

FROM ANTIRACISM TO ABOLITION: THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITY CULTURE
CENTERS IN BLACK STUDENTS' ACADEMIC IDENTITIES AND LANGUAGE

by

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ABSTRACT

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Drawing on focus group, interview, and participant-observer data collected as part of this IRB-approved [19.177] qualitative research project, this dissertation provides insights about how Black American students develop academic identities through coursework and extracurricular involvement in a Black culture center on the campus of a historically white institution (HWI). I apply the lens of “abolitionist education” (Love) to explore the languaging that students and faculty in the Black culture center do to create community and racial uplift in a type of institution where racial identity historically has been marginalized and obscured—and where, the collected data indicate, such occlusion continues despite institutional efforts to prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion. Through this analytical lens, I consider how college writing teachers who are committed to antiracism might reimagine their work as abolitionist educators. This reframe illuminates not only the nature and scope of the structural work that lies ahead for people who aim to abolish institutionalized racism in higher education but also the collaboration necessary to see it through. I conclude by offering four means by which abolitionist educators, including but not limited to writing teachers, can strengthen their impact in their own institutions.

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For Mila and Annalie,

May you always speak up in the face of injustice.

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Chapter 1: How Do We Language So Black Students Matter?

“I hope you can hear the structural in what I’m asking. How do we language so people stop killing each other?” (Inoue, “How,” 364)

That “dark suffering” exists—suffering that is predicated upon the fact that “the very basic idea of mattering is sometimes hard to conceptualize when your country finds you disposable”—is not a question (Love 2). Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) are communicating this all the time, in many different ways, as they have been for centuries—through the texts they write, the songs they produce, the films they direct, the performances they give, the scholarship they publish; through digital receipts (like cellphone videos); through mass protests; and through everyday acts of ordinary resistance like clapping back at micro- (and not-so-micro-) aggressions. Despite the prevalence of dark suffering, tireless efforts of BIPOC to remove the blinds constricting the white gaze, and collective resistance to structures of oppression, “most dark suffering goes unnoticed by too many Americans,” argues professor of education and activist Bettina L. Love in her book *We Want to Do More than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom* (27). Theorizing the “educational survival complex, in which students are left learning to merely survive, learning how schools mimic the world they live in, thus making schools a training site for a life of exhaustion” (27), Love argues that although

this type of violence is less visceral and seemingly less tragic than the physical acts of murder at the hands of White mobs or White men acting on their White rage, [...] the racist, hateful language and systemic, institutionalized, antidark, state-sanctioned violence that dark children endure on a daily basis in the educational survival complex murders the spirit; it’s a slow death, but a death nonetheless. (33-34)

School, Love contends, is killing the spirits of BIPOC children, a problem no less tragic than physical murder. Such a charge—one that so many scholars make—compels educators who care

about justice and equity and about the welfare of other human beings to ask the questions, *What is my role in this suffering? And what can I do to help end it?* Writing this dissertation has been a search for those answers.

What We Can't See, We Can't Stop

For most of my life, I've had a recurring dream: I'm screaming something to someone, looking them in the eyes, but they can't hear me. They hear sound, they hear words, but they don't grasp the meaning I'm screaming to convey—they're in their own head, filling in the dots that they think I'm trying to connect, but they miss the very words I'm saying. I'm furious, and I keep screaming, trying to get them to hear me, but they remain unfazed, going on with their interpretations of what I'm thinking, feeling, saying. I imagine this might be one small part of how it feels to be dark in the United States today. For all the ways BIPOC direct white people's attention to racist structures, many see only the personal, the localized instances of racial discrimination. They also see only their skin and, for a few, their sociopolitical positioning, though many believe that positioning is the result of good, hard work. "Americans have long been trained to see the deficiencies of people rather than policy," explains historian and antiracist scholar Ibram X. Kendi, "It's a pretty easy mistake to make: People are in our faces. Policies are distant" (28).

For a person whose identities are represented in spaces where decisions are made on behalf of others, it is hard to see the pivotal role that that representation and its normalization play in constructing their worldview. That is, when we see only people who resemble our own identities in positions of power, it's easy to assume that whoever isn't represented is somehow to blame, as if entire groups of people are lacking in whatever skills, knowledge, or motivation are needed to fill these roles. When we see a small number of underrepresented people in these positions of

authority, our perspectives seem justified, because *some* people made it.

It is policies that sustain inequity, Kendi argues. If we see only the *symptoms* of inequity—the struggles of groups of people—and do not recognize how those struggles are created by discriminatory policies, then we cannot truly address inequity even if we desperately want to.

Asao B. Inoue, scholar of race, rhetoric, and writing studies, is one of many antiracist educators imploring their colleagues to shift their attention to the structural. In his chair’s address at the 2019 Conference of College Composition and Communication, he argued:

I’m not saying we have to change our perspectives, soften our hearts. Our hearts are not the problem. In fact, I’m actually saying the opposite, that we cannot change our biases in judging so easily, and that your perspectives that you’ve cultivated over your lifetime are not the key to making a more just society, classroom, pedagogy, or grading practice. *The key is changing the structures, cutting the steel bars, altering the ecology, in which your biases function in your classrooms and communities.* I’m saying, *we must change the way power moves through White racial biases*, through standards of English that make White language supremacy. (“How,” 364, emphases added)

Like Love, Inoue developed his argument in response to the problem of suffering—in this case, the impetus for the Black Lives Matter movement. “How do we language so people stop killing each other?” his address’s title asked. Although the question might seem hyperbolic when posed to a bunch of writing teachers, it points to the significance and power of the human voice—and what happens when that voice is suppressed or trained to assimilate to others’ expectations. The role of writing teachers in the suffering of students, Inoue said, manifests through the power we wield over students’ grades and the biases informing our assessments of their work. The most impactful way we can reduce that suffering is to change the power structures, because biases are not quickly changed, nor do individuals have the power to create or reduce mass suffering that policies do.

For Inoue, therefore, the most integral power structures in educational settings are what he calls *assessment ecologies*, a heuristic for considering the system of many interacting and

interconnected elements that influence one another where/when assessment happens. In writing classes, these ecologies comprise all the factors influencing the judgements people make when assessing others' knowledge or written texts. Inoue's heuristic, driven by antiracist purposes, helps to make visible the structural ways that racial and other biases impact students and our practices of assessment. This heuristic and Inoue's labor-based grading methods have greatly influenced my pedagogy as a white writing teacher. Still, they don't quite get at the pedagogical concerns about white teachers *teaching* BIPOC students in the first place—about how we might be perpetuating racism by doing our jobs, how we can notice our own complicity in racist ideas, and how we can change and do better.

I wondered—are there other ways beyond assessment in which I might be causing BIPOC students and colleagues to suffer? If so, how can I change what I'm doing? Is there more I as a white teacher can do, in addition to cultivating antiracist assessment ecologies, to support BIPOC students and resist structural racism in the teaching of writing? Implementing hip hop pedagogies feels appropriative to me, and I'm not well versed in various cultural rhetorics, plus choosing a culture to focus on in the first-year writing classes I teach most seems problematic for all the cultures represented among students that doing so leaves out. I have deep ethical concerns about teaching students to code-switch, and I'm not quite sure how to effectively teach code-meshing, but I wanted to learn more. My questions evolved: What research might I do to better see the antiracist possibilities for as well as the problems with my teaching racially diverse students as a white person? How can I work in solidarity with my BIPOC colleagues and students to thwart systemic racism at the various levels of my work—in the classes I teach, the departments and institutions I'm part of, and the discipline within which I research and learn? *What is my role in this suffering? And what can I do to help end it?*

Why We Fight: Abolitionist Education and Mattering

“Freedom, not reform” is Love’s mantra (11). To theorize the structural changes she believes are essential for eradicating educational injustice, Love draws on the metaphor of abolition, contending that activists must “demand and fight for an education system where all students are thriving, not simply surviving” (11). Thriving is both the cause and effect of freedom, Love says. To thrive is to “create new systems and structures for educational, political, economic, and community freedom” (1); it is also to “matter enough that our citizenship, and the rights that come with it, are never questioned, reduced, or taken away,” because “the ideas of democracy, liberty, and justice for all [...] are the unalienable rights needed to thrive” (2). Thriving and freedom, thus, are inextricably bound.

Love’s freedom-centered, abolitionist metaphor is useful for the ways it emphasizes the severity of the inequity Black and Brown children face in the U.S. education system. Although Love’s book centers K-12 education, I use her metaphor as a lens for antiracism in college settings because her injunctions are relevant to postsecondary educators as well. At times Love’s distinction between abolition and antiracism is unclear, but generally, she uses them differently, suggesting that antiracism is one of the values on which abolition is founded. “Persistent, structural barriers [...] cannot be eradicated by tweaking the system or making adjustments,” she argues, “We must struggle together not only to reimagine schools but to build new schools that we are taught to believe are impossible: schools based on intersectional justice, antiracism, love, healing, and joy” (10-11). Perhaps the greatest function of the abolitionist metaphor is its focus on destruction (abolish) instead of just a fight (anti-):

Abolitionist teaching is as much about tearing down old structures and ways of thinking as it is about forming new ideas, new forms of social interactions, new ways to be inclusive [...] new ways to establish an educational system that works for everyone, especially those who are put at the edges of the classroom and society. (88-89)

Abolitionist education, Love says, is about completely dismantling racist structures, not just fighting them. It is succeeding, creating a new order. Antiracism lacks the intensity of that revolutionary purpose because it focuses on resistance, not on eradication. Throughout this dissertation, however, I use abolitionism and antiracism interchangeably because of antiracism's relative newness to rhetoric and composition as a term¹; I do not want teachers to feel they aren't doing enough and so become discouraged and quit. My goal is instead to highlight the symbiotic relationship between antiracism and abolitionism to help push writing teachers' activism further. To account for some of the differences in Love's terminology while using those terms interchangeably, I emphasize the extracurricular requirements of antiracist teachers, agreeing with Love that "[p]edagogy, regardless of its name, is useless without teachers dedicated to challenging systemic oppression with intersectional social justice" (19).

For abolitionist education to exist, people—students—have to matter. Love explains:

[T]he idea of mattering is essential in that you must matter enough to yourself, to your students, and to your students' community to fight. But for dark people, the very basic idea of mattering is sometimes hard to conceptualize when your country finds you disposable. How do you matter to a country that is at once obsessed with and dismissive about how it kills you? How do you matter to a country that would rather incarcerate you than educate you? [...] How do you matter to a country that measures your knowledge against a "gap" it created? How do you matter to a country that labels you a "model minority" in order to fuel anti-Blackness? (2)

This difficulty conceptualizing what it means to matter (and survive) that Love says "dark people" experience is important. If our BIPOC students and colleagues don't believe that they matter, they won't fight. They will capitulate to the status quo, and their vital perspectives, values, methods and so on will be subsumed. Abolitionist education, freedom, thriving—all

¹ Following Love, I use "abolitionism" in reference to the movement to end slavery as a rhetorical strategy to highlight structural racism within educational institutions. This use of the term is wholly different from the movement in rhetoric and composition in the late 1990s and early 2000s, led by Sharon Crowley, to abolish compulsory first-year composition in postsecondary education.

begin with the idea of mattering. Using abolitionist teaching as a lens, my research thus takes up the question, how do we language so BIPOC students matter? As I explain in the next section, my research question quickly became *how do we language so Black students matter?*

Seeking Answers: Research Design

As I contemplated how I might find answers to my questions, I considered places on a college campus where 1) antiracist work might be happening consistently with students in the classroom and where 2) I could access groups of BIPOC students learning together. “[L]iteracy is embedded in its social context,” explains Roz Ivanic, so “it is necessary to recognize the interests, values and practices which hold people together and see how discourse emerges from those, rather than starting by looking at discourse” (80). For this reason, I wanted to locate my research in a place where a community of people defined by a shared racial identification engaged in intellectual work on a college campus. I also needed a place that I could visit multiple times to get a fuller sense what was happening there, and because I do not live within easy commuting distance from my doctoral university, I looked for a place closer to home.

One of my alma maters, in the town where I now live, seemed a promising fit not only for its proximity but also for its racial demographics and its status as a historically white institution (HWI).² Specifically, this open-access, land-grant university in a semi-rural Midwestern locale surrounded by predominantly white agricultural communities is generally regarded as a commuter school, with many BIPOC students recruited from the Midwest’s multicultural metropolis 60 miles away. The racial demographics³ of the university’s students are more

² Like Micere Keels, I use the term “*historically* rather than *predominantly* White college and university [...] because it is about much more than the demographic composition of these institutions that make them hostile places for historically underrepresented students” (7).

³ Out of respect for the people who agreed to participate anonymously in this study, I need to maintain the anonymity of this institution, this county, and these people. The statistics throughout this dissertation are true. If you want to know more, please contact me at kddbailey@gmail.com

diverse than the county's racial demographics. Fall 2020 statistics show that just over half of its undergraduate students (55%) were white, which is nearly 20% less than the 2022 county demographics; 15.8% were Black (6.8% more than county), 17.9% were Hispanic/Latinx (5.3% more than county), 5.4% were Asian (2.7% more than county), 0.1% were Native American (0.4% less than county), and 3.7% were bi- or multiracial (1.4% more than county). Collectively, the school has fewer white students and more BIPOC students than its surrounding communities.

Also significant within this institution, which I call *Midwestern U.*, are its five academic culture centers (hereafter referred to simply as “culture centers”), most of which function not only as student support and outreach units but also as academic units. These centers would provide access to communities gathered around common interests, values, and practices in an academic setting, which I had been seeking. Through these culture centers, students have access to culture-centric interdisciplinary curricula and minors of study as well as academic and professional support services, cultural programming, social gatherings, community outreach events, and volunteer service opportunities. The institution's website describes these centers as “a ‘home away from home’ for students seeking ways to connect with students who share their culture [...] spaces where you can celebrate and honor traditions and connect with students and faculty in a warm and intellectually engaging and inviting environment.” Educational theorist and professor Gloria Ladson-Billings (qtd. in Patton) explains that on the campuses of HWIs, culture centers fulfill vital educational, advisory, and social and psychological support roles for students of color amid

the reality of life in the United States and on our college campuses. Despite advertising themselves as open and democratic spaces where the marketplace of ideas allows or different and divergent viewpoints, many college and university campuses remain difficult places for students of color to negotiate. (*xi-xii*)

In addition to providing a place of refuge and support for BIPOC students in what are often hostile environments, culture centers “fill important educational roles for all people, BIPOC and white, to “learn about the history, culture, and experiences of others” (*xii*).

Because of their academic function to teach people about specific cultures regardless of whether students belong to those cultures, these culture centers were places where, despite my white racial identity, I felt I could ethically conduct ethnographic research as a participant-observer. The only other places I could have accessed students of color organizing around racial and/or ethnic identities would have been student organizations, which serve as places where marginalized students can bring their marginalized identities to the center of their discussions and/or experiences. My presence in those places would be intrusive and would reproduce legacies of White supremacy, the notion that White bodies are unraced and are thus welcome anywhere. In essence, my presence in those spaces would have been violent and thus counterproductive to antiracism.

The website of the culture center that is the subject of this study echoes the centrality of culture centers to social justice through an emphasis on advocacy and explicit references to the multiple overarching communities of which the center is a part: the university campus, the university as metonym for its leaders and their commitments, and the larger civic community. Nevertheless, half a century has passed since culture centers were created in response to student protests in the 1960s and 1970s; the culture center where I located my study was established in 1971. Despite the vital equity roles these centers play in increasingly diverse academic environments, they remain minimally studied and theorized in higher education scholarship—much of which is “historical and focused on the student protests of the 1960s and 1970s” (Patton

xiii)—and have no presence within rhetoric and composition scholarship. For this reason, culture centers seemed an ideal site for the qualitative research I wanted to do.

Context of Study

I began this project intending to focus on the three largest culture centers at Midwestern U. Upon speaking with the directors of two of these centers, I realized that the scope of my intended project was far too broad for a dissertation, so I narrowed the research to one of them. I chose the Black culture center for two reasons. First, many researchers in disciplines intersecting with rhetoric and composition have addressed the unique circumstances that Black students face with linguistic racism, such that they focus specifically on “anti-Black linguistic racism” (Baker-Bell). Second but perhaps more importantly, Black culture is especially important to me because I grew up in predominantly Black neighborhoods and attended public elementary and secondary schools with predominantly Black students. Issues around race and anti-Black racism were vital parts of my daily life growing up and have deeply informed my worldview and my personal and professional priorities. They have become increasingly important to me through graduate study of critical race theory, sociolinguistics, and writing pedagogies. After deciding to locate my study within the Black culture center at Midwestern U., my primary research question became *How does the Black culture center influence the development of Black students’ academic identities, and what roles does academic discourse play in that development? What can writing teachers committed to antiracism learn from the culture center’s approaches and methods?* By “academic discourse,” I meant the discursive means of knowledge production, but I designed the study to also account for extralinguistic resources involving any semiotic means of communication or their combination. Before I detail the research methodologies and data

collection, I will briefly describe the Black culture center's physical space as well as the resources it offers to students and the surrounding community.

Building Design and Location

Built in 1993, the building that now houses the Black culture center where I conducted my research is a nine-room facility situated along the southeast edge of campus, along the primary thoroughfare through the city. The building itself, inside and out, exudes symbols of Black heritage. Above both sets of entry doors on the north (the main entrance) and south sides of the building, under each gable, is a large X built into the structure, a symbol of Malcolm X (see fig. 1). Built into the brick retaining wall on the building's north side (see fig. 2), on each side at the base of the stairs leading up to the building, are nine small brick squares in the colors of the pan-African flag (red for bloodshed, green for land, and black for people), arranged as a cross. At the center is the black square, with a green square adjacent to each side of it, comprising the cross; red squares take up the four corners. On all the brick posts that are part of this wall and stairway are four small squares, two red and two green, arranged to make a larger square: the Ghanaian Adinkra symbol of *Kuronti ne Akwamu*, a symbol of democracy, sharing ideas, and taking council.

The double doors at the main entrance open into a foyer area, directly across from which is the central room of the building, the classroom. Designed to serve as a "living room" with the rest of the "house" surrounding it, the classroom is the main gathering space where all the center's events and classes are held. When the classroom doors are open, as they often are, the main entrance feels like an entry to the building's heart and soul; straight across from you, on the classroom's south wall, is a large mural facing the main entrance (see fig. 3). Painted primarily in red, black, green, and gold, the mural includes the facial profile of a person of African descent

on one side, a fist indicating Black Power on the other side, and between them, an open book bearing the culture center's vision. Adinkra symbols are incorporated throughout the mural: *Gye Nyame* (God is omnipotent); *Dwennimmen* (strength in mind, body, and soul; humility, wisdom, and learning); *Bi Nka Bi* (justice, fairplay, freedom, peace, forgiveness, unity, harmony, and the avoidance of conflict or strife); *Denkyem* (adaptability and cleverness); *Dame-Dame* (craftiness, intelligence, and strategy); and *Abode Santann* (divine creator; the omnipresent, all-seeing eye). The classroom also includes African carved masks, sculptures, and bowls displayed on the wall and on a small table in the front right corner of the room. All art throughout the building is either made or donated by students or faculty and foregrounds African symbols, Afrocentric values (like community and activism), Black leaders (including Maulana Karenga and Mary McLeod Bethune), and African American celebrations (like Kwanzaa). In addition to the resources it provides, the Black culture center provides a physical space that reflects Black presence and culture on campus to students, employees, and local residents. This space provides a tangible sense of belonging for those in the Black community who encounter it.



Fig. 1: The gable on each of the building's entrances features a symbol of Malcolm X. Source: Midwestern U.'s Twitter profile.



Fig. 2: An aerial view of the Black culture center at Northwestern U. The brick retaining wall contains symbols of the pan-African flag that represent bloodshed, land, and people. Source: Northwestern U.'s student newspaper



Fig. 3: The mural on the south wall of the classroom in the Black culture center at Northwestern U. Source: Screen shot from introductory video on the website of the Black culture center at Northwestern U.

Academic Courses

As both a student support center and an academic unit providing classes for a Black Studies minor, the Black culture center at Northwestern U. is open to all students who want to learn about Black history and culture and contemporary issues facing Black peoples in the U.S. Classes like African American Critical Thought, for example, teach students about various topics—in this

case, sociohistorical thought in the 19th and 20th centuries—from the perspectives of Black scholars. Other classes teach about the social, economic, political, and historical conditions in which Black Americans have created and continue to create knowledge, meaning, culture, community, and change.

This center offers an 18-credit Black Studies minor that “presents an interdisciplinary body of knowledge that examines the histories and cultures of African Americans with an appreciation for the historical, social, and political influences of Africa and the African Diaspora.”⁴ As part of the minor, students learn how to “analyze racism and its present-day manifestations in order to promote better understanding among ethnic and racial groups.” The courses taught here foreground Black perspectives, voices, and values. Requirements for the minor include the following:

- **Three core courses (9 credits total):** Racism in American Culture and Society, Foundations of Black Studies, and Afrocentricity
- **One history course (3 credits):** African History to 1600, African History Since 1600, or African-American History to 1865
- **Two elective courses (6 credits total):** Courses span the following university departments, with example course offerings:
 - Anthropology (e.g., Africas in the Americas)
 - Black Studies (e.g., Social Philosophy of Hip Hop Culture)
 - Economics (e.g., Economic Area Studies—C. Africa, South of the Sahara)
 - Geography (e.g., Geography of Africa)
 - History (e.g., History of Black American Business and Entrepreneurship)
 - Journalism (e.g., Ethnic Minorities and the News Media)
 - Political Science (e.g., Politics of Africa)
 - Sociology (e.g., Race and Ethnicity)
 - Theatre (e.g., African American Theatre)

In addition to the minor, the culture center offers a 12-credit Black Studies certificate “designed to provide interested students with a strong sense of the African American culture and experience

⁴ This quotation is taken from Midwestern U.’s online course catalog.

and its impact on individuals and society.”⁵ For the certificate, 6 credits from the core courses and 6 credits from the electives are required.

Social and Community Outreach Events

Throughout each academic year, the Black culture center at Midwestern U. hosts a variety of free social events and community outreach events for students and the surrounding community. Annual events include the pre-Kwanzaa celebration before winter break, assorted Black Heritage Month events, and the pre-commencement event each spring semester called the Black Graduation Recognition Celebration.

One Friday each month, the Black culture center hosts “So-Full Friday,” a free, laid-back social event designed to celebrate Black culture and excellence. The programming for this event varies monthly but often includes a collective movie viewing, a presentation or workshop, a game, or some other form of social event—and usually a meal—held in the culture center. At the time of this writing, the month’s So-Full Friday event was titled “Honoring Black Women,” a joint effort with Midwestern U.’s Gender and Sexuality Resource Center, including “a meal and Jeopardy game centering on the contributions of Black women ancestors and current icons who are paving the way for Black women.”⁶

Student Support Programs

The Black culture center at Midwestern U. offers four formal student support programs geared toward helping Black students graduate:

- The Black Student Achievement Program (formerly S-Plan, for “Survive and Succeed”) pairs first-year and transfer students with peer mentors to help them navigate the college environment and gain access to various kinds of academic and personal support available to them.

⁵ This quotation is taken from the website of the Black culture center at Midwestern U.

⁶ This quotation is taken from the website of the Black culture center at Midwestern U.

- The Black Male Initiative (BMI) provides Black male-identified students with scaffolded academic support, mentors, social events, and community service opportunities to focus retention efforts on young Black men. To date, BMI has a 100 percent graduation rate.
- The African American Mentor Program gives Midwestern U. students opportunities to develop leadership skills by mentoring local middle and high school students.
- The John Henrik Clarke Honor Society recognizes Black students with a 3.0 and above GPA and demonstrated commitment to community service.

Together, these programs sponsored by the Black culture center offer opportunities for Black students to connect with one another, access tangible academic and personal support resources, celebrate their individual and collective accomplishments, and give back to their communities.

Methodologies

In her 1993 Nobel Lecture, Toni Morrison cast language as a living thing, as agency itself—“an act with consequences.” Language does not only represent, that is; it *does*. In a chapter problematizing her work as a literacy ethnographer, Kate Vieira emphasizes this point as well: “writing often acts in ways that have negative consequences for those written about, especially when the writees are from marginalized groups. To repeat (because it bears repeating): Writing not only says. It also does” (54). It is with the gravity of this knowledge that I chose and designed this project and that I write about it now, knowing that the words I write have effects—on me, on others who read them, and through us, on others. I am acutely aware of the ways in which this dissertation invokes vital social justice work while, at the same time, these words coming from my white fingertips perpetuate white supremacy, because it is *my* voice and perspective—the voice of a white cis-gender woman—that ends up on these pages. It is *my* voice framing the stories of the people whose experiences are the center of this work. Additionally, the presence of my white body in a space partly designed to be a refuge for Black college students had the potential to invoke trauma. Not only does the white body signify assumptions of belonging, but also it bears associations of colonizers, in a historically oppressive institution, no

less. This problem is one Asao Inoue confronted in his chair's address at the 2019 Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC):

Just as it is unfair that in our world most indigenous, Latinx, and Black Americans will never get the chance to do what we do, to be teachers, or professors, or researchers, or something else that taps their own potentials because of the racist steel bars set around them, it is equally unfair that you perpetuate racism and White language supremacy not just through your words and actions, but through your body in a place like this or in your classrooms, despite your better intentions. Let me repeat that to compassionately urge you to sit in some discomfort: White people can perpetuate White language supremacy by being present. You can perpetuate White language supremacy through the presence of your bodies in places like this. [...] You perpetuate White language supremacy in your classrooms because you are White and stand in front of students, as many White teachers have done before you, judging, assessing, grading, professing on the same kinds of language standards, standards that came from your group of people. (357)

The reality that Inoue highlights—that the authority with which I write is due largely to good fortune, and that this authority can perpetuate systemic racism—makes an antiracist project like this one a quandary. On one hand, stories that otherwise might not be told do find voice through this work; on the other hand, those stories are being filtered by Whiteness. Because I believe that the telling of neglected stories is imperative for racial justice work, however, I have proceeded with this potentially controversial project, bearing in mind the notion that

Methods *are* epicentric. Geologic. They are the molten core. They make plates shift, crevices gape. They are at the ethical, social, political, and relational heart of what we think we are doing when we write about others. And this, this writing about others, demands the integrity of purposeful design, as well as awareness of potential outcomes. (Vieira 57)

I could ethically proceed with this project, that is, by designing research methods with care, guided by critical race theory and Afrocentric methodologies. To contextualize these methodologies and the specific research methods that developed out of them, I will begin by explaining the methodological values and assumptions that informed my design of this research, followed by a description of the specific methods I used to collect qualitative data.

Before I begin, I must clarify a couple of important definitions and conventions I use throughout this dissertation. In keeping with the Black culture center's convention, I use *Black* to reference a racial-ethnic category of people from a wide range of ethnic groups of African descent. Similarly, I use *white* to reference racial-ethnic category of people from a wide range of ethnic groups of European descent. I have independently chosen a convention for capitalizing these racial-ethnic categories: I capitalize Black but lowercase white. I have implemented this convention with the hope of drawing attention to white readers' expectation of equality. The impetus for this juxtaposition of one capitalized and one lowercased racial designation grew out of a rhetorical strategy Inoue used in his CCCC address: he began by addressing his BIPOC colleagues at length, later addressing his white colleagues and drawing attention to the experience of being excluded and their attendant emotional response. While I cannot exclude white readers (nor do I wish to), my goal with this convention for capitalizing is to challenge white readers' expectations and, through this minor disruption, perhaps cultivate critical reflection about those expectations and their relationship to readers' own racial subjectivity.

Critical Race Theory as a Framework

I designed this project with critical race theory (CRT) first and foremost in mind given my own racial identity and the racialized community of people I wanted to learn from. My concerns were threefold: 1) I needed to clearly define the community I was researching and to justify my focus on that community as a white researcher; 2) I wanted to examine how a race-centered community in an HWI resists oppression; 3) I wanted to prioritize racial justice in an educational setting. My research was most influenced by education scholar Tara J. Yosso and Chicana and Chicano Studies scholar Corina Benavides Lopez, who argue that a CRT framework for education research adopts the following five tenets: Centrality of race/racism with other forms of

subordination (including language), challenge to dominant ideology, commitment to social justice, centrality of experiential knowledge, and transdisciplinary perspective and historicity (Yosso and Lopez 97-98). That is, my project would: examine the intersections of race, racism, and language within a Black culture center at an HWI; explore alternatives to writing instruction that adopts *standard language ideology*, the assumption that an ideal form of a language exists; have the goal of adding to existing knowledge about antiracist writing pedagogies; foreground the perspectives and experiential knowledge of Black Studies scholars (most of whom were Black) and Black students; and draw from scholarship in education and sociolinguistics in addition to rhetoric and composition to develop a broader understanding of the data collected.

To these ends, most of my research design was influenced by Yosso's theorization of *community cultural wealth*, which is

an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression [... and] begins with the perspective that Communities of Color are places with multiple strengths. [...] [It] centers the research, pedagogy, and policy lens on Communities of Color and calls into question White middle class communities as the standard by which all others are judged. (Yosso 77, 82)

The center of a community cultural wealth project, that is, must be a Community of Color. In my study, the Black community at the heart of Midwestern U.'s Black culture center would be my reference point for what kinds of knowledge and means of knowledge production are deemed valuable in this academic space. I would also explore whether and how that value translated to the HWI within which the Black culture center was situated.

Yosso's approach applies critical race theory to offer an alternative interpretation of Pierre Bourdieu's cultural capital theory:

According to Bourdieu, cultural capital refers to an accumulation of cultural knowledge, skills and abilities possessed and inherited by privileged groups in society. [...] [Bourdieu's] theory of cultural capital has been used to assert that some communities are culturally wealthy while others are culturally poor. This interpretation of Bourdieu

exposes White middle class culture as the standard, and therefore all other forms and expressions of “culture” are judged in comparison to this “norm.” In other words, cultural capital is not just inherited or possessed by the middle class, but rather it refers to an accumulation of specific forms of knowledge, skills and abilities that are *valued* by privileged groups in society. (76)

In contrast to traditional interpretations of Bordieu’s theory, Yosso’s interpretation highlights the “knowledges, skills, abilities, and networks [...] possessed and utilized by People of Color” (82).

I designed data collection instruments to gather information about these knowledge, skills, abilities, and networks. I also used CRT in my data analysis “to theorize, examine and challenge the ways race and racism implicitly and explicitly impact on [sic] social structures, practices and discourses” (Yosso 70). Applying CRT to the concept of cultural capital, Yosso explained that community cultural wealth contains six types of capital:

Aspirational capital refers to the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers. [...] *Linguistic capital* includes the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style. [...] *Familial capital* refers to those cultural knowledges nurtured among *familia* (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition. [...] This form of cultural wealth engages a commitment to community well being and expands the concept of family to include a more broad understanding of kinship. [...] *Social capital* can be understood as networks of people and community resources. [...] *Navigational capital* refers to skills of maneuvering through social institutions. [...] *Resistant capital* refers [to] those knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality. (77-80)

Yosso’s taxonomy helps to make visible the various kinds of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts that students and faculty in the Black culture center bring to Midwestern U. and use both to survive and to resist racial oppression in an HWI. Although I did not use Yosso’s terms in my written analysis, I did use them to loosely guide my reading of the data.

Afrocentrism as a Framework

In an article entitled “Toward an Afrocentric Research Methodology,” education researcher Ruth Reviere offers a framework for Afrocentric research design, which “challenge[s] the use of

the traditional Eurocentric research criteria of objectivity, reliability, and validity in the inquiry process” (710). These criteria, Reviere argues, “are inadequate and incorrect, especially for research involving human experiences,” (709) because they do not account for researchers’ assumptions about “race and human behaviors” and are thus often flawed (724). In an Afrocentric methodology, explains Reviere, a researcher must overtly acknowledge “any and all subjectivities or societal baggage that would otherwise remain hidden and, hence, covertly influence the research activity” (710). This acknowledgement must happen through “all elements of the research process[,] from the framing of the research question to the data-gathering techniques and the interpretive analysis” (724).

Reviere developed this research methodology from two primary sources: 1) the original theorist of Afrocentrism, Molefi Kete Asante, who identified three Afrocentric principles of knowledge construction and interpretation and “appeal[ed] for fairness and openness in the research activity”; and 2) W. C. Banks’s argument that “communality is necessary for the verification of knowledge claims,” which Asante endorses (712-13). The methodology includes five canons (713-20):

- *ukweli* (truth must be “grounded in the experiences of the community”)
- *uhaki* (research methods must be “fair to all participants” and “mindful of the welfare of all the participants”)
- *kujitoa* (the “structure and use” of knowledge generated through research is more important than “objectivity and dispassion,” which often are terms masking European subjectivity)
- *ujamaa* (“theory and practice should be informed by the actual and aspired interests of the community”), and
- *utulivu* (research must be *just*, or fair in procedure and open in its application).

All these criteria place the community at the center of the research: all knowledge must generate from within the community in the service of care. I designed this project to honor these canons in the following ways.

One, my research relied most heavily on interviews and focus groups with faculty, the center administrator, and Black American students in the Black culture center. Although I attended some events and classes as a participant-observer, the notes I took merely helped to contextualize the findings of the interview and focus group data.

Two, all theory generated from this project emerged from the interviews and focus groups. Through data analysis, I assumed the truth of what all participants said and endeavored first and foremost to understand that truth without imposing my own perspectives through critique. This orientation required continual self-examination and reflection throughout the process of data analysis and writing, accountability from my advisor through feedback, and substantial revision at times. Suspending my judgements and attending deeply to the words and perspectives of participants was difficult when they said things that referenced standard language ideology, which I discuss in Chapter 4, or seemed to demonstrate what literacy scholar April Baker-Bell calls internalized “anti-Black linguistic racism” or “respectability language pedagogies,” concepts I discuss in Chapters 2 and 4, respectively. These criteria also became relevant when Asia, one of the students in a focus group, recounted an experience with a former white teacher that deserved some analysis. Although what that teacher said and how he said it were filtered through Asia’s interpretation and memory and thus not necessarily “accurate” as told, what mattered most was Asia’s interpretation of the experience and how that interpretation stayed with her and influenced her future experiences with academic writing. An Afrocentric methodology enabled me to focus on what truly mattered—Asia’s experience as she had internalized it—and not on foregrounding the filter and thus lack of “objectivity” as a limitation to the study. In other words, the data here were not a problem because my methodology resisted Eurocentric research criteria that are not useful (and are arguably harmful) to the study of human subjects.

Three, I overtly acknowledged with research participants my reasons for conducting this study and how my life experiences and subjectivity led me to it. The canon of *ukweli* required me to “present sufficient information about [myself] to enable readers to assess how, and to what extent, [my] presence influenced the choice, conduct, and outcomes of the research” (Reviere 714). As such, I explained to faculty and students that I am concerned about racial justice, especially in educational spaces, due not only to my study of language, literacies, and power in graduate school but also to my experiences growing up and attending public schools with predominantly Black peers as a white kid. When relevant to our conversations, I acknowledged the difficulties my white racial subjectivity poses for my research. I have done the same throughout this dissertation.

Four, although I have not written it into the dissertation, I continually theorized my own whiteness throughout the entire process of designing, conducting, and writing about this project. I agonized over the ethics of researching a Black community as a white person, and to learn how to do so respectfully, I spoke with Erin Winkler, a white associate professor of African and African Diaspora Studies at UW-Milwaukee (UWM), about how she accounts for her racial subjectivity and navigates this difficult psychological terrain in her own research. I wrote and rewrote, many times, a preface for the dissertation articulating and questioning my positionality and reasons for pursuing these questions with these methods. In so doing, I also critically considered the assumptions behind and implications of my questions and methods. (I have since abandoned the preface idea and have chosen instead to integrate reflections on my positionality throughout the dissertation where relevant.) I also listened to Inoue’s CCCC address countless times to remember his charges for white people, and I carefully read selections from Romeo García and Damián Baca’s *Rhetorics Elsewhere and Otherwise* and Rachel Bloom-Pojar’s

discussions of research design in *Translanguaging outside the Academy*. I virtually attended an event sponsored by the Black culture center at UWM entitled *Navigating Academia While Black*, through which I learned about some experiences of Black students and community members at UWM. Moreover, because my development of a co-edited collection about antiracism and subjectivity coincided with my dissertation writing, I continually reflected on and applied what I learned throughout that publication process as I analyzed and wrote about the data I collected for this project.

Five, I changed the dissertation's focus after the conversations with focus group and interview participants did not provide the kind of substantial information about writing that I originally sought. My original goals for the project were to learn about students' literacy practices in/for school and about professors' culturally sustaining approaches to writing assignments and assessment. However, students did not have much to say about their writing, nor did they have many artifacts to share. Likewise, the faculty members I spoke with didn't have many writing assignments or formal assessment methods I could analyze. As such, I decided to write about the themes I saw emerging through the conversations, even though those themes didn't seem immediately relevant to rhetoric and composition, and asked what writing teachers could learn from them.

Six, I used the same set of scripted questions as the foundation for both focus groups and the same set of scripted questions as the foundation for all three interviews. Although I allowed the focus group and interview conversations to follow a natural trajectory led by participants, I returned to the scripted questions when it seemed participants had said what they wanted to say.

I adopted Reviere's Afrocentric methodology not only because it seemed especially relevant to research in a Black culture center given the concepts' importance to African cultures, but also

because these canons reflect the antiracist values of critical self-examination, theorizing of subjectivity, deeply attending to what participants are communicating (as opposed to just listening), and so on. Through the process of conducting this research, I have come to believe that an Afrocentric or similar methodology is an ethical imperative for any antiracist research involving human subjects.

Data Collection

I collected data for this IRB-approved [19.177] project using qualitative, ethnographic methods of focus groups, interviews, artifact collection, and participant observation. All focus group sessions, interviews, and artifact collection occurred during the Spring 2019 semester, and participant observation occurred during the 2019-20 academic year. I recorded audio files of each focus group and interview session using the voice memos app in an iPhone, and I saved the recordings as MP4 files on a private, password-protected hard drive and backed them up on password-protected, encrypted cloud storage. Transcriptions were created via two different methods, including a paid transcriptionist and a paid digital transcription service, which I then reviewed alongside the audio files. I asked the paid transcriptionist to retain participants' natural language use, including grammatical and phonological features of Black English as well as markers of thought, hedging, confirmation, and so on ("um," "kind of," "you know," etc.). I also attended to natural language use in my review of the interview that was digitally transcribed.

I collected participants' names, created a key that links these names to pseudonyms I generated, and stored this key separately from study data. I changed all names in the original transcriptions to their corresponding pseudonyms. All hard-copy consent forms and notes were stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home office, and digital consent forms were stored on my

password-protected hard drive. The following sections describe the data-collection protocols I designed and implemented.

Focus Groups

To gather information about the perspectives of Black students currently enrolled at Midwestern U., I conducted two one-hour focus group sessions inside the Black culture center. Appendix A contains both transcripts, since throughout this dissertation I do not specify which session quoted material comes from. Participant criteria included only Black students 18 years of age and older (to avoid IRB complications involving consent with minors) who were involved in some way with the Black culture center. The purpose of these sessions was to learn about students' experiences with the Black culture center at Midwestern U.; with learning in general, both in and out of school; with producing artifacts (including but not limited to texts) that made them feel smart or clever; and with writing for school. I wanted to get a sense of these students' experiences with knowledge production and whether (and if so, how) the Black culture center influenced their intellectual self-concept. I was especially interested in learning about any writing-centered tasks that felt meaningful and valuable to them. Drawing on Johnny Saldaña's explanations of the need for alignment between central and related research questions in *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, 3rd edition, I framed the questions for focus group participants to be exclusively ontological, pertaining to the nature of their experiences (70).

Recruitment

To recruit student focus group participants, I sent an email to the front desk coordinator at the Black culture center, who forwarded that email to the culture center's listserv on multiple occasions. I created a flyer, which I hung throughout the Black culture center, the university student center, and the largest dormitory on campus; left copies at the front desk for interested

students to take; and posted to my personal Instagram account, tagging Midwestern U.'s Black culture center in the caption. A friend employed in Student Services at the university also shared this post with her professional network, tagging another Student Services unit and asking them to repost as well. I did not have funds to pay participants, so as an incentive, I offered a meal, provided immediately after the focus group sessions, in exchange for one hour of their time.

In the recruitment materials, I decided to use the term “African American” instead of “Black” because I specifically wanted to recruit students who identify as American, which assumes cultural knowledge and experience that non-Americans will not have, and because “African American” seemed more respectful—not reliant on skin-color to define the fraught concept of race—to me than “Black American.” For the contact information on both the recruitment email and flyer, I shared my UWM email address and created a Google voice phone number to be used exclusively for this project to receive both text and voice messages.

Although I had hoped to have 50 participants, I received only 10 responses after multiple efforts via email blasts and word-of-mouth from the culture center's director and graduate teaching assistants, so I chose three dates and times that aligned with openings in the Black culture center's single classroom and/or computer lab, with my schedule, and with meal times, and participants emailed me to sign up for a date and time. All interested students were able to sign up on one of two of the dates, so I held two focus group sessions. Because recruiting participants took two to three months, these focus group sessions were held at the end of the Spring 2019 semester; I was unable to conduct follow-up interviews, which I had originally planned to do, because students left campus shortly thereafter.

Sessions

At the beginning of each semi-structured focus group session, I introduced myself and my

study, reading from the Focus Group Protocol (Appendix B). I passed out consent forms, which I had previously shared via email with students who had expressed interest, and collected them after students had signed them. I then worked through the questions in the Focus Group Protocol, beginning with the first one and asking the others as they came up or seemed natural in conversation. As students responded to the questions, I sometimes asked clarifying questions or questions asking for examples or inviting others' input. At times, students talked through ideas together, which I openly encouraged.

Interviews

To learn about the multifaceted functions of Midwestern U.'s Black culture center for students, faculty, and the university, including but not limited to its intended and explicitly antiracist functions, I interviewed the culture center's director and the two professors who most regularly taught courses for the Black Studies minor housed there. Although intended to be 30 minutes, each semi-structured interview lasted 60-90 minutes as the conversations naturally developed. I conducted each interview in person, in the interviewee's private office on campus. Interviewees included the Black culture center's director—Carrie Herron, a Black cis-gender woman who was a PhD candidate in Educational Psychology—a Black cis-gender male tenured faculty member named Dr. Geoffrey Clemons, and a white cis-gender male tenured faculty member named Dr. Mark Pate.

I designed the Semi-Structured Interview Protocol (Appendix C) to inquire about interviewees' perspectives of academic discourse, the Black culture center, and the intersections of the two. The goal was to elicit these leaders' perceptions of the culture center's roles in helping Black students acclimate to college and enculturating students into academic discourse. I also wanted to learn about the center's culture-specific methods of fulfilling these roles.

Following Saldaña’s guidance, I scripted mostly epistemological questions for the faculty and director interviews, inquiring about interviewees’ understandings of and knowledge about the Black culture center and “academic discourse,” a key concept in my study. The final question, and many of the follow-up questions I asked during the interview, was ontological, inquiring about interviewees’ experiences with academic discourse and interpretations of those experiences. In a sense, the question about how they defined academic discourse was ontological as well, as it attended to a definitional understanding that undoubtedly was influenced by experiences driven by their racial identity in an HWI. These questions, in tandem with the focus group questions, set up a study that allowed me to pair culture center leaders’ knowledge alongside students’ experiences and, thus, explore places of resonance and of tension.

Appendices D, E, and F contain separate interview transcripts.

The semi-structured interview approach provided the flexibility necessary for interviewees and I to discuss topics or ideas as they naturally arose in conversation while also giving me ways to guide the conversation back to the research focus if/as needed. It was important to me to cultivate conversations that felt natural and comfortable to elicit, as much as possible, interviewees’ most authentic responses to the questions, especially given their pertinence to language politics and my white subjectivity doing research in an HWI. Establishing a comfortable rapport felt especially important for my interviews with the center’s Black leaders because of our differing racial subjectivities and the political nature of my research.

Artifacts

In addition to the recorded conversations, I solicited and collected written artifacts from focus group participants and interviewees. From focus group participants, I requested any artifacts they had produced in or for school (they could be but did not have to be written text)

that made them feel smart. If the artifacts were made in response to an assignment, I asked them to also send me the assignment prompt. My goal was to learn from these students what kinds of assignments they responded positively to and what kinds of text production (here, I use “text” loosely to describe a communicative artifact) felt intellectually meaningful and rewarding to them. I received two artifacts from only one of the 11 participants, so I did not use students’ materials extensively in my study as I had hoped. I did, however, reference in my analysis one of the artifacts submitted.

From interviewees, I requested whatever course documents they had and felt would be useful based on our conversation: syllabi, assignment prompts, and assessment materials. I wanted to learn about the kinds of “text” production these teachers were inviting from students and how they were valuing and judging the artifacts they received. I received multiple documents in total, but because interview data were so rich and because interviewees’ materials differed substantially in type and did not all pertain to courses in the Black culture center, I did not analyze these materials as I anticipated. Instead, I opted to use these materials to loosely inform my interpretations of the interview data. That is, I read the documents to get a sense of the persona the teacher constructed through the materials and of the teacher’s priorities, keeping those ideas in mind as I reviewed and analyzed the interview data.

Participant Observation

To develop my own sense of intellectual and cultural engagement in the Black culture center at Midwestern U., I attended a couple of sessions of Dr. Clemons’ African American Critical Thought class as well as multiple events sponsored by and usually held in the culture center. When I attended the classes, I arrived early, talking casually with students and explaining to them that I was sitting in on the class after Dr. Clemons’ invitation to see what it was all about.

Students shared with me the text they were supposed to have read prior to the class session. During class, I sat with the students at the two long tables in the front right corner of the room where they gathered in a sort of cluster for a discussion-oriented class. I spent the class session listening, paying attention to the interpersonal dynamics between Dr. Clemons and the students and periodically taking notes about things each said on my laptop. I tried to minimize my note-taking to avoid disrupting the flow of the class; I did not want students to feel like they were being surveilled.

During events sponsored by the culture center, I took notes on my laptop as others were doing as well. For conversation-oriented events like the one I discuss in Chapter 4 that was structured like Jada Pinkett-Smith's *Red Table Talk*, I participated in discussions and took notes at breaks and jotted down thoughts from memory after the event. I sat near the back for all events, conscious of my white subjectivity in a space designed to uplift Black students, faculty, and community members. Circumstances required me to bring my 18-month-old daughter to one of the public talks, and I had asked the director about the appropriateness of me doing so in advance. In my experience, it is not uncommon for Black women to bring their children to such events outside of business hours, and the director enthusiastically told me to bring her; bringing my child to this event cultivated brief verbal exchanges and moments of connection with other women in attendance. I found these comments, gestures, and smiles helpful in relieving discomfort I felt about the presence of my white subjectivity in this space.

Analysis

My approaches to coding the data were largely drawn from Saldaña's guide. Because it seemed consistent with canon of *ukweli* in the Afrocentric research methodology I was using (in which all theory is grounded in the experiences of the community being studied), I began by

using the coding methodology of *grounded theory*, which “involves meticulous analytic attention by applying specific types of codes to data through a series of cumulative coding cycles that ultimately lead to the development of a theory—a theory ‘grounded’ or rooted in the original data themselves” (Saldaña 55).

Because I was most interested in hearing about students’ experiences with academic discourse and the Black culture center, I began coding and analysis with the focus group data. Following Saldaña’s suggestion, I applied the basic coding methods of Attribute Coding and Structural Coding in my first cycle. I identified four attribute codes⁷ and 17 structural codes⁸, and I subcategorized data under each code according to the focus group the data came from. I also identified (originally by numbered IDs, which I later changed to pseudonyms) the speaker of each quote attached to each code. The structural codes helped me to get a clear sense of the topics that emerged through the focus group discussions, and the attribute codes minimally provided historical and identity-related context for participants’ comments. (Admittedly, I did not sufficiently prepare for data collection about participants’ identities. In hindsight, I wish I would have prepared a short form for each participant to complete with identifying details about their status as students; their hometown; their racial, ethnic, gender, and any other identities; and so on. This form would have enabled me to explore more nuanced connections between participants’ intersecting identities and their comments in the focus group sessions.)

On a second pass through the data, I employed a combination of Descriptive Coding and In

⁷ **Attribute codes:** year in school; kind of student (transfer vs. started there, undergrad, grad student, nontraditional vs. traditional, etc.); racial identity in context; where went to K-12

⁸ **Structural codes:** how student is involved in Black Culture Center (BCC); kinds of support BCC gives students; reasons participant is not involved in some way; reasons participant is involved; how student got connected to BCC / learned about it; how students stay connected even when not physically there; problems that university needs to address/acknowledge; what students really need/want from school; negative experiences at school (K-12, college); positive experiences at school (K-12, college); self-perception, self-awareness; writing instruction; writing student did and loved; student explains issues with U.S. education system; how students compensated for what they felt was missing from their education; multimodality; BCC vs. CHANCE program

Vivo Coding. For descriptive coding, I “assign[ed] basic labels to data to provide an inventory of their topics,” and for in vivo coding, I pulled words and phrases from participants’ own language for the codes (Saldaña 97). I listed all these codes in a Word document (not included in an appendix, because codes are listed in the nearby footnotes), and I then categorized them by topic. Doing so allowed me to see themes that emerged through the data, which I discuss in Chapter 2. To help me make sense of these themes and identify the larger story they told about the Black student community in the Black culture center at Midwestern U., I used the coded data to write an analytical memo, which I shared and discussed with my advisor before then drafting Chapter 2 in full. In the chapters that follow, I have included these markers when they seem helpful to understanding nuances in a participant’s response, but when they obstruct the point at hand, I have removed them from the analysis.

Because the interview data involved fewer voices in conversation and thus was easier to work through, I approached analysis much more loosely than I did for the focus group data. For each interview, I did some informal structural coding, identifying key terms and concepts that emerged repeatedly throughout our conversation. I looked for relationships among those concepts to get a sense of each interviewee’s core focus or concern in relation to academic discourse and the Black culture center. I first did this for each interview in isolation, writing notes and pulling quotes out, and then I reviewed the notes I had taken for each interview alongside each other, looking for intersections, commonalities, and tensions. What I found was that despite using the same interview protocol for all three interviews, the focus of each differed substantially from the others, because each interviewee brought unique perspectives informed by unique subjectivities and histories to our conversation. Ultimately, I found commonality among them through a core concept—mattering, as drawn from Love’s work. I explore that concept and

its emergence in the faculty and director interviews in Chapter 3. Fortunately, the concept of mattering parallels two of the foremost themes that emerged through my analysis of the student focus group data: home/family and visibility. I used mattering as a lens to help me make sense of the data as a whole and articulate key takeaways from this study for college writing teachers who are committed to antiracism, which I develop in Chapter 4.

While the primary sources for analysis were the conversations I had with students, faculty members, and the director through focus group sessions and interviews, the notes I took as a participant observer in Dr. Clemons' class and in events sponsored by the Black culture center informed my interpretations of that data. That is, I used the data gathered through participant observation to contextualize the themes I saw emerging through the focus groups and interviews. For example, my notes about topics discussed and about presentation methods in these events, which framed my experiences in this Black culture center, undoubtedly influenced what I looked for as I coded the focus group and interview data.

Although I had originally planned for focus group participants and interviewees to review my interpretations of their words in the relevant sections of chapter drafts as part of the Afrocentric methodology, unusual life circumstances delayed my interpretations and prevented me from doing so. (A few months after completing data collection, I postponed my doctoral work for a one-year visiting assistant professorship that required a two-hour daily commute and that required all my time; halfway through my second semester, the global COVID-19 pandemic further prolonged my work on this dissertation.) By the time I had my interpretations ready for review, a few years had passed, which I felt was too much time for memories of our conversations to be reliable. Today, the director I interviewed works for another university in another state, and one of the faculty members I interviewed no longer has an office in the Black

culture center and so is somewhat removed from its daily operations. All the students are no longer enrolled, I presume. Given these circumstances, throughout my data analysis and writing, I have been especially careful to consider and reconsider the larger context of each interview and focus group within which all referenced statements and ideas were made, and I have critically examined my own biases along the way, soliciting critical feedback from my advisor. I have also more liberally quoted participants than I otherwise might have, so that the analysis I offer is easier to connect to the specific words of participants. These quotes also give the chapters the sense of human presence that I believe is necessary for Afrocentric and/or antiracist research, especially when such research is conducted from a white subjectivity.

In the following chapters, I share the results of my research, all of which center on mattering. Chapter 2 explores the central themes that emerged through the student focus group sessions alongside students' stories of writing for and in school. Chapter 3 shares faculty members' and administrators' voices and perspectives. In the final chapter, I consider the role of the Black culture center in abolitionist education, including the ways it cultivates students' academic identities through discourse and writing. I conclude by offering for writing teachers who are committed to antiracism some actionable suggestions for mattering-as-abolitionist-work that I call the "4Es": Emerge, Expect, Extend, and Engage.

Chapter 2: What Matters *To* Black Students

I began this project with questions about the kinds of academic writing Black students were doing in a place where Blackness was not only affirmed but also centered. I wanted to be a better (more radical, more effective than I already was) antiracist writing teacher, and I wanted to see how antiracism was being done on the ground, through the work of racially minoritized teachers and students in an HWI. Some of my questions included: *What can I learn from students who are involved in the Black culture center in some way—whether by taking classes, working there, attending events, or participating in mentoring and other extracurricular programs—about Black writing/communication strategies for academic purposes? Do certain kinds of activities or prompts, or certain ways of communicating about that activity or prompt, afford innovation that makes use of Black communication strategies in rhetorically effective ways and that Black students find culturally sustaining or enriching? How do students' experiences with learning to write for academic purposes in the Black culture center differ from their experiences outside elsewhere in the university?*

My goals for this study were practical. I wanted to know what, if anything, I could do with the ideas and insights I gained through this study to teach writing courses more equitably. I also wondered how I could use these ideas and insights to inspire more equitable writing pedagogies, curricula, and assessments throughout a writing program and across the university. Because my foremost concerns that led to this study pertained to students, I wanted to begin the data analysis by hearing their voices and perspectives, as their education is central to our work as teacher-researchers. This chapter shares those findings.

Three Themes: Students' Needs for Love and Belonging on Campus

Three overarching themes emerged as we talked, themes that reveal students' desires and frustrations related to their shared cultural identity as Black American students in an HWI: home and family, visibility, and accessibility and connectedness. In this section, I define those themes and offer examples of how they manifested in our conversation. In later sections, I look more closely at the students' languaging to reveal tensions between these themes and the stories they shared about their experiences with writing for/in school.

Home and Family

For all the focus group participants, the Black culture center is a place of familiarity, a “home” where they connect with “family.” It’s a refuge from “out there,” a place of understanding, a place where Black students can “fly as [they] want to” (Victor, 0:03:19.4-0:03:33.6). It’s a place where care and understanding are offered, where resources are given: time, money, knowledge, connections. It’s a place where Black lives truly *matter*, where they are celebrated, appreciated, studied, and invested in. It’s a place where they are recognized, where they exist—where their existence is affirmed. “[T]his Center is really like a place that for years the Black [Midwestern U.] community can come here and hang out and just chill, have fun with each other,” explained Victor. “It gives us a place like home” (0:02:53.5-0:03:13.7). Many other participants talked explicitly about the family and community they find at the Black culture center, often referring, like Victor, to the culture center’s building as home, a safe space amid an otherwise stressful environment. Curtis, a senior undergraduate, shared:

All those people, you know, those staff, those are like my family. I’m only here at night just cause I’m in class all the time but you know it’s just like you know he said. It’s like my home away from home. You know. [...] [I]t’s not many places where *we* feel, I guess, you know, uh, recognized, or, you know, we have a place where we can just come and just be [...] where people come in and it’s a life already. You know, forget what’s goin’ on out there. And I remember you know in here, I came here in 2013 you know uh when

I started my under degrees it was a lot of, you know, racially, you know, tension on campus still. A lot of times when stuff would happen people would just come to the Center and it would be like our refuge. You know I went to the Million Man March, you know, with the Center you know those types of memories you know. You know this is home for me you know. (0:03:37.8-0:05:23.7)

Home, for Curtis, is a refuge, but Angel clarified that the Black culture center was meaningful for Black students even though non-Black students were there for classes, events, and so on. So even though this space is open to all, it still functions as a refuge from racial tension for Black students in an HWI, because “we know that it’s here for African American students,” Angel explains:

Just like they have the Latino resource and then the LGBT [...] resource. Like everybody kind of have their own resource so they can feel welcome even though this is a predominately white institution. It’s like it can give you a sense of like connectivity or whatever. (0:07:43.1-0:10:12.3)

Having a space intended specifically for Black students to connect with other Black students, that is, is significant to Angel.

Angel sees the teachers and administrators in the Black culture center as parental figures of sorts, people who give advice, get to know Black students, hold them accountable to their commitments, and even help them understand their own identities, families, and histories as part of Black culture and American society. “I can come here to get advice in school. But I also can come here to get advice in life as well. And it’s like you have those teachers that care about you,” she said. Elsewhere in the university, she continued, professors “don’t really *know* you, they’re not really tryin’ to get to *know* you unless you know you’re all in their face askin’ about your grade and stuff like that. That’s the only way they *kinda* get to know you.” But the professors in the Black culture center, she said:

keep up with you throughout your whole, you know, um, time that you’re here to make sure that you’re doin’ good, see what you need help with, you know, kind of get you connection. [...] [It’s] kind of like uh I guess a family community in a sense. Cause you

know most of the Black administrators [on campus], they know each other, and they have those conversations. [...] It's just like it's like a caring environment basically. Like even though they're administrators and teachers, they're not those administrators and teachers that just give you a grade and let you be on your way or whatever. (Angel, 0:10:28.2-0:12:21.0)

Participants see the Black Studies courses offered in the Black culture center as sources of familiarity and support that are just as vital as the faculty and administrators students work with. One class in particular, shared Angel, helped ground her understandings of “almost everything in society” in an exploration of Black families. In this class, the professor

talked about almost everything in society—like to poverty, to the parenting styles that uh African Americans, you know, the way that they bring their kids up, the way that how marriage can help in the way that we succeed in life. [...] [I]t went from everything, but it never was like, “Oh you just all over the place.” It always tied back to the black family. And everything, almost everything in her class helpin’ me too. So it’s like the way that they’re teaching us, like I said, they put professors in here that actually make sure that you gain that knowledge or whatever that you need. (0:19:24.5-0:21:19.8)

Having a physical place where Black students can gather and learn about shared cultural identities, perspectives, and histories that are excluded in most other places on campus helps to remedy the feeling of isolation on a historically white campus. Extracurricular events like Black graduation create this sense of home as well. For Bianca (and ostensibly many Black students), Black graduation exists to promote positivity and celebrate Black success and solidarity. That solidarity is crucial for students of color who “feel isolated at times on a predominately white campus,” Bianca explained, because “It’s such an extreme part of mental health, it was for me. You know? When you want to see somebody who looks like you or talk to somebody who could possibly understand where you are coming from, when you have an experience, that was a huge part of mental health for me” (0:08:17.1-0:10:33.4). Asia agreed, arguing that the result of these needs not being met is a problem for universities in the U.S., where retention is a central concern:

You have students that identify with these centers. So if they don't—our biggest issue right now is retention. If you cannot point these students to where they can, at least, have the opportunity to be assisted with, that's why they're leaving. Like I said, had I not found the Center or found the Black Student Union, I literally was going to transfer. Because I'm like, there's no one else like me. There's no one that looks like me in my classes. (0:20:37.5-0:22:21.6)

This sense of familiarity, or belonging, and its connection to mental health is explored at length in Micere Keels' *Campus Counterspaces: Black and Latinx Students' Search for Community at Historically White Universities*. Keels describes the disparate realities for white students and Students of Color that give rise to a feeling of invisibility and, ultimately, low graduation rates among Students of Color:

[S]ome social identities are affirmed at historically White colleges and universities and are associated with feelings of inclusion and an unquestioned embrace of the institution, while other identities are rendered inferior or invisible and are associated with feelings of exclusion and resistance of the institution. In counterspaces, identities that are rendered inferior or invisible in the larger campus culture are explored, critiqued, and deepened, and sometimes claimed for the first time. (5).

In HWIs, culture centers function as counterspaces—"ideational, relational, and/or physical [spaces that have] academic, social, cultural, and/or political goals [and] provide marginalized students with sites of resistance that enable them to name, critique, and counter stereotypical understandings of their group" (19). For the students in this study, the Black culture center provided both the physical and intellectual space for Black students to see other Black perspectives and to themselves be seen, to feel at home in a historically hostile place (the institution of higher education). Without this counterspace, at least a few of the focus group participants would have left the institution, they said.

(In)Visibility

By and large, the focus group data emphasize students' desires to be seen, known, and supported—and, in turn, to see, know, and support others in the Black community both on

campus and worldwide. Its converse, invisibility, is a recurrent theme in the data in multiple respects. For example, the Black culture center's building itself is in a highly visible location on the edge of campus that sits alongside a major state highway, *the* main thoroughfare through the city. Despite this location (and a sign with the Center's name posted right near the sidewalk), students explained, delivery people don't know it exists. When someone in the Black culture center orders food for delivery, for example, they have to meet delivery drivers across the nearby side street, at the psychology building, "because they can't find us," explained one focus group participant (Asia, 0:13:19.0-0:13:26.8). The Center isn't included on campus tours for prospective students, despite having existed for decades, so many students don't know it exists. Likewise, the Center's outreach efforts and resources aren't well publicized throughout the university, so many students don't (can't) use them.

Focus Group participants expressed deep frustration with the Black culture center's seeming invisibility to others in the university and local business community. Ultimately, they explained, this invisibility impacts students' abilities to see and be seen. The problem, though, is not an individual one; an entire community is obscured, a cultural world within the world of the university. This world is what Asia, a third-year undergraduate and one of the most active students in the Black culture center, refers to as the Black Campus: "I feel like if you're not familiar with the Black Campus, you don't know that the [Black culture center] exists because it's not included on the tours" (0:04:59.9-0:05:19.9). The Black Campus, which includes the Black culture center, is how Black students get connected to culturally sustaining resources across the university. Students expect to get connected to the Black Campus largely through campus tours, which Bianca explained are

[...] a really, really big deal. Like that is one of the main ways you can advertise this place. And the one place you can show equality amongst the resources on campus, you

intentionally cut it out. When you look at [this university], I don't know if it's changed. But when I used to MapQuest [this university], the [Black culture center] is not on there. Not even on the map of campus. (0:12:59.8-0:13:19.0)

When campus tours skip the most culturally sustaining organization and space for Black students on campus, “when the Center is blocked or, like, hidden or not advertised,” Bianca explains, “students ultimately miss out. Particularly minority students” (0:14:05.7-0:14:58.6). As Bianca talks, she often alludes to agency that she does not associate with particular bodies but that clearly implicates white administrators and other non-Black university employees, who comprise the racial majority (overall, 77.6% white for the 2018-19 academic year). These people, Bianca implies, intentionally obscure the presence of the Black culture center—it is the direct object of unnamed people's actions, actions that are associated with deceitful motives like burying and hiding, obscured by darkness. “I'm like, you know, somethin' like that should not be, in my mind, buried or hidden. It should be put out in broad daylight, just like any other resource, you know?” says Bianca. “Especially because it's like in a prime location. [...] It's like we're not hard to find. We're not buried anywhere” (0:10:34.7-0:11:40.9).

Unaware of the culture center's existence, Black students miss not only the opportunity to access resources designed to support their academic success and sense of belonging but also knowledge of people who have been and are vital to American history. In our focus group sessions, participants spoke about the widespread omission of diverse Black histories and perspectives from mainstream education. Figuratively speaking, those histories and perspectives are not visible to students, who consider such perspectives to be “extra.” Bianca says that this invisibility affects other Students of Color and white students as well:

You know, [minority students] aren't the only ones [to miss out on what the Black culture center has to offer]. There are other people who are not—people of color who are not, like, Black, that want to learn about our history, you know, and they don't get that opportunity. (0:14:05.7-0:14:58.6)

Invisibility is a theme even in these courses, as many of the films students are assigned to watch reference something hidden, unseen; *Hidden Colors*, *The Blindside*, and *Hidden Figures* are a few titles focus group participants mentioned. Angel, a fourth-year undergraduate who had gone to a predominantly Black high school, said that prior to taking courses in the Black culture center, all she'd learned about Black history was slavery. But in the class where students watched *Hidden Colors*, a documentary series directed by Tariq Nasheed about the untold history of People of Color around the world, she learned about Black people's contributions to social and technological progress, for example, and about the diversity of Blackness. "I heard every year [about slavery]," Angel said:

It got to where I don't need to hear that anymore. But like *here*, it's like I learn more about, like [...] There are different Black people. Black people in different countries or whatever, but you don't see that or you don't hear that, of course, because the media's not gonna tell you that. So [...] it give me basically like that—that extra education that I need that I know I'm not gonna get probably from anywhere else. (0:07:43.1-0:10:12.3)

Several focus group participants brought up slavery and their frustration with that being the only part of Black history they were taught. Saniya, a freshman, explicitly addressed her concerns about visibility when explaining her experiences learning about Black history in high school. Her concerns, however, centered on the visibility of everyday racism in the U.S. as well as of teachers' own experiences of (and sometimes complicity in) such moments:

I would have white teachers, you know, and it's Black History Month or whatever. And we'd start talking about slavery, and then it's like, "Oh yeah, this happened, but you guys know that already." It's like, they don't really care *about* it, and they don't really, like, share their personal experiences, or like—you know, like, stuff that they have experienced that they know is wrong, but they won't let you know that. [...] It's just, like—it's like, hidden, like it's underneath them, like, they're not putting it out, like, wearing it on themselves. But for [Dr. Pate, a white professor who teaches in the Black culture center], it was like—he gave us an example of, um, when he was young, uh, or something like that, somebody that he used to drive in a car with or something, uh, they saw a Black man walkin' by, and they would, like, lock their doors. But everybody in the class was like, "Hey, I see a Black man walkin' down the street, I'm lockin' my door too, like, that's not a race type of thing." But the fact that he admitted that to a class full of

African American students [...] at least you can admit that you've had a moment where you've like felt like—um, yeah. (Saniya, 0:26:48.8-0:27:16.5; 0:27:20.5-0:28:10.0)

What Angel refers to as “extra education” is the foregrounding of people and perspectives not typically represented in U.S. curricula, “stuff like that that we, like, don't learn” (0:17:41.1-0:19:20.6). For Saniya, this “extra education” was more granular: detailed examples of others' experiences with systemic problems, even when they were *part* of the problem. She sees this transparency as demonstrating care for the issue at hand, in this case, the everyday racism that Black people in the U.S. are subjected to.

In a sense, the Black culture center exists to make Blackness visible to the university and surrounding communities. Its vision “centers on providing the [university] community, on and off-campus, with knowledge and appreciation for Black history and culture [...] [t]hrough intellectual inquiry about and cultural engagement within the African diaspora.” As one participant said, it's “a small space on campus that [is] dedicated to Black excellence” (Bianca, 0:08:17.1-0:10:33.4). So when the culture center is invisible to students, those histories and perspectives, Black excellence, is also invisible—and not just to Black students, but to students of all races and ethnicities.

Visibility wasn't always desirable to focus group participants, though, particularly where their use of language was concerned. Bianca, for example, expressed concern about being visible in ways that would disadvantage her, make her life harder. “It's bad enough that we are targeted as women and then as women of color,” she explained. “So I'm not, you know, um, tryin' to become an even bigger target” (1:14:00.9-1:14:56.4). She said these things in reference to the capitalist context of the U.S., contrasting her individual power and significance in relationship to “a whole company that has been existin' from the beginnin' of time” (1:14:00.9-1:14:56.4). Her resignation to the idea that “university teaching [is] preparing us for a world,” which she

previously identified as “the work world,” implies a self-image of powerlessness, of finiteness, in comparison to the longstanding monolith that is business. Bianca was communicating a paradox: she wanted to blend in, to not have her Blackness made visible (or in this case, audible), so as to gain greater access to material wealth and power; simultaneously, she wanted Black history to be accessible to all (0:14:05.7-0:14:58.6).

Ultimately, it seems that students’ desires for visibility depended upon whether they were talking about a collective Black identity or an individual’s Black identity, and whether that visibility resulted in support or trauma. Students in the focus groups critiqued a collective invisibility on campus: the invisibility of Black history and culture, resources for Black students, and Black community. In contrast, Bianca’s desire for a sort of *invisibility* was individual, the outcome of having been traumatized by white students and teachers who criticized her Blackness in predominantly white schools as a child:

I came from [a public housing project known for extreme poverty and organized crime]. I’m very proud of where I come from because I didn’t ask to be born there, but I did everything in my power to not become a stereotype, you know? [...] You know, I wasn’t aware that I was a Black [...] I didn’t know I was Black until I got around white people. Because when I grew up over there, I was just Bianca. You know, like, and I don’t even think it’s because we all looked alike. You know, it was because, you know, we treated each other as equals. And then when I entered mainstream society [by moving to the suburbs around age 11], I became a Black girl, and I was treated as such. You know, that’s when my race became aware to me, and it was not a positive recognition, you know? (1:35:29.5-1:37:51.9)

Earlier in our conversation, Bianca described what had happened:

[S]tudents would mock me [...] they would make me sound very ignorant, like, to my ears. And then the teachers would laugh. Like, they would *laugh*. And there was no, there was a huge lack of support there, um, on behalf of me. You know? And the fact that I was, like, one of the only students of color—particularly the only Black student in the classroom—that made me feel very small. Um, it made me feel really inferior. Um, and I developed a lot of trauma from it that I didn’t realize was trauma at the time. I refused to raise my hand for, like, years. I think up until college. I didn’t join any, um, clubs. Um, for the most part I didn’t join anything. And, um, I became terrified of public speaking. (0:33:02.9-0:34:56.9)

There was one person, though, who saw Bianca in a way that felt good, a way that made her happy to be visible. For Bianca, being seen—in a positive way—meant being cared for. This person, Miss Huggins,

was a resource teacher. And, um, she [...] found [my siblings and I] because we were having trouble in classrooms. We became very defensive towards other students. And we often would lash out. Like, and [...] the people around us would make it seem like our lashing out was irrational. Like, you know, oh my gosh, these angry Black kids are comin' to the suburbs and messin' up our environment. That's why they shouldn't be here. They didn't see—well they say [they did], but they didn't care that we were bein' made fun of and it hurt our feelin's and we were bein' attacked verbally, we were bein' bullied verbally. You know? And emotionally. So we lashed out. Um, Miss Huggins, I don't know how or why, but she heard about it. And she came and pulled each of us out of the classroom. And we assumed we were in trouble. And she was like, "No I just hear ya'll havin' a hard time, what's really goin' on?" And she talked to us. You know, and she didn't force us into that room to teach us. She gave us the option. She was like, "I'm here to help, you know, if ya'll don't feel comfortable in the classroom, you know, if you feel like there's somethin' that you don't completely understand, you know, you can trust me." And the rapport didn't come right off the bat. She offered her services and she stepped back, you know? And then we were allowed to come to her. And when we came, she was who she said she was. And the resources that she provided were what she said they were going to be. (0:35:08.9-0:37:41.4)

Miss Huggins saw what Bianca and her siblings were experiencing, inquired about and heard their perspectives, offered help without expectation, and followed through with the help she had offered. This kind of visibility, one predicated on respect and dependable support without expectation, is the kind of visibility Bianca remembered with gratitude years later. In other words, visibility is desirable for Bianca—and ostensibly other historically marginalized students—only when connected to meaningful, reliable support. That is the kind of support offered by the Black culture center but that is systematically hidden from many students. Visibility is also about care for Curtis, which he says is different in the classes he takes in the Black culture center. "I think most times when we're in other classes, we don't really feel, uh, a part of this class, you know, we don't really feel heard. So we don't really care anymore," he

said. “So, uh, you know, when we’re in [the Black culture center] we’re so directly a part of it because it’s truly about us” (0:31:13.5-0:32:42.9).

Accessibility and Connectedness

Students repeatedly referenced the difficulties of getting connected to the Black Campus, largely as a result of the invisibility of the Black culture center. The onus was on them to discover the culture center’s existence—to find something they didn’t know to look for even though they were aware they needed the support. When students don’t get involved with the Black culture center, Bianca says, “that can look like we don’t care. When in all actuality it’s we literally don’t know. We have no idea, you know?” (0:15:25.9-0:15:35.6). In 2018, Midwestern U. had 2,111 Black non-Hispanic undergraduate students enrolled (16.6% of the undergraduate student population) and 278 Black non-Hispanic graduate students (6.8% of the grad student population). These numbers account only for survey respondents.

Whether or not this participation rate is largely the result of poor publicity is impossible to determine, but the experiences that Asia and Bianca described with much frustration indicate that there is a problem with access to the Black Campus. Asia’s connection to the Black culture center was fortuitous, the product of happenstance when she learned about another Black organization on campus, the Black Student Union (BSU), on Twitter. After participating in the BSU-led protest publicized on Twitter, Asia then learned about the BSU-hosted freshman pageant, which she also participated in. One of the pageant’s coordinators told Asia that she was graduating and her job with the Black culture center would be available. “And that’s when I applied and found out that we had a Black culture center,” Asia said (0:06:39.3-0:06:55.4).

Not every student finds out about the Black culture center so early in their college experience, though. Bianca, now a second-year graduate student and employee of the Center for

the past two years, transferred as an undergrad and only found the culture center after “doing quite a bit of research” to find “an honors society that represented Black people.” “I knew for a fact that there were other intellectual Black bodies on this campus,” she said, “I just didn’t know where to find them because it wasn’t publicized.” When she found the John Henrik Clarke Honor Society for Black students, which is run by the Black culture center, “I became aware of where, you know, a small space on campus that was dedicated to, like, Black excellence” (0:08:17.1-0:10:33.4). Grateful as she was that she was now actively involved with the Black culture center, Bianca was frustrated:

[T]his is ridiculous. If this resource exists, it exists for a reason. You know? And it should be publicized so that the services can be provided, you know? It shouldn’t have taken me to do research on my own to find the place that was meant to be for me. Especially when I learned about the history of this place, how hard they fought for this center. You know. And how long it took. (0:10:34.7-0:11:40.9)

Tracie, now in her second year of graduate school at Midwestern U., transferred there as an undergraduate and learned about the Black Studies minor when she came for orientation. Her unusual circumstances as a non-traditional adult student who came to college with a clear purpose for her education shaped her experience of finding the Black culture center. As an older student with a clear purpose and priorities, she had one less thing to wonder about and could be attuned to additional opportunities that arose. So she declared the minor, and “every semester for the four semesters that it took me I was here at least, I would say, three to four days a week, takin’ classes” (0:22:55.4-0:24:25.9). Because she was pursuing the minor, she was on the Center’s listserv, so she got emails inviting her to get involved with the culture center in other ways. And because she’d already had jobs where email was used heavily, she was already accustomed to checking email every day, unlike other focus group participants. So she saw all the Invites to the culture center’s offerings and events. While the Center’s outreach efforts were successful with a non-traditional adult student like Tracie because they were delivered to a place

she already habitually checked, traditional college students seem to have been missing them. Ironically, though, Tracie was concerned that her age would result in “some sort of disconnect” from the campus community (0:24:30.8-0:27:23.3). When she tried to join some other campus organizations that relied most heavily on social media for announcements, she felt like they were “super clandestine. Like, where do I go?” she asked rhetorically, explaining:

I’m not on Twitter. I’m only on Facebook. I only do political posts on Facebook. I’m barely even on there. So I don’t have that. I can’t just go on Twitter and like randomly see. And I was like well where are these meetings? How come they’re not posted anywhere? And what I’ve come to see is that this is a whole [Midwestern U.] problem, [...] overall, [Midwestern U.] has a problem with how they communicate out to their larger student body. [...] Everything that—everything that I learned about [the Black culture center] either came from me experiencing here from my minor or through some sort of email that was sent. (0:24:30.8-0:27:23.3)

Fortunately for Tracie, access to the Black culture center was not an issue, but just as she is an anomaly at the institution, so is her experience of getting connected.

For the focus group participants, this systemic opacity of and at times absence of the university’s communication about the Black Campus, which resulted in the culture center “not being available to students,” was an issue of disrespect, one that “other [...] places on campus are shown” (Bianca, 0:17:59.7-0:20:01.4). That lack of respect has a trickle-down effect, Bianca explained, because by not being accessible to students, the culture center—the hub for the Black community on campus—cannot “show [Black students] their talents.” Bianca continued:

We have a lot of talent; beautiful Black students like Asia. And if we get all of them together, we can make magic happen on not just one thing, many things. We can show them their talents. [...] You know, that would go volumes on this campus. That could change the trajectory of the Center, you know, and how it operates. (0:17:59.7-0:20:01.4)

The implications seem clear: when Black students don’t feel like they belong in college, when their academic talents aren’t visible to them, and when no one they’re learning about or from looks like them, they leave, whether on their own volition or not. In their article using critical race theory “as an analytical framework [...] to examine the persistence of racism in higher

education,” Yosso and Lopez explain that “the transition to the college campus for many Students of Color begins with their confronting subtle, yet stunning racial microaggressions that aim to remind them of ‘their place’ at the margins of the university” (84).

Writing That Matters

As I looked for themes in the focus group data and how they might relate to writing, my questions drifted away from students’ writing *strategies* and toward their *beliefs about* and *experiences with* writing for school. This was what these students talked about, despite my multiple and varied attempts (verbally during our focus group and afterward, in an email), to get students to talk about or send me some writing they had done that they were proud of. I told them explicitly that their writing *could* be for school but didn’t *have* to be, so the texts they could choose from weren’t limited except that they needed to make students feel smart. To help assuage any trepidation they might feel, I told students in the follow-up email that I wasn’t *evaluating* their writing but was hoping “to get a sense of the kinds of writing you take pride in, that make you *feel* like the brilliant person that you are.” I also attempted to increase the likelihood that students would share examples by expanding the kinds of texts they could share (“videos, writing prompts, books, articles, syllabi, etc.”) and by shifting the focus to texts *others* had produced that they “found really helpful in shaping your writing or the ways you *think* about writing.” My goal was to minimize any pressure students felt in hopes that they would share some material artifacts I could analyze. I did not, however, get sufficient data; I received one writing sample from one focus group participant. I also found it incredibly difficult to get participants in the focus group sessions to describe in detail the texts they produced in or for school; students mostly talked about their interactions with teachers and described only a couple of assignments they liked. In the absence of written artifacts and in-depth discussions about those

artifacts and about students' writing strategies, I shifted my focus to the experiences with writing for/in school that students talked about in our focus group sessions.

During our focus group conversations, students seemed generally uninterested in talking about writing processes and communicative strategies, and frankly, as those conversations evolved, so was I. As students shared their stories, I became far more interested in the ways they talked about their identities as Black students in the United States and their experiences with being taught to write academically in various educational settings. The writing experiences that students discussed fell into two categories: writing that they found meaningful and rewarding, and positive writing experiences with teachers.

Projects That Students Found Meaningful and Rewarding

As expected, the writing that students talked about was writing that *mattered* to them. Such projects centered on topics of their choosing and, possibly because we were in the Black culture center and because they were surrounded by only other Black students, pertained to the experience of being Black in the U.S. Specifically, they talked about Black visibility—visibility not only to others, but also to themselves. In fact, that topic was what cultivated palpable excitement among students; their enthusiasm in talking about their racial identity in the context of a historically white institution was contagious, not only for me, but also among them. Writing projects like these that are meaningful to the students in front of us are crucial for more than just their psychological value; they also “offer students opportunities for agency; for engagement with instructors, peers, and materials; and for learning that connects to previous experiences and passions and to future aspirations and identities,” explain writing scholars Michele Eodice, Anne Ellen Geller, and Neal Learner in their book *The Meaningful Writing Project: Learning, Teaching, and Writing in Higher Education* (4).

Students in the focus groups discussed two projects that in some way involved writing, and I begin with their stories because they provide good examples of the kinds of writing for school that these students found meaningful and rewarding. Although students didn't discuss the kind of writing I hoped to learn more about—formal expository or analytical academic writing—their examples touch on some of the themes identified earlier in this chapter. They also illuminate key factors in the positive experiences that students described with writing for/in school, experiences that I will share and analyze later in this chapter.

Making Blackness Visible to Others

Teaching others about the Black experience in the U.S. was important to these students because, as revealed through the themes of our discussions, doing so made Blackness visible. Specifically, it made the challenges of being Black in the U.S. visible to people who haven't experienced those challenges. It gave voice to experiences with racism that many of the students have had, experiences that have deeply impacted their sense of who they are in the world and their futures. One student, Tracie, talked about a poem she wrote and revised many times when she was in the creative writing program as an undergraduate student and her impetus for doing so:

It [...] start[ed] originally as an assignment that I did for class. But then what had happened was I went to a conference. So I was a part of the English Honors Society and my poetry had got accepted, I submitted it to present at a conference, and it got accepted. Um, so like me and four other people came and I was in this session that didn't even have anything to do with me and I can't even remember what we were talkin' about. But it had somethin' to do with race. And I was, like, one of the few people of color there at that whole conference. And believe me, every room, every time I go anywhere, I'm checkin'. I want to know, you know, where my people are. So I was one of the very few. And it was just like some comments that some people were makin' after the session was over and it just struck me how easy it is for some people to be able to talk about race and then they just—and it was just such a heavy topic. And then they were like, "Oh yeah. Okay, now let's go to lunch." And it was like, I couldn't even move. I was like, "What? This is crazy!" And how some people can interact with heavy subject matter but because they don't have to live it, it's so easy for them to put it down. This is a great topic of

discussion. Let's fill these 15 minutes with this discussion. And then I don't have to think about it anymore because I don't have to live it because that's not my life experience. It's just somethin' that we happen to be talkin' about and I may or may not have a good opinion about it or a strong opinion about it or somethin' like that so. I just remember bein' triggered and then that just turned that piece. I was like, "This is gonna be the one." (0:45:53.9-0:47:55.6)

Tracie's reflection alludes to two of the themes that came up repeatedly in the focus groups in reference to both the Black culture center and students' experiences with writing for/in school.

The issue that compelled her to keep writing was, in some sense, a visibility issue—one in which race was the central focus of a conference session and then, as soon as the session ended, seemed to disappear for the primarily white audience. For Tracie, the weight of systemic racism felt heavier when the white people who were supposedly invested in helping carry that burden so easily set it down. When the people in her conference session did not recognize their privilege and propensity to discard that weight at will, Tracie was flabbergasted. The frustration she felt upon witnessing fellow conference-goers' intermittent engagement with inequity that so greatly impacts her life motivated her to work extensively on that poem on her own volition, intent on being heard:

A lot of the poems that I used to write, it was just, like, one and done. Like you start writin because you have a feelin or you listen—you're listenin' to somethin' or you hear somethin' that triggers you, you have an idea, you want to write it down. You write it down and then it's done. [...] It wasn't a thing for me to go back and, like, work with a piece. It was when it was done, it was done. I loved it, I loved it how it was. But this one piece, [...] I must have edited it for, like, months. And I was obsessed with it. [...] And I just thought that it, it took the way that I was feelin' when I was triggered and I wrote this piece and it just, it just spiraled into somethin' that was like so beautiful to me. And I just loved the piece. And I, like, edited other poems since then, but that was my most heavily edited piece." (0:43:55.3-0:45:33.8)

Tracie experienced what most writing teachers hope to facilitate: the joy, satisfaction, and pride that come with writing something that feels important and true and that come through patience and the practice of revision. Her process was inspired by writing about an experience that triggered a strong emotional response to white privilege. This experience was also influenced by

racial alienation at this conference and by a desire to connect with others who shared her racialized identity and perspective, to find “where my people [of color] are.” Here, she’s identifying People of Color as “her people,” a group identified by a possessive pronoun, people with whom she possesses a collective identity. In some sense, this collective could be considered a family, bound not by blood but by racialized experiences. By responding to the experience in writing, and by finding and taking opportunities to share and perform her writing, Tracie confronts white privilege as part of her people, on behalf of her people. In confronting white privilege and foregrounding the Black experience, Tracie makes Blackness visible to people who aren’t racialized Black.

Contextualizing Black Experience for Self

Black students need Blackness and the Black experience in the U.S. to be made visible to them too, albeit in different ways than non-Black students. In my focus groups, even though all participants were personally aware of the effects of systemic racism on their own psyche, they communicated a lack of contextual knowledge for their experiences prior to taking Black Studies courses. Developing this knowledge helped students gain new perspective of their racial identity, not only in their sociopolitical context but also in relation to the diverse cultures of Africa and the African diaspora. In essence, their learning in the Black culture center made Blackness and all its meanings and implications more acutely visible to students. Students relished opportunities to integrate this knowledge as a means of deepening their own self-understanding.

Saniya, for example, discussed an assignment in Dr. Pate’s “Racism in American Culture and Society” class, a multimodal documentary pitch. This group project gave Black students an opportunity to explore, in depth, topics that were deeply personal to them—topics that made visible the systemic nature of their own experiences. The assignment was to choose a topic

related to the class and explain the “historical context of our subject, why it was important for us to research it, and um, like, who were the key people involved in the topic and stuff like that”

(0:22:56.0-0:24:12.8). Saniya’s project was about racism in education. She explained:

It was such a coincidence, you know, because we are experiencing stuff like that. So it was really cool that we did a project like that. ’Cause it gave us an opportunity to put our thoughts out there and make it known that we care about this type of stuff and that we’re learning something in here and that it’s helping us to become better. (0:22:56.0-0:24:12.8)

This project, said Saniya, not only gave students an opportunity to be heard but also “help[ed] [them] to become better.” “I feel like all the information that I took from this class,” Saniya explained, “is really beneficial to me because some of the stuff, I never really knew before we got in here” (0:21:49.0-0:22:52.0). Students in this focus group had already talked at length about loving the class because it taught them about Black people’s extensive contributions to American history, contributions that are overlooked in mainstream U.S. history curricula. This class also complicated students’ understandings of what it means to be Black by focusing on Black diversity and the African diaspora, making differences visible by paying close attention to them. And it provided broader context for feelings that were personal to students, that were distinctly Black experiences, “the way that Black people are treated” (Angel, 0:19:24.5-0:21:19.8). This project, agreed focus group participants who were also students in Dr. Pate’s class, felt meaningful for the ways it connected them to their lineage, to greater self-understanding, and gave them access to evidence-based knowledge about their sociopolitical realities that supplemented their personal experience.

Positive Experiences with White Writing Teachers

In addition to describing writing projects they found meaningful, students shared a lot about their experiences with learning to write for and in school. By and large, their descriptions

centered on teachers, usually white people. In fact, students were *eager* to talk about these experiences, especially those involving teachers who these students found supportive and helpful. Asia, who came to Midwestern U. from a large, public, white-minority high school in a half-white suburb of a major Midwestern metropolis⁹, described the experience of feeling underprepared when taking the requisite gen-ed college writing course. In high school, she was in Honors and AP English classes and took a Writing for College course, so she assumed she was well prepared for college-level writing. As do many incoming college students, she expected the gen-ed course to focus on rule-driven tasks like formatting a paper and citing others' work. "So when I came to [university], I was in [the first-year writing course]," Asia said, continuing, "My professor was Dan Conrad. I love Mr. Conrad. I think he was a Master's student getting his PhD." Mr. Conrad's "way of teaching and his way of accepting our writing" surprised Asia, because he focused on the *content* of her writing. Not only that, but he paid attention to Asia's ideas, differentiating their quality from the quality of her writing. She explained:

I could tell that he thoroughly read my paper. It wasn't just like, "Okay here's the rubric, if you don't meet the rubric, then here's your low C / high D." It was like, "Okay, I need you to know why you're not writing correctly. Because your content is there, your ideas are there, your formatting—we can work on formatting. But I need you to know what's wrong so we can make it right." And I'm like, "What do you mean? I've never been told that my writing sucks!" And he's like, "I'm not saying that it sucks, I'm just saying that it's not the best." (0:53:58.9-0:55:25.6)

For Asia, even though her teacher critiqued her writing with value judgements about correctness, rightness, and quality, the first-year writing course with this teacher was a positive experience. In this course, Asia felt seen and heard; she "could tell that [Mr. Conrad] had thoroughly read" what she had written. By affirming the existence of her ideas in the writing, he validated the quality of her thoughts and her identity as an intelligent human being. It wasn't the *thoughts* that were

⁹ The suburb's demographics were 50 percent white, but only 20 percent of the students in Asia's high school were white.

incorrect, but how she had *communicated* them; in effect, Mr. Conrad was dissociating Asia's thoughts from her writing. He was, also in effect, communicating to her that language is not as personal as thoughts, affirming her intelligence while downplaying the importance of the language she used to convey those thoughts: "I know that you know what you're talking about," she recalled him saying, "and I know that you have the ideas and I know that it can just be like a formatting thing" (0:55:29.7-0:56:34.5). In Asia's memory, Mr. Conrad minimized the value judgements about his criticisms, alluding to those criticisms as merely rules to follow, right versus wrong, minor details that he referred to as "formatting."

What Mr. Conrad seemed to be referring to, however, was form (possibly style, possibly organization; Asia didn't say). I'm inferring this referent for a couple of reasons. First, Asia used "formatting" to refer to two different things: she recalled Mr. Conrad saying, "we can work on formatting," followed by an exception, "*But* I need you to know what's wrong," which makes it seem like he's talking about something other than formatting. That is, the "but" clause doesn't seem connected to what Mr. Conrad says they can work on (ostensibly at some later date). Second, Mr. Conrad seems to be referring to how Asia is *communicating* her ideas, which writing teachers know is not an issue of formatting. No writing teacher—even a novice Graduate Teaching Assistant at Midwestern U., all of whom are graduate students in the English department—would say someone isn't writing "correctly" or "not the best" when referring to formatting, because any advanced student or teacher of writing knows that formatting isn't a primary factor in the effectiveness of a text's communication. Third, Asia said Mr. Conrad "would tell me, like, write your paper first however you're comfortable and then we can redo it format-wise later" (0:59:14.3-1:00:34.9).

What is also interesting about Mr. Conrad's response is his focus on himself: "I need you to know why," "I need you to know what's wrong." There's something about this construction that seems benevolent to her, that removes the weight of responsibility from Asia. This teacher will help her correct her writing, and he's taking the responsibility on himself. In positioning his feedback this way, Mr. Conrad draws Asia's attention to his benevolence and away from what he is really asking her to do, which is assimilate to what linguists H. Samy Alim and Geneva Smitherman call "White Mainstream English," the normalized white ways of speaking that most people refer to as "standard English." Asia feels supported, given access to her teacher's knowledge that will help her succeed in college, and she feels that her ideas are seen—two of the themes that continually re-emerged in the focus groups as students' greatest concerns. Teachers who are compassionate, who are "here *for* Black people" (Angel, 0:19:24.5-0:21:19.8), are what these students really looked for. Bianca underscored this need:

I think teachers need, or, they will benefit from identifying with when a student is anxious. You know, especially in a writing class. Writing is very subjective, and it's also very personal. Even if it's not a reflective paper, I am going to show you my inadequacies when I touch this paper. When I start typing, you're going to see all of my flaws. If I look at you as a teacher, which, of course, I will be because you're my instructor. I know for a fact that I have this perception that you're going to look at this and see just how incompetent I am. Even if it's not true, if I've been told that or shown that my whole life, this paper provokes anxiety. It may exhibit itself in procrastination or just throwing anything on the paper. Because instead of me putting my best work down and you telling me it's not good enough, I prefer to put the worst possible thing and like take that grade myself. You know? So like if teachers could do a better job of, and that sounds means, if teachers could, um, if they could become more aware of emotional and mental health symptoms that their students are going through and not just say go to counseling. You connect with that student and figure out why is it that every time we have a paper due, well why is it that every time I bring up this assignment, you get fidgety, or you start missin' classes, or, you know, you linger a little bit after but you don't say anything to me. Or you have a billion questions! What is going on? What's wrong? You know? You need to sit down with me and talk to me. And when you sit down with your students, look at them. You know, it's not like with those students in particular, it may be more helpful to just take five minutes, ten minutes, and not type an email at the same time. You know? Sit down with them and go through and outline and not make them feel like this is what we do in high school. You know, like, you stuck, I'm a teacher. I teach writing. This

happens to everybody, you know? Let's get our thoughts out onto paper. (1:08:09.6-1:11:22.9)

Black students *can* and *do* find this compassion in some white teachers and historically white institutions, but they've learned through experience to not expect it. They do, however, expect to find it in the Black culture center, which is why the culture center is such a vital place for them in a historically oppressive environment. Bianca described compassion as a trait that is fundamental to "a lot of people of color [...], specifically Black people":

Because we've been treated so—when you're treated in a way or you deal with a certain amount of trauma, where you view it as trauma or not, you learn compassion, you know? And when you learn compassion, you can look at people and give compassion. And everybody needs that. Whether they want to admit it or not. Everybody needs somebody to care. Especially when they're at a vulnerable point in their life. And that's something I feel like is a unique gift despite all the trouble that a lot of Black people go through in this country. We have the gift of compassion. We can look at you and be like, "I'm not gonna judge you because I know how that shit feel." I'm not gonna talk about you. You know, I'm not gonna you know, I'm not gonna lead you in the wrong direction. We just open. I don't know. We smile. We somebody hurting because it's like I know that language. I know that look. You know? I'm just sayin'. And then it opens you up. (1:33:03.2-1:34:44.5)

However, when compassion is their primary focus, if students are concerned with merely surviving in a hostile space, they don't recognize or really think much about the violence of White Mainstream English (Alim and Smitherman) and "anti-Black linguistic racism," the denigration of Black Language as a means of denigrating Black people (Baker-Bell). The need to survive trumps the need to understand or the need to be right. Bianca demonstrates this belief when she says:

I mean, it's in the work world. So, like, when you send an office email, it has to be in standard American English. So when I look at the university teaching that, it's preparing us for a world. Like, even if restructure does happen. It needs to happen on the biggest scale, you know, and we ain't there yet. You know? So we have to keep the standard in place in order for us to be successful in society. (1:14:00.9-1:14:56.4)

Even students who were critical of "standard English"—the same students who expressed frustration with the invisibility of Black excellence and access to Black-affirming spaces in a

historically white institution—still accepted its place in society, its existence as legitimate.

Tracie, for example, explained:

I personally don't have a problem with standardized English. I have a problem with the naming of it as Standard. Because who's standard? Now we're getting into some other things that, to me, really calls, like, the standardization of language. And it kind of even hearkens back to, like, education as a hegemonic institution overall. (1:16:17.0-1:19:10.9)

Tracie thinks of speaking and writing in White Mainstream English as “talking green,” a phrase she got from a documentary and prefers to the phrase “standard English.” She explained:

There's this YouTube video. I can't even remember the name of it now. But it's a documentary. And as a part of the documentary, they, um, talk, they are at this school in [...] somewhere in Virginia. But this school treats Standardized English, they call it, “Talking Green.” And then you have a green zone. Because they associate it with making money. With corporate America. So it's not like, “Um, well don't talk that outside talk here.” It's like, hey, you know that you're in the green zone. We're talkin' green right now. So that nobody has to feel like when they go out. So when you go out and you're in your community, you're not speakin' that bad English. You're just not talkin' green. And there's no need to because you're just chillin' out with your friends or your family. (1:16:17.0-1:19:10.9)

In sharing their thoughts about “standard English,” both Bianca and Tracie alluded to the primacy (the world Bianca says students are being prepared for) and inevitability (whenever you're in the “green zone,” somewhere where you make money) of White Mainstream English as part of life in the United States. Tracie began to destabilize this notion of inevitability by discussing how Black artists challenge white language supremacy (Inoue) when they create texts that resist White Mainstream English yet still bring in a lot of money. She explained that drawing attention to this reality is a way to “open up” a classroom, by which she seemed to mean “decenter White Mainstream English”:

I think that if you want a way to open up your classroom, you have to use different mediums. And I think that music is one of the easiest and most accessible mediums because across the board, like, popular music, no matter what you look like or how you identify, you might like that music. And that music is not always usin' standardized English. But somehow, it's a money language, right? When you go and you're rappin' this way and you're usin' these colloquialisms or whatever. But you're makin' all of this

money from doin' it. Or somebody's makin' money. The record execs. Somebody is makin' money off of it. So how can you open it up? (1:19:25.0-1:21:47.1)

What Tracie was drawing attention to is the reality that White Mainstream English isn't the *only* green language. As she continued, however, Tracie implied that even though all dialects are valid, some are only truly appropriate in creative texts, whereas other contexts require code switching. She reflected on the college course, a Black Women in Fiction Class at a community college, that first got her thinking about dialectical variation:

[W]e had a whole conversation about dialects and how every person's dialect, however you're used to talkin' from where you come from, that's valid. And don't even let anybody invalidate that for you. Don't ever let anybody take that from you. Don't ever feel like you have to give that up. And then that like kind of parlayed into code switching. [...] And I get it as a creative, as a writer. I think that that's really cool that infuse into your novel, your novella, your short story, your whatever. (1:19:25.0-1:21:47.1)

To relegate Black dialects to creative writing only, however—and to require code switching in formal academic or professional contexts—is to perpetuate white language supremacy and, in turn, reinforce white supremacy. That is, code switching is itself a *tool* of white supremacy, argue scholars like Inoue, Baker-Bell, and Vershawn Ashanti Young. No matter what we call “standard English,” its function is still to exercise white dominance. The problem of language prejudice, explains Young, is people's attitudes about other people—“the way folks with some power perceive other people's language” (110)—not the language itself being inferior. “Black English don't make it own-self oppressed,” he argues. “It be negative views about other people usin they own language [...] that make it so” (110). This is something that Bianca started to realize by the end of our focus group session when she said to Tracie:

You keep sayin' something that's triggering me. Because I've heard it before, bad English. That is so demonizing. Like, bad? So what is yours? Good? You know? Like what's crazy is you brought up rap. Everybody consider their kind of rap, but then when we talk in a particular setting, we're frowned upon. And like you said, this very versed, the way it's, you know, spoken, makes billions, you know? It is a money language. And it's funny because, in particular, because I can't speak to other races, black people like we are often imitated and people want to talk like us, dress like us, look like us, and act

like us. But we can't be us. That's weird to me. Not even in the classroom, you know? Just bad English. Oh. And I heard that growin' up from teachers. Like, you know, that's not good English. So what is? Yours? You know, like, I just, and I've never, when I moved to the suburbs, even though I heard a lot of young white kids talking, um, in their, I guess their dialect, you know? It wasn't labeled as bad English. (1:21:47.1-1:23:13.8)

“Bad English,” Bianca began to realize during the hour and a half that we talked, is anything that isn't white English. That realization was energizing for Bianca, whose speech volume and cadence increased as she said,

I don't like this study anymore. I'm kidding! I'm just getting my feelers, that's all. It's just, it's triggering a lot of emotions. I'm glad though, because that means its something that needs to be talked about because I'm pretty sure I'm not unique in, um, feeling this way. (1:23:17.4-1:23:51.3)

Here, Bianca identifies a topic that in her experience, isn't being talked about—even in the Black culture center, a place she says is dedicated to Black excellence, a place all the focus group participants said makes Blackness visible, a place that feels like home, where Black issues are central and where “intellectual inquiry about and cultural engagement within the African diaspora” supports the “development of cultural knowledge, research, academic excellence,” and more.¹⁰ If students aren't being taught about something as culturally vital as Black language in a Black culture center, and if in that space standard language ideology is accepted and upheld—even just as a means of helping students succeed in a capitalist economy—what kinds of messages are students getting about Black excellence and its place in the American academy? No matter whether they're in a class elsewhere in the university or in a Black Studies course, if anti-Black linguistic racism is being accepted and reproduced—*especially* in a space meant to challenge systemic racism—this kind of internalized racism and white language supremacy will continue. “It has the potential to be great,” Bianca said about the Black culture center. “It has the potential to be amazing, but it's a lot of foundational fundamental stuff that has to be worked on.

¹⁰ This quote is taken from the website of the Black culture center at Midwestern U.

You know within ourselves, you know, accountability is everything you know? But also on a larger scale, you know” (1:38:47.5-1:39:10.7).

Languaging Academic Identities

As a teacher-researcher for over a decade, including two years at Midwestern U., I have never witnessed widespread enthusiasm for learning among Black students of all genders in an HWI like I did in these focus groups and in the Black Studies course I attended as a participant observer. To some extent, my subjectivity as a college-educated white cis-woman undoubtedly has influenced not only my perception of racialized students’ dispositions in class—such that it is hard sometimes to ascertain how much a student is engaged—but also their comfort with and trust in me. That comfort and trust, however, are critical for all students, and especially so for Black students, as my study revealed. In HWIs, Black students are especially attuned to their exclusion, their invisibility, their disconnectedness—however white supremacy manifests in their particular academic context—and that experience of belonging profoundly impacts their academic engagement.

When given the opportunity to speak and be heard, students willingly shared their experiences, desires, and frustrations with me, a white teacher-researcher. This willingness suggests to me that students do not often enough feel like their voices matter—in turn, that *they* matter. What the findings shared in this chapter indicate is that for these students, opportunities to acquire and integrate knowledge that contextualizes their identity-driven experiences (including but not limited to how they are racialized), and overt recognition of the quality of their ideas and thoughts, were central to positive experiences with writing for and in school. Until they were made aware of standard language ideology, they were not consciously bothered by expectations to code switch to White Mainstream English in their writing. Students could

language their academic identities in many ways so long as the things they most deeply identified with—in this context, Black culture and the Black experience in the U.S.—were seen and heard...so long as they mattered.

Chapter 3: What Matters *For* Black Students

What does it mean to matter? This was the single most prevalent question that arose from my interviews with faculty associated with the Black culture center. As core faculty and administration in the center, these teachers and director are deeply invested in sustaining and promoting Black culture. Their work in this center communicates to the university and its regional community that Black culture matters: it's worthy of study, celebration, and sustenance. On another level, mattering is relevant to the work they do with students because it influences the curricular and programmatic decisions they make on students' behalf. I found myself asking: *what do these leaders believe matters for Black college students' lives? What do they think matters in the courses, special events, and extracurricular organizations implemented by the Center?* Together, these interviews raise questions about value: *what gets their attention, and why?*

In this chapter, I discuss the three interviews as case studies, considering the interviewees' differing subjectivities alongside their words. My goal in this chapter is to develop a cohesive sense of the values and perspectives these leaders bring to the Black culture center at Midwestern U. and how those values and perspectives impact the writing that students are assigned in these leaders' classes. Of course, the values explored in the following sections are not mutually exclusive or exhaustive; each interviewee would likely agree with the values discussed by another. I have singled out each person's primary focus, however, in order to more carefully analyze the lens through which that person makes curricular decisions and how that lens might impact students' sense of mattering. In the following chapter, I will compare these values and perspectives to those of the students in the focus groups, placing that comparison within the broader conversation about antiracism—specifically, what it means to be antiracist in general

and what it means to be antiracist writing teachers, especially in compulsory general education writing courses, according to past and current writing studies scholarship.

To Matter Is to Succeed, to Achieve High Expectations, to Refute Mediocrity: Carrie Herron, Director

A Black woman from Gary, Indiana, an industrial city widely known for high poverty and crime, Carrie Herron is the director of the Black culture center at Midwestern U. and manages its operations, student employees, events, and so on. At the time of our interview, Herron was a dissertator in an Educational Psychology PhD program at Midwestern U. and held both a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in Business as well as an MBA. Though Herron did not say so directly, her upbringing in Gary and formal education in Business undoubtedly influenced her perspective of Black students and the role of the Black culture center at Midwestern U., much of which focused on student success. Many Black students at Midwestern U. come from similar urban environments, so Herron identifies with these students and seems comfortable with the assumptions she makes about why they come to college and what they need in order to fulfill that "why."

On the Purpose of College Education

Throughout our conversation, as Herron focused on student success, she emphasized accomplishment, the meeting of high standards. Underscoring her focus on successfully meeting high expectations was the fundamental goal of students' *survival*. For example, when the pivotal "S-plan" ("survive and succeed") mentor program in the Black culture center was developed, Herron wasn't around, but she shared her understanding of its purpose:

Part of that "survive and succeed," you know, is getting through college. And so, we—we were at a time where students were coming here as a mechanism of survival. And I do

feel like that that's still very true today where a lot of our students are coming here; this is their opportunity to survive. (00:09:20:15-00:09:48:06)

In our conversation, Herron referred to different kinds of survival: as psychologically withstanding being in an HWI, and as pursuing post-secondary education in order to financially survive in a capitalist economy. Survival—both physical and psychological—is “a very staple part of the Black experience,” Herron said. So in college, she explained, “even though it may look very different from survival the way ‘survival’ has been defined in the past, survival is still a very huge part of what these [Black] students are coming here to do. And not just to survive but also to succeed” (00:09:48:19-00:11:40:11).

I asked Herron for clarification about what she was saying students are “coming here” to survive and whether by “here” she meant the university or the Black culture center. Her response was one example of inconsistency or misunderstanding on my part that I found more than once as I reviewed the interview transcript. She responded with “the university,” but in her explanation she seemed to be talking about the culture center. She was alluding to the trauma of an HWI, not something *outside of* the institution (as if she were referencing students coming to Midwestern U. in order to survive in the world). She said:

[Midwestern U.], so coming to college and just being able to survive in a predominantly white environment that's very different from where all of our students come from. [...] [W]e have students that come from all manners of all urban places [...] [T]hey're coming from different places, and they're all converging here. (00:09:48:19-00:11:40:11)

I suspect the seeming inconsistency may be the result of both being true, that students are trying to survive the world by coming to the university and the HWI by coming to the Black culture center.

Herron's view of survival and value is no doubt influenced by her geographical background and by her formal education in Business. When Herron talked about students coming to Midwestern U. to “survive and succeed,” for example, she relayed a very tangible, material

frame of reference, one that is valued in economic terms. That is, Herron’s implicit definition of success entailed meeting high standards set by people in power—in this case, educators. The goal of meeting those standards is to be able to “communicate through the written form in a way that would allow them to engage with someone who may not have had their same experience” (00:33:48:27-00:36:48:07). Herron didn’t talk about *why* students would need to engage with these people in this way, but the implication is that so they can succeed in a capitalist economy—so they can succeed *in order to* survive.

On the Role of the Black Culture Center

The Black culture center at Midwestern U. plays a significant role in holding Black students accountable to high standards for academic achievement, suggests Herron. Herron called this perspective “Afrocentric,” saying “It’s long been a standing, at least in this center, that there is a Afrocentric lens through which we teach. And so we’re not [...] teaching from a ‘Black is a deficit’ mindset” (00:20:08:07-00:23:15:14). For Herron, *Afrocentrism* means refuting the societal white supremacist notion that Black people—in this case Black students—are mediocre. It means teaching students about achievement as part of African American heritage and expecting students to also succeed. The Black culture center plays a crucial role in Black students’ success, Herron explains, because of this Afrocentric perspective, which doesn’t exist elsewhere in the HWI.

On Blackness as a Deficit

At the center of Herron’s high expectations for academic success is critical thinking. “The whole purpose of the whole [culture center] is to break [...] down” the trained habit of students merely restating what they’re taught, which Herron said results from the “regurgitory nature” of K-12 education. Perhaps unintentionally, she did this habit-breaking work herself when talking

about academic achievement and her frustrations with what counts as “academic.” She challenged criticisms of Black ways of knowing and communicating and explained some of the obstacles Black people commonly face in educational settings:

I think that in a lot of ways Blackness is seen as a deficit. [...] [O]ur experiences are constantly challenged. Our research is challenged, you know, just everything about Blackness is a challenge. And it’s easy to challenge something when there is a power dynamic. Right? Where we are not necessarily that person—the people in power—to change the narrative about who we are and when our ways of knowing and our ways of communication and even when we look at, I mean, when you look at qualitative research as a whole, and just if you break it down to, like, narrative, or specifically storytelling, and, like, that is frowned upon as not even research. But how do people and minority communities communicate, right? We come from places where we learn through stories. We learn through narratives. But now all of a sudden those are not valid ways of knowing unless it is being done by a researcher that sits on the other side of power and is doing it in a community that they have. You know, so when we look at human development, right, and if there’s a researcher that is studying in—let’s just say Africa, you know—or, or in very remote places, right? That research is more validated than research from a Black researcher coming from a narrative perspective. (00:17:32:24-00:19:45:21)

Outside of Black communities, Herron explains, Black ways of researching and communicating are not valued—they are more valuable as objects of *study* than practice—and Black people don’t have the power to change this reality. This sense of powerlessness seemed personal for Herron, whose mother required her to speak “the Queen’s English” even in their own home growing up:

And I’ve never met the Queen; I don’t know who she is. And nor have I ever been to England. But what I do know is that when I go outside, I’m in this all-Black school district, you know, and—now, granted, my teachers are also speaking what my mom would term the “Queen’s English”—but, [...] you learn how to code-switch as a kid, right? And so I would not dare say the same things out with my friends that I would say with my mom, or my family members. (00:20:08:07-00:23:15:14)

In the place where Blackness in all its manifestations should have been most valued—in the familiar space that “home” signifies, with people who shared her racial identity—Herron was expected to speak the foreign, colonizing language of white royalty. Her neighbors and peers at school spoke Black Language too, but the expectation that they code-switch at school and, in her

case, home, remained. As she described that experience, Herron gave the impression that as a young person, this expectation frustrated her.

Nevertheless, as an adult Herron seemed to accept the necessity of code-switching for upward mobility. In our interview, she seemed unbothered that Black Language is denigrated in academic genres even while she was clearly frustrated that Black research methods and storytelling are. When it came to language, Herron seemed resigned to the rules and expectations set by white people: “Your words matter, you know, what you say, how you say it, it puts you in spaces,” she said (00:20:08:07-00:23:15:14). So even while Herron did this habit-breaking work of calling attention to the ways Blackness is denigrated in academic settings, she perpetuated those very habits when she spoke proudly about the “high standards”—standards that valorize “the Queen’s English” and other white ways of communicating—that she was held to as a student and maintained now as a teacher. Herron continued to define these high expectations of Black students, the antithesis of the “Black deficit” perspective, as “Afrocentric”:

Even though I was raised in a predominantly Black school district—predominantly, basically all-Black school district—all of my teachers, Black or White, all came from what I would, what I view now as an Afrocentric lens. They did not view us in deficit. At all. My, I mean, my White teachers were just as, you know, you know, caring and, and not—they put us on the same level. So one of the things that would happen is that we are in some of these areas you have Black teachers who, the bar is here [gestures with hand up high, showing a level]. Now they’re never going to lower the bar to come to you. This is where the bar—our White teachers were the same way. Okay? And they were not going to lower the bar, they were not going to let you use that, you know, that “society is—” right, they were not—you gon’ have to come up to where we are. Period.
(00:24:36:28-00:27:00:00)

The nebulous “bar” Herron described functioned on a linear scale of low to high, independent of context. The standards it represented seemed measurable and apolitical. Failing to meet this bar, the standards, and blaming that failure on society being unfair was an intolerable excuse, Herron said. In other words, the “bar” is not the concern for Herron—what is her concern is that students be held to it and know they can achieve it. That is, the standards are not a problem for Herron;

the problem, she implied, is the lowered expectations that so many people hold for Black students. This assertion exists in tension with Herron's tacit recognition that words are political, an implication of her belief that code-switching facilitates upward mobility. She seemed, that is, to truly believe that standards both are and are not objective, a contradiction that did not resolve through our conversation.

Ultimately, for Herron, Afrocentricity is an attitude, an orientation toward Black people. She believes her teaching is Afrocentric because of her expectations of Black students:

I tell students, "This is my bar. I'm not gonna adjust it because you don't feel like you can make it. You are going to figure out how to get to this bar, and it does not have—and you—because I know you can do it." And I think that that's the attitude that I carry that I feel like is more of Afrocentric lens. It's that "I know that you can do it. You may not know you can do it, but I'm not gonna change it because I know you can hit it. So hit it. I don't wanna hear excuses, I don't wanna know why you feel like you can't hit it. We can work through that. But you gon' hit this bar, cuz it's right here." And so I—I—I do and, so, a lot of this—they would say, you know, "You hardcore." I'm not hardcore. My bar is just high. And yours is just not. (laughs) (00:28:10:12-00:30:05:10)

Herron also shares that she holds Black students to a higher standard than other students, "because every other class may not. They may let you come here with a lower bar, and I am not. We simply don't come from that people. Period" (00:28:10:12-00:30:05:10).

To her, African heritage is one of achievement, of ability to succeed. It's about the struggle. But it's not about setting the goal, defining it. It's about how you work toward that goal, she explains:

And you don't get to be mediocre. None of my students get to be mediocre, but especially you, because I know that the—that the, the risk for you to be viewed as mediocre, even if it's yourself viewing yourself as that, the danger in that is so much greater for you. The consequences are so much greater for a Black student than it is for other students. And that's what I know. Because if you believe inherently that you are mediocre, then that mediocrity is generational and it can be. But if you believe that you are great, that that greatness can also be generational, and that can carry us further than giving you a mediocre mindset. (00:30:06:07-00:30:46:19)

It's like Herron sees mediocrity, or one's belief that they are mediocre, as more threatening to

Black students' success than are expectations that fundamentally denigrate (at best) and extinguish (at worst) a vital part of their cultural heritage. The onus is on them to adapt their communication strategies to their audience of people "who may not have had [your] same experience," ostensibly white people, she suggests:

The challenge, though, that I see as somebody that's teaching and transmitting knowledge is that I know the after. [...] So when you graduate from college you're gonna be expected to write. You're gonna be expected to communicate in the written form and verbally. [...] in a way that would allow [you] to engage with someone who may not have had [your] same experience. (00:33:48:27-00:36:48:07)

For the most part, the notion that Black *language* is deficient doesn't trouble Herron; the notion that Black *people* are deficient does. This belief suggests that Herron views people and language as separable, as identity not bound up in language, even while for her as a child it was. Yet even as she talked at length about the importance of high expectations and success for Black students, Herron made comments or shared anecdotes that belied the belief that standards are apolitical. For example, she explained a situation where her Black peers envied her use of what reasonably can be presumed is "the Queen's English," and where she reassured them that their language, ostensibly Black English, was not deficient:

Even now I notice that there are times when I'm talking—like, I'm like, presenting in front of other students—and they're like, "I really want to say stuff like you say it," and I'm like, "but how you said is actually OK too. You can carry the same sentiment that I carry, look, but we have been taught"—and by "we" I mean African American students—"have been taught that if you speak a certain way, that you carry something." There's a, there's a level of something that you carry that automatically puts them at a deficit. So, in that way, you know, I am not at a deficit, but our students would certainly *feel* like they are. (00:20:08:07-00:23:15:14)

Here, Herron says that the belief that Black Language is deficient is something that's *Taught*, that's part of the "Blackness as deficit" mentality—the antithesis of Afrocentrism. She knows that she isn't deficient, and neither are they, nor is their language. Meanwhile, she prides herself

on the “high bar” she sets for students, one that requires students, many of whom speak Black Language, to code-switch into “standard English” in order to succeed.

On Writing Assignments and Assessment

These subtle contradictions pertaining to language and identity recurred throughout our conversation. For example, Herron talked about two qualities of language use that she appreciates and looks for as a reader and as a teacher: plainness and authenticity. Mixed in with these concepts was the notion of voice. For Herron, “plain language” seemed to imply words and phrases that all people can understand easily, without needing a dictionary—no jargon or vernacular— or that the speaker/writer defines upfront. This phrase came up in response to my asking her about “academic discourse,” a term she felt was jargon and not “plain language.” She explained why using jargon was problematic:

When we ask questions of people, and those people do not share our experiences—when we ask them questions in our vernacular, basically what we’re saying is that “you then need to figure out and adapt to what I’m asking.” Right? (00:49:22:25-00:50:04:22)

In other words, by asking Herron a question using a key term she did not recognize and by not defining it, I assumed a position of superiority. I put the onus on her to “figure out and adapt to what I [was] asking.” And while I thought the problem was that I had used a specialized term from one discourse community in another context, Herron’s focus was different: she explained that the term is acceptable for writing, but not for speaking. In other words, her concern pertained to the mode of delivery. She expects someone to use “plain language” when they’re asking another person a question orally, with the implication that she’s specifically referring to real-time spoken conversations:

When we ask questions, that, that how we define things, why don’t—just ask what that is. I think that when you write it maybe you’re going to write “academic discourse.” But when you ask somebody about academic discourse, you gotta tell them what—you can’t use the word “academic discourse.” You have to put that in what we call “layman’s

terms,” like, just make it plain. What does that *mean*? And then ask me how we do *that*. (00:42:23:03-00:42:50:05)

Questions, she implies, are commonly a part of spoken conversation. And questions need to be posed in “layman’s terms.” For Herron, layman’s terms—what she calls “plain language”—are simply straightforward, unmarred by context. She didn’t define it more than that, but she did differentiate “mak[ing] it plain” from “using the terms that feel comfortable to you”—no jargon, no vernacular—as if “plain” is somehow obvious (00:48:32:09-00:48:34:23). She explained the difference as making the question “plain enough for [the person you’re asking] to understand it” without using “[your] vernacular” (00:49:22:25-00:50:04:22). She also suggested that the high expectations she sets for students are meaningful and accessible because she “make[s] it plain enough for [students] to understand [them]”—plain enough, that is, that she doesn’t let students ask her questions about these expectations. In other words, to Herron, plain language is an essential part of creating assignments with high expectations that Black students are well poised to achieve:

Some people will say that me having a bar and a standard means that I’m saying that you need to write to this bar. But I’m saying that if I make it plain enough for you to understand it, then the bar still is here [gestures up high]. (00:49:22:25-00:50:04:22)

In other words, students’ ability to meet teachers’ high expectations depends upon teachers’ ability to state those expectations plainly.

When I asked how Herron differentiates making something plain from dumbing it down, she suggests that people who share racial identity have implicit knowledge of this difference: “[I]t’s just—it’s something that’s ingrained, right? So that I think that white teachers may have a harder time with that than a Black teacher” (00:50:08:26-00:50:34:01). She says that white teachers may have “inherent biases” that lead them to not define terms (00:50:35:15-00:50:44:28). It seems, then, that my concern about being a white woman read as speaking condescendingly to a Black

woman peer was far less of a concern for Herron than it was for me. For her, the assumption that we shared knowledge of a key term for our discussion was the greater problem.

At the same time, Herron continued to emphasize the importance of holding students accountable to high expectations, which she said she does by being “authentic” with students and by looking for authenticity in their writing. For Herron, authenticity has a variety of meanings, from holding high expectations (which she connects to Afrocentricity) to being honest about one’s knowledge and its limits to conveying a consistent voice in speaking and writing. When I asked how she assesses whether students meet “the bar” she repeatedly spoke of, or how she upholds this bar in an Afrocentric way, I followed up by asking whether she looks for code-switching. Her first mention of authenticity came in reply:

No, I don't think it's about code-switching; I think it's about being authentic. And, and, you know, I think authenticity is at the root of Afrocentricity in my viewpoint and and being authentic means that, you know, you don't get a pass” (00:27:09:08).

The explanation and example she gave, however, did not connect to authenticity as I understand the term, as being true to one’s sense of self, one’s identity. Perhaps, however, she saw holding high expectations for Black students as “authentic” because doing so helps these students to be true to the legacy of Black struggle and success.

Later in the conversation, the topic of authenticity re-emerged. Herron’s use of “plain language” is part of being authentic, because it entails being honest about what she does and does not know. She explains key terms when needed (based on her implicit understanding as a Black woman, as I mentioned earlier), and when she doesn’t understand something a student is communicating, she asks them. Asking a student for clarification, she says, is just

me being my authentic self. Because there are sometimes that I don't know stuff. And I tell ‘em—I don't know what that means. Students say stuff all the time. [And I respond] “I don't know what that means. Define it for me.” Right? Because I want them to get comfortable with me asking them. Because their level, their knowledge, is not my knowledge. (00:51:31:00-00:52:21:02)

For Herron, authenticity is bound up with humility, it seems. By acknowledging to students that they have knowledge she does not possess—by humbling herself in front of them—she sees herself as being *authentic*.

Authenticity is also what Herron looks for in her students' writing. In this context, she defined authenticity in two ways: as ideas that are not “regurgitory in nature” (00:37:13:15-00:38:10:15) and as a voice that she recognizes from their in-class discussions. It's unclear, though, what she meant by voice. On one hand, she was referring to someone's ideas, their thoughts, when she said she asks them in her assignments, “What are your thoughts? I want to hear what your voice is” (00:33:48:27-00:36:48:07). Here, she conflates voice with thoughts. When I asked her how she defines voice and authenticity in writing, what she *looks* for, she could not clearly define it beyond that she just recognizes it:

I—you know, to be honest, I—I look at it as not only am I reading your voice but I can actually see that this is your voice. So not necessarily in word choice. Word choice, I am—I am a stickler for, like, grammar and being able to communicate via the written form. (00:45:18:02-00:45:43:05)

Our conversation continued as follows:

KB: The standard English form?

Herron: I would say Standard English. I am more Standard English. Do not write how you talk, because everybody—that is not a clear meth—you know, and part of that is just my love for, um, orders, like W.E.B. DuBois, like, there was no—like, he wasn't writing—his bar was here [gestures up high]. He wasn't writing here [gestures down low]. The writing was not—have you ever read *The Souls of Black Folks* or *Miseducation of the Negro*? These are books that are so rich and also you need a dictionary to read those books, right? Because they are just chock full of this, like, his—his writing was just so far—it was like you are literally a sociologist and philosopher, like that is *who you are* and, but I always look to see if I could hear the student's voice in the writing. And it's the voice that I can recognize. So when a student speaks in class, I know your voice. Right? I know—I know your voice, um—

KB: Like, when you say “voice,” do you mean—

Herron: I can hear it

KB:—because you said it’s not, it’s not word choice.

Herron: Not necessarily.

KB: So for you it’s like —

Herron: It’s like your voice, like I can—I can read a student’s work and say, like, absolutely this student wrote this. And I can see that interplay between—because, there is—like, how you talk or even your word choice, even. When you write, there are just certain similarities for me that just bring it all together. And I can feel that with a student—I’m like, okay, this is that student’s voice. And it doesn’t have to be written in slang, it doesn’t have to be written in like a different—it doesn’t have to even—you know, it doesn’t have to be written problematically, quote unquote, to—for me to still hear that person’s voice. It’s kinda hard to explain, but I’ve gotten quite good because I’ve had to work on it myself. Right? And so I think my level of sensitivity comes from that. (00:45:45:16-00:48:11:23)

Like “plain language,” “authenticity” was a term Herron did not define beyond its obviousness to her, despite the fact that authenticity seemed to be Herron’s greatest priority when assessing students’ work. For Herron, its obviousness results from her prior experience with the person communicating, much like “plain language” results from her knowledge of the people she’s speaking to. But instead of saying “culturally relevant” language, she called that language “plain.” And instead of saying she was looking for a “familiar” voice in students’ writing, she called that voice “authentic.”

It isn’t clear, however, what that authenticity looks like or what it means to succeed in meeting Herron’s high expectations for writing assignments, for example. The features of successful writing that she says matter most—authenticity and grammar—are unmeasurable beyond the rules of “standard English grammar.” And they are not replicable, as Herron could not define voice beyond something that she recognizes and is good at recognizing because she’s had to work on making her own voice come through in her writing.

One thing is clear, though: for Herron, authenticity belongs to the realm of ideas, and voice pertains to both ideas and how they’re communicated. A voice is authentic inasmuch as it relays

ideas that are consistent with Herron’s prior experiences with the writer. The actual *language* used does not matter for a person’s voice to be authentic. To the contrary, Herron, who is a self-described “stickler for grammar and being able to communicate in [‘Standard’ English],” believes it is possible to have an authentic voice while also meeting standards of White Mainstream English (00:45:18:02-00:45:43:05). As such, “standard” English is an important part of Herron’s assessments of student writing, an assessment criterion that was implied when she called herself a “stickler for [‘standard’ English] grammar” (00:45:18:02-00:45:43:05) and is demonstrated in the rubrics she shared with me. Nevertheless, Herron said she and others in the Black culture center don’t teach students how to code-switch, because “students have learned that throughout their lives [...] Just in their experience of being educated” (00:16:06:15-00:17:08:24).

For Herron, then, while succeeding means meeting someone’s high expectations for you, and while for Black students part of succeeding is refuting societal narratives about Black mediocrity, that success is measured only by the teacher’s implicit recognition of a student’s “authentic” voice and by students’ adherence to the rules of “standard” English grammar that Herron assumes students are well familiar with by the time they come to college. For Black students who believe that language is an integral part of identity and that authenticity requires using language in ways that feel natural to them, authenticity is constrained from the beginning. Their success, in turn, is constrained from the beginning. As a result, their mattering is constrained from the beginning, because for Herron achievement is tantamount.

To Matter Is to Make Progress Toward One’s Goals and Fulfill Cultural Responsibilities: Dr. Geoffrey Clemons

Born and raised in Peoria, IL, to Black, working-class parents, his mom from Memphis, his dad from Peoria, Dr. Geoffrey Clemons explains in his monograph that throughout most of his school years, he straddled two worlds between home and school. Until first grade, he was surrounded almost entirely by his Black communities. In first grade, he attended a racially and economically diverse school where, for the first time, he interacted with several white peers. When in third grade his family moved to a suburban neighborhood with the hope of upward mobility, he was a racial minority—one of the only Black kids in his school, the only Black kid in his class.

Despite being an anomaly in this environment, Clemons says his experiences of marginalization by White students were rare, though significant. Contrary to what one might expect, his Black community ostracized him more, criticizing his language, clothing, and interests. Reflecting on this experience in his monograph, Clemons highlights the complexity of Black kids’ racial identity development. That is, to develop a sense of what Blackness looked like and meant for them, these kids identified what they were *not*. They did not dress in certain ways; did not like certain genres of books, movies, and music; did not talk in certain ways. Clemons, however, contradicted these expectations; he straddled not only two worlds, but also two racial identities.

The influences of these disparate communities and of Clemons’ own hybrid identities seem significant for the ways they impact his teaching and mentoring in the Black culture center. They were also evident throughout our conversation, particularly in regard to the goals of higher education and his expectations and hopes for Black college students. For example, his focus on higher education as a “tradition” and not as a system of exclusion or enculturation reveals a

privileged orientation toward higher education that many students at Midwestern U. do not seem to share, as evidenced by the focus groups I report on in Chapter 2. Furthermore, while Clemons says in his monograph that he is most concerned with systemic social justice, the priorities he spoke of in our interview seem to focus mostly on the individual—individual acts of racism, individual moments of connection, individual successes and failures (students graduating from college). He seemed, at least in our conversation, more concerned about individual students graduating than about identifying and challenging institutional barriers to Black students' sense of belonging in this HWI. His work in the classroom and through university and community events he's hosted and participated in mostly engage with individual instances of racism and microaggressions, not so much racist policies.

The opening line of Clemons' monograph demonstrates, albeit from a Black man's voice, the kind of problem that Kendi says most well-intentioned white people perpetuate: the conflation of "not racist" with having friends of a different race. Robin DiAngelo, a prominent scholar of Whiteness Studies, attributes this deflection to an inability among white people to tolerate the uncomfortable reality that they can be complicit in racism even though they identify as *not* racist, a disposition she calls white fragility. Of course, Clemons' implication that racism is an individual problem is not the same as a white person saying it, because he speaks from a racially marginalized subjectivity. Perhaps this is what led him to write the second sentence of his monograph, in which differentiates himself from BIPOC who forsake their cultural identity for white hegemony. He continues in the first paragraph by positioning himself as a Protestant Christian, contextualizing his worldview with Bible verses that center on justice and humility. These guiding values reflect an orientation toward racism that foregrounds what Clemons says he learned as a young child: that all humans' commonality—their shared species—is paramount,

though history and culture do matter. This orientation, however, lacks exigency; coupled with the opening lines of his monograph, it also seems relevant to the perspective Dr. Clemons brings to his work as a professor in the Black culture center at Midwestern U.

On the Purpose of College Education

What Clemons believes matters most for Black college students' lives is that they "aggressively and always *progressively* move in a direction that's going to get [them] closer to accomplishing the dreams and goals that [they] may have as [...] individual[s]" (00:25:01-00:27:14). College graduation is a crucial step in moving toward those goals, Clemons suggests, advocating for students' exclusive focus on learning and graduating. "I tend to construct myself as being more of a traditionalist," he says:

Because I have a real deep romantic idea about what it means to be a college student, and what one ought to be doing with their time in this period of their lives. And I recognize that people have jobs and all that shit, but I don't care, I really don't. Your number one job is to be a student and graduate and get out of here. Everything else is just extra gravy, or extra headache, you know. (00:21:30-00:24:55)

To progress toward their goals, Clemons explains, students have to prioritize graduation above all. His responsibility is to support students in this effort by "show[ing] [them] what the expectations are going to be from other professors on this campus so that [they] can get the hell out of here. With a degree" (00:21:33-00:24:55).

Implied in this priority is an assumption that students know what their college and career goals are and that having a college degree will help them achieve those goals. The goal of expedient graduation, then, is *his* goal for students, despite his clarification that he's prioritizing "the dreams and goals that [students] may have as [...] individual[s]" (00:25:01-00:27:14). Similarly, here and throughout our conversation, Clemons repeatedly focused on his own beliefs about what matters for Black students:

I tell my students a lot that, you know, I ask them if they're thinking about graduate school, especially anyone that's past their second year, and, you know, there's a lot of hemming and hawing about it, and my refrain is, "You need to go get a doctorate. We need more Black doctors, plain and simple. And if you're not gonna do it, who *is*?" (00:25:01-00:27:14)

This refrain echoes a story Clemons shared in his monograph, one in which white British journalist Donald Woods—a close friend of the late Black anti-Apartheid activist Steve Biko, who was murdered by the South African government in 1977—told Clemons decades before. Clemons' encounter with Woods, and the friendship between Biko and Woods that he'd read about, developed in him the belief that BIPOC activists and white activists are *equally* responsible for working toward racial justice. In other words, the onus for achieving racial equity is in part on Black people.

For Clemons, part of that responsibility involves continuing the legacy of Black academics:

The culture has a really strong and rich tradition for academics. And of all things in our culture, that is *the* one thing that we should not sacrifice, because if we can't create and develop our own things, our culture's gonna die" (00:25:01-00:27:14).

Here, Clemons links the creation of "our own things" to academic work. He might mean that the creation of knowledge is tantamount to or requisite for all other kinds of creation, or he might mean that Black inventors, artists, and other discoverers are scholars in their own right and deserve to be seen and recognized as such. Regardless of his nuanced meanings in this claim, one thing was clear: Clemons was emphatic about the importance of academic work for Black people. This work, he said, is fundamentally connected to survival, a major theme of my interview with Herron. The difference, though, is that Clemons was talking about the survival of Black culture, not individuals.

Ultimately, Clemons communicated that Black college students share in the responsibility of sustaining Black culture by way of sustaining Black *academic* culture. "If you can graduate from here with a reasonably decent GPA, you can go get a doctorate," he said. "It's not an occult

thing. It's a *hard* thing, it's challenging, but we can't as a culture—[trailed off]" (00:25:01-00:27:14). With this statement, Clemons voiced confidence in students' ability to fulfill their responsibility to Black culture by earning a graduate degree. Nevertheless, Clemons' goals for students and his confidence in them revolved around his own values and perspective, as he continually placed himself in his sentences' subject position: "And I'm not in the business of [letting Black culture die]; I don't have any interest in seeing that happen," he said (00:25:01-00:27:14). These values, though rooted in social justice, do not necessarily reflect students' own values, a point worth noting.

On the Role of the Black Culture Center

For Clemons, one of the most central roles of the Black culture center at Midwestern U. is to promote Black culture—the histories, voices, perspectives, ideas, and creations of the people of Africa and the African diaspora—while engaging students in critical conversations about Blackness in the United States. Black culture comprises what Clemons called "literacies of Blackness," which he said teachers and administrators in the Center "collectively try to [...] promote [...] and help students understand how they're positioned within society and on campus and *why* that is—not just that it *is*, but *why* is it" (00:27:20-00:32:20). In other words, students learn not only *about* literacies of Blackness but also *how* those literacies both shape and are shaped by their social contexts. As he described what this focus looks like in the classroom, Clemons used "literacies" broadly to represent the lenses through which humans construct or interpret meaning, which include but are not limited to language:

Literacies are embodied, right? [...] So ultimately, the first step of any literacy project is understanding the self, understanding the individual, understanding where one comes from, or where members of a certain community are coming from. So when you're in a Black Studies center, and you're teaching in a Black Studies program, [...] there's a couple of things that are happening, at *least* a couple of things. 1) Some professors—there are some, um—and this can be embodied in any one given professor, but there's

this one strategy of recognizing where kids are coming from. So a lot of our kids, for example, are coming out of South and/or West side of [major urban hub]. And so recognizing that that's where they come from and that [...] those communities serve as the cultural foundation for anything that they're gonna do *here*. And so there are professors that will definitely try to make sure that in their classes, they're, you know, tying information back to, you know, life in [major urban hub]. And 2) there are others—and I include myself as one—that are more inclined to saying, “Look, I know that you had *this* back at home, but you're not *there*. And it's my responsibility (especially if it's in a lower-level course) to show you what the expectations are going to be from other professors on this campus so that you can get the hell out of here. With a degree. (00:21:33-00:24:55)

Whereas some professors in the Black culture center purposefully integrate students' home literacies into their academic work, that is, Dr. Clemons believes his primary responsibility is to train Black students in academic literacies—those that “other professors on this campus” will expect them to be skilled in. That felt responsibility is the byproduct of Clemons' goal for college students to graduate posthaste.

For Clemons, academic literacies are part of a *tradition*, the “tradition of gaining and creating knowledge”—a key concept in my interview with Dr. Clemons (00:45:58-00:49:07). “There are, of course, many modes [of gaining and creating knowledge],” he said, referencing examples like Western, print-based culture and the oral culture of African and Asian traditions, as well as structuralist and poststructuralist approaches to analysis (00:45:58-00:49:07). The *academic* tradition, however, is what he focuses on:

I think that the larger notion of this quest for knowledge and knowledge production is the larger issue at play. And underneath that you have all of these other cultural, institutional, social, economic, historical constraints and challenges that are all negotiated all at the same time. (00:45:58-00:49:07)

Tradition, in other words, is the larger context within which all sorts of literacies are negotiated (00:45:58-00:49:07). Clemons does not see the academic tradition—“the tradition of gaining and creating knowledge”—as exclusively Western.

Nevertheless, Clemons explains why he prioritizes teaching Black students the academic

literacies he knows other professors value:

I try to promote to my students the Western notions of academic success and literacies, not as a way of privileging—and I think this is something that non-White groups have to struggle with a lot—they don't teach them to *privilege* them for the students. They teach them so that they can be successful. And then, once they are aware of these different discourses and these different approaches, hopefully—especially if they continue on into graduate school—they're more conscious about them, and in that way, they can be far more deliberate about what they *do*, and far more strategic about what they do, as opposed to just doing it just *because*. (00:45:58-00:49:07)

What Clemons is suggesting is that students be taught to “succeed” (i.e., graduate) and be left to their own devices to become more critically aware of literacy differences, more strategic about the ways they wield their own literacies.

This is not to say, however, that Clemons avoids literacies of Blackness in his classes. To the contrary, he says, “if I'm teaching my hip hop class, I like to highlight students in the class that maybe have some rhyme skills, or some DJ-ing skills, or some B-boying skills, you know?” (00:25:01-00:27:14). The class in which those literacies are invited, however, is significant. They are part of a class that revolves around a specific element of Black culture (hip hop); Clemons did not say he invites these Black literacies into his more traditional classes.

While Clemons does not engage students in challenging the demarcation between academic literacies and Black literacies, he does engage them in reading “scholarship that comes out of the Black experience” (00:27:20-00:32:20). In so doing, he is challenging the Western tradition of privileging white scholars in curricula, instead “privileg[ing] the experiences and identities of African Americans and, by extension, the African diaspora” (00:01:12-00:01:29). His focus, however, is not on the *language*; it is on Black scholars' critical *thought*. Clemons wants students to know “the classics [...] *The Souls of Black Folk*, [...] *The Miseducation of the Negro*, [...] Toni Morrison's *Playin' in the Dark*, [...] Ta-Nehisi Coates—any Ta-Nehisi Coates—or Baldwin or whomever” (00:27:20-00:32:20). Going through undergraduate school without ever

having read these classics, he said, is “a mis-education”:

And so I wanted to have an experience where they get to grapple with great books, to pull them back or show them—or guide them, I don’t know which word to use—but to help engage them in really understanding the depth of this scholarship that comes out of the Black experience. [...] I try to make sure that throughout the semester [...] that they’re constantly being recursive [and thinking about how the scholars and their ideas are connected to one another], to try to make them understand that just because something was written 150 years ago doesn’t mean it no longer has relevance to what’s happening right now. (00:27:20-00:32:20)

The work that Black scholars have done, Clemons said, is vital reading for undergrads, because it provides perspectives of American culture that are unique to Black scholars and that remain relevant to American life today. The academic side of the Black culture center is uniquely poised to teach students about these scholars’ work, which largely is underexplored in an HWI.

Although the Center is focused “on Black *studies*, not [...] Black *people*,” Clemons said, it does offer for Black students “a ready-made community” (00:01:30-00:02:36). “Especially on a college campus where there’s so much of a dominant presence of Whiteness, [...] non-White students ought to have spaces that they can go to that are safe,” he said. “Safety is about coming to a space where you don’t have to explain yourself, you don’t have to defend who you are, you don’t have to defend what you’re about, you don’t have to defend why you say something a certain way” (00:12:52-00:15:02). Clemons sees community as people who occupy a shared space, one where a person’s identity is naturally understood and accepted. In an HWI, that community is a safe haven in a hostile environment, Clemons implied. Part of the safety offered in such a space is freedom from being on the defense, from having to justify oneself, including one’s language, he said.

While having such a safe space for speaking “a certain way” (00:12:52-00:15:02) may be crucial for Black students in an HWI to persist long enough to graduate, leaving the status quo unchallenged outside the culture center participates in that culture’s own segregation, in a sense.

In other words, one way to circumvent the hostility of one's language being challenged is to use language that isn't different from the status quo, to blend in, and that is what Clemons seems to advocate. Clearly, Clemons values Black students' need for safety and community and that need's fulfillment through a physical gathering space. However, he seems to value safety—in this particular context of Black students in an HWI—in the form of *retreat*, of relegating one's cultural identities to the space reserved for that community. Perhaps this is an issue of not having the critical mass necessary within the institution to cultivate safety outside the culture center. No matter the reason, it is consistent with how Clemons teaches students to value (or devalue) language by focusing on Black thought at the expense of Black language in Black scholarship. It is also consistent with how he trains students through his writing assignments and assessments to use language in college.

On Writing Assignments and Assessment

When explaining that many of the Black culture center's leaders (but not him) integrate students' *home* literacies into the classroom, Clemons implied that his main goal is to help students develop *academic* literacies so they can graduate and reach their goals. Academic literacies, which Clemons alluded to when he talked about teaching students “what the expectations are going to be from other professors on this campus” (00:21:33-00:24:55), are linked to tradition for Clemons. When I asked him, “As a scholar, do you feel any ambivalence or resistance toward conventions of academic writing?”, he responded:

No. [...] I mean, it's part of a tradition, so—it's not that I think that traditions are sacrosanct and should never be tampered with—they should, any tradition should have the room to grow with time—grow *and* change with time—but at the same time, you know? Some of this stuff has been going on since Plato. [Laughs] So, I mean, like I said, I'm kind of a romantic about all this, you know? I think that, you know, being a part of this larger tradition is an important thing, and I think that's something that Americans tend to not really take very well. (00:43:54-00:44:44)

Conventions of academic writing don't bother Clemons because he sees them as part of a tradition, a seeming cornerstone for all that he values. I followed up by asking how he defines this tradition. He replied:

I mean—tradition in academia to me—it's like, yeah, I know that our current conception of higher education stems directly from Western European ideology and all that, I'm aware of that. At the same time, I think that there are spaces that, um, for lack of better terms right now, nontraditional folks can insert themselves into this larger tradition. The tradition to me, in and of itself, is the tradition of gaining and creating knowledge. *That's the tradition.* (00:45:58-00:49:07)

The tradition Clemons repeatedly drew attention to throughout our interview is the “tradition of gaining and creating knowledge.” In this explanation, however, he referred to people who don't adopt Western European ideology as “nontraditional”—they diverge from the norm, from the tradition. In so doing, despite acknowledging the “lack of better terms” that he was experiencing in the moment, Clemons associated the tradition of gaining and creating knowledge with people who adopt Western European ideology. “Nontraditional folks” can, however, “insert themselves into this larger tradition,” he said. The implications are twofold: not only is the onus on these people to thrust themselves into a space they don't normally inhabit, but also the tradition they're inserting themselves into is larger than their own. These explanations speak to issues of belonging and of significance. So I asked, “How would you differentiate between tradition and [...] a system? Because I'm thinking about—I mean, I know they're not the same [...] but [...] that tradition, the very history of that tradition is oppressive” (00:44:45-00:45:07). “*Can be* oppressive,” he replied (00:45:08-00:45:09).

For Dr. Clemons, it seems, the tradition of gaining and creating knowledge—which in the U.S., Clemons acknowledges, “stems directly from Western European ideology”—has a significance and a history that are worth being faithful to and is not fundamentally oppressive. That is, the conventions inherent to this tradition *can be wielded* as tools of oppression but are

not themselves oppressive in nature. Moreover, these conventions can be influenced by people who “insert themselves into [it].” What inserting oneself into this tradition entails, however, Clemons did not say.

Although writing as part of the tradition of gaining and creating knowledge seems important to Dr. Clemons, he does not prioritize it in his classes. What he said about the importance of learning to write in school and about how he trains students to write in school are contradictions. While he implied that people must be able to write well to succeed in the world, “because they’re gonna say a lot *about* you if you present yourself [in writing] this way [with lots of ‘punctuation and usage errors’]” (00:35:31-00:39:38), he acknowledged his own limitations with *teaching* students to write well but positioned himself as a capable *judge* of writing, someone who understands what “good” writing looks like. In other words, he seems to feel capable of assessing students’ writing but not of teaching them how to produce or practice it.

Nevertheless, it is unclear whether Clemons considers himself part of the problem he identified with writing instruction, because he spoke in the third person while explaining, “Most writing instruction in high school sucks. Most writing instruction in college sucks. Writing instruction is just hard, and people don’t do it very well” (00:35:31-00:39:38). While he doesn’t claim to be among these people, Clemons does admit his own lack of skill in the writing of assignments, calling one he wrote for his present class “convoluted”:

I have to admit, I am *horrible* at writing assignments. Not for not trying [...] I’ve gone to seminars, I’ve go—I’ve had other people read assignments, I’ve had other people who teach multicultural methods for English and English language learning methods—I’ve had them, colleagues, you know, “Dude, does this assignment make sense?” and read it, and it was like, “Aw man, it sounds great,” then I give it to students and they’re like, “Huh?” [Laughs] (00:33:48-00:34:04)

Here, Clemons identifies a disconnect between his intentions for a writing assignment and students’ understanding of those intentions. However, he assumes that disconnect is the product

of his own inability to communicate well with students in writing, so he acquiesces to students' desires. Consider, for example, the junior-level class I attended for this study as a participant observer, African American Critical Thought, the class where Clemons most heavily engaged students in reading "scholarship that comes out of the Black experience" (00:27:20-00:32:20). In this class, he asked students to connect texts Black scholars wrote a century ago and to "tie them together using literature that is ultimately reflective and prescient at the same time" (00:27:20-00:32:20). So I asked him how he invited students to make those connections, what students produced (or were going to produce) in this and other classes he teaches. I had heard that these students' major course assignment was a performance of some kind, and I wanted to know more about why he chose that particular assignment. The reason was not what I expected, a planned decision on Clemons' part. He explained:

So they decided they didn't want to do this writing assignment, and what I wanted them to do was they were gonna need to identify two African American critical thinkers and basically learn their ideas and represent them in an essay, and, you know, take two, compare and contrast—you know, how are they similar, how are they different. What are their overarching arguments, how are they similar, how are they different, you know that whole synthesis and all that shit. They don't feel that. They don't want to do it.

KB: Any idea why?

Clemons: Well it could be because maybe the way that I wrote the assignment description was convoluted. I have to admit, I am *horrible* at writing assignments. Not for not trying; I've gone to seminars...I've written assignment—

KB: Have you gone to the Writing Center?

Clemons: Ye—(nods affirmatively) [...] I'm also equally inclined to just say, "I'm not gonna tell you what to write, just give me a thousand words. Let's see what you come up with." Which is really hard to do, because they already have these embedded expectations of what they're supposed to be doing and "what do they need to do to get an A?" (00:33:02-00:36:26)

Most concerned with their ability to earn an A, students resisted this major writing assignment. I was curious about why junior-level students suspected that getting an A would be overly difficult

in a class offered by the Black culture center, a place designed not only to teach students about Black Studies but also to provide a space where Black students feel fully accepted in a community of people who share their cultural identities. So I asked Dr. Clemons how he grades and assesses writing, to which he responded at length:

When I sit down to grade, I do take into account, especially near the end of the semester, whether or not the student has shown any *growth*. Whether or not they've taken any advice that I've given, or anything like that. And of course that's all also dependent on time, because if it's one of those semesters where I'm just swamped, that feedback doesn't get back as fast as *I* would even want it to, you know? So they write an assignment, and, the next thing you know, the *next* assignment is due, and I still haven't returned the *first* assignment. So all those things kinda snowball.

But when I'm approaching my assessment of them and their performance, what I try to do is I try to just kinda like step back and like, "Okay, based upon all the, um, essays that I've read for this particular class or this particular course over time—you know, semester to semester—how does this particular essay fit within that landscape?" And then it's more of a matter of, "Alright, what does this person, what does this student need to know to help advance their writing?"

Because what I've come to find, especially in the lower-level courses, like "Racism in America," students are really reflecting what they were told to do from high school, in their high school writing. And so explanations tend to be very thin, arguments aren't really well crafted, and then of course, the silly, stupid mistakes that drag down all good essays—punctuation is off, and—you know, just—and I tend to be harder on that stuff, because it's like, "Look, this is the *easy* part." You know? So I'm always telling students, "Look, you know"—I remember earlier in the semester, someone had written a *really, really, really* kick-ass piece, but it was filled with these punctuation and usage errors. And it was like, "I don't wanna be a dick about it, but I can't let you go out there writing like this." Because they're gonna say a lot *about* you if you present yourself this way. So I told the student in my comments on Blackboard that he had some really great ideas, but they all got lost. Because I was too busy paying attention to all your comma splices, and—[laughs]—and all of your—you know, all of your missed punctuation, and all of the misspelled words, even though you have a red squiggly line under it, you know? And stuff like that.

So on one hand, it's like if they can articulate verbally ideas or—in class, it's clear that they are *engaging* with the text, and they have something to say, and I can help guide them through a dialogue about any given reading, that's one thing, that's one activity. And one literacy, right? And I have the tendency of privileging *that* one. You know, it's like what are you doing in class? How are you *talking* about this stuff? Because writing is a completely different skill. (00:35:31-00:39:38)

In this explanation, I notice that Clemons' expectations are vague, unarticulated. He previously

told me he doesn't use rubrics, and here, he said he considers students' work as a "landscape," as something he can just look at holistically and answer the question, "what does this student need to know to help advance their writing?" He also sees punctuation and spelling as critical parts of writing well, essential skills for joining the legacy of Black scholars, and he admits that he doesn't reliably respond to students' writing quickly enough for them to consider the feedback for future assignments. Together, these beliefs about and approaches to teaching writing may communicate to students that what matters most for writers is simultaneously conformity and individualism—the ability to implement detailed rules and to develop ideas in writing without consistent feedback that engages them in learning how to do so. It seems, then, that the extent to which a student can succeed as a writer depends on the extent to which they can implement prescriptivist grammar rules and teach themselves how to develop ideas in writing.

Succeeding as a writer, Dr. Clemons suggested, is a vital part of the success that he hopes students will achieve: the success of earning a college degree in order to then accomplish one's goals. If students' goals include mattering, making a difference in their communities and the world, Clemons seems to believe they need to become part of the Black academic tradition. And becoming part of this tradition relies on students' ability to conform to grammar rules and to naturally learn how to write while they are being taught how to think. Thus, mattering in an academic setting is a feat that many of the students who come to this HWI likely feel unable to accomplish. As with Herron, students' mattering on Clemons' terms is constrained from the beginning.

To Matter Is to Be Heard, Understood, and Supported: Dr. Mark Pate

Finishing up his fourth semester at Midwestern U. at the time of our interview, Dr. Mark Pate is a white History professor who specializes in 20th century U.S. History and African American

History. Dr. Pate is a member of the History department and also teaches in the Black culture center as part of his spousal hire agreement (his wife is director of the Latinx culture center at Midwestern U.). He came to Midwestern U. from Georgia Southern University, where he taught the school's predominantly Black students in both the History and African Studies departments.

Pate grew up not far from Gary, Indiana. His high school peers were predominantly Black, as were many of the students he taught at Georgia Southern, so being one of the only white people in a predominantly Black space is not unusual to him. (Of course, he always shared a racial identity with the people in power; all his teachers growing up were white except one, an African American man who was his eleventh grade English teacher. "There were very few people of color in the school [leadership], period, and if they were, they were, like, a janitor," he said [0:29:26.1-0:29:42.8]). It is probably these experiences that made him keenly aware of the implications of his subjectivity in this space, a topic that our conversation gravitated toward several times. In fact, *most* of what Pate talked about was his role in the Black culture center and his strategies for navigating racial tension while doing antiracist work as a white man in a communal space for Black students. He also talked about what he wishes the Black culture center did better for students.

On His Role as a White Professor in a Black Culture Center

"The very first semester I was here," Pate said, "I had one student [...] who, like, came in, looked at me the first day, and was just, like, in horror. And, like, just started, like, texting right away" (0:21:07.8-0:22:34.3). At some point, Pate explained, he said something to her, garnering the response, "Yeah, I'm sorry. I'm just so, like, blown away right now." Her surprise was, of course, that a white professor was teaching a class in the Black culture center. "This is *our* Center," she said. "This is, you know, typically what happens is [...] there'll be, like, three or

four white students in the class. Eventually they'll just all drop the class. And then all of the Black students will just kind of come together," she continued (0:21:07.8-0:22:34.3).

Protective of Black students' space on campus, this student said these things in front of the whole class, which included a few white students. Pate described the gist of her statement and a later situation where this student raised her concerns with the culture center's director:

She was talking about it very much as this social space. Everybody would just come together, and it will be this one big family. The academic [...] part of it was not computing at all. [...] And this student actually asked a staff member to do an independent study version of the same course, so she didn't have to take it with me. Now the director was like, "No. No. He's got a degree in this. This is an academic course. Yes, you're focusing on, like, issues of race, privilege, you know, power, whatever. But you're also writing and communicating and reading. You're doing academic things in this course. So he's the best person to do it. So you can either take it with him or you can drop the course and drop the [Black Studies] major." (0:22:39.2-0:23:56.7)

This conflict gets to the heart of the conundrum of having a hybrid culture center on campus:

while having the academic side helps to generate community around intellectual work that sustains Black culture (and, in turn, Black students' sense of academic belonging), it opens up a vital Black counterspace to white bodies. (I explore this issue more deeply in Chapter 4.)

As such, Pate must tread carefully as a white professor in this space. To do so, he focuses on the academic work of the course and on his work of *facilitating* an environment for (not *leading* a) discussion, separating himself from the social functions of the culture center. He openly acknowledges his limitations with students, like he did in response to that student on Day One:

I said, "Look. All I can tell you is that I'm qualified to teach this course from an academic perspective. [...] I'm well positioned in that respect. I cannot speak to [...] other issues. I can facilitate an open environment in which students can talk about those issues. But my mission is that this is an academic [...] course. My goal is to make you better writers, communicators, readers, critical thinkers through the lens of race and racism in American culture and society." (0:24:13.8-0:25:51.4)

He diverged for a moment to contextualize the course for me: "A lot of students have the misconception that the course is about [...] interpersonal racism," he explained. "And it is. But

it's more about [...] structural and institutional racism.” Then he continued describing the encounter with this student:

So I'm like, “No. We're going to look at structures as well.” [...] I understand your perspective. [...] But this is not going to be a course where we just talk about random [...] things. There's a structure to the course. And there were some students who actually defended me, right away. [...] It ended up being fine. And I expected something like that was going to happen. This was syllabus day. (0:24:13.8-0:25:51.4)

With this expectation of students' resistance to his white body in a position of power within the Black culture center, Pate defines his involvement with the Black culture center with an intentional distance, created out of care. His office, unlike other faculty members', is located in a different building on campus. Pate is careful “to [...] be not too much of sticking my nose in spaces unless I'm asked to kind of do it. [...] I've kind of held back a little bit in that sense,” he said (0:08:21.7-0:09:56.0).

This concern for *supporting* students in Black spaces rather than *guiding* them grew out of his study of U.S. History and the tendency of white people to draw attention to themselves and their ideas even as racial justice activists. Pate carefully moderates the input he does share with students to avoid making his perspective the prominent one, and he openly acknowledges with students his limitations due to his racial subjectivity to students early on in each semester, which he thinks cultivates students' comfort in talking with him. That is, Pate recognizes the disparities in his own and Black students' lived realities, and he doesn't ignore or minimize those disparities as white educators often do. To the contrary, he addresses them directly, letting students know that he is aware of them, that he has studied the systems in place that have created and sustained them through history, and that he is invested in helping to change them, in part by teaching students about them.

To help assuage some of students' inevitable skepticism, Pate “usually [...] talk[s] [at some point] a little bit about my background, the community I grew up in, kind of why I came to this

[work], because I didn't grow up in, like, a lily-white community" (0:07:30.6-0:07:51.6). He also shares with students photos that demonstrate his firsthand experience with gentrification, one of the issues covered in his "Racism in American Culture" class, in an area that some of these students also grew up in:

I'll show the students in class my yearbook when I was in kindergarten or first grade and all the white faces. And then I'll show my high school yearbook and it's completely different. I grew up in a community before "White Flight" and then I was still there when White Flight was still happening. [...] Usually there are students that attended that high school or [...] one of the neighboring schools. A lot of the students I've had this semester are from either the city or the south suburbs. So they understand that a little bit. (0:08:21.7-0:09:56.0)

Students are familiar with the areas Pate is talking about, where he comes from. Part of Pate's approach to cultivating rapport with students in the Black culture center is to acknowledge his subjectivity and lay bare relevant bits of his history that led him to this work. He also facilitates student-driven discussions as part of his antiracist pedagogy:

I run a very [...] loose classroom in the sense that it's structured, but I'm also not, like, the censorship police in terms of when students are talking or what students are saying, [...] where they want to go in certain ways. You know, so I [...] try not to stifle them. (0:12:54.5-0:15:50.9)

Students' voices are important to Pate, and he tries to inhabit the role of listener through all his involvement with students of the culture center, while also sharing the knowledge he's gained with students in the classroom. Pate opens space for opportunities to listen by making himself available to students. One way he does this is by

making it a point to get to the classroom about an hour early [...] to give [students] an opportunity, should they want to come in and talk about the readings for that night, um, any kind of assignments that we've done. Anything that they want to talk about related to anything. I mean I've had students come in talking about you know the president or, you know, blackface in Virginia. [...] I also make it a kind of point to wander around the center a little bit both before and after [class] and [...] sit down with people and just [...] talk and, you know, get to know people and that sort of thing. I'll try to work in the [...] [culture center's computer] lab every once in a while just so I [...] have a presence there and people know who I am. In addition to that I've told students that I'm always willing to participate in any kind of programming that they want me to be a part of. (0:04:52.0-

0:06:23.2)

For Dr. Pate, to matter is to be heard, to have opportunities to lead/initiate collective action, to be talked about and thought about deeply (in content areas being taught, films being shown, ideas being discussed—in public events, and from diverse perspectives), and to have credentials that are meaningful to the people you’re with. Pate’s concept of mattering alludes (whether intentionally or not) to the issue of whether a tree falling in the forest makes a sound if no one is there to hear it: do Black students’ voices matter if no one listens to them? Do they create any effects—or, more importantly, do they even have the *potential* to create effects?

On Writing Assignments and Assessment

Of the three professors I interviewed, Dr. Pate seems most concerned with grounding assignments in students’ experiences and existing literacies (like oral storytelling) while also building new ones (like formal argumentation). Like Clemons, Pate focuses on cultivating students’ skills in reading comprehension, reflection, connection and application of key concepts and historical moments to students’ lives, and argument development. They usually write, “if not every day, in some way [they’re] writing [...] once a week at least,” generally in the form of essays as part of reading quizzes and to cultivate certain kinds of critical thinking—reflection on their influences, beliefs, and values, how those things have changed over time, and on the implications of their worldviews—much like the kinds of writing Clemons assigns. However, Pate creates assignments that prioritize students’ perspectives and experiences, which he has found dramatically impact the quality of their writing. Students do not write clearly when working with other peoples’ ideas or when they feel like their own experiences don’t matter, as when they write a research paper; Pate said these texts are often “incoherent.” When students feel like they will be heard, however, when their experiences become visible to others, their

writing is much clearer and more impactful. This is also true when students understand how the writing task at hand will directly impact their daily lives after college.

Students' engagement in their coursework also depends on the significance of their existing literacies to the assignments. Students really resist conventional assignments as forms or means of knowledge production, Pate said, speaking as if from their perspective before shifting back to his own:

It doesn't have any applicability towards my future life, so I'm just not going to do a very good job on it, or if I do, it's going to be painful going through it. If it's just a regular group presentation or you present on this topic and there's no guidelines, just tell me what you need to know about that, they're super resistant to doing it. If you could teach those same skills through a more creative assignment, they're much more likely to buy into it in my experience. Like the documentary pitch idea. [...] Anything that allows them to take advantage of their strengths, they're super excited about. They're so good with technology and editing and anything that they can do where they can use [those skills] is nice. (1:21:24.4-1:25:51.2)

Pate has found that the extent to which students' identities, experiences, priorities, and literacies are made visible through his assignments affects students' interest in, efforts toward, persistence with, and creativity in response to them. This finding supports one of the central priorities that emerged in the student focus groups, visibility, a theme I discuss in Chapter 2 and a pedagogical connection I discuss in Chapter 4.

The assignments Pate creates are mostly multimodal in the sense that Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen define the term, as a "unified and unifying semiotics" (2) involving any or all of the five senses: visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, and gustatory (taste). For example, Pate's assignments provide opportunities for students to invoke these senses both directly, through presentations and performances (like formal debates), and indirectly, through representation (things that evoke a sense of touch or smell via memory) in digital texts (like slides and videos). Pate says he prioritizes multimodality to reflect the kinds of communication students will rely on "in the 'real world'":

In the “real world” they’re going to engage in this discourse in a variety of different modes. It’s not like they’re going to write a five-paragraph essay in their work. They’re going to have to give presentations, they’re going to have to think on their feet on the spot. I focus a lot both in writing and in oral [assignments] on making arguments with specific evidence. (0:46:32.9-0:49:07.2)

Assignments that work across modes, he says, help to get and keep students engaged. One assignment that has been especially successful is the one that students in one of the focus groups discussed. I share the gist of it here because students were so enthusiastic about it that it seems worth mentioning. Dr. Pate described the assignment, a documentary pitch, as

a group presentation packaged a bit differently. The idea is I’m a billionaire, [and] they have to pitch to me a documentary topic that they want me to fund. [Not only did they have to sell the topic, but they also had to incorporate] elements of a good documentary. There’s got to be a narrative arc[:] who are your compelling characters, and why are they compelling? What primary sources are you going to use? What’s your soundtrack that you’re going to use? And [then] they had to do the pitch, and I asked them very pointed questions as if I were an actual investor: [...for example,] tell me, what’s the demographic breakdown in Harris County where Sandra Bland was pulled over? And so they did this, but I also had them write an essay at the end of the assignment where they had to reflect back on what would you have done differently if you could have started it two months ago. (0:53:32.0-0:56:49.7)

Students loved this project, loved Pate’s class, because as one student, Saniya, explained, “it gave us an opportunity to put *our* thoughts out there and make it known that we care about this type of stuff and that we’re learning something in here [that’s] helping us to become better” (0:22:56.0-0:24:12.8). “It was really cool that we *did* a project like that,” Saniya said.

Unlike Herron and Clemons, Pate admittedly struggles with assessing students’ writing. Part of the reason for this struggle is that like Herron, he listens for students’ voice in their writing:

I read essays in the student’s voices [...] so I can hear them in their writing. I know that [...] how they sound [...] is *them*. So to try to get them to be something that they’re not in writing is always something that I struggle with. (1:26:54.4-1:29:11.0)

What Pate is alluding to is assessing and responding to students’ *linguaging*, their process of making meaning through language, and the tacit expectation that their language should “conform to [...] whatever the world thinks [...] it should be” (1:26:54.4-1:29:11.0). For Pate, part of this

expectation is that students not “writ[e] how they talk” (1:23:14.5-1:25:51.2). Although he does not say it, the expectations Pate is referencing are the result of standard language ideology, which I explain in depth in Chapter 4. Even while Pate struggles with grading students’ work from the lens of standard language ideology, he still holds them accountable to grammar rules, because “there are certain ways that you write. Like subject-verb agreement needs to be [...] right” (1:23:14.5-1:25:51.2). When he grades, he corrects “obvious grammar [...] mistake[s],” explaining to students that “if you’re writing a resume or a cover letter or something like in the real world, this can’t sound like this, if for your own benefit you want to get the job or go to the top of the list” (1:26:54.4-1:29:11.0). In other words, Pate acknowledges the sociopolitical context in which students are writing, but he tries to dissociate himself from that context. He tells students that he is

focusing overwhelmingly on your ideas and your content and your analysis and [...] I will point things out, but I’m not going to necessarily grade you way down if your writing is not up to where I think it should be or where the academy says it should be. (1:26:54.4-1:29:11.0)

Still, the very reference to hierarchy in regard to language use and to expectations from a powerful institution cultivate a sense of inadequacy. Students are used to this message of inadequacy, though, as evidenced by the kinds of questions they ask Pate:

they come in very apprehensive in general, even on tests, they’ll raise their hand [...] and I’ll come over [...] and they’ll ask, “Is it okay if I spell this wrong?” Or they’re very concerned about the grammar of an essay exam and I’m like, “Don’t worry about it. I’m more concerned about your content.” (1:26:54.4-1:29:11.0)

The tension Pate feels and exhibits through his conflicting allegiances to students’ voices and to their success in the “real world” is the same tension many antiracist writing teachers feel and does not lend itself to easy (if any) resolution. In Chapter 4, I explore the implications of tensions like these for abolitionist education. I identify them here, though, to demonstrate how the

antiracist values we hold as teachers and the beliefs we hold about students often compete with what we believe matters most for students' success outside our class. As such, while we may prioritize students' voices, listen to them, and embrace them, our beliefs about grammar and about our responsibilities to students may simultaneously constrain them.

On the Role of the Black Culture Center

Dr. Pate sees the Black culture center at Midwestern U. as a vital space “where students can talk about important [and current] issues [...] involving race [...] [because] you’re not likely to see those conversations throughout campus” (0:30:38.5-0:32:14.3). It’s also “a space that really [...] encourages students to be involved in a variety of campus organizations,” like the Black Male Initiative, Black Student Association, Black fraternities and sororities, and more. “There’s a lot of encouragement of students [...] being involved in organizations and leadership positions,” he said (0:30:38.5-0:32:14.3). When I asked how he sees the Black culture center helping students acclimate to college, he said the Center does a good job of helping Black students navigate campus as people of color:

What can you do, and [what] can’t you do? You may live wherever you live, but here you can get smart with University Police, but you can’t with state police. Or this is a good place to [fill in the blank], this is not. It’s kind of a—I’m not sure—I guess that’s navigating the academy in the sense of surviving. And knowing what you can do, and you can’t do. (0:44:25.4-0:45:32.0)

While support and guidance for navigating a predominantly white university are certainly helpful for Black students—here, Pate explicitly mentioned “survival” as did Herron—Pate expressed concern about the experiences of Black students at Midwestern U.:

What I don’t hear from these students that I heard from many of my Georgia Southern Students was “I love [Midwestern U.]. [Midwestern U.] is great.” I don’t know if I’ve heard that at all, from anybody. I heard that from African American students *a lot* at Georgia Southern, which is interesting because it’s the Deep South. The county is very [...] racist. They actually have bars on campus with a Confederate Flag. It’s high rates of people of color being pulled over. [...] It’s not a great place. But African American

Students would say, “We really like it. This is a great school. We just enjoy being here.” [...] It was just a beautiful campus, a lot of organizations. [...] It was 30-35% African American [population]. If you were in the bubble of Georgia Southern, there were parts of it that felt almost HBCU-ish. I think Midwestern U. feels isolating for a lot of students of color and that they experience a lot of microaggressions on a pretty regular basis. Even from very well-intentioned instructors. (0:39:42.1-0:41:37.6)

From Pate’s vantage point, it seems that despite the many academic and student support services the Black culture center at Midwestern U. provides, Black students’ needs are not being met like they were at Georgia Southern. He has his own critiques of the Center, but he’s aware that these critiques reflect his own experiences as a white man looking in, not those of the Black students they impact. Nonetheless, his perspective as an insider-outsider is worth considering. Some of the problems he identified include the following:

The Center’s programming tends to be insular.

There’s a lot of programming on a variety of different topics, [...] [but] they do not do a very good job [...] of bringing in external speakers and people from outside of Black Studies. People who are scholars in, um, either proponents of social justice, social justice activists. People could come in and provide sort of an outside perspective from the Center. I don’t think the Center does a very good job of taking advantage of the folks we have here on campus [like BIPOC scholars such as the Africanist a few doors down from Pate’s office]. What they tend to do is recycle the same kind of, you know, [...] So Geoffrey Clemons does a ton of programs for them. Um, they’ll have, like, upper level students, like, leading programs and things like that. So it ends up being kind of [...] echo-chamber. (0:30:38.5-0:34:02.8)

Pate continued:

I compare it to [...] my wife’s Center, which is a very parallel center, the Latinx culture center. They have probably 15 people from just outside the university itself who will come in and do workshops, talks, spend a day on campus with the students, [...] talk to them about their academic research, but also things about, like, what should you do if you’re an undocumented student and you’re confronted by law enforcement or something like that. They’re getting perspective from not the same three or four people. (0:34:17.8-0:35:29.0)

Students who are heavily involved with the student-life aspect of the Center are not engaged academically.

My experience with students who are very involved in organizations, whether it’s Black

Male Initiative or Black Student Association, tend to not be very good students [...] in the sense that they don't show up to class very often. They don't really read very often. They don't seem to even sometimes have interest in much of the material in the class, material that has a direct bearing on the organizations that they're a part of. Students who are very interested in [...] challenging the administration are also—and I'm painting with broad brush strokes here—are also not the ones doing the readings and the work that would help them make the case for why they need change at the administrative level. [...] I think what the problem might be in some ways is that they're so involved in their orgs that they're shortchanging coursework. Some of my best students, almost without fail, have been not in any org. They're just not involved. (0:34:17.8-0:37:39.6)

Still, Pate said, "I think they're getting something very, very important and significant with the orgs. I think they're learning a lot of skills that are going to help them in the job market. But I just think that sometimes it's a detriment to their coursework" (0:38:31.4-0:38:51.3).

The Center is perceived across campus as lacking academic rigor.

"The Center does a lot of let's watch a movie and talk about it. Way too much," said Pate (1:05:54.9-1:06:06.2). "I think they spend a lot of their budget on food," he continued, "because it's sort of like, 'Let's watch Friday or something. And let's order a bunch of food and eat the food and watch Friday and then...'" (1:06:09.6-1:08:39.8). During the semester I gathered qualitative data, there was at least one such event every month. I went to one of these events, though, and no one showed up but me.

Pate appreciates the use of film as a gathering tool, but he also thinks the Black culture center is missing valuable opportunities for critically engaging the films they show. "It's just [...] this kind of let's hang out together this time and, um, but some of that could certainly be replaced by research, talks about how you do research. Because every single student on this campus in every place I've ever been struggles with research. (1:06:09.6-1:08:39.8)

Pate also described the Center's reputation as

The place you go on campus as an African American student as kind of a safe space where you could sort of take classes with somebody who looks like you. Um, you can kind of be in a comfortable environment. But it did not have a reputation for being of very, um, high academic standing. [...] It still has that reputation. I think that's partially

what [...] the previous director, [Dr. Clemons's wife], and then what Dr. Clemons is trying to do is kind of elevate the academic the profile of the Center. They had, and they still do to some extent, have a very high number of staff teaching courses. [...] I know there's this perception that, you go to the Black Center, you get an A. You'll take a class with somebody who kind of will just chat with you about different things. (0:15:58.4-0:17:40.7)

People who've been part of the Center for a long time are resistant to change.

Despite the aforementioned challenges the Center must contend with, Pate says there's also an insiders vs. outsiders mentality that impacts the Center's potential for positive change. "I remember when I came and I met with [the director before Herron] the first time," Pate said:

She told me that[...] even her as [...] as a person of color, she got [...] a really rocky reception when she first got there. In part because it was kind of a, you know, this center's running the way that it is. We don't need to make any changes. [...] It runs fine as it is. [...] She told me, I think the word she used is that this is, like, a hard place to kind of weave your way in if you're [not] [...] part of the Center, if you're not staff of the Center or someone who frequents the Center. (0:19:32.9-0:20:22.0).

Black constituents of the Center want to protect their space, so they don't publicize it.

"I think there's this kind of like this tension of 'We want this Center to be this space for us,'"

Pate said:

And because of that, we don't want to give too much into [...] advertising it to the rest of the community. [...] In the one sense it's a safe space. The people that are there are the same people that are always kind of there. Almost like a dive bar kind of feel in the sense that it's like the same people. Right? So, like, [...] if they make it kind of a bigger space or whatever, I think that would be just unnerving for people as well. (0:42:19.7-0:43:30.9)

While Herron did not acknowledge the Black culture center's challenges or weaknesses, and Clemons attended only to the institutional perception of the academic quality of the Black culture center, Pate offered a more distanced critique. His concerns are relevant to students' mattering, but not to one another. That is, they are relevant to students' mattering *as Black students* to the greater university. In other words, while students and faculty in the Black culture center are

engaged in the work of mattering to one another, they are simultaneously overlooking potential threats to the university-wide sense of their mattering.

All Together, Now

The findings of my interviews with the director and faculty of the Black culture center at Midwestern U. demonstrate the diversity of abolitionist approaches to education that Love identifies:

There is no one way to be an abolitionist teacher. Some teachers will create a homeplace for their students while teaching them with the highest expectations; some will protest in the streets; some will fight standardized testing; some will restore justice in their classrooms; some will create justice-centered curriculums and teaching approaches; some will stand with their students to end gun violence in schools; some will fight to end the prison-industrial complex in and outside of schools; some will fight in the effort so communities can peacefully govern themselves to control their children's education, housing, healthcare, and ideas about peace, justice, and incarceration; and some will do a combination of all of these. (89-90)

Abolitionist teaching is accessible to all and is practicable in all contexts because of its many entry points and possibilities. Nevertheless, fervor for justice may lead educators to adopt narrow parameters for abolitionist teaching whereby they judge the antiracist *nature* of a pedagogical approach based on the *significance* of its potential impact. We see this in arguments in the disciplinary scholarship of rhetoric and composition, the foremost issue being respectability language pedagogies, through which teachers instruct racially and linguistically marginalized students to code-switch to White Mainstream English to avoid negative stereotypes while also saying that their language practices are valid and equal (Baker-Bell). What my study reveals, however, is that it is important to clearly differentiate narrow parameters from the racist/antiracist binaries that Kendi lays out in *How to Be an Antiracist*. That is, approaches focused on antiracist priorities that we don't share may still be doing antiracist work that is

needed in their particular institutional context. Those approaches—when enacted *as* antiracist—merit exploration and consideration.

In my study, the three interviews revealed a confluence of beliefs about what it means to matter and what roles the Black culture center plays in Black students' mattering. Herron and Clemons were most attentive to students meeting particular goals (predetermined assignment and course objectives, graduating), whereas Pate was most attentive to students having opportunities to be heard. Their attentiveness discloses their values, and values are another way of articulating what *matters* to them. What matters *to* them and their work as educators is what matters *for* students. Students are always impacted by educators' values. What Love communicates so clearly is the central truth that abolitionist educators cannot do this revolutionary work alone. Every effort matters. And that's the point: what matters is that we *do* something in response to our abolitionist values—and by acting out those values, we come to *matter*.

Chapter 4: How Black Culture Comes to Matter in a Historically White Institution

In a sense, the question of whether Black *culture* matters in an educational institution—as in, is able to thrive—is the central concern for abolitionist educators. By definition, culture is a product of community, and communities are defined by the people who comprise them. People are inseparable from culture, just as they are inseparable from language. If culture doesn't matter in an institution, its people don't matter in that institution. Herein lies the problem.

Until now, I have discussed what it means for Black students and educators to matter in an HWI. Abolitionist educators, however, are most concerned with the institution itself, with dismantling structural racism at the highest levels. How, then, do the educators and students in the Black culture center at Midwestern U. thwart racist institutional structures through culture-specific courses and events? That is, how do *they* do the revolutionary work of mattering—of finding ways to matter, and in so doing, thriving—and what role does discourse (especially writing) play in that work?

This chapter draws from my focus groups, interviews, and secondary research to offer a call to action for antiracist educators and writing teachers. In the pages that follow, I develop four specific strategies for antiracism that I refer to collectively as the 4Es: Emerge (support Black visibility), Expect (Black excellence), Extend (the Black intellectual tradition), and Engage (with one's own subjectivity and with Black students and colleagues). Although writing is not a requirement for implementing these strategies, I see them all as relevant to the work of writing teachers and as realizable through writing pedagogies, curricula, and assessment practices. They begin with students' needs, rely on communal insight, and emerge from diverse perspectives, all of which emanated from a university's Black culture center.

From Surviving to Thriving: Black Students' Need for Spaces of Visibility, Solidarity, and Resiliency

What emerged time and again in my focus groups and interviews with students, faculty members, and the administrator of the Black culture center at Midwestern U. was a desire for elevating Black visibility, Black excellence, and Black legacies—a desire for Blackness *as a recognized, respected frame of reference* within an academic space, within this educational institution at large. For students and faculty alike, the campus culture center provides this space through its dual function as not only a student support unit but also an academic services unit. However, as I share in Chapter 2, students explained that the surrounding campus environment neglects (at best) and obscures (at worst) this space, its frame of reference, and the rest of what they identified as the “Black Campus”—the network of people and groups on campus who centralize Blackness as a frame of reference—at this HWI.

The Black Campus is a critical part of college life for Black students who persist through graduation. In other words, the Black Campus is Black students' connection to various psychosocial supports and resources “that enable [them] to cope with and resist oppression, thereby exhibiting resilience” (Keels 18-19). Without this multifaceted support network, many Black students drop out. In fact, says Keels, “*most* historically underrepresented students continue to leave without a degree,” despite the fact that college enrollments, thanks to efforts to expand access to postsecondary education, are more diverse now than ever before (9-10, emphasis added). For Black students, that number is about 60 percent, compared to about 37 percent of white students (10). “This low likelihood of degree attainment means that enrolling in college can be damaging for the futures of too many Black [...] youth,” argues Keels:

[N]ot only is college financially riskier but [...] increasing numbers of low-income and low-wealth students, who are disproportionately Black and Latinx, are exposed to that risk. [...] [A]ccess to a degree becomes access to student debt without [an] increase[d] likelihood that historically underrepresented students graduate. Because Black students

take on the most debt, they have been hurt the most by a system that has prioritized broadening enrollment over increasing persistence. (10)

Efforts to recruit and enroll more Black students in college are more detrimental than helpful, because they subject these students, who are usually from low-income and low-wealth families, to profound and potentially life-altering financial risks. These risks outweigh the potential economic benefits of college education when support structures that usher students toward graduation either do not exist or are inadequate or incomplete.

Such support structures that facilitate Black students' "success at historically White colleges and universities" include counterspaces, which account for the reality that Black students' success in an HWI is dependent upon their resilience in the face of structural racism and microaggressions (Keels 11). Such resilience is tied to students' beliefs about themselves as college students, about their felt sense of belongingness in college, and to their *identities* as college students. Keels makes these connections: "When students lack a 'place' on campus, they are more likely to adopt a functional ('I go to school') identity rather than an all-encompassing ('I am a student') identity" (6). The academic identity that students adopt directly impacts their success in earning a college degree, and historically underrepresented students are disproportionately hindered in this identity-forming process by personal experiences with structural racism. In fact, "there is increasing evidence that identity-conscious supports"—supports designed to account for students' divergent educational experiences based on their social group membership—can help bridge historically marginalized students' transition to and success at historically White colleges and universities" (Keels 11). These supports, realized through

identity-affirming counterspaces [...] help counteract this outsider status [...] [F]acilitating formal and informal "exclusionary" spaces enables universities to create the conditions that facilitate historically marginalized students' inclusion and integration into

the broader campus community [...] that enable marginalized students to support each other in establishing a sense of campus belonging and academic self-confidence. (11)

Counterspaces like the Black Campus or the Black culture center, that is, make possible for Black college students the belongingness and self-confidence that are crucial for developing “adaptive coping skills [that] prevent microaggressive experiences from derailing [their] day” and their college experience at large (17). They “provid[e] respite and restoration, enabling minority students to continue engaging in the ‘clash of ideas.’ As noted by Morton Schapiro, Northwestern University’s president, in a January 2016 *Washington Post* op-ed, ‘students don’t fully embrace uncomfortable learning unless they are themselves comfortable’” (17).

This comfort is *not* the comfort of ignorance or of withdrawal from contact with challenging ideas, as many people with systematically privileged identities believe. Rather, it is the comfort of being seen, heard, and understood. It is also the comfort necessary for students to grapple with uncomfortable ideas. In Keels’ study, as in my own, students wanted “access to counterspaces—safe spaces that simultaneously validate and critique one’s interconnected self and group identity—that would enable radical growth [...] the development of ideas and narratives that challenge dominant representations of and notions about their marginalized identities” (2). Yosso and Lopez also contend that “campus culture centers as counterspaces forged in the margins of historically White colleges [...] function] as transformative sites of resistance for Students of Color” (83). By providing spaces of comfort, campus culture centers facilitate the difficult work of intellectual development. As I show in Chapter 2, students in my study *wanted* to think differently about themselves within an academic context; they *wanted* to challenge dominant narratives about their identities and belonging not only in their own minds but also in their schools. They did not want an easy pass. They *wanted* to learn and to grow. In order for that to happen, though, they needed a counterspace on campus.

Above all else, as I explain in Chapter 2, the students in my study wanted visibility and a sense of belonging or connectedness, a desire that is a clear outcome of the reality Keels describes, in which “some social identities [...] at historically White colleges and universities [...] are rendered inferior or invisible and are associated with feelings of exclusion and resistance of the institution” (5). The significance of the culture center as a counterspace for these students is that in that place, “identities that are rendered inferior or invisible in the larger campus culture are explored, critiqued, and deepened, and sometimes claimed for the first time” (Keels 5). By grappling with other Black students and faculty about Black identities within the context of a historically white university, these students developed self-confidence and a sense of belonging in an academic setting that otherwise might have eluded them. In other words, they found ways to matter.

This mattering is part and parcel of thriving as Love defines it. “The work of mattering to one another,” she explains, “[...] is the work of pursuing freedom. It is the work of our survival, and how we will one day thrive together” (8-9). As a counterspace, the Black culture center on the campus of a college or university is a vital resource for Black college students to thrive—to flourish, to grow, and to succeed. It is a space ripe for “an abolitionist approach to educational freedom [...] built on criticality civics, joy, theory, love, refusal, creativity, community, and, ultimately, mattering,” an approach to education that Love says thriving depends upon (15). All these elements are prevalent in the Black culture center at Midwestern U. through its hybrid function as an academic unit and a student support unit.

Collective Freedom Dreaming in and through the Black Culture Center

“For those of us who are dark, our lives are entrenched, whether we like it or not, in [...] pursuing freedom,” in “creating [...] a community that strives for [...] justice and citizenship for

all,” she claims (8-9). A fundamental part of life for Black Americans, Love says, is “collective freedom dreaming”: building a community of people who will fight for freedom and refuse to be prevented from reaching their goals. The evocation of collective freedom dreaming and adoption of a “politics of refusal,” Love argues, “is one of the necessary components of activism vital to dark folx’ survival and is fundamental to abolitionist teaching” (43).

In the Black culture center at Midwestern U., educators and students alike evoke and engage in collective freedom dreaming by creating, together, “spaces of love, solidarity, and resiliency, as [they] demand what seems impossible from a place of love and joy” (Love 12). In fact, collective freedom dreaming is happening when campus counterspaces such as the Black Campus, which includes the Black culture center, are developed. These counterspaces are “spaces of love, solidarity, and resiliency” in that in these spaces, historically marginalized people “do not have to debate the existence of marginalization and oppression” (Keels 19). The people in this space share the common denominator of, for example, “direct experiences with oppression and marginalization in educational spaces” (19). Because they don’t have to defend the reality of these experiences to one another, they are able “to move on to deeper, more radical discussions” (19) and to pursue their shared goal of thriving in an educational setting, of experiencing educational freedom.

The extracurricular programming sponsored and hosted by this Black culture center is one of the most readily apparent means of freedom dreaming through the cultivation of Black community, joy, and resistance. For example, in an event designed by a Black woman graduate student to resemble Jada Pinkett Smith’s talk show *Red Table Talk*, in which three women of different generations sit around a red table and discuss a wide variety of timely topics, participants explored generational similarities and differences among Women of Color in how

they communicate their needs and find healing. The event offered multiple entry points for finding common ground with other attendees, whether through racial, gender, or generational identities; these identity categories were also points of difference that participants explored. In another event, a Black woman scholar and executive administrator at Midwestern U. shared her research about Black women's contributions to racial uplift and liberation as they helped community members rise above oppressive conditions and move the Black community forward. Her specific focus was on the leadership of Black women in the formation and administration of culture centers, one of many roles through which Black women tirelessly resist institutional white supremacy. The focus on this intersection of marginalized identities, Black womanhood, created opportunities for solidarity and resilience in a historically oppressive environment. Together, these two events not only cultivated conversations engaging multiply marginalized perspectives from dozens of attendees but also created psychosocial and physical counterspaces of love, solidarity, and resiliency—of collective freedom dreaming.

Other events I attended that semester extended the counterspace beyond the walls of the Black culture center. One was a public dialogue between Dr. Clemons and Dr. Pate, followed by a Q&A about Clemons' monograph, *White Fatigue*, and its implications for the university and its surrounding community. With well over 100 attendees, this dialogue raised critical questions about the presence of institutionalized racism on campus and the roles of white allies in challenging it. In many ways, Clemons and Pate (and ostensibly others from the Black culture center in attendance) “demand[ed] what seems impossible from a place of love and joy,” highlighting opportunities for collective action (Love 12). In so doing, they, too, cultivated Black freedom dreaming.

The student support programs offered by the Black culture center at Midwestern U., listed in Chapter 1, also function as “institutionalized mechanisms that enable marginalized students to support each other in establishing a sense of campus belonging and academic self-confidence” (Keels 11). They facilitate the development of subcommunities within the larger Black culture center community, subcommunities that recognize, honor, and uplift the Black students who are historically least likely to graduate from college as a result of structural racism. In other words, these programs help students not only to survive, but also to create new futures—to thrive.

Because the courses offered through the Black culture center foreground Black perspectives, voices, and values and highlight Black diversity—including Black experiences of marginalization and oppression, celebration and joy—they often resonate with students’ shared experiences. They also become pathways to learning about intersectionality and other forms of oppression, such as when Dr. Clemons, in his “African American Critical Thought” class, compared patriarchy to white supremacy to help students understand how patriarchy influences our thinking, the status quo. These classes provide for Black students the validation of being seen and heard, the historical and sociocultural contexts they need to understand their experiences and use them for good, and the knowledge of how their ancestors have laid intellectual paths for them to follow and extend. Students in Clemons’ class read bell hooks’ *Ain’t I a Woman? Black Women and Feminism*, for example, and watched her two-part video “Cultural Criticism and Transformation.” Together, they wrestled with the question of what makes a Black movie a Black movie, whether a white person can make a Black movie, and why that matters. They then read Toni Morrison’s *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* and watched the documentary “Imagine: Toni Morrison Remembers,” discussing how whiteness is always constructed as what Blackness isn’t, defined by what it’s *not* instead of what it *is*. Along the way,

Clemons coached students in working through difficult texts, saying, “If you’re reading and you feel like you can’t keep reading, keep reading.” When a student said he didn’t know if he comprehended what he was reading, but that he started to understand after watching critical interpretations and reviews of the text, Clemons replied, “But did you have *questions* while you were reading, before you watched the critical interpretations/reviews? That’s what you bring to class with you.”¹¹

By coaching students in this way and engaging them in grappling with the words and ideas of Black scholars, Clemons and other professors in the Black culture center engage students in the work of collective freedom dreaming. They create solidarity among difference, drawing on shared racial identity to contextualize problems (like patriarchy) that divide the Black community, and in so doing, forging stronger connections with one another. “It becomes important for you all, in your path to young scholars, to use the language [of Black scholars],” said Clemons when talking about patriarchy. “You should step back and think about how you are positioning black women.” By training students to become ethical knowledge producers, cultural critics, and skillful leaders, Clemons and other professors in the Black culture center are simultaneously cultivating a community of people who fight for freedom across multiple domains of contemporary life—“educational, political, economic, and community freedom” (Love 1).

Same Context, Same Goal, Different Methods

The goal of liberation, of which mattering is a part, emerged in various iterations through the focus groups and interviews I conducted for this study. Students, faculty, and administrators shared this goal, revealing it through statements about their desires for elevating Black visibility,

¹¹ These quotations from Clemons here and in the next paragraph are from my very brief participant-observer notes.

Black excellence, and Black legacies within an academic space. Despite this commonality and their shared value of communal effort, the students, faculty members, and administrator I spoke with held such different views of how to achieve the goal of Black liberation. This shared goal and collective effort, along with disagreements about how to realize that goal, are what Love foregrounds in her book:

For those of us who are dark, our lives are entrenched, whether we like it or not, in creating what Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. called a “beloved community,” a community that strives for economic, housing, racial, health, and queer justice and citizenship for all. This is the work of mattering to one another. It is the work of pursuing freedom. It is the work of our survival, and how we will one day thrive together. It is how dark folk in this country have always mattered to each other, by attempting to carve out [...] common goals for justice, liberation, liberty, and freedom that inspire and make this country better for all. *We have not always agreed on the methods of liberation, but the work has never ceased.* (Love 8-9, emphasis added)

That is, although students’ and faculty/administrators’ priorities sometimes exist in tension with one another, their community work of mattering to one another, of pursuing freedom within the Black culture center and as part of the Black Campus no matter their different methods of pursuit, lays the groundwork that Love says is necessary for thriving. From a distance, the tensions between students’ and faculty/administrators’ desires may seem confusing and/or counterproductive. When considered as the collective work of mattering that’s an essential part of abolition work, their significance to antiracism becomes clear. The interplay of tensions and synergies in academia today is evident even within campus counterspaces, where Black, Indigenous, and People of Color lead the work of abolition within our institutions.

Educators who are committed to antiracism or, in Love’s terms “abolitionist education,” might benefit from recognizing the sometimes-conflicting perspectives, beliefs, and values they might find among their Black colleagues and students of color who are overtly engaged in antiracist work. By ascertaining the shared goals and attending to differences among Black colleagues’ and students’ methods of achieving those goals, educators who are committed to

fighting for justice in their institutions can more deeply learn of their institution's particular needs from those who are always already immersed in this fight.

The primary methods of mattering—of fighting for Black liberation—that students, faculty members, and the administrator of the Black culture center at Midwestern U. revealed through the focus groups and interviews are encapsulated by the “4Es”: Emerge, Expect, Extend, and Engage. I offer this taxonomy to demonstrate how antiracist educators might identify meaningful actions that are faithful to the diverse priorities that BIPOC leaders have identified for their particular institutional context. I explore how writing teachers might work in tandem with these institutional leaders to follow their lead while also considering the ways that our disciplinary scholarship (like Baker-Bell, Young, Inoue, et al.) can support the priorities they've identified.

Emerge: Support Black Visibility

“How are people like me viewed at this institution?”

“How do I want to engage with or distance myself from various subcultures of this institution to protect my sense of self?”

“Who am I at this institution?”

These three questions, explains Keels, are questions all college students ask. These questions are deeply connected to student development, which “is strongly determined by how the institution organizes itself to answer these questions” (39).

The identities that are valued in the contexts we're immersed in profoundly shape our own identities. When the answer to the first question is silence, when “people like me” are seen as tangential to the institution, as part of the periphery, their sense of belonging is diminished at best, eradicated at worst—if it ever existed in the first place. In other words, whether students claim an academic identity and/or the extent to which they integrate or compartmentalize their

multiple identities (racial-ethnic identity, gender identity, academic identity, and so on) depends greatly on whether and how much their non-academic identities are valued in their educational institution.

The relationships between identity and belonging are well established in the field of psychology, and for nearly 20 years educational psychology researchers have revealed their connection to performance across all domains, including but not limited to academics. Janine Delahunty, Irina Verenikina, and Pauline Jones, for example, review numerous sources indicating a “strong connection” among students’ sense of community, satisfaction in school, and perceived learning (253). Gregory M. Walton and Geoffrey L. Cohen found that belonging impacts “a wide range of important outcomes” including but not limited to students’ “academic performance, self-reported health, and well-being” (1450). One major focus of this research is on *stereotype threat*, a “socially premised psychological threat that arises when one is in a situation or doing something for which a negative stereotype about one’s group applies” (Steele and Aronson, 1995). The finding of Claude M. Steele and Joshua Aronson’s seminal work, reproduced many times over by researchers across disciplines, indicates that the fear of reinforcing negative stereotypes profoundly impacts a person’s sense of self.

This identity threat, which is especially pervasive among minoritized groups who are negatively stereotyped, impacts not only students’ performance but also their attrition in college. “The results,” argue Walton and Cohen, “suggest that inequality between marginalized and nonmarginalized groups arises not only from structural factors but also from concern about social belonging” (1450). In other words, stereotype threat is directly connected to inequality. Students’ academic identity—their “beliefs about themselves as learners, [...] about themselves as belonging to particular educational institutions, and [...] about the importance of schooling for

their futures”—is particularly important because, Keels says, it “plays an important role in shaping students’ educational trajectories. Transitioning to college comes with many challenges and shifts in roles and responsibilities; having a strong academic identity can help students persevere when challenges and failures arise” (125).

Educational psychologists have developed a number of interventions, most of which focus on cultivating a sense of belonging and of ability, to counteract stereotype threat. What the success of these interventions indicates is that for students most affected by stereotype threat, performance is significantly impacted by the trust these students have in their environment. That is, the underlying issue is trust, not students’ lack of effort or confidence, as is so commonly believed. The issue is systemic, not personal.

Herein lies the conundrum: A strong academic identity can help Black students persist through adversity in college, but Black students are less likely to develop a strong academic identity if their racial-ethnic identity, for example, isn’t valued (or they don’t perceive it to be valued) at their college or university. Nevertheless, in most historically white institutions, including Midwestern U., “research consistently shows that Black and Latinx students continue to experience racial-ethnic microaggressions and feelings of isolation on campus” (Keels 27). It follows, then, that finding ways to amplify and normalize Black visibility on campus in a historically white institution is a crucial part of antiracism in educational settings.

As I explain in Chapter 1, I have adopted Keels’ use of the term *historically white institution* rather than *predominantly white institution* because the bodies that comprise institutions of postsecondary education are only one part of what makes them hostile for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. (For that matter, I also use the term *postsecondary education* rather than *higher education* as a deliberate resistance of the hierarchy associated with historically white

institutions.) Far more significant than the bodies that inhabit it is the fact that academia rewards and requires what philosopher and radical feminist theorist Marilyn Frye calls *whiteness*, “a deeply ingrained way of being in the world” that “extends across ethnic, cultural, and class categories.” In her essay entitled “White Woman Feminist,” Frye explains that whitely people hold a dogmatic belief in their authority and self-righteousness (at the expense of pursuing truth), are pretentious, and value above all else propriety and rule-following in their ethics. Further, they “make it clear to people of other races that the last thing the latter are supposed to do is to challenge whitely people’s authority.” Whiteness precludes true discovery and knowledge production, yet in educational institutions in the U.S., it is deeply embedded in policies and procedures, assessment practices, and often in worldviews of teachers, administrators, and others in positions of power or influence. An environment where such a way of being is pervasive is inhospitable for those who hold what Frye calls “different habits of feeling, perception, and thought.”

I explain this distinction of terms here because it is whiteness that obscures and denigrates opposing worldviews, and it is whitely people who punish those who embody and voice them—especially when they do so in the pursuit of freedom and justice. Thus, a vital part of abolitionist education is drawing attention to and supporting those ways of being in the world that whitely people and structures systematically hide or discourage.

The irony at Midwestern U., however, is that the student participants in my study said few people (Black students included) know the Black culture center exists, much less can find it. Many of them found the Center by happenstance, even though they had been actively looking for a Black community on campus. Outside of this Center, their needs for practical support and a sense of belonging in this HWI were not being met. They were all aware of these unmet needs,

yet they didn't know who or what might fill them, or how. The Black culture center, while created in part to *increase* Black visibility on campus, was itself being systematically obscured. Details about how the center was obscured are discussed in Chapter 2.

As I explain in Chapter 2, what the students in my study repeatedly drew attention to is the systematic invisibility of *Blackness*—Black cultures, histories, perspectives, accomplishments, and community—in academic spaces and the impacts of this invisibility on their academic identities, priorities, and connection to resources that help them succeed in school. Students also emphasized the need for a sense of familiarity and belonging in this academic space—they wanted to feel at home, part of a family—and for easy access to the Black Campus, the counterspace where they would find that family. These needs were tantamount for these students, who also talked about the importance of the Black culture center, once they found it, to their sense of belonging in the university. Only in this center were their racial-ethnic identities a vital part of the institution.

Because Blackness is an integral part of these students' identities, the invisibility of Blackness on campus challenged their sense of themselves as college students. Given their previous experiences with systemic racism in the public education system, many of these students likely came to the university with tenuous relationships to their academic identities. Even if these students did arrive at Midwestern U. with a strong academic identity, the palpable invisibility of the Black Campus challenges the coherence of their racial-ethnic and academic identities. As a result, maintaining a strong academic identity becomes all the more difficult. A lack of coherence among these identities is significant, Keels explains, because “when there is conflict or tension between identities, growth in one domain can weaken other domains” (125).

Moreover, Keels continues, “Maintaining conflicting identities is most challenging when the conflict occurs between two or more highly salient aspects of one’s sense of self” (125).

When maintaining both identities is no longer tenable, or when one of their social identities is threatened, students are forced to choose which identity to prioritize. Asia, one of the focus group participants in my study, experienced this dilemma during her first two years of college and nearly lost her financial aid due to failing grades. A fourth-year student and prominent leader in the Black culture center when we talked, Asia had a reputation even among professors like Dr. Clemons for being smart, able to meet deadlines, networking-savvy, and, overall, “a strong, beautiful, young Black leader,” as Bianca, a graduate student and one of the other focus group participants, described her (0:17:59.7-0:20:01.4). What happened, Asia explained, is that she “got distracted”; she “forgot why [she] was here” (0:52:24.6-0:53:22.1). What she was distracted by, though, was giving to the Black community on campus once she found it at the end of her freshman year. “My sophomore year,” she explained, “I got so immersed in, like, being Asia’s gonna save the Center, Asia’s gonna save everybody that Asia wasn’t saving herself. And so my grades, like, tanked” (0:49:10.9-0:50:04.4). As in Asia’s case, conflicting identities often translate into counterproductive habits and behaviors in the classroom: not completing assignments, disengaging from class discussions, and so on. Keels’ research, however, suggests that educators can help by supporting the coherence of students’ identities. “When our multiple identities cohere,” she writes, “growth in one identity domain can strengthen and facilitate growth in other domains” (125). If students feel safe claiming both their racial-ethnic identity and their academic identity equally, without concern for threat to one of those identities—and even better, if they come to believe those identities are symbiotic—they have a critical foundation for thriving.

Thus, educators who are committed to antiracism should continually ask themselves, *How can I encourage students to see their multiple identities as coherent, especially as they intersect with their academic identity? How can I help students develop a strong academic identity? What kinds of supports and resources are available to historically underrepresented students on my campus, and how visible and accessible are they? How can I amplify the visibility of those supports and resources on campus for not only the students in my classes but for all students and faculty? Alongside each of these questions, arguably the most critical question to ask is How does my subjectivity as a [insert racial-ethnic, gender, and other identities] impact what options are available to me and how I can and should implement them in my particular institutional and classroom contexts?*

In addition to these broader questions, writing teachers should ask themselves: *How can I cultivate a classroom environment where students feel that their many identities, especially those that are marginalized in a historically white institution, can safely emerge? What policies might I adopt? What steps do I need to take to create learning experiences that facilitate critical reflection on the intersection of racial-ethnic, linguistic, and academic identities in ways that challenge institutionalized linguistic racism? What factors do I need to consider when attempting to create counterspaces in my classes and in my institution where the politics of words like “academic” and “professional” writing are laid bare, and where literacies that resist hegemonic standards not only are accepted as “academic” but also are celebrated as such?* More specific iterations of these questions might include questions like: *How can I as a white cis-gender woman center and celebrate Black excellence in the classes I teach, not through the lens of exceptionalism but as a central part of the critical thought I endeavor to engage students in?*

Ultimately, what my research reveals is that one of the most important questions writing teachers committed to antiracism must ask—alongside questions about their subjectivity in their classes and institution—is *How can I center race-ethnicity in my discipline as a vital and rich part of communication, even (perhaps especially) in educational and professional settings?* This question is particularly important as a means of challenging the status quo: “the idea that foregrounding race-ethnicity perpetuates racism, the argument being that if we want racism to disappear, we must first ignore the existence of race-ethnicity” (Keels 26).

As a partial answer to some of these questions, for example, a writing teacher at Midwestern U. might look for and showcase in their course texts and assignments Black excellence and Black joy. Love emphasizes the omnipresence of Black joy and its importance to abolition work:

What is astonishing is that through all the suffering the dark body endures, there is joy, Black joy. I do not mean the type of fabricated and forced joy found in a Pepsi commercial; I am talking about joy that originates in resistance, joy that is discovered in making a way out of no way, joy that is uncovered when you know how to love yourself and others, joy that comes from releasing pain, joy that is generated in music and art that puts words and/or images to your life’s greatest challenges and pleasures, and joy in teaching from a place of resistance, agitation, purpose, justice, love, and mattering. (15)

Joy, she suggests, is a fundamental part of Black strength and resilience. A writing teacher, therefore, might assign texts that celebrate Black resilience and excellence, texts written *by* Black individuals that celebrate Black resilience and excellence *in their own right*, not as responses to such whitewashed topics as slavery. Works written by the Black scholars that Clemons says are part of the canon of Black academics (see Chapter 3) are the kinds of texts that would support students’ desire for Black visibility. A writing teacher might also create writing assignments that engage all students in finding and connecting to campus resources they might need, offering a list of such resources that includes those designed specifically to support Black students. In so doing, the teacher should frame these resources as facilitating or celebrating

students' strengths, not supporting their weaknesses or rectifying their deficits; this approach, grounded in Black excellence, is crucial for abolitionist education.

Expect Black Excellence (With Some Caveats)

A recurrent theme and one of the most fraught topics in conversations about anti-Black racism in education and racial justice activism is the concept of Black excellence and its converse, Black mediocrity. How Black excellence is defined, though, seems to vary, and this definition is significant in the context of antiracism. Depending on how the concept is understood, it has the potential to either reinforce the racist ideas that lead to inequity or challenge them. One of the difficulties I encountered in interpreting the data I gathered is that this term, which focus group participants used and which corresponded to a major theme in my interview with the director of the Black culture center, is generally not defined with much, if any, nuance. Its meaning is often assumed and determined by its surrounding context. As such, my approaches to interpreting that interview data required me to first explore potential meanings of Black excellence and the implications of those meanings for antiracism.

Sometimes, Black excellence is defined as achieving particular goals and is seen as success, even when those goals are determined by whitely authorities and reinforced by whitely structures. For example, when the late critical theorist bell hooks wrote, "In our reading and our writing we must refuse to make peace with mediocrity. We must demand excellence" (163), hooks was defining excellence as the condition of being taken seriously by people in power:

My people, my people: here we are in the new millennium and we must fight for our right to become and to be seen as serious writers and thinkers. We are still fighting to have our words taken seriously no matter our subject matter, and yet we are still fighting not to be denigrated, not to be seen as mediocre when we write about race and racism. [...] We are still living in a world that does not take the work of black writers seriously enough, or that can take our words seriously only if we strip ourselves of any racial awareness, if we write from the perspective deemed universal. (hooks 162-163)

There are two problems for hooks: that Black thinkers and writers aren't taken seriously, and that the reason for this is that they don't sufficiently assimilate to the dominant culture's expectations of serious thinkers and writers. The greater of these problems, for hooks, is that Black thinkers and writers aren't taken seriously. This is the concern she takes up while acknowledging the sociopolitical context in which Black writers write, a reality they cannot escape. The only way out is through, hooks implies, arguing that Black people are responsible for fighting for their excellence to be recognized and acknowledged—and that the only way this will happen is if they don't let their Blackness show, so to speak.

Others, however, problematize the concept of Black excellence, associating it with Black exceptionalism—the notion that Black people who are “excellent,” who do good things, are exemplary, the “model minority,” and are undeserving of racist treatment or abuse. In other words, excellence is a way to avoid racist stereotypes. This focus on excellence as novel aligns with respectability politics, “the idea that emulating white middle-class values, presentation, and culture can ‘uplift the race’ and eliminate caricatures of Blackness as intellectually deficient, doomed to eternal poverty and illiteracy,” explains Guilaine Kinouani, a senior psychologist, adjunct professor of psychology at Syracuse University in London, and director and founder of the diversity and inclusion social enterprise Race Reflections (116). Kinouani argues that the very idea that Black excellence requires writing “from the perspective deemed universal” makes it inseparable from racist logic. She reminds readers that racism is structural when she states, “We cannot work our way out of white supremacy. We cannot excel our way out of racism. The pressure that keeps us striving to do so is racism” (116). Black excellence, Kinouani implies, will not bring about racial justice, because stereotypes of Black people as “intellectually deficient”

and illiterate are not the result of Black people's failure to "emulat[e] white middle-class values, presentation, and culture." They are the product of racism.

Moreover, the trope of Black excellence not only fails to escape but also reinforces systemic racism, Kinouani suggests when she writes, "Emulating the master's politics reifies the master's superiority and their contempt for Blackness" (117). In other words, considering Black excellence through the lens of whitely values merely uplifts those values, not Blackness (which, to the contrary, it denigrates). Kinouani's adaptation here of Audre Lorde's argument in "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" is significant because of what it leaves unsaid, the truth that follows Lorde's oft-cited quote: "For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. *They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change*" (99, emphasis added). Real change, Lorde (and Kinouani) argues, comes only through "learning how to take our differences and make them strengths" (Lorde 99). In other words, there is no way out, so we have to create *new* ways of disrupting the status quo.

This argument is also supported by Kendi's careful defining of terms that are fundamental to understanding structural racism. In *How to Be an Antiracist*, he writes:

Racism is a marriage of racist policies and racist ideas that produces and normalizes racial inequities. [...] A racist policy is any measure that produces or sustains racial inequity between racial groups. An antiracist policy is any measure that produces or sustains racial equity between racial groups. [...] There is no such thing as a nonracist or race-neutral policy. (17-18)

Although these definitions might seem overly drawn out, Kendi's deliberate juxtaposition of racism and antiracism does important rhetorical work; it removes the middle ground of not racist, but also not antiracist. If there is inequity, there is racism embedded in policies, Kendi says. Antiracism must, by definition, actively challenge these policies. In other words, antiracism cannot coexist with racist logic. Taken together, Lorde's, Kinouani's, and Kendi's arguments

indicate that when defined as achieving some expectation that reinforces racist ideas and, inevitably, inequity, Black excellence is antithetical to antiracism. Nevertheless, hooks' implication that the only way out is through, so to speak, may be a more realistic one for young adults in college to achieve without further disadvantaging them financially (which often happens via failed courses, more education debt, and more time spent in school instead of doing paid work).

The intricate complexities of this dilemma made understanding and grappling with the perspectives of the Black professor and administrator in my study the most difficult part of this project. Although the peacemaker in me wants a simple answer to the question “Is Black excellence antiracist or not?”, the reality is that there is no clear answer. Different Black people with different subjectivities in different contexts with different purposes have different takes on Black excellence and its relationship to antiracism. What I have learned from this study is that while a broad perspective is crucial for social justice activism to avoid historical pitfalls and help evaluate our progress toward social justice goals, the particulars of our institutions matter, too. Resistance happens in many ways, large and small, and sometimes those small acts of resistance create the foundation for much larger, collective acts in the future.

For example, it may well be that by promoting “Black excellence” as academic achievement at Midwestern U., the Black culture center engages more Black students in intellectual engagement and knowledge production than if they prioritized antiracist activism first and foremost. As a result, students may be increasingly able to ground their activism in deeper understandings of human nature and history, of tools and technologies, of processes, of systems, of politics—of whatever students study in college—and in a legacy of well-informed critical thought laid out by Black ancestors who also fought for freedom. Maybe student engagement is a

function of the Black excellence trope. That is, it may well be that while holistically, Black excellence is antithetical to antiracism, it is also a useful motivator to cultivate small changes, small shifts in authority and power that collectively, far in the future, may coalesce to create a major antiracist shift in the institutions that govern American life.

This possibility is plausible if Black excellence is defined as a process or a state of being or becoming. Love references what historian Carol Anderson says is “the trigger of White rage”: “Black advancement [...] Blackness with ambition, with drive, with purpose, with aspirations, and with demands for full and equal citizenship” (qtd. in Love 23). I want to be clear that the problem here is absolutely and only white rage, and this rage is fully the responsibility of white people to reckon with and fight and is not the job of Black people to fix. Nevertheless, Love emphasizes throughout her book that abolitionism is a fight, a struggle, that “justice will not happen without it” (9). Love also says that “the field of education is anchored in white rage, especially public education” (22), and that “[e]ducation is one of the primary tools used to maintain White supremacy and anti-immigrant hate” (23). Perhaps, then, one important role of Black students and educators in this fight for educational freedom is to focus on their advancement as thinkers and writers; meanwhile, their white peers and colleagues must take up the front lines in confronting this rage and blocking its effects. Perhaps Black excellence as a process of advancement *could* have a revolutionary function. After all, ambition, drive, purpose, aspirations and demands are all signifiers of growth, progress, and thriving. All could also be considered part of “the work of mattering” as Love defines it, as “the work of pursuing freedom.” This perspective, it seems, resonates with hooks, who wrote, “If we want to be part of a revolution, if we want to resist the tyranny of mediocrity then we must see excellence—the

striving for excellence in our reading and writing—as essential political resistance” (164). If we define Black excellence in this way, perhaps it can be considered antiracist.

It is through this lens that I am attempting to understand the priorities for antiracism in the Black culture center at Midwestern U. that were central to its director, Carrie Herron, in our interview. Throughout our interview, Herron repeatedly emphasized the necessity of holding Black students accountable to “high expectations.” For the most part, she didn’t articulate what those expectations are, but the ways she talked about them alluded to the whitely standards that are commonplace in historically white institutions, and in reference to writing, she referenced “standard English.” That is, at least with writing assignments, Herron seemed to measure Black excellence against whitely standards that she didn’t seem to take issue with or see as racist. I think, however, that there are two things worth parsing out here: expecting excellence of Black students as an orientation toward learning, and expecting assimilation to dominant, racist standards.

Having spent time with Herron in the Black culture center as a participant-observer at various events and in our interview, I believe that Herron’s focus was on expecting excellence as an orientation toward learning and that, as an educator who continually claps back at racist structures and microaggressions, she truly believed in standard language ideology in formal, academic settings. If she didn’t really believe it, then for some reason she felt compelled to convince me that she did while also identifying and critiquing other forms of systemic racism. I know from our conversations that she doesn’t believe that Black Language is intrinsically inferior to “standard English,” but she did seem to truly believe that it isn’t appropriate in academic settings. Examples like this one are why linguists like Alim, Smitherman, and Rosina Lippi-Green, along with literacy scholars like Baker-Bell and African American rhetoric scholars

like Young and Elaine Richardson call for more theorizing of language and language education through the lens of race and racism. Even within counterspaces designed to be antiracist, racist ideas sometimes linger.

What, then, can be said for expecting Black excellence of students in an educational system founded on anti-Black linguistic racism (Baker-Bell) and that rewards White Mainstream English (Alim and Smitherman)? After all, Love explains, “Failing a test because your language is deemed inferior communicates a message about your identity and ideas of who is and what is smart” (20). Perpetuating White Mainstream English as “academic” language communicates this message as well. It could even be argued that the very nature of the term “academic” in regard to writing is problematic for the ways it positions literacies that don’t conform to hegemonic standards as not belonging in educational spaces. So how can educators who are vested in Black college students’ graduation address anti-Blackness, “specifically as it pertains to language education,” which “is different than addressing racism and white supremacy” in that same domain (Baker-Bell 19)? And how should educators who are well trained in the intersections of critical race studies and language education respond when they find anti-Black linguistic racism being perpetuated by Black leaders in spaces designed to celebrate and uplift Blackness? How does the answer to that question change when the concerned educators are white?

I do not pretend to have answers to these questions, but what I have learned from this study and from my graduate training is that BIPOC leaders, especially in culture centers, are uniquely attuned to the racial climate at their institutions. As such, they are authorities of the particular racial justice needs in the institution at any given time. At Midwestern U., the Black leaders of the culture center were *most* concerned with uplifting the academic reputation of the Black culture center as a place of critical inquiry, intellectual engagement, and knowledge production.

This is not to say that confronting institutional racism wasn't a priority for them; it just wasn't their *first* priority, because their first priority was to help their students survive and thrive—to engage them in the collective work of mattering, “not for recognition or acknowledgment but to create new systems and structures for educational, political, economic, and community freedom” (Love 1). Like hooks, they seemed to believe the only way out is through. In solidarity with the Black leaders at Midwestern U., a writing teacher who is committed to antiracism in this institution should respect and adopt these leaders' priorities in the classroom. That is, they should maintain high expectations for all students, including Black students, avoiding what Love and Herron both personally witnessed and were deeply troubled by, which was “educators lower[ing] their expectations for students of color while insisting they were doing what was best for their students” (Love 21).

There are several ways to maintain high expectations while also being careful to avoid perpetuating anti-Black linguistic racism. Such a goal requires framing those expectations around developing habits of strong learners and defining excellence as an orientation toward learning—counteracting what Herron called the “Black is a deficit” mindset (00:20:08:07-00:23:15:14) and cultivating what Stanford University psychologist Carol Dweck calls the *growth mindset*, which “is based on the belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts, your strategies, and help from others” (7). A grading policy that balances concerns for Black excellence and anti-Black linguistic racism would demand the kind of excellence that facilitates deep learning while accounting for the ways systemic racism profoundly affects students' confidence in their writing; it would remove the threat of failure by decoupling grades and writing assessment. Such methods resist standards-based models of grading; one example is Inoue's contract grading, spelled out in *Labor-Based Grading Contracts*. Inoue's trust-centered

method of writing assessment, for example, is based on work completed, with expectations made clear upfront; students detail the tasks completed and time spent in an ongoing labor log that accompanies their assignments. Maintaining high expectations in antiracist ways also requires teachers to attend to the reality of stereotype threat for many linguistically marginalized students, especially Black students. A non-Black teacher in particular might need to openly acknowledge this reality with students, making it visible as part of making an outward commitment to fighting this particular way that systemic racism affects so many students' daily lives. Because non-Black (especially white) teachers in positions of authority are most the common sources of stereotype threat, this step is especially important for these teachers.

For Herron, helping to mitigate stereotype threat is a critical part of demanding Black excellence and counteracting the “Black is a deficit” mindset (00:20:08:07-00:23:15:14). Following Steele’s guidance in *Whistling Vivaldi*, Herron holds Black students accountable to high expectations for achievement, acknowledges the challenges those expectations impose, and expresses her confidence in their abilities, directly telling them she *knows* they can meet those expectations:

I know that you can do it. *You* may not know you can do it, but I’m not gonna change it because *I* know you can hit it. So hit it. I don’t wanna hear excuses, I don’t wanna know why you feel like you can’t hit it. We can work through that. But you gon’ hit this bar, cuz it’s right here. (00:28:10:12-00:30:05:10)

Herron’s words here indicate a “tough love” approach to assessment, the kind of tough love that’s commonplace for Black matriarchs to embody for their children, especially their sons. It’s a tough love that exists to steer Black boys in particular away from the school-to-prison pipeline, putting the onus on them to adapt in whatever ways are necessary to, as Herron says, “survive and succeed.” This approach matters in the context of a counterspace centered on Black culture

that exists to help students thrive. It is not, however, one that non-Black educators can easily and ethically take because of the historical bind between racialized bodies and power.

Therefore, one of the most important things a writing teacher with antiracist commitments must do is openly acknowledge *and account for* their subjectivity in the classroom and institution. As the edited collection I created with Inoue indicates, this work is far more difficult for white educators in particular to do well than most expect; most stop short after acknowledging their subjectivity, not knowing how to account for it in their work in the classroom. Nevertheless, it is a crucial part of antiracism, without which many educators unknowingly reproduce the very inequities they're trying to fight. One way of accounting for one's own subjectivity is by practicing collaborative assessment with and alongside students. Part of this assessment requires explicitly on the judgements we make about our own and others' language use, making subjectivity a central part of those discussions by considering how it impacts the assumptions that we make as writers and as readers. Inoue offers specific suggestions for what this practice might look like in his blogbook *What It Means To Be An Antiracist Teacher: Cultivating Antiracist Orientations in the Literacy Classroom*.

While implementing these pedagogies of solidarity with Black colleagues and of resistance to structural racism in HWIs, teachers committed to antiracism should draw on their disciplinary knowledge to explore other opportunities for antiracism. For example, writing teachers should actively seek opportunities in their courses and in cross-campus spaces and events to share knowledge about standard language ideology and its implications for all people, but especially those whose linguistic identities are multiply marginalized due to the compounding effects of racism, classism, and misogyny. This is part of the collective abolitionist work of pursuing educational justice and freedom, of mattering to one another by “attempting to carve out [...]

common goals for justice, liberation, liberty, and freedom that inspire and make this country better for *all*” (Love 9).

Extend the Black Intellectual Tradition

Through the academic functions of the Black culture center at Midwestern U., students who take courses in Black Studies become part of two traditions, in a sense. As U.S. college students, they become part of the Western intellectual tradition that prioritizes rationalism, analytical thinking, and experimentation and is most concerned with the individual over the collective. As students of Black Studies, they also become part of the Black intellectual tradition

rooted in the understandings and experiences of people of African descent living in the United States [...] a comprehensive system of thought specifically designed to challenge Jim Crow, lynching, disfranchisement, discrimination, and other forms of racial oppression [...] [that] animate the long struggle of Black people for equal justice. (Aldridge, Bynum, and Stewart 9)

In the Black intellectual tradition, the focus is on the collective striving for equity and freedom and on the critique of systems of oppression. In both traditions, the purpose is to generate knowledge and understanding, but the *goal* of the Western intellectual tradition is to live a meaningful life, whereas the goal of the Black intellectual tradition is to change the sociopolitical milieu. One tradition is focused on the development of the self; the other is focused on the freedom of an entire people.

The tensions between these two traditions speak to the critical position that Black college students and educators are in: in order to succeed, they must assimilate to the Western tradition, but in order to thrive, they must work against it. The very existence of the Black intellectual tradition is a testament to the determination and ability of the Black community to make a way out of no way, so to speak. “We have created in the void,” Love says, “defiant of the country’s persistent efforts to kill and commodify us. Finding ways to matter” (8). Love explains how the

perpetual erasure of Black accomplishment contributes to legacies of white supremacy in educational institutions:

The idea that dark people have had no impact on history or the progress of mankind is one of the foundational ideas of White supremacy. Denying dark people's existence and contributions to human progress relegates dark folx to being takers and not cocreators of history or their lives. (Love 14)

By excluding Black voices, ideas, discoveries, and creations, the Western intellectual tradition perpetuates the notion that Black peoples lack the ingenuity and creativity that are, in fact, defining features of the culture and their resistance to oppression. Interdisciplinary scholars Derrick Alridge (Education), Cornelius Bynum (History), and James B. Stewart (Labor Studies & Employment Relations, African American Studies) offer specific details about Black scholars' revolutionary work in the introduction to their edited collection entitled *The Black Intellectual Tradition: African American Thought in the Twentieth Century*:

the experiences of Black people in the United States and their long struggle for social justice produced innovative strategies for challenging systematic racism at home and abroad. Emphasizing the twin objectives of defining and defending Black humanity and of demanding social justice and the dismantling of racial apartheid, this volume examines the ideologies, theories, interpretative studies, and cultural productions and reproductions Black people created to affect change. The volume demonstrates how Black people communicated their ideas about race, racism, discrimination, and equality and transmitted these ideas from one generation to another and how post-civil rights generations have extended the ideas of their predecessors while charting new intellectual terrain. (9-10)

All these achievements—the intellectual labors of Black scholars—comprise the tradition that Dr. Clemons steadfastly endeavors to preserve and extend, as the interview data shared in Chapter 3 reveal. If the Black intellectual tradition dies, Black culture will die, Clemons argues as he explains:

[Black] culture has a really strong and rich tradition for academics. And of all things in our culture, that is the one thing that we should not sacrifice. Because if we can't create and develop our own things, our culture's gonna die. (00:25:01-00:27:14)

The creation of knowledge is the basis for all other creation, he suggests. Concern about the death of Black culture is thus the impetus for Clemons' foremost antiracist priority as an educator at Midwestern U., to pass on and maintain the Black intellectual tradition. Clemons advances and urges others to advance the tradition through typical academic avenues, like coursework that explicitly teaches it (for example, he teaches a class called African American Critical Thought) and mentorship that encourages Black undergraduates to earn doctorate degrees. Periodically, he also hosts events like public talks and film screenings to talk about the issues that the Black intellectual tradition confronts, like structural racism revealed through current events. In this way, he also extends the Black intellectual tradition by applying Black scholars' theories and arguments to participants' everyday worlds, making these connections by foregrounding the ideas, not the people behind them. Both inside and outside the classroom, Clemons is doing the work of an abolitionist educator, "call[ing] out and teach[ing] students how racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, Islamophobia, and inequality are structural, not people behaving poorly [...] start[ing] [this work] in the classroom, school, and school community" (Love 55).

At the same time, however, Clemons maintains an ambivalent stance toward the Western intellectual tradition, a tradition that is founded on colonialist ideals and that some refer to as "intellectual imperialism" (Alatas 23). In our interview, for example, Clemons acknowledged that "our current conception of higher education stems directly from Western European ideology" and then immediately directed attention to the "larger tradition" of which both the Western intellectual tradition and Black intellectual tradition are a part: "the tradition of gaining and creating knowledge" (12). In doing so, he attended to the *shared* function of both traditions, to knowledge-generation alone, instead of focusing fully on raising awareness of the Black

intellectual tradition and its oppositional functions. That is, he situated the Black intellectual tradition *alongside* the Western intellectual tradition as part of that “larger tradition [...] of gaining and creating knowledge” instead of foregrounding the community- and equity-centered Black tradition *as a response to and in direct opposition to* the individual- and growth-centered Western tradition (12). In our conversation, he did not discuss, in any terms, the *whiteness* of the Western intellectual tradition.

Clemons’ ambivalence toward the Western intellectual tradition—which rhetoric scholar Susan Jarratt says is “built on several centuries of economic and cultural imperialism” (110)—believes the radical goals of abolitionist education, the basic premise of which is to dismantle systems that perpetuate injustice. Abolitionist educators “must criticize [these] systems,” argues Love, “work[ing] to undo these systems while working to create new ones built upon the collective vision and knowledge of dark folk” (55). Writing and rhetoric scholar Shyam Sharma argues similarly:

To borrow the words of Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, the decolonizing of knowledge production, as distinct from postcolonial critique of its hegemony in the global era, involves the “teasing out [of] epistemological issues [and] politics of knowledge generation, as well as questions of who generates which knowledge, and for what purpose” (11). (171)

In other words, abolition, decolonization, antiracism—whatever the distinct focus—requires attention to and critique of what is valued in our academic systems as knowledge production and of those values’ relationship to power. We cannot amplify or extend the Black intellectual tradition without being clear about why it exists in the first place and without taking a stand against the Western tradition and its ideological functions. Abolitionist educators, therefore, must bear in mind that extending the Black intellectual tradition involves more than just passing on the revolutionary ideas and texts of Black scholars; it also involves continuing their work of

challenging the status quo in academic institutions, that is, an intellectual tradition built on imperialist ideals.

Two core tenets of this tradition that are directly relevant to the work of writing teachers are 1) adherence to Aristotelian and agonistic rhetoric *as* rhetoric, neglecting or sidelining all other approaches to rhetoric (including but not limited to African American rhetoric), and 2) the existence of a standard, idealized language free of variation. Rhetoric has evolved since Aristotle's lifetime during the fourth century B.C.E.:

It has grown to encompass a theory of language as a form of social behavior, of Intention and interpretation as the determinants of meaning, of the way that knowledge is created by argument, and of the way that ideology and power are extended through language. [...] Enlarged as a theoretical resource, rhetoric has also expanded its grasp of the ways that women, people of color, and cultural or ethnic minorities use language to gain a hearing for themselves. In short, rhetoric has become a comprehensive theory of language as effective discourse. (Bizzell and Herzberg 1183)

Despite this evolution, Aristotelian rhetoric is most frequently taught in general education courses at colleges and universities and is the singular rhetorical approach that makes an appearance in high school advanced placement exams and college entrance exams. Other forms of rhetoric are identified as “cultural rhetorics” or by their purpose, such as “invitational rhetoric.” The implied norm—just “rhetoric”—refers to Aristotelian and agonistic rhetoric.

Contemporary understandings of language are also overlooked or sidelined in the Western intellectual tradition. For example, the notion of standard language is universally recognized by linguists as a hypothetical construct, a myth, created by people who benefit from adherence to that construct. Nevertheless, schools universally require and teach “Standard American English” (SAE). The very notion of a standard language is ideological in nature, because it exists in order to organize people and power, suggests Lippi-Green. For this reason, bias toward this hypothetical standard is referred to as standard language ideology. In the U.S., standard language ideology refers to “Standard American English,” a descriptor that signifies “the language of the

educated” (Lippi-Green 57) and positions educated people as authorities on “*idealized language*, which captures the sense of an honorable and rightful perfection” (55). SAE, therefore, is used interchangeably with terms like “academic English” or “formal English.”

To make visible the ideological work of SAE, sociolinguists Alim and Smitherman direct attention to the *people* behind it—those who benefit from it—by using the term “White Mainstream English” instead of SAE. What their re-naming of this hypothetical standard means is that when educators teach White Mainstream English as “academic” English, they’re reifying whitely standards for the writing of intellectuals. In effect, terms like SAE, “academic English,” and “formal English” suggest that language that deviates from the idealized form in educational settings is not *intellectual* language. Because people and their languages are inseparable, the stigmatization of language extends to the *people* who use that language, identifying who is and isn’t perceived to be intellectual (based on their language use). Inevitably, the hypothetical construct of SAE has tangible effects on people who don’t conform; not only does it imply that they don’t belong in academic spaces, but also it can have legal consequences that create entire social justice movements like Black Lives Matter (see Rickford and King). Language matters, and rhetorics matter, because they simultaneously reveal and influence what we think.

Characterizing rhetoric at large by one particular, antiquated approach to it and requiring adherence to a hypothetical language standard are arguably two of the Western intellectual tradition’s most crucial means of inculcating Western European ideology. As such, abolitionist education *must* delve into questions that both contextualize and problematize the rhetorical and linguistic status quo and explore alternatives that have been and are systematically ignored or marginalized. Of particular importance to the Black culture center, of course, are Black rhetorics and Black Language.

For reasons I do not know or understand, the Black intellectual tradition at the heart of the Black culture center at Midwestern U. is studied in isolation from the Black rhetorical tradition and Black sociolinguistics, to the detriment of students. Yet *how* people communicate ideas is *as* if not *more* important than *what* ideas they communicate, and as I have identified throughout this chapter, scholarship studying this “how” of Black communication through rhetoric and sociolinguistics is in no short supply (see Alim and Smitherman; Richardson; Kynard; Baker-Bell; Young). Nearly 50 years ago, Smitherman was publishing about Black Language, which many now call African American Vernacular English (AAVE), as a language in its own right and advocating for its recognition as such in educational institutions. Some, like Neisha-Anne Green, are extending this work into Writing Center scholarship. In addition to studies of language, many scholarly publications explore African American rhetorical *practices*, often at great length. Adam Banks, for example, explores the rhetorical work of mix tape production—which connects oral, print, and digital traditions—in his monograph *Digital Griots*, comparing the DJ to the West African *griot*, a significant cultural figure as the keeper of oral histories, the storyteller. *African American Rhetoric(s)*, edited by Elaine Richardson and Ronald Jackson, and *The Routledge Reader of African American Rhetoric: The Long Duree of Black Voices*, edited by Vershawn Ashanti Young and Michelle Bachelor Robinson, are two lengthy collections delving into Black rhetoric at length. Lou Maraj’s *Black or Right: Anti/Racist Campus Rhetorics* explores the rhetorical strategies that “Black folk” use to destabilize institutional whiteness in historically white institutions. All this scholarship exists, and it mirrors what Black students are asking for—yet they are not getting it in college, even in counterspaces like the Black culture center at Midwestern U.

As a college writing teacher of racially diverse classes and as a student who grew up in predominantly Black public schools, I've had countless encounters with Black students who hate "academic" writing in intensely personal ways. I've also witnessed, on multiple occasions, Black students' enthusiasm when we read and discussed texts that value Black rhetorical practices as brilliant or that directly critique standard language ideology, like Young's academic journal article "Should Writers Use They Own English?", written in AAVE. These experiences demonstrate students' attunement, even if subconscious, to the racist functions of "academic" writing standards in the Western intellectual tradition. It is clear that the vast majority of them have been harmed by these standards, have been made to feel inadequate, inferior, in educational institutions until/unless they were able to assimilate. This, too, is what my focus groups revealed. Until they learned about standard language ideology, focus group participants did not hold negative opinions of "academic" writing if they felt they had successfully assimilated to "academic" discourse. Once they became aware of the ideology, however, their perspectives seemed to shift; I witnessed this shift as it happened in the focus group session with Tracie, Asia, and Bianca, the discussion revelatory and the emotion palpable. As I explain in Chapter 2, toward the end of our focus group session, Bianca was processing out loud the significance and meaning of the phrase "bad English," which Tracie had used during the session. Her realization that "bad English" is anything that isn't White Mainstream English, she said, was "triggering a lot of emotions," which she was glad for because it meant they were talking about something that mattered—something that *needs* to be talked about (1:23:17.4-1:23:51.3).

Abolitionist teachers of writing can address students' concerns and needs by extending the Black rhetorical and sociolinguistic traditions in several ways. They can teach against standard language ideology. They can teach sociolinguistic facts about Black English, or AAVE, and

about White Mainstream English, showing students how these language varieties—or distinct languages, depending on where they land in the language/variety debate begun by Smitherman—reveal disparate beliefs and values. They can teach Black rhetoric on its own or even, perhaps, as an alternative to the agonistic rhetoric of the Western intellectual tradition, as Sharma advocates for doing with the South Asian tradition of Nyāya rhetoric.

Outside the classroom, while respecting Black leaders’ institutional knowledge, abolitionist writing teachers also can and should engage colleagues in critical discussions about “respectability language pedagogies,” which Baker-Bell defines as

approaches that view racially and linguistically marginalized students’ language practices as valid and equal yet instruct these students to use White Mainstream English to avoid the negative stereotypes that are associated with their linguistic and racial backgrounds by appearing “respectable.” [...] [T]hey teach Black students to respond to racism by adhering to white hegemonic standards of what it means to be “respectable” instead of teaching them to challenge, interrogate, and resist Anti-Black Linguistic Racism. (29)

These pedagogies of discursive assimilation are what both Herron and Dr. Clemons described when talking about how they teach students to write for college; such pedagogies are not uncommon, even in counterspaces. With this in mind, writing teachers should not expect Black colleagues and students to feel any ambivalence or resistance toward conventions of academic writing, a disposition that I looked for and did not find throughout my study (except at the end of one of the focus group sessions) and that I directly asked Clemons if he experienced, to which he responded no. They may also find contradictions in what antiracist colleagues say and do, as I found when Clemons said:

I also think that, you know, if there’s such thing as literacies of Blackness—I mean, I’m pretty sure there is—I think what we in the Center collectively try to do is promote literacies of Blackness and help students understand how they’re positioned within society and on campus and *why* that is—not just that it *is*, but *why* is it. (7)

When Clemons said “promote,” he seemed to be referring to viewing these literacies as “valid and equal” yet later referenced standards of White Mainstream English when describing his

expectations of students' essays; this contradiction between claim and practice is how Baker-Bell characterizes respectability language pedagogies. Such an overt contradiction or a disposition of acceptance means that abolitionist writing teachers may have a more difficult time gaining traction with compelling others—including Black antiracist educators—to forgo respectability language pedagogies, but it does not mean the work is futile or not worth undertaking.

At the programmatic, administrative level, abolitionist writing teachers can challenge the status quo by exploring and finding ways to resist how imperialist ideals are structured into institutional requirements for general education writing coursework and placement into those courses, writing program goals and assessment practices, and course objectives and assessment practices. Many rhetoric and composition scholars have addressed these problems, and abolitionist writing teachers and administrators need a working knowledge of the existing literature and its implications for their own institutions. A few notable sources include Staci Perryman-Clark and Collin Lamont Craig's edited collection, *Black Perspectives in Writing Program Administration*, Carmen Kynard's *Vernacular Insurrections*, Sharon Crowley's *Composition in the University*, Carmen Kynard and Robert Eddy's article "Toward a New Critical Framework: Color-Conscious Political Morality and Pedagogy at Historically Black and Historically White Colleges and Universities," and Christopher Schroeder's monograph, *ReInventing the University*.

Regardless of the avenues we take, part of abolitionist educators' work is extending the Black intellectual tradition. One of the best ways to extend this tradition is to teach its content (as Clemons does), but to augment the content with relevant sociolinguistic and rhetorical instruction that can help students see connections between the resistance that the Black intellectual tradition calls for and how language more clearly fits into those goals.

Engage with Your Own Subjectivity and with Black Colleagues and Students on Campus

Most BIPOC in the U.S. are keenly aware of their subjectivity, the many ways that their bodies and voices are racialized, gendered, classed, and so on and those identities' relationship to power. Most white people, including those who consider themselves antiracist, are not. Many critical theorists have argued that white people are not deeply aware of their subjectivity because they don't *have to* be. I call this reality, this discrepancy between people who are racialized Black versus those who are racialized white, the *awareness gap*. I do so as a rhetorical strategy, applying to white people a "gap"-related term as is often done to Black students: the achievement gap, the education gap, and so on. I use this strategy to direct attention toward whiteness, implicitly begging the question—as Inoue did directly in his CCCC chair's address, lifting the question from W. E. B. DuBois' opening to *The Souls of Black Folk*—"How does it feel to be a problem?" "Too often, though not always," says Love, "our allies are eager White folk who have not questioned their Whiteness, White supremacy, White emotions of guilt and shame, the craving for admiration, or the structures that maintain White power" (117). This concern about white people's neglect to problematize their own subjectivity is present in the work of so many people of color, yet the neglect continues, even among those who consider themselves antiracist allies. I witnessed this neglect firsthand among white contributing writers when developing an edited collection about collaborative assessment for antiracist purposes with Inoue that is currently under review. It was this neglect, compounded by writers' anxiety about foregrounding white subjectivity and inexperience with doing so critically, that led us to shift the collection's focus almost entirely to explorations of subjectivity in writing assessment ecologies.

Awareness (or lack thereof) is vital because it is foundational to both the existence of racist systems and the abolitionist work that subverts them, suggests Love, explaining that the implications of this awareness gap are, in a sense, terrorizing:

One cannot enter freedom-dreaming spaces holding on to dark people's nightmares. We cannot have conversations about racism without talking about Whiteness. The time-consuming and serious critique and reflection of one's sociocultural heritage—which includes identities related to race, ethnicity, family structure, sexuality, class, abilities, and religion—taken side by side with a critical analysis of racism, sexism, White supremacy, and Whiteness is the groundwork [of abolition]. (118-119, emphasis added)

What Love says here so powerfully is that the unrecognized, unchecked sociocultural heritage of white Americans—the awareness gap—is “dark people’s nightmares.” Perhaps surprising to white people, who often assume that the more obvious racist issues like police brutality and lynching are the bigger problem, Love’s assertion speaks to the gravity of this introspective work. The heritage of white people, her whole book intimates by exploring its inverse that Black children inherit, is one of assured survival—at least where sociocultural factors are concerned. It is a heritage of unearned ease, access to resources, and a feeling of racial belonging in most spaces they’ll enter in daily life. When white people do not deeply understand the many ways this heritage impacts their lives, and the many ways they sustain it (whether knowingly or not), they do not change the one thing from which all other change springs: their worldview. The awareness gap is why “a future educator can engage the language of justice and culturally relevant teaching, while webbed to a disposition that is harmful to all students” (Love 14). This disposition is something Dr. Pate alluded to during our interview when contextualizing what he doesn’t hear from Black students at Midwestern U. but did at his previous university, that they loved their university. “I think Midwestern U. feels isolating for a lot of students of color and that they experience a lot of microaggressions on a pretty regular basis. Even from very well-intentioned instructors,” Pate said (0:39:42.1-0:41:37.6). Our understanding of who we are in

relation to other human beings, augmented by our understanding of how our lives are impacted differently based on our identities, influences how we interact with one another and where and how we invest our resources. If white Americans do not recognize the ways they are habituated to being listened to, being highly regarded, getting away with transgressions while being recognized for accomplishments, and much more, they cannot recognize how intricately these expectations are bound to privileged identities (and how people identified differently do not share those expectations). They cannot recognize how these expectations implicate them in harming others. Moreover, they cannot recognize how by harming others, they are harming all.

Within the context of rhetoric and composition, Inoue also implores people who haven't done this internal abolition work to do so, emphasizing the lack of this work as a common denominator among all forms of oppression:

All of these decisions [that lead to systematic oppression] are made by judging others by our own standards and inevitably finding others wanting, deficient. People who judge in these ways lack practices of problematizing their own existential situations and lack experience sitting in the discomfort that problematizing brings. They lack an ability to sit with paradox, guilt, pain, and blame and make something else out of it all. ("How" 358)

One's subjectivity is not something to simply acknowledge; abolitionism requires treating privileged subjectivities as problems, considering deeply how they contribute to systems of oppression. The purpose of this problematizing is not to induce guilt but to more clearly perceive and understand the seeds from which injustice grows. Ultimately, the goal is to weed out those seeds so that justice can flourish, but we cannot eradicate what we cannot see. Shrinking the awareness gap is especially vital for writing classes because, as Inoue argues, "the practices of languaging are fundamentally practices of judging. What is reading rhetorically or considering the rhetorical situation for a writer or speaker, if not a series of judgments?"

What Inoue reminds white writing teachers is that "problematizing [our] own existential situations" is an arduous process, one that requires patience and fortitude. The patience and

fortitude required, however, are miniscule compared to that which BIPOC must muster daily.

Love describes the experience of being Black in America as

a life of exhaustion, a life of doubt, a life of state-sanctioned violence, and a life consumed with the objective of *surviving*. Survival is existing and being educated in an antidark world, which is not living or learning at all. It is trying to survive in, and at the same time understand and make sense of, a world and its schools that are reliant on dark disposability and the narratives necessary to bring about that disposability. This existence is not truly living nor is it a life of mattering. As dark people, we are trying to survive the conditions that make the dark body, mind, and spirit breakable and disposable. (39)

I share these excerpts not to enlist white guilt as a motivator, but to amplify the deeply painful perspectives that colleagues of color are so generously sharing as part of their abolition work.

These perspectives need to be heard, for we are *all* in “the steel cage of White supremacy, of White racial bias,” and together we must find a way out (Inoue, “How,” 353). Our roles are different, but both require fortitude. BIPOC have endured and continue to endure physical, mental, and spiritual torture; surely white people can endure the demons in their own minds.

In her book *Reading, Writing, and Racism: Disrupting Whiteness in Teacher Education and in the Classroom*, Bree Picower recommends multiple sources that help people deconstruct whiteness and investigate the many ways we sustain whiteness through habits of thought and action. Some such books and workbooks include Layla F. Saad’s *Me and White Supremacy* and Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun’s *Dismantling Racism*. Of particular significance to me have been Michael Omi and Howard Winant’s *Racial Formation in the United States*, Kendi’s *How to Be an Antiracist*, and Lippi-Green’s *English with an Accent*. Perhaps most vital to my own increasing awareness of my implication in racism and the ideas and policies that maintain it has been the honest, uncomfortable conversations I’ve had with people who are also engaged in unpacking their subjectivity, especially when they are further along than I am in that process. Helping others who haven’t been doing it as much or as long as I have been has also been helpful in internalizing what I have learned, because it gives me opportunities to repeat the words of

antiracist activists leading the way, and to remember through that repetition. This brings me to another point, one that I have learned experientially and that Picower also makes:

Through these experiences, I was given the opportunity to learn valuable lessons that helped reshape the way I saw the world, the first of which was that White people don't have the answers. *To address racial justice, it is necessary to listen and learn from people oppressed by racial injustice.* (14-15, emphasis added)

The most meaningful, most impactful understanding of my own implication in whiteness that I have gained has been due to the work of BIPOC activists. Although I have referenced many of them throughout these chapters, I call attention here to the specific works that for me were seminal and to the specific takeaways that forged the trajectory for my research. (I risk redundancy here because I believe it is important to credit those who have laid out the ideas we have taken up, especially when doing so amplifies BIPOC voices and labors.) Inoue's CCCC address was the first provocative call-to-action that I distinctly remember and that motivates me still. In the speech, Inoue *named* the racial subjectivities he addressed before and as he critiqued instantiations of white supremacy in our discipline. He did not make space for whitely disidentification with whitely ways of being in the world. Banks' *Digital Griots*, which I read for a seminar course in my master's program and discussed with other white students who had varying depths of racial awareness, compelled me to think differently about what forms and strategies of communication I consider normal, smart, or rhetorically important and how those judgements are connected to whiteness and white supremacy. Young's "Should Writers Use Their Own English?", along with his Call for Papers for the 2019 CCCC, both written in AAVE, challenged my assumptions about what smart writing must do (and therefore, in my whitely mind, must look and sound like). Toni Morrison's 1993 Nobel lecture, which I read and listened to for the first time during the Fall 2019 semester, deepened my understanding of the cultural significance of language and its import for antiracism, not only in writing classes but also in the

public sphere and daily life. The first Black activists I encountered may not have known they were activists, but they were the foundation for the graduate study that has catalyzed this dissertation. These activists were my high school peers in the mid-1990s who fought to be seen and heard, who argued for a history class that acknowledged their history (beyond slavery discussed in our U.S. History class), and who did so in a whole-school assembly during a week of observance, titled “Silence the Violence week,” that the school had (perhaps subconsciously) designed to stigmatize (and silence) these students.

Although I was not able to truly hear my peers then, the “deep and mindful attending” practice that Inoue said is essential for problematizing white subjectivity brought echoes and images of their relentless activism to the forefront of my memory. I have tried and continue to try to attend across the decades to what my Black peers were saying then alongside all that I read and hear from my Black colleagues, neighbors, and teachers today. The practice Inoue describes comes from the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh:

We have to understand others without trying to control or change them. In fact, love and understanding, or deep attending, are the same for Hanh, and to practice it, one must ask the other for help. We cannot do it alone. I am taken particularly by his suggested practice. Hanh says, “sit close to the one you love, hold his or her hand, and ask, ‘do I understand you enough? Or am I making you suffer? Please tell me so that I can learn to love you properly.’” (363)

This presence of body and mind and the commitment to love and understand is, I believe, where the work of internal abolition must start and how it must continue. Until we are able to deeply attend to the BIPOC activists leading abolition work in our communities great and small, and to act in response to what they communicate, we cannot begin the external work of antiracism.

What this means is that we also must be able to attend to paradoxes that have no clear resolution. One of the most salient paradoxes for white teachers committed to antiracism is their

very presence in positions of power in educational institutions—especially when the students they’re teaching are BIPOC. Inoue explains:

Just as it is unfair that in our world most indigenous, Latinx, and Black Americans will never get the chance to do what we do, to be teachers, or professors, or researchers, or something else that taps their own potentials because of the racist steel bars set around them, it is equally unfair that *you perpetuate racism and White language supremacy not just through your words and actions, but through your body in a place like this or in your classrooms, despite your better intentions*. Let me repeat that to compassionately urge you to sit in some discomfort: *White people can perpetuate White supremacy by being present*. You can perpetuate White language supremacy through the presence of your bodies in places like this. [...] That feels unfair to say so bluntly, doesn’t it? *You perpetuate White language supremacy in your classrooms because you are White and stand in front of students*, as many White teachers have before you, judging, assessing, grading, professing on the same kinds of language standards, standards that came from your group of people. It’s the truth. It ain’t fair, but it’s the truth. *Your body perpetuates racism, just as Black bodies attract unwarranted police aggression by being Black*. Neither dynamic is preferred, neither is right, but that’s the shit—the steel cage—we’re in. The sooner we can accept this fact, the sooner we can get to cutting the bars. (“How,” 357, emphases added)

A vital part of problematizing one’s white subjectivity, Inoue argues, is recognizing how white bodies in authority positions perpetuate racism *through* that subjectivity—something they didn’t choose. Until we can acknowledge that and exist with the discomfort that we are physically bound to a legacy of oppression, we cannot begin to dismantle the structures, built by racist ideologies, that created and maintain that legacy. We cannot dismantle what we cannot tolerate looking at.

This is the kind of awareness required for Pate to effectively teach Black Studies courses in a Black culture center as a white cis-gender man committed to antiracism, and this is the awareness that manifested in our interview. As I explain in Chapter 3, Pate exhibited a hesitation about his involvement in the Black culture center that developed not from self-interest but from awareness of the implications of his white male subjectivity in a Black counterspace. “I worry about being too involved,” he said (0:12:54.5-0:15:50.9). “I’ve tried to [...] not [...] stick] my nose in spaces unless I’m asked to do it. So I’ve held back a little bit in that sense,” he said

(0:08:21.7-0:09:56.0). Pate attributed this hesitation to his study of the Civil Rights and other social movements in which white people inserted themselves, ultimately creating resentment among the local community.

The fear of being resented, one might argue, is a self-centered motive, not one reflecting the kind of racial awareness that BIPOC activists are calling for. As a historian specializing in U.S. History and African American history, however, in addition to being married to a BIPOC activist, Pate is well aware of the complex dynamics at play among racialized people with different subjectivities interacting with antiracist goals. He is also aware of what Kimberlé Crenshaw termed *intersectionality* in the ways that Love says are foundational for antiracists:

“Intersectionality is not just about listing and naming your identities—it is a necessary analytic tool to explain the complexities and the realities of discrimination and of power or the lack thereof, and how they intersect with identities” (Love 3). Pate described a couple of ways these realities impact students and teachers at Midwestern U. A lot of the Black male students in the Black culture center, for example, wear button-down shirts and ties to school to elevate their sense of belonging in college; “that’s part of the idea that [they] need to be twice as good [as white students],” he explained (1:33:37.8-1:34:38.4). His wife, the director of the Latinx culture center on campus, cannot come to class “with a few hairs out of place” if she wants to command respect, yet Pate says he “could walk in wearing a basketball jersey and I’m going to command respect and nobody’s going to really say anything about me” (1:33:37.8-1:34:38.4). Pate also talks with his students about race and gender biases in student evaluations of instructors, saying:

You will probably do that with me too. You will rate me higher probably than you would if I was a person of color—if I was a Black woman doing essentially the same thing—even though you are all of color [...] because [...] that’s the world that we live in. (1:34:39.4-1:35:20.7)

Considering the transparency with which Pate broaches these issues with students and with me, along with the sense I got in the public talk about antiracism between him and Dr. Clemons that I attended, I believe that Pate's hesitation comes from a place of concern and respect for the Black community at the heart of the Black culture center.

While remaining sensitive to the implications of his subjectivity in this Black counterspace in a historically white institution, Pate seems to practice the deep and mindful attending that Inoue forwards and the structural critique required of antiracists. "Whiteness relies on remaining masked in order to maintain the ideology of an equitable and democratic society," explains Picower (7). Pate explicitly identifies whiteness and its connections to power as a core part of his teaching practice. As I explain in Chapter 3, Pate does this attending by making himself available to students, habitually arriving to the classroom an hour early, by listening to them, and by letting students direct class discussions, to some degree, or find their way through rhetorical challenges (like convincing administration of the funding inequities between Black fraternities and sororities on campus and other fraternities and sororities on campus). When students come to him, he explained, sometimes they ask questions, and sometimes they come just to tell him something, to explain what's happening in their worlds, because they just want to be heard. Pate's classes, he said, are loosely structured so that students can lead the conversations. What is important to note, however, is that instead of explicitly *centering* students' perspectives, which still places the onus and power in Pate's hands (who has the authority over what gets attention?), he *decenters* his own. That is, Pate does not require students to speak or to lead, but he creates space for them to do so if they want, and he invites their perspectives. Most importantly, he attends to them.

Part of how Pate cultivates an environment of trust among Black students in the Black culture center in him as a white cis-male teacher is by being upfront about what he thinks his limitations are, “what I think I can do for them and what I think I can’t,” he said:

So I talk about my academic background. [...] I’ve read these things, and I can speak on these issues. So from an academic perspective, I can help you here, here, and here. And I can help you with contexts in this situation. But I’m a white man, so I don’t experience racial discrimination. [...] I live my life without having to think about a lot of things that you do. So you’re never going to hear me say, “Oh yeah, somebody followed you around in a store. Oh that reminds me of the time when I was, you know, in Germany, and somebody looked at me weird.” [...] I don’t make those connections. (0:12:54.5-0:15:50.9)

Aware of his white racial identity, Pate doesn’t try to identify with students as a means of establishing rapport with them. To the contrary, he intentionally avoids doing so. He also openly critiques racial injustice at Midwestern U. as part of engaging with his own racial subjectivity and with Black students. For example, he has talked with students

about faculty searches in the past and how [...] despite the fact that the university talks about being inclusive and diverse and the strategic plan has this idea of recruiting from Black and Brown neighborhoods [...], when it actually gets down to the nitty gritty of [a] hiring committee, committee members will convince themselves that they need to hire a white person [...] through a variety of rhetorical [...] backflips. (0:12:54.5-0:15:50.9)

While openly critiquing the racist behaviors of colleagues with students is risky to a teacher’s reputation with white colleagues and administrators, doing so demonstrates one small way that Pate uses his privilege as a tenured white cis-male faculty member to name systemic racism and forge antiracist alliances with students.

I say all this about Pate not to praise him or his antiracist efforts but to draw attention to how he demonstrates the kind of activism that BIPOC activists inside and outside rhetoric and composition are asking for from white people. “Stop being an ally; instead be an accomplice,” implored Neisha-Anne Green in her keynote address at the 2017 International Writing Centers Association conference. “In many intersectional social justice groups,” explains Love, “the

language is shifting from needing allies to coconspirators” (117). Like accomplices, who “actively demonstrate allyship” (Green 29), “a coconspirator functions as a verb, not a noun,” explains Love (117). Coconspirators, that is, have to “love dark people, question their [own] privilege, decenter their [own] voice, build meaningful relationships with folx working in the struggle, take risks, [and] be in solidarity with others” (117). This is what it means to *engage*, to actively participate in problematizing one’s own white subjectivity, deeply attending to BIPOC from a place of love and understanding, and “work[ing one’s white] privilege for dark lives” (117). Engaging requires action; it requires “solidarity with courageous coconspirators,” and this solidarity, argues Love, is “the backbone of abolitionist teaching” (118). “We are all needed in this project, this fight, this work, these labors,” says Inoue. “But [...] most in the room, in our disciplines, are White, [...] many of whom sit on their hands, with love in their hearts, but stillness in their bodies” (“How” 355).

Still, the question remains: when should white people begin the external work of antiracism? Love believes that “the internal work [...] needs to happen before the outside work can start” (118). “[D]eep personal reflection is a must,” she says, “before taking up space in spaces that are trying to build, heal, and tear down all at the same time while never forgetting that joy is central to the work of freedom” (Love 118-119). Central to that reflection is “deal[ing] with the emotionality of being White,” she says (144). Only then can “white folx [...] be coconspirators” and learn “how to work their privilege for dark lives” (144, 117). Inoue, however, views the internal and external abolition work as necessarily concurrent, at least after some basic understanding of whiteness and systemic racism is reached. The reason is that the tendency among white people, he suggests, is to use lack of preparedness as an excuse for complacency:

I cannot tell you how many times I’ve heard writing teachers, ones who are conscientious, critical, and experienced, say to me, “I’m just not ready . . . I don’t feel

comfortable yet, maybe next semester.” What a blind sense of privilege! What a lack of compassion—if compassion is more than feeling empathy, but a doing of something, a suffering with others. (“How” 366)

Compassion, he says, requires action—action that is rooted in concern for others’ suffering, unfettered by our discomfort. Like bell hooks suggests, as I explore in the earlier section “Expect Black Excellence (With Some Caveats),” the only way out is through. And the only way through is to move. And the only way to move is to engage with the difficult things before us: with our own white subjectivities, and with the stories of suffering that mobilize our BIPOC colleagues, students, and friends.

Beginning at the Center

At Midwestern U., the Black culture *center* is a physical place, a gathering space, a locus of Black culture on the campus of a historically white institution. The classes and activities in this space focus on Black culture as *central* to their mission and vision, to their identity as an organization. In this sense, the center is ideological. What I am arguing throughout this dissertation is that the Black culture center is also an optimal point of origin and reference for abolitionist work in a college or university—“the point from which an activity or process is directed,” as Oxford Languages defines “center”—even for writing teachers. That is, I operationalize the word “center” here to call attention to the centrality of the culture center to antiracism and abolitionism in a historically white institution.

University culture centers offer educators (including but not limited to writing teachers) an important place to learn about their institution from historically marginalized perspectives. As a place where Black excellence is celebrated and prioritized, the Black culture center, for example, makes visible some of what is marginalized or outright obscured throughout the university—cultural values, scholarship, perspectives, voices that are silenced and/or ignored in a historically

white institution. Here, educators can learn about the challenges and kinds of discrimination and racial injustice that BIPOC students and faculty are facing within the institution and about the resource gaps (such as culturally sustaining tutoring for skills like writing) that many do not notice. They can learn about the knowledge BIPOC students and faculty are producing and the modes and mediums through which they're sharing it. They can learn about what brings these students and faculty joy (the "joy that originates in resistance" [Love 15]), how they collectively fight injustice within that educational institution and support one another, challenging each other and promoting resiliency through solidarity. They can learn, that is, how to be accomplices, or coconspirators, with BIPOC colleagues and students in these centers.

All of this learning from BIPOC students and faculty in the culture center is part of the fundamental antiracist work of "understand[ing] and recogniz[ing] America and its schools as spaces of Whiteness, White rage, and White supremacy" (Love 13) and of "be[ing] in solidarity with dark folx and poor folx fighting for their humanity and fighting to move beyond surviving" (12). "Educational justice is going to take people power," Love contends, "driven by the spirit and ideas of the folx who have done the work of antiracism before: abolitionists" (9). At Midwestern U., and likely all educational institutions, the fight for racial justice includes tensions and contradictions that are not easily (if at all) resolved, many of which I have explored throughout this dissertation. Those tensions and contradictions are opportunities for deeper attending to one another, for greater learning, and for coalition-building through that shared struggle of developing understanding. They are also helpful reminders that while "reluctan[ce] to exercise principled criticism of black people [...] den[ies black people] the freedom to err" (West 3), white educators' foremost responsibility in matters of antiracism and abolition is to deeply

attend to what our BIPOC colleagues and students are communicating. We must grapple with questions like those rhetoric scholar Jacqueline Jones Royster asks:

[W]hen do we listen? How do we listen? How do we demonstrate that we honor and respect the person talking and what that person is saying, or what the person might say if we valued someone other than ourselves having a turn to speak? How do we translate listening into language and action, into the creation of an appropriate response? (38)

In asking ourselves these questions, we must do the work of becoming reflective coconspirators, creating the conditions for a participatory democracy that “uplifts voices that have been deliberately placed in the margins[,] and seeks to organize, strategize, and mobilize through consensus building” (Love 67). To do so, I argue, entails beginning at a university culture center, a prime locus for institutional insight and abolitionist leadership despite its common relegation to the margins of university life.

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Appendix A: Focus Group Transcripts

Focus Group A Transcript

File Name: Focus Group A.mp4

File Length: 01:40:53

SPEAKERS

Asia

Bianca

Tracie

FULL TRANSCRIPT (with timecode)

0:03:00.3-0:04:12.6

Kristin: Okay so the first question, just to kind of get a sense, um, of your interactions here and, like, your involvement here is like what—how are you involved with the [Black culture center] and what kinds of support—like I know what kinds of support it offers students more generally, so I want to hear about your perspectives about the support that it offers you and other students, or has if you aren't involved with that stuff here. And when I say involved, I mean, like, are you part of any of the groups that they have put together? Like you work here obviously. Do you attend class here? What's the extent of your involvement here? Because I'm really looking at—so you know Doctor [name redacted]—I don't know if you guys went to that talk where she talked about the Black Cultural Center's role and like all the different work that the cultural center does at PWI. This is actually sort of similar work so I'm looking specifically at the work of a Black Cultural Center. So anyway, if you could just speak to that. Like, how you're involved. What kinds of support.

0:04:12.6-0:04:55.9

Asia: Okay, um, well I am involved with the center both as a student as an employee, I work here. So I get to see both sides of the spectrum. Um, as far as, like, academics, I take classes here. Um, I'm pretty familiar with most of the professors and instructors that teach here. Um, I'm not involved in any of the programs that coincide with the Center like S-Plan or John Henrik Clark but I do assist with them on the worker's side, but not as a student.

0:04:55.9-0:04:59.9

Kristin: Do you want to talk about why at all?

0:04:59.9-0:05:19.9

Asia: Well, um, my first year, I didn't—I was not really familiar with the Black Campus. And I feel like if you're not familiar with the Black Campus, you don't know that the [Black culture

center] exists because it's not included on the tours. So if you don't know what you're—yeah. Which is why I did a tour. So that now I can go give that info to admissions.

0:05:19.9-0:05:24.2

Kristin: I didn't know it existed. But I didn't—I mean, my experience is totally different so.

0:05:24.2-0:05:28.7

Asia: I didn't know until, like, my second semester of my freshman year.

0:05:28.7-0:05:30.9

Kristin: And how long have you been here now?

0:05:30.9-0:05:32.3

Asia: This is my third year.

0:05:32.3-0:05:34.3

Kristin: So that's recent, that they're still not doing that. Okay. Wow.

0:05:34.3-0:06:33.5

Asia: Correct. Didn't know it existed until I got involved with the Black Student Union and then I applied to work here and got hired the same semester. But I didn't know what S-Plan was. It just was people emailing me. I'm like, "I'm not interested in what you guys are talking about." Like, I don't want a mentor. I don't know what you would mentor me about. Like, please stop emailing me. So I wasn't aware let alone that there was an entire [Black culture center]. So that's kind of why. And then, um, as a sophomore, because S-Plan is more towards mentoring Freshmen. So I'm like, "If I wasn't mentored, why would I do that?" Because I don't know the requirements and stuff. And then I started working here. So that was just enough in itself to be an employee before hours and then to just go somewhere after hours, that was a lot.

0:06:33.5-0:06:39.3

Kristin: Yeah. How did you find out about the Center?

0:06:39.3-0:06:55.4

Asia: Um, I did the freshman BSU Pageant and one of my coordinators worked here, so she was like, "Oh I'm graduating and my job is hiring." And I'm like, "Sure I need a job." And that's when I applied and found out that we had a [Black culture center].

0:06:55.4-0:06:57.2

Kristin: So it was through the Black Student Union connection?

0:06:57.2-0:07:06.9

Asia: Mm-hm. Had I not done that pageant; I probably would have not still been a student here because I wouldn't have known about any resources because they're not broadcasted.

0:07:06.9-0:07:08.7

Kristin: How did you know about the Black Student Union?

0:07:08.7-0:07:26.2

Asia: I saw it on Twitter. I just so happened to see, like, there was a protest happening. I'm like, "Oh, I agree with that. I'm gonna go." And then that's how I got involved with them and then I did the Freshmen Pageant in the spring.

0:07:26.2-0:07:29.0

Kristin: Okay. It's like a beauty pageant?

0:07:29.0-0:08:09.4

Asia: It is. So there's different categories of the pageant. There's an intro speech. There's a platform which is something you'd like to see changed on this campus. Um, the only beauty part is like the model walk, but that's like five minutes. Um, and then they ask you questions about, like, um, things going on around the country or things going on around campus or if you could change anything about this campus, what would you do? Who would you talk to? Things like that. So that was my Freshman year. And then I coordinated it this year. So I was able to see the change and stuff like that.

0:08:09.4-0:08:17.1

Kristin: That's really cool. That's through the BSU too? Okay. Thanks.

0:08:17.1-0:10:33.4

Bianca: Okay. I have never taken classes here. But I have been an employee here for about two years and I'm a graduate student. Like [Asia], I had no idea this center existed. I transferred and I came here my junior year. And the only reason I found the Center in undergrad is because I got involved to join a lot of honors societies that would be like predominately white. And I was very intentional about joining an honors society that represented black people. Um, because I knew for a fact that there were other intellectual black bodies on this campus, I just didn't know where to find them because it wasn't publicized. So I had to do, um, quite a bit of research and then I came across John Henrik Clark, and it was located in the Center. So I came here and I became aware of where, you know, a small space on campus that was dedicated to, like, black excellence. Once I did that, I just, um, tried my best to stay in contact with individuals at the center to make sure that, once I decided to go to graduate school here, that it became a part of my curriculum in any way possible, you know? Even if I wasn't a student I still could learn, you know, a lot from the Center. So I became a graduate research assistant. Even though I had, um, plenty of different opportunities, I was like, "no I want to go here." You know? There is a lot for me to learn. I was upset at the fact that I wasn't made aware of this place because as a person of color, you do feel isolated at times on a predominately white campus. So I feel like those resources should be publicized by teachers in a syllabus somewhere so that you aren't, um, left feeling left out. It's such an extreme part of mental health, it was for me. You know? When you want to see somebody who looks like you or talk to somebody who could possibly understand where you are coming from, when you have an experience, that was a huge part of mental health for me. So I was upset that I wasn't, um, privy to this center at first. And what's worse is, I was in the psychology building the whole time.

0:10:33.4-0:10:34.7

Kristin: Across the street? Yeah.

0:10:34.7-0:11:40.9

Bianca: So it made, I was just like, this is ridiculous. If this resources exists, it exists for a reason. You know? And it should be publicized so that the services can be provided, you know? Um, often times, um, a lot of black students don't show up to events on campus. And I know now from personal experience it's because sometimes they're poorly advertised, you know. We don't know all the time. It shouldn't have taken me to do research on my own to find the place that was meant to be for me. Especially when I learned about the history of this place, how hard they fought for this center. You know. And how long it took. I'm like, you know, somethin' like that should not be, in my mind, buried or hidden. It should be put out in broad daylight, just like any other resource, you know? Especially because it's like in a prime location. We're right next to...

0:11:40.9-0:11:41.4

Kristin: Route 38.

0:11:41.4-0:12:20.0

Bianca: Yes! It's like we're not hard to find. We're not buried anywhere. The Center is small but it's full of a lot of jewels and people who care and are willing to give students direction when necessarily. Even our undergraduates. [Asia] helps a lot. [Asia] helps graduate students, you know? Because she understands our experience. It speaks volumes to us on campus about how we're treated. You know, the things that we go through academically, personally, you know? It just helps. Um, what was the other? Yeah. I think that's—I hope that answers your question.

0:12:20.0-0:12:54.8

Kristin: I think it's really interesting that you talked about where you would find out about that. Like you're thinking about syllabi and stuff like that. Because a lot of times I think as a teacher, people don't read the syllabus. A lot of times you wonder. So that's the thing is I wonder like who is the—where—who needs to be publicizing this? And this is kind of outside of my research. So I'm thinking about yeah, that's something I do as a writing teacher, put that stuff there. But beyond teachers, too, how does this need to be put out there? In what ways?

0:12:54.8-0:12:55.9

Bianca: Like [Asia] said, it's not even on the tour.

0:12:55.9-0:12:59.8

Kristin: That's shocking to me. Yeah.

0:12:59.8-0:13:19.0

Bianca: That's a really, really big deal. Like that is one of the main ways you can advertise this place. And the one place you can show equality amongst the resources on campus, you intentionally cut it out. When you look at [Midwestern U.], I don't know if it's changed. But when I used to MapQuest [Midwestern U.], the [Black culture center] is not on there. Not even on the map of campus.

0:13:19.0-0:13:26.8

Asia: We don't even get deliveries. Like we have to get our food delivered, like, next door because they can't find us.

0:13:26.8-0:13:33.7

Bianca: Yes. So it's, like, there's a more—yeah. There's more of a going on.

0:13:33.7-0:13:39.5

Kristin: Is it institutional red tape, do you think? Or is it like, well it's probably a lot of things. But.

0:13:39.5-0:14:01.0

Bianca: We don't know. It's just that when you find, like, little things like that, that are actually huge, like, why would you skip this center, particularly, when you're going. And it's not that big. And we're always ready for the tour. But more than that, we are part of the campus, you know?

0:14:01.0-0:14:05.7

Kristin: Yeah. This was the first place I felt, like, was alive on campus.

0:14:05.7-0:14:58.6

Bianca: We do, you know, amazing things. I'm still salty. Okay, this is gonna be petty, but I didn't get to do black graduation in undergrad because I didn't know about this center. And that is somethin' that is really big to some people. I was mad. I was mad. I've been tryin' to get—and askin' about the quizzes I get. I feel like I should get that time back. But we do a lot of things to promote, um, positivity and show support to our students throughout the Center. And when that—like when the Center is blocked or, like, hidden or not advertised, students ultimately miss out. Particularly minority students. You know, we aren't the only ones. There are other people who are not—people of color who are not, like, black, that want to learn about our history. You know and they don't get that opportunity.

0:14:58.6-0:15:25.9

Kristin: Or people like me. Like, I didn't know it existed until, like, literally, the semester before I left. And so I happened to have an assignment that told me to go find somebody in one of the buildings, I don't even remember what it was. And he recommended—Doctor [name redacted]. But that was it. That was the only connection. And so I'm surprised. I'm really surprised that it wasn't just me being a white person that made me not hear about it.

0:15:25.9-0:15:35.6

Bianca: Right, yeah. And it's like that can look like we don't care. When it all actuality it's we literally don't know. We have no idea, you know?

0:15:35.6-0:15:52.1

Kristin: Yeah, I was—I've wondered that too about events and stuff. And like trying to get through like to people. Like even for this, for the focus groups. Like how do you reach people?

And how is information getting around to students. So you had talked about Twitter is something that...

0:15:52.1-0:17:09.4

Asia: If that's social media, and I think that's something that the Center is trying to get in the wave with. Because, like I said, they were emailing me. If you're not—if you don't work—if you're a student and you don't work on campus, your email is not getting checked. I literally did not start checking my email until I started being an employee, because whatever a professor needs to tell you, they're going to tell you on Blackboard. So if they're spamming your email, it's like, what are you doing? Or if they're emailing about an event, you're not going to check it, you're not going to look because what do you have to look there for? You don't care. I mean, it's kind of unfortunately, because it's slightly unprofessional. But at the same, you got to get with what the students are doing. If the students are telling you, "We don't check our email." Don't chastise them. Realize that, "Wait a minute, I only check my email because I'm an employee," Why else would you check your email? Now I have the Outlook app because I have to check my email. Otherwise, I'll miss out on work stuff. But yeah.

0:17:09.4-0:17:13.6

Kristin: That's really interesting. Is it only Twitter? Like, you guys said you have a group chat. Is that just for a class?

0:17:13.6-0:17:28.8

Asia: Yeah so in class we have a group chat. Um, that's one of the first things that a lot of students do. Like in the beginning of a class they'll be like, okay, let me see who I identify with and we'll make a group chat.

0:17:28.8-0:17:31.5

Kristin: And you mean, like, a text message string, right? Okay.

0:17:31.5-0:17:59.7

Asia: Mm-hm. Um, a lot of organizations have, like, GroupMe. So they have, like, their full organization chat and then there will be an exec board chat. I know that, like, our programs that run through the Center are student-ran so they have different group chats too. Because not everyone is comfortable with giving the world their number so. But most communication is through some form of social media.

0:17:59.7-0:20:01.4

Bianca: That's like students like [Asia]. Incoming students are instrumental to the Center because they are keeping with the trends. They are the new trend. That's how we stay on the map via our efforts. Because clearly, [Midwestern U.] is missing somethin'. But, um, like, [Asia]—I can speak to [Asia], like, this is one of my favorite, not workers, people in the world. Because she's so smart. And she's network savvy. She laughin' but, if we run into a jam and we need to get people on board, I don't care if [Asia] asleep or in a meeting. An important meeting. We'll FaceTime her. We will, like, "[Asia] we need help. We need you to." But that's what I don't like about us not being available to students. We have a lot of talent; beautiful black students like her. And if we get all of them together, we can make magic happen on not just one thing, many

things. We can show them their talents. Like, for the longest time, [Asia] assumed that I didn't like her because I stayed on top of her. But it's because I saw her greatness. Like she is so smart. Um, her networking abilities. Like the fact that she can stick to a deadline. The fact that she can be, like, not cutthroat, but [Asia] will get you in order. If you are not doing what you supposed to do. And to me, I saw a strong, beautiful, young black leader. I'm like, "She got it." You know? She can command a room and not just commend it; she can direct it. And she has ideas and she's not afraid to implement them. You know that would go volumes on this campus. That could change the trajectory of the Center, you know, and how it operates. But they often don't get the chance because we don't get, like, the advertising. I feel like I'm overusing the word. But that's the only, we don't, we're not shown the respect that other center or, um, places on campus are shown.

0:20:01.4-0:20:07.6

Kristin: Even other cultural centers? It's a [unintelligible].

0:20:07.6-0:20:08.4

Bianca: I wouldn't—I don't—I can't honestly answer that.

0:20:08.4-0:20:10.3

Kristin: You said Centers. I didn't know what you meant.

0:20:10.3-0:20:37.5

Bianca: Yeah. You know what? I'm glad you said that. I can't honestly speak to that because I've never went and spoke to the Latino Resource Center about how they feel about their representation on campus, or the Asian Resource Center. Or, you know, LGBTQ Center or the Women's Studies Center. You know, I've never sat down and asked that question, honestly. And I don't want to make up anything or, um, uh, imply. So I don't know. I was just speaking to us specifically.

0:20:37.5-0:22:21.6

Asia: Um I will say because I, like, I put together a campus tour strategically that Admissions thought it was just to get the school here. But I wanted to see how everything worked. I wanted to see why they didn't, not just stop by my center, but they don't stop by the Asian American Resource Center. They don't mention it. Like, they didn't even know the correct name. So I'm like, okay, this is a problem. Because you have students that identify with these centers. So if they don't—our biggest issue right now is retention. If you cannot point these students to where they can, at least, have the opportunity to be assisted with, that's why they're leaving. Like I said, had I not found the Center or found the Black Student Union, I literally was going to transfer. Because I'm like, there's no one else like me. There's no one that looks like me in my classes. I didn't take a Black Studies course until I found out about the Black Student Union. Didn't know there was a minor. Didn't know anything. So if I don't know, thinking of Freshman [Asia], I can only imagine what any other group—because there's not, unless you catch them on move-in day. That's your only opportunity. And that's really just student volunteers. But that's not what the students are asking about. They want to know, it's Friday, it's move-in day. What am I going to do when my parents leave? What's going on? Not, okay, well Monday is coming

up. And I didn't know there was a Back to Campus tour. The Center literally throws a tour, they show you around campus, all the organizes there are.

0:22:21.6-0:22:22.8

Kristin: The [Black culture center] does?

0:22:22.8-0:22:40.5

Asia: Mm-hm. They partner with, um, [Zeta Phi Beta] Sorority Incorporated. And they do this whole tour. They show you the shortcuts. They show you everything. And I had no idea that happened. And now that we're getting in on those orientations and those admitted student days, we can tell students.

0:22:40.5-0:22:41.5

Kristin: So you are? Okay.

0:22:41.5-0:22:53.5

Asia: But, like I said, if you don't know then that's—that's a retention problem. Because the students don't have anyone to identify with.

0:22:53.5-0:22:55.4

Kristin: Do you want to talk about your time?

0:22:55.4-0:24:25.9

Tracie: Um, yeah. So I came here as a transfer student as well, um, and actually I found out about the minor when I came for my orientation and I had to declare that day, and I already knew what I wanted my major to be. And I also declared my minor. Um, and so that's what brought me to the [Black culture center] because all of my, uh, Black Studies Minor classes were here in the center. So every semester for the four semesters that it took me I was here at least, I would say, three to four days a week, takin' classes. Um, and because of my involvement here—I think it's because I was a minor that I was on the listserv, so I got reached out to to, uh, ask if I wanted to be a mentor for the S-Plan, um, which I said yes. And then I got some people and then I contact them two times and then they didn't respond and then—and then I was done. I didn't do anything else with that. But that's how I knew about the S-Plan. And then it seems like I was getting two or three emails. I came as a non-traditional student, so my professional career trajectory had already, like, I was used to the hamster on the wheel. I didn't have any problem checkin' the emails. It was important for me from when I got here and so that, like, from that I got invited to a lot of the award ceremonies that were sponsored by, uh, [the Black culture center] and, um, I don't wanna rub it in, but Black Graduation was a pretty...

0:24:25.9-0:24:30.8

Kristin: So you two had totally different experiences. And you think it's because you specifically came here for the minor?

0:24:30.8-0:27:23.3

Tracie: I think that it's because that I declared the minor. And I think I want to say, because I would be wondering too. I would still read the emails but I would be like well did I sign up for

this? Or how do you know to contact me about this? But it's whatever. And, uh, [name redacted], she's not here anymore, but she was doin' all of like the S-Plan correspondence. Um, but I think that my declaring the minor might have put me, uh, on some list servs so that I was gettin' this information. Um, and I participated in the things I wanted to and I didn't in the things that I didn't want to. I didn't have any, um, organizational involvement, but that was my personal thing. I just came here kind of with a chip on my shoulder because I came as a non-traditional student and I thought that I was too old—I thought that there would be some sort of disconnect. But I ended up, my bubble was burst because in every place that I went, like, number one young people didn't even know how old I was. And number two, it wasn't like a thing like oh you sit over there because you're older and we'll be over here because we're the younger ones. It wasn't like that. But I had some insecurities about it. So that kind of stopped me from joining some of the organizations. A couple of them I tried to join, but I feel like the [Meters] were, like, super clandestine. Like where do I go. I'm not on Twitter. I'm only on Facebook. I only do political posts on Facebook. I'm barely even on there. So I don't have that. I can't just go on twitter and like randomly see. And I was like well where are these meetings? How come they're not posted anywhere? And what I've come to see is that this is a whole [Midwestern U.] problem, this is not just a like, I do think, I'm not tryin' to say that a case can't be made that they forget about some of their, um, smaller departments, but overall, [Midwestern U.] has a problem with how they communicate out to their larger student body. And it's just, um, it's kind of unfortunate but, um, yeah. Everything that—everything that I learned about that either came from me experiencing here from my minor or through some sort of email that was sent. Um, what I do want to say—so I work for the Asian American Resource Center, and I do think that we face a lot of the same issues. And I think that what makes us different is that we use those orientations. Like even right now, we're getting ready for the summer orientations. Last year we were able to capture 300 students that identified as Asian, Asian-American, or Pacific Islander and kind of route them to our peer mentor program. And then what that looked like is after we got them, like, the day that we got those names, we were sendin' out emails. Two weeks later, like, I hope your summer's goin' good, here's another email. Two weeks later, like, hey, the school year's about to begin and we're gonna be havin' this program. And then, even still, out of those 300, probably we retained like 1%.

0:27:23.3-0:27:24.9

Kristin: I wonder why. Huh.

0:27:24.9-0:29:06.8

Tracie: I think that it's the like, um, so if you have a table at orientation and you have, like, so everybody's in these student's faces. Everybody's sayin', hey, come to my table. Look at this. Um, and then you might have somethin' gimmicky on your table. So maybe have some keychains or maybe have some candy. Of course that's gonna pull them over there. Then once they're over there, they're going to sign up to get you to stop talkin'. They want you to sh—they're ready to move on. So of course they're gonna sign up. But then only the ones who really were like, man, I think that this could be impactful for me are going to remember. Everybody else it was just a day where I signed up for a lot of things and then look, I got a whole bunch of stuff in my pocket to prove it. That's what I think that it really is. But I think that the university has to do a lot more within the individual centers. They need to find what's going to work for them as well. And they can't—I don't think that the centers can just depend on the university to

do the marketing for them, um, because for whatever reason, it's not working. And that's across the board. Even in things that you might not think are like, um, cultural or ethnic. For example, SA, I don't understand how a group of students who's responsible for five, four, three, two, one, however million dollars that are in their budget every year, and we don't know when the meetings are, when the senate meetings are, like, what is being—what is being decided upon at these meetings. There is no one place where all students know that they can go to get all of this information from the campus. And that's an institutional thing. That's somethin' that the university needs to work on and not somethin' that I think that the individual departments should be worried about. And then, they should just have to worry about whatever extra effort they need to put for their program, you know, their department. But that's enough about that.

0:29:06.8-0:31:20.3

Kristin: It's complicated. So I want to bring this back actually. I kind of just in, being mindful of the time, maybe combine some of these questions a little bit. Um, Bianca, you said something that totally hit the nail on the head with what I'm wanting to find out with this research. You said something about, um, I don't remember, um, one of the roles of the centers to show black students that they're smart. Show them the ways that they are smart and to kind of reinforce that. And I think that, to my, is, like, my ultimate question is how can I create a space in my classes—because I have, like, no control over the student body. But what can I do to not keep doing that violence that says that smart looks look like XYZ and how do I, like, what sorts of, I guess, projects can I have students do? How can I engage students in thinking about writing, um, or producing things? You know, so specifically within first year composition, but it doesn't have to be. So I guess I'm just saying that to contextualize, like, that is, I completely 100% share that that is my question. Um, and what I'm wanting to look at. So, um, with that in mind, I'm wanting to hear about your guys' experience with like learning, with writing, with making things, so that's what these questions center on. Uh, tell me about your experiences with learning something that has really stuck with you, whether inside or out of school, I don't even care. Um, what did you do to develop that understanding? What helped you remember that experience? Um, so you can talk about something like that. That's question two. Question three, um, is like, some, a time that you created something that you felt was really smart. Like, I want to hear about those moments that you did something that you were just like, "Yes." Like, this is fucking smart. Um, and I love what this was. And where you felt that, not because somebody else told you it was. Um, and where that was and I want to hear about how, like, maybe what lead up to that. Can you think of a moment like that? In school, out of school, whatever. And tell me whatever you can about that experience?

0:31:20.3-0:31:27.8

Bianca: When you say, um, an experience that stuck with you? Is it positive or negative?

0:31:27.8-0:31:49.1

Kristin: You can talk to me about either. I really want to hear about this, the positive stuff. Because so much—so much research talks about deficits and negatives. And I'm really wanting to shine a light on this. But, talk about that, if that's what comes to mind. And if you can't think about—which is really sad.

0:31:49.1-0:32:09.9

Bianca: Well I have something that—it starts out negative but it turned positive. Um, so, um, I came from the inner-city. And when I moved to—my mom moved us to the Northwest Suburbs. And when we moved there was a predominately white neighborhood. It was all white.

0:32:09.9-0:32:11.0

Kristin: How old were you?

0:32:11.0-0:32:59.6

Bianca: Huh? I was like, 11? And, um in the classrooms, what I was sharing to you about I was often made fun of for the way that I spoke. Never mind the fact that my teachers were supposed to be professionals and they were supposed to be educated on AA and EE and the fact that it was a dialect, you know, and that it represented a community within our, like, country. You know and it's to be respected. And there's a particular way to address or to teach students to speak this dialect. You know, you should be very careful not to minimize or diminish their efforts in your classroom because you don't identify with that dialect. Um, that was not the case for me.

0:32:59.6-0:33:02.9

Kristin: With teachers specifically you said you were made fun of? Teachers, students, both?

0:33:02.9-0:34:56.9

Bianca: It was both. Um, students would mock me, like, ya'll. And they would make me sound very ignorant, like, to my ears. And then the teachers would laugh. Like they would laugh. And there was no, there was a huge lack of support there, um, on behalf of me. You know? And the fact that I was, like, one of the only students of color. Particularly the only black student in the classroom, that made me feel very small. Um, it made me feel really inferior. Um, and I developed a lot of trauma from it that I didn't realize was trauma at the time. I refused to raise my hand for, like, years. I think up until college. I didn't join any, um, clubs. Um, for the most part I didn't join anything. And, um, I became terrified of public speaking. Like it was bad. But there was something that kept me going. Like, my grades improved significantly. And I didn't understand why until later in life. I had this teacher; her name was Mrs. [Huggins]. She would take me, at lunchtime, and she would teach me and my siblings. And when she taught us, even though she was a white lady, she didn't teach us like we was black kids coming from the city. She treated us like children who had to learn. That was it. There was no, um, I didn't feel like she treated me a certain way because of my color, you know? I saw a teacher, passionate. I felt a teacher passionate about teaching, you know? And she saw kids who needed help, so she used what she went to school for. She utilized her passion and her knowledge to make us feel, you know, um, capable of learning everything we needed to learn. Because we were very behind due to the lack of resources from our prior environment, you know?

0:34:56.9-0:34:58.4

Kristin: What kinds of things was she teaching?

0:34:58.4-0:35:03.0

Bianca: Um, she taught us everything. That's how bad the teachers were.

0:35:03.0-0:35:08.9

Kristin: What kind of a teacher was she there? Was she at your school? Like how did you connect with her?

0:35:08.9-0:37:41.4

Bianca: Miss [Huggins] was a resource teacher. And, um, she got in contact with—well she actually found us because we were having trouble in classrooms. We became very defensive towards other students. And we often would lash out. Like, and people would, what would make it worse was the people around us would make it seem like our lashing out was irrational. Like, you know, oh my gosh, these angry black kids are comin' to the suburbs and messin' up our environment. That's why they shouldn't be here. They didn't see—well they say, but they didn't care that we were bein' made fun of and it hurt our feelin's and we were bein' attacked verbally, we were bein' bullied verbally. You know? And emotionally. So we lashed out. Um, Miss [Huggins], I don't know how or why, but she heard about it. And she came and pulled each of us out of the classroom. And we assumed we were in trouble. And she was like, “No I just hear ya'll havin' a hard time, what's really goin' on?” And she talked to us. You know, and she didn't force us into that room to teach us. She gave us the option. She was like, “I'm here to help, you know, if ya'll don't feel comfortable in the classroom, you know, if you feel like there's somethin' that you don't completely understand, you know, you can trust me.” And the report didn't come right off the bat. She offered her services and she stepped back, you know? And then we were allowed to come to her. And when we came, she was who she said she was. And the resources that she provided were what she said they were going to be. She helped us step by step. You know, if we didn't understand somethin', we weren't made to feel incompetent about it. You know, she was like, okay, yeah, I can understand how that's confusin'. She'd say, I understand this word success, we're not, like, aligning on our own, our definitions of it. Bianca, tell me what that means to you. You know and then I'd give her my definition. She'd be like, “Oh, I can see that. So you see it like this.” And even though she would, um, acknowledge you know my definition, she would still find a way to professionally and compassionately bring it around to what the word actually meant, you know? So it was, I don't know, it was just a lot of respect there. A lot of care, a lot of compassion. She didn't coddle us though. We weren't babies. She gave us tools to, like, to add. We were already resilient individuals but she added to that by teaching us, you know, that knowledge is power and I'm gonna show you how you can acquire this knowledge, you know, and not disrespect you, you know, in the process of doin' that.

0:37:41.4-0:38:25.9

Kristin: Tell me about like writing and stuff. Did she work with you on your writing? Because that's such a difficult thing because I don't feel like myself when I do academic writing really. And I fit in in some ways that so many people are made to feel like they don't. So how did she go about doing that, and how did you, like, work through that? How do you feel about that now? Because there's a major argument in our field right now that is saying we need to stop teaching this whole Standard American English as like this intellectual way of writing. It doesn't have to look this way. You know? So I'm curious, I guess, I want to hear about that a little.

0:38:23.9-0:38:29.7

Bianca: Um, I don't know how I could remember everything about Ms. [Huggins]. This is so weird. But, um, obviously it was big...

0:38:29.7-0:38:34.0

Tracie: She was monumental.

0:38:34.0-0:38:34.4

Kristin: Impact, yeah.

0:38:33.4-0:41:26.4

Bianca: Specifically, Ms. [Huggins] focused on, like, the fundamentals—the fundamentals of writing. So, like, um, before she even got to, like, how to use a word, she broke down, um, punctuation and why it was essential in a sentence. Like this is a comma. You know? Because at first people used to say—you know, I hate it when they say, you know, you put a comma where you pause. I'm low winded. So I had a lot of run-on sentences. You know, like, it was long, you know? I could talk for a minute. But I'm like, but I paused here. You know. And, um, it didn't work out that well. But then she started to break things down in a different way. And I can't even tell you the specific way she did it, but when she broke it down, it make a lot of sense. Like, semi-colons. I'm like, why is this stupid thing? And she's like, oh, it's kind of a period and a comma. So you can you start a new sentence here Bianca? You know, if you wanted to, can you start? And I'm like yeah. She was like, but, you know, do you have to? It was the way she spoke to us. It wasn't, um, she met us where we were. And that is huge. You know. She didn't um, address us in a particular way because technically, you know, this is the fifth-grade level. She met Bianca, she introduced herself to Bianca, and she taught Bianca. You know. She took the general aspect out of it and made it very personal. And I understand that can be very hard for teachers who have a lot of students, you know. But what she did was she took particular students who she saw were struggling, you know. Which was not a lot at the time. Um and I don't even know if it was a lot for her. This was one lady, five kids. You know, that could be a lot. But she met everybody where they were, you know? And she explained things to us the way we understood them. Because, in her mind, and she told us this, you have to be able to use this to further yourself in life. So I need for you to understand this, you know, in the way that you can continue to use it successfully and grow, you know? Develop further with it, you know, become a little bit more articulate, if you will. She didn't say those words because. Ms. [Huggins] would deem that as demeaning. Yeah, she wouldn't say it like that, but she made us feel important when she taught us about why it was important for us to use and learn fundamentals. She would basically be like, you know them kids can't mess with you no more. Because, you know, you know how to write this paper, you know, that's something they can't use against you anymore. Like, you know, it's a weakness, it ain't your fault. You offer—you are—you're from where you're from, you know, and you didn't ask to be born there. You know there's a whole systematic things where you don't understand for resources, but, we finna take that power away from them, and this is how. you know?

0:41:26.4-0:41:29.6

Kristin: How did she define success? When you...

0:41:29.6-0:41:31.4

Bianca: I can't, I told you, but I don't even remember how, or Ms. [[Huggins]].

0:41:31.4-0:41:31.6

Kristin: Or what was she preparing you to do?

0:41:31.6-0:43:20.2

Bianca: Um, Ms. [Huggins], success was just like an example. She did that with a lot of different words. So she would basically, um, give us literacy lessons and we would read and would saw—she would saw—she would see, you know, how, um, in a lot of resources they say, you know, you have to be careful with the research you're presenting because people's intellectual levels may not be there. You know, literacy wise. Somebody may read something and it may not mean to them as it does to you because they may not understand a lot of the words. So Ms. [Huggins] would give us a literacy lesson, and it would be small, like a paragraph. And she would be like, "Tell me what that means. Write it in a summary." And she would see that we were like, off. It wasn't there. And we would, like, embellish, make up somethin', or completely refuse to do it. And she would get to the bottom of that. Like, okay, this ain't, you know, what's goin' on here? Read my paper and I'll read yours. Does mine look different from yours? And she wrote very basic when we had to read hers, you know. In, like, layman's terms. And when we saw the differences, she would just ask us to elaborate. Sometimes it was a flat out, "I don't know what that word means so I thought it meant this because this word was before." And she was like, "Okay, well then this is what it mean." You know. Or, "I thought this word meant this because blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah." She'd be like, "Oh, okay, that makes sense. Where did that come from?" And she would, like, engage in a conversation and, um, try to understand your mindset. And then, like I said, she would bring it back around to the correct meaning, you know? You would remember what the word actually meant because that conversation was meant to be meaningful, you know? It wasn't, you know, the meaning. Or it wasn't somethin' that you wanted to bury because it was another bad memory, you know?

0:43:20.2-0:43:55.3

Kristin: That's very helpful. Thank you. Do you—or, uh, Asia or Tracie, like, have anything, like, can you think of, like, moments or, like, things that you've made or written or done. Like, and it can be, like, even something super short. Like, like you wrote an email that you were just like really proud of, like, the way that you did that sort of thing. Or you made something for someone else or for yourself or it was like a way that your journaled about something that you find was really like, or that you processed some information. I don't know.

0:43:55.3-0:45:33.8

Tracie: Well, um, yeah. So when I did my undergrad here, I Was English. And I was in the creative writing program with poetry. So I've written many pieces, because I've been writing poetry a long time. But I wrote this, um, one piece. And it's called hand-me-downs. And a lot of the poems that I used to write, it was just, like, one and done. Like you start writin because you have a feelin or you listen- you're listenin' to somethin' or you hear somethin' that triggers you, you have an idea, you want to write it down. You write it down and then it's done. I had no idea, um, about editing, goin' back, and, like, once you're done with the emotional portion of the piece, how can you, like, maybe, this time you're infusin' some logic into it. I just—I didn't, it wasn't a thing for me to go back and, like, work with a piece. It was when it was done, it was done. I loved it, I loved it how it was. But this one piece, and this was when I was here, I wrote

this piece, and I must have edited it for, like, months. And I was obsessed with it. Like I would read it over and over again. And I just thought that it, it took the way that I was feelin' when I was triggered and I wrote this piece and it just, it just spiraled into somethin' that was like so beautiful to me. And I just loved the piece. And I, like, edited other poems since then, but that was my most heavily edited piece. And, um, and I absolutely—I actually haven't even read it in a long time. But I adored that piece. Like...

0:45:33.8-0:45:37.9

Kristin: Can you share it with me? Like, not right now. I mean, like, later, like email or somethin'?

0:45:37.9-0:45:42.9

Tracie: Mm-hm, I can email it to you. Yeah.

0:45:42.9-0:45:45.3

Kristin: Why did you choose to work with this piece?

0:45:45.3-0:45:50.7

Tracie: I don't know. I don't know.

0:45:50.7-0:45:53.9

Kristin: Did you have to for a class? Cause you said were a poetry...

0:45:53.9-0:47:55.6

Tracie: It did start originally as an assignment that I did for class. But then what had happened was I went to a conference. So I was a part of the English Honors Society and my poetry had got accepted, I submitted it to present at a conference, and it got accepted. Um, so like me and four other people came and I was in this session that didn't even have anything to do with me and I can't even remember what we were talkin' about. But it had somethin' to do with race. And I was, like, one of the few people of color there at that whole conference. And believe me, every room, every time I go anywhere, I'm checkin'. I want to know, you know, where my people are. So I was one of the very few. And it was just like some comments that some people were makin' after the session was over and it just struck me how easy it is for some people to be able to talk about race and then the just—and it was just such a heavy topic. And then they were like, “Oh yeah. Okay, now let's go to lunch.” And it was like, I couldn't even move. I was like, “What? This is crazy!” And how some people can interact with heavy subject matter but because they don't have to live it, it's so easy for them to put it down. This is a great topic of discussion. Let's fill these 15 minutes with this discussion. And then I don't have to think about it anymore because I don't have to live it because that's not my life experience. It's just somethin' that we happen to be talkin' about and I may or may not have a good opinion about it or a strong opinion about it or somethin' like that so. I just remember bein' triggered and then that just turned that piece. I was like, “This is gonna be the one.” And, um, yeah. It's like, I think it's maybe like five stanzas or somethin' like that. And like they don't all rhyme but it's like each one—and it just like, it has a different tone, it has a different mood, but it's all under like the same thing. And I just fell in love with how I was able to put those pieces together.

0:47:55.6-0:48:09.8

Kristin: It sounds like you took that, I can't remember what word you just said, but the tension of, like, the frustration. Used that to kind of like, fuel the revision. Did you do anything with it? Or was it just a piece you kept to yourself?

0:48:09.8-0:48:49.0

Tracie: No I just, so I ended up sharin it in my poetry workshop. Um, and then also I think that I performed it like I did it Spoken Word style some different places. And it's cool because it has like an onomatopoeia part where it's like, I'm talkin' about the rain. Um I'm talkin' about the heaviness of, like, racism and like how it comes down and it saturates you, right? And then it's like—so then it's like, “Shhh.” And it's supposed to, like, resemble the rain comin' down but it's also for silence. And like, it's just, it's a cool piece man.

0:48:49.0-0:49:10.9

Kristin: I need you to perform it. That would be cool. Asia can you think of something that, like, and it doesn't have to be for school. It can be. Or any experiences you had where you were just like yes, I did this thing, and I am smart?

0:49:10.9-0:50:04.4

Asia: So I think Bianca will probably get super smiley when I say this, but my sophomore year, I got so immersed in, like, being Asia's gonna save the Center, Asia's gonna save everybody that Asia wasn't saving herself. And so my grades, like, tanked. And that was when I was like, this will never happen again. Like I knew I wasn't doing good. But when I saw the grades, like, in front of me in May, I'm like, oh no. Like I've never, like, in high school, my grades were always good. Um, and when I got an email saying, like, your SAP ratio and I'm like, “What is this?” And so I asked my mentor Doctor Clemons who was, like, the past director for the [Black culture center], she's like, “Oh no. What we're not gonna do is that.

0:50:04.0-0:50:04.4

Kristin: What is the SAP?

0:50:04.4-0:50:06.1

Asia: So, like you have to pass...

0:50:06.1-0:50:09.8

Tracie: Satisfactory Appeal Progress.

0:50:09.8-0:50:10.2

Kristin: Oh okay, gotcha.

0:50:10.2-0:50:11.8

Asia: Right. And so.

0:50:11.8-0:50:17.1

Kristin: You were just working too—were you just invested and like working with your time and your emotions, your energy...

0:50:17.1-0:51:21.4

Asia: Everything was more important than Asia to Asia. So, I may not speak in third person, but, um, so, I had to retake—that was fall of my sophomore year, fall 2018. And then spring I did a little better, but I didn't pass one class and I'm like, "No." Like, I cannot. I can't not succeed. So I retook the class over the summer and then Fall 19? Well Fall 18 I was like, "If I need to like disappear from campus, then that's what I'll do." Like, I'll still be here, but I just need to take a couple steps back. And I think I ended with my term GPA was like a 3.4. And I'm like, "Okay, we're getting it." Like this is what it needs to be. And then this semester, because I didn't, Bianca was gone, because she just had a baby. And I'm like, "I'm not gonna tell her until she comes back."

0:51:21.4-0:51:22.8

Kristin: About the low grades?

0:51:22.8-0:51:59.6

Asia: She knew about the low grades, right. So she's like, "So you look different." And I'm like, I had to take a step away. And, like, people on campus were like, "Where have you been?" And like, I've been here, it's just—my priorities shifted. So I don't know if it's just because I'm older now and I'm like, like I gotta graduate. Because, you know, unfortunately in the African American culture on this campus, graduating in 4 ½- Five years is not a thing. Like, it's talked about but it's like, oh well just use all your financial aid, it's fine. I'm like, that's not gonna be me.

0:51:59.6-0:52:02.6

Kristin: So you're saying people take like, more than six...

0:52:02.6-0:52:13.5

Asia: The full like six. I know someone who like it took them seven. Which, everyone has a different track to the finish line, that's fine. But I knew that wasn't gonna be me.

0:52:13.5-0:52:15.7

Kristin: Is it just like the this assumes that I can't do this in this amount of time or what?

0:52:15.7-0:52:18.5

Asia: No it's I get distracted. I go Greek...

0:52:18.5-0:52:24.6

Kristin: Not you, sorry, when you were talking like within the African American culture on campus here.

0:52:24.6-0:53:22.1

Asia: Um I just think that people—everyone gets distracted. I got distracted but I knew—I forgot why I was here. And then once I realized, like, you need to get your life together I'm like okay, I cannot go back down that path because it didn't feel good. I don't like not feeling good about myself and I knew that I was capable of more. But to actually see how bad I did, it was like, no.

So now, like, I've like regrouped and rebalanced and I'm okay with saying the word no. Like before I'd just be like, "oh yeah, I'll come pick you up. Yeah, I'll help you. Yeah, I'll teach you. Yeah, I'll come to your meeting. Yeah I'll come watch your dog." Like yeah, sure, whatever. And then it's like no I didn't do my homework but it's fine.

0:53:22.1-0:53:24.6

Kristin: So you're leaning. You're focusing on your own learning.

0:53:24.6-0:53:29.8

Asia: Correct. So I think that was like the biggest thing. Yeah.

0:53:29.8-0:53:30.0

Kristin: But it was like reflected in those grades?

0:53:30.0-0:53:35.7

Asia: Yeah. Stop looking. You're just...

0:53:35.7-0:53:36.8

Bianca: I'm just so proud of her.

0:53:36.8-0:53:37.8

Asia: She's a psycho.

0:53:37.8-0:53:58.9

Kristin: Can you just tell me, um, like, about your experiences with academic writing? Um I guess I mean, like, all of you. And I mean, like, that writing for in or for school. Um, high school, college, whatever. Just what you've seen. Like the negative, positive?

0:53:58.9-0:55:25.6

Asia: Yeah so, I'll go first. Um, I went to [name redacted] High School as you can see. So I was like in Honors English, AP11, AP12. And then I took a Creative Writing Course and I took a Writing for College Course. But I thought it was going to teach us the different formats and it didn't. So when I came to [Midwestern U.], I was in English 103. I think that's Rhetoric and Comp. My Professor was Doug [Conrad]. I love Mr. Conrad. I think he was a Master's Student getting his PhD. But, like, his way teaching and his way of accepting our writing. Like, I could tell that he thoroughly read my paper. Like it wasn't just like okay here's the rubric, if you don't meet the rubric then here's your low C/high D. It was like okay, I need you to know why you're not writing correctly. Because your content is there, your ideas are there, your formatting—we can work on formatting. But I need you to know what's wrong so we can make it write. And I'm like, "What do you mean?" I've never been told that my writing sucks! And he's like, "I'm not saying that it sucks, I'm just saying that it's not the best."

0:55:25.6-0:55:29.7

Kristin: How was he defining that? Did you feel like you had to live up to anything?

0:55:29.7-0:56:34.5

Asia: No. It was great. Because I didn't—all I knew was MLA. Like I didn't know about—I knew what Purdue Owl was but I didn't have to touch it because we used MLA the whole time. So when it came time to learn about different formats or—we wrote about the same book, but he wanted us to learn how to write differently. So he's like, I'm going to grade you because I know that you know what you're talking about. And I know that you have the ideas and I know that it can just be like a formatting thing. But every professor's not going to grade you because of your potential. So I just want you to know how to write differently just in case when you take 203—which is exactly what happened to me. I had to retake—did I have to? No, I didn't have to retake 203, but I got, like, a C. Like 103 I got a high B. 203 it was like by the grace of God I passed with a C.

0:56:34.5-0:56:35.5

Kristin: What was 203? Do you remember?

0:56:35.5-0:56:38.0

Tracie: Was that Advanced Composition?

0:56:38.0-0:56:42.6

Asia: Mmm, I think so. I think it was like research and composition.

0:56:42.6-0:56:45.5

Kristin: Okay, it used to be 104 here, I think.

0:56:45.5-0:58:00.5

Asia: Now it's 203. But it was a Gen Ed so I had to take it. So just seeing the two professors. And my second professor I don't even remember his name because I didn't like him. But it was just like well this is my rubric, this is how you have to write the paper. You didn't learn MLA—or APA, we have a writing center and like okay, well... that's not, like, what's working for me. Whereas Professor Conrad just really, like, I did have to take 203 because I retook it with Conrad. And when I showed him—I showed him my papers and he was like, “This is what I was talking about in 103.” Like, “I see you could have passed this class with a B. Really an A, you probably could have got an A. But some professors are just rubric, rubric, rubric. And they don't understand or care to understand that people come from different places.” Had I went up the street to [name redacted], I'm sure my writing would be fine. I'd know every format, every citation like the back of my hand. But that's not where I went and it didn't feel like he cared about that. So I can only imagine...

0:58:00.5-0:58:02.0

Kristin: What do you mean about that, sorry? [Name redacted]?

0:58:02.0-0:58:05.9

Asia: [Name redacted]'s a [affluent suburb] school. So, like, [major suburb] and [affluent suburb].

0:58:05.9-0:58:08.2

Kristin: Are you talking about High School or here?

0:58:08.2-0:59:05.0

Asia: I'm saying if went to [name redacted] as a High School Student, I would have been more well-versed in the different kinds of like formats and stuff. But I could only imagine with like my counterparts that went to like schools in the city. Because they didn't even know what I was—some people don't know formats because you don't have to use them. A paper is a paper. Most of the time in high school, you're doing book reports. You're not doing research-based papers. So if you don't have to do that and then your first paper in lit and comp is about research and you're like, "I don't even know what a good source is, let alone how to cite it. Let alone..." Like you don't know that so how are you going to be expected to produce great work if you don't even know what great work looks like because it was not exposed to you?

0:59:05.0-0:59:14.3

Kristin: And when you talk about great work, you're talking about just those fundamental pieces to help you them like write then maybe or something?

0:59:14.3-1:00:34.9

Asia: Mm-hm, yeah. I only had to write in MLA. So English 203, my first professor, he wanted everything in APA, and I'm like, "What? You want us to use what?" I don't even know what that is. And luckily my boss, [name redacted], she's a Master's Student and they have to use APA. But had I not told her that I didn't know what it was, I would have probably done worse in the class because it was like, I've never even heard of this, let alone had to use it. So what, like, there's a huge disconnect. Whereas, when I took it with DePaulma, he's like, "I'm not grading you. You can—your format can be great and there's no content. I'm concerned that you are able to retain the information and produce it. Not just how you produce it. We can work on the technicalities later." And he would tell me, like, write your paper first however you're comfortable and then we can redo it format-wise later. I need to know that you know what you're talking about first before you're giving me an abstract of bullshit, basically. So that's my take.

1:00:34.9-1:00:37.3

Kristin: Yeah. Super awesome.

1:00:37.3-1:01:27.6

Bianca: You said somethin' real important, the school you went to. That's that foundation piece though. Like I don't like how students are expected to jump from here to here because they worked their butt off and they got to college and they escaped a lot of stereotypes. But now that we're here it's like, um, screw you. Unless you get a diploma or a Mrs. [Huggins] when you're in the fifth grade, like, you know, it sucks that you have to—that they are the outliers. That sucks, you know? And then it's like, like, you know, where I said—you know, you didn't care about her background. But I feel as a teacher I feel like when you are in the classroom, in my head, you're there for all of your students. Not just the general idea of what you thought was going to exist in your classroom, you know?

1:01:27.6-1:01:29.9

Kristin: That's a really good way to phrase that.

1:01:29.9-1:04:30.0

Tracie: But that's what makes that common core piece so problematic is because it's not common and everybody—if there's no way to absolutely ensure that that's happening across the board at every school, then what happens is by the time that they get to college, you have a classroom full of learners who have come to these different bodies of knowledge in different ways. It's difficult for you to know how far they've come, but then there's still that expectation. So you've got that ambiguity. But you are comin' it with there's a standard that you have. And I've heard so many professors here say things like, um, if I see two or three grammatical errors, um, after that third one, I'm not gradin' anymore. Like I'm only puttin' three red marks on there, and then after that third one, you just get an F or you have to redo the paper or somethin' like that. But that's damaging. So then how do you even know, like Asia was sayin', how do you know if the content is there? Because the formatting is so easy and what a lot of professors don't say in English is that, like, when you think of, like, these big writers, these authors that we're reading, they're not perfect at writing. They have editors to do all of that stuff. All they need is the content. And then they can bring it to people who know how to format it, who know how to make it look good or sound good. And then you have a Best Seller on your hands. But that's not what you're communicatin' to students. And then when you get to students who might already be insecure about their backgrounds that they come from and their high schools, then, I mean, you just creatin' a environment where students are automatically expecting to be told what they have handed in isn't right. Students who are not even tryin' because they already know because of past experiences that they don't think that they can do it. And then you have situations that people aren't doin' too good in these English classes. Um, but these are general education classes, so you can't progress on in your degree if you don't pass first-level English. You know, you can be great everywhere, but if you don't have a teacher that's willin' to work with you or see where—I don't even want to call them deficiencies, but see where these disconnects are aligned, then you can work through them. And if you don't have that, but you have a lot of—I've also heard professors here say that, like, students comin' from urban neighborhood were devaluing the English program because they don't know—but that's a hard thing to hear. I would imagine it would be a hard thing to say, but I don't think that it is. I think that they say it and they mean it and they don't want to see certain students in their classrooms because they know that it means work that they're not willing to put and work. It's easier for them to just say, “You should already know this. This is the common core, so why didn't you get that? If you didn't get that, then it's a problem with you.” And that's what we like to call an AEDI, a deficient mindset.

1:04:30.0-1:04:35.0

Kristin: Exactly, and that's what I'm trying to not take with this research. I want to talk about the good.

1:04:35.0-1:04:51.9

Asia: I will say, um, kind of piggy backing off of Tracie, not an excuse, but just to be understanding. Like, my first 203 professor, like, he just was “Go to the writing center, go to the writing center.”

1:04:51.9-1:04:52.9

Kristin: Offloading. Mm-hm.

1:04:52.9-1:06:15.6

Asia: One, you have no idea what this—this student may be coming to you because you're the only person that they have time—not even just talking about extracurricular anything. Some of these students are working 40 hours a week and they literally go from class to class to class to class to work and redo it every day. So maybe they're coming to you because it's like, okay, your office hours align with the time that I have a break. Can you help me and then to just say, "Go to the writing center,"? Like, one you have to make an appointment to go to the writing center, you can't just walk in. Two, they're only open certain hours and they're understaffed. So you cannot just—your solution may not work for everybody's problem. I'm super grateful I graduated right when common core was, like, getting pushed to high school. Because I don't believe in common core at all. But it's just frustrating to see, like, people, unfortunately, I don't know how it is at other institutions. But there aren't a lot of instructors here to instruct and teach. There are a lot of instructors her to finish their degree. So if you're not really, you know...

1:06:15.6-1:06:20.0

Kristin: So you're talking about the gen ed classes, the people that are teaching those are graduate students. Is that what you're saying?

1:06:20.0-1:07:31.3

Asia: That and even above gen- I mean, once you get to like 300 level courses, they're not gen eds for the most part. So I mean, I had a professor who's a research student. And I knew that he could thrive in research, but when it came to teaching, he couldn't teach us. We literally taught the class ourselves and I had to retake the class. In the class now, and we're still, everyone is teaching each other. And that's not fair to him, but that's also not fair to these students that just spent \$1400 of their grant money or whatever to take this class. If that's the case, it could have been an online class. So I think that the university should stray away from like forcing research students to teach. It should be an option. Because now if this person is just on research and they don't know how to—you have to know how to teach to be an instructor. You can't just hold a lecture and then waste people's time.

1:07:31.3-1:07:50.4

Bianca: Or at least let it be their background. If you're going to be a graduate student, let it be—if they're gonna teach, let that be your focus and this be your practice, you know? That way we know whether it's likely that you'll be passionate about this process, and it's not just a stipend or a tuition waiver.

1:07:50.4-1:08:09.6

Kristin: Exactly, the funding model is so difficult. Well like and even when there's people, depending on how many students you have and stuff like that. There's been situations where, you know, I'm getting paid like can't live on this and teaching 50 students writing. And like you want to be able to give.

1:08:09.6-1:11:22.9

Bianca: Yeah. And you said somethin' earlier. You said what can you do? I think teachers need, or, they will benefit from identifying with when a student is anxious. You know, especially in a writing class. Writing is very subjective, and it's also very personal. Even if it's not a reflective paper, I am going to show you my inadequacies when I touch this paper. When I start typing, you're going to see all of my flaws. If I look at you as a teacher, which, of course, I will be because you're my instructor. I know for a fact that I have this perception that you're going to look at this and see just how incompetent I am. Even if it's not true, if I've been told that or shown that my whole life, this paper provokes anxiety. It may exhibit itself in procrastination or just throwing anything on the paper. Because instead of me putting my best work down and you telling me it's not good enough, I prefer to put the worst possible thing and like take that grade myself. You know? So like if teachers could do a better job of, and that sounds means, if teachers could, um, if they could become more aware of emotional and mental health symptoms that their students are going through and not just say go to counseling. You connect with that student and figure out why is it that every time we have a paper due, well why is it that every time I bring up this assignment, you get fidgety, or you start missin' classes, or, you know, you linger a little bit after but you don't say anything to me. Or you have a billion questions! What is going on? What's wrong? You know? You need to sit down with me and talk to me. And when you sit down with your students, look at them. You know, it's not like with those students in particular, it may be more helpful to just take five minutes, ten minutes, and not type an email at the same time. You know? Sit down with them and go through and outline and not make them feel like this is what we do in high school. You know, like, you stuck, I'm a teacher. I teach writing. This happens to everybody, you know? Let's get our thoughts out on to paper. You know, I don't like the Writing Center, particularly because I had a horrible experience. Although I am now a good writer, I used to be a horrible writer, I actually had a psychology teacher tell me one time, you know, "You need to go back to elementary or somethin'." And blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. I was like, back. And I let it go. But I made it my goal to further myself, um, with my writing by, like, taking, going in YouTube. I was so afraid to interact with staff here because of what she said to me. And then, to make it worse, when I did go to the Writing Center, I had these students who were not from here. I think they use British English? And, you know, we spell certain things different. Some things have double Ls, some things have singles. Mine had a double L. I think it was like collections or something, I don't know. First of all, they read my paper out loud, very loudly.

1:11:22.9-1:11:23.4

Kristin: They read it?

1:11:23.4-1:11:26.5

Bianca: Yes. They read. They take your paper and then they read.

1:11:26.5-1:11:27.8

Kristin: Yeah, usually the student reads it.

1:11:27.8-1:12:30.6

Bianca: Yeah, no. They read it out loud. And he was teaching somebody. He read it out loud and, like, his facial expressions were inappropriate. Um, it was a reflective paper, so I didn't

want it read. I would have preferred for it to not be read out loud, because it was personal, you know? And he was like, “Well what do you want from me?” You know, first of all I knew what I wanted, but if a student is told, like her, go to the Writing Center, I don't know what I want. I want you to look at this paper and tell me what's wrong. I can't articulate exactly what I want, but this is the Writing Center, so you should be able to look at this and see glaring errors and educate me on them so I don't have to come here as often, you know? But, like, I feel like there's a lack of respect for students who don't have all that it takes to immediately be successful in English courses. And the way that they are approached, the way they are regarded, the lack of attention they receive, um, is troubling, you know? And it interferes with their ability to grow.

1:12:30.6-1:13:18.6

Kristin: It's really interesting because I'm getting from all three of you, I think, it seems to me that you're less concerned about—or that it's not really an issue of you of what you're expected to do. But it's really all about the, like, getting there, and developing that. Which is interesting because I came into this thinking, like, I wonder if people feel like totally, um, alienated by expectations of like what XYZ is or looks like. But until we can kind of deal with the process, it almost seems like that's an unattainable goal to kind of challenge that structure. That's interesting.

1:13:18.6-1:13:50.8

Bianca: Yeah, I don't think anybody has a problem with achieving a goal. It's the lack of resources available to help us get there. If I'm confused, I can, I want—students want to be able to do what the next student is doin', you know? I want to have the confidence to accomplish any task my peers, can, but I need the resources to do that. And if those resources differ from what this student who attend school in Barrington was able to, then accommodate me because you care.

1:13:50.8-1:14:00.9

Kristin: And it doesn't matter to you that you're being taught standard American English, or whatever that is. Talk to me about that. That is what I wonder.

1:14:00.9-1:14:56.4

Bianca: I mean, it's in the work world. So, like, when you send an office email, it has to be in standard American English. So when I look at the university teaching that, it's preparing us for a world. Like, even if restructure does happen. It needs to happen on the biggest scale, you know, and we ain't there yet. You know? So we have to keep the standard in place in order for us to be successful in society. It's bad enough that we are targeted as women and then as women of color, you know, particularly. So I'm not, you know, um, tryin' to become an even bigger target to try and force my vernacular English on a whole company that has been existin' from the beginnin' of time. It's an issue in itself. But you know, like, that is the least of my worries. Just help the students who need to get to where you expect them to be, and do so in a helpful manner.

1:14:56.4-1:16:17.0

Asia: I will say it's one thing for—to know that your student doesn't understand. But it's another thing to insult the fact that they don't understand. Because it's not their fault, most of the time. Like at the end of they day, in higher education, most people have made the cognizant choice to

be here. Like K-12, that's something that your parents put you through. It's your steppingstone to becoming an adult, whatever. But most of the time, students are here because they want to be here. They're in the class because they know that this is the class they need to take to get to the next level. 9 times out of 10, that student's goal is, "I need to pass this class." So if they're coming to you, it's because, unless, I mean, I know the like last two-week thing, that's different. But if a student has communicated, like, look, I am struggling and I am trying but this is just not working, some students don't have certain grammar skills. That doesn't mean that they're choosing not to, that just means that they don't have them. So don't insult the fact that I don't—well not me but just in general, I've seen it happen. Don't insult the fact that it's not there, just help them get to it.

1:16:17.0-1:19:10.9

Tracie: And realize that, like, the way that they're speaking, the dialect and the word choices, or their lexicon, the language that they're pullin' from. That's real for them. That's real in their communities. That communicates and context is there for so many different people that they can talk to. And just because it doesn't fit in in the academic environment doesn't mean that it's invalid. It doesn't mean that it's wrong. I personally don't have a problem with standardized English. I have a problem with the naming of it as Standard. Because who's standard? Now we're getting into some other things that, to me, really calls, like, the standardization of language. And it kind of even harkens back to, like, education as a hegemonic institution overall. We're gettin' into some, like, real problems with like who controls what and then who is able to normalize what. And then you have a whole group of students. And this isn't just black students. We're talkin' about, like, students who come from, like, predominately from homes where English is not even the first language. You have all of this power then when you're standardizing or normalizing this one way of communicating, um. It sets up a lot of barriers for everybody who does not acknowledge that as normal in their communities or in their immediate homes. And then the other thing is that a lot of these people sit behind these desks and write these emails, they don't even always communicate in standard English. I'm sure that they're like, ya'll, or somethin'. It might not look the same, but dialects are what's common. The common—the standardized English, it is common in a way. It's common in like certain areas. But it's like, we can't pretend like it's the only way to talk and then everybody who doesn't do it, like that is wrong. And, um, there's this YouTube video. I can't even remember the name of it now. But it's a documentary. And as a part of the documentary, they, um, talk, they are at this school in, I want to say in Newport Beach, Virginia? I think they're somewhere in Virginia. But this school treats Standardized English, they call it, "Talking Green." And then you have a green zone. Because they associate it with making money. With corporate America. So it's not like, "Um, well don't talk that outside talk here." It's like, hey, you know that you're in the green zone. We're talkin' green right now. So that no body has to feel like when they go out. So when you go out and you're in your community, you're not speakin' that bad English. You're just not talkin' green. And there's no need to because you're just chillin' out with your friends or your family. You don't have to put that on. But I think that the name with it, it has somethin' to do with code switching.

1:19:10.9-1:19:13.9

Kristin: If you think of it, will you email it to me, the documentary?

1:19:13.9-1:19:24.7

Tracie: Yeah. Actually I have it. I have a whole—I will—I have a whole presentation that I put together for a class for Doctor Gyant, and it's about AAVE, um, and she lets me

1:19:24.7-1:19:25.0

Bianca: Can I get that too?

1:19:25.0-1:21:47.1

Tracie: Yeah. And it's a part of—I have it embedded. I have this documentary embedded. Um, but I just pull from like certain areas of it. Because they do a lot with like, um, music too. And I think that if you want a way to open up your classroom, you have to use different mediums. And I think that music is one of the easiest and most accessible mediums because across the board, like, popular music, no matter what you look like or how you identify, you might like that music. And that music is not always usin' standardized English. But somehow, it's a money language, right? When you go and you're rappin' this way and you're usin' these colloquialisms or whatever. But you're makin' all of this money from doin' it. Or somebody's makin' money. The record execs. Somebody is makin' money off of it. So how can you open it up? One of the most influential, um, experiences that I had in a classroom was in Community College in a Black Women in Fiction Class. And we were reading, I think it was *The Street* by Ann Petry. It was either that or it might have been Toni Morrison's *Jazz*. Whatever, there was a lot of, um, they wrote in the dialect. In there the author used, like, the dialect. So a lot of the students were like, oh I have problems readin' this because they were just usin' bad grammar, like, the whole time. And she stopped the class dead. And she—we had a whole conversation about dialects and how every person's dialect, however you're used to talkin' from where you come from, that's valid. And don't even let anybody invalidate that for you. Don't ever let anybody take that from you. Don't ever feel like you have to give that up. And then that like kind of parlayed into code switching. But that's a real thing. Like, I needed to hear that. Because before then it was just like, yeah, they were usin' that bad English. And I get it as a creative, as a writer. I think that that's really cool that infuse into your novel, your novella, your short story, your whatever. That people are literally, that I am reading the text exactly like they might have been speaking it. But in my mind, still, that's bad English. No, it's not. It's just a dialectical variation. You have to be able to respect that. So yeah, I just like, let's not call it standardized English, because that's not.

1:21:47.1-1:23:13.8

Bianca: You keep sayin' something that that's triggering me. Because I've heard it before, bad English. That is so demonizing. Like, bad? So what is yours? Good? You know? Like what's crazy is you brought up rap. Everybody consider their kind of rap, but then when we talk in a particular setting, we're frowned upon. And like you said, this very versed, the way it's, you know, spoken, makes billions, you know? It is a money language. And it's funny because, in particular, because I can't speak to other races, black people like we are often imitated and people want to talk like us, dress like us, look like us, and act like us. But we can't be us. That's weird to me. Not even in the classroom, you know? Just bad English. Oh. And I heard that growin' up from teachers. Like, you know, that's not good English. So what is? Yours? You know, like, I just, and I've never, when I moved to the suburbs, even though I heard a lot of young white kids talking, um, in their, I guess their dialect, you know? It wasn't labeled as bad English.

1:23:13.8-1:23:17.4

Kristin: It's the norm.

1:23:17.4-1:23:51.3

Bianca: Yeah. It's like, you know, it's mainstream society. You know? It's like—and then they're like why, what are you sayin'? You know, that's crazy. I don't like this study anymore. I'm kidding! I'm just getting my feelers, that's all. It's just, it's triggering a lot of emotions. I'm glad though, because that means it's something that needs to be talked about because I'm pretty sure I'm not unique in, um, feeling this way.

1:23:51.3-1:25:46.8

Kristin: Oh no! And you're not, like, not only people of color feel this way. That's the thing. Like, there are a lot of us white people who, like, in my field, who want to do this and we're, like, trying to figure out, like, how. And I recognize—and that's the thing that's so hard is like I don't want to teach this Standard English. But at the same time, like, there's a whole debate about this. There's this lady who wrote a book, Lisa Delpit, called the—and it's all about the Culture of Power is what she calls it. And rewriting, teaching people the Money Language, that's what she was talking about basically. And that's a massive, like divide in the field. And it's not binary. There's like, a lot of different perspectives on it. But what are we doing when we teach students this is how you need to write. So it's interesting to hear from students' perspectives and then like kind of witness what's happening here in The Black Cultural Center. I and I wish I could have like sat in on some Writing Center Sessions here. But they weren't done differently, it sounds like? It was just a transplant from the Writing Center? So it wasn't—it could be really cool though, if they had like a culturally driven Writing Center Appointments. But no, yeah, there's a lot of people trying to do this work. And it's just how? I've got to send to you, and if you want them too, I know I need to send them to you because you're in my field. Um, and if you have the time and feel like looking at them, I'd love to send you some sources on some of the stuff you have to read. Like there's some really interesting scholarship by some Black scholars in my field. One is called Vernacular Insurrections which I just love that title. And this one in like code meshes. So she writes, like, she weaves in and out of her like home vernacular and her academic vernacular, whatever. But it's like, all of it's brilliant and beautiful.

1:25:46.8-1:25:52.1

Bianca: It sounds like a lot of Black novels. They go in and out.

1:25:52.1-1:26:34.0

Kristin: Yeah. There's scholarship that's doing that now. So that's really neat to see. Um, uh, and there's a book in linguistics about, I'll send you an email about, like, with some of these titles, like, some things that I think you'd be really interested in reading. I don't even know what ethnicity this woman is or what race either. Um, Rosina Lippi-Green. She writes a book about, um, I think it's called Other People's—no that's Delpit. I can't remember. It's about language and ideology basically and how, what you guys were talking about, dialects and power and how all that's connected. And she busts all of that up.

1:26:34.0-1:27:32.2

Tracie: That's so necessarily. I'm getting into language politics now. And, like, language, language rules a lot. Language governs a lot. And the way that things are written and how they are written out, they just really set up who has access to the table and, uh, who basically better not even try. And, um, and whether you can understand them. And then language has a feel too. Like it has a tone. So like even if you don't understand, like, those big words. Which is off-putting in and of itself because I feel like if you don't understand, it's just too many words, it's too much inaccessible language. You're just gonna be turned off. You're not gonna, oh, let me just sit here with a dictionary and every other word, I'll just. Because that's difficult. Exactly. You've lost what's even bein' said in the document because you have to keep referring back to the dictionary and look up what those words mean. Yeah man, language politics.

1:27:32.2-1:27:51.7

Bianca: That's boring. Like when you, um, when that happens it get very boring. You lose, uh, your motivation. The document loses intrigue. You're like, what is going on here? You used, like, eugh. I agree.

1:27:51.7-1:27:58.7

Kristin: Yeah, and people who teach writing don't actually want that. Or not all people.

1:27:58.7-1:28:51.3

Bianca: You shouldn't feel like you're reading a research paper all the time. You know? Like they teach you how to read research documents. Every article of writing should not feel, especially in a 102 class. Like, this, you should not be doing that indefinitely. And if it, like, be creative and like break it down in layman's terms. You know, use the verbiage that your students are usin'. So, okay, this article says this. This is basically what this person is saying. And like normalize it. Like I know this is a lot. They teach us how to do this. I had to get through a whole—like B-. A lot of people are so worried about, um being perceived as this intellectual guide. Like are you there for you or the students?

1:28:51.3-1:31:37.6

Tracie: I don't think it's really set up in, uh, graduate school. From what I'm learning, um, I think that it's kind of set up that you're there for you. How much can you read and retain and then start to have these ideas about how like you can redirect what somebody already thought about in the field. And then you're not writing for people you imagine are your students. You're writing for other people that are already in that field. The problem is then that scholarship then cycles back around and it comes back to the classroom and now you're giving it to your students. But your students haven't made the choice that this is what I want to do in the field. They haven't signed on, like, this is what I'm passionate about. A lot of students, especially, all students in the 103, 102, 101, they did it because they were told to be there. It's a general education class. Exactly. So you have to be careful about the things that you—that you read. In terms of, like, scholarship and criticism. And I think that there could be some things that are said for like the novels. If you're able to pick novels, what literary works you're actually reading and how can you make those accessible, um, in terms of like the themes and concepts that are bein' explored, how can that be accessible to your students today? Can you relate it or compare it to somethin' that's happenin' that might affect them in their real life everyday situations or

currently politically or somethin' like that or socially. Um, and I think that it's really hard to do that with like, um, a Shakespeare. I think it's really hard to do that with Othello or Midsummer Night's Dream. Or whatever else they're making students read these days. Which half of that stuff, I didn't even read in high school so I come here like, and everybody else is talkin' about it. Everybody knows about the Iliad and I'm like, never heard of it. Guess I'll check out mentally for this class. But you can count here by my body! But it's a lot. Too about the Writing Center. When I first came here, that's where I worked. I worked at the Writing Center for my undergrad. And, um, when Black students would come in, I think they would just pick. So like if you make an appointment over the phone, or I think they even have it where you can make it online. You don't really know who you're workin' with. But, um, from like the first time that they would have me, they would be like, "I'm comin' back to you. I'm comin' back to you." And I got that a lot from the Black students and from the ESL students. And, uh, there were two Tracie's that were there. And people would literally request "Black Tracie." They wanted to work with "Black Tracie."

1:31:37.6-1:33:00.0

Bianca: I would have looked for you too. You know what? Because I genuinely wanted to learn. And like now, the biggest compliment that I have gotten, as a graduate student. I wrote a paper. A personal theories paper. And my professor got back to me. And he is published like several times over. And he said, "You write beautifully. If you're interested, I would love to somehow help you get it published." I was like yeah! That girl did her thing. But it took me isolating myself. And a lot of tears about being embarrassed. The fact that I couldn't come to—I tell all my students. I think Asia heard me say this tons of times. We have—you have access to resources to succeed. And then I was put in a position to show them that not all of us do. You know? Not all of us do. Um, for professors to crush you like that. For resources that are supposed—that I pay for. You know? To treat me like people in those positions, to treat me that way and have me isolated on my own, um, on YouTube for like 20 hours a day tryin' to get better. Which worked. That was unnecessary. I'm glad I did it.

1:33:00.0-1:33:03.2

Kristin: You used YouTube to learn how to write?

1:33:03.2-1:34:44.5

Bianca: Uh-huh. Yes. Yes. And I went all the way back. I had to channel Miss [Huggins]. And I had to find people on YouTube whose teaching styles matched with my learning styles, you know? And I was able to go through different lessons. And I received that compliment not once, but twice. And I was like, "Okay. Alright." And he was like, "I was waiting to see what you were talkin' about." And I was like, "Hey now!" You know. And I was just very, very, very proud. But I definitely would have looked for somebody who you probably made them feel accepted. And I think that's a lot of people of color have, specifically Black people, in my opinion. Because we've been treated so—when you're treated in a way or you deal with a certain amount of trauma, where you view it as trauma or not, you learn compassion, you know? And when you learn compassion, you can look at people at give compassion. And everybody needs that. Whether they want to admit it or not. Everybody needs somebody to care. Especially when they're at a vulnerable point in their life. And that's something I feel like is a unique gift despite all the trouble that a lot of Black people go through in this country. We have the gift of

compassion. We can look at you and be like, “I’m not gonna judge you because I know how that shit feel.” I’m not gonna talk about you. You know, I’m not gonna know, I’m not gonna lead you in the wrong direction. We just open. I don’t know. We smile. We somebody hurting because it’s like I know that language. I know that look. You know? I’m just sayin’. And then it opens you up.

1:34:44.5-1:35:29.5

Kristin: What you just said, I think, really encapsulates my experiences here, like, coming to the [Black culture center] as a white person. Because I was terrified at first. And I have never felt more accepted. More, like, loved. I don’t know how else to explain it. Like welcomed. I never was aware of my race. Like, or my non-race, or whatever. Um, there were never any assumptions. At least, if they were, they were communicated to me in any sort of a way. And that has struck me more than anything else since I started doing this research. Just coming into this space. And what you just said I felt is totally fair.

1:35:29.5-1:37:51.9

Bianca: I’m glad you had a positive experience. It’s funny that you say that because I said something to you earlier that I want to share. I told you I came from, um, I came from [a public housing project known for extreme poverty and organized crime]. I’m very proud of where I come from because I didn’t ask to be born there but I did everything in my power to not become a stereotype, you know? And I worked really, really hard to get to where I am, you know, and my environment made me the person that I Am which as resilient, beautiful, Black woman. You know, I wasn’t aware that I was a Black—I always knew I was a woman. But, um, I won’t say always, you know. Whole bunch of society stuff goes into that but whatever. I didn’t know I was black until I got around white people. Because when I grew up over there, I was just Bianca. You know, like, and I don’t even think it’s because we all looked alike. You know, it was because, you know, we treated each other as equals. And then when I entered mainstream society, I became a black girl, and I was treated as such. You know, that’s when my race became aware to me, and it was not a positive recognition, you know? It, like, I was taught in a way, um, I was, it was basically, I was treated in a way where I understood my place in society. Like you understand what I mean. Like I was confident in where I came from because I was an equal. And then, that boisterousness, that confidence was a little bit too much to take by my white peers. So they tried to do their due diligence and knock me down to size. You know, you don’t belong here. You know? And this is who you are in mainstream society. And they were taught that by their parents. Like I had horrible experiences with people in mainstream society. I actually have this conflict internally with you know the city being so bad and mainstream society bein’ great. It’s not great. It just has a lot of resources. But it sucks for a person of color. It’s a horrible place for a person of color. We have access to a lot of resources, but we are also bullied on a daily basis. You know? So it’s like, it was—that transition was really hard, but that’s where I learned about being Black.

1:37:51.9-1:38:47.5

Kristin: There was a woman that said like, uh, a talk, there was a panel. I’m at UW-Milwaukee right now. And um they did like a panel on Navigating Academia while Black. And one of the women there was not even in academia. But she was talking about, um, her kids. And she explicitly sends them to Milwaukee public schools even though she lives in the wealthier, white

area of town because she doesn't want them, like, exposed to the violence of white spaces. And I think about that, and that's actually, like, part of the work that I'm wanting to like look at here. It's like because this place is in many ways violent. I don't have to tell you guys this. And, yeah, the role of this place. It blows my mind that people don't know about it. Because this building. You can tell just walking into it that like there's this safety or something.

1:38:47.5-1:39:10.7

Bianca: It has the potential to be great. It has the potential to be amazing but it's a lot of foundational fundamental stuff that has to be worked on. You know within ourselves, you know, accountability is everything you know? But also on a larger scale, you know.

Focus Group B Transcript

File Name: Focus Group B.mp4

File Length: 00:57:55

SPEAKERS

Victor

Curtis

Angel

Saniya

Destiny

FULL TRANSCRIPT (with timecode)

0:00:27.6-0:02:17.4

Kristin: I'm going to ask questions of the whole group. You don't have to all answer. So if you don't want to say something, if you don't have anything to say, don't. But if you want to, if you have something you want to like add to something that somebody else says, or if you want to ask them a question, feel free to do that too. And if at any point you don't want to be part of the study anymore, you're totally welcome to not be. Another thing is while we're talking, if something comes up—like if you have thoughts that come up or questions or anything like that or an idea or an image comes to your mind and you want to jot that down, do. And I'll collect those at the end. Any paper, but you can do it on the questions paper too, if you just have a thought. I'll use that to analyze in case you didn't get a chance to say something that you wanted to say. Alright. So the first question I just want to find out to get sort of a feel for your involvement here in the [Black culture center] is how you are involved and what kinds of support do you feel that this Center offers for you for other students. I'm fully aware of and I've researched all of the things that the Center provides. But I want to know what you've found the most useful and what matters the most to you. [...] And any of you can talk about that. [...] You do not have to raise your hand. I know I'm sitting up here, but I want it to feel like a circle. Just make sure I can hear you.

0:02:17.4-0:02:43.8

Victor: Okay. I'm pretty involved in the [Black culture center]. I feel like it offers a lot to the Black community on campus. It forms a lot of orgs such like BSU and BMF, organizations I'm in. Um, like, organizations and advisors works together.

0:02:43.8-0:02:53.5

Kristin: Organizations what? Sorry. Okay.

0:02:53.5-0:03:13.7

Victor: I know this Center is really like a place that for years the Black [Midwestern U.] community can come here and hang out and just chill, have fun with each other. It gives us a place like home, you could say that.

0:03:13.7-0:03:19.4

Kristin: Do you tend to come and just kind of hang out? Do you feel like it's conducive to that space?

0:03:19.4-0:03:33.6

Victor: Well my schedule's actually like, very, like, busy. So I would come [unintelligible] fly as I want to. But when I am friends would come down here to see me and all that stuff, so yeah.

0:03:33.6-0:03:37.8

Kristin: Kind of knowing it's there is kind of nice?

0:03:37.8-0:05:23.7

Curtis: I been working here at the Center for about four years. I used to be here all the time. I got a Black Studies Minor. I been in multiple organizations. I did [unintelligible] work for BMI. I been with S-Plan for like a couple years. Pretty much a lot of different organizations. Like [unintelligible]. All those people you know those staff, those are like my family. I'm only here at night just cause I'm in class all the time but you know it's just like you know he said. It's like my home away from home. You know. [Unintelligible] so it's not many places where we feel, I guess, you know, uh, recognized, or, you know, we have a place where we can just come and just be. So you know for me you know when I'm workin' I'm always like at uh music, you know, some type of static where people come in and it's a life already. You know forget what's goin' on out there. And I remember you know in here, I came here in 2013 you know uh when I started my under degrees it was a lot of you know racially, you know, tension on campus still. A lot of times when stuff would happen people would just come the Center and it would be like our refuge. You know I went to the Million Man March, you know, with the Center you know those types of memories you know. You know this is home for me you know. So you know I'm like graduating, and I was blessed to be in charge of the decision making and all that you know because I want to represent the Center you know.

0:05:23.7-0:05:26.1

Kristin: Cool. Did you say you have something you wanted to add? Yeah. Go ahead.

0:05:26.1-0:06:19.7

Victor: Alright I actually just came back from a um a black male summit that was funded um funded by the Center. We went to South Carolina. We met everybody from CEOs to authors. It was at Clemson University. And they paid for everything. They paid for our food. My flight up. My flight there. The motel was paid. And it was a Hilton. All that stuff. Um, what else? Basic like the phones. They paid for like [unintelligible] too. And like they just funded a lot stuff. I just came home from a funded trip I just came from.

0:06:19.7-0:06:36.6

Kristin: One thing I'm getting, I totally can see this, is that it sounds like you feel really taken care of like financially. That they're like putting the money behind it. So it's not only like it gets you a place but also, it's that kind of support for opportunities?

0:06:36.6-0:07:37.7

Curtis: Yeah, it's an academic resource and it's a uh you know it's uh a resource center for students. So a secondary resource. So you have the academic side where you have the minor, you know, which offers you know other perspective, adding new things cause you know, it's just supposed to be like an [unintelligible], you know, view of understanding of how things work uh through that. But you also got the student support side where you know you got people who understand that you know some of these staff you know other people who understand your situation. So they also may understand how to deal with it because they've been in those situations, so they will make sure you got the money. They will make sure you know you get the you know you get involved everything that you need that can help you, you know, ascend or to be more involved or whatever, you know, the pattern. So they're able to fill those needs with other staff who understand.

0:07:37.7-0:07:43.1

Kristin: Anybody else have anything they wanted to talk about about the Center?

0:07:43.1-0:10:12.3

Angel: Well of course I take um classes here um so, the classes that I take, they're not just like...just classes that talk about what's happening in society. Like it gives you a rundown of stuff like from the past until now. So it's like, it helps me to basically learn more about myself because like he said li- or not living—no, living in a predominantly white area and going to a predominantly white school, you're not going to get that. And like even you went to, like I went to a predominantly black school or whatever but they didn't have that type of history like a course through history what we learned was slavery. I heard every year [unintelligible] I don't need to hear it anymore. But like here it's like I learn more about like ancient, ancient times where, you know, certain black people build this. There are different black people, Black people in different countries or whatever but if you don't see that or you don't hear that of course the media's not gonna tell you that. So it's like it give me basically like that—that extra education that I *need* that I know I'm not gonna get probably from anywhere else. Um, and it makes sure that they, I feel like they make sure that they put good professors here to teach us that information that we do need um so that we have that information for ourself and so that we can give that information out into the world as well. Um, and as far as like I go to something like the BSU mass meetings that we have and those are typically like about stuff that's happenin' around campus. And like sometimes you know what's going on around campus as far as like certain issues that might arise, or whatever. And sometimes you don't. So like goin' to those again is like helping you to stay connected to the community um [Midwestern U.] whether it's negative *or* positive. So that's a good attribute that they have as far as like BSU, um, organization. And then like everyone else say it's a place for us to come like because it's the [Black culture center] so of course like *other* people will come, but we know that it's here for African American Students or whatever. Just like they have the Latino Resource and then the uh LGBT uh their resource. Like everybody kind of have their own resource so they can feel welcome even though

this is a predominately white institution so. It's like it can give you a sense of like connectivity or whatever. So I get that from here and the Chance Building—well, the Chance Program. It's the admission building, but it's the Chance Program.

0:10:12.3-0:10:28.2

Kristin: So what do you see as different, I guess? I'm glad that you brought up, CHANCE, because I'm curious, in terms of the support they offer you there and the support that's here, like, how do you see them as doing similar things and different things? Or how have they influenced you differently?

0:10:28.2-0:12:21.0

Angel: So I would say so it's like I can come here to get advice in school. But I also can come here to get advice in life as well. So like I can go talk to Marcus Langston and be like, "well I'm taking this class," or that's the first thing he'll ask is, "So how classes lookin'?" And it's like you have those teachers that care about you. Because you—of course you'll sit in the lecture hall with probably like 400 other students or whatever or maybe a small area [unintelligible] with 30, 40 students. They don't really know you, they're not really tryin' to get to know you unless you know you're all in their face askin' about your grade and stuff like that. That's the only way they kinda get to know you. Um so it's like they keep up with you throughout your whole, you know, um, time that you're here to make sure that you're doin' good, see what you need help with, you know, kind of get you connection. Like I had one time where it was a semester that I had literally messed up completely. But from me goin' to talk to one of the Chance counselors, um, just I was waitin' in his office just talkin' to him in general, he was able to talk to my teacher, who actually happened to my advisor for the org that *I'm* in. So I talked to her as well. But you know with them havin' that connection she was able to you know to understand a lot more I guess comin' from them. And they gave me a chance to like kind of redo some of the work that I messed up on or missed or whatever. And it was able for me to get a better grade or whatever. So it was kind of like uh I guess a family community in a sense. Cause you know most of the black administrators there, they know each other, and they have those conversations. So it's kind of like they're gonna know like if like, they talk about one student, "Oh I had that student. Yeah she going through this," and they're like "Oh I didn't know that." And then you know they could probably come in and talk to you and stuff like that. It's just like it's like a caring environment basically. Like even though they're administrators and teachers, they're not those administrators and teachers that just give you a grade and let you be on your way or whatever, so.

0:12:21.0-0:12:22.2

Kristin: Are you talking about Chance or are you talking about both places?

0:12:22.2-0:12:27.0

Angel: Both. Yeah. Cause Marcus Langston was in here...

0:12:27.0-0:12:27.2

Kristin: Is he also a counselor?

0:12:27.2-0:12:37.3

Angel: No he's not. So he's in here [unintelligible] Black Studies but I also go to the Chance Building and talk to um well Chris who's over here. Um.

0:12:37.3-0:12:40.5

Kristin: Okay. So that's what I was going to say. I thought there was somebody here.

0:12:40.5-0:12:52.1

Angel: Yeah. He moved over here but I also talked to the others like we got assigned um a counselor when we first get here. But it's like you make other bonds you just make those other bonds. So I talk to other Chance counselors as well so.

0:12:53.7-0:13:03.9

Kristin: So how are they different then? The support that you get there and the support that you get here? Like do they focus on different things or do they have different methods?

0:13:03.9-0:13:21.5

Angel: I don't see a difference personally, probably because I go for just the same thing, just someone to talk to and stuff like that. Of course your Chance counselors are helping you through your first year that you're here. Cause most of the time you're takin' Chance classes.

0:13:21.5-0:13:23.2

Kristin: Just the first year really?

0:13:23.2-0:14:11.5

Angel: Yeah so, I just found out like I guess after that first year, then they don't really have to deal with you. Like if you come back, then you come back. And that's what I've been doin'. Like, um, so, that's why like I built those relationships or whatever, just to have, but—yeah, I don't really see a difference. Because like I go to anybody I'm pretty sure they'll give me a letter of recommendation, which I got from [name] and the [unintelligible]. So I don't see a difference, which is a good thing. Because they're both giving basically that support that I would make sure that, you know, students will need or whatever. I don't see a difference technically. I mean the organization, 'course there's organizations here um in the [Black culture center] but it's still like to uplift the black community basically.

0:14:11.5-0:14:17.5

Kristin: Are the, um, the Chance counselors also black or are they of multiple different ethnicities?

0:14:17.5-0:15:18.8

Angel: It's mixed. They have, like, they have some black, um, they have I think mostly black actually. Um I know one lady—yeah, it's kind of it's kind of mixed basically, yeah. It's not just all, um, black administrators, it's fairly mixed around. They have other, um, what are they called? Resources there. As far as like tutoring, stuff like that. So um yeah, it's like, it give you that extra help that you need. Um, because they know, like, certain classes that you might take, like, as a math class for Chance, they have Math 110 and some students probably get it or

probably don't get it, but they have a tutor there for you. Um they have some for chemistry as well. So it's like, it's a lot of resources basically that you can come to for, in both of those buildings as far as the [Black culture center] and Chance, um, the Chance Program.

0:15:18.8-0:16:27.4

Kristin: Okay. Does anybody else? Um I kind of want to come back to one thing you said Angel because it goes into the second question. So I want to hear about your experiences with learning something that's really stuck with you. So you mentioned something in school here—well, not something in particular, I was wondering if you could maybe give an example. Um, you were talking about a class where you, or—I don't know if you said a class, but you learned about the history. And then you also—so not only a history that goes back really far, but also, um, looking at things at more nuanced ways. So not like reducing an entire group of people to like *a* race. But like you're looking at varieties of black people and that sort of thing. Um, can you talk to me a little bit about that class or the professor, instructor, whatever, like, what that experience was like and what about it kind of *stuck* with you? Like, maybe the *ways* of teaching? Anything that comes to mind.

0:16:27.4-0:17:39.5

Angel: So that professor was Marcus Langston. The way he taught it, it didn't seem like “alright we're here for class”—and that class is two hours actually. So it was a night class. Typically those run from 6 to like 8:40 or whatever. So you know around that time don't nobody really want to come to class or you know they're tired from the rest of the day. But like the way he set up like the way that he *is*, he's gonna make sure that we get that information. So if like—it doesn't seem like “well, okay, here go the lectures. Here go, you know, write this, write that out.” It's more like a, you know, like there's like a open conversation. He might show a video, talk about that video. Um, we did have readings and stuff like that. And the readings were based on like being—I think a book for that semester was like being a black student at a PWI so that you can learn how to you know, get through it or whatever. Um and then the video that was showed for me to see like the different variety of black people was, um, Hidden Colors. Hidden...?

0:17:39.5-0:17:41.1

Victor: Yeah Hidden Colors

0:17:41.1-0:17:41.1

Kristin: Hidden Colors?

0:17:41.1-0:19:20.6

Angel: Yeah that's, uh, that's the astronaut with a black baby. But Hidden Colors, it's different volumes to that. So, and it lasts—it's like a documentary. But there different videos—I think, like, four or five maybe? Yeah. So he would show, um, sometimes we'd have like a, a movie day or whatever, but basically all the information on there is showing you, like, ancient history about black people and the affects that they had on the world, um, how they contributed of course and stuff like that like that we don't learn. Like we'll just see like this person invented this. And typically it's a white person, so, um, they just show how they basically, you know, added to that and stuff like that. And I feel like that's so [unintelligible] because it wasn't just a, “here go some

notes, here go a lecture,” stuff like that. It’s like he made sure that we actually had a conversation about it so that we all could see from different perspectives about how we see, you know, certain views of the world. And I think one time he asked us like what are we? It was like Black, African American, uh, Afro American, stuff like that. And I’m just lookin’, like, “I’ve never been asked this question before.” So that made me think more about you know uh bein’ black, like it’s different ways that you can describe yourself or whatever. So his class like really stuck with me. And then I just got out of one class, uh—actually I like the way that, uh, Mark taught his class as well. And I was shocked. And that might sound like rude. But he’s a white person...

0:19:20.6-0:19:24.5

Kristin: No I mean he’s a white guy teaching black studies. I realize I’m a white person doin’ this research? Right?

0:19:24.5-0:21:19.8

Angel: Exactly. And, um, ‘cause I would think, like, you know most [unintelligible] would probably try to throw in their perspective or, you know, the way that they are, but I can like learn, get to know him more. It’s like, okay, he’s here, you know, for us. And like all the information he gave us was still information that we probably didn’t even know about the way that black people are treated and stuff like that. And it’s like he was more, um, what is it? Like liberal, I guess. Like he was here *for* black people. Um because all the information—I’m tryin to figure out like what it was. Like I didn’t know about [unintelligible] until he talked, um, till he talked about it in a lecture—like, it’s still a lecture set up, he’s still lecture set up, but he made sure that he would tell you to like, for you to understand like, “oh wow I didn’t even know about that. And now, you know, we know about that.” Um, so I liked his class. And then Passion, um, she’s actually *was* a Chance counselor, now she’s a different, um, she’s in a nursing program now. But her class is based on black families, and within that she talked about almost everything in society—like to poverty, to the parenting styles that uh African Americans, you know, the way that they bring their kids up, the way that how marriage can help in the way that we succeed in life. And like it was just [unintelligible], it went from everything, but it never was like, “oh you just all over the place.” It always tied back to the black family. And everything, almost everything in her class helpin’ me too. So it’s like the way that they’re teaching us, like I said, they put professors in here that actually make sure that you gain that knowledge or whatever that you need.

0:21:19.8-0:21:49.0

Kristin: So how are they, um, and I’d like to hear from anybody on this, like assessing your knowledge. Or like, what is it? So you have these conversations. So then, like, what do they have you produce or do?—I hate those words. They’re very capitalist—but like, what do they, have—are you taking tests or something? Or are you writing things? Or are you like presenting or like acting things out, like performing things?

0:21:49.0-0:22:52.0

Saniya: I just want to add to what she about, um, the class in here with Paul, the Racism in American Culture. That’s like my first class talking about, like, race and racism or anything, and like—I felt the same way, like, we have a white teacher teaching us about racism and I’m like, “Okay, you know, like, let’s see what this is about.” And once the class really got goin’ and

started to get, like—I saw the bigger picture. Like, he didn't have any bias towards the topic that he was teachin' us about. Like—it's like he knew that he was a white man teaching a class full of African American Students about racism in America. But he didn't let that, like, affect the way he taught the class. And I feel like all the information that I took from this class, it's like really beneficial to me because some of the stuff, I never really knew before we got in here. And, um, the last part that you just asked about, what did we—what did you say? What did we what?

0:22:52.0-0:22:56.0

Kristin: Like what did they have you do, like to turn in or whatever?

0:22:56.0-0:24:12.8

Saniya: So for this class, particularly, we um, took like quizzes and stuff. Like he would give us something on Blackboard and say, “Hey, go read this, and then tomorrow it's gonna be a quiz with like two questions and you need to be able to answer the questions, like a short essay or somethin like that. And then we just recently did a project for this class. It was a, um, documentary pitch. And he gave us, like, he gave everybody a group, and we had to pick, like, different topics within our group and um, basically we had to get up in front of the class and explain to them like the historical context of our subject, why it was important for us to research it, and um, like, who were the key people involved in the topic and stuff like that. And um, the topic that my group chose was racism in education. And it was, like, such a coincidence, you know, because we are experiencing stuff like that. So it was really cool that we, like, *did* a project like that. 'Cause it gave us an opportunity to like put *our* thoughts out there and, like, make it known that we, you know, care about this type of stuff and, like, that we're learning something in here and that it's helping us to become better [unintelligible].

0:24:12.8-0:24:20.1

Kristin: So did you, was it, like, do you have anything? Like could you share that with me—like, the project?

0:24:20.1-0:24:40.8

Saniya: Um we made a slideshow. We were in the same group, me and her and, like, a couple other people. We made a slideshow and wrote down like, notecards and stuff of how we'd say it. But we didn't really have, like, anything written down. It was just like a slideshow, it just had some pictures on it. But we really, like, spoke from...yeah.

0:24:40.8-0:24:54.6

Kristin: Okay. Do you think, maybe could you send me your slideshow and just kinda, like, write that out? Like—I'll send you an email after—like, write out—when I say “write that out” I mean, tell me what you just told me now about how you just kinda spoke from—like you had talking points it sounds like?

0:24:54.6-0:25:10.4

Saniya: Yeah. We had all—we had different slides and stuff like that. And whatever we talked about, basically we just prepared for what we were going to say ourselves. Like, I had note cards, and some people had, like, a sheet of paper, and just talking...

0:25:10.4-0:25:16.7

Kristin: Yeah, I would love to, like if you have the notecards still that would be—

0:25:16.7-0:25:16.9

Saniya: I think I have the notecards.

0:25:16.9-0:25:23.9

Kristin: It would be helpful for me to see even, like, what you're doing, like, how you're processing the information and preparing it to deliver. Does that make sense?

0:25:23.9-0:25:28.3

Angel: Do you want the project or notecards?

0:25:28.3-0:25:30.9

Kristin: Yes. Both.

0:25:30.9-0:25:32.8

Saniya: I can show you the project.

0:25:32.8-0:25:49.3

Kristin: I don't need them right now, but like, in an email or something? I'll give you my email address. If that's cool with you guys. And yours too [speaking to someone else]—like, if you have notes or something...

Angel: Yeah we have—it's the same thing.

Kristin: But you don't have a recording of it or anything? He should have recorded those.

0:25:49.3-0:25:54.3

Saniya: It was like, everybody's presentation was, like, 30 minutes long, so like, that would—

0:25:54.3-0:26:48.8

Kristin: Yeah. But no, that's really interesting. So yeah, so you probably understand some of the backdrop—and probably more than I do, because I'm not in Education specifically, but—about the reasons for the project that *I'm* doing. Um, what was I going to ask? Oh. Okay. So you both said something that I want some clarification on. So Saniya you said Paul didn't have bias toward the topic, and he didn't let his whiteness affect the way he taught the class. And then—and I'll come back to that—and then, Angel, you said that Paul didn't throw in his perspective. So I really am curious, like, what you expected. Or like what you're used to. Like what kinds of experiences, because—shoot straight with me, because, like [unintelligible]...

0:26:48.8-0:27:16.5

Saniya: Well in high school I would have white teachers, you know, and it's black history month or whatever. And we'd start talking about slavery, and then it's like, "Oh yeah, this happened, but you guys know that already." It's like, they don't really care *about* it, and they don't really,

like, share their personal experiences, or like—you know, like, stuff that they have experienced that they know is *wrong*, but they won't let you know that, but in this class...

0:27:16.5-0:27:20.5

Kristin: Oh, so it's like an erasure kind of?

0:27:20.5-0:28:10.0

Saniya: It's just, like—it's like, hidden, like it's underneath them, like, they're not putting it out, like, wearing it on themselves. But for him, it was like—he gave us an example of, um, when he was young, uh, or something like that, somebody that he used to drive in a car with or something, uh, they saw a black man walkin' by, and they would, like, lock their doors. But everybody in the class was like, "Hey, I see a black man walkin' down the street, I'm lockin' my door too, like, that's not a *race* type of thing." But the fact that he admitted that to a class full of African American students, and you like, what kind of reaction did you expect? But everybody was like, "Yeah, like, we do the same thing. That's not bad. That's not, like, *racist* or anything like that, and at least you can admit that you've had a moment where you've like felt like—um, yeah.

0:28:10.0-0:28:12.0

Kristin: Yeah, you—go...Yeah.

0:28:12.0-0:28:16.6

Destiny: Yeah, cuz I'm also in the same class actually. But yeah.

0:28:16.6-0:28:19.6

Kristin: I'm talking with Paul actually next week, so that's cool.

0:28:19.6-0:28:31.3

Destiny: Um we, well I had that group project, I had mines on like the movies, um, like different movies we picked. *Blindside*, *Hidden Figures*, and—that was my group.

0:28:31.3-0:28:33.7

Kristin: The *Blindside* and *Hidden Figures*? Is that one thing or two?

0:28:33.7-0:28:33.8

Destiny: It's two different ones.

0:28:33.8-0:28:37.2

Kristin: Okay I was gonna say. Okay.

0:28:37.2-0:30:09.5

Destiny: Two different things. But um—see, in my group, it was able to like explain to the class like the difference from what most people see in the movie compared to behind the scene, like, it was completely different. And I felt like, um, when we did that presentation, a lotta people thought, like, kinda differently. Especially when we had, like, the summaries, um, that we hand out. Like, a lotta people, like, didn't expect a lotta [themes?]. But I felt like when we were in his class, I felt like I learned a lot more. Because I also just recently just interviewed him for one of

my projects, and he talks about, like, this is—he says some bout, like, this is not stuff that I teach for ya’ll to get a good grade or somethin’ you know you are expected to teach. This is somethin’ I want ya’ll to like wake up and to stand in the real world. And, like, when he said that, that kinda spoke to me, because like...I felt like, um, like, during, like, high school or, like, elementary school, what we learned about, like, slavery, we don’t like—it’s just, like, as if you got to learn this. It’s, like, make it seem less important. But when I’m in here and he’s teachin’ this, he’s way deeper in details and it’s like you see a lot of things more differently, especially from *his* perspective. And it’s like—I never, like, thought of that, or I never knew that, and I felt like, um, during his class, like, we do learn a lot more. Especially compared to like high school.

0:30:09.5-0:30:46.9

Saniya: Also to add to that, like, today in class, this morning, like we were like, closing up or whatever because it’s our last week and he basically gave—it was, like, a slide show, and he gave us, like, what he wanted us to take from taking this class. So it was like, he gave us all these concepts that he wanted us to understand after like we’re done takin’ this class, and like, um, small or big, like, you can make things happen. Like stop racism. Or like, different stuff that you wouldn’t expect the teacher to just, like, lay all of this out, like, “This is what I want you to take from my class. Some teachers just like—like they say—

0:30:46.9-0:30:48.5

Kristin: Like do something with this.

0:30:48.5-0:31:09.3

Saniya: Yeah, like, “Do something with what I taught you this whole semester. But some teachers is just like, “Okay, if you learned something, you learned something, and then, like, if you didn’t, then you just didn’t.” But he, like, made sure that we *did* learn somethin’. So he wanted us to use the knowledge that we got. And I find that pretty cool.

0:31:09.3-0:31:13.5

Kristin: That is cool. I don’t think I’ve ever experienced something like that either.

0:31:13.5-0:32:42.9

Curtis: And I think more importantly, I think, you know—you asked the question of, you know, uh, type of things are, you know, we doing in class? And I don’t think it’s a matter of, like, kind of the way we’re assessed, or stuff like that. I think it’s all the traditional stuff, I think, you know, the content, the fact that, like, the stuff that we’re learning is stuff that we feel directly applies to our life. So it’s not something that we gonna learn, you know, for this, you know, 16 weeks and stuff that we know it’s important, and that we’re gonna need—you know, this stuff is important to who we *are*, you know. So, you know, I think of when I get my license [unintelligible], you know, it’s the same way if, you know, like if, you know retain that information or say like, you know about music, you know. Because for *me* this is stuff that’s gonna be—you know, this is who I *am*, um, all this—like yeah, I could take gen ed classes, and yeah it’s cool that I learn the stuff but, you know, I don’t really have to *retain* it long term, you know. But this stuff *here*—I know that this stuff that I’m directly interested in, stuff I truly care about it, so—it’s stuff that, you know, is gonna go into my long-term memory, you know, um. So it doesn’t matter how I’m assessed. I care about it, so I’m gonna treat it differently than—I’m assessed while, you know,

doin a math paper that [unintelligible]—you know, and I think most times when we're in other classes, we don't really feel, uh, a *part* of this class, you know, we don't really feel heard. So we don't really *care* anymore. So, uh, you know, when [we're in there?] we're so directly a part of it because it's truly about us.

0:32:42.9-0:33:12.2

Kristin: Yeah. So you just bridged super well. And if you [someone else] had something to say you can too, but I need to get this out because I'll forget it. My memory sucks. Uh, so I'm trying to figure out how to do that in a writing class. Because a writing class is not a content class, right? Like, we're teaching, like, a thing. So, how can I? Like, what are your thoughts? Like, as students? Of, like, writing and making things and communicating?

0:33:12.2-0:33:48.2

Angel: Typically, when I—because I don't mind writing papers, like I like kind of writing papers sometimes, depending on what it is. Now if you tell me to do somethin' that I'm completely not interested in, like, at all—like, “write about what happened in a British town 15-somethin-hundred miles away that I don't even know or care about, that's not gonna benefit me, it's like—why am I writing this? I'm just funna write this just to get this grade. But it's like, when you—I guess, give them, give more space to, like, be free in the writing. Like a free writing type.

0:33:48.2-0:33:55.2

Kristin: So you're talking about content? Still. If you get to write *about* something you care about, you don't even mind, like, writing essays?

Curtis: No, see, it's not about—oh, go ahead.

0:33:55.2-0:34:36.6

Saniya: About that particularly, I, um, in my English class we're writing a 8-10 page research paper, like, for our final. And at first I was scared 'cause I'm like, what if he, like, gives us a topic, like, “Write about air pollution,” or somethin' like that. And I'm thinkin' like 8-10 pages on air pollution? But it was like, he said, “You can write the research paper on anything that you choose, and I feel like—I kind of cheated a little bit because I'm using the topic that we did our documentary on.

0:34:36.6-0:34:40.3

Kristin: That's not cheating! That's being a smart student. I'll tell you right now, that is being a good student.

0:34:40.3-0:35:08.6

Saniya: Because we have like, like, I have my own research that I did, like, my own information like all in my notebook and stuff. But the stuff that I heard my peers say while were up there presenting and the slideshow that we have, I can go look these events up, look these people up and then just put it all together. And I have 8 or 9 pages on a paper that I really care about. And not, like, somethin' stupid that I'm gonna be repeating myself.

0:35:08.6-0:35:48.2

Kristin: So talk to me about that writing—like, okay—and let me kinda go then into—this is like goin’ real smoothly, this time—I want to hear about, like, a time that you created something, and it can be that you wrote something, that you thought was really smart and complex—or maybe was different from what you’re used to doing—that you were really, really proud of. And I just want to know—want to hear about it. Like, talk to me about the features and, like, or maybe your process or, like, what about it did you feel was, like, super engaging? Or, like, what was your favorite part of doing it, and how did you do it? Does that make sense? Or [what was your favorite part] of it itself when it was done?

0:35:48.2-0:37:12.1

Saniya: So not to keep usin’ this class, just because we’re in here, but, it kinda like—it kinda is a part of my everyday thing. Like this class has become a really big part of stuff that I use everywhere else. But it was a paper that we did in here, um, a race essay. And it was, like—uh, I can’t really remember the question that it ask—but, uh, I think it was like, “How do you feel about your culture,” or somethin’ like that, “and, like, the experience that you had with racism or like how has it affected you, how has it shaped you, and, uh, have you, like, caught on to stereotypes or like judged people because of things that you’ve heard?” and stuff like that. And I felt like I just, like, skated with this paper. Like, I did so much work with this paper, it just like—I don’t know, I felt free to write about it. Because it was like, this was my time to really confess to, like, how I feel about different stereotypes that I’ve heard or how things have affected me in my life with me being African American in a predominantly white institution. I feel like it was really, like, free to put all my thoughts out.

0:37:12.1-0:37:54.7

Kristin: So how was it for you, like—talk to me about the aspect of it that felt, like, *intellectual* to you. Or like, that sounds really weird. Because what you’re describing is like *totally* intellectual and, like, really smart and, like, *academic* work. And it’s, it’s not—I mean, yes, it’s also this sort of like cathartic thing where you can, like, just kind of put stuff out there and be vulnerable and be honest and kind of process stuff, but—but for *you*, I guess, what about that—do you know? Like, what about it made you feel smart? Or what did you think was smart *about* it?

0:37:54.7-0:38:24.3

Saniya: Um I just felt like it was me bein’ able to tell the difference what is wrong and what is right. Like, you know, like, not necessarily a wrong and a right, but like, me feelin a certain way about, a certain—like, a different group of people, like—I just feel like me bein’ able to admit that I have, like, some times when I went along with a stereotype but now I know that’s not okay. So I feel like just bein’ able to do that it made me feel like I matured.

0:38:24.3-0:39:10.3

Kristin: So being able to reflect and also see differences and, like, tease things apart, is that what you’re saying? Okay. What else? This is, like, the crux of everything, like, I want to hear about.

[Unsure]: What was the quest—

Kristin: Something you made or did that you just really thought was smart and complex. And it *doesn't* have to have been for school, or in school. Or it *could've* been. And it doesn't have to be writing like you typically think of writing. 'Cause writing is, like, it's really easy to think of writing like sitting down and writing a paper. But, like, we're *always* writing in different ways. Sometimes I have really smart Twitter threads, for example, like—every now and then. So yeah.

0:39:10.3-0:39:20.2

Destiny: Um for me, uh, I feel like one of the things that I recently just did that was, like, very creative, it was for my LTRE class.

0:39:20.2-0:39:22.7

Kristin: What is that? LTRE?

0:39:22.7-0:40:52.9

Destiny: Like a literature class. Um, we had to do like a PowerPoint presentation based on, like, basically your own strategy that you, um, came up with to help, like—as far as *reading*. And I feel like, um, what I did, I came up with my own strategy, and I was able to share with, like, my classmates of how that, um, worked out for me, and why I chose this strategy. And I feel like it was very creative because hearing from, like, other people opinion on how they understand, like, when it comes to reading and writing, like—it makes you, like, think differently, like, when I was tellin' them, like, “Usually, like, when I read, I'mma try to get engaged when reading, 'cause sometimes readin' can be boring. Like for real. It can be boring sometimes unless it's like a really good book. So I was tellin' my class, being like, how, “I will always, like, make sure I write notes when I'm readin' to help me, like, understand or try to summarize it like for each paragraph.” And then, what um, like triggered a lotta people that they never thought of, it's like—you know how like you, um, ask yourself like a lot of questions? I said usually that will help me as a reader to understand, like—as if you havin' an actual conversation, it might sound weird, but you havin' an actual conversation with yourself. That helps me, like, as a reader to understand more about, like, writin' and readin'.

0:40:52.9-0:40:54.6

Kristin: Can you explain that a little bit more, like what that looks like or sounds like?

0:40:54.6-0:41:06.0

Destiny: Um like, for me, like, when I read somethin', like, I will ask myself, like, “What does that mean?” Or, like, stuff like that.

0:41:06.0-0:41:08.3

Kristin: Yeah, yeah, yeah, so you have this like internal monologue kind of going on?

0:41:08.3-0:41:37.1

Destiny: Yes, 'cause you know like, even if you talkin' to somebody and they tellin' you a story and you tryin' to figure out, like, “Okay, so what happened? What they say?” That's like usually what I do, like, when I'm reading, and that helps me as a reader. And when I told people that they was like, “I need to start doin' that because I never thought of it.” But I felt like that was, like, one of my, like, creative moment when we had to come up with our own strategy. And it

made other people wanna use the same strategy when it comes to reading. So I feel that was my, like, creative moment.

0:41:37.1-0:41:43.6

Kristin: That's a really—do you ask 'em out loud? Or do you just, like, are you aware of them happening in your head?

0:41:43.6-0:41:47.6

Destiny: It's like both.

0:41:47.6-0:42:16.8

Kristin: Yeah. That's amazing that you figured that out on your own. That is really cool. So it was the figuring out the strategy itself—so the assignment kind of gave you that? That's cool. I know you've made somethin' smart Victor. [Unintelligible.] I'm totally teasin'—you don't have to.

0:42:16.8-0:42:27.8

Angel: I don't know if this appli—I don't know if it applies or not, but, well it typical—um, it was a paper.

0:42:27.8-0:42:26.8

Kristin: It doesn't have to be a paper, though. It doesn't even have to be for school. I mean, cause you could think of like...

0:42:37.6-0:42:57.0

Curtis: I can—you know, you know I can—the easiest thing I can tell you about would be [unintelligible] composing or arranging music. You know, I always played it, you know—but, you know, even if you know, but moreso I think about what you say it doesn't have to be in school. Like, I remember when I was, you know, younger. I made a—I was workin' at a kits shop. I used to work there.

0:42:57.0-0:42:56.2

Kristin: In a what shop?

0:42:56.2-0:43:58.7

Curtis: Kits shop. It was like wood shop. You know, [unintelligible] or build stuff. And I used to, you know, uh, teach other, you know, kids how do to it. I [unintelligible] myself but I just knew about it. And um when I got into, like, 8th grade, I made a down draft table, which is a, you know, it's a table with a fan in it and it sucks up all the, uh, you know, the particle of, you know, wood. And I thought it was like so dope that I *made* that. And, uh, the reason we were so—it's 'cause, you know, I don't think, you know, uh, like—you know, buildin' stuff had always been like a manly thing, and I don't think most people do it, you know, now. And I think that's a skill that, you know, like, uh, it's always gonna be *needed*. You know, and even, like, when I created music, you know, I—you know, just thinkin' about, like, you know, the ability to do this is somethin that I've always loved. So now I'm able to do it, and just, like, you know, it goes back to those skills that I feel like it's very important, you know, to who I am, or, you know, *who* I

wanna *be*, you know. So, you know, I was more interested to do it no matter, you know, *what* it was, or the obstacle because I really cared about the outcome.

0:43:58.7-0:44:03.8

Kristin: So it was like, knowing that you had this sort of vision of this thing that you wanted to do and then achieving that vision?

0:44:03.8-0:44:54.6

Curtis: Yeah or just, just, you know, just the skills in itself. You know like, you know, for example, when I'm thinkin' about you know how to like correlate it to what *you* do. It's not moreso about the subject, like I don't really care about the *writing* portion. I know I'm gonna have to write it. It's about what am I writing *about*? You know, so it's even moreso, you know, uh, okay, you know. Like me, I mean, like I know, after this I have to write a 8-page paper, but I know it's about music, so I know I—you know, I—although I know I don't want to write the paper, I know it's something I can easily write about, you know. It's not—you know, it's like if you're in math, you know, the problem's not that multiplication is hard, it's that I'm multiplying John White apples, and I don't *care* about John. Then we talk about, you know, somebody else that I care about, and then the content matches, you know, what I'm actually learnin', and then it's easy. It's just that same old stuff.

0:44:54.6-0:45:02.4

Kristin: You just gave me a really interesting idea for a workshop I'm leading next month.

0:45:02.4-0:45:21.4

Angel: This is kind of off topic but just throwing in there. That's kind of how I feel about like how we have to take all these general ed courses just to get to a major. And it's like we did—we're not ever gonna use or need the general ed classes that you took before you started takin' your major classes. And I feel like it's [unintelligible]...Like, but it's, yeah.

0:45:21.4-0:45:47.7

Curtis: And you unmotivated. So then you walk in—so they, like, you thinkin' like, either the kid just doesn't know what his major is, [unintelligible]. He's in a class for 16 weeks that he really doesn't *care* about. And he's unmotivated to actually do the work. So the quality of what you're going to get, it's just going to be bad. He's unmotivated. And you probably can't figure out a way, because you don't know how to reach him. You don't know if he doesn't care or you know, so you just, you know...

0:45:47.7-0:46:31.6

Kristin: You just described like my whole experience. Because that's what I teach is like a gen ed writing class. So like yeah how do we teach—It's basically about like how do we get people to like start having these academic kinds of conversations. The kinds of conversations where you are like looking at details and pulling things apart like you had said. And like uh reflecting on things and that sort of thing. Because that's what that class is like really trying to help you start doing is doing that kind of work. Uh so uh what was I going to say? I mean your class. Is that a major class, the Race in American Culture? Do you have to—it's a gen ed? It's not a gen ed or?

0:46:30.9-0:46:31.2

Saniya: No it is a required gen ed.

0:46:31.2-0:46:38.8

Kristin: So how is that class different? Because it's themed?

0:46:38.8-0:46:42.0

Curtis: Well I just think it's more so like again...

0:46:42.0-0:46:44.4

Kristin: Is it the topic that you're interested in?

0:46:44.4-0:46:49.2

Curtis: Yeah. I mean I don't think it's moreso that it's—Like I said, it still has the traditional assessments like any other class. It's just, what are they talkin' about?

0:46:49.2-0:46:50.2

Kristin: It's the topic.

0:46:50.2-0:47:28.5

Curtis: Yeah so you know, I mean, like, here you're talking about you see unmotivated students. You know I would probably say okay, you know my thing would be as the student would be okay, although I know that I don't care about this class, this [unintelligible] class, you know, try to relate to somethin' that I'm gonna be in the future. So if it's a paper about somethin' that I, you know, you know that will encounter me later, you know, in their life in their future, somethin' like that, it will have more meaning. As opposed to you know me just writing a persuasive argument just for the sake of writing a persuasive argument. Like, okay, why am I doing this? Like I really don't *care*. Now I'm doin' it for the grade. And you know I'm just BS-ing it.

0:47:28.5-0:47:50.7

Kristin: Can you tell me about like your ideal writing class then? Like if you had to do—so like—and I'm thinking specifically about like your first-year writing class. Like the gen ed. Like say you *have* to take it. Like what would it—what would it be like? What would you write about? How would it be run? Go ahead.

0:47:50.7-0:48:07.7

Victor: Um my class, my ideal class, my ideal writing class? I want it to be, like, more of a free write. Yeah I mean like most of your—I mean, it be like most of your assignments would be free writes and then some of them would be, like, required.

0:48:07.7-0:48:08.4

Kristin: Tell me what you mean by free write.

0:48:08.4-0:48:31.8

Victor: So like if you give me a paper like a regular persuasive paper on somethin' that you, you know, you feel or it be a information paper or, it's up to us. You know, actually like you get to choose your topic. As long as it fits the identity. You gets to choose your topic. And also like teach like basic um like writing skills for it.

0:48:31.8-0:48:32.7

Kristin: Okay. What would a class session look like maybe?

0:48:32.7-0:50:49.8

Angel: So like if you it's kind of like what he was sayin'. So it's still a free write. But if like let's just say you said I need a journal or a paper or somethin' like that on, "you tell me somethin' that you're passionate about that can possibly change the world." Or somethin' like that. Or "what kind of impact can you have on whatever topic that you choose that can impact the world." They would free write on that because I'm pretty sure in some type of way [unintelligible] somebody is passionate about somethin' and they will write about that and it will be like probably the best writing that you ever seen. So like if you was to say like just for an example you ask me and I say, like, "I want to see equality amongst education." And I started technically, from his class, I'd start thinkin' about solutions. Because he had us do um uh a little participation um thing. About, he gave us, well we can pick the topic or whatever to talk about but at the end give solutions as to how you can change that, um, change whatever was wrong with whatever topic that you chose. So um, uh, for instance if I said like I think we chose like the doll industry. How like most of the dolls are white. So we could talk about, you'll talk about that but you'll still give your solution as to how you can you know change that or impact the community with that and what kind of change would that bring? That's still them talkin' about, um, talkin' about somethin' that they're passionate about but it's still related to you givin' them a persuasi—or *them* givin' *you* a persuasive writing. So they're still, I guess, fulfilling your requirements of whatever you tellin' them to write, but it's still them getting out how would they feel or you know their perspective on certain topics or whatever. But if it's like if it's a specific topic and you want something, um not in general or whatever, you wanted to focus on one thing, I don't know how that would—still kind of free writing, I guess, but it's like...

0:50:49.8-0:51:04.6

Kristin: No I see what you're sayin' though. So talk to me about, like, how your work would be evaluated then. And, like, how has your work been evaluated in the past in ways that you found that like you hated or that you loved?

0:51:04.6-0:51:51.1

Saniya: My English class—we had like, every *day* you come to class—we had to write uh—like the teacher, he would stand up in front of the class and say, "Hey, I want you to write about this, this, this, and this." Like basically a prompt and he'll give it to us and we have to write about it in like however many sentences. But it's like I guess he's like grading it on like how *much* you write instead of what it is that like what you put into the paper. So it's like, what you're up there telling us to write about isn't somethin' that we can connect with or somethin' that we like really *care* about like care to write about. It's like you're grading me based on how long my paper is,

but I have more information than this person who just sayin' like the same stuff over and over again in so many different words.

0:51:51.1-0:51:55.6

Kristin: So you don't like it? That's an approach you don't like. So how would you change it?

0:51:55.6-0:52:19.1

Saniya: I mean it'll just be like, "what type of examples are you using?" Like, "how are you making your arguments?" Like the teacher should be grading based on are you answering my question that I'm giving you. Not like—"okay, don't sit up here and write two sentences, that's not gonna answer the question." But it's like, "Are you tellin' me what I want to know from what I've asked you?" Not, "Are you writing a whole page?"

0:52:19.1-0:52:24.7

Kristin: Oh so not quantity. Is he not also doing other writing assignments though?

0:52:24.7-0:52:59.6

Saniya: Yeah, we're doing other writing assignments but they're being graded, like. I really don't like the way that my English teacher graded this year. I mean, I had been writing [unintelligible]... Terrible... But it's just like, I've had to talk to him about things and then it's like, maybe he really wasn't, like, doin' it to the best of his ability, 'cause then when I talk to him it's like, "Oh yeah, you're right, you're right." But it's like, why didn't you grade me like that in the first place? Why do I have *this* grade but after I talk to you now you feel like I should have *this* grade? It's like I feel like I shoulda had the grade that came after.

0:52:59.6-0:53:04.9

Kristin: So what did you—what's your problem with the way he's grading? Besides, I mean, obviously, like, do you feel like he's not...

0:53:04.9-0:53:11.6

Saniya: I don't really feel like he's like *grading* it, like *really*. I feel like he's just sayin' "here's your grade." Because some teachers...

0:53:11.6-0:53:13.1

Kristin: But he's not actually reading it?

0:53:13.1-0:54:13.3

Saniya: Yes. Some teachers they give comments on your papers and they say, "Here, fix this." And "Oh good job at this, you're doing well at this, but I need you to fix this." And "This will boost your writing." And etc. etc. But it's like he just says, he just gives you a grade, like, "I can't tell you what to fix." Like, yeah. If you're not givin' me 100% then you should have comments on my paper about what I need to fix. 'Cause it's like, then if you givin' me like 75% then it's like ok this 75% for what? Like where's the rest of it? Where's the other 25%? Why didn't I meet the rest of the requirements? And then I've gotta *talk* to the teacher who's like, "Oh well maybe you *did* deserve a better grade." It's like, it shouldn't be a maybe. You should be

standing on what you gave me on this assignment unless, like, you knew you were wrong for giving me what you gave me in the first place.

0:54:13.3-0:54:15.7

Kristin: Yeah okay. So you want...

0:54:15.7-0:54:27.3

Saniya: I just want somebody who cares about what I'm do—like, I'm not just sitting in a class writing for nothing when the teacher's not doing anything to help me become better.

0:54:27.3-0:56:35.2

Curtis: And I feel like you know you know you asked like you know how you know should we be graded. It's one thing to be like giving a grade on the same [unintelligible] as any other you know like you know but it depend what the prompt askin'. You know is it askin' me to you know like a persuasive argument or whatever. But I think you know more than anything, I think it's you know the thing [unintelligible] you don't feel, you know, even what *she* said, you don't feel a part of the class. You don't feel like uh—or even heard, like even in Literature, the readings, you know, in English class, it's not really representative of *us*. So you already [unintelligible]... you already feel like an *other*, so, you know and that's how we comin' to most general classes. So, you know we're already on the outside lookin' in, and then we, you know, write a paper, and we're like okay, whatever. And then we get a grade with no understanding you know or whatever. And then it's like okay this is one of *those* classes.

Kristin: Just, continually...

Curtis: Yeah so you know and so if you know if you feel more you know I guess you know a part of the class you know, even you know, representative of literature, or um—just the type of dialogues we were having, you know, in the class. And then when we you know I think when they say creative you know writing it means like okay, yeah you can you know ask me, if we're in the chapter of writing argumentative essays, cool. But, you know, you can let me pick what I want to write about. You know 'cause then I'll have more you know autonomy and I care moreso about what I'm writing about. You can assess whether it's an argumentative essay or not, and whether I did the things that needed to be done, you know to state my claim. But its not more so about the content of what I'm writing about. It's just more so the mechanics. That's the whole point of the class. It's like, are you able to do those mechanics? So you know I think sometimes when you dictate you know um everything, you know, um—you already have people who feel like othered. They already—they still feel isolated *and* confined at that point. You know, so they don't even have, you know, a reason to care.

Appendix B: Focus Group Protocol

INTRO

Thank you so much for coming to talk with me today. As you know, I'm here to learn about the ways you learn and communicate in school and out of school. I appreciate your time and willingness to talk about your perspectives and experiences.

In order to use our conversations as research, I'm required to collect documentation of your consent to participate—the signed form that I asked you to bring with you today. I'll collect those now. [Collect signed forms.]

As part of this focus group, I'll be asking questions of the entire group. It is not necessary for each of you to respond to every question. However, I would love to gain as much input from you as possible, so I may ask you to respond individually at certain points. Please also feel free to answer or comment on each other's responses; I would like this to be as much of a discussion as possible. I want to know how you might answer my questions as a group based on your collective experience.

To help you get a sense of what we'll discuss, I'm giving each of you a sheet of paper with the questions we'll cover, along with a question about how you'd like me to refer to you in my writing. While we're talking, please use this paper to jot down—in full sentences or not, it doesn't matter—any notes, thoughts, ideas, questions, and so on as they come to you.

Remember, you are free to leave or withdraw your input at any point. Your participation in this focus group is completely voluntary and will not impact your grades or academic standing in any way. Our conversations will be anonymous; I will not record your names or identifying features in my transcriptions, and if I quote you, I will give you an alias or will use the one you've provided. In addition, I will not share your responses with your teachers or administrators.

QUESTIONS

Question 1: The Center

How are you involved with the Black culture center, and what kinds of support does it offer you and other students?

Question 2: Experiences with Learning

Tell me about your experiences with learning something that has really stuck with you, whether in school or outside of school. (You can reference experiences as far back as your elementary school period.) Who was involved in your learning? How did you learn; what did you do to develop understanding? What helped you remember this experience?

Question 3: Intellectual Work

Think about a time you created something that you thought was really smart and complex, and/or that was different from what you're used to doing, that you were really proud of. Can you tell me about what you created, why you created it / for whom, when, and where? It can be written text, but it doesn't have to be. It can be anything that you made, as long as it made you feel smart, clever, etc.

Question 4: Academic Writing

Tell me about your experiences with academic writing, by which I mean any writing for or in school. You can reference experiences in high school or college. [If further prompting is needed, I will ask follow-up questions like: What kinds of assignments have you done, what kinds of feedback have you received on your academic writing, and how do you feel about writing in and for school?]

Question 5: Academic Writing

Describe your ideal writing class. What do you learn about? What do you do? What does a class session look like, sound like, feel like, etc.? What kinds of projects do you have to do? How are they evaluated?

CONCLUSION

Thank you again for participating in this research. Later in my study, I may ask some of you to talk with me one-on-one. If you've agreed to be interviewed by indicating so on your consent form and if you're selected, I'll contact you by email sometime during this [Spring 2019] semester.

Appendix C: Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

As you know, I wanted to interview you to understand your unique perspective on academic discourse and on the Black culture center and the ways that the two intersect. I've drafted some questions to guide our conversation, but I may diverge from these questions a bit in order to allow the conversation to flow naturally. You are, of course, welcome to refrain from answering a question or to withdraw from participating in this study at any time.

QUESTIONS

1. How would you describe the ways that the Black culture center helps students acclimate to college? (Follow-up questions may be necessary if interviewees mention topics or ideas that pertain to academic discourse.)
2. How do you define academic discourse?
3. In what ways does or does not the Black culture center invite or train students to participate in, challenge, resist, and/or modify academic discourse, which for my study includes but is not limited to written text? In what ways does the Black culture center model academic discourse or the relationships with it that the Black culture center invites?
4. As a scholar, do you feel any ambivalence or resistance toward conventions of academic discourse? Do you notice any such ambivalence or resistance among students who are involved with the Black culture center? Are there any special issues or unique considerations with Black students and academic discourse that you think are important to address?

Appendix D: Interview Transcript – Carrie Herron

File Name: Interview with Carrie Herron.mp4

File Length: 01:01:58

SPEAKERS

KB – Kristin Bailey

CH – Carrie Herron

FULL TRANSCRIPT (with timecode)

00:00:05:26-00:01:12:00

KB: Okay. Some I'm just gonna read you a paragraph I wrote because I'm supposed to do that apparently but so I'm interviewing you to understand your perspective on academic discourse and on the Black culture center and the ways that the two intersect. Again this is a semi structured interview. And of course if you don't want to answer a question or withdraw from participating you're welcome to at any point. And you'll see by the way like whatever I quote from you if you want to look at it and see what what I've said after I do the data analysis I'll share that with you. I want people to be able to sign off on their words. But that'll be further on down in the process. OK. So I have four questions. And this might go on different trajectories. I do not have a clock on me do you. I don't want to look at a clock. Take away too much of your time. Okay. So you tell me when it's about 30 minutes. OK. Or I'll try to keep track. OK. So how would you describe the ways that the Black culture center helps students acclimate to college?

00:01:13:19-00:02:23:02

CH: So I feel like there's a lot of different ways. Obviously the most like direct-contact ways are through our programming initiatives. One is our S-plan, which is survive and succeed, a first-year and first-year-transfer student mentoring program geared towards providing students tools to be successful in college, whether that's academic tools, social tools in the form of, like, pairing them up with a mentor and then in addition having weekly meetings in the fall and then biweekly meetings in the spring where they talk about different topics. For black men specifically we have Black Male Initiative, which is a program just really geared toward character development, skill building, academic success, with the goal of graduation specifically for black men. We also have.... So those are two, like, what I would call our first-year programs. Did you say first-year students?

00:02:23:24-00:02:25:19

KB: No I just I just was wondering in general, yeah

00:02:26:01-00:03:01:27

CH: So, then we have John Henry Clark Honor Society, which is a step up from, I look at it as a step up from S-plan in that, you know, so we—it is—you have to have like a 3.0 and above, you

do community service. It is in the tradition of Black Studies to, you know, promote service to the community and to give back, and so JHC is part of that mission. Leadership development, you know, all those that go into that. So those are the more kind of direct ways.

00:03:02:10-00:03:29:08

CH: I feel like some indirect ways that we support students is through like our outreach programs, where our students actually are serving as mentors and that's our African-American mentoring program that really takes place in the DeKalb/Sycamore—no, not Sycamore—but the DeKalb schools where we serve as mentor—our students serve as mentors, rather—in elementary and middle schools. I made that up. Middle schools and high schools, middle and high schools. I'm thinking elementary because we're looking at—

00:03:29:08-00:03:31:14

KB: Are you going that direction?

00:03:31:17-00:03:34:26

CH: Yes. We are. So it's just kind of figuring out how that can all work.

00:03:35:05-00:03:38:16

KB: Is that after first-year students that do that or your first-year—

00:03:38:16-00:04:14:03

CH: You know, some first-year students, like, it depends on how you, what's your level of competency is, right? Some first-year students are like, "Yeah I want to be able to give back immediately, so they have that. Then there are some other ways, right. So we send students to professional development, to conferences. Black men go to like black, our Black Male Initiative members, we send them to like professional development conference. This year we we're organizing SAAS, which is Student African-American Sisterhood for Black women, and so we sent them to a conference.

00:04:15:11-00:04:17:26

KB: Is that like BMI, like is it like a new organization?

00:04:21:25-00:05:19:06

CH: It's like a new organization. Okay, so SAAS and SASB are two separate organizations: one supports black men; one supports black women. The reason why I'm really hesitant to say like one is an offshoot of the other is because they're really not. They're really different concerns that really center women and men, especially in the African-American culture. And so it's a really different experience that we're hoping that the students will get. Now SAAS is just coming into fruition and getting started. So there's that. Then we have our co-curricular experiences, right? So we are home to an academic minor. Then there are some other things that we do to try to supplement what we teach in the classroom and that comes in the form of like our So-Full Fridays. Whether it's a discussion or it's a movie, you know, those things happen, I mean those events occur.

00:05:19:20-00:05:34:18

CH: We also have other events, like we do pre-Kwanzaa, Black History Month events, Black graduation at the end, you know, we do a Black graduation.

00:05:35:03-00:05:36:05

KB: Is it separate from—

00:05:36:07-00:05:41:12

CH: It is, and it's a big deal, so.... This is our 30th year doing black graduation.

00:05:41:12-00:05:41:27

KB: Can I come?

00:05:41:27-00:06:11:08

CH: Absolutely, it's open to anybody. And the president comes, and we have deans coming, and faculty members, and so it's a really big deal for us and for our students. So I feel like those are some of the ways, I mean, this year we've been doing some different things. So we've had the Writing Center, who made us a satellite site this year, and we know that it won't continue past because they've been directed that they think they can't do it for the whole year.

00:06:12:00-00:06:13:05

KB: Even for this whole academic year?

00:06:13:12-00:06:18:06

CH: Right. So they're going to be—after spring break they'll be pulling, pulling out.

00:06:18:10-00:06:18:18

KB: Do you know why?

00:06:19:03-00:06:40:01

CH: Well, because it's a stretch, right? Even though we have a lot, we have good participation here, their staff is stretched, right, so trying to run three or four satellites. I mean, Gail is doing Stephenson, and then they have one, so the library, and then three other satellite sites and they just can't.

00:06:40:25-00:06:42:27

KB: Did they do anything in the other cultural centers or no?

00:06:42:28-00:06:47:24

CH: Yeah, one, they have, this semester they just started with the Asian-American Resource Center.

00:06:47:27-00:06:49:03

KB: So are they also pulling out there?

00:06:49:03-00:07:01:06

CH: Everything. So we—we had it last fall. So we have—I mean this fall, this past fall. So we—and it was a good experience and it's something to kind of revisit in the future hopefully.

00:07:02:12-00:07:28:21

CH: Yeah. So we—we—we try to provide all these different experiences every other year. There is a trip as planned to Ghana. We're working on some other things for next year in terms of some alternative spring breaks and just trying to give students the experience. And the information. So I think that those are some of the ways that we support our students. But I know when you when you say it out loud, it's like a lot.

00:07:28:21-00:07:30:09

KB: Yeah, do you sleep, or...?

00:07:30:20-00:07:31:19

CH: I try to sleep.

00:07:31:20-00:07:39:11

KB: And there's just—is it like almost entirely run by the three or four of you that are administrators here?

00:07:39:11-00:07:45:23

CH: The four administrators here and then we have one, two, three, four Gas.

00:07:46:01-00:07:49:29

KB: OK. And the Gas are—are they like how are they—

00:07:50:07-00:08:18:04

CH: I have one GPA for Black Male Initiative specifically. I have one GA that does nothing but programming, specifically working with S-Plan and John Henry Clark and then the other programs, like our other center-based programs, and then I have one G.A. during co-curricular programs, and then I have another G.A. who does just assessment. Yeah.

00:08:18:08-00:08:19:09

KB: Assessment of the program?

00:08:19:16-00:08:34:05

CH: Assessment [thinks aloud]—we have just been working on the assessment piece for our classes. Yeah.

00:08:39:11-00:09:20:07

KB: So you talked about a couple things I want to come back to, S-Plan as “survive and succeed,” I want to come back to those terms, and then you talked about the different sort of gendered experiences and that SAAB and SAAS. And I wanted to ask you about mentor training. I think I'm gonna hold off on that one. When you talk about “survive and succeed”—so that's a really big part of what I'm looking at—can you talk about, can you just expand on “survive,”

like, “survival.” What does that mean—like, what do you do with that word? And “succeed,” and how are you defining success? I don’t mean just you. How do you see the center, I guess, talking about that?

00:09:20:15-00:09:48:06

CH: So I wasn’t here when these programs were developed. So that was the name of the program when it was developed, and part of that—I’m thinking part of that “survive and succeed,” you know, is getting through college. And so, we—we were at a time where students were coming here as a mechanism of survival. And I do feel like that that’s still very true today where a lot of our students are coming here; this is their opportunity to survive.

00:09:48:12-00:09:48:19

KB: To Midwestern U. or to the Black culture center?

00:09:48:19-00:11:40:11

CH: Midwestern U., so coming to college and just being able to survive in a predominately white environment that’s very different from where all of our students come from. I think that we have this tendency to have a heavy emphasis on [major urban hub]. But honestly, we have students that come from all manners of all urban places, right? From [major city], from [major suburb]—so our students come from a wide array, from the South Suburbs, like, they’re coming from different places, and they’re all converging here. And so part of that being able to survive college, you know, is inside and outside of the classroom. And so survival is something that has been, I would say, a very staple part of the Black experience, right? And so I think—which is a very different experience from what we would look at when we see White culture, right? And so we know minority populations have had to survive, and so this idea of survival, you know, even though it may look very different from survival the way “survival” has been defined in the past, survival is still a very huge part of what these students are coming here to do. And not just to survive but also to succeed. And so the breaking apart of those terminologies that have been really so intertwined in our community. So “survival,” it has often been put with “success,” but actually it is a separate term, right? And so in one vein you are surviving, but really are you succeeding? Because you can survive through college with like Cs and Ds and get degrees, right? But really “succeeding” means that there is a plan, that your plan has an afterward, and that while you’re here that you’re actually succeeding in all these different areas.

00:11:42:12-00:12:11:23

KB: So how are you measur—OK. You’re talking about assessment and things like that, and I guess—let me kind of situate this within the research that I’m doing to think about the ways that you’re kind of defining success. One of the questions I had was in what ways does or does not the Black culture center invite or train students to participate in, challenge, resist, and/or modify academic discourse. So I’m specifically interested in discourse.

00:12:11:24-00:12:14:05

CH: So explain that to me, and what you mean.

00:12:14:15-00:12:17:00

KB: What part? Academic discourse, or all the other things.

00:12:17:03-00:12:17:07

CH: Academic discourse.

00:12:17:07-00:12:44:07

KB: So the ways that we communicate in academic settings for academic purposes, whether that be to learn, to communicate—you know, to develop knowledge, to communicate that knowledge. So I use “discourse” I guess more broadly just because I think about writing more broadly. And about like what academic writing could be or could look like. I’m trying to think of how to word this.

00:12:44:08-00:12:54:11

CH: No I was just—I’m try—so—and I think that even, even in the terminology that you use, right? So “academic discourse,” like “hmm...”

00:12:55:00-00:12:56:20

KB: Is that white inflected?

00:12:57:03-00:13:26:23

CH: It is! I mean, I should say that one of the—yeah, because what sometimes tends to happen is, um... So I think that a lot of what happens in terms of discourse happens in our classroom, but it also happens outside of our classrooms. So when we think of, we talk about stuff like code-switching and things like that, well they’re learning that they are one specific people inside if they’re taking these courses. But outside of these classes—

00:13:26:24-00:13:27:09

KB: They are what?

00:13:27:13-00:14:41:14

CH: When I say they are one specific people, they communicate in specific ways when they’re in class, sometimes away from, you know, wherever they come from, right? So it’s a very, like, sometimes it’s very—it’s its own dialect, you know. And I find myself asking, “What does that mean? Like, tell me what that means, because I don’t know what that word means, you know. Outside the classroom is completely different. They tend to—students tend to have their own way of communicating. And, I mean, they communicate in—in the way that they’ve kind of been reared to communicate, from wherever that comes from. [Major urban hub] has a very different communication pattern than those that come from [major city]. Even those that come from [major suburb], and even we as staff members, you know, have our own mechanisms of communication and oftentimes based on our level—not even our level of education but moreso our experience with education and with books. There’s tons of students that don’t even read, they just kind of muddle through, you know, and just try to figure it out. So when you use the terminology “academic discourse,” I guess I’m trying to, like, what information are you seeking to get from that question?

00:14:41:27-00:16:06:15

KB: So I'm trying to think about the ways that—Ok. I'm starting from this premise that when people talk about what does it mean to communicate academically or what is academic writing look like, we have—see this is such a broad generalization, but there tend to be agreed upon, like, criteria that are made—like, that people tend to assess—and a lot of that is being pushed back on now and has been for a really long time. What does that mean when you have people that don't share these particular values, that have their own value systems that prioritize, like, embodied experiences or things like that over this very cerebral, like, knowledge-making, if that makes sense. Our ways of, I guess, like, processing experiences and communicating them—and then our ways of communicating those, like thinking about the ways we structure ideas in writing, and, um—like people often will talk about, like, academic registers—like, you need to write in this—and what we're talking about is this code-switching, right? And I'm wondering, I guess, how that's managed here. Are you teaching people to code-switch? Are there other alternatives that we can employ so that we're not, like, perpetuating the problem.

00:16:06:15-00:16:13:06

CH: What's interesting is that no, we don't teach students how to code-switch. I think that students have learned that throughout their lives.

00:16:13:07-00:16:14:24

KB: Just in public school, or whatever, just in their secondary—

00:16:14:24-00:17:08:24

CH: Just in their experience of being educated, right? So I think that they have learned that. I think the resistance comes when... So I had a conversation with some people who taught English 103, and one of the things that they were told was that they were specifically told to mark down students who write in using AAVB, or whatever-VE. To particularly mark down those students. Well, if we're talking about African-American um—what, what is it called? African-American Vernacular English, then we're talking about marking down Black people. All Black students, right? And so do we have these same conversations when we talk about students of other minority groups, right? Because—

00:17:09:27-00:17:27:01

KB: No, that's something I'm dealing with, is there's this whole movement in my field of Writing Studies that's looking at How do you navigate different languages? And that's why I want to study specifically, like, in the Black culture center, because it's treated differently. It's not—AAVE is not treated the same as

00:17:27:07-00:17:27:12

CH: Well it's not.

00:17:27:13-00:17:30:15

KB: students who have—even though it is its own dialect.

00:17:30:16-00:17:31:01

CH: But—

00:17:31:16-00:17:32:18

KB: It's seen as a deficit.

00:17:32:24-00:19:45:21

CH: Well, but I think that in a lot of ways Blackness is seen as a deficit. And so if—if you are going to oppress a people, then you have to oppress them from the very genetic DNA. And so we know from history that Blacks—Blacks were often I mean, considered three-fifths person, like—just all these things, to just all the way to the cellular level. And so thinking that language would be anything different, for me, is just very—I mean, our experiences are constantly challenged. Our research is challenged, you know, just everything about Blackness is a challenge. And it's easy to challenge something when there is a power dynamic. Right? Where we are not necessarily that person—the people in power—to change the narrative about who we are and when our ways of knowing and our ways of communication and even when we look at, I mean, when you look at qualitative research as a whole, and just if you break it down to, like, narrative, or specifically storytelling, and, like, that is frowned upon as not even research. But how do people and minority communities communicate, right? We come from places where we learn through stories. We learn through narratives. But now all of a sudden those are not valid ways of knowing unless it is being done by a researcher that sits on the other side of power and is doing it in a community that they have. You know, so when we look at human development, right, and if there's a researcher that is studying in—let's just say Africa, you know—or, or in very remote places, right? That research is more validated than research from a black researcher coming from a narrative perspective.

00:19:48:17-00:19:49:06

KB: Yeah.

00:19:49:18-00:19:50:02

CH: Yes.

00:19:50:10-00:20:08:06

KB: It's really interesting, it's interesting how you differentiated too between the researchers doing the work, because I've seen—I see that in my field, and I didn't even think about it like that. There's a lot of move, like, within the field to incorporate narrative as, like, legitimate types of academic discourse.

00:20:08:07-00:23:15:14

CH: But even—even that statement, like, why do we have to move to make something legitimate? And who are you to legitimize somebody else's experience, right? So we don't have to legit—we don't have to make quantitative research legitimate. Now numbers don't have to be made legitimate. But when we talk about people's very stories, that can only be made legitimate by somebody else. But if that same person says that's not legitimate then now you have invalidated it. And so I think that we talk about, you know, creating that—that synergy in the Center. We—it's long been a standing, at least in this Center, that there is a Afrocentric lens through which we teach. And so we're not—we don't—and even the professors that are teaching it, they're not teaching from a “Black is a deficit” mindset. You're teaching from a different

mi—so, when a student is in class, they may use their own vernacular. They're going to use that, because that's how they're going to communicate—they're going to communicate in how they communicate. And sometimes, that's not a pretty—that's not, that's not what others would view as, as proper. I mean even growing up I remember, you know, as a child my mom—so for myself and my sister, she would say to us, like, you cannot use slang in this house, you're going to speak the Queen's English. And I've never met the Queen; I don't know who she is. And nor have I ever been to England. But what I do know is that when I go outside, I'm in this all-Black school district, you know, and—now, granted, my teachers are also speaking what my mom would term the “Queen's English”—but, you learn how to code-switch as a kid, right? And so I would not dare say the same things out with my friends that I would say with my mom, or my family members, or vice—but—I also noticed that my my you know, I read a lot. I think that, you know, it was like books were, for me, very highly pushed. Books are not necessarily pushed in the same way now as they have been in the past. And also, you know, it was—your—your words matter, you know, what you say, how you say it, it puts you in spaces. But even now I notice that there are times when I'm talking—like, I'm like, presenting in front of other students—and they're like, “I really want to say stuff like you say it,” and I'm like, “but how you said is actually OK too. You can carry the same sentiment that I carry, look, but we have—we have been taught—and by “we” I mean African-American students have been taught that if you speak a certain way, that you carry something. There's a, there's a level of something that you carry that automatically puts them at a deficit. So, in that way, you know, I am not at a deficit, but our students would certainly feel like they are.

00:23:16:10-00:23:45:26

KB: So my research is trying to find something I can grab on to, like, shift that narrative in my classes that I teach and then hopefully others as well. Like, how—how can I help students feel like they're not at a deficit? Like, how can I engage or make space for, or whatever, the communicative, like, the ways that they develop understanding and the ways that they communicate.

00:23:46:29-00:23:47:06

CH: Ah yeah,, (whispers, something about her tone suggests to me that she wrestles with this perpetual question as well in her teaching).

00:23:47:14-00:24:10:14

KB: But to kind of showcase the brilliance of it and to look at the resources that they bring even though they're different from—so there's, like, a lot of different areas of research that are looking at this. Like, a lot of people are problematizing assessment, and like looking at—okay, one of our biggest problems is assessment and the ways that we're assessing these students writing. So that's one aspect of it. I guess I'm looking at ways to invite.

00:24:11:05-00:24:18:29

CH: Yeah. I think one of the things that I would suggest, just for your research, is to interview a white professor that's doin' it.

00:24:18:29-00:24:23:01

KB: So that was gonna be my next question, is how do your white teachers, you say, like—

00:24:23:06-00:24:25:02

CH: Teachers, you say it as if it's plural. We have one, Dr. Pate.

00:24:25:08-00:24:28:01

KB: I was wondering, is he like in sociology or something or psychology, or what does he do?

00:24:32:08-00:24:33:19

CH: He's, um, he's history. Dr. Pate I believe is a history professor.

00:24:33:21-00:24:36:20

KB: And does he also, like, this Afrocentric lens, that's—

00:24:36:28-00:26:23:05

CH: I don't know. You know, I—I know the students really like Dr. Pate. Mark Pate. I know students really, um, I think that they're, um—you know what, I don't want to speak for him. I feel like, you know, he would be able to give you that piece of the narrative of of of what his experience has been. But I can tell you my experience in terms of—and not necessarily from the Center perspective, because I think one of the things is that he was the first, to my knowledge, white Professor to ever teach in this, in the Center. But he's not the only professor—like, I've had Dr. Carey Birch over in Foundations, who really, I mean, his mind is, like, phe-no-men-al in terms of, like, you know, being able to not try to be match—or, like, oh yeah, I understand, not to come from a place of “I know your experience” but providing the atmosphere and the space for you to have the conversations, you know, about your experience, and bring your experience into the room, in a way. So I, you know, I can't speak to that, but what I can say is that one of the things, you know, that students now coming to college don't have that I can say that I did have is that even though I was raised in a predominantly Black school district—predominantly, basically all-Black school district—all of my teachers, Black or White—all came from what I would—what I view now as an Afrocentric lens. They did not view us in deficit. At all.

00:26:23:06-00:27:00:00

CH: My, I mean, my White teachers were just as, you know, you know, caring and, and not—they put us on the same level. So one of the things that that that would happen is that we are in some of these areas you have Black teachers who, the bar is here (gestures with hand up high, showing a level). Now they're never going to lower the bar to come to you. This is where the bar—our White teachers were the same way. Okay? And they were not going to lower the bar, they were not going to let you use that, you know, that “society is—” right, they were not—you gon' have to come up to where we are. Period.

00:27:00:00-00:27:02:09

KB: What does that look like? Because that's what I want to, like, what is the—how is this Afrocentric lens demonstrated, and what is that bar?

00:27:02:13-00:27:03:04

CH: Well, it—

00:27:06:12-00:27:07:05

CH: I think that—

00:27:07:07-00:27:09:02

KB: Are you code-switching good enough? I mean but

00:27:09:08-00:27:54:20

CH: No, I don't think it's about code-switching; I think it's about being authentic. And, and, you know, I think authenticity is at the root of Afrocentricity in my viewpoint and and being authentic means that, you know, you don't get a pass. So, for example, math is math, OK? You can only learn calculus—this is calculus. So calculus cannot come—calculus is not gonna be tau—you're not gonna learn inferior calculus, you're gon' learn calculus. I've got a better example. Some people talk about my typing—so, I don't look at the keyboard when I type; I look directly at the screen. Well my keyboard teacher—I had a typing cla—I had a business class that—remember high school? So I had to type—my teacher,

00:27:55:14-00:27:55:18

KB: Yes. Yes. I don't think they do that anymore (laughs).

00:27:55:18-00:28:10:06

CH: They do not. My teacher, her thing was—and she didn't care what you did—you can not look at that keyboard. And you would be looking at this thing and you would have to type, and you were like, “where did you learn that?” I learned that in school.

00:28:10:06-00:28:10:10

KB: They don't teach that, huh?

00:28:10:12-00:30:05:10

CH: They do not. But my—she's still alive—but her standard was here (gestures up high). She was never going to say, “oh well you can't do it? Well why don't I just make it—NOPE. You better figure out how to get to this bar, because here it is. Come to it. And it's not even—it's not her bar. And so for me, as I'm working with students and being new here, students often—I think that that that's, for me specifically, that is how I operate. I tell students, “This is my bar. I'm not gonna adjust it because you don't feel like you can make it. You are going to figure out how to get to this bar, and it does not have—and you—because I know you can do it.” And I think that that's the attitude that I carry that I feel like is more of Afrocentric lens. It's that “I know that you can do it. You may not know you can do it, but I'm not gonna change it because I know you can hit it. So hit it. I don't wanna hear excuses, I don't wanna know why you feel like you can't hit it. We can work through that. But you gon' hit this bar, cuz it's right here.” And so I—I—I do and, so, a lot of this—they would say, you know, “You hardcore.” I'm not hardcore. My bar is just high. And yours is just not. (laughs) And even in my classrooms when I teach, “Here's my bar”—and my students will will, they—and you know and also I do carry into a classroom that I'm oftentimes, sometimes I'm one of the only and may only be the only Black face that you would see in a classroom in your four or five years of college. Right? And so I also carry into that, and I—and some—and I have to check my own bias, especially with my students of color. So if I go into a classroom, my Black stud—I may hold you to a higher standard because every

other class may not. They may let you come here with a lower bar, and I am not. We simply don't come from that people. Period.

00:30:05:10-00:30:05:27

KB: Yeah.

00:30:06:07-00:30:46:19

CH: And you don't get to be mediocre. None of my students get to be mediocre, but especially you, because I know that the—that the, the risk for you to be viewed as mediocre, even if it's yourself viewing yourself as that, the danger in that is so much greater for you. The consequences are so much greater for a Black student than it is for other students. And that's what I know. Because if you believe inherently that you are mediocre, then that mediocrity is generational and it can be. But if you believe that you are great, that that greatness can also be generational, and that can carry us further than giving you a mediocre mindset.

00:30:48:26-00:31:06:02

KB: (laughing) I just wanna clap. Tell me this, then. How do you—I'm like—screw this, I don't even need these questions. How do you explain, clarify, describe, define, whatever, that bar? When when you're—what classes are you teaching?

00:31:06:04-00:31:19:17

CH: So I don't, well I don't get to teach any—oh, I taught UNIV 101 this semes—this year. I taught that in the fall. The year before that I've taught classes in hospitality, which is my academic background area is Business.

00:31:20:23-00:31:23:02

KB: Really? I thought you were in Education.

00:31:23:02-00:31:37:07

CH: I'm in an Education PhD program, Ed Psych, my my undergrad and my first master's, they're in Business, and then my—then I have an MBA. So complete Business background, but—which is possibly why [unable to decipher because I interrupted her].

00:31:37:08-00:31:42:13

KB: This is just really interesting, because this is something I'm teaching and wrestling with these issues right now in this class [points to Business Communication textbook].

00:31:43:12-00:32:37:09

CH: Business—business is a, business is what—and I hate the term colorblind, but it is it's not colorblind. What it is is that money speaks, and so they don't care. And sometimes I feel like I walk into a space and students are like, "But they—I don't care about that." You want to make money. How you gonna make money thinking that you can't do something. Right? So I think for me—so, I was teaching an intro class, to university—university life. Yeah, University 101. And one of the things that I, that I do want to do—so there's this "Creating a Writing Intensive Course" workshop that I went to, and I wanted all my courses to be writing intensive because I know that writing is hugely important. Right? And you cannot write in AS—you cannot write

how you talk. Period. Right? Cuz I would love to write how I talk, but I can't, like it's just— that's just—

00:32:37:13-00:32:38:29

KB: For other people, or for your self?

00:32:39:29-00:33:45:24

CH: For other people, for other people. For myself? Absolutely. But like when you're writing to communicate an idea or, like, we have to be mindful in some ways of who our audience is. That's what they teach us in writing, right? But one of the things in just creating this, this course was working with my students. And like, when I walked in that classroom, my students, you know, I would ask them to do certain things and they were like, "No we need every step, we need to know what exactly do you want to read in our writing," and I'm like, "Well where is— where do you come into? Like, how is—how is this, um, relationship with you and I—it's just me telling you and you regurgitating, and that's not really creating what I wanted it to create, and so, I gave my students some different. Challenges. You know? Like, for example, don't ask a question. There are times when you can ask a ton of questions. But if I give you all the tools, then it is your job to figure out how to communicate that back to me.

00:33:46:00-00:33:48:23

KB: So what do you mean, like, giving them all the tools, like—

00:33:48:27-00:36:48:07

CH: So, for example, I had these writing assignments for my class, and they were based on, um—we had—we had this Common Reading experience, which students hated. They hated the Common Reading—they didn't like this last part—this last one we had. So I would have them write like a reflection on that. But in my syllabus, I would say, these are the things that your reflection need to include. Not answers to these questions, but specifically, I want you to reflect on, What are your thoughts? I want to hear what your voice is. And by and large—and then we would have a discussion in class. By and large, that discussion in class was phenomenal. It was way better than what I was reading in their papers because their verbal communication was spot on. Like they can communicate, and they would say how they felt about things. Now, one of the most interesting comments from a first-year student, first year on campus, which sparked an awesome discussion is, my Black students say it, "this, this is a very segregated school." Is it? When the White students say it, "I don't feel segregated at all." Okay, so the White student who was rushing a fraternity, seemingly an all-White circumsta—so you don't see because you don't see that, because you literally physically don't see it. My Black student, who is really existing in a lot of Black spaces, are like, "Well, it's even really segregated within Black community. Like, are you from the West Side of [major urban hub]? Versus the South Side, because that's two different ways of talking and participating in community and so it's just, it was just very interesting how when I'm asking you to write your reflection, it's a very different experience than you actually having a conversation. And they enjoyed the discussion part of the class. That was what some of th—I was like—they enjoyed the discussion part. The challenge, though, that I see as somebody that's teaching and transmitting knowledge is that—I know the after. Right? So when you graduate from college you're gonna be expected to write. You're gonna be expected to communicate in the written form and verbally. Right? Now, do I use slang when I talk?

Absolutely. Absolutely. Wherever because I have decided that I'm going to be my authentic self. But I have that privilege, right?, because I've already earned three degrees. Whereas students cannot als—they can't navigate walking in that space yet. They're just not quite balanced enough, and—now when I say “balanced,” they're not secure in who they are enough to balance the space where they can both communicate via the written form and authentic, it, communicate through the written form in a way that would allow them to engage with some, with someone who may not have had their same experience. But it's a little bit more of a, you know—but then also to be in their authentic selves when they communicate verbally.

00:36:48:16-00:37:03:08

KB: So I find it really interesting that you even were getting—because I see that lot, like you know, as a White teacher, like, getting responses that I'm just like, “No, just, like, tell me like it is,” like, just be—like, I'll read their writing and I'm just like, “Stop writing what you think I want to hear, or”—

00:37:03:11-00:37:03:13

CH: Yeah

00:37:03:15-00:37:09:09

KB: Or read. And so I think it's really interesting that it sounds like you were saying even the Black students

00:37:09:09-00:37:09:11

CH: Oh all students. All students.

00:37:09:13-00:37:13:11

KB: in your UNIV class like, weren't being like authentic with you.

00:37:13:15-00:38:10:15

CH: But I understand, right? So first year students and—you know what?—even my senior level classes where I spare no—like, the bar is just so high that they, they, you have to, like, catapult up to that thing. But I think what it is is that coming from school, coming from K through 12 education, which is very—I don't know if this is a word, but I'm about to put it in the dictionary—regurgitory in nature. Right? Right. So I tell you; can you tell me back? Absolutely. Let's prepare you to take this test. Let's prepare you to hit these markers. Well now all of a sudden you get to college and we're trying to break that which we have built up for so many years? You know. The problem is our education system. The problem is not that students can't necessarily write. But when you train people to be certain people, then you can't get mad when they are that person. Yes!

00:38:10:19-00:38:15:22

KB: Well, so how do you start? Like, how do you start kind of really breaking that?

00:38:15:27-00:38:16:24

CH: I'm not saying that we

00:38:17:12-00:38:19:08

KB: Or like, or like shifting it or like helping

00:38:19:08-00:38:32:27

CH: Shifting their mindset? I think—I don't think that that is something that, like, that is not something that we—that, that we have to do in higher education. It's something that we have to facilitate.

00:38:34:20-00:38:34:25

KB: What's the difference?

00:38:35:15-00:38:39:20

CH: So doing it means that it's all—the responsibility is solely on us.

00:38:40:02-00:38:40:16

KB: So to do the breaking?

00:38:40:17-00:39:52:12

CH: To do the breaking. Facilitation means that we create an environment where you are—that is being broken on you, but you're doing the breaking. We're just present—we're giving you the space to break it. So we do that by—we have some, we have some awesome conversations over here, where we—I know I engage in some active challenge and support of students and different, on different things, where I'm asking them to explain things, I'm asking them to, you know, come along, you know, with student leaders as they are trying to write proposals. I'm like, "Let me read that proposal. Okay, let me show you, let me help you, like, "Okay, so is this what you're trying to communicate. Okay cool. So tell me how you could communicate this better, because I don't understand this. I don't get it. Right? And so it's putting the onus back on them to then have them think through the problem. I think so often we try to solve the problem especially in the wri—you know what, why don't I just grade your paper, tell you everything that's wrong with it, give it back to you, you correct—no. What I'm going to do is we're gonna sit down and we gonna have a critical dia—we're gonna have a conversation about this. And at the end of the day you are going to fix it. [Phone call interrupts, so I pause the recording.]

00:40:02:23-00:40:28:27

KB: Okay. So I narrowed it down to like three questions I want to kind of just go back over and make sure to clarify. So you were just talking when we stopped about how the Black culture center facilitates—sorry, nope, you were talking about, like, how we need to, like, provide an opportunity to facilitate, like, the breaking of these sorts of enculturated habits. How—how do you see the Black culture center doing that, like, providing that opportunity? What specifically do you think you do to make that space?

00:40:30:02-00:41:20:13

I think that's a very hard question because I think that the whole purpose of the whole space is to break down that, to break that down. Right? And so it's—and it can be organic, or it can be structured. Organic would look like, just, conversations—I am—we are known for going out to the front and just sparking conversation with students asking them different things and then just

engaging right then. I think that it happens academically in the classrooms with the faculty and instructors who are engaging in those not just verbal conversations but in the written form. In classes. I feel like—also, through a lot of the programs and services that we offer. But it’s verbal communication; it’s not written all the time.

00:41:20:15-00:41:41:19

KB: Yeah okay. Is it always—like, how do you do it with groups of people? Like—because you talked a lot about, like, individualized things, but that is so much labor. So how do you—what—I guess what sorts of things have you guys done—events, programs, whatever—that you think have done maybe the most effective work in that regard or the most memorable?

00:41:44:27-00:41:56:02

CH: Um, I’m not really sure. I don’t know. I can’t say—I mean I would want to say our Soulful Friday, but that’s kinda new in terms of happening.

00:41:56:11-00:41:57:18

KB: Is that always films?

00:41:58:04-00:42:00:13

CH: No, sometimes it’s discussion around a topic.

00:42:00:15-00:42:03:29

KB: I wonder if that thing I went to—the generational—was that a Soulful Friday?

00:42:04:05-00:42:05:10

CH: That was a Soulful Friday.

00:42:05:15-00:42:07:06

KB: Okay. That was really enlightening.

00:42:07:07-00:42:10:24

CH: Right? And so that—it can come in that form, it can come in different forms.

00:42:10:25-00:42:18:28

KB: Okay. Um, you problematized the whole, like, “academic discourse” phrase, which I totally appreciate.

00:42:20:09-00:42:20:26

CH: Well I think that—

00:42:22:12-00:42:23:00

KB: What do *you* use to call it?

00:42:23:03-00:42:50:05

CH: I don’t know, because we don’t talk like that. I think that what it is is that when we—when we ask questions, that, that how we define things, why don’t—just ask what that is. I think that

when you write it maybe you're going to write "academic discourse." But when you ask somebody about academic discourse, you gotta tell them what—you can't use the word "academic discourse." You have to put that in what we call "layman's terms," like, just make it plain. What does that mean? And then ask me how we do *that*.

00:42:50:06-00:42:51:15

KB: So how would you make it plain?

00:42:51:18-00:43:04:19

CH: I don't know, because I really am still not clear about academic discourse. And I probably should as a, as an academician, but I'm not. I'm like, I don't know what that means. I don't know what discourse—I don't know, I should Google that. I'm gonna Google it.

00:43:04:23-00:43:32:11

KB: Yeah—it's so complicated, and I'm dealing with this too because the way I think about it is like, well, discourse is like the conversations that we have. And are those conversations always like linguistic? No, not necessarily. But, like, what are the things that we do to develop knowledge and to communicate about that knowledge—that's kind of the way I think about it. But yeah, I don't—is there a—yeah, you guys just don't even talk about it, you just do it?

00:43:32:11-00:43:35:01

CH: We don't use that, I—Yeah, I was like yeah, *no*.

00:43:35:01-00:43:35:22

KB: That might be it.

00:43:35:24-00:44:03:08

CH: I don't think that that's a term—[reading Google definition of "academic discourse"] "verbal interchange of ideas, especially conversation. Formal and or—so, formal and orderly and usually extended expression of thought on the subject. Connected speech or writing. A linguistic unit such as conversation or story larger than the sentence. A mode of organizing knowledge, ideas, or experience that is rooted in language and its concrete contexts. Hmm." I'm like—

00:44:08:12-00:44:16:02

KB: So it sounds like your conversations—like what she, um, the gir—Mary Stamper? It was Mary, right?

00:44:16:02-00:44:19:27

CH: Mary Stamps.

00:44:19:27-00:44:36:09

KB: Oh that's right. I said Mary Stamper because that's my mom's maiden name, and it—that's how I connected it. Um, when she did that, she based—like, she had this model, like, the Red Table Talk sort of thing, and it—to me, like, that was a sort of metaphor for thinking about what academic discourse is—

00:44:36:15-00:44:36:24

KB: Well I can see that.

00:44:36:26-00:44:39:28

KB: --it's just getting together and, like, having a conversation, I guess.

00:44:40:08-00:44:40:26

CH: Yeah.

00:44:40:27-00:44:44:17

KB: When you call—okay, So-Full Fridays is S-O-dash-F-U-L.

00:44:44:21-00:44:45:18

CH: Like so full.

00:44:45:27-00:44:50:23

KB: Or F-U-L-L or something. Yeah,, like, what's—so obviously soulful

00:44:50:25-00:44:54:08

CH: Like you leave so full, so full of knowledge, so full of food. So full.

00:44:57:21-00:45:14:07

KB: [Laughing] Gotcha. Alright. Um, okay. That's really helpful. What—you talked about authenticity, and this is actually something I noticed in some other things I was reading—there's talk of this “what is, like, authenticity, and what is that—that's a lot—that a lot of us look for. What does that look like to you in writing?

00:45:14:10-00:45:14:15

CH: Ohhhh.

00:45:14:15-00:45:17:12

KB: Like, how do you recognize it when you see it? What do you—

00:45:18:02-00:45:43:05

CH: Well you know what? I—you know, to be honest, I—I look at it as not only am I reading your voice but I can actually see that this is your voice. So not necessarily in word choice. Word choice, I am—I am a stickler for, like, grammar and being able to communicate via the written form.

00:45:45:16-00:45:47:12

KB: The standard English form?

00:45:47:12-00:46:50:05

CH: I would say Standard English. I am more Standard English. Do not write how you talk, because everybody—that is not a clear meth—you know, and part of that is just my love for, um, orders, like W.E.B. DuBois, like, there was no—like, he wasn't writing—his bar was here

[gestures up high]. He wasn't writing here [gestures down low]. The writing was not—have you ever read *The Souls of Black Folks* or *Miseducation of the Negro*? These are books that are so rich and also you need a dictionary to read those books, right? Because they are just chock full of this, like, his—his writing was just so far—it was like you are literally a sociologist and philosopher, like that is *who you are* and, but I always look to see if I could hear the student's voice in the writing. And it's the voice that I can recognize. So when a student speaks in class, I know your voice. Right? I know—I know your voice, um—

00:46:52:09-00:46:54:14

KB: Like, when you say “voice,” do you mean—

00:46:54:15-00:46:54:19

CH: I can hear it

00:46:54:19-00:46:56:29

KB: --because you said it's not, it's not word choice.

00:46:57:00-00:46:57:08

CH: Not necessarily.

00:46:57:08-00:46:57:26

KB: So for you it's like—

00:46:58:17-00:47:24:20

CH: It's like your voice, like I can—I can read a student's work and say, like, absolutely this student wrote this. And I can see that interplay between—because, there is—like, how you talk or even your word choice, even. When you write, there are just certain similarities for me that just bring it all together.

00:47:24:22-00:47:25:04

KB: Yeah.

00:47:25:07-00:48:11:23

CH: And I can feel that with a student—I'm like, okay, this is that student's voice. And it doesn't have to be written in slang, it doesn't have to be written in like a different—it doesn't have to even—you know, it doesn't have to be written problematically, quote unquote, to—for me to still hear that person's voice. It's kinda hard to explain, but I've gotten quite good because I've had to work on it myself. Right? And so I think my level of sensitivity comes from that. I've had professors, my profe—now, as a doc student—tell me I can't write, I need to work on my writing. And then I've had others that are like, “No, this is great,” like, you know? And so I think that beauty is in the eye of the beholder—and that includes writing.

00:48:11:24-00:48:31:01

KB: Yeah. So, it's interesting because, like—and *I* have dealt with this, like, even just, like, learning to kind of communicate about my research. Like what does it mean to be authentic and, like, to say it plain? Because you mentioned that to me the last time—like, “No, no, just tell it to

me straight. Like, what is it that you want to know?” And, like, I think I am, but apparently not. Because I’m using these terms—

00:48:32:09-00:48:34:23

CH: But you’re using the terms that—that feel comfortable to you.

00:48:34:26-00:48:40:11

KB: Yeah. So you’re asking me for audience awareness. Or some—well, sensitivity or—no, I don’t know—

00:48:40:11-00:48:52:15

CH: Not sensitivity, but just—I mean, know your audience. You know in writing—Straight from seventh grade, and I loved my, my writing teacher, I loved her so flipping much—my English teacher.

00:48:53:05-00:48:54:00

KB: Yeah?

00:48:54:05-00:49:19:20

CH: And she would—I mean, that was one of the core things, that’s one of the core things that we learn is—when we learn to write is to write to your audience. Who do you want to read this. Right? That is who you should be writing to. That’s who you should be writing to. Right? And you can write in your own vocal structure—vocal structure—as you are writing to someone else.

00:49:21:08-00:49:21:13

KB: Yeah.

00:49:22:25-00:50:04:22

CH: Or writing for someone else. And so I think that when we are asked—when we ask questions of people, and those people do not share our experiences—when we ask them questions in our vernacular, basically what we’re saying is that “you then need to figure out and adapt to what I’m asking.” Right? I think—and it can be tricky, right? Because some people will say that me having a bar and a standard means that I’m saying that you need to write to this bar. But I’m saying that if I make it plain enough for you to understand it, then the bar still is here [gestures up high].

00:50:04:22-00:50:08:15

KB: And how do you differentiate, then, between plain and dumbing down?

00:50:08:26-00:50:31:00

CH: Yeah. So, I think that it’s—it’s just kinda—it’s been—I think because it’s just—it’s something that’s ingrained, right? So that I think that White teachers may have a harder time with that—

00:50:31:19-00:50:32:00

KB: Yeah

00:50:32:12-00:50:34:01

CH: --than a Black teacher.

00:50:34:10-00:50:34:15

KB: I wonder why that is.

00:50:35:15-00:50:44:28

CH: And some of it is because there are some inherent biases that we may have, right? That I would say

00:50:44:29-00:50:45:28

KB: The black teachers, or white teachers?

00:50:45:29-00:51:06:00

CH: White teachers may have. Like, “Come on, guys, you don’t know what this word means?” Like, you know, that—that happens in classrooms, whereas, you know, in a different classroom, that student may hear, “Okay, I want you all—let’s talk about academic discourse. What I mean by that is yada yada yada yada yada.” And that’s not dumbing it down.

00:51:06:00-00:51:07:18

KB: You’re just defining your terms.

00:51:07:18-00:51:24:17

CH: It’s just defining the terms. Right? You’re giving them the rules of engagement. “Oh, okay, I understand that. Oh okay, good, I get that.” Versus, you know, saying it in a condescending way, or not even providing an explanation, “Go and figure it out.” You know?

00:51:24:27-00:51:30:17

KB: So where do you decide—like, how do you know, then, where a definition would be insulting?

00:51:31:00-00:52:21:02

CH: Ya know? I mean, I think sometimes it’s just okay to just ask. Like, some think we’re too sensitive on. Just ask—like, “Do y’all know what that means? Alright, well let’s talk about it.” Right? And so—and to me that’s me being my authentic self. Because there are sometimes that I don’t know stuff. And I tell ‘em—I don’t know what that means. Students say stuff all the time. “I don’t know what that means. Define it for me.” Right? Because I want them to get comfortable with me asking them. Because their level, their knowledge, is not my knowledge. I was raised in a different time by a different generation of parents than they were. And so there are times when I just—we just have to be okay with questioning and not thinking that questioning things is a sign of--*challenge* all the time. There’s a time to challenge and support and there’s a time to just relax and ask the questions that you need the answers to.

00:52:21:24-00:52:24:29

KB: You’ve been really helpful with that. Just, like, personally for me.

00:52:24:29-00:52:30:21

CH: I sure hope so. And I try not to be condescending even though sometimes people say I— [trails off]. I'm not condescending.

00:52:30:22-00:52:31:23

KB: No I think you're **direct**.

00:52:32:00-00:52:40:15

CH: I'm a very direct person because I just, I just want us all to get it right. If everybody just practice get it right—somebody will get it right.

00:52:41:07-00:52:42:24

KB: That's how you set your bar, I think—

00:52:43:10-00:52:44:00

CH: It is.

00:52:44:00-00:52:46:05

KB: by being direct—at least, I don't know, like it—

00:52:47:11-00:53:49:21

CH: I understand what it is when people are **not** direct. And I have been in those classrooms and I remember ha—let me tell—I had the most **phenomenal** teacher. She—she was phenomenal. And I took this black sexuality class and I was like, “Oh, I'm gonna”—I **knew** I was gonna learn in **this** class. And I got in that class, and she had us reading some stuff that—like, she had us reading complex articles, and I was like—I was **struggling**, not necessarily in the reading but just, like, having to always have a dictionary and understand. But it wasn't like she was like, you know, “What, is that too hard for y'all?” Like, “Is that too—is that too ha—okay, let me just switch it—No. This is the reading, and we're going to have great discussion of this reading in this class.” And I—that was so eye-opening for me. 1) She was not—I think in my whole time at college I had three black professors. One in English—I had a—because I took a African American literature class. Dr. Shackelford.

00:53:49:21-00:53:49:25

KB: Where'd you do--?

00:53:51:21-00:55:19:12

CH: Um, Purdue. 2) was my black sexuality class, with uh, Sandra, I can't think of her name. Then I learned that she's from Gary, and we have some common people that we know. I was like, **come on**. And then my third one was a Jamaican professor—Jamaican-born professor—that I had my hospitality program. Each one of them had a bar. And of that I remember going into my English teacher. And I was crying. Like, [mimics crying voice] I didn't do the assignment,” like I did not do the assignment, but she was like, so, like, “Okay, so, relax and let's talk about how we can get you on.” And I was just like, “Oh my God, I just love her so much.” It was it was an experience, right? Because, you know, all of my other teachers, they

didn't care. They—and that's—and that's—students feel when you don't care about them being successful in life, forget this class. Cause this—education is more than this class. Let's talk about life. Right? And I feel—I felt like, you know, the conversation was not dumbed down, the conversation—it was like they were who they were, and they were not going to change who they were to match yo fly. That just was not gon' happen. It's what white teachers do every day. Right? But it's just sometimes it comes off in a condescending way, even how they talk to students, it's like, “Dude you ain't gotta talk to them like that.” Right? So yeah.

00:55:20:27-00:55:23:09

KB: Yeah. Or patronizing. If we do try to help, then—yeah.

00:55:23:09-00:56:34:20

CH: And so I try to embody some of those positive things that—that I got from those experiences when I teach. And I've been teaching in college courses since I was a senior in college. You know, I've been, and I s—teaching and transmission of knowledge and being authentic. And everyday I'm not *on*. There are some days I'm not *on*. Right? And so, not feeling like I always have to be the expert. I think that that to me is authenticity. When—if you feel like when you step in the class that you need to be the expert and you need to be in control of everything, right there—that power dynamic—you're not going to have this academic discourse that you speak of. But when you go into the classroom acknowledging that this is a space for us all to learn and grow, then that—that changes things. And that's what we do here. That's the environment that I want to provide. That is not me. It's we. Now I am the main decision maker, so at the end of the day, it's gon' come back to me. But let's all participate in this process. So I'm often asking people, “What do *you* think? Give me *your* opinion.” Right? “Give me other things to consider” is what I'm saying to them. Change my mind if that's what you feel like you need to do.

00:56:36:14-00:56:38:26

KB: How they respond to that? Like, first year students.

00:56:39:03-00:57:15:01

CH: First year students don't *know* how to respond to that. They think, like, “you're asking me my opinion?” Absolutely. Right? First year students—not only first year students but when people first work with me, you know, just my first time employees. Like, “No no no, tell me what you think.” “It doesn't matter what I think at this point; I'm asking you what *you* think.” You know? And I think that for some—sometimes it's—having some—working with somebody like that can be refreshing, but it can also be very scary to have it as a professor because, now, you don't know—how am I being graded? Students. How am I being evaluated? Staff.

00:57:16:03-00:57:28:05

KB: Right. Yeah, exactly. Well, so how do you push that—like, how do you get it—when everybody is totally silent, and nobody wants to talk, and you're just like “No no no, like for real, I'm not *judging* you right now, like, let's *talk* about this.”

00:57:28:07-00:57:32:00

CH: I don't say that. I say stuff like, “We goin' sit here until somebody says something.”

00:57:32:02-00:57:32:22

KB: And you do it?

00:57:32:26-00:58:24:17

CH: And we do it. We gon' sit here. We just gon' be uncomfortable moments until somebody says something. You know? But it's also about building that rapport. Right? So I'm not always just going into the classroom just doing classroom stuff. I do sneaky stuff to my students, you know, I play, you know, we do critical thinking type of games, like we—we **participate**. Right? And I'm not a person that—so we participate. We participate. And we participate in other ways. That way you feel like this **is** a space that you can share, that you can have those conversations. You know? Otherwise, you know, I can't—I can't always be direct. There are times when I have to be, you know? Relaxed. In conversations there are seasons. There are seasons for everything. And so, yeah.

00:58:26:22-00:58:49:17

KB: I think you've addressed everything—like, so much more than I had hoped, even. [both jabbering] Can you share with me your syllabus in writing—you talked about the writing intensive courses or, like, a more recent one that you did or something? Can I just like—

00:58:49:21-00:58:55:18

CH: You can see my UNIV 101 course. I just don't feel like it's as writing intensive as **I** would like it to be, but it is pretty writing-intensive.

00:58:55:21-00:59:02:06

KB: Well the one that you talked about the reflections, where you said exactly what you want them to do. Like, whatever that was.

00:59:02:08-00:59:03:27

CH: That was UNIV. Yeah. I could share that.

00:59:04:06-00:59:08:18

KB: And, like, however you assess them, or, like, whatever you use to assess—

00:59:08:21-00:59:38:16

CH: And see, I didn't **assess**. Like, and I told—I was **very** clear—in a reflection, a reflective piece, I'm not out here trying to assess your content. Because that's me saying that what you—now I'm validating what you're saying. So, really? Did you hit the—did you hit the page count that I asked for? Did you hit—you know, can I—is there some clarity in your writing? So you can't really hit for a page count in a reflective piece, I don't think. You can hit for content.

00:59:38:18-00:59:44:06

KB: Do you have, like, samples of things you've used for evaluation? And other writing assignments? I'd love to—

00:59:44:08-00:59:56:22

CH: I do have a—well, not for this class, but for another class that I taught, I had—I created a rubric. Yeah I think I have—because my flash drive’s been wonky, but I do have that rubric for this other assignments.

00:59:57:00-01:00:11:14

KB: Anything. I can send you an email and just ask you for those, like, syllabi—or, like, I would just really like to see how you’re, like, *what* you’re asking the students to write, *how* you’re asking them to write things, and what kind of, like, parameters you’re giving them.

01:00:14:18-01:00:14:21

CH: Okay.

01:00:14:21-01:00:20:12

KB: So. Okay. And then again, like, maybe an example of a critical thinking type of game or whatever that you’re talking about that—

01:00:20:18-01:00:35:11

CH: So have you ever played the game, um—it’s not a game—um, I’m going on the island. No—I’m going on a boat. And on that boat I am taking an apple. Do you want to get on the boat?

01:00:36:02-01:00:36:09

KB: What?

01:00:36:20-01:00:37:17

CH: Do you want to get on the boat?

01:00:37:21-01:00:38:12

KB: For an apple? No.

01:00:38:12-01:00:44:13

CH: You want to get on the boat. So you say you’re going to get on the boat. And then I’m going to ask you, what are you gonna bring on the boat?

01:00:46:25-01:00:49:16

KB: Legit? Like, what am I going to bring on the—well, where am I going?

01:00:49:16-01:00:51:00

CH: It doesn’t matter. I’m going on the boat.

01:00:51:00-01:00:51:03

KB: And how long am I going?

01:00:51:03-01:00:54:28

CH: Doesn’t matter. I’m going on the boat. I’m bringing an apple.

01:00:54:29-01:00:56:02

KB: Can I bring sunscreen? Because I will get so burnt.

01:00:59:00-01:01:12:03

CH: You bringing sunscreen? You cannot get on the boat. Because I get to decide when you get on the boat. But I can get on the boat, and I'm bringing an apple. But you want to get on the—you *do* want to get on the boat, like, that's established. So, what are you bringing on the boat?

01:01:12:13-01:01:14:17

KB: Well I already told you, and you said no.

01:01:14:18-01:01:16:08

CH: You can't bring sunscreen, so you got to choose something else.

01:01:16:08-01:01:18:18

KB: So I gotta choo—and what am I supposed to figure out?

01:01:18:24-01:01:19:23

CH: You've got to figure out

01:01:19:28-01:01:21:04

KB: what your criteria are?

01:01:21:04-01:01:21:05

CH: Yes you do.

01:01:23:23-01:01:26:27

KB: Oh good grief. I don't like your criteria [laughing]. You get a lot of that?

01:01:27:09-01:01:30:19

CH: Yeah. Oh, the students—and they *struggle* with it. They struggle with it.

01:01:30:19-01:01:31:18

KB: And what are your criteria?

01:01:31:18-01:01:34:11

CH: I'm not telling you. You've got to figure it out. So—

01:01:34:12-01:01:35:27

KB: Oh hell. Do you use the same one every time?

01:01:35:28-01:01:39:20

CH: I do. And so—well, I mean, you can change it up. But I use the same one. Because stu—

01:01:39:21-01:01:42:29

KB: Well give me an example of the sorts of criteria—like, it has to food? Or like

01:01:44:02-01:01:54:23

CH: I can't tell you! Nope, it doesn't. They have to figure out the right—whatever criterion you choose for them to get on that boat, then they can choose. So I'll turn off because you'll be taping all of this, and we will pl—

01:01:57:29-01:01:58:03

KB: Here, I'll stop it.

Appendix E: Interview Transcript – Dr. Geoffrey Clemons

File Name: Interview with Dr Clemons.m4a

File Length: 01:20:50

SPEAKERS

KB – Kristin Bailey

GC – Geoffrey Clemons

FULL TRANSCRIPT (with timecode)

00:00:34-00:00:42

KB: First of all, do you have questions for me about the purpose of the study? Do you want me to explain it further?

00:00:43-00:00:46

GC: No, you've explained it pretty well.

00:00:47-00:01:09

KB: So, I'm trying to get your perspective on the Center itself and the ways that it's helping students acclimate to college. So, I guess, I want to try to kind of steer away from the obvious a little bit; you might have to like recap some of the things, like, in terms of the different sorts of organizations that the Black culture center has, and what not. I'm aware of all of that. What, I guess—

00:01:10-00:01:11

GC: Pssh, you're better than me, because I don't know—

00:01:12-00:01:29

KB: —specifically—[laughs] well, I'm looking into it a lot—um, what needs do you see, do you, Dr. Clemons, see, the Black culture center addressing for students, and how? Like in terms of helping them acclimate to college.

00:01:30-00:02:36

GC: Um, well, we offer a ready-made community. And in that ready-made community, we, of course, privilege the experiences and identities of African Americans and, by extension, the African diaspora. Um, I think we have, um, a number—well, I think, I would say all of our staff as well as affiliated and associated professors, um, understand the importance of working progressively and actively with Black students. I'm not gonna say that there's like a requirement of understanding and sensitivity for anybody who teaches here, but I will say in my experience, it seems like folks who do teach here are understanding. Because, you know, we have White instructors.

00:02:37-00:02:38

KB: More than one?

00:02:38-00:04:39

GC: Yeah. And I've never heard really any complaints about them. Now, with that being said, that doesn't necessarily mean that I haven't heard complaints about having White professors or instructors, but—we had, um, one, um, hire a couple of years ago who came in. He was a White male, degree in Black studies, taught at a university down South, and was really, really good at what he does. When he first started, there was some consternation about, um, his identity and his abilities, or his fidelity to Black studies and Black culture. Those things, by the end of the semester, were squashed. And I believe that only like two or three students out of somewhere upwards of 30 students actually dropped the course. And now he's, you know, one of the fellow beloved instructors, and there's a lot of respect for him. So, I say all that to just say that our professors tend to be much more sensitive of the challenges and needs of Black students compared to many other professors on campus in other departments and units. I think we also, um, I think we are capable of, you know, really promoting academic rigor (seems to be careful with word choices here, slows down rate of speech, something about his inflection seems tentative), and I think that that happens to varying degrees, I think some of us are much more, um, pointed about, um, our expectations of, you know, academic success.

00:04:40-00:04:48

KB: Can you clarify...? We'll keep all of this confidential, but it's just trying to help me understand.

00:04:49-00:05:03

GC: So there, um, there have been rumors, or, you know, word around the student campfire that if you want an easy A, there are certain classes in Black studies you can take to get an easy A.

00:05:04-00:05:06

KB: That's anywhere though, right? Or is it different, like—?

00:05:07-00:07:57

GC: I don't really care [laughs]. I mean, I don't care whether or not it's common, or whether or not it happens in other departments, that—I don't really give a damn. What I care about is that number 1, Black students are looking for easy As, cause I think that that, that trend, um, can end up being ammunition used against us. You know, “Oh, look at them, they're just looking for easy As.” You know, as opposed to, “I need to find a class that's really gonna push me. You know, it's like, um, a nosedive to the bottom, so to speak. Um, so, there is rumor that there are, you know, classes that are easy As, and at the same time, there are—especially students that are in Black studies know that there are some professors that you just don't play with. That, um, I think all of us are open to students and want to work with students and have healthy relationships with students, and I think, all of us are understanding that sometimes things happen, and, I think, you know—I know for, speaking for myself, I know that if a student comes to me and tells me that some shit is goin' on, I'm far more comfortable with saying, “Okay, we can work with that, no worries, let's, you know, take care of what you need to take care of at home, or, your illness or what have you, and come back to me when things die down and we can have a conversation

about how you can finish the semester, or if we need to give you an Incomplete or what have you.” So, I know that I am far more willing to bend for my students; however, of course, and I don’t think this is necessarily by design, I think it’s just kind of, um, human: students who, before anything like that happens, you know, try on their own to develop a relationship or show that they are, um, a thirsty student, um—they’re far more easy to bend to than someone who just intermittently shows up to class and, then, like, at midterm decides to tell me that, “Oh, my mom’s dying of cancer. Can you help me?” [laughs] And it’s like, “Wait, you should’ve told me that like Week 1, dude. You know, then I would’ve like, I wouldn’t have spent the last six weeks thinking about are you at home just, you know [...silence], or a lazy s—.”

00:07:58-00:08:19

KB: Yeah, no that’s been my experience more with students of color than White students is that they’ll silently sort of bear—unless, like, I’m missing something and they’re trying to pull the wool over my eyes or something, but I don’t think so, I think that—it just seems like there’s issues that, or challenges that they’re facing, that they don’t talk about.

00:08:20-00:09:38

GC: Right, and I think that they think that they’re not supposed to. I think that they think that if you have to go to your professor and ask for something, then that shows that either you’re not a good student, or you’re weak, or you’re some kind of other negative signifier that they don’t want to be associated with. And I don’t think that—especially if they are first generation—students don’t recognize that everybody does it, you know? And—although, you know, hey, you know, I can also understand why given some professors, they wouldn’t want to, um, because some profs can be assholes about it, you know? And just unbending, and I don’t think that—I don’t think having a high-quality educational experience is exclusive of having professors that are compassionate and caring. Cause if my student is too caught up in something that’s going on out there, they’re not gonna concentrate on what’s going on in my classroom, and I should be aware of that.

00:09:39-00:09:55

KB: Do you do stuff, like—this is kind of going off aside—with professional development for the faculty that are involved in the Black culture center? Like, that seems like a really important thing to talk about, because the demands that students are facing outside of class are not the same.

00:09:55-00:10:06

GC: Um, you know, that’s a damn good question, and the fact of the matter is, no. So, I’m putting that [...]

00:10:07-00:10:27

KB: You know one of the best things that I—one of the best professional development things I ever had—was here, um, in first-year writing—they did a whole thing on microaggressions—because I had never heard of that before. And it totally changed the ways that I taught and thought about things, and like approached—just having that [...]

00:10:28-00:11:16

GC: Well, you know, I think that, you know, especially framing the conversation that way, I think that part of the reason why we probably don't or at least never really have, is because a lot of that professional development, especially around cultural competency, um, is—it's not meant to be, but I think it's also interpreted as—learning how to support non-White learners in the classroom. And so I think that folks here in the Center, I mean, in any given Black Studies course, 98% of the students are Black. I mean, you know, I teach a class on hip hop, right?

00:11:16-00:11:22

KB: I didn't even know that, like, I could come take classes here when I went here for my Master's degree.

00:11:23-00:11:52

GC: Which... That's interesting. I mean, the idea that there's actually an entire minor, an entire set of classes, that White people feel like they can't take those classes, or they're not supposed to take those classes—at a public university, where an action like that would be summarily illegal, [...] get thumped for it, just the notion that—

00:11:52-00:12:51

KB: Or shouldn't, like the kind of, like, not legally or whatever, but more like the—you just don't—Well, this is a question that I, I guess this is tied to the question I asked at your book talk the other day that obviously was just not a good time to get deep into though. But I wrestle with it even coming here, just for the research, like—knowing that to some degree, my very body is associated with violence and can create, you know, like reactions or responses that maybe aren't, like, something that I notice, but that are problematic, you know? So, I think to some degree, that's the sort of—when I say, like, “shouldn't go,” or “I'm not allowed to take,” I guess that's kind of like what I mean, is like do I belong, or should I be coming into a space that is protected for People of Color, you know? Specifically, African American students when I'm talking about the Black cultural—

00:12:52-00:15:02

GC: Yeah, I mean I, I get that, but, you know, the name of the Center is the Black culture center, not the Center for Black People. And although I do think that, um, non-White groups especially on a college campus where there's so much of a dominant presence of Whiteness, yeah—non-White students ought to have spaces that they can go to that are safe. And, but I don't think that safety necessarily equates to exclusion. I think safety is about coming to a space where you don't have to explain yourself, you don't have to defend who you are, you don't have to defend what you're about, you don't have to defend why you say something a certain way. So when White folks come into the center, White folks have to be on notice that “I am not coming into this space as a judge. I'm coming into this space to learn and to be a part of a community that's been here long before I even decided to walk into this building. That is what a center for any identity ought to be able to project. So, I think it becomes really important that, you know, following this breadcrumb of professional development, I think that when we think about professional development, especially around identity issues, we largely frame it as being about race and ethnicity first and foremost. And it didn't even register to me that maybe we should have a pro development session on understanding the trans community on campus, or maybe we should

have a pro development session on understanding Whiteness, and how Whiteness emerges in curriculum, even when we're trying not to. Or—

00:15:03-00:15:05

KB: Or in your presence in the classroom.

00:15:05-00:15:53

GC: Yeah, you know, and—we should have our own professional development on microaggressions and implicit bias and all these other ideas that are connected to cultural competence, because yeah—we have our hangups. And just because we are a marginalized group—and probably I would dare to say the most iconic representation of what a marginalized group is—maybe we should, you know, take a page from our own book and recognize that other communities ought to be understood as well, and just because we have the experience of being minoritized and dominated doesn't necessarily mean we have a monopoly on that.

00:15:54-00:18:25

KB: It's interesting how you, um, I guess where my thought with all of that kind of like how that was processed for you, like in terms of, like, branching out, and things like that, cause I didn't even—yeah, just like identity generally, and—I guess, um, yeah those intersec—yeah the intersectionality is such an important thing that I don't think a lot of us, we don't talk about normally, like in everyday conversation. I didn't—until I went to Milwaukee—so I'm for all intents and purposes a first-generation college student and have been to, like, three very different institutions, and Milwaukee is by far the most liberal, progressive, activist. So, it's interesting, like, how much I didn't even know till I went there. Um, so, okay—all of this is kind of circling around my biggest concern, which is academic discourse, which—by that, I mean the ways that we use language and whatever, so whatever various communicative means, to develop understanding, to—how did I explain it to myself?—to exchange ideas, to develop critical thought. Um. I think about my role as a writing teacher—it's kinda, it's funny how I ended up, like, in this field, because I honestly don't really care about, like, teaching academic writing—because I actually am pushing against it all. Like, I hate the sort of standards of what things are supposed to look like and how we're supposed to, like, help students end up with this thing that meets whatever criteria that are really bullshit. So I'm trying to think about how to push back against those criteria and how to rethink the criteria by which we assess but also, like, assign writing, the things we invite students to do. Cause for me it's all about the critical thought. I love teaching rhetoric. Rhetoric and Composition just tend to go together, Writing Studies exists and First-Year Composition classes exist because, like, as a remedial thing, like that's kind of how they happened. So, I see that as, like, my space for being able to interject and do activist work, I guess.

00:18:25

GC: Okay.

00:18:26-00:19:40

KB: Especially difficult when you have a culturally diverse class, or when you don't know what your class makeup is gonna be, and one class you've got at a time is like 90% White students, and then you've got another class that's 90% Students of Color, most of whom are Black. So,

I'm trying to learn from the Black culture center, like, how do you, or how does the Center, what are the various ways that the Center engages students, to help sort of cultivate a sense of academic identity through that discourse. And I'm talking about discourse more generally because in Writing Studies, we are starting—like, I guess it's been like 10 years or so that people are really thinking about writing more broadly, as the sort of multiple kind of communicative practices—so people are looking more into performance studies and whatnot. My project builds on—or is coming from—this book that I read where this, um—

00:19:40-00:19:41

GC: Which book?

00:19:41-00:20:53

KB: Digital Griots? It's—have you heard of it? It's in my field. Adam Banks—he's a Black scholar, and he did a community literacy class, and—I don't even know, I don't think any of that matters um, like, for this conversation [thinking to self out loud here]. Basically, the whole book is an argument for the brilliance of the mix tape as a sort of rhetorical production, and the process of creating the mix tape. And all the intellectual work that goes into it. And he talks about students as this digital griot, the storyteller—and takes it back to the West African tradition of the griot. So part of my work is wanting to see what sorts of literacies—for lack of a better word off the top of my tongue—are students here coming in with that I can use in the—that I can invite? I guess—in the classroom, and sort of prioritize, or center, to resist that sort of deficiency model.

00:20:53

GC: Okay.

00:20:54-00:21:14

KB: So, a lot of people are doing work on code-meshing—or code-switching, some people are into that—or, so that's like, there's kind of this binary in the field, to some degree, where it's like we either do this thing, or we teach people to adopt the language of the culture of power.

00:21:15-00:21:16

GC: Yeah, that whole Delpit thing.

00:21:16-00:21:25

KB: Delpit, yeah, you know—okay. So, yeah, so I'm looking for a more complicated way to think about this.

00:21:26

GC: Um

00:21:27-00:21:29

[silence]

00:21:30-00:21:32

KB: I didn't even just ask you a clear question. I would just love to hear your thoughts on [laughs]...

00:21:33-00:24:55

GC: Well, yeah, um, well—literacies are embodied, right? You know, there's something—it's not simply—literacy isn't just procedural steps that one takes to ascertain meaning. It's about—it's just as much that as it is about more intangible things like essence, and culture, and, you know, the lenses in which—understanding and recognizing that there are multiple lenses in which you approach the construction or interpretation of meaning. So ultimately, the first step of any literacy project is understanding the self, understanding the individual, understanding where one comes from, or where members of a certain community are coming from. So, when you're in a Black Studies center, and you're teaching in a Black Studies program, some of us will definitely—so there's a couple of things that are happening, at least a couple of things. 1) Some professors—there are some, um—and this can be embodied in any one given professor, but there this one strategy of recognizing where kids are coming from. So a lot of our kids, for example, are coming out of South and/or West side of [major urban hub]. And so, recognizing that that's where they come from and that—and those communities serve as the cultural foundation for anything that they're gonna do here. And so there are professors that will definitely try to make sure that in their classes, they're, you know, tying information back to, you know, life in [major urban hub]. And there are others—and I include myself as one—that is more inclined to saying, “Look, I know that you had this back at home, but you're not there. And it's my responsibility (especially if it's in a lower-level course) to show you what the expectations are going to be from other professors on this campus so that you can get the hell out of here. With a degree.” So, I tend to construct myself as being more of a traditionalist to a certain degree, because I have a real deep romantic idea about what it means to be a college student, and what one ought to be doing with their time in this period of their lives. And I recognize that people have jobs and all that shit, but I don't care, I really don't. Your number one job is to be a student and graduate and get out of here. Everything else is just extra gravy, or extra headache, you know.

00:24:55-00:25:00

KB: Why? What is your—get out of here for what? Like just to have a piece of paper?

00:25:01-00:27:14

GC: No, not just to have a piece of paper, but to aggressively and always progressively move in a direction that's going to get you closer to accomplishing the dreams and goals that you may have as an individual. I tell my students a lot that, you know, I ask them if they're thinking about graduate school, especially anyone that's past their second year, and, you know, there's a lot of hemming and hawing about it, and my refrain is, “You need to go get a doctorate. We need more Black doctors, plain and simple. And if you're not gonna do it, who is? And if you can graduate from here with a reasonably decent GPA, you can go get a doctorate. It's not an occult thing. It's a hard thing, it's challenging, but we can't as a culture—I mean, on one hand, the culture has a really strong and rich tradition for academics. And of all things in our culture, that is the one thing that we should not sacrifice. Because if we can't create and develop our own things, our culture's gonna die. And I'm not in the business of that; I don't have any interest in seeing that happen. I say in lectures and seminars that I have no problems with being Black [laughs]. Being

Black is not a problem; it's what has been done to Blackness that is a problem. And so, I say all that to say that I think, you know, in terms of, um—and then of course this all depends on what class is being taught, so if I'm teaching my hip hop class, I like to highlight students in the class that maybe have some rhyme skills, or some DJ-ing skills, or some B-boying skills, you know?

00:27:15-00:27:16

KB: How do you know?

00:27:16-00:27:17

GC: You ask.

00:27:18-00:27:19

KB: Oh, you just ask them what they, okay—

00:27:20-00:32:20

GC: Yeah. And then—or before class starts, look at the roster, and, you know, share it with Rhaya or somebody and say, “Hey, anybody on this list got any skills?” [Laughs] You know? But I also think that, you know, if there's such thing as literacies of Blackness—I mean, I'm pretty sure there is—I think what we in the Center collectively try to do is promote literacies of Blackness and help students understand how they're positioned within society and on campus and why that is—not just that it is, but why is it. So, in my African American Critical Thought class, for example, the approach that I wanted to take to it—I had initially thought about a bunch of critical topics, and what has been the history of critical thought related to that topic. So, what's critical thought related to the nature of identity and Black culture? Critical thought about the impact and repercussions of mass incarceration, blah blah blah. And then I was like, no—that's kinda lame, that's kinda predictable. What, in my opinion was, that students don't know the classics. You know? And I think it's—I think going through 4, 5, 6 years of undergraduate school and not having ever read *The Souls of Black Folk*, or not having ever read *The Miseducation of the Negro*, or not having read Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark*, um, or not having read Ta-Nehisi Coates—any Ta-Nehisi Coates—or Baldwin or whomever, um that's a mis-education. And so, I wanted to have an experience where they get to grapple with great books, to pull them back or show them—or guide them, I don't know which word to use—but to help engage them in really understanding the depth of this scholarship that comes out of the Black experience. Because it's funny, and I try to have them—I try to make sure that throughout the semester, as we progress through the ages, or through the years, that they're constantly being recursive and looking back at—it's like, “Oh, so this is how James Baldwin connects to Malcolm X, Martin Luther King. Oh, this is how Malcolm and Martin are directly tied to DuBois and/or Woodson. Oh, this is how Woodson connects to Marcus Garvey or Booker T. Washington. This is how Washington connects—” you know, so to try to make them understand that just because something was written 150 years ago doesn't mean it no longer has relevance to what's happening right now. And it's hard to read a book like *The Fire Next Time* by James Baldwin without recognizing what's happening right now. And the ways in which Baldwin was talking about the exact same problems in really powerful ways back all the way in 1963. Or how *Letter from Birmingham Jail*, which is largely, you know, an admonishment of White clergy—hello? Trump supporters. You know what I'm sayin'? It's like, you know, Baldwin saying this back here, 1963, and now look what's—what's White clergy in the Midwest doing right now? You

know, in their support of Donald Trump, and by supporting Donald Trump, you're in bed with all of his policies and everything that comes after that. So, look at these two events, and tie them together using literature that is ultimately reflective and prescient at the same time.

00:32:21-00:32:50

KB: So how do you—okay I have two questions about that. The more important one is How do you invite students to make those connections? Because a lot of times, that's what we do with writing, right? Like, that's the function of it, or whatever. What do students produce in your classes? They told me that at the end they're having some sort of a, like a performance thing?

00:32:51-00:32:54

GC: So apparently, they didn't wanna write the essay. [Laughs hard]

00:32:55-00:33:01

KB: I understand why. [Laughs]

00:33:02-00:33:44

GC: So they decided they didn't want to do this writing assignment, and what I wanted them to do was they were gonna need to identify two African American critical thinkers and basically learn their ideas and represent them in an essay, and, you know, take two, compare and contrast—you know, how are they similar, how are they different. What are their overarching arguments, how are they similar, how are they different, you know that whole synthesis and all that shit. They don't feel that. They don't want to do it.

00:33:44-00:33:47

KB: Any idea why?

00:33:48-00:34:04

GC: Well, it could be because maybe the way that I wrote the assignment description was convoluted. I have to admit, I am horrible at writing assignments. Not for not trying; I've gone to seminars ... I've written assignment—

00:34:04

KB: Have you gone to the Writing Center?

00:34:05

GC: Ye—(nods affirmatively)

00:34:06-00:34:08

KB: Oh okay, I was gonna say I've had them help me with that [laughs-I think he was making funny faces].

00:34:09-00:34:34

GC: I've gone to seminars, I've go—I've had other people read assignments, I've had other people who teach multicultural methods for English and English language learning methods—I've had them, colleagues, you know “Dude, does this assignment make sense?” and read it, and

it was like “Aw man, it sounds great,” then I give it to students and they’re like, “Huh?”
[Laughs]

00:34:35-00:34:42

KB: I don’t know that that’s necessarily your thing—I think, to some degree, though, it’s like them learning a new genre, like how do you read—

00:34:42

GC: Yeah.

00:34:43-00:34:50

KB: Well and their so used to having certain kinds that have ridiculously strict expectations, that are very formulaic, and—

00:34:51

GC: And I’m not.

00:34:52-00:34:54

KB: So, right—I mean, you’re a college professor.

00:34:55-00:35:26

GC: But at the same time, I’m also equally inclined to just say, “I’m not gonna tell you what to write, just give me a thousand words. Let’s see what you come up with.” Which is really hard to do, because they already have these embedded expectations of what they’re supposed to be doing and “what do they need to do to get an A?” Which is another thing, I don’t use rubrics.

00:35:26-00:35:31

KB: Do you do, like, labor-based grading, or what do you—how do you grade?

00:35:31-00:39:38

GC: Um, so, that’s a really great question. So, when I sit down to grade, I do take into account, especially near the end of the semester, whether or not the student has shown any growth. Whether or not they’ve taken any advice that I’ve given, or anything like that. And of course, that’s all also dependent on time, because if it’s one of those semesters where I’m just swamped, that feedback doesn’t get back as fast as I would even want it to, you know? So they write an assignment, and, the next thing you know, the next assignment is due, and I still haven’t returned the first assignment. So all those things kinda snowball. But when I’m approaching my assessment of them and their performance, what I try to do is I try to just kinda like step back and like, “Okay, based upon all the, um, essays that I’ve read for this particular class or this particular course over time—you know, semester to semester—how does this particular essay fit within that landscape?” And then it’s more of a matter of, “Alright, what does this person, what does this student need to know to help advance their writing?” Because what I’ve come to find, especially in the lower-level courses, like “Racism in America,” students are really reflecting what they were told to do from high school, in their high school writing. And so, explanations tend to be very thin, arguments aren’t really well crafted, and then of course, the silly, stupid mistakes that drag down all good essays—punctuation is off, and—you know, just—and I tend to

be harder on that stuff, because it's like, "Look, this is the easy part." You know? So I'm always telling students, "Look, you know"—I remember earlier in the semester, someone had written a really, really, really kick-ass piece, but it was filled with these punctuation and usage errors. And it was like, "I don't wanna be a dick about it, but I can't let you go out there writing like this." Because they're gonna say a lot about you if you present yourself this way. So I told the student in my comments on Blackboard that he had some really great ideas, but they all got lost. Because I was too busy paying attention to all your comma splices, and—[laughs]—and all of your—you know, all of your missed punctuation, and all of the misspelled words, even though you have a red squiggly line under it, you know? And stuff like that. So on one hand, it's like if they can articulate verbally ideas or—in class, it's clear that they are engaging with the text, and they have something to say, and I can help guide them through a dialogue about any given reading, that's one thing, that's one activity. And one literacy, right? And I have the tendency of privileging that one. You know, it's like what are you doing in class? How are you talking about this stuff? Because writing is a completely different skill. And I can't necessarily fully be pissed off at them, because most writing instruction in high school sucks. Most writing instruction in college sucks. Writing instruction is just hard, and people don't do it very well.

00:39:38-00:39:44

KB: Well, a lot of people think they can just do it without actually study—I mean, there's a whole field that is studying it for a reason.

00:39:44-00:41:14

GC: Exactly. And so that's why I have a tendency of not being as hard as I could be. Because I do think that I inflate my grades when it comes to essay writing, because if I gave the grades that I wanted to give, or at least that I felt was, um, in my experiences, warranted—a lot of my students would only get Cs in my class. And I don't necessarily think that just writing assignments alone, or one genre of assessment should dictate whether or not you were successful in a course. I think it has to be a more holistic evaluation. So, encouraging students to always be, um, participants in class by asking que—I mean, the class that you sit in on, it's a great class, because it's awesome to see everybody in the class having something to say or having some kind of question that's a sensible question that clearly arises either out of the discussion directly or out of the text directly. So, in that regard, I'm like way happy about the class.

00:41:14-00:41:15

KB: What level is that class?

00:41:16-00:41:34

GC: It's a 300-level. And I don't think there are any prerequisites for it, but it's a 300-level class. And there's only 8 students in the class. Makes me wonder what the class would be like if there were 15. Or 20.

00:41:35-00:41:36

KB: Have you taught it before?

00:41:36-00:41:37

GC: No, this is my first time.

00:41:37-00:42:17

KB: Okay. It's an excellent class; if I had a class that was that engaged—and that brilliant? That's the thing—it's like...yeah. Sorry, I'm just thinking. That is one of the hard parts, that the courses I teach are focused on the one kind of literacy. So there's this whole area that they're talking about, like "Multiliteracies" and like the various ways that we make sense of things. At the end of the day, though, students have to produce things in our capitalist—right? Like—education system.

00:42:17-00:42:18

GC: Which is why—

00:42:18-00:42:19

KB: So, which is why they're doing the—what is it—

00:42:20-00:43:09

GC: They're creating their own assignment, because it's like, when Rhaya had asked if they could create their own thing, I told her, "I don't care. As long as it shows that you guys really did dive into that literature." I really wanted, um—so I told Rhaya that—I don't care what they did, as long as 2 things. As long as 1) it showed that they really did engage with the literature and understand the literature, and 2) everybody has to do their own short writing assignment.

00:43:10-00:43:13

KB: So, what is that gonna be? And what do you mean by short?

00:43:14-00:43:22

GC: 4 pages. And um, in that, they have to reflect on what they themselves learned through the course.

00:43:22-00:43:25

KB: Okay. Do you evaluate the writing and give them feedback, and then—?

00:43:26

GC: Yeah.

00:43:27-00:43:50

KB: Okay [trying to figure out what to say next]. I want to ask you this question, because I'm really curious. As a scholar, do you feel any ambivalence or resistance toward conventions of academic writing?

00:43:51

GC: No.

00:43:52

KB: No?

00:43:54-00:44:44

GC: I mean, it's part of a tradition, so ... I don't—it's not that I think that traditions are sacrosanct and should never be tampered with—they should, any tradition should have the room to grow with time—grow and change with time—but at the same time, you know? Some of this stuff has been going on since Plato. [Laughs] So, I mean, like I said, I'm kind of a romantic about all this, you know? I think that, you know, being a part of this larger tradition is an important thing, and I think that's something that Americans tend to not really take very well.

00:44:45-00:45:07

KB: So how then—okay, that's a really interesting use of the word—how would you differentiate between tradition and, like, a system? Because I'm thinking about—I mean, I know they're not the same, it's like comparing apples and oranges, but—or not even—but um, I mean that tradition, the very history of that tradition is oppressive.

00:45:08-00:45:09

GC: Can be oppressive.

00:45:10-00:45:44

KB: But it's—I mean, at least in terms of—okay, so you're talking about academic writing more generally, and okay I'm thinking about first-year writing. But I mean, to some degree, if you study classical Rhetoric, that is very, like, very ancient Greece—in terms of like, very masculine, like, certain things are privileged, and certain ways of encountering the world and thinking about the world.

00:45:44

GC: Mm-hmm.

00:45:45-00:45:57

KB: So, when you think about the tradition, I guess, what are you thinking of, and how are you conceiving of that tradition? I'm guessing that you're not seeing it as this sort of more linear thing.

00:45:58-00:49:07

GC: No, not necessarily, I mean—tradition in academia to me—it's like, yeah, I know that our current conception of higher education stems directly from Western European ideology and all that, I'm aware of that. At the same time, I think that there are spaces that, um, for lack of better terms right now, nontraditional folks can insert themselves into this larger tradition. The tradition to me, in and of itself, is the tradition of gaining and creating knowledge. That's the tradition. And there are of course many modes to making that happen. So there does have to be a balance between the Western tradition of privileging the written word—essays—with the African and Asian traditions of oral culture. You know, speeches, group presentations, that kind of stuff. There are definitely modes of critical thought that are traditional—you know, for lack of better—oh, it's not a lack of better terms—but, you know, more structuralist approaches to analysis of all forms, literary or otherwise, is one thing. And then, of course, on the other hand you have more poststructural approaches to analysis. So, I think that the larger notion of this quest for knowledge and knowledge production is the larger issue at play. And underneath that you have

all of these other cultural, institutional, social, economic, historical constraints and challenges that are all negotiated all at the same time. So, on one hand, I think that, um—and I try to promote to my students the Western notions of academic success and literacies, not as a way of privileging—and I think this is something that non-White groups have to struggle with a lot—they don't teach them to privilege them for the students. They teach them so that they can be successful. And then, once they are aware of these different discourses and these different approaches, hopefully—especially if they continue on into graduate school—they're more conscious about them, and in that way, they can be far more deliberate about what they do, and far more strategic about what they do, as opposed to just doing it just because.

00:49:08-00:49:10

KB: Do we need to change the system though?

00:49:11-00:49:27

GC: Mm...? Well, I mean, education in the United States just needs to be changed altogether, because it sucks. And we know why it sucks, we know how it sucks, and we know how it got to the point as to where it sucks. [laughs]

00:49:28-00:49:41

KB: Well so is that part of the plan? Like, we get more people of color in positions of power to—I mean it's not all that, it's not all a race/ethnicity thing—

00:49:41-00:51:49

GC: No, but without that diversity—so first and foremost, just because you have a diverse group of people doesn't mean shit in terms of making anything happen or reforming anything—that doesn't mean anything. Because I can name about 6 or 7 white boys right now that are all over what you're trying to do and highly supportive and highly motivated. Right? And can stand toe-to-toe with anybody and dismantle a system. So why any given system is nothing more than a white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. Right? A la bell hooks. So, but—at the same time, if you don't have diverse voices in there, then something is definitely missing, and that says a lot. So, I don't think it's so much that—I don't think that every student is—I mean, again, this is the Du Bois in me—I don't think that every student that graduates from here is gonna be brilliant. But they are gonna need to know what to do to be able to successfully engage that system that's already out there that they're gonna be walking into. Hopefully in the process of helping them understand that or learn about that or also helping them understand and see what their own natural gifts and abilities are and how they can develop strategies to insert and assert themselves in any given context, whether that be corporate America, K-12 education, criminal justice, you know, whatever industry you wanna choose. Film. Blah blah blah. Did that make any sense?

00:51:50-00:52:33

KB: It did. No, I've got a lot that I'm thinking through now. My brain's starting to get, like, heavy and full. It has a limited capacity. [laughing] You mentioned modes of critical thought, and this is actually something that I had written down for myself to look into, like how bell hooks approaches and defines critical thinking and, like—would you say—this is, purely, like, asking you as an expert on this stuff—do you see any intersections or parallels or whatnot between modes of critical thought and, like, race and ethnicity—like, cultural values?

00:52:34

GC: Can you say more?

00:52:35-00:53:31

KB: So like—so we've got this like sort of—so I'm—okay, I'm very limited in terms of my understanding of how to define—it's very linear in my mind, the ways that we think about, like, modernism/postmodernism, structuralism/poststructuralism, new materialism, things like that. I don't know if that's an accurate understanding of it, but that's kind of the way I understand things to have evolved. Are some of those, I guess, modes of thinking more Western European than others?

00:53:32

GC: Yeah.

00:53:32-00:53:40

KB: And are some more rooted in, like, African traditions?

00:53:40

GC: Um...

00:53:41-00:53:50

KB: Or maybe not rooted but more aligned? I know that's probably a really weird question. But it affects the ways that we think about—

00:53:50-00:55:36

GC: Nah it's not a weird question, I think—I think the largely the ways that, at least analytically, we construct, um, the world does come straight out of Western Europe. And it's—for what it's worth, you know, that is one of their grand contributions. You know. The meta-analysis of how we communicate, and how we make meaning. Right on. And poststructuralism, which of all those forms of analysis is probably my favorite because of the fact that it is so open and recognizes that there are invariably going to be an infinite number of ways that one can critique any given text, written or otherwise. And so, poststructuralism creates a space for traditionally unheard voices to be very heard, whether that be feminist voices, Afrocentric voices, queer voices, etc. So, poststructuralism moves to—poststructuralism ultimately becomes that, you know, unifying umbrella of the diverse experiences and perspectives. And I think that it's poststructuralism that most closely aligns with non-Western European thinking. Even though it is a staunchly Western European idea.

00:55:37-00:55:40

KB: What about New Materialism, or—?

00:55:40-00:55:42

GC: Don't know anything about it.

00:55:42-00:56:13

KB: Okay. Because I think that affects the sorts of work that we do and the assignments that we give and whatnot, so I wonder if there's, that's tied in in any way. Um, okay. Do you notice any such ambivalence or resistance towards conventions of academic writing among your students involved here? Or are there any special issues or unique considerations with Black students and academic writing that you think are important to address—or discourse more generally?

00:56:14-00:56:17

GC: What is it? But I don't really think that's a—

00:56:17-00:56:18

KB: Are there any special—

00:56:19-00:56:30

GC: I don't think that's a—that anything that Black students collectively don't know is anything all that unique from what White students don't know in my experience.

00:56:30-00:56:40

KB: Not about a knowledge, about considerations with how we approach the teaching, or the training.

00:56:41-00:56:43

[silence]

00:56:44-00:56:52

GC: Um...this is gonna sound really fucked up, and I'm glad this is anonymous, but I kind of have a tendency of approaching all my students from a deficit lens. [laughs]

00:56:53

KB: Oh geez. Well, I mean you are teaching.

00:56:54-00:58:17

GC: Well, it's a part—it's partly because I'm also very well aware of, you know, education pre-No Child Left Behind versus education post-No Child Left Behind. And in education post-No Child Left Behind, there's a whole lot of safe assumptions that you can make about what they don't know. Because it's—NCLB was that damaging of a policy. The spirit was fine, but the actual implementation of the policy was just horrid, because it, of course, especially for more economically challenged school districts, which were predominantly Black and Latino, that overemphasis on the test—practically to the exclusion of everything else, including essay writing—is just changed the American student in ways that I don't know if we're ever going to be able to get back. Students have always been lazy. I'm just gonna put that out there. I was a C student in high school, so I'm not trying to be holier than thou in any way, shape, or form. I fucking hated school. It sucked.

00:58:18-00:58:19

KB: You think it's lazy? Or—

00:58:19-01:01:43

GC: It's lazy, and disengaged. I mean, I think that there are so many things that happen for adolescents and young adults that are just a lot more interesting and sexy than school. Now, that doesn't mean that we don't know better as educators, because we do. We know what works and what doesn't work. Friends of mine used to say, would always ask, "What would Dewey do?" As in John Dewey. Because you go back and you look at what Dewey was saying back in the 30s, and it's like, "Yeah. Yeah, that's a great idea. We should still be doing that, and we're not doing it. Why not?" You know? Because, it worked. And I'm of the opinion that the American education system—public education system—has been to not work, and to be ineffectual. Because a lot of people make a lot of money that way. More people make more money by fucking up education than by fixing it. And the proof is in the pudding; there's just far too much research that's been done to show how much we're fucking up kids by our practices and pedagogies, I mean, it's just not good. And then we have the audacity to, you know, talk about how great Finland is without being willing to do a quarter of what Finland did to make Finland great. [laughs] And the fucked-up part about all that? Is that they got all their research from us. [laughs] The Finns got a lot of there—I mean, if there's one thing that's true about American education, it's that we have the most impressive educational research apparatus on the planet. And we've produced a lot of incredible research over the last 50, 60, 70 years. So, we have a lot of answers. We knew—we knew that No Child Left Behind was gonna fall apart before the legislation was even signed. You know? There were people like Linda Darling-Hammond saying, "We should not be doing this." And then to have someone like Diane Ravitch, who was staunchly in favor of No Child Left Behind, and more conservative or neo-conservative policies, for her to come out and say, like, "That was wrong, y'all, I'm sorry." [laughs] You gotta give the girl her credit, right? Which was so cool of a thing to actually see, and a great model of what does feminism look like, you know, compared to the men, like um, her friend at the time, Chester Finn. He still hasn't said peep about his miscalculations in the 80s and his pronouncements about what testing could do in the 90s and all this other crap. But with all that being babbled, um, I don't even remember what my point was. I love it when that happens.

01:01:44-01:02:18

KB: I feel like you touched on it at some point. So that actually connects to another thing I was wondering and I'm gonna ask the students about that I interview or do focus groups with, but like, students that are coming here that you know of, that are involved in the Black culture center, what do you hear—like why, if it's possible to even, like, give some sense of a collective response, but why do students come here? Like what—so you're talking about like coming here and getting out—what is it that's—

01:02:19-01:02:21

GC: Well, why do students come here in the first place?

01:02:21-01:02:31

KB: Yeah. To college. Specifically Black students, like who are coming from—I know we've got the CHANCE program and that's what makes things possible for a lot of students from underserved areas, but—

01:02:31-01:02:36

GC: The primary reason is because of money.

01:02:37

KB: To make more?

01:02:37-01:03:00

GC: To be able to make some. [laughs] In some cases—in some cases I think students, I think in most cases students come to college with the primary reason of developing some kind of skill or learning some kind of a discipline so that they can then go out and translate into the economic marketplace.

01:03:00-01:03:02

KB: Do you find that actually happening?

01:03:03-01:04:03

GC: Yeah. Students graduate, they get jobs. You know? So, I think that's the #1 measure of whether or not, you know, a college career was successful. Did you get a job in what you majored in? And that's the language that people use. Now, I stretch that out to say, if you didn't get a job in your major, does that mean that your collegiate experience was pointless? Because I don't think—and I've never thought—and again, I'm a traditionalist and a romantic about all this—I always felt that going to college was literally about having an opportunity in your life to just learn and experience new things. And in that path, you'll find something to hang your hat on that motivates you and pushes you into that economic marketplace. So I was a philosophy major.

01:04:04-01:04:07

KB: Are you seeing that happen very much, though, with students?

01:04:08-01:04:34

GC: No. And that's a big shift. And, um, I don't—and that's a part of the reason why I wanted them to read books in the Critical Thought class. Because I feel like one of the things that was so brilliant about my experience was that I was lucky to have been surrounded by a group of people who were all really thirsty.

01:04:35-01:04:37

KB: In college, or just growing up?

01:04:38-01:05:32

GC: Definitely in college. Um, you know, it wasn't uncommon for my friends and I to be hanging around the dorm room or the residence hall room—mine or somebody else's on the floor—and all of a sudden we're talking about going out and getting fucked up and then the conversation all of a sudden we're talking about, I don't know, the scene from Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* that one of us just read and suggesting that everyone in the room—he's just like, "Dude, you need to take a look at this book." And then someone saying, "Oh, well, I was just looking at, um, Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, or, you

know, he's like, "Oh man, you guys need to read Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*; that's the shit," you know?

01:05:33-01:05:35

KB: That never happened in my—

01:05:35-01:05:44

GC: I swear to God. And some people think that I'm making that up. And I can call my boys right now and it's like, "Hey, were we having these kinds of conversations?" He's like, "Yep."

01:05:44-01:05:45

KB: Where'd you go to undergrad?

01:05:46

GC: I went to Eastern Illinois.

01:05:47

KB: No kidding.

01:05:47-01:05:53

GC: No kidding [laughs].

01:05:54

KB: Wow.

01:05:54-01:06:50

GC: Yeah, exactly—wow is right. But I—we're just—we were lucky, because we were also living in a college town where it wasn't uncommon to see one of our English professors at one of the local watering holes—we're like, "Oh, man, you hang out at Friend's?" "Yeah. I've been coming here long before you have." It's like, "Oh wow," you know. And then sitting down with your professor drinking a beer—over beers—and then having conversations about, you know, I don't know, postcolonial literature and Nadine Gordimer, you know, or whatever. And so, um, you know, I don't know—I don't see that spirit reflected in most of my students across identities.

01:06:51-01:07:01

KB: Do you think that even class, like social class, is it something that maybe you wouldn't notice? Like, what do you think is different?

01:07:02-01:07:06

GC: That desire to know. That—

01:07:06-01:07:07

KB: Is that—well where does that come from?

01:07:08-01:09:23

GC: I've had students tell me in class—I might use a word like “erudite” to describe someone like MLK. It's like, “MLK is one of the most erudite people you're ever gonna know about.” “What's that mean?” “What, erudite?” “Yeah.” “It means, you know, you can speak very well, eloquent.” “Well why didn't you just say that? Why you have to use all these big words?” And I had to like really break a student down once, in class, in front of everybody—probably should've pulled her to the side, but it was a teacher prep class, and I was like, “Don't ever say anything like that again. You wanna be a teacher. You say that you wanna be a paragon for the quest for knowledge. You're on the front line. What happens if a student looked at you and used the word “erudite” and you didn't know what it meant? Would you tell that student just, ‘Ugh. Why'd you have to say that? Why didn't you just say the simple version?’” It's like you're in a university. You're supposed to be engaged with big words, new words, new ideas, new concepts. This is what this experience is for. So, I think that it's not necessarily something that is unique. I think the average American student has moved to an era of feeling like just because they got in, they deserve to get up. Just because they signed up for a class and had a couple of good assignments means that they deserve an A. You know, and it's all—it kind of just reduces to this experiment in social mobility, and—moving closer and closer to these really utilitarian notions about what the value of education is and much further away from these more spiritual and, you know, um, spiritual ideas about what education is for. Um, I guess that's the way I put it.

01:09:24-01:09:25

[silence]

01:09:26-01:09:36

KB: Yeah, I guess it's hard to understand how that wouldn't be impacted by various layers of identity.

01:09:37-01:10:40

GC: Yeah, I mean, and—you know—so, definitely, class has something to do with it. Whether or not you're first generation, or second generation, or third generation has something to do with it. Um, I do—I do get frustrated with Black students because we do have that history of people actually dying to try to make sure that we do go to college, and, you know, you're a Black student in any given class, you can pull up on your phone, you know, James Meredith [laughs] or, you know, the little girl that—Ruby Bridges, you know, and desegregating Little Rock, and, you know, you can see these things that have happened. And the clear sacrifices that people made just to make it seem like a forgone conclusion that you would be in college too.

01:10:41-01:10:56

KB: Yeah, that's interesting. That's a—I think that's a good point to close on probably. Because you had talked about the strong and rich culture of Black academics, or of academics in Black culture. This is what you're getting at, right?

01:10:57

GC: Yeah.

01:10:58-01:11:29

KB: Like people who fight to be educated. Okay. Do you have a list of what you would consider classics of Black critical—not critical thought necessarily, but like—you were listing, you were talking about like Du Bois and Woodson, others—things that I need to read. [he laughs] I know—all of the things. So, like, whittle it down for me.

01:11:30-01:11:34

GC: You got Du Bois—I'm always gonna say Du Bois first.

01:11:34-01:11:36

KB: Which texts specifically?

01:11:36-01:15:51

GC: Any. Any. [laughs] There's so many reasons to read Du Bois, because he did so many things first. So, like, the book *The Philadelphia Negro* is considered the first real American sociological text. Because he does this brilliant analysis of Philadelphia turn of the century, turn of the 20th century. And of course, *Souls of Black Folk*, and he's just—he's so prolific, he's just got so much stuff. So like just grab the reader—so there's Du Bois. I do think it's important to read Booker T. Washington even though I hate him. Langston Hughes. Countee Cullen, Claude McKay, and they're all more poets than nonfiction folks. Um, Elaine Locke—*The New Negro* specifically is really important. Woodson's *Miseducation of the Negro* is indispensable, and I think it still works for today. E. Franklin Frasier's *The Black Bourgeoisie* is pretty powerful. Anything written by Martin Luther King is great. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* is great. Or any collection of Malcolm X's speeches. However, Malcolm's point—after a while, it gets kinda—it's like, okay, I got it, dude. Leroi Jones, *Blues People*. Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice*. Um, *The Autobiography of Asada Shakur*. Anything by Angela Davis. Audre Lorde's *Sister/Outsider*. Everything by Toni Morrison, especially *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved* and *Song of Solomon*. And *Playing in the Dark*. Mumia Abu-Jamal's *Letters from Death Row*, it's pretty interesting. George Jackson, *Soledad Brother* is pretty powerful. A lot of that lit that was coming out of the Black Power movement—oh, shit—Stokely Carmichael, Black Power. Cornel West, *Race Matters*. Claude Steele, *Whistling Vivaldi*. Everything by Ta-Nehisi Coates. I would say Obama, *The Audacity of Hope*. *Dreams from My Father* is wonderful, but I think *The Audacity of Hope* is a little bit more philosophical and more—it's a much greater critique.

01:15:52-01:15:55

KB: Are these all texts that you use in your classes?

01:15:56-01:17:29

GC: Some, yes. Some I haven't. Alice Walker, the book *The Color Purple*. The movie's great, but the more I watch the movie, the more I realize how Spielberg'd it was, and how non-Spielberg the book is. I mean, it's a beloved staple in the Black community, and I feel like if you are Black and you never watch *The Color Purple* on Christmas or Thanksgiving, your card's gonna get revoked. It's like one of those things, you know, like whether or not you saw *The Wiz*. There's one lady, Black feminist—of course bell hooks—um, Barbara something, I can't remember the name of her book it ends with *The Myth of the Superwoman*. Lorraine Hansberry's stuff is incredible. She wrote *A Raisin in the Sun*.

01:17:30-01:17:33

KB: Are a lot of what you've named fiction?

01:17:34-01:18:03

GC: No. Most of it's non. Any book of essays by James Baldwin's always gonna hook you up. And we haven't even started talking about hip-hop lit. Hip-hop studies is just a whole different—a whole ball of wax.

01:18:04-01:18:08

KB: Are you studying hip-hop songs and like that, raps, the culture? What is it that you—

01:18:09-01:19:01

GC: You know, I look more at the culture and the, um, the general issues related to hip-hop as a phenomenon. We do look at—I have not been utilizing the song—every week they have songs to listen to. So, for example, if we're talking about the history of B-boying, I'll give them like 6 or 7 songs that are from the B-boy era of the late 70s, early 1980s, that B-boys used to really get off to, like "Egyptian Lover," or [laughs]... Or like "Planet Rock," or, you know, something like that.

01:19:02-01:20:50

[unrelated dialogue]

Appendix F: Interview Transcript – Dr. Mark Pate

File Name: Interview with Dr Pate.m4a

File Length: 01:36:21

SPEAKERS

KB - Kristin Bailey

MP - Mark Pate

FULL TRANSCRIPT (with timecode)

0:00:36-0:03:26.6

KB: I'm just going to read you what I wrote because it's easier. I wanted to understand your perspective on academic discourse. I can kind of define how I'm thinking of that. And in the Black culture center and on the ways that the two intersect. So I have these questions, this is a semi-structured interview, so I might diverge. If you don't want to answer a question or if you want to withdraw from participating in the study, feel free, at any point. When I write the study too, I'll come back to you with things that I've said just to make sure I'm interpreting correctly that you're comfortable with what I've said. So academic discourse, by that I mean the ways that we communicate for academic purposes, whatever that might be, in academic settings. So whether to generate new knowledge or to develop an understanding of something. It can be writing. It doesn't necessarily have to be—I like to use the term discourse because I think of writing much more broadly as this constellation of things that we do in order to communicate based on the technologies that we have available. So I'm looking not only at the sorts of papers or things like that that students are producing, or thinking about that, but also the things like some of your students had talked about a presentation that they did. By the way they love you. I know that you weren't, like, you felt kind of nervous or something or you felt uncomfortable, it sounded like, teaching in that setting. And they actually acknowledged, and they brought you up multiple times. It was really interesting. And said how they were really skeptical at first, but then they realized why you were there and there was something about the ways that you teach. I can go back to my notes if you want, just to let you know. You never get to hear that stuff from students, I feel like. They really appreciated the ways that you approached the classroom and the content and the stuff that you invited them to do. Anyway, maybe first before I get into this, I should ask you specifically about your involvement in the [Black culture center]. Because the other people I've interviewed so far are housed there, at least in part, like Doctor Clemons' office is partially there and then he goes to another one somewhere else, I think. So can you tell me a little bit about the work that you do there? You don't only teach there, it sounds like. Because you're also teaching [licensure] students. But tell me about your work there.

0:03:26.6-0:04:49.7

MP: So, um, I guess I'll sort of step back and talk about kind of how—what my position was when I was hired, um, to come here. Um, so my wife and I came as a pact, um, to [Midwestern U.]. She's the Director of the Center for Latino and Latin American studies. Um, and they were

sort of looking, you know, for—to kind of be creative in ways that—where could we put him, you know? Um, and there wa- there was a need in the Black culture center, um, to particularly teach some of the intro level courses. Um, Racism in American Culture and Society. Um, when I was in Georgia Southern University where, I was there for six years, um, I taught, um, both in history and in Africana studies up there. So although I didn't teach as much, um, interdisciplinary, um, coursework at Georgia Southern, I did have experience teaching Civil Rights Movement, um, Race in Politics, Race in Sports. Um, so they kind of fit, like, we need somebody to teach these courses. Um, so part of my contract calls for the history department to, um, offer three Black Studies Courses a year. Um, it doesn't have to be me but it—but it's most likely me, right? So the first semesters here I taught two courses. I taught a, um, a Theme Learning Community, um, with two other instructors, um, in Black Studies [Acorgee]. I don't know you've met here, talked to her. Um, it was great. Um...

0:04:49.7-0:04:52.0

KB: She the reason I had started doing this work so.

0:04:52.0-0:06:23.2

MP: Yeah, she's great. Um, I worked with her. I worked with, um [name redacted], who's retired. Um, who did kind of the intro level first year experience kind of course work. So we all kind of designed this group of courses or group of courses that all kind of spoke to one another and that was a small group of kids. 20—20 students. Um, and then I taught another 30-person racism course, um, then I taught a Race in Sports course and then this year I taught the Race in, um, or, Racism in our Culture and Society again. So, um, my work there is mostly kind of confined to—to teaching. Um, I do make a point to kind of get to the classroom about an hour early, um, to give them an opportunity, should they want to come in and talk about the readings for that night, um, any kind of assignments that we've done. Anything that they want to talk about related to anything. I mean I've had students come in talking about you know the president or, you know, blackface in Virginia. Or, you know, they'll, sometimes they'll come in before and after that. I also make it a kind of point to wander around the center a little bit both before and after and kind of sit down with people and just kind of talk and, you know, get to know people and that sort of thing. I'll try to work in the—in the lab every once in a while just so I kind of have a presence there and people know who I am. Um, in addition to that I've told students that I'm always willing to participate in any kind of programming that they want me to be a part of. So, um, so I've a couple of events with, um, Geoffrey Clemons. Um, moderate...

0:06:23.2-0:06:23.5

KB: Yeah, like the one I went to. Yeah.

0:06:23.5-0:06:42.0

MP: Yeah. Um, we did another really kind of cool program, I think, um, in the center itself. It was part of their Soulful Friday, um, programming where I talked about kind of teaching African American History and Geoffrey talked about teaching kind of Whiteness Studies and kind of how that dynamic...

0:06:42.0-0:06:43.3

KB: Oh that's interesting. So it just...

0:06:43.3-0:06:50.1

MP: So it plays together. Yeah. And it was a good kind of, good discussion.

0:06:50.1-0:06:50.4

KB: When was that?

0:06:50.4-0:07:20.0

MP: This was, uh, at the end of last year. Um, and it was funny because one of the, one of the work studies who I kind of met right away when I got here, um, and I would talk to quite a bit before my classes in the fall, um, kind of came up to me before it was about to start and she was like, “Don’t be nervous. It’s gonna be ok. Like, I’m sure they’re gonna—they’re probably gonna attack you.” But like, don’t worry. And I’m like, “What? Kendall, like, what are you talking about?” I mean, it was fine, you know. Um, she was, like, worried that students were gonna...

0:07:20.0-0:07:21.2

KB: Was it tense?

0:07:21.2-0:07:29.1

MP: Um, there were some students asking very kind of pointed questions. Um, more about kind of my motivation about why do you teach this.

0:07:29.1-0:07:30.6

KB: I’m getting a lot of that about my research.

0:07:30.6-0:07:51.6

MP: Yeah. About, like, why do you want to do this? What’s your motivation? Like a lot of the sort of, they’re weary of White Savior Complex of... So but usually kind of once I talk a little bit about my background, the community I grew up in, kind of why I came to this, it makes a little bit more sense, um, I think for people, um, than some—You know, because didn’t grow up in, like, a lily white community and, um....

0:07:51.6-0:07:53.8

KB: That sounds familiar to me.

0:07:53.8-0:08:02.9

MP: My, the high school I graduated from was, um, over 50% African America.

0:08:02.9-0:08:03.3

KB: Where did you—do you mind telling me, like...

0:08:03.3-0:08:06.4

MP: Yeah, um, T—name redacted. [Name redacted] North High School.

0:08:06.4-0:08:06.8

KB: Where is that at?

0:08:06.8-0:08:08.6

MP: Um, It's in the Southside Rurals of [major urban hub].

0:08:08.6-0:08:10.5

KB: Okay. So I'm from [city].

0:08:10.5-0:08:11.7

MP: Oh yeah. Okay.

0:08:11.7-0:08:13.7

KB: So like where, South Suburbs, like...

0:08:13.7-0:08:14.6

MP: [City].

0:08:14.6-0:08:21.7

KB: [City]? Okay. Gotcha. That's really interesting. So we have very similar upbringings.

0:08:21.7-0:09:56.0

MP: Yeah. So yeah. But when I went, because I'll bring this, I'll show the students in class, sometimes, I'll show them, like, my yearbook like when I was in kindergarten or first grade and all the, it's like, mostly white faces. And then I'll show my high school yearbook and it's completely different. I mean, they grew up in kind of a community before "White Flight" and then I was still there when White Flight was, like, still happening, essentially. Um, so I talked about those experiences. And usually there are students that attended that high school or they attended one of the, like, [high school]. You know, [name of high school]. Um, a lot of the students I've had this semester are from either the city or the south suburbs, like, the west, um, the westside of [major urban hub]. So they kind of understand that a little bit. Um, but so, I'll do kind of programming with the center as well. Um, I have some students that will just kind of reach out to me for advice or sort of questions about different kind of things. You know if they're, um, talking about like challenging the administration on this or that, not what should we do but like what, from a historical perspective, should we be aware of, you know? But I've tried to also be not too much of sticking my nose in spaces unless I'm asked to kind of do it. So I've kind of held back a little bit in that sense. Um, so that's kind of my involvement. I'd like to be more involved. Um, this year with the [licensure] thing it was just tough. It was just almost two jobs at once. And it was hard. So, yeah.

0:09:56.0-0:09:58.5

KB: Yeah. Is this the only year you've done that or?

0:09:58.5-0:10:10.0

MP: Yeah. I don't know why I did it. It's not like I'm being paid all that much more. Um, I'm kind of a sucker for, you know, if you keep, come on, you should do this, we need you.

0:10:10.0-0:10:12.3

KB: Yeah, you're just gonna cave?

0:10:12.3-0:10:14.7

MP: Yeah. But I'll be alive when it's over.

0:10:14.7-0:10:21.0

KB: Yeah. So next year, are you just doing history stuff and like, history, and like...

0:10:21.0-0:10:25.2

MP: When I negotiated the job, I negotiated a semester of no coursework. So in the fall I'll be writing, um, the book.

0:10:25.2-0:10:26.1

KB: How long have you been here?

0:10:26.1-0:10:30.9

MP: Uh, I came last fall.

0:10:30.9-0:10:33.0

KB: Oh, like this is your second semester or?

0:10:33.0-0:10:34.3

MP: Second year, yeah.

0:10:34.3-0:10:41.5

KB: Okay. Got it. So you will be writing? Okay. Nice. That sounds amazing.

0:10:41.5-0:10:42.8

MP: Yeah, I'm looking forward to it.

0:10:42.8-0:10:55.7

KB: That's actually what I'm doing too. I'm on a fellowship so no teaching. So that's a really nice break. It's hard to go back and forth. And what's your load here? Is it, like, a three?

0:10:55.7-0:10:56.6

MP: It's a two-two.

0:10:56.6-0:11:35.8

KB: Two-two? Okay. That's totally irrelevant. I was just curious. So okay you just said two things, and I'm just curious what your thoughts are and why, like, um, a, why you hold back. But then all, like, or what your thoughts are with that. But also, what do you think is contributing, like, to students being, like willing to approach you for advice or for things like that or to ask questions about challenging the administration? Was it like that to begin with? Because if you've only been here two years, like, you're clearly establishing some sort of an ethos as an ally, as an accomplice.

0:11:35.8-0:12:53.1

MP: Um, I mean, I hold back—part of the reason I hold back is because I think of my academic kind of background, um, and the reading that I've done like on the Civil Rights movement and other kind of social movements. Um, and sort of all these stories about these white people kind of inserting themselves into these grassroots movements, um, and being sort of resented by the local community. Um, so I've sort of learned, or at least, I believe that it's important to kind of let the student's kind of lead their own, um, where they want to go. You know, even if I know. I mean there are cases where, you know, the students are pushing an issue. Um, let's say funding of fraternities and sororities and sort of the disparity between, um, predominately black fraternities and sororities and other fraternities and sororities on campus. And I'll kind of know they're not really kind of approaching it the right way necessarily or they don't have the, um, they haven't done enough kind of research or study of that topic to kind of, they're not ready to approach the administration. But I'm still kind of reluctant to always kind of step in or anything like that.

0:12:53.1-0:12:54.5

KB: Unasked? Or are they asking you to and you still?

0:12:54.5-0:15:50.9

MP: They will ask sometimes. Like, um, questions. Sometimes it's more just like I need to tell you this and they'll just sort of like explain kind of what's happening. And, um, it's almost like they appreciate kind of being heard in that sense. Um you know. So I mean that's kind of part of the issue. I worry about kind of being too involved. Um, too much. I mean, I don't worry about it at all from like a tenure perspective or, like, an institutional perspective. Like, I'm tenured. And part of what I tell them too is, like, I'll be honest with you about what I think are the problems on campus with administrators and faculty and students and ways that I think the university could do better. Like, I don't have anything to lose in that sense. Um, I also know, because my wife is over there, there's also kind of like an extra layer of security that I kind of have that other people may not have. Um, so I'm always honest with them about, um, a variety of things. Like we've talked about faculty searches in the past and how, um, you know despite the fact that the university kind of talks about being inclusive and diverse and the strategic plan has this idea of sort of recruiting from black and brown neighborhoods and things like that, when it actually gets down to the nitty gritty of, like, an actual hiring committee, um, committee members will convince themselves that they need to hire a white person, basically. Um, through a variety of like rhetorical, uh, you know, backflips and things. So that's kind of one thing. I think students are comfortable with me in a sense that I, um, I try to be very, like, upfront with them in early on in the class with what I think my limitations are. Um, what I think can kind of do for them and what I think I can't. You know, so I talk about my academic background. Like, you know, I've read these things and I can speak on these issues. You know, so from an academic perspective, I can help you here, here, and here. And I can help you with contexts in this situation. But, you know, I'm a white man, so I don't experience racial discrimination. I don't really experience—I live my life without having to think about a of things that you do. So you're never going to hear me say, “Oh yeah, somebody followed you around in a store. Oh that reminds me of the time when I was, you know, in Germany, and somebody looked at me weird.” Or something. I don't make those connections. I also don't kind of—I run a very kind of loose classroom in the sense

that it's structured but I'm also not, like, the censorship police in terms of when students are talking or what students are saying kind of where they want to go in certain ways. You know, so I kind of try not to stifle them.

0:15:50.9-0:15:58.4

KB: Do you have, uh, diverse classes. Like, racially, ethnically. Or do they tend to be predominately African American? Like, how do you...

0:15:58.4-0:16:39.6

MP: They're predominately African American, yeah. Almost all. Um, I think—and this is sort of, I don't know to what extent this is true, but this is what I've heard from multiple folks, um, both with faculty and students. Um, is that three, four, or five years ago, um, the Black Study Center had a reputation of being kind of the place you go on campus as an African American Student as kind of a safe space where you could sort of take classes with somebody who looks like you. Um, you can kind of be in a comfortable environment. Um, but it did not have a reputation for being a very, um, high academic standing.

0:16:39.6-0:16:42.0

KB: And that was three or four years ago?

0:16:42.0-0:17:04.2

MP: I think it—it still has that reputation. Um, I think that's partially kind of what Joe is, what Gina, the previous director, and then what Joe is trying to do is kind of elevate the academic the profile of the Black Studies Center. Um, they had, and they still do to some extent, have a very high number of staff teaching courses. Um,

0:17:04.2-0:17:10.1

KB: Uh, like Adjuncts and Lecturers? Is that what you mean? When you say staff, who are we talking about?

0:17:10.1-0:17:20.9

MP: Yeah. There's—some are, some are adjunct lecturers. Um, and some are folks that work in the Center that also, like, will teach a class, like, here and there.

0:17:20.9-0:17:23.2

KB: Oh okay. So it doesn't matter about training or credentials?

0:17:23.2-0:17:40.7

MP: Yeah. I think that's kind of been the issue in the past. Where there have been, like, courses—and again, I can't speak to this with personal, but I know there's this perception that, you go to the Black Center, you get an A. You'll take a class with somebody who kind of will just chat with you about different things.

0:17:40.7-0:17:41.1

KB: So there's no real academic rigor?

0:17:41.1-0:18:09.6

MP: Yeah. You're not, you know. And that's—students do kind of struggle with that when they look at the syllabus that I give them. I don't give them—I can show you the syllabus. It's not that rigorous, I mean, compared to what I think, in a vacuum, what it probably should be. Um, but they struggle with, like, the amount of reading and the amount of, like, academic stuff that we're doing. Um, and I think part of that is perception. They're just not thinking that that's what they're gonna get.

0:18:09.6-0:18:13.0

KB: Are they first year students or second year students a lot of times? Or are they...

0:18:13.0-0:18:15.6

MP: This time it was. Um, the first time I taught it not so much.

0:18:15.6-0:18:21.6

KB: And you even have upper classmen that are thinking those things? Interesting. Okay.

0:18:21.6-0:18:52.6

MP: Yeah. It was. I mean, it's. I mean, I could—I should do, like, a statistical analysis and break them down by class. But I don't get a sense that, like, the upper classmen perform that much better than the first, second year students. Um, like, I don't get the sense that they're that much better writers or, you know. Um, so, yeah. It's tough kind of in that respect. Um, I lost my train of thought.

0:18:52.6-0:19:32.9

KB: Sorry. You were talking about the, yeah, because we did kind of weave a little bit, um, the reputation that the center has and how they're trying to develop more of an academic... I mean, it's been around for how many years? Like, decades? Like fifty years? Thirty? I mean, and the whole time it's kind of had this social support, um, among—so you would say that's among, like, students generally? Like, what about faculty and, and on campus? I wonder if that's, like, a white perception. Or if it's, like, from black students.

0:19:32.9-0:20:22.0

MP: Yeah. I remember when I came, and I met with [name redacted] the first time. She told me that, like, um, that even her as sort of like, as a person of color, um, she got kind of a really rocky reception when she first got there. Um, in part because it was kind of a, you know, this center's running the way that it is. We don't need to make any changes. You know, it's sort of, like, you know, we don't need to come in and kind of make any academic changes or anything. It runs fine at it is. So there was that kind of a level. Um, but she told me, I think the word she used is that this is, like, a hard place to kind of weave your way in if you're kind of part of the—the Center. Um, if you're not staff of the Center or someone who frequents the Center.

0:20:22.0-0:20:25.5

KB: In what ways?

0:20:25.5-0:20:54.1

MP: Um, kind of an insider-outsider status sort of thing. If you were an outsider, you were not going to be openly welcomed by people immediately. You would have to prove your medal in the Center. I felt that to some extent with some folks, but others it was, Doctor G. was great, immediately from the beginning.

0:20:54.1-0:21:01.1

KB: Do you mean, like, as a faculty member? Is that what she's talking about? Or as a person? Because my experience has been really different.

0:21:01.1-0:21:04.7

MP: I think anybody is what she said.

0:21:04.7-0:21:07.8

KB: I was afraid of that. And I did not experience that at all.

0:21:07.8-0:22:34.3

MP: I think Ann makes a difference there. I think Ann is a very kind of, very welcoming. Like, you know, come on. She makes you feel welcome right away. So I think it's a little bit of a different vibe than it used to be. Um, so that, you know, I mean I always try to kind of open and look at it with an open mind too. You know, I need to make my own determinations about people. Because I mean, you come into a situation, you're only hearing about this one does this and that one does whatever. This one is this and that. And, you know, this one likes to talk shit behind the scenes, but they'll be nice to you. But I mean, like, I can't be bothered with that kind of craziness. Um, I did—I don't know if this has to do with this topic in particular, but the very first semester I was here, I had one student, um, who, like, came in, looked at me the first day, and was just, like, in horror. And, like, just started, like, texting right away. And at some point I, like, said something to her and she was just like, "Yeah, I'm sorry. I'm just so, like, blown away right now." Like, you know, um, you know, the Black Studies Center. Like, this is our Center. This is, you know, typically what happens is, you know, there'll be, like, three or four white students in the class. Eventually they'll just all drop the class. And then all of the black students will just kind of come together.

0:22:34.3-0:22:36.1

KB: That's what the student told you?

0:22:36.1-0:22:38.5

MP: In front of everybody. Yeah.

0:22:38.5-0:22:39.2

KB: Oh. Were there white students in there?

0:22:39.2-0:23:56.7

MP: Yeah. There were a few. Everybody would just come together, and it will be this one big family. She was talking about it very much as this social space. The academic kind of part of it was not computing at all. Um, almost as if, you know—and this student actually asked a staff

member to do an independent study version of the same course, so she didn't have to take it with me. Now the director [Gina] was like, "No. No. He's got a degree in this. This is an academic course. Yes, you're focusing on, like, issues of race, privilege, you know, power, whatever. But you're also writing and communicating and reading. You're doing academic things in this course. So he's the best person to do it. So you can either take it with him or you can drop the course and drop the Major." So she ended up sticking with the course. But that, like, stuck with me for kind of a long time. I don't know what this says about me, but I was like, "Man, if I was that white student in the course or in the class who was told by a student, you know, we really don't want you here at all. We'd rather just have this space. I'd be, like, horrified."

0:23:56.7-0:24:13.8

KB: How did you manage that? Going back to how we connect in the first place. Thinking of the violence of your white body and how managing that weird tension of wanting to do the work and be an accomplice but also.

0:24:13.8-0:25:51.4

MP: I said, "Look. All I can tell you is that I'm qualified to teach this course from an academic perspective. You know, I have a degree to do it. I'm well positioned in that respect, right? I cannot speak to kind of other issues. Right? I can facilitate an open environment in which students can talk about those issues. But my mission is that this is an academic kind of course. My goal is to make you better writers, communicators, reading, critical thinkers, you know, through the lens of race and racism in American culture and Society." And a lot of students have the misconception that the course is about, like, interpersonal racism. And it is. But it's more about kind of structural and institutional racism. So I'm like, "No. We're going to look at, like, structures as well." So this kind of what it is. I understand your perspective kind of completely. But this is not going to be a course where we just talk about random kind of things. There's a structure to the course. And there were some students who actually defended me, right away. One student then accused her like, "You're being racist against him." Or something like that. You're not allowing him to whatever. It ended up being fine. And I kind of expected something like that was kind of going to happen. This was syllabus day.

0:25:51.4-0:25:53.5

KB: Was your first semester here?

0:25:53.5-0:25:58.5

MP: Yeah. First semester, first day.

0:25:58.5-0:26:17.2

KB: Was growing up for you like that too? There was a lot of animosity in my school. Like, to where I thought that reverse racism was a thing until I learned that it's not.

0:26:17.2-0:27:20.8

MP: I mean, my family is blue-collar working-class people who have never taken a course on race in their life. Have never read anything about race in their life. Watched the news where black and brown people are primarily portrayed as criminals. Things like that. I had friends who had families that were very racist. Hearing the N-word was not uncommon. Not by my

immediate family but by the more extended family. Parents of friends. An, you know, if you're looking at it from a non-sophisticated sort of framing, you have a community that's white. It's the parades and the festivals. And then all of a sudden you have people of color started moving into the neighborhood and other white people leave. They take their business with them. So the neighborhood is "not as good as it used to be." So, you know, my grandmother, everybody, they blame the blacks are moving in. And that's the problem.

0:27:20.8-0:27:27.9

KB: So you weren't surrounded so much by the tension within your school system and whatnot?

0:27:27.9-0:27:37.5

MP: I'm sure it was there. I just didn't kind of see it probably. I don't really remember having any kind of conversation about race in the school. Um, we talked about, you know...

0:27:37.5-0:27:37.5

KB: Really?

0:27:37.5-0:29:23.8

MP: No. We talked about slavery and we talked about Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King and the basic kind of thing. I went to this school, both my elementary and whatever the next level is. My brain's not—and right behind it was this apartment complex. And Kansas City did not have many apartment complexes at the time, but there was this one apartment complex. And everybody who lived in that apartment complex was of color. Every single person. Um, and I had students in my classes who were from that kind of complex. Almost, without fail, single mother households. Things like that. Um, but it never occurred to me, like, why are people of color in this apartment complex? Like, what's the structure never kind of—and then why is my neighborhood all, like, white people. Nice, you know. I mean, note nice houses but just, like, you know, middle-class working-class kind of houses. Um, I mean, I played sports growing up. You play with a lot of people of color. I don't remember talking about race or thinking about race or really any kind of that. You know, I'm sure I was taught that everybody's equal and we all have equal chance and we don't discriminate, and you know all that kind of stuff. You know, I remember when I was grade school, like, not understanding, like, affirmative action. Like, thinking that was unfair to white people. Um, yeah, thinking if you were black thinking you were more likely to get advantages just because you were, like, black. I don't remember a teacher ever having a conversation with us about why that's wrong.

0:29:23.8-0:29:26.1

KB: Were most of your teachers white?

0:29:26.1-0:29:42.8

MP: All of them. Except, um, I had one African American man who was an English teacher when I was, um, a junior in high school. That was it. There were very few people of color in the school's period, and if they were, they were, like, a janitor.

0:29:42.8-0:30:38.5

KB: Working, you mean? But all the students, that's interesting. So I could keep having this conversation forever, but I want to make sure I get, like, these questions. So I guess this whole conversation kind of helps really foreground the question of the way you see the Black culture center helping students acclimate to college. I mean, what you've seen in two years. Or do you see it—I don't know. In what ways? It might not be in academic. Or maybe it is. Maybe it's changing. What do you see? I think you've kind of touched on that a little bit. But like, how does it help position them as intellectuals or academics or is that happening? I don't know.

0:30:38.5-0:32:14.3

MP: Um, I think it creates a space in some ways where students can talk about important issues involving kind of race. So it's quite common to be in there and have students talking about, um, something going on. Whether it's, you know, the Laquan McDonald shooting in [major urban hub], um, you know or Kanye's comments about slavery. Um, things like that. So you're not likely to see those conversations throughout campus. I think it does increase a space where students can think about the issues. Um, it's a space that really kind of encourages students to be involved in a variety of campus organizations. So, like, the black male initiative. A lot of the students who are a part of that will hang out in the Center and spend a lot of time in there. Black Student Association, a lot of students there. So the students that are usually in the Center are also part of one of these other—the Black Frats and Sororities are a part of that. Um, so there's a lot of encouragement of students, like, being involved in organizations and leadership positions. Um, There's a lot of programming on a variety of different topics. Um, they do not do a very good job, I think, of bringing in external speakers and people from outside.

0:32:14.3-0:32:16.0

KB: Outside of what?

0:32:16.0-0:32:31.7

MP: Outside of Black Studies. People who are scholars in, um, either proponents of social justice, social justice activists. People could come in and provide sort of an outside perspective from the Center.

0:32:31.7-0:32:33.1

KB: Even from the university or you mean like?

0:32:33.1-0:32:34.9

MP: Within the Black Studies Center.

0:32:34.9-0:32:43.1

KB: Right. So outside of the Center, like, outsiders to the Center from within the university or from other universities?

0:32:43.1-0:32:56.9

MP: Both. I don't think the Center does a very good job of taking advantage of the folks we have here on campus. So I think we have a lot of scholars on campus who talk about race, racism, African American History.

0:32:56.9-0:32:58.6

KB: Scholars of color?

0:32:58.6-0:33:28.7

MP: Um, we have some, yeah, that you know. So Ismael Montana is an Africanist a few doors over here. I don't know if he's ever done a program for the Black Studies Center or been asked to do a program for the Black Studies Center, ever. Um, what they tend to do is recycle the same kind of, you know. So Geoffrey Clemons does a ton of programs for them. Um, they'll have, like, upper level students, like, leading programs and things like that.

0:33:28.7-0:33:34.1

KB: Yeah, I've been to some. Graduate students.

0:33:34.1-0:34:02.8

MP: So it ends up being kind of, and this was the same way at Georgia Southern, um, where I think they would, from kind of an academic perspective. They would do better, and I think they have the funding to kind of bring in more people, um, that they don't know and haven't seen all the time, um, to offer kind of different ideas and perspectives. Otherwise it gets too echo-chambery.

0:34:02.8-0:34:17.8

KB: Do you think that part of that is the results of them, like, just being in the initial stages of starting to make a shift towards becoming an academically recognized unit or no? I mean, because they've been an academic unit for a long time though.

0:34:17.8-0:35:29.0

MP: Yeah. I mean, I compare it to sort of my wife's Center, which is a very parallel center, Center for Latino American Studies. Um, they have probably 15 people from just outside the university itself who will come in and do either workshop, do talks, spend, like, a day on campus with the students. Um, you know, talk to them about their academic research, but also things about, kind of, like, what should you do if you're an undocumented student and you've confronted the law enforcement or something like that. They're getting perspective from not the same three or four people. Um, I think that would sort of expand the academic profile of the students. Um, and so, related, kind of, I guess, and I've talked to my wife about this a lot too. Um, my experience with students who are very involved in organizations, whether it's BMI or Black Student Association, tend to not be very good students. I don't know if I find it surprising, but it's always kind of jarring to me.

0:35:29.0-0:35:31.3

KB: Good in which way?

0:35:31.3-0:36:07.1

MP: In the sense that they don't show up to class very often. They don't really read very often. Um, they don't seem to even sometimes have interest in much of the material in the class. Material that has a direct bearing on kind of their organizations that they're a part of. Students

that are very interested in kind of challenging the administration are also, and I'm painting with broad brush strokes here, but are also not the ones doing the readings and the work that would help them make the case for why they need the change at the administrative level.

0:36:07.1-0:36:10.2

KB: How do you know they're not doing their readings?

0:36:10.2-0:37:14.2

MP: 'Cause they don't provide anything in their quizzes to provide any evidence that they did the reading. When called on in class or when they discuss it in class, there's no evidence to show that they did readings. They're not reproducing anything, um, from the work, right? Um, and I understand they're not going to get the full argument from the reading. They're not going to be able to sort of produce 10 pieces of evidence from the reading. But, like, I'll just give you an example. There was one reading we did on Colorism where they referenced the Lion King. And, like, everyone who did their reading was like, The Lion King. You know, the Lion King didn't have that much to do with it, but that, like, they reproduced it, right? Um, it just, there's some just that there's nothing there. They're just not producing. Even, like, the things that jump out of the reading that may not be part of the argument but they're there. There's nothing.

0:37:14.2-0:37:16.0

KB: Nothing is sticking with them?

0:37:16.0-0:37:39.6

MP: Yeah. And so, I don't know whether that—I think what the problem might be in some ways is that they're so involved in their orgs that they're shortchanging coursework. Some of my best students, almost without fail, have been not in any org. They're just not involved.

0:37:39.6-0:38:31.4

KB: It's so interesting because Anna kind of talked about those organizations as being, like, really critical in ways that actually sounded really intellectual, well-versed. So there's like this disconnect. And this is what I'm trying to kind of really get at and work with is, like, this notion of what academic work is often, like, very white-inflected. I feel like, especially, like, as a working-class person, it took me a long time. And I still struggle with feeling like a part of that community or wanting to. Um, so it's interesting to hear, I guess, a different perspective on that.

0:38:31.4-0:38:51.3

MP: I mean, I think they're getting something very, very important and significant with the orgs. I think they're learning a lot of skills that are going to help them in the job market. But I just think at sometimes it's a detriment to their coursework.

0:38:51.3-0:39:19.0

KB: I wonder why. Do you have any insights about that? Have you talked with students? Because I wonder sometimes why students are coming here from, you know, Southside, through the Chance Program. You can't generalize. But what students are wanting. Generally why they're here.

0:39:19.0-0:39:25.9

MP: I get the sense that a lot of students, and I use a default, it's not their top choice.

0:39:25.9-0:39:26.1

KB: The school?

0:39:26.1-0:39:30.3

MP: Yeah. For some. Um...

0:39:30.3-0:39:35.7

KB: Like, what would a top choice be?

0:39:35.7-0:39:38.7

MP: UIC.

0:39:38.7-0:39:42.1

KB: Okay. A school in a more urban environment probably?

0:39:42.1-0:39:56.8

MP: Or U of I. What I don't hear from these students that I heard from many of my Georgia Southern Students was I love Midwestern U.. Midwestern U. is great. Um, I don't know if I've heard that at all, from anybody.

0:39:56.8-0:39:56.4

KB: And you heard that at Georgia?

0:39:56.4-0:40:49.1

MP: All the time, yeah. From students. Um, and I heard that from African American students a lot a Georgia Southern, which is sort of interesting because it's the deep south. The county is very kind of racist. They actually have bars on campus with a Confederate Flag. It's high rates of people of color being pulled over. The [unintelligible] goes to a concert there and the cops, like, raided the concert at Georgia Southern, um, because they smelled marijuana. And then they ended up, [unintelligible] was in jail in Bullet County for like a month or something. It's not a great place. But African American Students would say, "We really like it. This is a great school. We just enjoy being here." I'm not sure students enjoy, like, DeKalb.

0:40:49.1-0:40:52.4

KB: Did they ever talk about why or what they loved about it?

0:40:52.4-0:41:00.5

MP: It was just a beautiful campus, a lot of organizations. Um, it was a high African American population. It was 30-35% African American.

0:41:00.5-0:41:02.4

KB: In the school?

0:41:02.4-0:41:11.8

MP: Yeah. So there was this, you know, if you were in the bubble of Georgia Southern, there were parts of it that felt almost HBCU-ish.

0:41:11.8-0:41:22.9

KB: That's kind of what I envisioned. So when you're talking about the, yeah, it's seriously racist.

0:41:22.9-0:41:37.6

MP: Yeah. I think Midwestern U. feels isolating for a lot of students of color and that they experience a lot of micro-aggressions on a pretty regular basis. Even from very well-intentioned meaning instructors. Um.

0:41:37.6-0:42:19.7

KB: Well so one of the things that I thought was really interesting, one of the students that was in a focus group said something about the Black Campus. I'd never heard that phrase before. And she was talking about how there's a real emphasis on visibility in the conversations that we had and a lack thereof. Students didn't even know that the Center Existed, like, until they happened to find out through an event. Like she found it, like, through a pageant through the Black Student Union. So, I don't know where I was going with that. But there's like this subversive like Black Campus.

0:42:19.7-0:43:30.9

MP: I mean, there's—I think there's this kind of like this tension of we want this Center to be this space for us. And because of that, we don't want to give too much into, like, advertising it to the rest of the community. I think if they advertised it as a space, like, we don't want more white students to come in and start taking classes in the Center as well. I think a lot of folks would really not like that idea. In the one sense it's a safe space. The people that are there are the same people that are always kind of there. Almost like a dive bar kind of feel in the sense that it's like the same people. Right? So, like, even within—I'm not sure, like, even other African American students, if they make it kind of a bigger space or whatever, I think that would be just unnerving for people as well. So it's...

0:43:30.9-0:43:40.3

KB: Oh interesting. Okay, yeah. Like, to even—that is really interesting.

0:43:40.3-0:43:50.8

MP: Yeah, I mean, um, yeah.

0:43:50.8-0:44:06.1

KB: Um, so, okay, yeah, so you were talking about—I totally lost track of how it would be when we were talking about this question, but the ways that it helps students to acclimate to college. So you were—the Center.

0:44:06.1-0:44:21.5

MP: The Black Studies Center. Yeah. I mean, we have the intro level kind of courses which deal with your basic skills and courses and acclimating. We have done, once a year, the themed learning committees. Did I talk to you about those?

0:44:21.5-0:44:25.4

KB: I very vaguely know about them.

0:44:25.4-0:45:32.0

MP: Yeah, um, so that will be a group of, in our case it was twelve students who took three courses within in the center itself that all really were about—I mean they were black studies courses but they were also dealing with kind of like how do you find the library and you know what is plagiarism, like, what are some testing skills. You know, that kind of thing. You know I think the Center does a good job of, like, talking about how do you navigate campus as a person of color. Like, what can you do, and can't you do and, you know? Um, you know, you may live wherever you live, but here you, um, you can get smart with University Police, but you can't with, like, state police or this is a good place to kind of, this is not. It's kind of a—I'm not sure—I guess that's navigating the academy in the sense of, like, surviving right? And knowing what you can do, and you can't do. Um, I know they've done like writing center for a while.

0:45:32.0-0:45:33.2

KB: Yeah, like just a semester and it stopped.

0:45:33.2-0:45:50.9

MP: Just a semester. But I'm not sure, like, how many academic programs they're putting on there. In the Black Studies Center. That deal with, like, okay, we're going to deal with how do we rewrite an essay. Or basic kind of skills programming.

0:45:50.9-0:46:32.9

KB: So that's what I wonder. Because maybe they're taking a different approach. Like, one thing I saw Doctor Clemons—cause I sat in on some of his classes—doing is, like, engaging. Like a lot of it was through dialogue. There wasn't really any writing happening. But they ended up doing some sort of a presentation. I'm curious about the ways that writing is brought in. So what are you doing in your classes, I guess? And how do you think about your classes doing that work with academic discourse? Maybe you should define it for yourself first for me?

0:46:32.9-0:49:07.2

MP: I see it kind of the way you do. I think when they're in the “real world” they're going to engage in this kind of discourse in a variety of different modes. It's not like they're going to write a five-paragraph essay in their work. They're going to have to give presentations, they're going to have to think on their feet on the spot. I focus a lot both in writing and in oral in making arguments with specific evidence. Um, and so, a lot of times we'll talk about things, um, where it's not just kind of I'm asking for one specific thing and they're recalling back kind of back to me. I'll ask, like, bigger kind of broader sort of questions and I'll expect them to—or I work with them on responding in a way that is more than one sentence, um, that incorporates an argument, incorporates evidence. Um, understands the difference between description and analysis. Um,

and we do that kind of repeatedly and we do that in a variety of different ways. So we'll have, like, informal discussions in class. Um, I'll put them in groups sometimes of, like, three to five where they'll have to like either roleplay, take on a particular perspective and make an argument. They'll just sort of talk about something. They'll propose a solution. Um, one of the things I like to do is let groups sort of challenge each other. So I think in some ways it's much easier kind of to present something than it is to present something and know your classmates are going to challenge you on it and you're going to have to come back with another round of deeper evidence. We did this a lot with kind of solutions to racism issues. So like, um, I'm trying to think, um, we talked about being followed around a store as a person of color. What's the solution to that? Um, and one group was like, "Well pass a law that says if they follow you around a store, they could be arrested and thrown in jail." Or something like that. Alright? But then another group was like, "Well what about their first amendment rights or rights to freely associate, like, how do you know?" Because the courts have repeatedly said that if you're not being explicitly racist, you can't...

0:49:07.2-0:49:12.0

KB: Did you guys talk about the George Zimmerman thing in that context?

0:49:12.0-0:50:10.9

MP: Yeah about kind of you know we all know what we saw but the law says this and like how do we change? You know. We try to go like multiple levels kind of deep on that to get them used to kind of being able to defend positions. Um, and usually we go up to a point where we kind of reach a dead end just to show how complicated and nuanced sort of the world is. I don't actually lecture that often. Um, most of it is just kind of some sort of an activity that we do. We've done debates before. Um, Like, kind of structured debates. They'll do opening statement, rebuttal, closing. Um, so in terms of writing, we usually write, like, if not every day, in some way we're writing, like, once a week at least.

0:50:10.9-0:50:13.1

KB: When you say writing, what are you...

0:50:13.1-0:53:28.9

MP: So I quiz them every time they do a reading assignment. And I do that to kind of ensure that they are actually doing their reading. So I'll pull out an example. I have other artifacts and things like that I can give you. I mean, sometimes the quizzes are just sort of multiple choice. And so... question, like, five would be an example of a typical writing that they would do. Use evidence from the reading, examine the argument, how do people change over time? How have things changed over time? Um, you'll give them some choice when they write so they can write something. I always tell them too that they don't feel like they can answer the question kind of head-on, just tell me about the reading. You know, basically prove to me that you did it. Show to me some evidence that you did it. And then typically what I'll do is I'll share like an exemplary quiz with them the next time. Redacted names and everything like that. So they can see what a really good writing assignment looks like. Um, so beyond that, we had two assignments that worked with discourse. Let's see if I can find a semester's worth of—so the first one was a race essay. It didn't require any outside information at all. Um, what they had to do was kind of talk about their own views of race and kind of philosophies on race and kind of how they had

changed over time. So looking at their kind of personal environmental influences. Um, the extent that they have adopted stereotypes and divide stereotypes. Um, whether they pushed the racial status quo, or they accepted it. You know, to kind of get them thinking about these questions. But they had to provide evidence, um, to support these kinds of. I tell them too, if you're not comfortable sharing some of this stuff then, you know, you don't have to share that kind of stuff. Thinking that we've all—we changed depending on whether we're in a particular school or whether we have a particular mentor, or we see, you know, the Trayvon Martin story, we change kind of how we think about things. And I'm huge on like process writing. So they have opportunities to turn in drafts, work with me on like a thesis. Um, uh, and we can kind of go back and forth that way. They don't all take advantage of that. Many of them will do it the night before and kind of turn it in. But I give them the opportunity to submit drafts to me ahead of time and I give them feedback, um, of also their before and after class every single there. So they can do that. Um, the other kind of big assignment...

0:53:28.9-0:53:32.0

KB: Is this a big, like a high stakes ish?

0:53:32.0-0:53:47.7

MP: This one is probably 15% of their grade. Yeah this one's the highest. This one is fully graded you know. This one was worth 200 and this was worth 20% of their grade and this was a documentary pitch.

0:53:47.7-0:53:58.2

KB: This is what they really liked, this assignment. You used this last semester, right? This is what they talked to me about. They loved it so much. They felt like they learned a ton.

0:53:58.2-0:55:31.3

MP: It's almost like a group presentation packaged a little bit differently. The idea is I'm a billionaire, they have to pitch me on a documentary topic that they want me to fund. Yeah, they had to like talk about it, but they also had to kind of present, you know, elements of a good documentary. There's got to be a narrative arc. You know, who are your compelling characters and why are they compelling? What primary sources are you going to use? What's your soundtrack that you're going to use. And so they did this, but I also had them write an essay at the end of the assignment where they had to reflect back on what would you have done differently if you could have started it two months ago. Um, what was the work that you did. A lot of the groups struggled with group members that weren't pulling their own weight. Um, but I always talked to them about, like, this is the real world. Like I work on committees together with people who don't answer emails, don't show up, don't do their work. So at some point you have to decide, do you do their work for them? Um, do you confront them on the side? Um, you know so you have to learn to make those decisions. Do you just throw them under the bus? Do you come talk to your boss ahead of time and say, you know, "This person is not showing up." Um, and so, and I tried to kind of socially engineer the groups in a sense of, like, you know, I had...

0:55:31.3-0:55:32.1

KB: So you created the groups?

0:55:32.1-0:56:49.7

MP: I created the groups because in the past, when I've let them do it, the knuckleheads go with the knuckleheads and, like, the really high-performers go with the high-performers and then just you have one fantastic, brilliant thing and then you have another one where two out of five people are there that day. You know, one of the two that's there didn't know that there was an assignment due. Um, and that didn't work out all that perfect. Um, but you know, it's, but I talked to them about how this is kind of a real-world sort of scenario. And part of this too was they had to do the pitch and then I asked them very kind of pointed questions as if I were actual investor. So I would really kind of, you know, I would always go with kind of a sandwich method. Which is, you know, you did a really great job, you did awesome, I loved you guys, you guys were awesome. Okay. Now I'm going to be like, you know, tell me what's the demographic breakdown in Harris County where Sandra Bland was, you know, pulled over. Sort of a thing. And then, no, you did great. Sort of. So um those are kind of the ways that we—we're always, always discussion. Always writing. Um, always using evidence. Always training critically.

0:56:49.7-0:57:10.2

KB: What did you find about, like, if you had to, like, talk about the responses you got to this, race essay in the documentary pitch. Like, can you speak to things that you noticed about the stuff that you were getting in terms of—and I don't know when these, like, I know this was a final project, the documentary. When was the race essay?

0:57:10.2-0:57:19.2

MP: This was, um well they got this assignment, like, week two. Um, it wasn't due for another month and a half though.

0:57:19.2-0:57:20.9

KB: Okay. So halfway. Okay. First half of the semester.

0:57:20.9-0:57:32.4

MP: Yeah. But I always introduce it and then two weeks later, I'll talk about it again. And two weeks later, I'll talk about it again. Just so they know its kind of coming up. A lot of them don't take advantage of doing it early.

0:57:32.4-0:57:34.8

KB: So they do it completely outside of class?

0:57:34.8-0:58:22.0

MP: This one they did. Yeah. Uh, we talked about it a lot though in class. The documentary pitch, I gave students one full week in class to work on it. Um, but what I told them was, we went to the library. I said, "You're adults. You're getting 150 minutes in my class to do this. If you think you can do it later, and all meet up at night, or like, you know, if you just want to like, that's you. You make that decision." Um, and that's what a lot of them ended up doing and they ended up having to scramble last minute, you know. Um, next time I may make them, like, actually be there and stay there. Just so that...

0:58:22.0-0:58:22.0

KB: Forced accountability sort of?

0:58:22.0-1:00:08.7

MP: Yeah. Part of the reason I do the race essay too—and I used to, I did a similar version of this, um, when I taught at Georgia Southern, but I would do it with my US History Survey courses and there were like 200 students in it. Um, and in that course, I would kind of compare white students and students of color and kind of their different reactions to does racism exist on campus, yes or no? And the white students would be like, “No, it doesn’t really exist on campus. But if it does, it’s the black students crying racism.” And the black students would say, “Yes, it does exist on campus. Let me give you ten examples.” Um, so this ended being, um, like, they’re really specific and pretty raw about what they talk about. Um, experiences kind of growing up. A lot of them had really difficult kind of experiences in schools. A large number of students, um, attended schools where they were one of a few African American in the school and, um, how they would have issues with, like, hair. Like they couldn’t wear natural hair. Because there was a rule about height or something on the hair. Um, or being, like, followed around stores a lot is something that students will mention. Um, uh, individual teachers kind of, you know, they’ll have a discussion about slavery or something in the classroom and they’ll be like, okay, “Jenae, what do you think about this?” Yeah. What do you think about that? Um, a lot of students would talk about, like, how their parents would say that everybody is equal, and we need to treat everybody equally and, you know, I was never. None of them were taught to be racist by family.

1:00:08.7-1:00:12.0

KB: Are you talking about black students?

1:00:12.0-1:01:12.7

MP: Yes. Yeah. Um, There was also a lot, and I’ve read for my own work and the research that I do in the first book that I wrote, I read a ton of memoirs that you always read with a grain of salt because people are trying to make themselves look a certain way. It’s no different in these. In that, people’s parents are good for the most part. Unless one parent, like, left. They’re portraying themselves pretty well. Um, there’s a level of like holding back that they don’t wanna, I mean we all do this. They don’t want to, um, admit to anything that they might have done. Um, but it’s very kind of revealing. IF I had more of, like, a sociology background and more of, like, an empirical research background, I’d love to, like, code these out or do something with that. Um, with the documentary pitches, um or actually. I will say too, these—I found the students write better when they’re writing about a topic that they like as opposed to.

1:01:12.7-1:01:14.1

KB: They love that about your class.

1:01:14.1-1:02:08.0

MP: Because I think—the first time I taught this I think I had them do some kind of research paper too and it was almost like two different people had written these things. One was, like, incoherent, and the other one was like... I mean, I had one student who like, never showed up to class, um, early in the semester. Was quiet. Like, wrote the most amazing race essay. Like, analytical. Um, just, like, long sentence then short sentence. The cadence of it was great. So I

told her, like, you are a fantastic writer. Like, you should blog or something. Because, I mean, this is awesome. And she was like, yeah, nobody told me ever that I was a good writer. So they're written pretty well.

1:02:08.0-1:02:18.6

KB: But you said topic. Do you think it's the topic? Because I don't know what you did for your research paper. Or is it the genre? Or both? Like what did you do for the topic for the research paper that you had them do?

1:02:18.6-1:02:23.1

MP: Some Jackie Robinson thing that was stupid

1:02:23.1-1:02:24.9

KB: So you decided what it was?

1:02:24.9-1:02:47.3

MP: Yeah. They had a primary source reader with, like, fifty primary sources on Jackie Robinson. So they could write anything they wanted. They just had to construct a narrative based on these. Or look at, like, two or three things from his life and experience, whatever that may be, based on the primary. And it was awful.

1:02:47.3-1:02:57.3

KB: Have you ever done a research paper where they chose the topic and then thought about it and, like, looked at it in comparison to this? Because I'm really curious.

1:02:57.3-1:02:57.9

MP: That's a good idea. Never.

1:02:57.9-1:03:17.3

KB: Because that's a real issue for me that I struggle with. Because, like, the genres that we or the types of writing that we invite, or production. So that was actually one question I wanted to ask you about is if you noticed students gravitating to particular forms or means of knowledge production?

1:03:17.3-1:03:19.0

MP: Yeah. I think.

1:03:19.0-1:03:29.2

KB: Do they seem more enthusiastic or do they seem better? Because it sounds like, I mean, they're doing a great job of writing here where it's drawing on personal...

1:03:29.2-1:03:36.7

MP: Yeah. They love this because they can rely a lot on kind of personal experience, but they can also draw in some of the course ideas.

1:03:36.7-1:03:38.4

KB: And you see them doing that?

1:03:38.4-1:05:25.9

MP: Yeah. Yeah. Um, like we talked about, we read, like Eduardo William Silva's, um, colorblind, book on colorblind racism and one of the things that he talks about in there is this idea of abstract liberalism. Um, you know, so the white person who's liberal in theory but when kind of the rubber meets the road, they don't want to make any, you know they vote for Hilary Clinton and have a Bernie sticker on their car or whatever the case may be. But then, when there's calls for affordable housing in Geneva, no, they don't want to do that. That will depress their property values and it all becomes kind of personal. So you would see them kind of talking about that sometimes. About how they would have, like, a teacher or a white person they know that was super, like gung ho. But then when it came to a particular thing, they wouldn't, um, they weren't as woke as they thought they were. SO they do incorporate kind of some of the outside stuff. because we talked a lot about, like, one of the big things this semester is like urban, um, rebellion. So we talked about, like, LA92 and Ferguson and Baltimore, um, and kind of the larger reasons why, um, [major urban hub], these poorer relationships because community and police. And they talked about that sometimes in the neighborhoods they grew up in, being harassed by police and citing some of the readings in class. Um, so you could just tell that they just kind of, they, and I don't know if they see that as, like, the burden. Like, they don't have to go to the internet or find a source or something. That's boring. Um, they can just kind of write based on their experiences.

1:05:25.9-1:05:49.8

KB: I wonder if they'd be really, I'm just thinking here, like, that I wonder if a big thing to maybe think about and focus on is, like, how we teach students to research. And what that means. And, um, yeah. Now I'm really curious what the center is doing with that or if it's missing opportunities for... that's just this particular center.

1:05:49.8-1:05:52.9

MP: The Center itself, I mean, it could be good.

1:05:52.9-1:05:54.9

KB: It sounds like it's pretty insular.

1:05:54.9-1:06:06.2

MP: Yeah. Um, I mean. I'm not over there as much. I mean I get the emails and things like that. The Center does a lot of let's watch a movie and talk about it. Way too much. Let's watch a movie and talk about it.

1:06:06.2-1:06:09.6

KB: But do they actually, I mean, I went. And, like, nobody showed up

1:06:09.6-1:08:39.8

MP: Yeah. Usually they'll, I think they spend a lot of their budget on food. Um, because it's sort of like, let's watch Friday or something. And let's order a bunch of food and eat the food and

watch Friday and then. Which, like, I used a lot of, like, when we were talking about the Riots '92, I showed a clip from, like, Don't Be a Menace to South Central. And Your Juice. I show a film. Joe is big on, you know, film. Um, but it's the kind of let's just pop it on, show it, and not critically engage it. Um, is just... and part of that is just, you know, this kind of let's hang out together this time and, um, but some of that could certainly be replaced by research- talks about how you do research. Because every single student in this campus in every place I've ever been struggles with research. Like, what is a peer reviewed source? Um, I mean, like, we talked about, like, I introduced to them in this course the CRAP method pretty early on. And we'd go, I'd put them in groups and they'd, you know, Colin Kaepernick or something. We're gonna, like, everyone finds their own Colin Kaepernick and let's evaluate it based on the CRAP method. Um, but even in this documentary pitch, they were supposed to have bibliographies of primary and life of peer reviewed sources and good secondary sources. And, no matter how many times I talked about it in class, and I talked about it a lot, about kind of how, like, if you're doing your presentation on Laquan McDonald, you're probably not going to find a lot of secondary sources because it just happened. But what you can find sources on are, like, the history of Race in [major urban hub]. You can find histories of that particular neighborhood. You can find, um, history of police community relations throughout urban America. Um, and that was always a jump, going from their little topics to how can we contextualize this using secondary sources. And I would beg them at points. Like, I can go to the library with you. I will physically walk to the library with you, go to the stacks, go to the databases, and I'll help you identify these sorts of things. And it just didn't take for whatever reason.

1:08:39.8-1:10:17.1

KB: I'm so curious. Because I wonder if there's, like, a sort of real, embodied resistance to like the space. Because that's why I was thinking like the Writing Center, I'm really disappointed that that didn't pan out. Because I wonder if it were, I guess, like, constructed in really careful and thoughtful ways instead of just being, like, oh here's a satellite location. Which I know funding is a massive issue. But, its kind of seems like, I would imagine that they'd probably have better results in terms of people showing up and the kinds of work that they're doing. Because I'm seeing brilliant things. Like these students are saying. Like, in the things that I went to. So like there was this talk that a graduate student lead, a couple of them, really interesting, in the fall. And the kinds of intellectual work that were happening were, like, fantastic. And then, like, the classes that I went to. Like, some of Joe's classes. Really interesting that the ways that its kind of manifested. Like students show up 20 minutes late and like really don't seem engaged. But things that they're talking about and the ways that they're having these conversations are really, really smart. Um, and so I wonder if there's like some sort of, like, I can't think of the, like, corporal resistance to like the library. Because I noticed when I went there, people do not sit in this library. They don't work there. And I often see people not engaging in research fields like this sort of elitist thing or something, I think? I don't know.

1:10:17.1-1:10:57.2

MP: Yeah, I don't know. I try to work in the library, like, once a week because I like to kind of be around the students a little bit and get out of my comfort zone in the office. Um, I know this is completely off topic. But this library has kind of an issue with a lot of, um, homeless people. people with mental issues like being on the computer and just being like, "Bah!" You know? Or

like, and that is rampant. And I don't know what you can do about that. But I think that deters some students from working in there because it's...

1:10:57.2-1:10:59.3

KB: Because it's right kind of front and center.

1:11:01.3-1:11:52.8

MP: Yeah. I think there's one person that must have turrets or something. He'll be like "Fuck, fuck fuck." You know. And so, and I don't think that's completely all of it. But so I do, that's why we'll usually spend like two or three classes over there through the semester in the library doing something where we're physically there. Like I'll kind of be in the middle and they kind of do their thing and then we'll come back and have conversations with me or conferences. But I think that's part of it. Um, kind of knowing what to do. I mean, even though, our library is great about having, like, someone there in the front who can just work with anybody who needs help on a particular project. Um. But yeah. I fight with that. At Georgia Southern we had a First Year Experience program that everybody had to take. Which it helps fantastic.

1:11:52.8-1:11:54.4

KB: Don't they do it now? Or no?

1:11:54.4-1:12:45.1

MP: They do something here. I don't think everybody has to do it. Um, the way it was done at Georgia Southern, which, I loved it. Which is, anybody could teach it. From full professor person to, you know, adjunct, lecturer, staff person. You didn't have to have any—there were basically no qualifications needed to teach FYE. Um, which is why they could offer so many sections. And you could teach it based on your own theme of your own choosing. So like, I did one on fantasy sports. I did one on fast foods. I did one on the 90s where you just take a topic and you teach research and literacy and sort of academic literacy skills based on that topic. So they do research based on fantasy sports.

1:12:45.1-1:12:46.3

KB: And students know that that's the topic that they're signing up for?

1:12:46.3-1:13:24.9

MP: Yeah. So they're more likely to buy-in to what I'm wanting them to do because they're all wanting to play the fantasy sports, right? So, like, um, or they're happy to do the presentation because they get to do it on, like, boy bands in the 90s. Um, and so that was great. And then we would also talk about like there's a section on like sexual assault and like, um, you know that sort of—on campus. There's a section on like you know, plagiarism and academic ethics on campus. Race.

1:13:24.9-1:13:27.7

KB: Within the class that you taught?

1:13:27.7-1:13:47.4

MP: Yeah. So you know if you were doing a section on sexual assault, like, you'd talk about a [unintelligible] from like a sports perspective. You use the window of whatever your topic is. It was really effective. Um I think it's expensive to do.

1:13:47.4-1:13:50.8

KB: Why is that? If anybody's teaching it? Just cause you have so many?

1:13:50.8-1:13:59.8

MP: You have to pay everybody to teach. Yeah, I mean they had; I should grab the list. I mean it was massive. They had 100+ people teaching it.

1:13:59.8-1:14:04.2

KB: And it's the same credit, like, pay right? For anybody who's teaching it or how does that work?

1:14:04.2-1:14:06.6

MP: It was like 2000 bucks to teach it.

1:14:06.6-1:14:07.6

KB: For anyone? No matter your credentials?

1:14:07.6-1:14:36.3

MP: Right. Yeah. Which I mean, you know, moneywise, it's like, you look back and \$2000 for one class is probably not worth it. But we all liked it. We all had—yeah. My wife did one on like Food TV or something like that? You didn't even have to be an expert on it. You just do it on whatever you like.

1:14:36.3-1:14:55.8

KB: Yeah that was something that kept coming up too was like having interest in the particular area being really important. How did you actually deal with, uh, cause you just say this has to be based on a topic involving racism. So how did you work through like topic generation?

1:14:55.8-1:16:37.9

MP: So I generated a list of like 10 topics. But I said you could order off menu. It doesn't have to be those 10. But when I've done this before, I haven't given them any suggestions. I have it somewhere here. Just pull it up real quick here. Um, when I haven't given them any topics, usually there's one or two groups that really just kind of struggle to come up with anything. Um so I said you can either go with these kinds of topics or you could come up with something on your own. In the end, four of the groups picked one of my topics, one group presented on [unintelligible], which was not on my list. So pretty contemporary for the most part. One did Sandra Bland. I didn't realize there was already a documentary on this until after we had already done it. One did Laquan, one did Racism in Education, and one did the White Savior. So they actually did great. They just didn't do films. They expanded it well beyond that as well. They talked about, like, um, white people who go on mission trips and like save the people and like write these memoirs of how they saved the local people and that sort of thing.

1:16:37.9-1:16:47.9

KB: And they pick some sort of an aspect to tell. How do you help them narrow that? Because they have to do research in order to narrow that right?

1:16:47.9-1:17:18.9

MP: Yeah. So they kind of get to know whatever the topic is. Um, and then I'll talk to them. I'll say, you know, documentaries are about telling a story. So what's the story you're trying to kind of tell here, that you're trying to convey. I left my phone downstairs.

1:17:18.9-1:17:19.5

KB: Yeah, I didn't even pay attention to the time. Sorry.

1:17:19.5-1:19:43.0

MP: Oh no I'm totally fine. I'm horrible for keeping my phone on silent a lot of times and my wife will—I'll look at it and there will be like 10 text messages and I'll be like, "Crap I'm in trouble." So I'll ask, you know, what's the kind of story you want to tell here? And once you have that story, what characters do you want to populate in the story? Not 10 of them but two or three kind of characters. We also watch some documentaries. They have to watch them at home but also there are some in class that we watch. So one of those, I don't know if you've seen it, it's really good. It's called *Whose Streets?* It's about Ferguson but it's a very bottom up documentary. And it focuses particularly on two people. Um, this one guy named, um, I think his name is like Mike- Da- David [unintelligible]. He's part of an organization called Cop Watch. So he leaves his apartment with a camera and like films encounters between police and community. Um, and it talks about his role. Yeah. It's been around for a long time. And the other one was a woman named [unintelligible] who was, um, had this little daughter. Nursing student, had this little daughter, dropped out of nursing school to be part of this community activism. It tells the story of Ferguson through their experiences in it. I tell them about what's your perspective going to be? Who are you going to focus on? You can't just—I don't want this to be like just one here's one slide about Colorism, here's another slide about Colorism, here's another slide about Colorism. Like there has to become some kind of a story. Um, and then once they kind of knock that down a little bit I think they have a better idea of what they're doing. And some of them were just like, one I describe as it was just one slide to the next slide. It was like something—I told students I'm like if I go to a zoo and I go into the amphibian area and I'm looking at an alligator and then I go into the next thing and there's a bear there. I'm going to be like, what? It's going to be disorienting. That's what you're doing with these slides. You're like... I think you're talking about braid extensions here in classes and then next thing you're talking about something completely different. You know like there's got to be a flow to it.

1:19:43.0-1:20:20.7

KB: So okay you answered this. Um, I'm curious about this actually. So as a scholar, do you feel any ambivalence or resistance towards conventions of academic discourse? And then there's several questions. So I'll just kind of ask them all and then you can decide what to talk about. Do you notice any such ambivalence or resistance among students who are involved in the Black culture center? Um, are there any special issues or unique considerations with black students in academic discourse that you think are important to address?

1:20:20.7-1:20:28.3

MP: So is there any ambivalence. Like traditional kind of modes of discourse?

1:20:28.3-1:21:24.4

KB: Yeah, I mean, when you think about what academic discourse is, looks like, sounds like, etc., um, I'm trying to think about I guess the ways that—okay, let me see if I can phrase this. Correlations between the way students perceive themselves as intellectuals or academics and the ways that they are engaging in or I mean yeah, the ways that they're engaging in academic discourse and how that sort of pushes against maybe the status quo or whatever. These sort of traditional understandings of what things look like or sound like. And the ways that they adopt the standards.

1:21:24.4-1:23:05.5

MP: The real resistance of kind of conventional assignments. So the Jackie Robinson assignment was here's a research paper. It involves a topic that I'm not that interested in. I know I got to write that essay. I've written throughout high school or whatever. It's boring. It doesn't have any applicability towards my future life so I'm just not going to do a very good job on it or if I do, it's going to be painful in going through it. If it's just a regular group presentation or you present on this topic and there's no guidelines just tell me what you need to know about that, they're super resistant to doing it. Um, if you could kind of teach those same skills through a more creative kind of assignment, they're much more likely to buy into it in my experience. Like the documentary pitch idea. Or I've done debates in the past. Like very formal debates that would replace a presentation like this where they have a topic and they have to, like, research the topic. SO you may be talking about, like, college athletes being paid, but you're doing it in kind of a debate. You're doing it in a different way. So they get more excited about doing that. Anything that allows them to take advantage of their strengths, um, they're super excited about. I mean they're so good with technology and um editing and like anything that they can kind of do where they can use that sort of stuff is nice.

1:23:05.5-1:23:14.5

KB: So do you have ideas for that? Like what sorts of things have you seen? Because that's another thing I'm looking at is the ways that students are using technologies.

1:23:14.5-1:25:51.2

MP: I've seen students use, like they'll do slideshows but not with PowerPoint. So they'll do like video slides um where they'll put it together and it will be part of one just sort of like movie that goes throughout. Um, I've seen them use like Kahoot! online sort of things that allow, um, them to ask questions and us to be able to respond to them in real time on our cell phones. Um, those kinds of things. Anything through the lens of social media. So if you were going to do a tweet thread about this topic, would it look like? You know, um, so they're more enthusiastic and excited to like do those things. Um anything really traditional is, they're not going to be so interested in. I think there's a—they want to see how it can actually have a real-world effect on them. They don't want to do an assignment they don't think is going to be valuable in the future. So I always kind of go the extra mile and make that step for why this is something that will help you not just now but five years from now, ten years from now. Like, and so then there it clicks

like a little bit more as well. SO we'll talk about like, if you call Comcast and you're having a problem with your cable, you need to have like evidence to explain why you're having a problem and you need to be able to present it in a clear and coherent way. So even like little things you do throughout the day, you need to use some of these skills. Um I have a problem just like everybody else does with students writing how they talk a lot of times. And sometimes that's difficult, particularly in black studies. Um, because even though social—on social media I follow a lot of black studies scholars. And when they're communicating on social media, they'll communicate in a way that is different from their academic writing. So I try not to be so “this is the way you do it” kind of a thing, but in a sense, there is certain ways that you write. Like subject verb agreement needs to be kind of right. Um and so you know, that's always a tricky part for me.

1:25:51.2-1:26:54.4

KB: How do you frame that? Because this is actually a really big area of contention in my field right now. And there's a lot of research being done about using AAVE in the classroom and like using—so I don't know if you're familiar with Adam Banks. He does a lot with like digital rhetorics and race. And he was in composition I don't know where he's at now. He's at Stanford though. And he, what was I going to say? I lost my thought. He writes, like he does a lot of work with mix tapes and like thinking, like I can't really explain the ways that he writes because I can't quite figure it out but it's kind of cryptic. It's not AE—I mean there is AEVE involved. Where am I going with this? Why am I talking about that? So do you—what do you do with that? Do you talk to students about that? Do you not?

1:26:54.4-1:29:11.0

MP: I mean I will generally sort of—when I grade like a writing assignment, I will correct grammar right? That's sort of an obvious grammar kind of mistake. And you know I'll frame it in a way too that like if you're writing a resume or a cover letter or something like in the real world like this can't sound sort of like this, if for your own benefit you want to get the job or go to the top of the list. Like for this race essay, what I tell them is I'm focusing overwhelmingly on your ideas and your content and your analysis and I'm not going to you know I will point things out, but I'm not going to necessarily grade you way down if your writing is not up to where I think it should be or where the you know the academy says it should be. Um because then I think they come in very apprehensive in general, even on tests, like, they'll raise their hand in a test and I'll come over or they're writing an essay and they'll ask, “Is it okay if I spell this wrong?” Or like they're very concerned about the grammar of like an essay exam and I'm like, “Don't worry about it. I'm more concerned about your content.” Um so I kind of deal with it as like I will work with you on these things, but I'm not going to penalize you necessarily on certain phrases or certain whatever that may not conform to whatever I think or whatever the world things that it way it sort of should be the way the world has deemed it. Um, but yeah. It's something I struggle with. Um because I have a tendency to do too and I've done this my entire life. I read essays in the student's voices. Um and I've always done this. Um and so I can like hear them in their writing. Um and I know that that's like and like that is how they sound like that is them. So like try to get them to sort of be something that they're not in writing is always something that I sort of struggle with.

1:29:11.0-1:30:41.2

KB: Or also yeah like buying into a system that is made to kind of get certain things out of them. That's, yeah, ultimately that's a dilemma that I deal with all the time. And when I'm trying to kind of untangle a piece of maybe in this research is like how do I help students in ways that are culturally affirming and valuing while giving them like what they want or what they need in terms of their education while they're here, but also, not subjecting them. Or maybe not uncritically kind of talking to them or I don't know about what it is that I'm doing. Because when we talk about things like resumes in the real world, we're talking about very like white masculine middle class you know values and priorities. So how do we—that's I guess what I'm wondering. And like how do we resist—do you see students resisting that and in what ways or? I don't know. Or do you see that happening within the academic setting or the literature. Like I've been noticing in our scholarship in my field or in related fields, people are writing a lot more in AAVE or they're weaving in personal experience or they're structuring essays or articles very differently. Do you see that in your field as well or?

1:30:41.2-1:33:05.3

KB: Yeah. It's very refreshing kind of for me. Yeah. And they're certainly, yeah, there's some pushback. Yeah so you see that kind of tension, right, on the one hand. Um, but then on the other, you're right, they're going to have to get a job, right? And what we've done, part of what we've looked at, we talked about that study where people sent the same resume out for different names and you got rejections if it was a sort of ethnic name compared to the white name. I presented in kind of this is the world, it's fucked up, we know it's fucked up because we talk about how it is on a pretty regular basis, right? So you and I never told them that you need to do this or this or this, but these are decisions that you have to make as an individual from time to time right? Like I have students that talk about um I had several women this semester talks about having job interviews and going through that struggle about do I straighten my hair for this job interview because I know that that's probably what they're going to want to see. Um, do I sort of do I give in right? Or do I stay strong and see what happens. Um, do I write the way that the white middle class male wants me to write like or do I stay true to myself and kind of, um. But ultimately, I try to never tell them anything really about what they should do or shouldn't do, you know? Um, even we talk about voting a lot. Even something like voting where it's so important that people vote. But I know it's easy for me to go vote but it's not for other people. So I just try to give them as many tools as I can but ultimately just say you need to make these decisions but it's best to kind of know what the landscape is out there when you're moving out.

1:33:05.3-1:33:37.8

KB: And I'll look at that, like, when I'm coding stuff to see like yeah how are students, or are they, or to what extent are they trying to strike a balance between yeah. How they're doing. It's interesting because I'm not seeing a lot of resistance among students to the sort of conventions of academic discourse or whatever. And Doctor Clemons frames it as like tradition which I think is an interesting approach. Instead of conventions or standards.

1:33:37.8-1:34:38.4

MP: I think they've so been brought up in school that way and many of them have not had many black teachers so they've sort of resigned to the fact that this is the way the world is and this is what it needs to be and this is what I've got to do. Um, even though you can tell there's like

inner turmoil there about it, but they just sort of resolve that. I mean you'll see a lot of the students in the Center dressed really nice in the sense that they'll wear shirts, ties, things like that. Then they'll have like one day a week the BMI students will all dress in like suits and ties and that's sort of part of the idea that you need to be twice as good. My wife talks about this too when she teaches in how I could walk in wearing this basketball jersey and I'm going to command respect and nobody's going to really say anything about me, but she walks in with a few hairs out of place or whatever.

1:34:38.4-1:34:39.4

KB: Yeah. Do you have makeup on? Do you wear jeans?

1:34:39.4-1:35:20.7

MP: Yeah. She's being judged. And I tell my students too, I show them the Student Race and Instruction Studies that like white men get like a 0.5% bump on their student evals just for being a white male. And I'm like, "You will probably do that with me too. Like you will rate me higher probably than you would like if I was a person of color, if I was a Black woman doing essentially the same thing, even though you are all of color, you will rate me higher because that's what sort of—that's the world that we live in."

1:35:20.7-1:35:21.7

KB: You share that with them?

1:35:21.7-1:35:23.1

MP: Yeah.

1:35:23.1-1:35:23.9

KB: As part of your class? That's interesting.

1:35:23.9-1:35:51.7

MP: Yeah. That I get that added benefits that I don't—if I'm being tough—if I yell at a class I'm being, you know, tough and stern. If my wife yells at a class she's being a bitch. Yeah. You know if a black professor talks about race, he's playing the race card. If I talk about it, oh it must really be a problem if he's talking about it

1:35:51.7-1:35:54.4

KB: Or you must be a bleeding-heart liberal?