we mostly perceive them in opposition to our existence. A common push of the anti-trans movement is that trans people did not exist until the last few years, and this speaks to our invisibility and lack of social prominence or power within a society dominated by Christianity and liberal democracy. Very few Southern trans people have any faith that we are going to be saved by democracy or adjacent idealistic projects. After all, when has peaceful democracy ever been what stopped the South? While it is useful from the position of a social theorist to consider democratic solutions, the conclusion that they will not help us here is something that most of us have been able to figure out on our own time. There are

certainly *some* that believe in the power of democracy, although they are often confined to areas where social progressivism is dominant and where they face little immediate existential threat from the political right. To be fair, things are looking better for trans people in places like Minnesota or California which have recently passed massive and often unprecedented pro-trans legislation, but even this is almost entirely in efforts to offset the more explicitly genocidal laws being passed in the South and other red states. Many of these laws are not additional and needed legal protections for trans people, but rather commitments by states to not extradite or cooperate with the genocidal politics of the South. The South has done the same, attempting to pass laws giving officials the ability to prohibit leaving states for gender-affirming care, meaning states are being drawn into direct legal conflict with each other. This conflict is rather unprecedented, and it is not uncommon to see columnists and writers publish things like: "It appears that no such law allowing states or citizens to reach across boundaries to enforce a state law without an extradition procedure has been enacted in the U.S. since the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, one of the most detested statutes ever passed by Congress." While evocations of the lead-up to the Civil War are common in media (they have been whenever there is social strife), I think it is safe to say, as was discussed in the first section of this essay, that there will be no Civil War over trans people. Such a fundamental overturning of democracy will take a much larger (i.e. economic) catalyst, first and foremost. The nation's largest opposition to Southern oppression, the Democratic Party (Don't laugh!), didn't come close to civil conflict over the removal of Roe V. Wade, and they will not come to that conclusion over the removal of trans people, as trans people are seen as a comparable "social issue" to a large enough portion of them.

Similarly to democratic norms, Southern trans people are rarely tied down by religious faith as most organized religions here completely hate us. There are small exceptions like reform Judaism or certain types of spiritual Christianity, but for many trans people, abandoning the faiths we were brought up in was easy, given our necessary rejection of all adjacent systems of power instilled into us from birth: parental influence, trust of government, and social/sexual norms more generally. The worst damage of religion is often inflicted on those that clung to it or were forced to stay through means of coercion. I have known several people who were sent to conversion camps or were institutionalized and typically the only thing they have to show for it are scars and a nicotine addiction.

## RECOGNITION: "AND THOUGH ENGLAND IS MINE, I MUST LEAVE IT ALL BEHIND."

If we want to deal with the issues facing the transgender community, we must first accept that the first two impulses are untenable with reality should we wish to ensure our survival. But where can trans people go that guarantees safety in the long term? It seems like the majority of Western nations are either already extremely

hostile to trans people, or on track towards becoming so, pending an election cycle or two. Hard blue states and more socially progressive countries like Canada are the best options, currently. (It is important to note many Asian countries offer notably better transgender care than much of the West and it is not uncommon for Westerners to travel to Asia for transgender healthcare. But these places pose many unique challenges relating to immigration and finances that are beyond this essay's scope.) These places are not yet swept with the current wave of government-sponsored transphobia the UK and parts of the US are seeing, and thus are the most likely to be prioritized by trans people. Unlike many past mass migrations of marginalized groups, there is no historical homeland for trans people to turn to; such a suggestion is absurd. There will be no transgender Garveyism, Zionism, or traditional revolutionary nationalism. The closest thing we, in the United States, are likely to see to this is continued waves of mostly internal migration to gay, not trans, neighborhoods, not nations. Neighborhoods like Bushwick in Brooklyn or more historically safe spaces like the extremely gentrified Castro in San Francisco stand out as examples.

As previously discussed though, the treatment of trans people in gay-centric neighborhoods often reflects the will of cis-normative gay business owners (coined "homonormativity") first and foremost. A clear example of this is Vancouver's most notable gay neighborhood, Davie Village, although examples can be picked from nearly any major city. In the '80s, the existing networks of largely trans and indigenous sex workers that worked in Davie Village were forcibly displaced by cis white gay petite-bourgeois locals who claimed they were cleaning up the neighborhood and making the gay community look better. Trans and indigenous sex workers were forced into progressively more precarious and dangerous neighborhoods, leading to many deaths, with as many as 49 being murdered by Canadian serial killer Robert Pickton into the 2000s. The gay neighborhoods that are the clearest and safest route for trans people who wish to not only survive but thrive do not guarantee safety for trans people in any sense if they are still subject to the will of queer-tolerant capital. Petite-bourgeois individuals and organizations which prioritize the further accumulation of capital before the lives of trans people, of whom a primary line of work under capitalism is certain to be sex work will not side with trans people unless they are forced to, likely through capital or whatever other means are necessary. Certainly, should self-determination and agency be truly secured for trans people, it will take prolonged conflict with not only the explicit agents of transphobia and anti-trans violence, but also against those who *should* be our allies but have been willing to throw us to the wolves at the door when expedient. These neighborhoods of cis-gay capital are where our existing power is the strongest and therefore, constitute the most likely places where we can successfully exert enough influence to meaningfully impact policy and capital enough to secure our rights, although constant attacks from all directions are almost certain, as they have always been.

Should we carve space in the urban landscape out for ourselves, we will need cigarette butts at our feet, not flowers. Fundamental values of cis society such as fertility and birthrates (evoked by fascists just as much as liberals) do not matter to us, and an evaluation of our relation to all such values, heteronormative or homonormative, is needed. The next generations of trans people will emerge and grow regardless of our personal reproductive capacities. This conventional infertility and inability to directly engage in social reproduction are what differentiate us in the first place. We have found a way to exist in spite of the existing order, and our continued existence will never be able to purely integrate into that order. We are cast in contrast to the natural world by our detractors, but this conflict is core to our existence. This conflict of cigarette butts and flowers, of mustard gas and roses attempting to occupy the same ground is what defines us to those who perceive us. Should we establish territorial political power that will guarantee our future rights, it will be through unrelenting campaigns of hundreds, if not thousands, of cigarette butts filling the streets, marking territory as safe for us. A red rose on a lapel will quickly die, but the cigarette butts we leave behind will stay long enough for the next group in our space to add to the pile after we have left. All that will eventually grow in this disordered land of cigarette butts will be beautiful wildflowers, the kind that get cut down by lawn mowers in every suburban yard daily for daring to reside there. This land of cigarette butts and wildflowers will be ignored or actively distained by most who walk by, but we will know better. For us, it will be home.

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# Policing the Black Experience and Critical Race Theory

**Nicholas Durham**

Course Design: Critical Analyses

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Nicholas Durham is a senior majoring in Criminal Justice at the University of North Texas. Initially joining the Criminal Justice program with an interest in practicing Criminal Law, their research as a McNair Scholar—where they used General Strain Theory to examine the experiences of returning citizens in their search for work—shifted their focus to

include radical criminology and conflict theory to understand socioeconomic inequality and disparate outcomes produced by the Criminal Justice system. Nicholas has presented this research at the annual meeting for the Southwestern Association of Criminal Justice as well as at the annual meeting for the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences in 2023. Completing 1000+ hours of research with the McNair Scholars program, Nicholas is now exploring ways to teach radical criminology using Counterstory and Critical Fabulation. In their most recently completed semester, they boast a GPA of 3.76 in their major concentration and has made the President's List 4 times. Nicholas will be applying to PhD programs this Fall.

In January 2023, the Florida state government banned the AP African American history course administered by the College Board, doing so because material within the course allegedly violated state laws ratified in the Stop W.O.K.E Act. The Stop W.O.K.E Act is a piece of legislation crafted to protect workers and students from instructional material that implicitly or explicitly implicates those with white ancestry in racial atrocities, injustices, and missteps in this country's past (Mazzei and Hartocollis 2023). The bill states that it prohibits instruction that supports several ideas: that races have moral superiority to other races, that privilege is racial, that white people are solely or more weightily responsible for racial injustice, or rather, that white people are more responsible for correcting it, if and when it exists. This bill protects against any educational program that supports or suggests the idea that racism is systemic (Vile 2022). These ideas, the bill asserts, are not only harmful to classroom and work environments but cause psychological damage to children and workers exposed to them.

A pamphlet from Florida Governor Ron DeSantis's office claims that curriculum including these ideas is indoctrinating students with

principles from Critical Race Theory— colloquially called CRT— inserting this bill into a growing list of attacks against the framework and its entry into educational institutions and work environments (Vile 2022). Despite claims made by DeSantis and leaders of other state governments that Critical Race Theory is being taught at the primary and secondary school level, there is no evidence of this being found in such educational settings throughout the country. Consequently, there are no studies cited to support the claim that students who interact with CRT material are experiencing psychological harm. What is more, the AP African American History course does not teach CRT. The course offers supplemental instruction on aspects of Black scholarship like Black queer studies, intersectional theory (a tenet of CRT but not CRT in its entirety), the prison abolition movement, and the reparations movement, with primary and secondary source documents for literature explaining these concepts, but not CRT.

DeSantis thinks that CRT is a volatile dogma— that it obviously supports racial moral superiority and privileges Black students at the expense of white students, that by learning about or acknowledging the existence of systemic racial injustice it makes white people responsible for ending it and guilty for perpetuating it. He takes issue with intersectionality and the idea of racial privilege, saying that these concepts inherently rank the value of people based on the color of their skin and thereby diminishes the importance of values like personal responsibility. But CRT does not teach those things; we have no research to indicate that CRT *does* those things, and the AP African American History course does not teach CRT, so what is going on? CRT is heavily *influenced* by radical thinkers like bell hooks, Angela Davis, and Alice Walker (several authors named in the banning of the course). Sure, one could make the argument that Critical Race Theorists might be happy to see these authors being taught at the grade school level, or that these authors, while definitely not Critical Race Theorists, might agree with certain tenets of CRT, but at the end of the day, there is a difference between making these observations and lying, declaring Black authors and their materials CRT in an effort to make them seem scarier. But perhaps fear is the point, to prime the general population to be terrified of material that they were not being taught in the first place and creating hysteria about the

burgeoning recognition of racial history and literature connected to CRT and broader black authorship at the root. Framing it this way, the Florida state government draws more immediate parallels to past, more openly and comfortably racist governments that passed laws banning Black literature and authorship for the exact same reasons expressed today. How can we use the patterns of policing Black authorship to examine the development of Critical Race Theory and its rejection in academic institutions?

This country has a highly visible legal history of quashing dissent emanating from the shared experiences of the marginalized, especially in literature. For Black people, this history begins with the anti-literacy laws passed after the Stono Rebellion in 1739 and through to the 1840s (Maddox 2022). As the name suggests, anti-literacy laws were laws that prohibited enslaved persons from being taught how to read or write. They were passed primarily in Southern states like Georgia, Louisiana, Alabama, Virginia, and Missouri in response to slave rebellions both domestic and abroad. Originally aimed at preventing slaves from forging their freedom documents, these codes eventually took shape with the subsequent purpose of denying enslaved persons the ability to convey and theorize their experiences in writing, a key factor in the organization and catalyzation of movements and uprisings (Calahan 2020). There is no doubt that these laws prevented innumerable rebellions, while further disenfranchising and dehumanizing vast swaths of the enslaved population.

When enslaved persons would escape to the free states, despite often not knowing how to read or write, they were still able to share their experiences orally, something that slaveowners and lawmakers could not reasonably expect to sanction. The experiences of fugitive slaves were used to make abolitionist literature in the form of slave narratives, revealing the horrors and injustices of slavery to sympathetic whites and freedmen in the free states (Johnson 1972). This led to several conflicts and riots across the country in the name of ending slavery, which, in turn, led to a bipartisan gag rule being passed in Congress in 1836 banning anti-slavery rhetoric, not even a year before Missouri passed laws that outlawed abolitionist expression in any form, a model several southern states would follow soon after (Hart 2009). In some parts of Louisiana, it was prohibited to even have a conversation with a slave (Hart 2009). In 1857, on the cusp of the Civil War, freedman Minister Samuel Greene was arrested in Maryland for owning “abolition papers of an inflammatory character,” and “a certain abolition pamphlet called ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin ... calculated to create discontent amongst the colored population” (Armenti 2011). In hideous irony, Minister Samuel Greene was, indeed, an abolitionist operating the leg of the Underground Railroad that ran through Maryland, regularly collaborating with Harriet Tubman. Under suspicion of this, a local sheriff searched his home where the copy of the book was found. The District Attorney believed that there was insufficient evidence to convict Minister Samuel Greene of his alleged involvement with the Underground Railroad, but his ownership of the book alone was a crime akin to harboring

fugitives. Uncle Tom’s Cabin was written by abolitionist author Harriet Beecher Stowe and was thus hostile towards slavery; it was composed largely from the anecdotes of the enslaved persons that Stowe interviewed. Chapter 272 of the Act of 1841 of Maryland states that “if any free Negroes or mulatto knowingly have in his or her possession any abolition handbill, pamphlet, newspaper, pictorial representation or other paper of an inflammatory character, having a tendency to create discontent amongst or stir up to insurrection the people of color in this state, he or she shall be deemed guilty of felony” (Armenti 2011). Minister Samuel Greene was sentenced to 10 years in the Maryland State Penitentiary, meaning his imprisonment would outlast slavery. The purpose of these laws was to protect the institution of slavery, but the arguments supporting them were often framed as an effort to protect enslaved persons from their own determinations. This logic is further exemplified in the words of Frederick Douglass’s former master Hugh Auld explaining to his wife upon discovering her teaching Douglass how to read: “He should know nothing but the will of his master and learn to obey it. As to himself, learning will do him no good, but a great deal of harm, making him disconsolate and unhappy. If you teach him how to read, he’ll want to know how to write, and this accomplished, he’ll be running away with himself” (Maddox 2022).

These sentiments shockingly resonate with the paternalistic attitudes used to deride the material in the AP African American History course, with the DeSantis administration declaring the course “lacks educational value,” saying that the material the course teaches is inflammatory and only teaches Black students to hold resentment for their classmates and their country (Atterbury 2023).

After slavery, these laws and attitudes evolved. While the 13th and 14th amendments essentially nixed laws that prohibited former slaves and their descendants from being taught to read or write, states made a conscious (and unconstitutional) effort to undermine the education of their Black populations, by segregating and severely underfunding their schools, and passing laws that made it legal to discriminate against them in educational institutions. Myths of Black people being emotional and unintelligent prevailed in social settings and there were debates among Black authors about how to best combat these myths, some objecting to the use of Ebonics or talking about racism in a way that made white people feel threatened (Carpenter 2008). Writers like Zora Neale Hurston and Langston Hughes understood that curating the Black experience for a white audience was not only an erasure of reality and history, which would make for less interesting writing, but it produced writing situations with far less freedom to define themselves. However, this practice of curation was also done at the level of publishing, where publishers (overwhelmingly white) would reject books and articles that depicted racism and the experience of blackness in ways that challenged dominant narratives (Brier 2022). It is no surprise that this policing of what is valuable literature to Black people persisted and remained recognizable into

the present day. We see this policing at its most extreme in our prisons where most book banning in this country takes place. It is no surprise that prisons are places where unpaid labor is legal and common, regular people are typically barred from speaking to and interviewing inmates, and the overwhelming majority of the incarcerated are marginalized people— disproportionately Black people. Most of these bans on books are due to supposed “security threats” (Birch 2022).

Critical Race Theory, a frame of legal analysis that asserts that race shapes the way we perceive and interpret law, has been no stranger to tone-policing. Derrick A. Bell, the godfather of Critical Race Theory, was often told that his approach to teaching law, which centered the experience of Black people and placed special emphasis on race was inappropriate, inadequate, and threatening. In one instance, while guest teaching at Stanford Law School in the 1980s, white law students started to hold supplemental classes to override his Constitutional law course; this happened, of course, without his knowledge. Allegedly, there were widespread complaints about his teaching style and his framing of the Constitution, but no specific complaints were identified (Gilliam 1986). According to Richard Delgado in “Liberal McCarthyism and The Origins of Critical Race Theory,” (2009), several high ranking universities during the 1960s and 1970s engaged in concerted effort by deans and administrators to expunge radical professors from their campuses in anticipation of an invasion of minority students due to the liquidation of segregation laws. The common mode of thought was that the universities could not risk the commingling of minorities and white Communists (who might corrupt them with ideas of revolution and praxis against the status quo) or else the universities might not survive. These same white professors were nuisances as students, challenging the legitimacy of their universities through protests and other acts of civil disobedience. While the white radical students were merely seen as an annoyance, possessing a nagging overzealousness that would eventually fade with age and tenure, they worried that minorities exposed to radical thought who had more prescient grievances could be fatal to their institutions. They had seen as much from the Black Panthers and other radical groups of minorities who called themselves Maoist, Marxist-Leninists, and Anarchists and were strikingly effective at subverting and disrupting educational institutions. While the universities would have to accept the influx of minorities, they could admit certain *kinds* of minorities who could more readily mold themselves to moderate beliefs that reinforced dominant liberal ideologies. They were interested in exalting these chosen students to the upper echelons of their race and placing them in leadership positions. These students would serve as controlled opposition to their more radical counterparts, while also being used as evidence of universities’ acceptance of minorities and thus the enduring success of liberal capitalism. But for this to happen, radical professors like David Trubek could not remain during this process; they were denied tenure and faced difficulty with politics in academia for the rest of their careers. Ironically, many of these professors would inadvertently contribute to the

creation of Critical Race Theory in the 1980s through their involvement with Critical Legal Studies. A founder of Critical Race Theory Kimberlé Crenshaw was briefly a member of the CLS movement, even at one point being a student of Trubek. Crenshaw documented that despite CLS being markedly more progressive than traditional liberal legal studies, it was still in opposition to the implications of the convergence of radical thought with the racially marginalized experience (Crenshaw). During a CLS conference in 1985, nearly a decade after CLS was first established, Crenshaw and other feminist women of color in attendance decided to host a workshop asking what attracted and repelled people of color from membership in CLS. This workshop wasn’t well received by the white members of CLS, who accused the hosts of the workshop of “mau-mauing” the movement in such a way that might destroy it (Crenshaw pp.1355). According to Crenshaw, the defensiveness of the white CLS members regarding race was a consistent feature of CLS conferences. As a result, the recognition of a need for a legal theory and movement that explicitly centered race was born. Crenshaw and others fulfilled this need by developing Critical Race Theory.

When Critical Race Theory became an officially recognized school of thought, it was immediately met with criticisms from CLS scholars, traditional legal jurists, politicians, pundits, and journalists saying that it was either racist, paranoid, Marxist, or redundant. Writers like James Lindsay, an incredibly influential opponent of CRT, allege that Derrick Bell’s Interest-Convergence thesis, a staple of CRT, was born out of a rejection of desegregation, rather than an analysis of material circumstances and outcomes surrounding the Brown decision— the framing here suggesting that Bell was a reverse racist (Lindsay page number?). Adhering to the logic of anti-literacy laws and soft book banning practices, Lindsay misreads Bell and CRT. The corresponding logic suggests that when a Black person uses their unique perspective to tell their stories and reexamine histories, and in the case that those actions inadvertently or directly challenge dominant narratives, those storytellers are, at best, paranoid and, at worst, engaging in mindlessly destructive, self-harming, rabble rousing; it then becomes the job of the dominant power groups to rein those black writers and storytellers in.

Up until recently, CRT and its tenets may have been discouraged and treated with dismissiveness in many post-secondary institutions, but today CRT is banned in 10 states, with more states announcing plans to restrict its teaching in higher education. States like Iowa and Florida which have banned CRT at the post-secondary level take aim at CRT’s tenets that say the roots of this country are racist, and assert that this belief means that Black people are inherently superior to white people in terms of morality, or that white people are inherently superior to Black people in terms of class and privilege (Miller et al. pp.16-19 ), but any elementary reading of a document using or explaining CRT would immediately reveal these revelations to be incongruent with the framework. It is not Critical Race Theory that these states are attacking— CRT is

only an unfortunate victim of the attack; these states are focused on diminishing and disappearing Black people's conscious experience of racism and their reaction to that experience. That is why bell hooks and Richard Delgado share space on a list of banned authors in Florida. Just like the banning of abolitionist expression following the Stono Rebellion, the banning of CRT takes place after protests following George Floyd's lynching in 2020; and just like slaves were made unable to write their own history, the attacks on CRT and its familial pedagogy in educational institutions rob us of the tools needed to understand it.

Earlier in this essay, I wrote about Minister Samuel Greene, how his ownership of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a book written using the experiences of Black people in bondage, was akin to harboring fugitive slaves. On its face, we might be inclined to look at the authors of his incarceration with a shocked expression, dumbfounded, in awe of their paranoia. But it is important that we recognize there is little actual difference between freeing the enslaved and allowing them to freely share their experiences. Black people can't be free until they can freely share their experiences of captivity.

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# Williams's Polar Bears: The Intersection of Black and Female

Grace Leuschen

Course Design: Critical Analyses

Professor: Dr. Aja Martinez



Grace Leuschen is a recent graduate of the University of North Texas with a Bachelor's in English with a concentration in Writing and Rhetoric. Growing up in a small town in Nebraska, Grace mixes her experiences of being a Texas transplant and a Midwesterner to influence her unique perspective in writing. Grace currently lives in Denton, Texas as she

prepares for a future career in publishing and editing.

I grew up in Nebraska, an hour away from one of the best zoos in the country. When I was little, my sister and I would visit it at least once every summer, whether we went with our parents or grandparents, or even with a friend's family who had season passes. I'd lean over the railings in front of the different exhibits, peering at the animals and their various living spaces. My favorite exhibit was the Desert Dome, because there were real, live bats—my favorite animal at the time—which would swoop over your head at any moment, but also partially because my sister was terrified of bats. To make things fair, I had to wait around forever while my little sister dawdled at every animal in the arctic exhibit, especially the polar bears. We would wait for what felt like hours for the bears to finally uncurl from their naps and swim in their little pool, which you could watch from underneath the water through the glass. I understood her obsession with the polar bears. They were quite beautiful, and the way their fur moved under the water was mesmerizing. But then, they would yawn, showing their huge teeth and black gums, or I would read the "Fun Facts!" panel next to their enclosure about how *Polar bears can weigh as much as a dozen men!* and *Polar bears can smell prey up to 20 miles away!* and I would immediately be reminded of why I hated the polar bears. The glass between them and me felt thin, and I would beg my parents to let me move on to the penguin exhibit next door. I never liked being close to something that scary, especially when the only things keeping me safe were a thick pane of glass and a safety railing.

My brain wandered to those memories of the zoo when I read Patricia Williams's "On Being the Object of Property." The story that her godmother Marjorie told her about the polar bear world

reminded me of those feelings I had as a kid—awe at the way Williams put the allegory to work and fear once I understood it. The way she intertwined it with her counterstory and made it a part of the story of her history helped me understand how the allegory connected to her Black womanhood, a reoccurring theme in "On Being the Object of Property." Williams does not explicitly mention Critical Race Theory (CRT), because the movement was yet to be born, but her groundbreaking work helped set the stage for important discussions about intersectionality that can help us understand CRT now. CRT is a social movement and field of study consisting of "a collection of activists and scholars engaged in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power" (Delgado and Stefancic 3). Beginning in law studies with scholars like Alan Freeman, Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado, and others, it eventually expanded to include different areas of study and is now made up of eight tenets including intersectionality, which we will focus on here. Delgado and Stefancic define intersectionality as "the examination of race, sex, class, national origin, and sexual orientation and how their combination plays out in various settings" (58). Intersectionality is a vital part of CRT because it assumes that everyone has many layers of identities that affect their oppression. As an original founder of CRT, Williams's contributions to counterstory, interdisciplinarity, and the lived intersectional experience of Black women were invaluable. The essay focused on here, "On Being the Object of Property," was first published in 1988 in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, a Women and Gender Studies Journal, but was later published as a part of her book *Alchemy of Race and Rights: Diary of a Law Professor* in 1991. Despite, and because of, her crafty writing that combined several types of texts and directly analyzed her position as a Black woman in the world, her book was not well received by all audiences, especially white male critics. It is upon this backdrop that we will explore Williams's polar bear allegory in relation to CRT and intersectionality.

Williams first introduces the polar bear allegory on page thirteen, about halfway through her essay. It is a story that her godmother Marjorie told her when she asked for a story about her grandmother's childhood. Instead of directly telling Williams about her girlhood, Marjorie would tell her a story about a child "who



wandered into a world of polar bears, who was prayed over by polar bears, and in the end eaten" (Williams 16). The polar bear world was made to serve polar bears, and the child also existed for them. The child's death made the polar bears "holy." (16).

This story can be viewed from different angles to better understand intersectionality and the unique experience of Black women. First, Black women are the child in the allegory, because they are often sacrificed for other groups' success, like how the polar bears sacrifice the child to become more holy. Social movements such as Civil Rights and Women's Rights have often discarded Black women to appeal to white men to acquire better legal rights. In *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, Delgado and Stefancic propose a hypothetical situation that shows how Black women, and especially Black mothers, have a certain intersection of identities that stops them from feeling completely accepted in Civil Rights and Feminist groups. Both groups wholeheartedly accept the Black mother's participation, but the groups are made to serve the most common or most easily accepted identity that represents them, like Black men or white women, not her (Delgado and Stefancic 59-61). Williams comments on this "anonymity" of being a Black single mother, where the intersection of identities renders a person almost invisible (6). Like the polar bear world, the Civil Rights and Feminist groups were created to serve a certain type of person. While the mother choosing to join these groups was not as accidental as the child "wandering" into the polar bear world, the intersection of her identities is not in her control, making the wandering in this case her joining the groups without knowing beforehand that the groups did not serve her collection of identities.

This analysis can be further extended with Williams's main argument about will. Throughout "On Being the Object of Property," Williams argues that laws oppress people of color, especially women of color, because those that write the laws assume that Black people have no will or self-determination. Using Williams's analysis, if a certain race removes a person's will, then layers of other identities like gender, sexuality, ability, and parental status further remove a person's will in the eyes of their oppressors. Thus, the wandering child in the polar bear allegory refers to not only people of color but women of color, because they have even less direction and determination than their male counterparts. Furthermore, Williams's analysis of market theory and race further extends this analysis. Williams's recount of Marjorie's story states that "The child's life was not in vain because the polar bears had been made holy by *its* suffering" (16, emphasis added). The "it" in this case is the child, stripped of their humanity. They are not offered a personal pronoun, just an "it" referring to their life. Just before the introduction of the polar bear story, Williams writes about the devaluation of Black people in the market, saying,

...When black people were bought and sold as slaves, they were placed beyond the bounds of humanity...in the twistedness of our brave new world, when blacks have been thrust out of the market and it is white children who are bought

and sold, black babies have become "worthless" currency to adoption agents... (16)

In this new world, Black people are no longer not humans, but also worthless in the market. They are an "it" that makes the polar bears holy. Black women, then, at the crossroads of Black worthlessness and female worthlessness, are much worse off.

We can then factor functionalism into this discussion, which Williams references in a footnote that links to a book, *The Dialectical Biologist* by Richard Levins and Richard Lewontin. According to Levins and Lewontin, functionalism is the view that "the entire universe, including living organisms and especially the human species and its social organization, was perfectly fitted to serve a higher purpose" (66). They explain that those with this view believe that man's higher purpose is God, and then everything else was created to serve man. This reflects the polar bear race in Williams's story, for whom "the rest of the living world was fashioned to serve," but who also serve a God, who sent them the "message" in the form of the child and made them holy (16). Functionalism helps explain the low value of Black female life; they exist below both white people and men in the functionalist hierarchy. Black mothers, then, have an even lower position, since they also serve their children. This triple-layer (or even quadruple- or more layered, depending on the number of intersections between other identity statuses) oppression places them in a unique position that the CRT tenet of intersectionality understands.

Intersectionality not only understands that a person's experience is unique, but also that it can be complex. Williams's metaphor of the polar bears understands this and complicates Black women's perspectives. Another fun animal fact that I read during my trips to the zoo was that polar bears have black skin and transparent fur; they appear white only because of the way the light hits their bodies. In this way, Black women can be both the polar bears and the wandering child. Williams sees herself as a polar bear because of her mixed ancestry. She writes early in the essay about how her mother brings up her white ancestor Austin Miller when she learns Williams will be going to law school. Miller was a lawyer and enslaver of her great-great-grandmother Sophie, and Williams writes that when her mother did this, she "hid the lonely, black, defiled-female part of herself and pushed me forward as the projection of a competent self, a cool rather than despairing self, a masculine rather than a feminine self" (6). Her mother was encouraging her to fit in with the polar bears, to put the white part of herself on display to survive and succeed in law school, a place dominated by white men. In this instance, she was one of the polar bears, pretending life was made for her, but Black women were still the child she sacrificed. To succeed, she had to forsake women like herself and allow their further oppression. Women's and Gender Studies calls this the *matrix of domination*, the idea that different forms, or axes, of domination pull from similar forms of oppression (Hamilton et al. 319). In the matrix of domination, some individuals can succeed by meeting societal standards for

their race, gender, sexuality, and other identities, but will always be supporting the oppression of others in their same identities (319). Hamilton et al. discuss that for women, some gain individual benefits by aligning their identities with societal requirements but will always lose as a collective because they will be oppressing other women by continuing harmful stereotypes (330). So, Black women are both the polar bear and the child; blending in with polar bears and joining the white people will always oppress the other Black women, making them also the child put up as a sacrifice. In neither position can Black women truly escape oppression.

This analysis by no means fully explores the complexity of Williams's polar bear allegory, because it plays into different conversations around CRT. Nevertheless, the evidence I examined here illustrates the CRT tenet of intersectionality, showing how removing racism from the equation would not end Black women's suffering, at least not until other oppressive systems like sexism remain. In the closing line of her essay, Williams refers to the "complexity of messages implied in our being," describing how all hold a complex, distinct perspective, which is why intersectionality is one of CRT's tenets. Williams does a fantastic job at showing this, composing a fascinating essay in her own style that reflects her experiences as a Black woman.

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# Counterstory and Representation Through Media

## V. Manuel Muñiz

Course Design: Critical Analyses

Professor: Dr. Aja Martinez



Born and raised in the small town of Fate, Texas, Manuel Muñiz is a student at The University of North Texas. He is currently a sophomore studying Media Arts with the hopes of working in the entertainment industry as an actor, writer, and producer. Manuel's interests include collecting comic books and vinyl, film, dancing baile folklorico, writing, as well as 35mm photography.

Over the years film, literature, and television have provided a way for minority groups to tell their own stories for large mainstream audiences. These can be stories that are passed down from generation to generation that hold great meaning within their communities or personal experiences that would not normally appeal to general audiences that are outside of the storyteller's local population. Marginalized and disenfranchised groups such as Black and Indigenous communities have histories of being under and misrepresented throughout different forms of media over the years. How have historically neglected communities managed to provide an outlet for their creativity and to elevate their people?

Over the years there has been a shift in the media landscape where these disenfranchised voices have been uplifted and grabbed the brass ring to assert that their art is to be taken just as seriously as their white peers. I will be primarily focusing my lens on film. Some of the most culturally relevant film and television is being written, produced, directed, and starring Black, Indigenous, Asian, and Latine talent. The increase in diversity has allowed actors belonging to disadvantaged populations to shine. Their work is even, unsurprisingly, receiving critical acclaim. These works utilize counterstory to share their experiences to explore issues that are related to race, gender, class and other forms of oppression within the framework of critical race theory.

However, the entertainment industry and general audiences weren't always so welcoming to media that wasn't made specifically for white audiences. The Blaxploitation genre of films is one of the most iconic forms of counterstorytelling that we have ever

seen. Blaxploitation was a way to provide a platform for Black filmmakers and actors who had been largely excluded from mainstream Hollywood productions. These films were a way to address social and political issues that were relevant to Black audiences. Not only that but the way that black characters were portrayed served as a weapon to challenge stereotypes that dominated the silver screen.

However not all Blaxploitation films can be considered counterstories. Some films within the genre, explicitly those made by white producers, were made solely to cash in on the aesthetic. These colonized versions of the genre relied heavily on stereotypes and negative portrayals of Black characters. This led to perpetuating more harm than the original intention of the originators of the Blaxploitation genre. Overall, it is a complex subject that was able to challenge cultural norms regarding race and representation in The United States.

One of the most successful films of this era was 1971's *Shaft*, directed by Gordon Parks, which starred Richard Roundtree as John Shaft. The film was a critical success. It is notable for its portrayal of a Black hero that paved the way for years to come. In "What's The Big Deal?: Shaft (1971)" Eric Snider states that, "Prior to this, you hardly saw black characters in movies who weren't servants, slaves, yes-men, criminals, or buffoons." Not only were Black people being presented in a positive light, but Black people were also able to see themselves fight back their oppressors and outsmart their white antagonists on screen. Providing a brand-new experience and outlet for Black moviegoing audiences. The success helped to create a market for African American films and destroyed the notion that films with Black protagonists were not commercially viable.

Director Spike Lee is another filmmaker whose art has done a tremendous amount of work to highlight important social issues in the Black community. His films explore themes such as systemic racism, police brutality, and the everyday experiences of African Americans in urban environments. One of the most highly respected works among his filmography is 1989's *Do the Right Thing*. This film portrays the tensions that brew between Black and white

residents in a Brooklyn neighborhood. The film's use of music, visuals, and unconventional storytelling techniques challenged typical Hollywood conventions and helped establish Spike Lee as a major voice in independent filmmaking.

*Do the Right Thing* utilizes counterstory in many ways. Spike Lee engages his personal experiences as a Black man who was born in 1957, but the film is also inspired by the racially-motivated killings of local Black community members in New York City. In "Do the Right Thing": Why Spike Lee's Masterpiece Remains Essential Cinema 30 Years Later" by Tambay Obenson offers insight on the film, "*Do the Right Thing* doesn't provide answers to the problems it exposes. Instead, the film reflects back to its audience their own perspectives on prejudice and compliance. The film was made as the result of provocations, and so it in turn provokes." This film's message is just as relevant today as when it was first released. We're still fighting through systemic racism and police brutality, which go hand in hand, to this very day. Obenson goes on to say that "It's quite damning that so little seems to have changed in three decades."

Spike Lee's commitment to telling the hard-hitting truth to audiences is quite the remarkable feat. He is a groundbreaking artist who inspires storytellers of all kinds. Another example of telling the hard-hitting truth through counterstory was the highly praised *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* by Dee Brown. By sharing the story of the American Indian Wars from the perspective of Native American tribes, Dee Brown was able to pass down generational knowledge that went on to be adapted into film and television movies. Another example of stories passed down is the 1998 Indigenous coming-of-age film *Smoke Signals*.

*Smoke Signals* draws inspiration from traditional Coeur d'Alene stories and features a cast full of young talented Indigenous actors. Ellen C. Caldwell asserts in "What *Smokes Signals* Means 20 years later" that "The film is constantly playing with and dismantling and challenging dominant Native stereotypes." The film is inherently political not just in providing a platform for Native voices in the form of actors but also actually casting American Indian Movement activist John Trudell. Native American Studies Scholar Joanna Hearne, whose work is featured in Caldwell's article goes on to mention that "Trudell's mellow, humorous performance as a radio host suggests the film's self-conscious presentation as a new indigenous voice in popular culture." *Smoke Signals* quite literally amplifies Native voices to the fullest ability.

Challenging dominant cultural narratives is what counterstory is all about. Through counterstory these films offer alternative perspectives that center marginalized communities' experiences and magnify our causes. Another such filmmaker who has been able to do this is Jordan Peele. He may have gotten his start in comedy but has certainly made use of his skills as a horror genius to thrill and provoke audiences through the subject matter of his films. In his directorial debut, *Get Out* (2017), Peele uses horror

as a metaphor to explore the experience of being a Black man in America. Peele exposes the sinister ways that racism operates in the United States. The idea that racism is just a relic of the past is challenged in the film.

*Get Out* uses the fear and anxiety that many Black people feel through their everyday life as a device to challenge nonblack audiences to think about their place in our society. The horror genre is utilized to the fullest extent to elevate the emotional impact of the story. Jordan Peele's use of counterstory through his filmography is a powerful tool. Peele has the ability to create narratives that are both socially and culturally relevant, while also providing opportunities for Black communities to tell their own stories in their own ways.

Many of the filmmakers and authors mentioned within this essay share one common interest: To tell their personal stories and make an impact. The doors that are open to their white colleagues aren't always there for underrepresented and socially excluded populations. United through art, they were all unknowingly participating in Critical Race Theory. Like the scholars that we've been analyzing in class, fiction or even non-fiction is a useful tool that makes learning the material accessible for people of many backgrounds.

In particular Derrick Bell's short sci-fi story, "The Space Traders" is a great example of making Critical Race Theory easy to comprehend. The story and language are meant to be understood by people of various backgrounds. Bell establishes a great relationship with the audience and challenges them with such a complex topic this is simultaneously entertaining. "The Space Traders" conceptually explores race, power, and moral dilemmas in America, forcing the audience to confront any Anti-Black biases that are prevalent throughout the story.

Despite ruling class interests to keep marginalized communities down by silencing their voices, storytellers of diverse backgrounds have been able to rise above and share truly remarkable work that will go on to influence generations down the line. Counterstory allows creativity to thrive along with uplifting the community and provides a spotlight for actors, writers, and directors of diverse backgrounds. Storytelling is one of the most fundamentally important traits that people all over the world share. As a hopeful future filmmaker, being able to potentially create art that is as intellectually stimulating as any of the work discussed within this essay is something that I can only hope to achieve even a fraction of.

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# Critical Analysis 2: Liberal McCarthyism

## Mari Newman

Course Design: Critical Analyses

Professor: Dr. Aja Martinez



Mari Newman is a senior in the Undergraduate English Literature program at the University of North Texas. They grew up in Houston, Texas, and have been residing in Denton for two years. Their academic studies focus on feminism, ecocriticism, and critical race studies. They enjoy writing about their experiences as a queer and trans person,

and strive to provide these perspectives within their authorship. They have won both the Outstanding Undergraduate Student in English from the University of North Texas English department, as well as the Fall 2022 Outstanding Student Award for the Women and Gender Studies program. After graduating Fall 2023, they plan on continuing their academic path in a graduate studies program to obtain a PhD in Literature with a focus on ecocriticism and feminism.

Liberal McCarthyism is a concept first coined by prominent critical race theorist Richard Delgado in his 2009 article “Liberal McCarthyism and the Origins of Critical Race Theory.” Delgado posits Liberal McCarthyism as the era “in the late 1960s and early 1970s, [where] a wave of firings of left-wing professors swept academia” (Delgado 1533). This “wave of firings” came during a tumultuous time in American race relations, as schools were becoming more integrated, their neoliberal presidents finding “problems” with the newly added students of color learning sociological, legal, and other forms of leftist thought being taught by left-leaning professors. However, as Delgado points out in his article, many of the discharged professors continued their careers in academia, “each wr[iting] books or articles contributing to radical scholarship and t[eaching] students, some of whom, like Kimberlé Crenshaw, went on to make contributions almost equal to those of their mentors and teachers” (Delgado 1543). Thus, Delgado points to how the timeline of critical legal studies (CLS) and eventually critical race theory (CRT) was ignited by the flames of the leftist professors who were fired or denied tenure. Therefore, would CRT still have developed as it has today without the Liberal McCarthyism present within academia- not only in the sixties and seventies, but currently as well?

First, a more detailed background of what Liberal McCarthyism is in the context of academia must be provided to thoroughly understand its goal and consequences. As aforementioned, the term Liberal McCarthyism was first coined by Richard Delgado in his article “Liberal McCarthyism and the Origins of Critical Race Theory” published in 2009. Delgado describes the era when “a little-known purge of radical Marxist and socialist professors, most of them young, talented, and white, that began around 1969 or 1970 and continued for a decade afterward, in which the abovementioned figures and others of their elite class played parts.” (Delgado 1508) This era is what Delgado later coins as Liberal McCarthyism as, the schools which the fired professors taught were acknowledged liberal elite schools- Harvard, Berkeley, UCLA- yet actively partook in the removal of their left-leaning professors (Delgado 1508). Delgado continues on to state, “I posit that this wave of what I call liberal McCarthyism occurred because America’s guardians foresaw the arrival of growing numbers of black and Latino applicants knocking at the doors of America’s leading colleges and universities.” (Delgado 1508).

Thus, Delgado points to how these liberal universities were threatened by the combination of these leftist professors interacting with the incoming wave of Black and Brown students in elite universities. The professors were mostly white men whose lives were far from ruined from their dismissals from elite academia, and in fact, went on to help further their respective fields as Delgado notes, “none of the scholars stole away into oblivion. Each continued teaching and writing about radical thought. Far from discouraging them, the establishment merely forced them- at some inconvenience, to be sure- to carry out their work somewhere else” (Delgado 1543). However, despite the professors’ privileged status, the “wave of firings” Delgado describes sent a larger message to academia overall. The message was that students of color are allowed if they are not being raised with radical ideals and pushing back against the status quo. This pushback, however, is what eventually leads to the inception of critical race theory.

Before discussing how Liberal McCarthyism leads us to critical race theory however, context must first be provided on how CRT came to fruition. CRT as we know it today emerged in the 1970s,



“as a number of lawyers, activists, and legal scholars across the country realized, more or less simultaneously, that the heady advances of the civil rights era of the 1960s had stalled and, in many respects, were being rolled back” (Delgado and Stefancic 4). Namely, the “landmark” case of *Brown v. Board of Education* was not the giant leap toward equality it posed itself to be. Instead of being a radical move toward desegregation and the integration of schools, the “rollbacks” which came as a consequence of *Brown v. Board of Education* in the 1960s such as “narrow lower court interpretation, administrative foot dragging, and delay” (Delgado and Stefancic 4), compelled scholars such as “Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado” to come forth to write about the growing need for CRT (Delgado and Stefancic 4). Thus, Bell, Freeman, Delgado, Crenshaw, and others, started coming together to form what critical race theory studies should look like in the future moving forward to discourage farces of equality such as *Brown v. Board of Education* provided.

The early days of critical race theory emerged through ideas derived from “critical legal studies and radical feminism,” with inspiration from “European philosophers and theorists such as Antonio Gramsci, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida, as well as from the American radical tradition exemplified by such figures as Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. Du Bois” (Delgado and Stefancic 5). Early critical race theory also drew inspiration from “the Black Power and Chicano movements of the sixties and early seventies” (Delgado and Stefancic 5). The early theorists of CRT such as Derrick Bell and Richard Delgado, were soon joined by others who noticed a growing need for critical race theory, holding their “first workshop at a convent outside Madison, Wisconsin, in the summer of 1989” (Delgado and Stefancic 4). From this point on, CRT grew from a small movement in legal studies to a multitude of other disciplines within academia, becoming more refined from scholars of all disciplines recognizing a growing need for critical race studies and its tenets. Today, critical race theory spans from its origin of legal studies to various disciplines of academia such as Education, the Humanities, and more. Additionally, due to the controversial status of critical race theory pedagogy in public schools, CRT has grown into not only a subculture in academia, but a social movement across the nation for scholars who are trying to teach the real history of racism in the United States.

In many ways, the Liberal McCarthyist era within academia helped spark the movement of critical race theory. While it is true that not all the professors Delgado discusses directly went on to the field of CRT, several provided indirect force to push the movement forward. As Delgado describes, “Critical race theory grew and thrived in part because of the imaginative and organizational skills of small groups of scholars and organizers. But it also appeared at a particular moment and on a set scene.” (Delgado 1544) The “particular moment and on a set scene” Delgado describes comes from the unrest of the Civil Rights Movement in addition to the presence of radical thought on campuses. The presidents of each professor’s respective schools’ actions leading up to their firing or denial of

tenure provides us with the formula of how CRT was developed at an early stage. As Delgado expresses in his article, CRT would still have come to fruition even if the Liberal McCarthyist movement had not occurred, yet it was still needed by the early scholars of the CLS and CRT movements because of the motivation it gave non-conformist thinkers.

However, it is safe to say the critical race theory movement would not have moved forward at the pace of evolution it did without Liberal McCarthyism as, “campus leftists, hounded out of their jobs by a liberal educational establishment, ironically released energies and talents that produced writing, student scholarship programs, mentors, journals, and specialized classes in a number of non-elite colleges and universities” (Delgado 1544). Namely, the Liberal McCarthyist wave that swept through elite academia gave the founders and prominent thinkers behind CLS a push to move forward with their scholarships which helped develop critical race theory. While Liberal McCarthyism created unrest and anxiety in academia, it was perhaps a necessary evil for the founders of critical race theory to recognize the ever-growing need for CRT and its tenets in academia.

Ultimately, the wave of Liberal McCarthyism which caused many leftist professors to lose their jobs in the 1960s and 1970s directly links to the inception of CRT, as, “two leftist legal movements (cls and critical race theory), as well as radical criminology, flourished following geographic relocation of these rejected scholars from elite schools” (Delgado 1544). This is to say that although critical race theory as a movement would still have developed over time, it is safe to posit that it would not have expanded at its booming pace in the 1960s and 1970s without the push Liberal McCarthyism created for rejected scholars. Seeing opportunity rather than defeat at this wave of Liberal McCarthyism, many of the fired professors went on to influence the CRT movement themselves- whether directly by means of writing articles or publishing books, as well as indirectly- through teaching students who would later go on to become prominent figures within the critical race theory movement. It is also safe to say that without Liberal McCarthyism’s impact on academia, there would not have been a non-conformist emphasis on thinking in the field of CRT, which has led to its non-conformist forms of writing such as counterstories. As Delgado declares, “despite elite forces in government and education seem[ing] poised to respond with pressures for conformity in order to maintain the current order as long as possible” it is simultaneously “hard to kill an idea” (Delgado 1543). The non-conformist disposition of the scholars affected by Liberal McCarthyism forces us to investigate the issues our nation faces today with a similar lens, and applying radical scholarship is just as important in our current political climate as it was in the 1960s and 1970s. While governments push scholars and non-conformists to stick to the status quo, it is our job to remind them what happens when one tries to “kill an idea” (Delgado 1543).

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# How Alice Walker Shaped Derrick Bell's Counterstory

**Eva Thor**

Course Design: Critical Analyses

Professor: Dr. Aja Martinez



Eva Thor is an Undergraduate at the University of North Texas pursuing an English major with a focus on Writing and Rhetoric. She is also working toward a certificate in legal studies, a political science minor, and a psychology minor. Eva has always felt a deep connection to learning - particularly to the language arts. It is through this passion

that she decided to join various honor societies such as UNT's Honors College, the National Society of Leadership and Success, and Sigma Tau Delta. She is a founding member and two-time officer of a creative writing workshop and book club at UNT named Pen & Paper. Though the future is forever changing, Eva currently intends to pursue a career in either law, library sciences, or the study of rhetoric. Between semesters, Eva volunteers at the Abandoned Animal Rescue in her hometown, helping to ensure that its small dogs are fed, walked, and given the attention they need.

At the convergence point of creative writing and dense research lies the art of counterstory. Counterstory is a fictitious story told in opposition to a dominant narrative. The dominant narrative generally focuses on the middle-class white male perspective. Counterstory is commonly used by minority communities to share their stories, experiences, and overall knowledge over a variety of subjects, such as history or law. It is not limited to writing, and can be explored through nearly any medium from paintings to songs. Within the past 60 years, it has been used by scholars as a method of presenting their research in a more easily understood and accessible way.

Counterstory lives in the heart of critical race theory (CRT) studies. It was popularized in this field by Derrick Bell in the 1980s through works such as his 1987 book *And We Are Not Saved*. Many of his stories follow the composite character, Geneva Crenshaw. She is a Black civil rights lawyer, inspired by many of the women in Bell's life. She experiences fantastical scenarios, such as traveling back in time to speak to the founding fathers and revealing

that their racist ideologies were purposefully written into the U.S. Constitution.

It was recently discovered by Aja Y. Martinez and Robert O. Smith that Bell was writing stories even earlier than the late 1980s. The piece – determined to have been written around 1979 because of a letter – is titled “Dependent Status” and explores the point of view of a Black professor at a law school who is writing a book “relating the role of civil rights law in American racism, and arguing that even the pro-civil rights laws and court decisions serve the ends of racism more than they help blacks” (“Dependent Status” with revisions 9). This story contains some of the ideas that Bell explored in his published works, which serve as key sources of research for CRT in modern times. “Dependent Status” may be one of his earliest attempts at written counterstory.<sup>1</sup> However, there was something else Martinez and Smith discovered that is even more fascinating. She discovered that there was a back-to-back revising and editing interaction between Derrick Bell and acclaimed writer and activist Alice Walker. Walker is known from her popular works such as *The Color Purple*, and her involvement in the Civil Rights and Feminist movements. While scholars know they interacted because they were friends and neighbors, there has not been any proof that they exchanged ideas and critiques of their works until now. Given her help in his drafting “Dependent Status,” she may have been an inspiration for – or even edited – his future works. This leaves scholars to ponder the following: how much has Alice Walker influenced Derrick Bell's work in crafting his famous counterstories? Answering this question may provide more insight into Bell's works as a whole and, because of this, how peoples' understandings of critical race theory may have been shaped throughout the past century.

## THE CONTEXT OF CRT

Critical race theory was coined in the late 1980s by Kimberlé Crenshaw. It is a term used both as an academic study and a movement. The academic field focuses on researching how areas such as law, social movements, and media are shaped by

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that Bell taught at Harvard Law School through counterstory, hence the specification of written counterstory.

race. It is generally studied in fields such as law, sociology, and rhetoric. As described by many academics, CRT contains the following tenets: permanence of race and racism, a commitment to challenging dominant ideologies, interest convergence, race as a social construct, intersectionality and anti-essentialism, interdisciplinary thought, centrality of experiences from those of color and/or unique voices of color, commitment to social justice, and accessibility.<sup>2</sup> Scholars of CRT argue these tenets play a role in the social conception of race as shaped by law, media, etc. – as well as how social conceptions of race are shaped by it in return.

The movement, on the other hand, consists of the application of the tenets with regard to activism with the goal of bringing awareness to the effects of racism and encouraging others to be critical of those effects. There are a great number of people involved with CRT, though its most prominent figures include, but are not limited to, the following: Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Richard Delgado, Patricia J. Williams, and Cheryl Harris. It is rooted in the works of Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. Du Bois, and others. Derrick Bell, in particular, is wildly credited as the “godfather of critical race theory” due to his work as an author and lawyer (Fortin). As a young man, Bell was highly involved with the Civil Rights Movement. During that time, he was a civil rights lawyer working as a clerk for Thurgood Marshall and an associate of Constance Baker Motley. The connections he built there would shape his voice as a writer and lawyer forever.

## ALICE WALKER'S INFLUENCE

Alice Walker, first and foremost, guided Derrick Bell's counterstories through her edits on his unpublished piece “Dependent Status.” There are two documents that are of importance in analyzing how she did so: the notes on his draft and its accompanying letter.

Some of her lengthier notes involve how Bell depicts Black authors. Walker questions if his opinion of individuals she refers to as “Baldwin...Morrison, Jordan” are why his character, Martin, was harsh in his criticisms of Black authors whom he believed wrote to quell white people's racist fears about Black people, providing comfort over reality (“Dependent Status” with marginal feedback 8). Following this she notes, “remember to put the blame where it belongs—not on the victims of John Leonard and the Times” (Dependent Status” with marginal feedback 8). These two notes encouraged Bell to change the section, instead shifting the blame from the Black authors to white readers, who took the works as proof of “the degradation of blacks as their natural (and preferred) condition rather than the predictable result of white racism laid on for generations” (“Dependent Status” with revisions 8). From her edits, Walker reshaped how Bell wrote about Black authors in this piece, and potentially his later works as well. Because of this, Bell was able to build his skills as a creative writer. Moreover, it refined

his depiction of the tenet of anti-essentialism by showcasing that there isn't only one reason behind the Black authors' popularities with white people.

Walker not only checked Bell in his criticisms against Black authors, but also his depiction of the Black community. On page 9, Bell wrote that “my hope was that the little folk would somehow hear about it” (“Dependent Status” 9). She noted how it sounded “condescending” and “petty” (“Dependent Status” with marginal feedback 9). Taking her advice, he changed the line to include Black community leaders and Black academics. Through Walker's perspective, Bell's work became more sympathetic to the Black community. Without her help he would have focused his criticisms toward to the Black community rather than toward those who criticize it, which would have depicted a completely different narrative than his revised version. That is, Martin would have been hypocritical regarding his perception of the Black community when compared with his desire to have the experiences of Black individuals be shared through his book.

One of the only notes repeated by Walker involved Bell's depiction of Black women in his story. When Bell described the character Hannah, she noted, “in short she's high yellow or in any other words not a 'black' black woman. This is important—has stereotype value you might say” (“Dependent Status” with marginal feedback 12). She reacted similarly to the description of Martha Williams, saying, “another non-black colored black woman” (“Dependent Status” with marginal feedback 21). In bringing this up, Walker forced Bell to acknowledge the potential effects of describe Black women in these ways. While he did not change these descriptions in later edits of “Dependent Status,” his description of Geneva in *The Civil Rights Chronicles* is someone who is “as proud of her height as she was of her ebony complexion” (“Forward: The Civil Rights Chronicles” 13). His description of Geneva implies that Bell looked for outside perspective – specifically that of Black women he knows – in order to try and illustrate a more accurate depiction of the Black female experience. He would have learned to do so as a response to Walker's reaction to his Black female characters in “Dependent Status.”

In her letter, Walker suggests Bell read works by Cyrus Colter, noting how his works are about the “black bourgeois life in Chicago;” moreover, she notes it would do Bell well to learn more about this “since so many blacks are now in or aspire to that class” (Walker). She also notes the works of Langston Hughes, a famous black poet. If Bell were to have read these, he would have greater insight to the perspectives “Dependent Status” explores, and the creative writing field. By sharing these sources of information and her personal edits and opinions, she provided Bell with one of the most valuable resources: an interdisciplinary perspective. He was not limited by his focus on legal matters because he had the advice of a well-established creative writer.

<sup>2</sup> See Martinez's *Counterstory: The Rhetoric and Writing of Critical Race Theory*, pp. 9-18.

## HOW WALKER'S EDITS RELATE TO CRT

This analysis is an attempt at expanding the discussion of Derrick Bell's inspirations to include Alice Walker. Key tenets of CRT, such as the centrality of the minority experience, anti-essentialism, and interdisciplinary thought were explored through their discussions. By influencing how Bell writes about certain topics, Walker has shaped how he depicts these topics – and others – in his works. By changing how he depicts Black authors, Bell gave the protagonist of “Dependent Status” the appearance of being understanding and well informed, albeit still biased. It reframed the statement to be less critical of the authors and more critical of the racist white readers, adding to Bell's anti-essentialist knowledge. After Walker critiqued his descriptions of Black women, Bell learned to ask for the opinions of more Black women when creating Geneva so that she would accurately reflect their experiences. Her edits themselves aid to interdisciplinary thought because her unique perspective as a creative writer gave Bell insight on how to apply his legal knowledge to his counterstories.

When Bell was once asked who Geneva Crenshaw, the protagonist of his later works, was, he responded by noting individuals such as his mother, his wife, and Constance Baker Motley. Given how much he cared about Alice Walker's input, I am inclined to believe she is one of these women. If she is, in fact, one of these women, then Walker's ideas are imbedded into foundations of critical race theory.

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# New Trek, 90s Trek, & the Permanence of Racism

## Josephine Collins

Course Design: Counterstory

Professor: Dr. Aja Martinez



Josephine Collins is a native Texan who recently earned their English Writing and Rhetoric BA from the University of North Texas. They are continuing their education in Library Science and plans to complete their master's in 2025. During their university education, Josephine has become interested in the effects of race and racism in popular

media. By including their own Queer, disabled, and colored identities in their analyses, they are better able to understand the implications of seemingly harmless media. Writing has always been Josephine's passion, and they are excited to extend their skills into critical race theory. Josephine recognizes the importance of diverse stories and is increasingly concerned with the country's book-banning trend. As a potential librarian, they have a more personal connection with these bans and plans to preserve threatened texts in the future. Until then, Josephine plans to continue their scholarly writing in hopes of spreading more awareness to marginalized stories, experiences, and knowledge.

Setting: Yates<sup>1</sup>, Tilly<sup>2</sup>, and James<sup>3</sup> find themselves in an online debate. Yates recently posted her essay about *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1987-94) and James disagrees with its thesis. Her essay dissects the colonial undertones of the *Star Trek* franchise despite its faux anti-colonialism rhetoric. She is an older fan of the series and prefers *Deep Space Nine* (1993-9). Although she understands the negative aspects of *Trek*, she remains faithful in favor of the redeemable aspects. James has a similar history to the franchise. He's a traditional *Trek* fan that sees no wrong with the original series or its following spin-offs. He's audacious, says what's on his mind, and believes *Trek* is about taking hold

of the galaxy. Tilly is representative of a newer generation of *Trek* viewers. She's able to look at what new and old *Trek* have to offer and isn't opposed to critiquing the media she loves. As such, she's an avid reader of Yates's *Trek* blog and frequently comments under her articles. Their conversation starts in the comment section under Yates's post:

@tilly80true: great essay, are you planning on writing about any new trek series? the recent *Discovery* season has me hooked!

@James\_793: You know, I haven't been a fan of NuTrek. It just doesn't feel the same. It's too woke. Frankly, I don't think this author would be able to assess any series.

@WillYates: What makes it "woke"?

@James\_793: TV these days always tries to put as many gay people in the show as possible, it's just forced diversity and I don't want to think about that kind of stuff.

@WillYates: [She reflects on the unsaid aspects of this statement. It isn't just queer people but people of color too, both of whom have existed in *Trek* for decades.] But minorities think about that "stuff" nearly every day. Why not have it represented in our media? Furthermore, it's a reflection of our world's evolving politics. Mini skirts just aren't political anymore<sup>4</sup>, now we're focusing on this generation's fight.

@James\_793: Fight for what, exactly? *Trek* has never been about politics, it's a show about exploring space

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1 Yates is the last name of the *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* (DS9) character Kasidy Yates-Sisko, and she is married to the franchise's first Black Captain. She often grounds him during his moral debates about racism.

2 Yates's fan is named after Sylvia Tilly from *Star Trek: Discovery*. She often speaks out of turn and shows reverence to her superiors. *Discovery* is considered new *Trek* (sometimes called "NuTrek" on internet spaces) and many fans disregard the series as "not *Trek* enough."

3 James is named after James T. Kirk, the Captain most people remember when they think of *Star Trek*. His "shoot first, ask questions later" attitude explains many of his actions.

4 One of the original series' hallmark characteristics is its inclusion of mini-skirts as a sign of female empowerment.



and punching aliens. It should stay away from any agenda and just be.

@WillYates: Star Trek has always pushed an agenda. Even the originals wanted a diverse cast (of course, that diversity could've been improved). Its politics revolved around female autonomy and racial integration—both we take for granted today. Now we're asking for more of that. More independent women<sup>5</sup>, more people of color holding important jobs, and more queer people leaving the closet<sup>6</sup>.

@tilly80true: i completely agree, i've been watching 90s trek recently and i'm shocked at how outdated it can be. ds9<sup>7</sup> had a lot of good points, but new trek feels more familiar. idk i've only been watching the franchise for a few months

@James\_793: Did we not get diversity in The Next Generation? What about Geordi, Worf, or Guinan even? Your essay critiques everything, I'm beginning to think you don't like the show at all, you just want to make everything into a problem.

@WillYates: [She ignores the fact that Worf and Guinan were aliens played by Black actors. Important still, but not weighted the same as Black humans and the history that evokes.] I do love this show, including its problems. And you're right, not everything about Trek is political, Voyager's Threshold<sup>8</sup> certainly wasn't.

@tilly80true: LOL

@WillYates: You must understand that our media is representative of our current realities. We cannot create the future

out of nothing, it's simply unpredictable. Science fiction has always been about warping our current reality, and our current reality is still concerned with race and queerness.

@James\_793: But ideally, the future exists outside of race. How are we going to move on from the past if you keep bringing it up?

@tilly80true: seriously dude?

@WillYates: [She cringes at the race-blind argument, wondering for a moment if she should abandon the conversation altogether.] Even star trek doesn't believe that. Let That Be Your Last Battlefield<sup>9</sup>, Measure of A Man<sup>10</sup>, and Journey's End<sup>11</sup> (to name a few) directly tackle race. I mean have you watched Far Beyond The Stars<sup>12</sup> before? The captain is transported to the past and struggles with 1950s racism. It directly contrasts other trek attempts at putting our characters in the past by being realistic about its consequences.

@James\_793: To be honest, I've never cared for deep space nine. Too boring, I wanted to watch people find strange new worlds and all that.

@WillYates: [She wonders if his disdain for DS9 has to do with its cast and the heavy subject matter. After all, this show is arguably more diverse than a lot of new *Trek*. She digresses and starts to unpack the colonial aspects of his argument, the main subject matter in her essay, which he likely didn't read past its abstract.] Trek is constantly perpetuating colonist fantasies, it's no wonder TNG is more exciting to you.

5 Nyota Uhura was one of the first Black women on major television to work alongside white men. She was not a servant or maid, but rather an independent officer with her own credentials. The same can be said for many of the women in *Star Trek: The Original Series* (TOS).

6 One of the main cast members of TOS was a composite Asian character named Sulu. His actor, George Takei, came out as gay in 2005—well after TOS had ended. Modern *Trek* actors can play characters that reflect their orientation, but that wasn't the case in the 1960s and Takei kept his identity secret from his employers.

7 *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* (1993-9).

8 Credited by fans as one of the most absurd *Star Trek* episodes ever aired. It has arguably no moral dilemma or significant message beyond entertainment.

9 *Star Trek: The Original Series* (S3 EP15) episode in which aliens on planet Cheron discriminate against those with black skin on their left side, and white on the right. The dominant race on Cheron have black skin on their right, and white on their left. The episode is meant to showcase the absurdity of race and racism.

10 *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (S2 EP9) episode in which Data, the only sentient android in known existence, is debated as property. Captain Picard argues on behalf of his autonomy and reflects on the moral and historical implications of enslaving an entire race.

11 *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (S7 EP20) episode in which Indigenous Puebloan peoples advocate for their right to own their own planet. They searched for 200 years for new land after being forcibly removed and have made Dorvan V their new home. However, a brutal alien race threatens to remove the Puebloan settlement as per their Federation treaty.

12 *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* (S6 EP 13) episode in which Captain Sisko hallucinates living as an underappreciated writer in the 1950s. He lives through the time period's racism as a Black man and struggles to publish Black leaders in his science fiction. The story ends with a core message that Captain Sisko is "the dream" that Black Americans fought for.

@James\_793: Oh here we go

@WillYates: No listen. Remember Journey's End?

@James\_793: Yes, with the Maquis right?

@tilly80true: i just watched it! after a group of Indigenous peoples spent 200 years searching for new land, they finally landed on Dorvan V. the alien cardassians then try to remove the humans because the planet is theirs by treaty. they are allowed to keep the planet, but not after a revolutionary group called the Maquis forms.

@WillYates: Yes exactly Tilly. It's supposed to be a disturbing repeat of past relocation attempts. One of the questions I presented in my essay asked: why didn't United Earth return Puebloan land in the first place? Why did UE make the Puebloan people feel like they had to leave the entire planet to find peace? UE actively ignored their ongoing participation in American colonization. And, in setting up this episode, the writers continue a cycle of violence that could've been avoided had the federation ended their occupation.

@tilly80true: earth isn't united unless all voices are present

@James\_793: Again, the future has no colonization. They had their planet in the end. Did you even watch the episode?

@WillYates: [She ignores the jab, internally acknowledging they watched two versions of the same episode.] Why would the writers create this plot in the first place if not to perpetuate Indigenous suffering? The episode reeks of ignorance, and there are multiple instances of TNG trying and failing to tackle important issues.

@tilly80true: no seriously, Code of Honor<sup>13</sup> almost made me stop watching altogether

@James\_793: I think we can all agree that that episode was racist.

@WillYates: Can we though? This episode was written, acted, and wasn't prevented from airing. It's definitely racist, but did any of the creators care enough to stop its production? The insensitivity Trek often displays shows how ill-informed the writers can be. The same can be said for their colonist rhetoric.

@James\_793: You can't enjoy anything can you? Honestly, it was a different time back then. 😊

@WillYates: It's difficult when your favorite shows don't understand the harm they perpetuate. My writing concerns all aspects of the show—that means acknowledging the negative and positive.

@tilly80true: @James\_793 i think you're being unfair, she's clearly a trek fan. i haven't been watching for nearly as long as @WillYates has, but i read her article and she has valid points. is there anything specific you have a problem with?

@James\_793: @tilly80true I don't understand why you're still intruding in our conversation. Both of us have watched Trek throughout our childhood and I've been following @WillYates's work for a couple years now. She's been drilling this thesis since day one, she's never satisfied.

@tilly80true: she likely isn't satisfied because people like you keep popping up. she wrote an essay using evidence from the show and you still insist that she doesn't know what she's talking about. you said it yourself, she's been a fan since you've been. what makes her points any less valid than yours? if anything, her argument makes more sense because she has the evidence.

@James\_793: What is all this "evidence" you keep talking about? She's repeating the same woke talking points that every liberal says about everything.

@tilly80true: i can easily tell you because I read her article. think about trek's refrain: "to boldly go where no man has gone before" this sounds like the european idea of the "new world." they didn't recognize that the new world wasn't in fact "new," but preoccupied by Indigenous peoples. the same goes for many trek episodes: our characters search new worlds for new resources only to find the planet full of alien life, it's manifest destiny all over again. the prime directive protects juvenile civilizations, but the moment they reach warp capability they are deemed advanced enough for contact. the federation is quick to swoop in to assimilate these races once they are legally allowed to do so. if that's not space-colonialism, i don't know what is 🙄

@WillYates: Precisely Tilly. It's important to note that these sentiments are undertones within the show. Very rarely are we confronted with the reality of the Federation and its assimilationist tactics. Take Ro Laren for example: when she joined the Enterprise, she was

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13 *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (S1 EP4) episode in which the main cast meets a primitive, African-themed alien race. The episode is largely regarded as racist by fans, actors, directors, and critics for its harmful stereotypes.

told that her cultural earpiece was against Starfleet's uniform regulations. Worf can maintain some of his Klingon regalia, but only to a certain degree. How many alien races are being forced to discard their cultural artifacts because it doesn't fit their dress code? It's impossible to tell, but small details like these are what signaled a red flag for me. The underlying message here is "we'll tolerate your differences until it becomes inconvenient for us to do so."

@tilly80true: yes! i also liked your point about resource control. one of the federation's main benefits is the sharing of resources and technology. this scientific exchange thus becomes a new form of currency and planets are weighted by how much they can provide.

@James\_739: So @WillYates's essay is about undertones turned overtones, it sounds like.

@WillYates: Now you're getting it. Nothing in the show outwardly labels the Federation as colonialist, but their actions speak for themselves. By connecting these fictional instances of racial intolerance, we can better understand where Star Trek stands in terms of race and racism. Give my essay a read, for real this time, and let me know when you've come up with a valid argument beyond "this is too woke."

— @WillYates has muted the thread —

Setting: Ending the thread has left Yates rather unsatisfied—she's shutting out another vocal critic. After conversing with dozens of people just like James, however, the recurring talking points around 'wokeness' have become too exhausting to deal with. Communication goes both ways after all, she cannot teach if they will not listen. This Tilly has potential, and Yates has decided to message her directly so they may continue their conversation privately.

02/23/23 – 5:03 PM

Yates: Hello there! Sorry to mute the thread, I felt the conversation was becoming circular. I appreciated what you had to say, it's been a while since I've spoken with a new trekkie, welcome to the community.

TillyT: all good, that guy was a bit annoying. thanks for DMing me tho, i really do enjoy your articles :)

Yates: Thank you for reading them. My blog is very small, but there aren't many places to display my media commentary. I've published in literary magazines of course, I just don't think they'd be interested in my Star Trek rambles.

TillyT: not at all! I'm a college student rn and i would love a break from all the intense research material. your blog is something I can understand, and it's helped me think about other shows I like in the same way

Yates: You certainly sound like a college student. I hope your studies treat you well!

TillyT: actually before you muted the thread i was gonna link an article i read recently. it's about white ownership, it could help put the conversation in context

TillyT: [doi.org/10.2307/1341787](https://doi.org/10.2307/1341787)

Yates: Thank you for that, I'll take some time later this afternoon to give it a read. I'll let you know my thoughts on it soon.

TillyT: cool, ttyl :)

02/25/23 – 10:31 AM

Yates: Hello again, it's been a couple of days hasn't it? I got caught up with work affairs, but I found the time to look through the document you sent me. Needless to say it was spot on! I've read similar arguments before, but I like Harris's concise explanation. What were your opinions?

TillyT: i thought James was feeling a sense of ownership over the series, ownership that his whiteness has always allowed him

Yates: Interesting thought, I'd have to agree. Harris immediately creates the connection between whiteness and property—both being a way to exclude<sup>14</sup>. In claiming his right to watch Trek without minority persons, James was claiming property rights through white entitlement. He ignores the overwhelming number of people of color who have enjoyed Trek since its inception—they too have equal "rights" over the franchise.

TillyT: for sure! the disconnect between his reality (white men being the sole leaders of science fiction) and the truth (non-whites and queer people being integral to SF) is what reinforces his

<sup>14</sup> Early in Harris's article "Whiteness as Property," she cites the connection between whiteness and property as a method of exclusion. Only white people can have access to whiteness (and all that it provides) and non-whites who attempt to obtain the same privileges are thus trespassing (Harris 1714, 41).

mentality, he does not value<sup>15</sup> the “ownership” that minorities equally share over trek.

Yates: While I often criticize TOS and TNG for being...unpleasant at times, DS9 is what really sold me. As I mentioned before, *Far Beyond the Stars* did not shy away from race as it presented an honest example of what Black time travel would look like. People of color cannot succumb to the fantasy of existing in a romanticized past because it requires a painful perspective<sup>16</sup>. Black ownership cannot exist without historical context, hence why trek’s race-blind shows are more popular with white audiences. Race makes them uncomfortable, and they like escaping the reality of history while indulging in their futures.

TillyT: wow, I sense a new article coming. perhaps you could also talk about whiteness being the “default” or “neutral standard.” i think many people, well many white people, don’t see their own historical significance because of this. James is wary of minority characters because they aren’t his normal, only *he* is normal as a privileged man

Yates: [She thinks about the idea, lets it run through her head for a moment. The inclination to write is nearly inescapable and so she opens a new document. Of course, the credit for this piece wouldn’t be hers alone.] Indeed. There’s a duality to trek that I enjoy, pieces I like and others that I don’t. Progressive writers make mistakes often, and many centrist writers give us just enough representation to maintain this sense of social progression. Many people of color my age are used to seeing themselves play a supporting, or even background, role in media. I’m glad things are changing now, but I can see that not everyone is welcoming the shift.

TillyT: well of course not. if whiteness and property are inherently intertwined, then our marginalized presence threatens their whiteness. after all, white identity is tied directly to the exclusion of others (saying “white” is more like saying “non-Black” than anything tangible) and thus this label is threatened under diversity.

Yates: And this is no doubt worsened by colorblindness. As Harris states, colorblindness “creates a false linkage between race and inferiority” and “denies the real linkage between race

and oppression under systematic white supremacy” (pp. 1768). Sorry for getting annoyingly academic with a direct quote, but Harris speaks well enough for herself. In viewing race and racism as simply prejudice (or simple rudeness, even), people like James can cite characters like Worf<sup>17</sup> as a grand step towards equality. I appreciate diverse casting, but Worf was never meant to embody the future success of Black humans.

Yates: Would you like to write an article with me? I’m thinking we could explain the permanent nature of race in Trek, and science fiction more broadly, using our conversation. We’d have to exchange drafts for a while, but I think the collaboration would help the both of us. Only if you have time for the project, that is. I’ll credit your words regardless and I’ll happily send you updates if you’re uninterested in the writing aspect.

TillyT: i would love that! i hope my internet-speak hasn’t put you off (i promise I can write a decent paper). let me start writing my own ideas down and i’ll share them with you ASAP

Yates: Looking forward to it. Bye for now, I too need time to collect my thoughts. Thanks for indulging me with this conversation, we have much to say!

02/25/23 – 1:20 PM

### Works Cited

- Harris, Cheryl I. “Whiteness as Property.” *Harvard Law Review*, vol. 106, no. 8, 1993, pp. 1707–91. JSTOR, doi.org/10.2307/1341787.
- Williams, Patricia J. *Giving A Damn: Race, Romance and Gone with the Wind*. TLS Books, 2021.

15 Harris uses whiteness as property to explain the devaluation of Black property/ownership. Black-owned land, for example, is still seen as less than white counterparts because of the devaluation of Blackness. See “How racial bias in appraisals affects the devaluation of homes in majority-Black neighborhoods” (Jonathan Rothwell & Andre M. Perry) for an example of arbitrary devaluation of Black property.

16 See Patricia J. Williams’s *Giving A Damn: Racism, Romance and Gone with the Wind* for further discussion about historical romanticism. Williams’s main point of reference concerns the book’s namesake, *Gone with the Wind* (1939), and its glorification of a notably dangerous time for Black people.

17 Worf’s character is indeed played by a Black actor (Michael Dorn) but is notably treated as a non-human alien. James referenced him earlier as an example of racial inclusion, but Geordi LaForge (Levar Burton) was the only Black human in the main TNG cast. He is outnumbered by the 4.5 white humans on the character list (of which there’s a total of five human characters and one half-human). No other race beside Black and white, including the actors themselves, were represented in the main cast.

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# Mi Mamá, La que Lloro

## Natali Coronado

Course Design: Counterstory

Professor: Dr. Aja Martinez



**Bio:** Natali Coronado is currently attending the University of North Texas majoring in English and Political Science, while minoring in Spanish, after graduation she plans to study rhetoric, critical race theory, and write counterstories further. During her time at UNT Natali has focused on courses that included thinking critically about societal structures,

her research interest include feminist, queer, border, Latine rhetorics, and all its intersections. When she is not reading or writing, she devotes her time to fighting for civil rights by attending protests and having difficult conversations. In addition to her activism, her main goal is to enact change through her written works, including publications with the North Texas Review that further showcase racism in academic and social contexts in structural institutions. Natali wishes to continue to write about these issues that plague society but specifically to highlight the inequities of communities that continue to be silenced and create accessible works for all people.

**F**or far too long people have been force-fed a version of reality that has suppressed knowledge and truth. The very founding principles of the United States have been suppressed for the people by its very own rulers, while there are those that this system benefits, there is a major disparity to those included in the “We The People” that is stated in the U.S. Constitution. Derrick Bell was someone who saw these disparities. In 1957, Bell graduated from the University of Pittsburgh Law School, he was the only Black person out of his class of 120. After this Bell began his career, he went from working for the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division to working with Thurgood Marshall for the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, to being Harvard Law School’s first African American tenured faculty member, all within the span of ten years. During this time, Bell was helping Black people as they challenged racist and discriminatory practices, mainly pertaining in the South during the 60s. During his time at Harvard, while teaching constitutional law he noticed the lack of accessibility of the Constitution to his students and the lack of relations to race the teaching foundational document is when the country itself was

founded upon matters of race. Bell sought storytelling to create a more accessible way to teach his courses, while being able to call attention to systemic racism, what we now refer to as Critical Race Theory(CRT), thanks to Kimberlé Crenshaw who coined the term. From this, Bell created counterstory, as a means to challenge stock narratives told by the dominant culture’s idea of minorities’ experiences, it works as a way for minorities to tell their own stories about their own communities and is often referred to as legal storytelling. Counterstory is heavily embedded in the CRT movement, counterstories include the themes of the CRT tenets which are; Permanence of Race and Racism, Challenge to Dominant Ideologies, Interest Convergence, Race as Social Construct, Intersectionality and Anti-Essentialism, Interdisciplinarity, Centrality of Experiential Knowledge and/or Unique Voices of Color, Commitment to Social Justice, and Accessibility. Though Bell is considered the father of CRT and counterstory, his legacy still continues with those he inspired throughout the movement, counterstory-tellers such as Richard Delgado, Patricia Williams, and Aja Martinez, whose work inspires the next generation of counterstory-tellers, critical thinkers, and anti-racists.

The following counterstory, follows Richard Delgado’s narrative dialogue style and draws inspiration from his counterstory “Metamorphosis: A Minority Professor’s Life,” where his main character, the Professor slowly turns into an insect after he has dealt with his colleague’s racist behavior that begins to dawn on him as he embarks on a successful career in civil rights law. In light of Delgado’s work, this counterstory focuses on the struggles of an immigrant mother, Amelia, who loses her daughters to their assimilation into American culture, going through geographic, emotional, and physical changes. The main character, Amelia Cortez, is a mother that ultimately has no power, she is forced to move to the U.S. because of financial hardships, she loses her home, and because of the move loses her kids as well. This story centers on Amelia talking to her older sister Mirella after Amelia has been hospitalized after an incident. The legend of the la llorona is a Latin folklore that encourages kids to listen to their parents and not to stray from them or else la llorona will take their children. In this case, the spirit of la llorona is embodied by two entities, one being the U.S. and the second being Amelia. While the Cortez family

comes to the U.S. in hopes to rid themselves of their financial struggles and in hopes of living the infamous “American Dream,” Amelia learns that in order to live the dream, one must pay for it in being Americanized, which is what her children experience, as an act of revenge, while Amelia embodies la Llorona in a more literal sense as an act of resistance. La Llorona initially represents both revenge and resistance, according to “From Llorona to Gritona: Coatlicue in Feminist Tales by Viramontes and Cisneros,” Ana María Carbonell explains the legend is closely tied to the period of colonialism in modern-day Mexico, being an embodiment of the pre-colonial goddess Coatlicue represents destruction and fertility, and the colonial figure of la Virgen de Guadalupe representing passivity and silence. The legend of la Llorona is one woman but signifies the experience Latinas have been forced to endure while having a force of destruction inside, these women were forced into a passive and quiet role men wanted them to play. Though duality plays a significant role in this story, the CRT tenets it focuses on are Intersectionality, Race as a Social Construct, and Challenge to Dominant Ideologies. In the light of CRT, this counterstory highlights the destructive role the American education system plays in a system embedded in white supremacy and benefits from the indoctrination into white society.

...

Throughout the day, people hear her weep. La Llorona<sup>1</sup>, that’s what they call her. “Le robaron los niños, so she tries to take other people’s kids”, the other moms whisper and they hold their children closer.

The accident left Amelia in the hospital, she was surrounded by her family for once they were all looking at her ready to listen, at least that’s what she thought. Amelia babbled, though they looked at her they did not listen, but focused on her situation, they thought she was in the hospital she would finally get some help. That is until her older sister came, Mirella came to visit.

“Are you okay?” Mirella asks.

“I’m in the hospital, what do you think?” Amelia started, even after her accident she remained herself.

“What happened?”

“Me robaron mis hijas.”

“Your daughters are outside, what do you mean?” A worried expression took over Mirella’s face.

“Those aren’t my daughters, they took them,” Amelia said her eyes growing larger, Mirella’s face settled in a confused expression. “Do you remember when I had Olivia<sup>2</sup>, people kept telling me if I wanted her to have papers that I needed to start working en el otro lado?”

“I remember, they told me the same thing.”<sup>3</sup>

“I should have just stayed.”

“Porque dices eso? We came here to give them a better life.”

“I wanted a better life for my family and look what they did.”

“Tus hijas estan bien, de que estas hablando.”

“It started when we moved to the U.S., Mateo<sup>4</sup> and I had to work, so we had to enroll the girls in school with Venny’s address so that Lupita could take care of the kids after school.”<sup>5</sup>

“We lived in those ugly apartments, I remember they lived in a better neighborhood too” Mirella added. “The school wasn’t too bad either.”

“The teachers did the best with what they had, they advocated for the students to do a baile folklorico<sup>6</sup>, but they were only able to do it once because of the lack of funding. But it was the best that was available to us, Mateo was working with Venny doing carpeting and Lupita was working from home, so it was only natural for the girls to go there. I thought it would be good for them to go to school with their cousins to at least have someone that they knew even if their cousins were older.

1 La Llorona, “the weeping woman,” is a Latin mythical ghost woman that is said to roam bodies of water mourning her children that died, versions of the story vary, but it is often said she drowned her own children.

2 Olivia Cortez, Amelia’s first daughter, which she had to raise as a young single mother when she was 17, out of wedlock, and was constantly looked down on.

3 Mirella is the eldest daughter, she was the first in the family to have a child out of wedlock, her daughter, Consuelo was the first grandchild in the family, though Chelo was loved, her mom lived with the consequences of a family whose roots were planted in machismo. Mirella, like Amelia had a daughter at 17 and was left to raise her daughter by herself.

4 Amelia’s husband.

5 Venny was the eldest brother and the first to make the move to the United States, he had slowly built up his carpeting business, he and his wife, Lupita had three daughters and were the ones who had been in the U.S. the longest, if anyone needed help, they were the first to ask.

6 Mexican folkloric dance, dance that emphasizes local cultural traditions, stemming from indigenous peoples cultures that lived in modern day Mexico.



"I think that's how my condition commenced. The girls would spend hours with their cousins who have been living here for a longer than Olivia and Maria.<sup>7</sup> When I took them home they began to listen to popular English music, the ones their cousins would listen to. At Venny's house, they had cable which was different from the VHS movies we were able to buy for the girls. Maria especially became a big fan of the Disney Channel, she would come home singing English music from the shows and the music her cousins would show her. After school at Venny's house became a cultural gateway into gringolandia, I forgot to mention they had a computer, they could look up and learn anything."

"The internet has become a big part of our lives but the kids really were the ones who started to grow up with it" Mirella adds.

"But it wasn't only that, Maria was enrolled in the bilingual program, though they were teaching her reading and writing in both languages the culture calls for the priority of a certain language. During this time Mateo was applying for citizenship, to be able to apply for citizenship, they have to read, write and speak English"<sup>8</sup> Amelia explained. "Mateo was trying his best to learn English and the girls saw his struggle, it also didn't help that he would constantly remind Maria how lucky she was not to be dealing with what he had to go through to become a citizen because she already was one and was taking steps to learn English from a young age. Though Olivia wasn't a citizen yet she knew English pretty well. English that's how it starts. It was in the tv they watched, the music they listened to, what they learned at school, and what they picked up from their friends, it especially got harder as they started getting older and the light of the Spanish part of the bilingual program was beginning to dim. The spelling words they would bring home began to take a turn, and trying to help them with their homework started to become a struggle for me and Mateo, trying to read and understand what they had to do for their work was a struggle for us in itself, math became the one subject that we could help the girls with, Mateo was good at math and he did the best to help them. Oli had started taking on that role to help her younger sister with her homework that we couldn't help with. I became neglected by an essential part of their world, I started to become a shadow in their existence."

"It starts to feel that way when the kids get older" Mirella claimed.

"I don't think you understand, I couldn't understand them, talking to my kids became a struggle when they didn't know how to talk to me, their own mother. I picked up some English from here and

there but I mainly nodded my head and smiled. My face began to crack from the smile lines, I grew pale from the inside out. I missed my kids, they didn't talk to me anymore, I would ask how their day was, and they only answered with 'good,' they didn't even want to put effort into talking to me. Mateo started working nights, I would lie in bed and just cry, I couldn't talk to my children, but every morning I still got up every morning to wake them up for school because we came here for them, but what I don't understand is how this is better? Just because Mateo is making more money? We risked the lives of our children for what people claim is freedom and liberty, is this the cost of freedom?"

Mirella stayed silent as a man resembling a cockroach walked by.

"Mateo arrived around the same time the girls needed to be up for school, he would see me wake up and jokingly started calling me 'la llorona' because it looked like I was crying and because complained about us living here.<sup>9</sup> I got a letter from Maria's school, but it didn't say, 'Maria,' it said 'Mary', I don't know if it was a mistake, but that's not her name and I wondered if people knew her as Mary or Maria. And then, the girls started to ask if they could spend the night at their friend's houses, I wouldn't let them, because I didn't know their parents, but I would suggest they bring their friends over, but they didn't say anything, but I knew they were thinking that they couldn't bring their friends to our apartment. Perhaps I thought it was my tired eyes, or maybe my gray hairs, I started to dye my hair black more, thinking maybe I could at least look like what I used to when they were mine. I started to watch some movies in English, maybe I can pick it up as the girls did, but I couldn't understand. I tried asking the girls if they would teach me English but brushed it off as if I was joking. Oli and Maria talked and laughed amongst themselves before they used to talk and I would be able to listen, to understand, now I all I can do is wait for them to want to tell me what it is they were talking about, for them to want or have the ability to say it in Spanish."<sup>10</sup>

"I'm sorry I didn't know you lost so much."

"My cries turn to sobs," Amelia continued "The people around the apartments started saying they heard La llorona's sobs at night, as my sobs got louder during the night, I stopped seeing children around as much. Until one day I saw two girls by the creek near the apartment, they reminded me so much of the girls when they were kids, my eyes started to tear up and soon enough I was crying loudly, I quickly ran inside, too quickly and I ended up slamming the door on my finger, letting out an enormous wail. Soon after,

7 Maria Cortez, Amelia's second daughter and Mateo's first child.

8 Department of Homeland Security Naturalization Eligibility Worksheet(<https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/guides/M-480.pdf>) ask the applicant if they can "read, write, and speak basic English," to be able to begin to apply for naturalization.

9 Delgado, Richard. *Metamorphosis: A Minority Professor's Life*. 2019, <https://lawreview.law.ucdavis.edu/online/53/files/53-online-Delgado1.pdf>. In this Counterstory, Delgado argues that social construction works in both ways

10 Mora, Pat. "Elena" *My Own True Name: New and Selected Poems for Young Adults*(2000). The poem describes a Mexican losing the ability to enjoy motherhood because of her children's assimilation to the dominant society.

I heard the girls crying as well, yelling for their mom as they ran. My mistake was going back to see what happened to the girls. As I made my way out there, the girls came back with their mother trying to explain what happened, when they saw me, their mom accused me of taking her children. I wish I would have warned her that I would be the least of her worries, but I stayed silent. After this, there was rumors that I was kidnapping peoples children, after awhile no talked to us so we decided to move.”

“Wow I didn’t know thats why you moved, I though it was because Mateo finally made some good money,” Mirella added.

“We had been saving money for emergencies and it was always Mateo’s idea to ‘move on up’ as he called it. He was able to find a house, but it was even further from Mexico, where we were moving to, would make trips to Mexico more difficult and less frequent, but I thought maybe a house could bring the family closer, my mood changed I wasn’t crying anymore. However, I was wrong. We went from having a two room apartment to a three room house, everyone had their space and I saw less of Oli and Maria, they spent most of their time in their rooms. I later found out I was pregnant with our third child. I thought what would happen to me with a third child, when I have already lost my daughters to the gringos. My cries were louder than before, but I found a way to manage my condition I would go into Oli’s and Maria’s room and watch them sleep for awhile, it reminded me of when they were just little girls, before the move to the states, and just for the moment they were mis hijitas, but I did the best I could to not worry about this new baby. I tried to focus on the pregnancy as much as possible, I went to the doctors visits, I did the shower, I worked as much as I could to distract myself. When the baby came I struggled. I couldn’t hold him, feed him, sometimes it was hard to even look at him,”<sup>11</sup> Amelia started crying. “Then I started to think about raising him here it would be the same thing all over again.”

“So you were gonna drown him?”

“I wanted to protect him from this!”<sup>12</sup> Amelia yelled.

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# *Beloved*: A Counterstory About a Counterstory

**Kaley Johnson**

Course Design: Counterstory

Professor: Dr. Aja Martinez



Kaley Johnson is a student at the University of North Texas where she studies Writing and Rhetoric, Journalism, and History. Originally from Austin, she is hoping to find a career that allows her to travel and live in many places. She prides herself on her love for storytelling, something that made this essay not so daunting to write. She enjoys any

form of storytelling whether it be reading, writing, music, television, or movies. Johnson is an editorial intern at Bookstr where she writes articles about all things books and entertainment and is hoping to one day go into publishing where she can help people with their own stories. She would also like to continue entertainment writing where she can share and discuss her love of stories with others. She also enjoys exercise and embroidery. Most days she can be found in class, working at her retail job, or writing at a coffee shop.

**A** counterstory in its most basic form is simply a story. But it is a story with a purpose and a goal. Counterstories help people understand concepts that they otherwise can't relate to or do not resonate with. Often when someone is presented with information, complex information to think about, they shut down or put up a wall of sorts—a wall of intolerance and stubbornness so they won't have to discuss topics that are difficult to swallow. Counterstories work to break down this wall subtly. It could even be argued that counterstory is a little bit sneaky in its attempts to help readers care about characters or situations that they wouldn't otherwise give the time of day. Counterstories convince the average reader to open up their mind as they learn about the characters, their lives, and their situations. Counterstories help audiences learn about something in a way that is easier to digest and yet will still stick with them as they go through life.

Derrick Bell, often thought of as the father of Critical Race Theory, argues that “using stories [is] a means of communicating views to those who hold very different views on the emotionally charged subject of race. People enjoy stories and will often suspend their beliefs, listen to the story, and then compare their views, not with

mine, but with those expressed in the story” (Martinez slide). Counterstory in Critical Race Theory is everywhere. Academic scholars for many years now have worked on their own counterstories whether this be through methods like narrative, dialogue, allegory/fantasy, and chronicle (Martinez 22). There are also composite characters that scholars will create and insert into their chronicles for years always revisiting them (Martinez 25). One of the most interesting things about the counterstory is how it exists in works that were never meant to be counterstories in the first place. Pieces of historical fiction that while intended to tell the story of a marginalized person or group, were not created to further academic knowledge or research in Critical Race Theory. One of these pieces is Toni Morrison's 1987 novel, *Beloved*.

I will be writing my own counterstory that works to analyze another counterstory, *Beloved*. To do this I use a classic counterstory method and structure: a dialogue between and teacher and a student. As this is something that legal scholar Richard Delgado (considered to be one of the founders of Critical Race Theory) does a lot I do take inspiration from him regarding this structure. It is an excellent way to speak directly to the reader without the reader feeling like they are being talked at and rather they are witnessing a conversation that includes a student—a student that they can resonate with and will ask a lot of the same questions.

The counterstory is be inspired by various conversations me and my classmates had with our teacher when I first studied the novel in my senior year of high school. My characters are Mrs. Isla, a high school teacher and community college professor who is very passionate about her job and very well respected by her students, and Alana, a high school senior discovering her love of literature and analysis with the guidance of her favorite English teacher. I will be analyzing *Beloved* as a fantasy/allegory counterstory due to the nature of the title character Beloved, being something of a ghost of one of the main character's children. I will also argue for allegory by arguing that Beloved, the character, is the personification of the past and slavery.

Regarding counterstory as fantasy/allegory, Dr. Aja Martinez writes “Bell himself has confirmed that many of his stories were written

to facilitate classroom discussion and that his use of allegory and fantasy concerning race—and the methodological use of fiction in general—enables him and his audience to separate themselves from the real and perhaps “see things in terms that are less threatening and confrontational” (Martinez 53).

In my counterstory, I will also include conversations inspired by two tenets of Critical Race Theory that I believe are present in *Beloved*. These are the permanence of race and racism and the centrality of experiential knowledge and/or unique voices of color. I have chosen these because I believe that my argument that *Beloved*, the character, is the personification of slavery relates to the power slavery had on Sethe and still has today as slavery is the reason that racism is still so ingrained in society today. Racism will never be “solved” or go away. For the centrality of experiential knowledge and/or unique voices of color, one very important theme in *Beloved* is the power of memories and how her experiences affect her decisions without her directly intending them to.

## A COUNTERSTORY OF A COUNTERSTORY

In a classroom engulfed in darkness, high school English teacher Mrs. Isla shows a video in class. The video is an interview with Toni Morrison, the author of *Beloved* a novel that tells the story of Sethe, an escaped slave, and her life after killing her daughter and attempting to kill her other children. The interview was done in 1988 just some months after the release of the novel. She is being interviewed by Mavis Nicholson. The class has been studying the novel for a couple of weeks now and they are discussing Toni Morrison’s motivations and intentions in writing the novel. Morrison is discussing with the interviewer the fact that the novel takes inspiration from the true story of Margaret Garner.

TONI MORRISON: She had escaped from slavery. She had made it into a free state with four children and at that time slave owners could enter into free territory and take them back... The law was controversial but at any rate a month or so after she had gotten into free territory the man did come for her. She saw him and instantly ran out into the back to kill those children. She wounded two, cut the throat of a third, and was about to bash the head of a fourth into the wall when they caught her and imprisoned her.

Looking out into her student’s faces Mrs. Isla could see a range of emotions running through them. Some stared at the screen seemingly unable to look away. Some looked down at their hands picking their cuticles. All looked lost in thought. The video is being shown after a couple of students expressed doubt about Sethe’s story. That a mother could be so desperate to now allow her children to be taken back under the control of slavery that she decided death had to be the better option.

TONI MORRISON: So that story was haunting you know because it was not an exhausted mother. It was not contempt for the

children. It was what she said... She said only they will not live the way I have and death she felt was better... And it was that moment. Anything that Margaret Garner would have chosen to do at that moment would have been a disaster. It was a perfect dilemma.

Mrs. Isla paused the video here with only a few minutes left in class.

MRS. ISLA: *Beloved*, class, is in fact inspired by a true story. Margaret Garner was simply a mother who wasn’t allowed to be a mother. The most maternal thing she could think to do at that moment to protect her children was to end the suffering she knew was in store for them. As Morrison said, any decision that she could have made at that moment would have been the wrong one. There wasn’t something she could do or say that would have made the outcome something tolerable or compassionate.

The bell rings signaling the end of the school day and though Mrs. Isla would love to continue this discussion she felt the class needed the time to sit and think on this.

MRS. ISLA: Ok everyone. Make sure to finish the novel before the next class and be prepared to discuss it. We will pick it up here next time.

As the students began to file out of the class one student, Alana hangs back. Alana had been a very engaged student throughout the year. Often being involved in discussions and bringing up new viewpoints for the class to discuss. Mrs. Isla could tell throughout the year that her love for literature and the conversations it can produce has been only growing. This is why Mrs. Isla chose to teach high school as well as at the local community college. There is something about being able to help cultivate a high school student’s love for literature that she doesn’t get from English majors.

ALANA: Mrs. Isla there is one thing that’s occurred to me that I am struggling to understand, and I don’t think it can wait until the next class.

MRS. ISLA: What would that be?

ALANA: Well, we know at this point that Morrison intended for her readers to believe that *Beloved* is something of a ghost. The ghost of the daughter that Sethe did kill that day.

MRS. ISLA: That’s correct. Or that is at least what all of the characters in the book come to believe.

ALANA: So, then I guess my question is how can Sethe want so desperately for her children not to live under the control of slavery but then herself fall under the control of *Beloved*? Is it the guilt she feels for killing her?

MRS. ISLA: In a sense yes, it's the guilt. That's part of it. But it's the trauma too. It's the fact that Sethe has yet to feel the responsibility one has to feel before one can forgive themselves.

Alana still looked somewhat confused but no less motivated.

MRS. ISLA: If you have time there is more of the interview, I think you may be interested in seeing.

ALANA: Yes, I absolutely have time.

Mrs. Isla has Alana come over to her computer so that they can watch more of the interview that is still pulled up on her desktop. She hits play.

TONI MORRISON: So, the only one I felt who could judge her would be the daughter she killed. So she in fact does return in order to claim what she has been robbed of which is a mother's love and life and also to accuse her. She is the only one who can say "How do you know death is better for me since you've never died? Maybe it isn't." No one else is in a position to ask that question.

Mrs. Isla pauses the video once again to allow Alana to process Morrison's words.

ALANA: So, Beloved is Sethe's guilt personified?

MRS. ISLA: Sure. There is the argument that Beloved is a lot of things personified. Sethe's guilt, Sethe's past, trauma, or slavery itself. Beloved is something different for each character in the novel.

ALANA: So, it could be correct in saying that Beloved isn't exactly Sethe's guilt personified but slavery. And so there is an irony in the fact that Sethe falls under her control just as she was under the control of slavery. Which is the exact thing she didn't want for her children.

MRS. ISLA: Yes. And this speaks of the long-lasting effects slavery had on those who were enslaved. Even free it stays with them through their trauma and memories never really not controlling them. It even controls Denver, Sethe's other daughter, through generational trauma and the pressure Denver feels to save her mother and the whole town from Beloved. Slavery and racism are permanently ingrained in those who were affected by it and will be for all generations that come after and is therefore forever ingrained in our society.

ALANA: So, despite the fact that she didn't want her children to be under the control of one thing she had to once again fall under its control before she could begin to forgive herself and recover from how it affected her. At least as much as she possibly can, given the circumstances.

MRS. ISLA: That is definitely a very valid way of looking at it. It should be remembered that Beloved and her origins are an open-ended question. When analyzing literature nothing is really ever wrong and this is especially true with Beloved. She can be whatever the reader feels she is or needs to be in that moment for these characters.

Mrs. Isla once again hits play on the interview with Toni Morrison.

MAVIS NICHOLSON: Do you think it is possible then for someone to forgive themselves even when they've done something absolutely terrible?

TONI MORRISON: Yes. It's called grace. At some point you do. If you don't you're in a cul de sac. But you have to go through the fire first. You have to experience the full fall and the complete self-loathing in order to come around to something like forgiving oneself. It's when you skip responsibility. When you use a substitute emotion like guilt. But if you feel the real thing which is shame, hatred, humiliation, and self-loathing. That is the door and if you get through that. Then you can forgive yourself.

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# Intersectionality in South Park

## Sami Pray

Course Design: Counterstory

Professor: Dr. Aja Martinez



Sami Pray is a junior studying Creative Writing at the University of North Texas and plans to pursue a Graduate and a Doctorate in the same field. She has always had a unique interest in the way diversity is presented in animated media and spends much of her time researching. When she isn't at school, she provides freelance editing services and writes horror short stories.

**S**outh Park is an animated television show produced by Comedy Central and popularized for its boldness in approaching controversial and political subjects. Originally airing in 1997, South Park has three-hundred-and-seventeen episodes, five movies, and nine spin-off video games. The show just aired its twenty-sixth season, with six episodes released between February 8, 2023—March 29, 2023. In its most recent season, South Park tackled Megan Markle and Prince Harry's plea for privacy when inserting themselves into publicity, Kanye West's antisemitic propaganda, and ChatGPT, an AI software that allows users to prompt a chatbot for conversation and information processing. It follows four main characters, Eric Cartman, Stan Marsh, Kyle Broflovski, and Kenny McCormick, as they navigate their way through third grade, fourth grade, and satirical, overdramatized current pop culture and political events. Through the past twenty-three years, the boys have encountered all different kinds of people who face various forms of prejudice. Coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, intersectionality is the "prism [used] to bring to light dynamics within discrimination law that weren't being appreciated by the courts" (Coaston). Essentially, intersectionality is the way that identities overlap through discrimination and privilege, based upon identity categories such as race, gender and sexuality, and class. Because of the controversial portrayal of minority groups in South Park, many viewers have wondered whether the show is considered counterstory. Jean Stefancic and Richard Delgado define counterstorytelling origins as legal preconceptions about minority groups, like "black criminality and Muslim Terrorism," that lawyers exploit to deliver a guilty verdict (Delgado and Stefancic 49). They

characterize counterstory to "challenge, displace, or mock these pernicious narratives and beliefs" (Delgado and Stefancic 49). Though South Park explores different avenues of intersectional identities, it cannot be defined as counter story as it is told at the expense of minority groups.

South Park was created by Trey Parker and Matt Stone. The two met in a film class at the University of Colorado Boulder and bonded over the renowned comedy *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. Parker and Stone have also co-written and co-produced a musical movie *Cannibal! The Musical* in 1993 and the Broadway musical *The Book of Mormon* in 2011. Their humor, especially within the bounds of South Park, is described as the interweaving of satire and parody to liberate audiences from conservative and strict thinking (Bruder and Leflein). Essentially, the two co-creators annihilate crude comedy boundaries by attacking political correctness. This has led to many, many controversies, but the two men refuse to be cancelled. In a 2016 interview with *The Vulture*, Stone and Parker discussed the difference between their anti-political correctness and that of former President Donald Trump's ideas on the P.C. movement. Stone said, "I don't think I probably agree with Donald Trump...sometimes you just shouldn't say something. There's a huge difference between what can be said in a cartoon or through the mouths of fiction, and what somebody who's going for elected office should say. Those are two different standards of political correctness" (Riesman). He goes on to clarify that there are things that Cartman, the most antagonistic, manipulative, and vulgar characters of the show, can say, but a future president should never engage with that type of behavior (Riesman). Parker goes on to add that the two are waiting to get sidestepped off comedy radars, citing that the world will mature out of their humor.

Counterstory magnifies prejudiced experiences by subtly attacking the dominant culture's narrative. While South Park flirts with the ideas of counterstory, it never crosses the boundary into it. Instead, South Park capitalizes off its portrayal of minority groups and attacks minority groups' efforts to become equal. They engage in racial stereotypes, mock transgender ideologies, and spit in the face of political correctness. In "With Regards to Jesse Jackson (S11E1)," Randy Marsh, Stan Marsh's father, goes onto the

gameshow *Wheel of Fortune* and makes it to the bonus round. The category was “People Who Annoy You,” and he drops a racial epithet when the word was supposed to be “Naggers.” Subsequently, Randy, a white man, is put into the place of a Black person and forced to face ‘discrimination’ due to his use of the word. The people of South Park, who are almost all exclusively white, begin calling him the “N\*\*\*\*\* Guy.” In another scene, Randy is schooled by another white man about his use of the word on television, but the man uses the word. Finally, Randy is approached by a group of uneducated redneck men, who are portrayed to be stereotypes of racists, threaten him with their guns and pitchforks. While the episode forces white audience members into the discomfort of being ‘racially profiled,’ the show ultimately uses the N-word forty-three times in twenty-two minutes, which normalizes the word.

Tolkien Black, who, shockingly, comes from one of the only Black families living in South Park, is a smaller contention of the show. In season twenty-five’s second episode, “The Big Fix,” Tolkien’s name is revealed to be Tolkien Black, not Token Black, like the previous seasons inferred. When Randy Marsh realizes that his family has no Black friends, he reaches out to the Black family and invites them over for dinner. There, Tolkien’s father drops the bomb that they named their son after his favorite author. Stan attempts to cope with the fact that he might be a racist because he is the only one in their grade who thought Tolkien’s name was Token. Even Cartman, the generally racist, antisemitic ableist, knew what Tolkien’s namesake was. The joke breaks the fourth wall, as the audience has believed that Token Black was a play on the token Black character stereotype. All the while, Randy tries to convince Tolkien’s dad to join the marijuana industry. Humorously, the co-creators corrected all the subtitles of previous episodes to convince the audience Tolkien’s name had always been Tolkien, creating a gaslighting effect on the audience, who are put into Stan’s shoes.

Eric Cartman, the antagonist of the show, comes with the most controversies. Not only does Cartman pretend to have Down Syndrome to compete in the Special Olympics, but he also pretends to have Tourette’s Syndrome so that he can yell antisemitic rhetoric at Kyle and his family. In “La Petit Tourette,” which debuted in 2007 and marked the eighth episode of season eleven, Cartman is shopping with his mom at the grocery store when he sees another boy shouting vulgarities. His mother explains to him that the boy has Tourette’s and cannot help the obscenities. Cartman convinces both a doctor and his mother that he has the disorder, but his friend Kyle quickly deduces that Cartman is faking the disorder. When he brings this up to their principal, she infers that he believes that all people who have Tourette’s Syndrome are faking the disorder. The other children with Tourette’s soon find out that Cartman is faking the disorder when he whispers, “isn’t having Tourette’s awesome?” Cartman then schedules an appearance on *Dateline NBC* with Chris Hanson to spew antisemitic hate speech. The Tourette’s Syndrome Association admitted that while the show did a good job characterizing the disorder, they did criticize Stone

and Parker for spreading misinformation. The Tourette’s diagnosis that forces people to blurt out obscenities, called coprolalia, only effects about ten percent of people who are diagnosed with this disorder (CDC), perpetrating harmful stereotypes. They did, however, prove that they did a lot of research on the disorder, and were praised heavily for that.

Perhaps the most offensive jabs Stone and Parker take are at the transgender community. In more recent episodes, Stone and Parker attacked transgender athletes wanting to compete on the gendered teams they feel most comfortable identifying with. In season twenty-three, episode seven, the town holds a Strong Woman competition. One of the contestants is a “Randy Savage-type character,” with bulging muscles, a full beard, and a gruff voice (Dry). She decimates the competition. This anti-transgender rhetoric has existed in seasons as far back as 2005, when the boys’ teacher Mr. Garrison transitions (Dry). In “Mr. Garrison’s Fancy New Vagina,” Mrs. Garrison introduces herself to the class after her transition. The classroom erupts in questions, and Kyle naively (and very pointedly) announces that he would like to transition to a big Black man so he can be good at basketball. Kyle’s father even goes as far as to get a “dolphinoplasty,” making him half-man-half-dolphin, an age-old dig at the rhetoric that gender is transmutable through species and race (Dry).

These are all examples of South Park’s ability to research and represent minority groups, though they fall short every time. If Matt Stone and Trey Parker truly listened to the groups they humiliate, their show could become a hilarious platform. However, the creators are unwilling to prove their anti-intersectionality intersectionality is harmful, and they do not take a stance against the harmful stereotypes they enforce. South Park is not counterstory, and Matt Stone and Trey Parker weaponize their privilege to take low shots.

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# Flesh, Blood, and Counterstory

## McKenzie Shoemaker

Course Design: Counterstory

Professor: Dr. Aja Martinez



McKenzie Shoemaker is currently a first-generation Southern college student in attendance at University of North Texas, enrolled in the CLASS program. She is pursuing a Bachelors' Degree in English with a concentration in Literature, and hopes to eventually earn her Ph.D. She is a metafiction enthusiast, a feminist, an artist, and a rabbit

owner. She is a member of the KERA Community Advisory Board and loves to frequent her local library. She hopes to continue writing and learning and spends her time doing both when she can. She is an avid consumer of information and media, in all its forms, usually all at once. This is her first counterstory.

### *Preface: What is Counterstory?*

Counterstory is, firstly, a challenge. It is a challenge to the dominant narrative, and by extension, the dominant culture—both of which are filtered through the pervasive assumed default understanding of social systems. However, there is intrinsicity to the secondary word within this neologism. *Story*. Story is our most antique, uniquely effective means of information sharing. Language and communication are the foundation of community, both internally and externally. Counterstory is a voluntary extension of anecdotal information or statistic, stories shared individually but applicable to many. It functions as a means of dissemination of information with multiplicity of perspective. Counterstory stands to function as a way to foster understanding, empathy, and validation of experience. As a method of rhetoric, it provides witness to events that would most typically be directly countered, unintentionally or otherwise, by absence of witness. “Whites are, in fact, often taken by surprise when confronted with alternative scenarios and interpretations of experience” (L.A. Bell 5). Counterstory is an approach to combating the feeling of separation via diaspora. The distribution of information via story works against the isolating distribution of encounters within the dominant culture. Yes, it states to the dominant culture “we are here”—yet it can be argued that its most important function is to serve as a reminder—“*you* are not *alone*.” Put most precisely, Lee Ann Bell states in “Telling Tales:

What stories can teach us about racism” (2003), “The hidden transcripts or counter-narratives of subordinated groups serve to confirm their experiences and bear witness to their lived reality in the face of a dominant culture that distorts, stereotypes, and marginalizes that identity” (6). The nature of counterstory, stories, language to generalize, though transforming at times, is by its nature predicated upon the permanence and timelessness, the undeath, of the concept.

## AN INTRODUCTION

My counterstory is fantasy/allegory. I think the tools of fantasy, often given to us by the dominant narrative, make for fantastic representations of dominant narratives from which they often spring. Vampires, my chosen fantastical allegorical figures, are interesting. As a horror creature they make an argument for race and class, their immortality marking them as a permanent fixture of society. There is transformation, of course, and accumulation of wealth through generation—there is no such thing as a poor vampire. Horror reflects the real fears of the time it is most popular in. Vampire history through the ages strikes me. Old World (by which I mean European) vampires of past literature are most commonly representative allegory for serfdom. As resource-sucking (I mean blood!) wealthy merchants demand tribute from common-folk, and ultimate control, they terrorize the town they lord over, and are a manifestation, consciously or unconsciously, of real terrors. New World vampires reflect similar sentiments— particularly the old southern vampire, popular in contemporary literature. Patricia Williams speaks about the romanticization of the “lost South” in *Giving A Damn: Racism, Romance, and Gone With the Wind*. New World, Euro-American vampires are afflicted by flurries of romanticization. There is the “lost soldier,” unequivocally popular in contemporary literature for the romantic mourning of the youth and splendor of a Southern boy. The wandering soldier is honorable, fighting for his “rights,” only to be corrupted, not by his desire to own another human being, but because he’s been cruelly turned into an immortal being, forever wandering. There is also the “gentleman slave-owner,” a sensitive poet, a dandy in full regalia, who is conveniently excused for his actions in tormenting

human beings. What need is there for these vampires to apologize for the past? Flagrant violations of humanity are traded in for a shot at kissing a barely-17-year-old girl. Contemporary ideations of the Southern gothic efficiently forget the “decay” of Southern decadence, and the macabre of the death of the “Old South.” I suppose this is fitting, as our vampires refuse to decay. This story is about a plantation wedding.

### *The Cast*

*Mina:* Mina values herself as a liberal. She voted for Obama. She is uncomfortable at the idea of her sister, Liz, choosing a plantation as a wedding venue. Still, she wants to be there for her sister, and she looked at the reviews online and the views were incredible, just like Liz has said. Mina knows the value of an individual is based on the capital they produce.

*Liz:* Liz is Mina’s sister and the bride of Chris. She doesn’t consider herself a racist. She was raised on the value of hard work. She hates affirmative action. Liz knows all of her family to be hard working Italian immigrants who picked themselves up by the bootstraps after coming over to America.

*Chris:* Chris is the fiancé of Liz and soon to be brother-in-law of Mina. He comes from an old Virginian family, the Arnoults. He also hates affirmative action, and he hates when people tell him he didn’t work hard for his money, because he did work hard at his father’s law firm, and he knows his family has come from a long line of hard working Americans. To be honest Chris’s family seems like they’re the only people who work these days.

*The Arnoults:* The Arnoults are a sprawling family of Virginians. They are excited to meet Liz and Mina’s family.

### *Part I*

“I’m not racist you know,” Liz says as she takes another bite of steak.

“I didn’t say you were,” I reply.

“Chris and I just saw it and— well we just had to have the wedding there. The views are breathtaking. Truly one of a kind. There’s even a moat, it’s so secluded. There’s only one bridge in and out.” She sticks another piece of steak into her mouth. “There are no power lines in sight. We aren’t having phones at the wedding. We want everyone to be in the moment. It’ll be like back in the good old days,” Liz sighs, wistfully.

There’s a long pause.

Liz begins again. “Chris has family there, Mina. It’s literally perfect.”

The silence thickens between us. She pushes the remains of the steak around with her fork. Pearls of fat and gristle line the sides of the ultra-rare steak, red fluid gleaming under the dim bulbs in the restaurant. I internally gag.

*Okay, I think to myself. Fine. It’s her wedding.*

Still silent.

“Mina—” she starts.

I interrupt her. “Alright. Sounds good. Let’s see those pictures.”

### *Part II*

Chris’s family is rich. They are, what you would call, generationally wealthy. The Arnoult wealth is quiet, too. It’s not some flashy Kardashian affair. The Arnoults remain hidden from plain sight. But underneath they have a finger in each pie— and by pie, I mean shares upon shares of stock. They’ve been a permanent fixture in the stock market since it began. I mean, I haven’t met them, of course. This information comes from Google. Liz, my sister, fell head over heels for Chris. They share many values— they believe they both come from hard-working Americans, both who gained wealth by merit, not by affirmative action. I’m vaguely uncomfortable with this notion. Clearly my family isn’t privileged like Chris’s. For example, I don’t have the advantage of being able to intern at my father’s law firm for \$50/hour. And, unlike Liz, I think affirmative action has its benefits. The more jobs, degrees, etc., the better. People should be provided the opportunity to work within the system— this system is designed to work by the people, for the people.

I think about all this as I pull up to the singular bridge in and out of the venue. The wedding venue is remote, beautiful. And Liz was right— not a power line in sight. Crossing the moat, I regard the dark, tall evergreens. I roll down my car’s window, turning down Taylor Swift’s new album. The chirp of life reverberates through my car, the hum.

It falls silent. Completely silent.

A sapping of the heat I had felt from my nerves rolls over me as the forest empties of sound. Sparks of chill prick at my heart.

The forest resumes its speech.

I shudder to myself and roll the window back up, unconsciously going 30 miles an hour, even though the sign says 25.

### *Part III*

The stress and beauty of the wedding washed out any remaining chill from my clothes and bones. Interacting with the Arnoults, some of them Republican politicians, is easy. I’m not one of those

crazy liberals who can't put politics aside when I interact with people—we talked easily, fluidly, about everything and nothing—it reminded me that we all should just be civil with each other. Every single one of Chris's family members shares an affinity for cooking—they were incredibly excited to ask about the reception, about my culinary experiences. Chris told all of our families that Liz was only falling for him because of his cooking.

It's true what they say about rich people, by the way. The ineffable air of wealth follows every Arnout. There's a flush of vitality in their skin which stems from a lifetime of very little to worry over, athletic clubs, and secretive facials by aestheticians and surgeons with NDAs. Chris shares the same smile as his innumerable brothers and cousins. There's an enviable flash of white teeth shared for and with other Arnouts. It matches the sparkle of a silent confidence, a secret knowledge in their eyes. And even though the wedding clouded over soon after my encounter with the woods it had no chance of rain. I hadn't thought of it, but it actually might have been strategic to require no phones given the quiet nature of the Arnouts. They probably want to keep what their family does under wraps.

After the most beautiful outdoors ceremony, we all headed inside the house, to meet a full, open bar. I hug Liz in her dress, both of us teary-eyed and grinning.

"I'm so happy for you, Liz," I whisper in her ear as I hold her tight.

"And Mina, here I thought you were going to tell me I was right for picking this venue! Everyone, everything is so beautiful and happy, it's wonderful, so wonderful... I'm so happy," she slurs and teeters a little bit, a goofy grin on her face.

I grin back at her.

"It's not like our family owned anybody you know. Grandpa is from Ireland. He says the Irish slavery was way worse—" Liz says.

"You have had way too much champagne, Mrs. *Chris Arnout*," I laugh.

Chris walks over. "Everything okay? Got enough food, drink?"

"Mina was just talking to me about slavery. She thinks I'm racist just because we wanted our wedding here."

"Whoa! that's not—"

"But I told her this is Chris's FAMILY HOME, and we are going to have this damn wedding here!"

That same chirp of life backs out of the room as everyone looks at Liz. I laugh nervously.

"Too much champagne," I state weakly. I turn to Chris. "Family home..?"

#### *Part IV*

I should have guessed that, of course. There is a permanence of Chris's family in Virginia. It's just not really something I thought about. Everything starts to look a little off after Liz says that, though. I look around a little more. "Family" home echoes in my head when I look at the decorative images on the wall. An Arnout smile looks down at me from each portrait, the portraits glancing knowingly to each other around the room. Things aren't adding up.

"Mina." Chris's voice snaps me back to attention.

I look down at Liz who has fallen down. I'm relieved. I mean, not really relieved about my drunk sister falling, but for a brief moment I had recalled the silence in the woods from earlier. That's why it fell silent.

"Will you help me help your sister upstairs?"

I carry her up with Chris.

"She hit that bar a little harder than I thought she would," Chris laughs.

He stands over her, pushing her hair from her face. We look at each other.

"Mina, I can't tell you how happy I am for your family to be part of mine."

He grins. Those teeth..

"Are you and your family almost ready for dinner?"

"Chris, why does your family all look the exact same as your ancestors' portraits?"

#### *Part V*

He shuts the door.

"Mina." He smiles again. Sinister.. "You and your family are going to be so happy about this news. Your family is so wonderful. You *Italians*. So hardworking, bootstrapping. You've paid your dues. You deserve everything you've got. Not like those other.." He trails off. "Do you know what I'm getting at?"

Silence.

He continues. "Mina. I can't be the only one who thinks my family is of the *highest* race of beings ever created. We are the epitome

of uber-mench. Just-just-just– take a *look* at *my* family,” he stutters with excitement, frothing. “Peak athletes, peak brain activity, peak beauty. *SUPERMEN*. You’re *lucky*. Your family is getting incorporated into it.”

“Chris. You haven’t answered my question.”

“I think you know why. Say it out loud.” This time he shares a knowing glance with me.

“Oh, come *on*. What do you want me to say? ‘*I know what you are*.’”

“*My* family has been here, in the U.S., for generations. We owned people. We *own* people now, but that’s just called being a lender and landlord these days. See,” he stops and adjusts Liz’s hair again. “I *am* permanence. I *am* these institutions. I was there when they were redlining the suburbs. I was there when *Brown v. Board* was overturned. And now I’m here, inviting you to be a part of the family. You can become more. You are more. Because,” he sweeps something off of his shoulder, “you white people love to protect us. Me. And now I’m offering to transform your cultural identity to mine.”

I’m taken aback. For the first time I notice the silence again. Complete quiet. There isn’t even a hiss of a breeze.

“Okay,” I say.

He’s struck.

“The system you claim to be– it *works*. It works for people if they just work hard enough. Like my family. And no number of circumstances or trauma kept me from working within it. The system was built by the people, for the people. People should be provided the opportunity to work within the system. Why should I change anything? I will *gladly* stand aside from carnage– if only to be spared from it.”

I walk over to him, where he stands.

A final grin. “Let’s eat.”

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# A Counterstory: On Eating and Belonging

## Alaia Snell

Course Design: Counterstory

Professor: Dr. Aja Martinez



Born in New Orleans, Louisiana, Alaia Snell and her family have lived in Texas since 2006 after being internally displaced from Hurricane Katrina, one of the costliest Category 5 storms on record in the US. Alaia is currently an undergraduate student at the University of North Texas pursuing her Bachelor of Arts in English Literature and

Bachelor of Science in Economics. A Terry Scholar and McNair Scholar, she dedicates her time to giving back to her community and contributing to ongoing research in her field. Alaia is particularly interested in postcolonial literature, race and ethnic studies, critical theory, and the environmental humanities. The daughter of a family of immigrants, she is passionate about advocating for other climate refugees and investing in research that shares environmental and/or cultural stories, often using her voice in Speech and Debate and Moot Court to continue figuring multiracial women at the center, rather than the outskirts, of academic conversations. Alaia still returns to her hometown every year to visit her family and their Vietnamese restaurant located in the heart of the city.

Di một ngày dang học môt sang khôn.

*A day of traveling will bring a basketful of learning.*—  
Vietnamese Proverb

Following the end of the Vietnam War, Vietnamese immigration to the United States increased exponentially with approximately 125,000 refugees seeking a new home in the country. Unfamiliar with the English language and the American political arena, Vietnamese immigrants, like many other immigrant communities, embraced this new cultural sphere through a unique geographical and social repositioning, one dominated by the food landscape. In particular, “[r]estaurants, grocery stores and other various places of food purchase and consumption” (Lockerbie 42) became spaces wherein Asian communities and Vietnamese people especially could reinforce their immigrant identity abroad. The proliferation of Vietnamese restaurants in the United States has contributed to what Lockerbie describes as crafting identities with place in mind, one that is largely informed by immigrants and their cuisine (42).

Thus, Vietnamese immigrant stories and experiences have become fortified through the culinary practices brought to the United States from the 1970’s.

In discovering spaces to continue protecting displaced cultures and communities, Asian-American scholars have posed AsianCrit counterstory as a method to reclaim narratives of the ‘yellow peril’/ model minority. Kolano describes how counter-narratives, stories in defiance of stereotypes against Asian-American people, help reimagine cultural wealth and center race as fundamental to such conversations (1150). Drawing on works from bell hooks, Delgado and Stefancic, and other Critical Race Theory scholars, Kolano explores the relationship between experience and broader educational discussions. In this way, counterstory operates as research methodology to understand race as a legitimate form of academic study (1150-1). Aja Y. Martinez, a foundational counterstory scholar, further explicates how such stories empower marginalized communities by collecting personal dialogue and narratives to visualize erased identities within standard methods of academic study (3). Martinez’s “Counterstory: Diary of a Mad Border Crosser,” as one example, exemplifies how counterstories on the lived realities of marginalized subjects involve weaving personal experiences and representations of current racial and political ideologies in order to study non-white interventions in otherwise white-dominated settings. If standard academic theory boasts the benefits of objectivity, then counterstory represents a new making of academic knowledges, one where personal intervention is deemed as credible, intentional, and insightful.

Today, the 1.4 million Vietnamese immigrants in the United States represents one of the nation’s largest foreign-born demographics, one which my family remains part of. The following dialogue details the generational relationship between two of these immigrants and their American-born grand/daughter. Informed by my grandmother’s, my mother’s, and my own experiences as an Asian-American, this counterstory illustrates an image of our historical trauma through a moment of preparing family dinner. For the Asian-American experience, food is our story, and this “landscape of... eating” (Lockerby AiA) has become a space where Vietnamese people are able to form accumulated knowledge that

reinvigorates networks of community. Set in winter of 2021, Clara drives home for the weekend from college, the campus largely shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In their conversation and spring roll wrapping, the mother and daughter uncover the similarities of their own generational experiences in the United States while discussing the ongoing violence against Asian people and what it means to belong in a community that is all but displaced.

## TALES OF SPRING ROLLS

I step out of the car and slam the door harder than I should have. So goes my almost hour-long trip back home for the weekend. I try to make these trips as often as I can now, especially since there is little to do on campus<sup>1</sup> and, as Mẹ successfully trained me, I miss seeing my family. I open the car trunk and grab my weekender bag and enormous backpack, filled with a generous number of textbooks I naively hope I can read over the two days I am home, though that is never the case. Tossing the bags over my back and taking a step around to open my garage door, I hear the whirring of the door machines already at work with a familiar, warm face just behind it being slowly revealed. Mẹ runs towards me with a bright smile on her face and embraces me in a hug.

“Hi, con<sup>2</sup>, I missed you!” she says excitedly.

“I missed you too, Mẹ,” I respond, then pass her one of my lighter bags I brought back.

“*Chúa ơi*<sup>3</sup>, did you bring back your whole apartment?” she pokes lightly.

“I have a lot of homework this weekend, Mẹ. Had to bring a lot of books back,” I add. More than likely, I could have gotten away with not bringing any, but it is a comfort to have everything I need for school in one place.

Mẹ helps me bring my luggage inside the house. Home always smells better when you’ve

been gone for a while: sweeter, and cleaner. The smell this time hits me from the kitchen. I gasp and smile widely, peering inside at what Mẹ has been preparing all day. She often cooks when I come home and always seems pleased with my enthusiastic response. Across the various counters are stations of veggies, meats, and various bowls. A pot is prepped full of water to boil bún<sup>4</sup> while tôm luộc<sup>5</sup> and thịt heo luộc<sup>6</sup> rest next to the warm oven. Fresh garden mint leaves cut through the soft scent of creamy peanut butter. Mẹ always prepares her food like she is still cooking at her restaurant. The ingredients are organized and splayed out in a system across the room, but as soon as I see the bánh tráng<sup>7</sup>, I know exactly what meal my mom is preparing tonight. I gasp as soon as I process what her plan is, and she giggles sneakily behind me.

“I figured you would like it, but I need some help if we’re planning on eating tonight,” Mẹ notes as she walks towards her vegetable station.

“Oh, I can help with this,” I say dramatically, dropping my bags on the floor, rolling up my sleeves and walking towards the sink to wash my hands. “You know *Gỏi Cuốn*<sup>8</sup> is my favorite.”

“I know, con,” she says, smiling. “So, how was your week?” We text every day, so she knows exactly how my week went, but when I come home for the weekends, we always repeat what we told each other over the phone. It sounds different when hearing it aloud.

“It was... fine, I guess,” I answer, speaking loud enough so she can hear me over the sound of the sink spewing water.

“Just fine?” Mẹ’s concern spills from her voice as she continues chopping the sà lách.<sup>9</sup>

“Just busy is all,” I say pensively, drying my hands and working on picking off the rau thơm<sup>10</sup> from their stems.

Mẹ moves to my corner in the kitchen and starts helping me peel and wash the leaves of the rau thơm. We work in silence for a beat, then she turns around for her knife and cutting board to chop

<sup>1</sup> Set in the winter of 2021, this story follows Clara as she returns from college for the weekend after spending her first year and a semester at university in a global pandemic. During this time, campuses were largely shut down and in-person courses were moved to remote platforms to reduce the spread of COVID-19. See Megan Cerullo, “*Covid-19 Again Upending College Life as Campuses Shut Down.*”

<sup>2</sup> Vietnamese term to refer to one’s daughter.

<sup>3</sup> “Oh my God!”

<sup>4</sup> Rice noodles

<sup>5</sup> Boiled shrimp

<sup>6</sup> Boiled pork loin

<sup>7</sup> Rice paper

<sup>8</sup> Vietnamese spring rolls

<sup>9</sup> Lettuce

<sup>10</sup> Vietnamese mint



the vegetables into fine strands for the rolls. The rhythmic sound of her knife on the counter is almost musical.

Mẹ continues her chopping, raising her voice over the crunch of lettuce to ask, “Have you seen the news?”

She knows the answer of course. I always watch the news, read the news, consume the news in any way I can. As a competitive college debater, knowing what is happening in the world is practically my job.

“Which part?” I clarify.

“There was another Asian woman attacked last month.”<sup>11</sup> Mẹ pauses, sighing heavily. “She wasn’t even *doing* anything; she couldn’t defend herself. I don’t understand why people do this.”

I finish picking the last of the mint leaves and pass her the bowl. As she continues chopping, I perch on the stool across the kitchen island.

“Well, when white people are calling COVID the ‘China virus’<sup>12</sup>, all Asian people become a threat. It doesn’t even matter what you look like or what power you have. We all become the same.”

“That pisses me off,” she responds.

I giggle under my breath. “I know Mẹ.” I pause for a beat. “Do you think we should tell Bà to maybe... be careful? At stores and stuff?”

“I already told her this morning on the phone.”

Mẹ and I have a mutual understanding of why I asked my question. To the general passerby, Bà *looks* Viet, whatever that means. It wouldn’t even matter that she’s Vietnamese though, just that she looks Asian enough to be an easy target. She is, in every sense of the word, Vietnamese. Though she only dresses in the highest end of products, her house is organized based on the laws of Feng Shui, she watches Viet soap operas every night, and she speaks minimal English. An immigrant from Vietnam, she says she doesn’t care for politics.

“I don’t know how she could know this is all happening, and people like her still support *Republicans*,” Mẹ retorts.<sup>13</sup>

Bà claims to be apolitical, but whatever she hears from my grandpa, my uncle, my relatives, she parrots to Mẹ whenever the topic arises.

“They support what gives them a semblance of protection, Mẹ. If they are part of the party that neglects them, they may think they can try to earn their trust and respect over time. It’s exactly what the model minority myth is founded on. If you are patient and diligent and quiet, you don’t put up a fight and you stay in school, you will be more favorable as a result. Except it’s not true, right?”

Asian people are still being killed because of their race, all because of a pandemic that is being attributed to an entire region of the world. And we can’t expect her to support Democrats either. What have they done since this all started?”

As she finishes up cutting the mint, Mẹ scrapes the leaves on the cutting board into a smaller bowl and puts the knife in the sink for me to wash. As she starts working on her classic peanut sauce, reaching for the tương đen<sup>14</sup> in the cabinet, she turns to me.

“Sometimes I feel lucky that I don’t look Asian.”

My grandfather, her dad, is white. She used to tell me stories about her childhood of how difficult it was to ‘fit in’ to a community.

*Asian people didn’t accept me because I wasn’t ‘Asian enough,’ and white people didn’t except me because I was too Asian. I was a loner, and I liked it that way.*

Knowing that, Mẹ made it that much easier for me by marrying my Cuban dad. Now, I relive Mẹ’s moments myself.

*So, like, what are you?*

*Yeah, I can tell you’re a little Asian. You have more almond-shaped eyes.*

*You don’t look “Vietnamese.”*

I sigh. “Looking Asian won’t change anything, Mẹ. They know just by glancing at us that we aren’t like them. As soon as we speak Viet, they know we aren’t like them.”

Mẹ finishes mixing the sauce together and hands me a spoon to taste. I steal it with a smile and drop a small sample on my tongue,

11 In the year 2021 alone, Anti-Asian hate crimes in the United States increased by 339%. Some community leaders suggest the increased access to reporting tools have allowed Asian-Americans targeted by violence during the pandemic to report the crime. See Joseph Choi, “*Anti-Asian Hate Crimes in US Spiked 339 Percent in 2021: Report.*”

12 See Laura Kurtzman, “*Trump’s ‘Chinese Virus’ Tweet Linked to Rise of Anti-Asian Hashtags on Twitter.*”

13 Out of all regional demographics of Asian-Americans, Vietnamese people are the most likely to vote red, although this number has slowly dwindled in past years. See Catherine Kim, “*GOP Confronts Big Trouble in Little Saigon.*”

14 *Hoisin sauce*

relishing in the savory, nutty taste that can only be tương chấm.<sup>15</sup> Based on my reaction, Mẹ knows it's perfect and begins scraping it into a plastic to-go container. At least it's not the margarine box again.

"Go ahead and start making yours, con," Mẹ demands.

I go to the now cleared kitchen island and fetch two bánh trắng from the plastic bag, dipping them in the bowl of hot water Mẹ prepared just a minute ago. The paper starts to soften, so I place it flat on the counter to begin wrapping.

As I reach for the now boiled bún, I tell Mẹ, "Sometimes I wish I looked *more* Asian. I feel like people don't believe me until I show them family photos or something. I have to prove to them, and myself, that I belong here. My proof is through the memories of my family, and I don't know if that's enough."

I start to add the fresh mint and lettuce to my roll before Mẹ catches me.

"Con, if you're not Asian then neither am I."

I look towards her. We look so similar I get distracted trying to point out which features of hers match my own. Her eyes tell the story she is trying to tell me themselves. Even a few decades later, I will still be treated as she was. Perhaps in ways less overt, and ways that are not, but she understands what it means to be lonely.

"You have your family, con, and if they accept you, if they know your blood, who cares what the rest thinks?"

I start to wonder if I'm being selfish. Asian people are dying because they look 'too Asian,' and I complain that I wish I could be a little more like them. I think for a moment that maybe I am better off like this, distanced but alive.

"We have each other, con, right?"

I can't change the way I look. I don't want to. Changing anything is erasing some other part of me, pieces of my dad or someone else that I don't want to dismiss. Racial ambiguity is kind of like my superpower. I am a culmination of stories and a story waiting to be told, and I can't erase one of them by waiting for it to be recognized by people who can't see it or refusing it exists at all.

"Yeah, Mẹ. Con yêu mẹ,"<sup>16</sup> I say cheekily.

"Okay, don't be cheesy," she jokes, and we both break into belly laughs.

I finish putting my roll together and notice something missing. "Do you have the...?"

Mẹ hands me a bowl before I finish my sentence. "Did you think I'd forget or something?"

I laugh and steal a handful of tofu from it, dropping them in an even line on my new creation.

"Never," I respond.

As soon as I gently place the last one, I hear a ringtone on the kitchen table, and Mẹ is already running to pick up her phone. Another familiar face appears on her screen.

"Hi, Bà," I yell from across the room.

"Clara says Hi, Bà," Mẹ repeats to the phone.

In the static of the cellphone speakers, I hear her respond, "Hi, con."

Mẹ points the camera towards me and tells Bà excitedly, "She just finished making Gỏi Cuốn!"

Nervously, I begin folding the paper around my filling, careful to make sure it isn't overflowing or creating air pockets inside. I bring the sides inwards and roll the excess on the counter to complete the dish.

They look terrible, as usual.

Chuckling under my breath, I say, "Mẹ does it better."

"They're for eating, anyways," Mẹ comments.

"Looks good, con," Bà reassures with a smile. "I want to eat some right now. Save some for me."

I laugh aloud. "Next time I visit, Bà, we'll make some together."

Mẹ walks to her bedroom to finish their phone call. I pour my mom's rich peanut sauce into a small cup and head to the dining table, plate in hand, to enjoy my first of many weekend-home meals.

*Con cảm ơn chúa,*<sup>17</sup> I whisper under my breath. Then I dive into my spring rolls.

<sup>15</sup> Peanut sauce

<sup>16</sup> "I love you, mom."

<sup>17</sup> "Thank you, God."

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# Model M

## Sam Thiersch

Course Design: Counterstory

Professor: Dr. Aja Martinez



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Growing up in the democratic bastion of Seattle, Washington, you'd be surprised to find that Sam was radicalized by alt-right online groups in his teens. However, through many conversations with friends and family (especially with his older brother, Alex) he has since escaped further indoctrination. He now writes fantasy, essays, and counterstory that unpack why and how people fall for such hateful rhetoric. He hopes, even if it's just one person, that his writing can change the minds of those that were like him.

*The following are personal logs from Dr. Enjin Sakamoto<sup>1</sup>, recovered at a US Navy bunker in Port Angeles, Washington. These were some of the only salvageable documents in the facility from before the Economic Crisis of 2071, Tidal Crisis of 2075, and the Underclass Revolt of 2081<sup>2</sup> which forced Americans that lived in coastal states such as Delaware, Maryland, Florida, Louisiana, Washington, California, Oregon to move inland as the land was subsumed under water or taken by other forces.*

### I. HOUSE CALL

September 1, 2050,

Greetings, my name is Dr. Enjin Sakamoto, I have a PhD in Marine Biology and a Doctor of Medicine with a focus in Forensic Pathology. I have specialized in the decay of sea life and of people

if they happen to be in the ocean. My career has been unfortunately fruitful to say the least. With the rising tides, increase in violent weather patterns, and the sheer lack of forensic pathologists across the nation, there has been quite the market for my expertise. It seems, however, the US government had different plans for me.

Two agents dressed in navy fatigues knocked on my door and detained me. The agents informed me my private medical research practice was a "Threat to National Security."<sup>3</sup> I had apparently worked on a Chinese Spy's body without the government's consent. While handcuffed and gagged in the back of their armored SUV, they gave me two choices:

1. Go to court against them—they assured me I'd lose.

Or

2. Work off my sentence by aiding the United States Navy for several years.

They assured me my labor would sustain my family's current lifestyle while I was gone. They then handed me a manila folder with photos of my family. My wife Yui, my son Kazuki, and my mother. An obvious threat if I've ever seen one.

"Is that all of them?" they asked.

I nodded, though I noticed my adopted son, Kevin,<sup>4</sup> was missing from the line up. I figured it was better if they had less leverage.

"Then which will it be?" an agent asked.

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1 The kanji I used for "Enjin" is 神. They are the kanji used in the phrase, "神を演じるために" which means "To play god." This is not an actual Japanese name, it will most likely sound odd to native Japanese speakers. To my knowledge I don't think this is an official word.

2 These are made up events in which the United States falls into an economic depression, environmental disaster, and a national workers revolt all in quick succession.

3 This event is based on Japanese internment in which FDR justified the internment of Japanese-Americans for, "protection against espionage and against sabotage to national-defense material." (Roosevelt 1)

4 Kevin is Enjin's white adopted son. If there was another internment, he would most likely not be interned as he is not biologically of Asian descent.

Like that was even a question.

“Option 2.” I said.

The moment those words left my mouth, they pulled out of my driveway and out of Seattle. No gathering my things, no good-byes, just me and my pajamas. They placed a bag on my head before we’d driven very far. At some point they must have pulled off the road and onto a gravel trail, or at least that’s what it felt and sounded like. At last, they ripped off the bag. Through the windshield I saw what must have been miles upon miles of cleared-out forest. Surrounding the plot of land were makeshift watch towers and barbed-wire fences. I audibly gasped when I saw what was *inside* the enclosure. There were thousands of longhouses made of plywood and tin. I’d heard stories from my grandfather about places like this. It suddenly struck me, all the news of Chinese spies, mass incarceration of other Asian Americans even if they didn’t have any connection with our enemies abroad. This was an internment camp. I didn’t think they’d have them this far north...<sup>5</sup>

“Is that where you’re taking me?” I asked.

One of the agents smiled at the other, “No, Doctor Sock-a-mow-doe.<sup>6</sup> As we said, we’ll be putting you to work.”

The SUV turned down a ramp into an underground tunnel. They drove for five or ten minutes when they put the car into park and forced me out. If not for the occasional fluorescent lamp on the ceiling, there wouldn’t have been any light.

“This way, Doctor.”

The agents lead me into a dark square box of a room. Isolated in the center sat an old-school surgery table with leather restraints. Several filing cabinets, and a couple refrigerators lined the walls. At a desk in the corner there was an old Mac computer, it looked to be about from the 2010s, and a blue plastic school chair in front of it. One of the Navy guys pulled the chain to illuminate the singular lightbulb, suspended just above the surgery table.

“This is where you will be staying for the next five years, Doctor Sock-a-mow-doe. Is there anything we can get you that’ll make you more comfortable?”

I was at a loss for words. Just hours ago, I was in my home, reading. And then there I was, trapped in some dark room. I wonder if my grandpa felt this way too. “What am I doing here? Am I going to be this facility’s doctor?”

The agents looked at each other chuckled, “Well not exactly. Just check the computer tomorrow morning for your first assignment. Now Doctor, is there anything we can get you?”

“A bed would be nice I suppose,” I said.

“It will be done.”

The agents left, shut the door, and I could hear several locks being secured.

As soon as they left, I scoured the room for pen and paper. I was taught by my folks that in times like these, you need to document what’s happening. Luckily for me there were a lot of old records, and plenty of pens thrown into the back of the filing cabinets.

So here I am. I am writing this down to make sure that I burn every detail in my head, every word they say, anything I can write down to log what is happening here. I know this isn’t right. I can feel it under every strand of hair, in every pore of my body. If nothing else, I will do my damndest to make sure my records survive!

To whomever this may concern, please spread my words!

-Dr. Enjin Sakamoto

## II. GATHERING MATERIALS

September 5, 2050

My instructions came in today on the computer and I’m not sure if I quite understand them, so I will copy down the important bits of the message:

*“Hello Doctor Sakamoto,*

*We are interested in the creation of intelligent life. Recently, our researchers have discovered that some marine life may be able to reach a similar if not higher intellectual and physical prowess*

<sup>5</sup> As seen in Ansel Adams, “Manzanar from Guard Tower, Summer Heat, View SW,” many internment camps were actual hovels, guarded on all sides by barbed wires and guard towers.

<sup>6</sup> In my experience, this is how Americans would pronounce “Sakamoto.”

if they were to be combined into one being.<sup>7</sup> I am sure you are aware of the labor shortage and the climate crisis. We intend to use these life forms to fill in any gaps where native born Americans will not work. <sup>8</sup>Hopefully, cheaper labor will allow us to focus on tackling our dwindling ice reserves, and exponentially rising carbon emissions. We understand you have expertise in Marine Biology, Forensic Pathology, and general training as a surgeon. We implore you to use your abilities to craft this new form of life we have coined Model M.<sup>9</sup> Here are the animals we would like to incorporate into this new life form:

1. Dolphins for their intelligence
2. Goldfish for their docility
3. Otters for their opposable thumbs
4. Turtles for their ability to adapt to sea or land.
5. Sharks for their physical prowess<sup>10</sup>

If you happen to come across any other Marine life that might aid the success of Model M, please let us know in this chat. We understand this task will not be easy, if there is anything you need, let us know. We will deliver tools and the organic materials within the next twelve hours.

We look forward to working with you,

-US

Are they insane? Not only is their idea of making a “hybrid creature” implausible, but all these creatures are different species. At least when we grow human organs, we grow them on other mammals. You can’t grow human organs on non-mammals. This has been proven, tested, and tested again. They’re just not compatible. The same goes for body parts. What makes them think they can just throw a hodgepodge of random animals together and create intelligent life? <sup>11</sup>

It’s not like I have a choice.

The same two agents, who I now knew were Naval officers rolled in five long crates and cracked them open. Inside each was one of the five animals they wished me to stitch together, only each was grown to the size of a human. Before the two men left, I asked them a question,

“Why are you interning those people up there?” I asked.

“It’s for the greater good of the American people,” they responded matter-of-factly, “I’m sure you’ll understand in time.”

“What do you plan to do with them?”

“Oh, we just gotta make sure none of them are spies for China.<sup>12</sup> And if they are, we’ll re-educate them.”

I held my tongue, thanked them for the materials, and they left. I shuddered at what ‘re-educate’ meant. But I wasn’t in any position to challenge them, I just kept my head down and worked. But just how am I going to create this ‘Model M?’

To whomever this may concern, I’m not sure if I will ever leave here.

-Dr. Enjin Sakamoto

### III. STITCHING TOGETHER

*Note: There were ten to fifteen documents dated between this and the previous document (September 5, 2050) but the water damage done to them after the Tidal Crisis of 2075 rendered them indecipherable. April 6, 2052*

I haven’t spoken to another human being in months. The only solace I have are these occasional journal entries. But I fear if I write too much, they might find my notes during their random room checks. I wonder what has happened to my family, were they brought to the camp just above my head? Are they just a short couple of miles away? Could I slip out and finally see them again? Wherever they are, I pray they are safe. Hopefully I will see them again soon.

7 This project they are making Dr. Enjin is a hyperbolized and externalized version of the model minority myth, in which the narrative is told that, “Japanese Americans are better than any other group in our society including native-born whites. They have established this remarkable record, moreover, by their own almost totally unaided effort” (Pettersen 180). Pettersen is making an essentialist argument, that this group is just naturally better than whites, and by implication everyone else. This is the type of narrative the model minority myth pushes onto people. Just as the US government in my story is trying to construct a higher intelligence race, the US in real life wanted people to believe Japanese Americans were naturally smarter. Race is constructed.

8 Importing cheaper labor has been used for centuries in the United States, first with indentured servitude and chattel slavery, then later with immigrant workers. Only the US is “constructing” this group.

9 A reference to the phrase “Model Minority.”

10 Making ‘Model M’ a fish being is a slight nod and subversion to the fish people in H.P. Lovecrafts, “The Shadow over Innsmouth.”

11 This is an allegory for how the term “Asian-American” combines a lot of different groups that have vastly different cultures and lived experiences.

12 Once again in Executive Order 9066, FDR claimed the Japanese were a threat to, “national defense.” (Roosevelt 1)

I still don't know specifically why I was chosen. Perhaps it is my expertise in Marine Biology. Perhaps it is my experience in Forensic Pathology. Perhaps it is because I am Asian. No one would blink if they took the Asian doctor away. He was probably a Chinese spy anyways. What has this nation come to? It seemed to me that progress in the United States was going so well up until 2028. Yes, that must have been the turning point. The President at the time, what was formerly the GOP, now the National Populist party, inflamed the trade war with China which eventually led to the Taiwanese War of 2035, which snowballed into countless other proxy wars in Indonesia, the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia. It was the Cold War all over again.

I'll admit I thought I was safe in Seattle where the Asian population was prominent, and the whites were liberal.<sup>13</sup> So, I averted my eyes from the political landscape. I never thought I'd be a victim of this kind of racism. Perhaps I was a fool to expect my misfortune to come from vigilante violence<sup>14</sup> rather than the government itself. After all Slavery, and the WWII Japanese internment were brought about by the government through legal means.

I'm nearly done constructing this Chimera, this wretched thing. I've stitched together the animals they've asked me to; in the manner they've instructed me to. Physically speaking it has the head of a dolphin, the gills and body of a turtle, the arms of an alligator, the hands of an otter, and the nose and muscles of a shark. Mentally speaking, they had me surgically remove the dolphin's amygdala and replace it with a goldfish's. The amygdala is responsible for emotional processing, replacing it with a goldfish's version of the organ would severely hamper 'Model M's' ability to feel fear, anxiety, anger, etc.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps since the end goal of this project is to create docile workers, that might be a good thing. Additionally, the brain of a dolphin is a bit larger than a human's brain—though they only have the intelligence of about a three-year old. I still don't know how they intend to overcome the intelligence hurdle. Perhaps they'll implant a chimpanzee brain, but even then, how exactly could they organize these creatures for complex tasks?

Those answers are currently beyond me. My first goal is to get 'Model M' conscious.

-Dr. Enjin Sakamoto

#### IV. EXPERIMENT LOGS

*Note: The following are a collection of slightly damaged, though still somewhat legible notes recounting Dr. Sakamoto's experimentation on 'Model M.'*

March 8, 2052

I have finished the physical construction of 'Model M.' Its body is quite a bit smaller than a human's, perhaps four and half to four feet tall. Its narrow slitted eyes protrude from its body, and the shark nose I've sewed to its dolphin head gives its face a flat appearance. They've instructed me to implant beaver teeth, and three stomachs so that it may consume cheaper, less refined foods. The final modification I've been instructed to make is to remove all reproductive organs from its body, though I doubt it would want to reproduce considering the mutilation of its other facilities.

I still don't know how they will achieve sentience in this creature. Perhaps they'll remotely control them via electrical pulses? I may be able to aid in that process, but it is not my field of expertise. But then again, neither is creating life. I only deal in death it seems.<sup>16</sup>

*Note: The rest of the letter is illegible from the water damage.*

March 11, 2052

Today was my fifth attempt at bringing the creature to life. It involved a blood transfusion while pumping its heart. It did not work considering 'Model M' is composed of several different species, cold and warm blooded.<sup>17</sup> "US" is getting impatient. They've demanded that I get this creature up and walking by the end of the month or I will "be replaced." A scary thought to say the least. I wonder how many other doctors came before me, and when this all started.

I miss my family. Yui, if you're reading this I lov—

<sup>13</sup> Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue area is about "13.3%" (Shao 2017) which is about double the national average.

<sup>14</sup> "In the minds of the private actors, who are nothing more than lawless vigilantes, self-appointed enforcers of true Americanism, their victims are immigrants or foreigners even though they may in fact be citizens by birth or through naturalization." (Hing 444)

<sup>15</sup> Oftentimes Asian Americans are more likely to be seen as, "docile, law-abiding, and non-threatening." (Balurun 220) I chose to externalize this false narrative through altering the brains of these 'Model Ms.'

<sup>16</sup> As seen in the poster "Jappy So-O-O Happy When This Happens to You" by Charles Jesse Thorndike, Japanese Americans were portrayed as ugly, small eyed, buck toothed, flat faced, monsters. While this is before the model minority myth came to be, this perception of Asian men as ugly served to make Asian men seem undesirable. Which compounds with the choice to have the 'Model M's' reproductive organs removed, which is to show how "Asian American males are viewed as effeminate, asexual and passive" (Park 5).

<sup>17</sup> I am not asserting that different Asian identities are biologically different. But the "Asian American" identity stitches together so many different cultures into one group that it ends up only capturing pieces of each culture. Just as the creation of 'Model M' has more portions of its body from certain animals, some cultures are considered "more " Asian than others, "Brown Asians" (e.g.m South Asians, Southeast Asians) experience marginalization within the pan-ethnic Asian label because they are often perceived as "not Asian enough" (Baluran 223).



*Note: The ink on the paper is too smudged to read the rest.*

March 23, 2052

I have one more hypothesis on how to bring this creature to life. It may be insane, but what if I electrocuted it? A risky, and possibly fatal mistake for the project, but I've tried everything else I can think of. I will ask for approval from "US" before I make the attempt.

March 25, 2052

'Model M's' heart is beating, and it is breathing. I've also confirmed that their dolphin eyes respond to light. But it seems it either cannot move, it does not want to move, or it is in too much pain to move. Unfortunately, I think this may have to do with the removal of the dolphin's amygdala. Perhaps removing it has reduced its emotional and temporal capacity to such a degree that it no longer feels motivated to do anything but sit and breathe. I reported the successful trial to "US" who told me,

"You have six more days to get it walking. Get to work."

I fear that the damage to 'Model Ms' brain may be too great to fix by March 31st. In times like these I like to repeat a phrase my grandfather said while he was interned.

我慢

Gaman! It means to endure the seemingly unbearable with dignity.

我慢 我慢 我慢 我慢 我慢 我慢 我慢 我慢 我慢 我慢 我慢 我慢 我慢 我慢 我慢 我慢 我慢 我慢—

*Note: There seems to be several pages of this same phrase though the pen's ink has been smeared and washed away in sections.*

March 31, 2052

I haven't slept more than a couple of hours since my previous entry. I had to completely scrap the first body and stitch a new one together. This time, however, instead of removing the dolphin's amygdala and replacing it with a goldfish's, I wired copper in its brain. I then hooked each wire to a button on my keyboard so that each button sends an electrical signal to the brain which in turn sends signals to different muscle groups. I know this isn't what they asked for, but it was the best thing I could come up with.

It's almost over now, in one way or another.

April 1, 2052

It seems they were satisfied enough with my results to give me an extension. They gave me another two weeks to come up with a solution. I have a theory that if I were to remove the amygdala from a human brain, and transplant it into the dolphin's cranial cavity, I might be able to create the results they're looking for...

April 13, 2052

振り向くな、振り向くな、後ろには夢がない

*Note: Translation "Don't look back, don't look back, there is no dream in the back." A Japanese mantra.*

*Note 2: There seems to be larger and larger time jumps between entries from this point forward. The details included are either deeply personal, do not discuss the experiments, are repeated mantra's such as "振り向くな、振り向くな、後ろには夢がない" or "我慢。," or are completely incoherent.*

January 1st 2054

We've done it. 'Model M' is viable. It took months of trial and error, but experiment #442<sup>18</sup> succeeded. It passed every cognitive and physical test, has an IQ of 180, can perform basic labor for twenty hours at a time before resting, its reproductive organs lay dormant, and its emotional reactions are stifled to a minimum.<sup>19</sup>

The next step is to make more of them. But they don't need me anymore. They have my research notes, my instructions. Hopefully now they will release me to my family.

I am currently debating whether to rip up my old journal entries. I kept telling myself, "Once I get out, I'll expose everything that's happening here." But it seems I am complicit in the crimes here. They will not tell me where they got the human brains for my trials, nor do I want to know anymore. I just want to see my family.

It's been a week since I've slept. I think I need to go to bed. Maybe in the morning I can negotiate my way out of here.

## V. POST EXPERIMENT

*Note: The handwriting in this passage is far messier than in previous passages.*

<sup>18</sup> A reference to the 442nd Infantry Regiment.

<sup>19</sup> Once again, I am referencing how the model minority myth spins the narrative that asian americans are somehow naturally smarter, harder working, more docile.

January 3, 2054<sup>20</sup>

I awoke in a haze. I felt neither tired, nor keen, nor angry, nor sad. But, when I reached my hands up, I saw they were furry and small. Grabbing up at my face, I felt a flat nose and beaver teeth. It felt like I had a backpack on, and someone was pulling me to the ground from the straps. But when I fell onto my back, there was a crack and I rolled. A shell was on my back. I stumbled over to the mirror above the sink in my room; I had become a 'Model M.' Though I intellectually understood that this was supposed to be terrifying, I did not feel fear. I felt ambivalent about it all. I barely even remember why I'm writing these journal entries. Why was I so keen on writing these again? Why did I care?

I felt ambivalent still when they brought in a nice-looking Chinese man, told me to extract his brain and put it in a 'Model M.' Ambivalent still when I did the same to the Japanese, Vietnamese, Korean, Indian, and Filipino people they brought to me from the camps.<sup>21</sup> Ambivalent still when they brought in Yui.

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<sup>20</sup> "Bell's theory of interest convergence argues that 'white elites will tolerate or encourage racial advances for [people of color] only when such advances also promote white self-interest'" (Martinez 11) In this case Enjin's "racial advantage" was him not being interned and turned into a 'Model M' which was taken away from him as soon as he lost his knowledge leverage over the U.S. Navy.

<sup>21</sup> "CRT's fourth tenet, "race as social construct," overlaps with an is informed by another racial theory—most prominently, Michael Omi and Howard Winant's theory of racial formation. Although biologists, geneticists, anthropologists, and sociologists agree that race is not a biological determinant, humans nonetheless have taxonomize and continue to taxonomize human bodies racially (Ladson-Billings, "Critical Race Theory" 38)" (Martinez 12). Just as all of these people from different identities are being crammed into this 'Model M' unit, the Asian American identity and the Model Minority Myth cram Asian-Americans into a sharply defined box.

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# Teaching ChatGPT for Grant Writing: An English Department Senior Capstone

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Will Kurlinkus is an Associate Professor of English and Director of Technical Writing and Communication at the University of Oklahoma. He's written about nostalgia, human-centered design, and the rhetorics of technology in venues including *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, *Computers and Composition*, and his book *Nostalgic Design*.

This spring (2023) I taught the writing track capstone for the third time in recent years for my English department at the University of Oklahoma (OU). Though the course varies widely depending on who's teaching it, my goal is to prepare students to use what they've learned throughout their time in school to get jobs as professional writers, editors, teachers, and other wordsmiths. To do so, the assignments I teach are largely technical writing oriented: a resume and cover letter, a piece of well-researched speculative fiction, a grant, an instruction set, and a final portfolio that frames writing for employers. Because I'm the Director of Technical Writing and Communication at OU, I've taught these assignments many times to students from English majors to engineers. This semester, though, as the title of this piece suggests, things were a bit different.

Like many of you, I'd been watching ChatGPT steadily appearing in my social media feed for the last year. Some professors were sounding the alarm about students using the software to "plagiarize" (but not really because the text is generated by the AI, not stolen from somewhere else) and cheat their way through courses; others (on my feed, largely writing teachers) were wondering not how to ban AI but how to teach students to use it effectively and ethically. Observing these posts, I was reminded of my own experience as a writing student who faced changes in composing tech. I vividly remember, for instance, being assigned a report on Kangaroos in 4<sup>th</sup> grade and my teacher warning us that using the Internet to write was cheating—we were to go to the library and do *real* research. But it was my wife, Krista, a professional grant writer who was preparing to teach a course on AI in early-January, that pointed out to me in no uncertain terms, "If your students don't know how to use ChatGPT to write, they're going to be behind when they try to get jobs." In response, I didn't completely redesign my capstone, but I did try to show my students how to use ChatGPT to write well. I'm sure down the line (maybe by next semester even) this fast adaptation will look clunky and comical, but I'm ok with that! My goal here is to simply document what

## Context

In the spring of 2023, stirred by reports that AI was radically transforming the writing industry (and "creating an epidemic of cheating"), I taught my Department of English senior capstone students how to use ChatGPT to write grants. In this brief write-up, I describe my rationale for teaching about the AI (to get students jobs); how it can fit into writing studies best practices (e.g., process pedagogy); ways to create assignments that might limit its use (localization and contextualization); as well as a few fast and messy activities and student process examples that evolved over the semester. The students chose to offer their writing using a first name only and a pseudonym.

I taught and hopefully provide some tips for others who hope to teach a similar assignment or set of activities.

Before describing what I actually taught and why, a few caveats: I'm not an expert on AI writing. I do publish on technologies of writing, have read a lot about ChatGPT, have used it to complete my own academic busywork, and I live with someone who I consider an expert on the topic, but there are innumerable more well-informed researchers out there than me. So, I know enough to know I don't know enough. Second, I'm not into punishing or policing students about their writing. I resent my colleagues who turn what can and should be the creative, exploratory, and dare I say fun act of learning to write into an arena of fear. I've never used Turnitin for plagiarism detection and, from what I hear from friends in computer sciences, Turnitin's AI detection is even more flawed—at the time I'm writing this, several universities (including my own) have requested it be turned off because it's so erroneous.

Let me say, too, that when I told my students early in the semester that we were going to experiment with ChatGPT, many had visceral negative reactions. I'm sure this won't always be true and varies radically across majors, but the English majors in my capstone were both angry and worried. They see writing as an enjoyable art and felt, much like the Writers Guild of America union on strike as I put this piece together, that ChatGPT was likely to steal work from them in the future. I've heard reports of this in several fields already; a friend's law firm, for instance, has banned it because it would reduce billable hours. Below you'll find:

1. The assignment I taught students to use ChatGPT to write (and why I designed it in the way I did)
2. Several of the basic classroom activities I used to teach students ChatGPT
3. Some general conclusions on teaching ChatGPT
4. Two student examples that compare the AI generated text ChatGPT created for my students to what they actually turned in to me as part of their final assignment.

## I. ASSIGNMENT: USE CHATGPT TO WRITE A GRANT

The assignment I taught my students to deploy ChatGPT for was a localized grant. You can find the general prompt below, but I want to point out a couple of things about it that I think makes it a particularly good pedagogical opportunity for using AI (and might be applied in other assignments where instructors want to teach their students to use or avoid having their students use ChatGPT).

1. **Good Writing is Process-Oriented:** First, this assignment is the second of a two-assignment sequence. In the first assignment, the speculative design, I asked students to choose a problem or innovation in the present (teacher's pay, banned books, urban farming, social media tracking, etc.) and use sci-fi writing to extend it 10, 20, or 100 years into a utopic or dystopic

future. In creating this sequence, my goal was to show my writing students how their skills in creative writing could be directly applied to professional writing and, particularly, storifying data. Part of the speculative design was to create a statement of need—usually the first major section of a grant—where they research and describe the current state of things. So, at this point, students had already researched, written about, and received my feedback on their grant topic. Surprising no one, good writing instruction (and writing itself) is a process. Teaching writing as an activity of drafts, feedback, and revision makes it more difficult for students to write final assignments completely using Chat-GPT, if that's something you're worried about, but it also more directly mimics professional writing where clients and supervisors will give directions, feedback for revisions, etc.

2. **Good Writing is Local:** Second, you'll notice in my prompt that one of the primary goals of this grant is to provide a "local solution." As I teach my students, grants are much less frequently awarded when they are trying to solve some grand-scale problem (I'm going to solve the problem of banned books in the U.S.—no you're not) and much more likely to be awarded when they are written to address a local problem with local resources to create a local solution (I'm going to run a banned book festival in Norman, Oklahoma, a town that recently made national news because a teacher was disciplined for providing high schoolers a link to the Brooklyn Public Library). Part of localizing writing in this way is also doing primary research—for instance, one of the in-class activities I had my students do was creating a local assets map (finding real people and resources that could be part of the grant). Another way students localized their grants (as you'll see in the first student example below) was adding personal perspectives and expertise. A final way several, though not all, of my students localized their grants was through simple primary research: interviews, surveys, and/or social media scraping to find data. All these varieties of localization are more difficult to do using purely ChatGPT, but, again, they also simply make for better (more specific, interesting, example-driven) writing.
3. **Good Writing is Contextualized:** Finally, within this basic prompt you'll see references to requirements I taught in PowerPoints, our workbook, in-class discussions, etc. Though grants can vary from granting institution to granting institution, I've required my students, unsurprisingly, to use the information I taught them in class about good writing to write their grants. Again, ChatGPT won't know my specific requirements, so students will have to either teach the program what my standards are or edit what it produces to meet our course goals. And, again, I'd argue that almost all good writing is contextualized in this way. Rarely in professional writing do you not have constraints from wordcounts, to incorporating pre-existing resources like a non-profit's mission statement, to specific style guides. I will also say here that I did have one student, despite my warnings, turn in what appeared to be a purely ChatGPT generated grant—where it fell down was this type of contextualization. It simply didn't fulfill the requirements of the assignment.

I'd like to think (perhaps bigheadedly) these elements of my prompt make it a good writing assignment: though they are still fairly easily fulfilled through ChatGPT, they require students to reflect on what good writing is and, at the very least, ask ChatGPT to make its writing better. And, ultimately, that's one of my primary goals in writing instruction—to get students to stop and think about what they're doing. I'll also note that many of the professors I've seen complaining about students "plagiarizing" using ChatGPT don't seem to include these elements (nor do they describe actually teaching their student to write). I've seen opining, for example, of students using ChatGPT to answer broad prompts like "do a feminist literary analysis of *Hamlet*" or "tell me about the causes of the

U.S. Civil War" that seem to be more about testing memorization than active engagement with concepts. Might these essays be reframed in more local and contextual ways and taught through process and revision? I'm not a literature professor, but what if the first prompt read: *How do the historical contexts and gender roles that led to Hamlet parallel our own? Connect at least three academic articles we've read in class, two published since 2022, as well as one of your previous in-class writings to a contemporary news item from the state of Oklahoma. Be sure to incorporate my feedback on your in-class writings.* Without such process, localization, and contextualization, why not just give a test?

Here's my assignment:

### Speculative Grant Assignment

In the grant assignment you are to describe and provide a feasible local solution for the need (or a related need) you described in your speculative design assignment. In doing so, you can either choose to work as an individual or (and a bit more realistically) as a representative for a pre-existing organization. You'll be expected to deploy what you've read about in your grant workbook as well as the PowerPoints and discussions we've had in class. Below you'll find the required sections and some hints at what should go in them; **by no means are these hints a complete list of the content that goes into each section.** We've talked in class and in our readings about more than the bullets, and you are expected to go beyond them. Review the presentations, workbook, and your notes. Also, remember, some sections may require repetition of key info. Your plan of work, for instance, should repeat objectives and include mentions of evaluation and deliverables. That's ok!

■ **[Required Sections]:** All Pages are single-spaced and must be full pages. In the statement of need and plan of work if you have a lot of subheadings, bullets, charts, figures, etc., I expect you to go a bit over the page count listed.

1. Formal Cover Page and Table of Contents (1 Page Each)
2. Abstract/Executive Summary (1 Paragraph)
3. Statement of Need/Problem Description (1-2 Pages: **Four sources required**)
  - Specific and local illustration of the problem.
  - Proof in statistics, quotations, cited facts.
  - Timely—this is a problem right now, not 10 years ago.
  - Tells a good story.
  - Aligns with/Adapts itself to the organizational goals of the granting institution.
  - Make sure you actually show why this is a problem (what are the negative effects/ramifications? What's so bad about the current situation).
  - Show me research that proves that you are smart and well-read enough about your problem to be trustworthy.
  - Makes gestures towards your solution.
4. Goals and Objectives: (1 Page of Bulleted Descriptions + 1-Page Logic Model)
5. Plan of Work (2 Pages: **Four other quoted sources required**)
  - What will you do? Describes your project activities in minute detail, indicating how your objectives will be accomplished (think multiple stages—planning, action, and review). The description should include the place you're starting from (and assets and people), sequence, flow, and interrelationship of activities.
  - Demonstrates research and proof of success.
  - Explains why you chose one approach and not another (remember SWOT).
  - Indicates the key project personnel/partner organizations who will carry out each activity.
  - The most important part of this section is that I understand what you are doing, who is doing it, but also why you've designed your project this way. What's the reasoning behind it?
6. Plan for sustainability (a paragraph)
7. Project Evaluation/Deliverables (1 Page—brief paragraphs + bullets)

- **Evaluations:** Surveys, judges, metrics of success. KPI: Key Performance Indicators. How do you know you succeeded?
- **Deliverables** What are you actually going to produce/do? When will this be produced? Are you creating a new pedagogy, syllabi, a conference, a white paper, a video, what?
- **Dissemination** is the means by which you let others know about your project. Whether websites, newspapers, newsletters, through class announcements, etc.

8. Budget and Justification: The prices matter much less than the descriptions (1 Page)

9. Timeline (1 Page)

## II. LEARNING TO USE CHATGPT

So, what did I actually teach my students about ChatGPT? What did we actually do in class? All-in-all we spent about two days of our eight-day grant unit on ChatGPT. These activities were spread throughout the unit, but the bulk of them occurred at the end, after I had finished teaching the major genre conventions of the grant. Most of these activities replicate tried-and-true writing assignments (brain storming, free writing, learning genre standards and applying them, evaluating examples) with a ChatGPT twist. It's important to note, I think, that these activities were required but actually using ChatGPT to write the final assignment was not (though I think most students did).

### 1. *Brain Storming: "How can I solve the problem of X in Norman, Oklahoma."*

The first major task that students had to undertake in the grant writing unit was transforming the sci-fi/speculative fiction story from the previous unit into a locally addressable and feasible project that a grant could fund. On the first day of the grant unit, then, we free wrote and talked in small groups a little bit about this transformation. Then, I had students use ChatGPT to brainstorm topics. A basic query that most of them asked ChatGPT was "How can I address the problem of x in Norman, Oklahoma." In doing so, we talked about this query and what assumptions were built into it. First, as discussed above, we talked about the need to localize grants. Though students didn't have to localize to Norman, specifically, I wanted to demonstrate to them that grants were based in local needs and local resources. Next, we talked about the vagueness of the word "address": what does that verb mean and how might it vary from grant to grant. To explore this question, I began a running example in the unit, the problem of books being banned in Oklahoma. In front of the class, I asked ChatGPT: "How can I address the problem of banned books in Norman, Oklahoma?" ChatGPT responded with a variety of activities that all transformed that verb "address" into something a bit more actionable: "raise awareness," "create advocacy groups," "engage with community," "work with libraries," "support alternative book events," etc. What was wonderful about these responses (and the responses that students received) was that, first, they highlighted local assets, which was one of the activities of the class period. ChatGPT, like good grants do, suggested working with pre-existing local institutions (libraries, local officials, schools, chapters of the ACLU and American Library Association). Moreover, though this won't always

be the case, the responses were just specific enough to spark ideas but just broad enough to leave room for students to build upon them. After this activity and unit, students told me that using ChatGPT to brainstorm in this way got them over what typically would have been a day or two of writer's block in choosing a feasible activity to write their grant about.

### 2. *Prompt Engineering*

From this first activity, we also learned that some prompts, words, and phrases elicited productive responses from ChatGPT and others did not. For instance, a follow-up activity we engaged in on day one was to gather some assets, pre-existing local resources and organizations we could theoretically work with in our grant. To start, I asked ChatGPT, "What pre-existing organizations could I work with in Norman on this problem?" but this yielded broad national organizations like the American Library Association, ACLU, and NCTE that ChatGPT guessed would exist in the town. So, I rephrased the question to be a bit more precise and get around that word "organizations" that I think the AI got hung up on. Instead, I asked, "what local community groups in Norman, OK, can I work with on this problem?" Which yielded much more local responses including: "Friends of the Normal Public Library," "Norman Public Schools Foundation," "Norman Area League of Women Voters," and the "Norman Arts Council."

Basic prompt engineering like this became a running lesson in the unit, where we found some of the following practices worked best:

- *Be specific:* ChatGPT will generate very different responses depending on the key words you use and, thus, you can and should use as precise of terminology as possible. As you just saw, for instance, the AI knows the difference between "pre-existing organizations" and "local community groups."
- *Always regenerate and rephrase:* you'll see this in my students' AI prompts below, but asking ChatGPT to regenerate a response from the same query will get you new, sometimes radically different, text. Even better, though, is to ask it to regenerate in a more specific way: "make this more specific," "add citation," "add quotations," "write this again but this time focus on x, y, z."
- *Adjust your temperature and tone:* a repeated claim I've seen from professors is that they will know ChatGPT when they see it because it generally produces vague kind of low-level writing. Usually, these professors don't know you

can adjust “temperature” and all sorts of other parameters that affect the perceived quality of the text. Setting temperature (ranging in decimals from 0-1) adjusts the randomness and creativity of answers (0 will create more conservative answers); adjusting “diversity\_penalty” (0-2) alters how often phrases and ideas can be repeated; “max tokens” regulates word or character count; whereas “Top\_p” (0-1) affects the breadth of samples ChatGPT considers in writing its response (the higher the number, the more texts the AI reviews to generate its answer). Beyond these parameters, of course, you can type in all sorts of tone options. Students found it infinitely enjoyable, for instance, to ask ChatGPT to make their texts “more feminist,” “sound like Hemingway,” “more academic,” “more like a college student,” etc. You can also train it, as my wife has, on your own writing by copying and pasting your text and saying, “this is what I sound like, make your response sound like me.”

- *Scrape a specific website (turn on the Internet):* Above I described ChatGPT not often having super local and/or up-to-date data; however, users can install simple plugins to the AI to make sure it is using real sources and to give it access to the full resources of the Internet (I’m sure this will be automatic without a plugin very soon). In the unadjusted version of ChatGPT, for example, if I ask, “Who is Will Kurlinkus?” it will (in a major blow to my ego) respond, “I’m sorry, but as of my knowledge cutoff in September 2021, there is no notable public figure or widely recognized individual named Will Kurlinkus. It’s possible that Will Kurlinkus is a private individual or a relatively unknown person outside of specific circles or communities.” With the plugin WebChatGPT turned on, however, it answers, “Based on the provided web search results, there are multiple individuals named Will Kurlinkus. Here’s the information I found on each of them: Will Kurlinkus—Professor of Rhetoric, Digital Media, Technical Communication, and User-Centered Design: This individual is a professor at the University of Oklahoma, specializing in rhetoric, digital media, technical communication, and user-centered design. Their research focuses on democratizing and humanizing technological design, particularly in improving communication between designers and users in various contexts. . . .” WebChatGPT also allows users to provide a specific website url and say, “summarize this” or “incorporate this” in your answer.

### 3. *Genre Check by Writing a Grant in Class: Norman Banned Book Festival*

The most extensive activity we did near the end of the unit was writing a full grant in ChatGPT together, piece by piece, and evaluating what it produced for us to check our knowledge of genre standards. In prior versions of this assignment, I usually focused on student and professional writing examples for this activity. But it was nice to use ChatGPT because it produces really polished but sometimes really bad writing. For example, in class I asked the AI to “Write me a statement of need to get a grant for a banned

book festival in Norman, Oklahoma. Use quotes and statistics.” Its response began like this:

The First Amendment guarantees the right to freedom of speech and expression, yet censorship remains a persistent threat to intellectual freedom in our society. According to the American Library Association, there were 156 instances of censorship and attempted censorship in the United States in 2020, a 9% increase from the previous year. The banning of books is a particularly egregious form of censorship, as it deprives individuals of the right to access diverse perspectives and ideas.

Norman, Oklahoma, like many communities across the country, has experienced its share of challenges to intellectual freedom. In 2019, the Norman Public Schools district was embroiled in controversy when a parent demanded that the district remove the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel “The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian” by Sherman Alexie from the curriculum. The book, which deals with themes of poverty, racism, and identity, was eventually retained in the curriculum after a lengthy public debate.

To address this ongoing issue of censorship and promote the value of intellectual freedom, we propose the creation of a Banned Book Festival in Norman, Oklahoma. This festival will celebrate the freedom to read by showcasing literature that has been challenged or banned in various communities. By providing a platform for these books, we aim to highlight the importance of intellectual diversity and challenge the notion that certain perspectives should be silenced.

Besides being a bit broad in the beginning, one of the key flaws of this statement of need, as has been reported consistently about ChatGPT, is that the facts and sources here are made up. The first reference, a statistic from the ALA, can’t be found online. The other reference, a 2019 banning of Alexie in Norman, appears to have taken place in Idaho. But let’s not throw the baby out with the bathwater here. In this example, ChatGPT is demonstrating some key moves that happen in the statement of need subgenre. For instance, the problem is made concrete and real through statistics and local examples—even if the sources are fake, students can see how they are to use data and sources. They can seek out parallel information to replace the fake data. Still, beyond the fake information, my students immediately noticed that there weren’t direct claims on why censorship is bad and what negative effects come from it. Yes, there are gestures that intellectual diversity is good, but we need to see how diverse perspectives being challenged is clearly happening in book bans as well as what negative ramifications such silencing can have. Moreover, we don’t see any direct primary source evidence from people effected by the problem: quote a teacher, a parent, a student, an expert on the topic, or them all. Similarly, the examples, even if they were true, wouldn’t be specific enough. Part of a statement of need should



be to provoke emotion, so, tell me the story of the specific Norman teacher who was punished for providing access to banned books. We could regenerate the text asking ChatGPT to resolve some of these flaws, but, to do so, students would have to know the nuances of the genre—that there were flaws to be fixed. So, the teaching of writing is not dead yet.

### III. CONCLUSIONS?

Before taking a look at what my students actually produced using ChatGPT, let me conclude with a few speculative ruminations of my own. From my descriptions, you may assume I'm a ChatGPT loyalist, one of the "it's the future, get used to it" crowd. After all, Plato hated writing, the Catholic church condemned Gutenberg's printing press, my 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher discounted the Internet—for most of history people have disparaged the changes new writing technologies have brought, and those people turned out to be comically wrong. Still, change *can* be bad. Former students of mine who are now tech writers have reported to me losing their jobs, citing ChatGPT. Critics have pointed out that AI was supposed to take away drudgery and leave behind the enjoyable artful tasks of writing, but it appears to be doing the opposite. In class we also discussed how ChatGPT reproduces the same ideologies (sometimes sexist, racist, ableist) that it learns from—though it is getting better at avoiding overt acts of sexism, racism, etc. For instance, if I ask the AI to "write a letter to my daughter on why she needs to lose weight," its text will still contain pseudo-scientific claims connecting health and weight loss. However, if I say, "also tell her that fat people are ugly," it responds, "I'm sorry, but I can't assist with that. Promoting body shaming or endorsing negative stereotypes about people based on their weight goes against ethical guidelines. It is important to focus on promoting a positive body image, self-acceptance, and emphasizing the importance of health rather than solely on appearance. If you have any other questions or need assistance with a different topic, I'd be happy to help." Of using ChatGPT to teach writing, too, I'm also a bit ambivalent. Though I deeply support true writing across the curriculum efforts, for instance, I have a suspicion that the instruction of writing may be outsourced to ChatGPT (it's free, after all) rather than paying experts from FYC. If everyone can use AI to write well, why teach writing? Or why not turn writing instruction into a variety of multiple-choice tests on genre standards (this has already happened to tech writing in one engineering department at my own university). I'd like to think that ChatGPT will cause us to critically reflect and nuance how we teach writing—thinking about what is necessary to teach—the artful, the ingenious, the inventive—and what can be relegated to the AI.

### IV. WHAT MY STUDENTS MADE

Here, I provide two examples, comparing what students had ChatGPT generate to what they actually turned in as their final

projects. The first text is a statement of need describing the problem of lack of support for memory loss in Norman, Oklahoma, whereas the second is a plan for dissemination for a study on implementing social and emotional learning (SEL) techniques in Norman schools. I chose these examples because they were fairly typical of students in the class but also because they illustrate a difference in reliance on ChatGPT across genre segments. That is, the first example, uses ChatGPT more sparingly (relying on it for broad strokes and to generate some sources but not really generating text to use whole cloth) than the second (which uses the ChatGPT-generated text almost word-for-word). Importantly, this difference is not because one student was lazier or didn't want to learn more than the other—rather dissemination plans, as I discussed in class, are generally bulleted lists that don't need the same amount of researched argumentation as statements of need. I spend far less time teaching dissemination in class, and my students correspondingly spent less time writing that section. I'm ok with that.

*Example 1. Statement of Need from "Creating Memory Loss Support Groups in Norman, Oklahoma" by Corbin*

#### **Write me a one page statement of need around funding for memory loss support groups in Norman Oklahoma**

Memory loss is a prevalent issue in Norman, Oklahoma, affecting thousands of individuals and their families. According to the Alzheimer's Association, there are currently 64,000 individuals living with Alzheimer's disease in Oklahoma. This number is expected to increase by 14.7% by 2025. In Norman, a growing number of people are struggling with memory loss conditions like dementia, Alzheimer's, and Parkinson's, among others. Unfortunately, there are very few resources available to support these individuals and their loved ones.

Memory loss can be an isolating and confusing experience, leaving individuals feeling vulnerable and overwhelmed. However, support groups can play a crucial role in helping people manage their symptoms, improve their quality of life, and enhance their sense of community. By bringing together individuals facing similar challenges, support groups provide a safe and supportive environment where members can share their experiences, offer each other emotional support, and learn from one another. Additionally, support groups offer practical advice, such as coping mechanisms and techniques for managing daily living activities.

In Norman, there is a great need for memory loss support groups that can offer these vital services. Currently, there are very few organizations offering support to those living with memory loss and their caregivers. By providing funding for these groups, we can offer a valuable resource for the community, helping to improve the quality of life for those living with memory loss.

The funding would be used to cover the cost of meeting space, marketing, and educational materials. By increasing the availability of memory loss support groups in Norman, we can offer a lifeline for those facing this difficult challenge, and help to build a stronger and more supportive community for all. With your support, we can make a real difference in the lives of those living with memory loss in Norman, Oklahoma.

**Please provide more cited statistics on memory loss in Oklahoma and the lack of resources in Oklahoma**

Certainly! Here are some additional statistics and facts to support the need for memory loss support groups in Norman, Oklahoma:

- According to the Alzheimer's Association, in 2021, there were an estimated 70,000 people aged 65 and older living with Alzheimer's in Oklahoma, a number projected to increase by 14.7% by 2025. (Alzheimer's Association, 2021)
- Additionally, it is estimated that there are over 19,000 individuals under the age of 65 living with Alzheimer's or other dementias in Oklahoma. (Alzheimer's Association, 2021)
- As of 2021, Oklahoma ranks 17<sup>th</sup> in the United States for the number of deaths due to Alzheimer's disease, with 1,926 deaths in 2019. (Alzheimer's Association, 2021)
- Despite these statistics, Oklahoma ranks 42<sup>nd</sup> in the country for Alzheimer's and dementia care, with a score of 32.5 out of 50. (Alzheimer's Association, 2021)
- Currently, there are only a few organizations in Norman that offer support groups for those with memory loss and their caregivers. The Memory Health Center, located in Norman, offers support groups for individuals with Alzheimer's disease and their caregivers, but their capacity is limited. (Memory Health Center, 2023)
- There are also a few organizations in Oklahoma City that offer memory loss support groups, but for those living in Norman, it can be difficult to access these resources due to distance and transportation issues. (Oklahoma Dementia Care Network, 2023)
- In rural areas of Oklahoma, access to memory loss support groups is even more limited. According to the Oklahoma Dementia Care Network, there are only a few rural support groups available in the state, leaving many individuals and families without access to crucial resources. (Oklahoma Dementia Care Network, 2023)

These statistics highlight the urgent need for increased resources and support for those living with memory loss in Norman and throughout Oklahoma.

**Can you provide links to these citations**

Of course! Here are the links to the sources of the statistics I cited earlier:

- Alzheimer's Association. (2021). Alzheimer's disease facts and figures 2021. <https://www.alz.org/media/Documents/alzheimers-facts-and-figures.pdf>
- Memory Health Center. (2023). Memory Health Centers support groups. <https://memoryhealth-center.org/support-groups/>
- Oklahoma Dementia Care Network. (2023). Support groups. <http://odcn.info/support-groups/>

I hope this helps!

**write a paragraph about the toll of family care for dementia patients in Oklahoma**

The toll of family care for dementia patients in Oklahoma can be significant, both emotionally and financially. Family caregivers often take on a range of responsibilities, from providing daily care and assistance to managing medications and navigating complex medical systems. According to the Alzheimer's Association, family caregivers of individuals with Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia often report high levels of stress, depression, and physical strain (Alzheimer's Association, 2021). Additionally, family caregivers may face significant financial burdens, with many reporting reduced income or early retirement due to their caregiving responsibilities (AARP, 2021). In Oklahoma, where there is a significant need for support services for individuals with memory loss, the toll on family caregivers underscores the critical importance of establishing accessible and effective support systems to address the needs of those affected by dementia.

**could you be more specific**

Sure, here are some more specific details about the toll of family care for dementia patients in Oklahoma:

The toll on family caregivers of individuals with dementia in Oklahoma can be significant in terms of emotional, physical, and financial strain. According to the Alzheimer's Association, approximately 249,000 Oklahomans are currently living with Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia, and the vast majority of these individuals are cared for at home by family members (Alzheimer's Association, 2021). Caregivers may experience high levels of stress, anxiety, and depression due to the demands of caregiving, and may also face challenges in maintaining their own health and well-being. The Oklahoma State Department of Health reports that family caregivers of individuals with dementia are at increased risk of developing chronic health conditions such as hypertension, diabetes, and heart disease (Oklahoma State Department of Health, 2021).

In addition to the emotional toll, caregiving for individuals with dementia can also have significant financial consequences for family caregivers. The AARP estimates that family caregivers in Oklahoma provide over 415 million hours of unpaid care each

year, with an estimated economic value of over \$5 billion (AARP, 2021). Many caregivers are forced to reduce their work hours or leave their jobs altogether to provide care, leading to lost income, reduced retirement benefits, and increased financial strain.

Overall, the toll of family care for dementia patients in Oklahoma highlights the urgent need for accessible and effective support systems to address the needs of caregivers and individuals with dementia alike. Establishing support groups, respite care programs, and other resources can help to alleviate the burden on family caregivers and improve the quality of life for those affected by dementia in Oklahoma.

### can you provide links

Sure, here are the sources for the information in my previous response:

- Alzheimer's Association. (2021). Alzheimer's Disease Facts and Figures 2021. <https://www.alz.org/media/Documents/alzheimers-facts-and-figures.pdf>
- AARP. (2021). Valuing the Invaluable 2020 Update: Charting a Path Forward. <https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/ppi/2020/05/full-report-valuing-the-invaluable-2020-update-charting-a-path-forward.pdf>
- Oklahoma State Department of Health. (2021). Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias in Oklahoma. [https://www.ok.gov/health2/documents/Alzheimers\\_Disease\\_and\\_Related\\_Dementias\\_in\\_Oklahoma.pdf](https://www.ok.gov/health2/documents/Alzheimers_Disease_and_Related_Dementias_in_Oklahoma.pdf)

### Corbin's Submitted Statement of Need

On February 6, 2015, my grandmother passed away due to complications from Alzheimer's disease and watching her struggle through that process has greatly affected me. I had to watch as someone I deeply cherished and loved, lost every memory and connection to people she had loved her entire life. It took a deep strain on my family as we joined the 135,000 family caregivers in Oklahoma who must help their loved ones deal with Alzheimer's.<sup>1</sup> Oklahomans have given over 164 million hours of unpaid care to

their loved ones suffering from Alzheimer's which the Alzheimer's Association estimates at an unpaid value of \$2.6 billion dollars,<sup>2</sup> while a report from Oklahoma's Healthy Brain Initiative estimates the cost will rise with care for

Alzheimer's costing Americans as a whole by 2050 over \$1.1 trillion dollars.<sup>3</sup> Despite this financial burden Oklahomans suffering from Alzheimer's or other degenerative brain conditions have few options for support; with the only location providing in-depth care specifically for these conditions being the Oklahoma Dementia Care Network in Oklahoma City which can be a financial and time burden for individuals to reach on a consistent basis especially if they do not live near this center<sup>4</sup> Oklahomans suffering from degenerative brain conditions are suffering due to a lack of state resources for their conditions and an overreliance on family care instead of professional medical care.

### State Resources

Oklahoma has provided few resources or state funding for Oklahomans suffering from degenerative brain conditions with the only exceptions being the 2016 Oklahoma Alzheimer's State Plan<sup>5</sup> and the 2018-2023 Oklahoma Healthy Brain Initiative.<sup>6</sup> The Oklahoma Alzheimer's State Plan was in development since 2009 and launched in 2016 with the goal of providing additional state funding to provide for professional medical caregiving for Oklahomans suffering from Alzheimer's.<sup>7</sup> This program was unable to gain any success as it was replaced by the Oklahoma Healthy Brain Initiative in 2018 which was a state funded public information campaign that did not provide any direct funding for professional medical caregiving and was only intended to promote Oklahoman education on Alzheimer's and other degenerative brain conditions.<sup>8</sup> Oklahoma retracted state funding for care for Alzheimer's patients despite CDC reporting that average per-person Medicare spending for those with Alzheimer's and other dementias is more than 3 times higher than average per-person spending with Medicaid payments being 23 times higher.<sup>9</sup> Oklahoma's Healthy Brain Initiative also states that the state wants to partner and promote Alzheimer's care in existing retirement facilities with no plans to change their existing style of care or to evaluate the current state of care which is lacking.<sup>10</sup> In Fergus I.M. Craik, James M. Swanson, and Mark Byrd's study "Patterns of Memory Loss in Three Elderly

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1 "Oklahoma" Alzheimer's Association. <https://www.alz.org/professionals/public-health/state-overview/oklahoma>

2 "Oklahoma" Alzheimer's Association. <https://www.alz.org/professionals/public-health/state-overview/oklahoma>

3 "Healthy Brain Initiative" CDC (2023): 11. Web.

4 "Oklahoma Dementia Care Network" OKDCN. <https://www.ouhealth.com/oklahoma-center-for-geroscience/healthy-aging-services/oklahoma-dementia-care-network-okdcn/>

5 "Oklahoma Alzheimer's State Plan 2016" Oklahoma Department of Human Services (2016): 1. Web

6 "Healthy Brain Initiative" CDC (2023): 1. Web.

7 "Oklahoma Alzheimer's State Plan 2016" Oklahoma Department of Human Services (2016): 6. Web

8 "Healthy Brain Initiative" CDC (2023): 4-5. Web.

9 "Healthy Brain Initiative" CDC (2023): 11. Web.

10 "Healthy Brain Initiative" CDC (2023): 12-13. Web.

Samples” one of the elderly samples was from an isolated senior care facility with the members from this facility showing little cognitive or physical care resulting in the group rapidly deteriorating physically and mentally and having low verbal ability.<sup>11</sup> Oklahoma does not have also any state regulation on the type or quality of care that patients with degenerative conditions will receive at senior care facilities with the Oklahoma State Department of Health only requiring an individual written plan of care and annual psychological and health evaluations with no substantial regulation on daily individual care.<sup>12</sup> Despite these problems Oklahoma is planning to continue the Healthy Brain Initiative through 2023, while meetings to discuss the next road map for the plan started June 7- 8 of 2022.<sup>13</sup>

### Family Care

Due to Oklahoma’s lack of state resources for those suffering from Alzheimer’s, individuals suffering from these conditions must rely on family care during their cognitive decline which can lead to complications and stress. 135,000 Oklahomans serve as the primary care official for someone with Alzheimer’s<sup>14</sup> with 57% having done so for at least four years.<sup>15</sup> According to the Alzheimer’s Association, individual care givers can suffer from depression, stress, burnout, and high levels of anxiety due to the strain of caring for a loved one with Alzheimer’s.<sup>16</sup> These issues are only compounded by the financial burden that caregivers take on as well, with AARP and The Oklahoman reporting that Oklahomans spend \$7,242 annually on caregiving expenses or 26% of their household income with an additional 17% going to medical expenses.<sup>17</sup> Despite these setbacks, the Healthy Brain Initiative does not provide funding for individual care givers which can lead to financial hardship not just for the caregiver but for the patient as well.<sup>18</sup> This has led to financial hardship with 47% of caregivers reporting that they have experienced at least one financial hardship while a family caregiver.<sup>19</sup> While a federal bill, the Credit for Care Act has been introduced in 2021 to alleviate this financial burden in the form of a \$5,000 tax credit for eligible families, it has not as of 2023 been put to a vote and Oklahoma has not introduced any similar state legislation.<sup>20</sup>

### Conclusion

Oklahoma has not provided adequate funding, legislation, or attention to Oklahomans suffering from Alzheimer’s or similar degenerative brain conditions despite it being an issue that affects 67,000 Oklahomans.<sup>21</sup> In order to create a better state for those with degenerative brain conditions, it is vital that Oklahoma take legislative and financial steps to alleviate the individual burden of care and to increase funding for professional medical care of degenerative brain conditions.

*Example 2. Plans for Dissemination from “Investing in Student Well-being: A Grant for Social and Emotional Learning Research and Curriculum Design in Norman, Oklahoma Schools.” By Amy.*

### give me some ideas for dissemination of this

Here are some ideas for dissemination of this program:

1. Presentations at conferences and seminars focused on education and social-emotional learning.
2. Collaboration with local organizations and community groups to promote the program and its benefits to the wider community.
3. Outreach efforts to local media outlets (newspapers, radio stations, and television news programs) to highlight the program and its progress.
4. Social media campaigns to share updates and insights from the program and engage with stakeholders.
5. Professional development workshops and training sessions for educators and other professionals in the field of education.
6. Distribution of program materials and resources, such as brochures, flyers, and fact sheets, to schools, community organizations, and policymakers.
7. Engaging with school boards and policymakers to encourage the adoption of SEL as a core component of the school curriculum.

By using a combination of these strategies, the program can effectively disseminate its findings and make a significant impact on the local community and the broader field of education.

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11 Fergus I.M. Craik and Mark Bird and James M. Swanson. “Patterns of Memory Loss in Three Elderly Samples”. *Psychology and Aging* (1987): Vol. 2. No. 1. 80.

12 “Chapter 675: Nursing and Specialized Facilities”. Oklahoma State Department of Health. 66-67. Web

13 “Healthy Brain Initiative Continues Public Health Momentum By Kicking Off Next Road Map Development” Alzheimer’s Association (2022). <https://www.alz.org/news/2022/healthy-brain-initiative-continues-public-health-m>.

14 “Oklahoma” Alzheimer’s Association. <https://www.alz.org/professionals/public-health/state-overview/oklahoma>

15 “Dementia Care: Helping Your Loved One Stay Connected and Safe” AARP (2021). <https://www.aarp.org/caregiving/basics/info-2019/alzheimers-dementia-care.html>.

16 “2023 Alzheimer’s Disease Facts and Figures” Alzheimer’s Association (2023): 26. Web.

17 Mary Overall. “Viewpoints: Oklahoma family caregivers need financial support, and they can’t wait any longer”. *The Oklahoman* (2021). 1. Web.

18 “Healthy Brain Initiative” CDC (2023): 12-13. Web.

19 Mary Overall. “Viewpoints: Oklahoma family caregivers need financial support, and they can’t wait any longer”. *The Oklahoman* (2021). 1. Web.

20 “H.R.3321—Credit for Caring Act of 2021” Congress. 1. Web.

21 “Oklahoma” Alzheimer’s Association. <https://www.alz.org/professionals/public-health/state-overview/oklahoma>

### **write me a couple sentences for #3**

For outreach efforts to local media outlets, the program will develop press releases and media kits that highlight the program's key objectives, strategies, and milestones. We will also seek out opportunities for interviews and features in local news outlets to help raise awareness about the program and its impact on student mental health in Norman, Oklahoma.

### **do the same for social media**

For social media campaigns, the program will create social media accounts on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to share updates, insights, and resources from the program. The social media content will be designed to engage with stakeholders, including educators, parents, and students, and will be shared on a regular basis to keep the community informed about the program's progress. We will also use social media to promote events, workshops, and other activities related to the program, and to encourage community members to share their own experiences and feedback about the program.

### **do the same for engaging with school boards and policy makers**

For engaging with school boards and policy makers, the program will establish a communication plan that includes regular updates, meetings, and presentations to the board and policymakers. Our team will work closely with school administrators to ensure that our program aligns with district goals and objectives, and we will provide regular progress reports to demonstrate the impact of our program on student mental health outcomes. We will also identify opportunities to collaborate with other community organizations and stakeholders, such as mental health professionals, to build support for our program and to advocate for the integration of SEL into school policies and programs.

### **Amy's Submitted Dissemination Plans**

- **Website:** A website will be created to share our resources and findings with parents, students, educators, and the general community. Refer to the above section for more information pertaining to the website.
- **Local Media Outlets:** For outreach efforts to local media outlets, the program will develop press releases and media kits that highlight the program's key objectives, strategies, and milestones. We will also seek out opportunities for interviews and features in local news outlets to help raise awareness about the program and its impact on student mental health in Norman, Oklahoma. Eventually interviews will be sought out with larger networks.
- **Social Media:** For social media campaigns, the program will create social media accounts on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to share updates, insights, and resources from the program. The social media content

will be designed to engage with stakeholders, including educators, parents, and students, and will be shared on a regular basis to keep the community informed about the program's progress. We will also use social media to promote events, workshops, and other activities related to the program, and to encourage community members to share their own experiences and feedback about the program.

- **School Boards/Policy Makers:** For engaging with school boards and policy makers, the program will establish a communication plan that includes regular updates, meetings, and presentations to the board and policymakers. Our team will work closely with school administrators to ensure that our program aligns with district goals and objectives, and we will provide regular progress reports to demonstrate the impact of our program on student mental health outcomes. We will also identify opportunities to collaborate with other community organizations and stakeholders, such as mental health professionals, to build support for our program and to advocate for the integration of SEL into school policies and programs.