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## **SCHOOLED: Hip-hop Composition at the Predominantly White University**

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation asks what hip-hop is doing in predominantly white higher-educational contexts, specifically in composition classrooms. Using ethnographic, autoethnographic, and historical methods, it finds that hip-hop's work in composition classrooms at PWIs is contradictory. This mixed-methods investigation suggests that the contradictory relation of white fans, students, and institutions to hip-hop is shaped on the one hand by white listeners' increasing identification with the historical struggles of African Americans under capitalism, and on the other hand, by disidentification or abjection of African Americans in an effort to "win" the zero-sum game of capitalism. This contradiction results in a paradoxical situation where white fans—and white institutions—love hip-hop and yet harbor antiblack views about the Black communities and Black students who make hip-hop possible. However, the findings also suggest that identifying this tension offers writing instructors an opportunity to be more explicit about working towards anti-racist goals in the hip-hop composition classroom. The dissertation's historical study, ethnographic and autoethnographic studies, and review of contemporary hip-hop and composition scholarship suggest that teaching and practicing reflexivity are core solutions to the paradoxical rhetorical action of hip-hop in predominantly white spaces. This entails teaching students to reflectively identify and write about their own positionalities as well as asking teachers and administrators to recognize and explicitly acknowledge their own positionalities.

The first chapter introduces the problematic of hip-hop's significant presence in elite PWIs despite hip-hop's emergence as a revolutionary Black art form in 1970s New York and the contemporary mass closure of public educational institutions for Black and poor students in the United States. It argues that, given the widespread uptake of Black language and discourse practices by millennials and youth, all composition classes should teach Black language and

discourse practices, including at PWIs. Chapter 2 positions critical reflexivity as the central methodological value of this mixed-methods research study, contextualizing the white female author's relationship with hip-hop and the development of her research within research and writing on whiteness in hip-hop culture and hip-hop pedagogy. Chapter 3, a historical study of the Open Admissions movement at the City University of New York, recontextualizes early hip-hop culture within the creative production of Black and Puerto Rican youths' artistic and educational movements of late 1960s and 1970s New York City, arguing for a reconsideration of the role that creative writing teachers of color and cultural rhetorics education broadly defined played both in the successes of Basic Writing under CUNY Open Admissions and the early history of hip-hop.

Chapter 4 offers hip-hop as a critical intervention to the Writing About Writing movement, arguing that the movement's prioritization of institutional writing practices over students' extracurricular and power-saturated language practices constitutes linguistic innocence. A classroom study of 4 hip-hop composition classrooms demonstrates the pervasive antiblackness of students' attitudes about language and advocates a reflexive, literacy-focused hip-hop composition pedagogy to teach students a socially conscious understanding of the major concepts of composition studies. Finally, chapter 5 considers hip-hop composition in the context of writing program administration, including issues of labor, disciplinarity, and graduate student teaching, retention, and training. Using dialogue with and materials from Nana Adjei-Brenyah, who taught two of the classes studied in chapter 4, this chapter highlights the role hip-hop can play in valuing the diverse language practices and writing expertises of graduate student composition instructors from non-normative identity groups. The dissertation closes with a call for composition instruction that recognizes how whiteness, Blackness, and power circulate through all students' everyday language and composing practices.

SCHOOLED:  
Hip-hop Composition at the Predominantly White University

By  
Tessa Brown

B.A., Princeton University, 2008  
M.F.A., University of Michigan, 2011

DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of doctor of Philosophy in  
Composition and Cultural Rhetoric, Syracuse University.

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## CHAPTER 1

### “They call themselves writers”: Hip-hop in Composition Studies

“They call themselves writers.”  
— *Style Wars*

Later in this dissertation, I will discuss several college writing, or composition, courses taught by a colleague and myself. Each of these courses, which all prominently featured hip-hop cultural products in their curricula, opened with a showing of *Style Wars*, the 1983 graffiti documentary by Henry Chalfant and Tony Silver about young graffiti writers in the 1970s and early 1980s New York. The film opens with shots of the New York City Metropolitan Transit Authority’s train yards at night, as a conductor calls for a train to be moved out. We hear the rumbling of the cars, the crackle of electricity. As the music builds, the car moves out from the yard, rumbling through the darkness, overhead lights intermittently illuminating its flanks. As the train approaches, coming into fuller light, we see the graffiti art covering its sides. The music swells as the viewer realizes the entire length of the train is covered in colorful graffiti pieces. The film cuts to a kid’s hand tracing spray paint along a wall, then another shot of a graffiti writer’s spray-paint can immortalized as graffiti art onto the side of a train in full daylight, scored by the triumphant sounds of a classical march.

Then the score breaks, the Sugarhill Gang cuts in, and the film quickly moves through shots of graffiti pieces, break dancers, aerosol cans, and kids tagging cars, before the narrator interrupts:

They call themselves writers, because that’s what they do. They write their names, among other things, everywhere: names they’ve been given, or have chosen for themselves. Most of all they write in and on subway trains, which carry their names from one end of

the city to the other. It's called bombing. And it has equally assertive counterparts in rap music, and break dancing.

The Sugarhill Gang comes back in: "Say, 'I am!' (I am!) 'Some-body!' (Some-body!)" The film goes on to introduce us to some of the more prominent writers of the day: Seen, Kase, Skeme and more, and counterposes the writers' descriptions of their own culture with commentary by MTA officials and then-mayor Ed Koch, who saw the art as vandalism that drained public dollars and, even at a moment of austerity in the city's budget, needed to be fought at any cost. The film charts the culture's rise from the enigmatic tags of Taki 183 in the early 1970s to the rising interest of the Manhattan gallery scene and the cooptation of the culture by white pop culture figures like Debbie Harry as well as rising discord within the subculture itself.

Thirty-five years later, hip-hop culture has become so dominant it is almost difficult to identify, with graffiti showing up as the urban texture in bank advertisements and condo developments. Meanwhile, Richie "SEEN" Mirando's archives—including pencil drafts on notebook paper and photographs of completed pieces on walls and train cars—are housed at the Hip-hop Collection at Cornell University Library's archives ("Guide to the Cornell").

When I first taught *Style Wars*, I was an MFA student at the University of Michigan teaching freshman composition, and I used the film to introduce students to the early hip-hop culture in New York, the culture of 5 elements—breaking, graf writing, rapping, DJing, and dropping science—that existed long before the commodified hip-hop they knew as a dominant player in their cultural landscape. But as I entered the field of composition and rhetoric, and became more versed in literacy research, I began to see how the opening line of *Style Wars*—"they call themselves writers"—alongside its loving shots of youths hunched over their notebooks at the "writers' bench," or describing how going "all city" validated their existences in a city that was cutting youth services left and right—resonated with composition, rhetoric, and

literacy research on extracurricular youth literacies, the role of identity in discourse, writing, and learning, and debates around the validity of nonstandard youth literacies and their viability in educational settings. But with SEEN's personal archives at Cornell and the dozens of professionals, myself included, teaching hip-hop courses at elite, often predominantly white colleges and universities across the country, the argument of whether hip-hop belongs at PWIs seems moot. The fact is, it's here. But why? And how? I found myself asking: what is hip-hop doing at predominantly white institutions? That is, how did it get here, and what is it doing—by whom, and for what purposes—now that it's here?

As a compositionist, rhetorician, and literacy researcher, I understand the question of “what hip-hop is doing” rhetorically. As a set of discursive practices, where meaning is expressed through writing, speech, visual art, and the body, hip-hop culture is deeply rhetorical in multiple senses. As a culture, hip-hop is rhetorical in that all cultures are rhetorical and all “meaning-making... is situated in specific cultural communities” (Powell et al). Individual hip-hop texts, which take the generic forms of rap songs, sonic compositions, break dances, and graffiti pieces, are also rhetorical, responding to the evolving, “recurrent situations” (Miller) of experiences of alienation in the United States and abroad, especially elements of the Black American experience, including segregation, inferior social services, police violence, mass incarceration, and commodity capitalism, all engaged through the valence of Black language practices. In her seminal 1984 article, “Genre as Social Action,” Carolyn Miller argued that the study of a genre (in my case, hip-hop genres) needs to focus not on the discourse itself but rather on the “action it is used to accomplish” (151). In this dissertation, I ask what actions hip-hop genres accomplish when circulated in primarily white educational contexts, particularly in composition classrooms, the primary site of study in my field. Using ethnographic, autoethnographic, and historical

methods, I find that hip-hop genres' actions in predominantly white composition classrooms are contradictory, and mirror the larger contradictions in white fandom of hip-hop, including my own hip-hop fandom as a white woman. My mixed-methods investigation suggests that the contradictory relation of white fans, students, and institutions to hip-hop is shaped on the one hand by white folks' increasing identification with the historical struggles of African Americans under capitalism, and on the other hand, by disidentification or abjection of African Americans in an effort to "win" the zero-sum game of capitalism. As a set of commodities, hip-hop embodies solidarity with its Black creators yet also encourages liberation through consumption, a process which abstracts the commodities—albums, images, even words—from their creators and promotes solutions to historical wrongs based in consumerism. This contradiction results in a paradoxical situation where white fans—and white institutions—love hip-hop and yet harbor antiblack views about the Black communities and Black students who make hip-hop possible.

However, my findings also suggest that identifying this tension offers instructors an opportunity to be more explicit about working towards anti-racist goals in the hip-hop composition classroom. My historical study, classroom and autoethnographic studies, and review of contemporary hip-hop and composition scholarship suggest that teaching and practicing reflexivity are core solutions to the paradoxical rhetorical action of hip-hop in predominantly white spaces. This entails teaching students to reflectively identify and write about their own positionalities alongside asking teachers and administrators to recognize and explicitly acknowledge their own positionalities as well. I argue that hip-hop's emergence, in the 1970s, in response to the impersonal discourses of neoliberalism and in the context of the identity-laden discourses of ethnic and women's liberation movements marked it as a vehicle for explicit

expression of personal identity, one that can be productively mobilized in contemporary composition classrooms. Writing in response to contemporary pedagogical movements like the Writing About Writing movement, I argue that hip-hop in composition classrooms forwards reflexive writing practices that extend beyond the institutional literacies of school and the workplace, demanding compositionists' language pedagogies attend to the complex literacy practices of our students in all aspects of their lives. In the context of the predominantly white university, hip-hop becomes a vehicle for all composition students to understand how Blackness and antiblackness circulate through our everyday language, challenging students to move towards more explicit and reflexive relationships to their language choices.

### Hip-hop in Predominantly White Academia and in Composition Studies

Across the country, educational opportunities for Black students are collapsing (Covert). As Black studies-cum-hip-hop studies have grown exponentially in the (white) academy, schooling for Black and brown students and ethnic studies have come under attack. In my hometown of Chicago, the city closed or consolidated 50 public schools in 2013, all of which served primarily Black student bodies (Ravitch). Then, in 2016, a budget standoff in the Illinois capital led to the defunding of Chicago State University, which served primarily Black students, leaving thousands of students and hundreds of faculty, many also Black, without their school and employer (Cohen, “#SaveCSU”). Public schools serving students of color have also been shuttered in Philadelphia (Hurdle). Budget cuts at San Francisco State University have seriously imperiled the College of Ethnic Studies, the only such college in the nation (Wang). In Detroit, the underfunding of public schools is so extreme that teachers staged a #SickOut, collectively calling in sick to bring national attention to the abysmal conditions in their schools (AJ+). In



North Carolina, budget discussions included efforts to close four of the state's historically Black colleges (Apodaca). And Arizona dispensed with the pretense of financial constraints when in 2010 it went after Mexican-American studies programs with a bill, HB 2281, which "bans schools from teaching classes that are designed for students of a particular ethnic group, promote resentment or advocate ethnic solidarity over treating pupils as individuals" (Santa Cruz). Meanwhile, academia's increasingly untenured labor force means that more faculty, disproportionately female and of color, have been bumped from the tenure line and relegated to job insecurity and poverty wages (Flaherty). And at Syracuse University, while I was pursuing my doctorate, a new administration began its tenure by cutting the Posse program's scholarships for exceptional students of color, again citing budget cuts, even as funds still existed for lavish campus construction projects (Nunez). In these changes, to which racist motivations are always denied, we see the continuation or the redeployment of the "united front in social policy" (Kynard *Vernacular* 230) used to staunch Black and brown advancement after the Civil Rights Era. Indeed, communities of color are also facing issues like police brutality, mass incarceration, environmental racism (the tendency of environmental degradation to disproportionately impact communities of color), a national jobs crisis, and a financial and mortgage crisis that wiped out levels of Black wealth not seen since the National Housing Act of 1934 prevented Black homeowners from accessing the same home loans as white would-be suburbanites, leading to white flight and the rapid devaluation of urban real estate (Madrigal). With Betsy DeVos promising to make the Department of Education "neutral" again, these trends are likely to only increase (Emma).

Yet despite these collapses (or maybe because of them), diversity efforts in higher education are flourishing, which has meant more dollars for hip-hop programming at colleges

across the country. Whatever the reason, the fact is, hip-hop is already present in some of the most elite PWIs in the country. Beyond playing at student parties, campus concerts, and on students' headphones, hip-hop has been institutionalized at some of the most elite historically white institutions in the nation. Consider these examples of hip-hop's presence at PWIs across the United States:

- At Harvard University, language and linguistics scholar Marcyliena Morgan runs the Harvard Hip-hop Archive, which beyond collecting hip-hop materials itself, has partnered with Harvard's Edna Kuhn Loeb music library to develop its Classic Crates collection. ("2016 Classic Crates Press Release"). Through the WEB DuBois Institute, the archive has offered the Nas Hip-hop Scholar Fellowship to key players in hip-hop studies including Mark Anthony Neal, Bettina Love, Regina Bradley, Murray Forman, Christopher Emdin, 9<sup>th</sup> Wonder and others, and the archive also maintains an online space for the further development of the hip-hop scholarly community ("Hip-hop Archive and Research Institute").
- The Cornell University Library houses its own Hip-hop Collection, featuring materials from multiple hip-hop luminaries and collectors including Richie "SEEN" Mirando, featured in the film *Style Wars*, Rock Steady Crew member Jorge "Popmaster Fabel" Pabo, and others ("Guide to the Cornell").
- The NOLA Hip-hop Archive at Tulane University, a digital archive of New Orleans hip-hop and bounce music, founded by Holly Hobbs, contains digitized interviews with artists including Mannie Fresh, Mystikal, and others (Thomson).
- At the University of Wisconsin, Gloria Ladson-Billings of the Education School established and runs an annual free 15-week hip-hop lecture series called "Getting Real" ("The Getting Real Series").
- At Stanford University, Jeff Chang (and until recently, H. Samy Alim) runs the Institute for Diversity in the Arts, an interdisciplinary institute that offers courses in Black, Latino, and Asian arts and activism with a strong focus in hip-hop and hip-hop pedagogy, including a partnership with a local high school ("About Us").
- Professor Elaine Richardson, alongside varying collaborators including Women's Studies professor Treva Lindsay, founded the Hip-hop Literacies Conference at The Ohio State University in 2011, which has been held annually at OSU and other campuses. ("Past Conferences").
- In 2012, Arizona State became the first university to offer a minor in Hip-hop Studies, via a track in their Africana Studies Department ("UA Introduces").
- Summer 2016 saw the first International Hip Hop conference at the University of Cambridge, and the University of Oxford teaches a hip hop course that is "a compulsory model for all first-year music students" (Grove)
- Michael Eric Dyson's course "The Sociology of Jay-Z" at Georgetown University received major media coverage when it debuted in 2011 (Melber).
- Mark Anthony Neal and producer Patrick "9<sup>th</sup> Wonder" Doughit's co-taught "History of Hip-hop" course has been so successful at Duke University that 9<sup>th</sup> Wonder developed a

partnership with HBCU North Carolina Central University to bring hip-hop history to their campus (“Patrick Dougherty”).

- Under the mentorship of hip-hop educators like Marc Lamont Hill, Chris Emdin, and Yolanda Sealey Ruiz, doctoral candidate Lauren Kelley at Teachers College Columbia held an annual Hip Hop Summit for high school students in the tri-state area (Levine).
- At Clemson University, A. D. Carson received media attention for his dissertation in the form of an original rap album, submitted to the program in Rhetorics, Communication, and Information Design (Scar). Carson was subsequently hired as an “Assistant Professor of Hip-Hop and the Global South” at the University of Virginia’s McIntire Department of Music (Newman).

Carson’s example reflects that beyond these incursions of hip-hop into wider academia, hip-hop has established a major foothold in composition and rhetoric as well as in related fields of literacy studies and English Education.

As I move to name and identify the interdisciplinary “hip-hop composition studies,” I do so cautiously, mindful of my positionality as a white woman. As I discuss further below, in naming “hip-hop composition studies” I hope to gesture to the many academics, mostly scholars of color, who are theorizing hip-hop-heavy literacy and writing education across multiple related disciplines. In defining this term, I begin—as so much hip-hop does—by breakin’ it down.

**(1) Hip-hop**, *n.* Also hip-hop, Hip Hop, #HIPHOP. A global youth culture with roots in the Bronx, New York, originally comprising the 5 elements of rapping, DJing, graffiti, breakdancing, and dropping science—now known to include style, language, novels, film, theater, journalism, and activism. A broad term whose designations range from the lived creative communities of cyphering rappers, dancers, and graf writers to commodified cultural products far divorced from the lived realities of artists and the lived struggles of communities of color.

**(2) Hip-hop**, *adj.* Any person, thing, or practice associated with the above (subject to much debate; see: fakers, wanksters, posers, wannabes, wiggers, sell-outs, realness, and authenticity).

**(1) Composition**, *n.* An academic field of study, also known as Composition and Rhetoric, Comp/Rhet, Writing Studies, which is responsible for managing the instruction of college writing courses and theorizing best practices for teaching writing based on studies of writers in and out of classrooms. See also

**(2) Composition**, *n.* A piece of composed knowledge, whether writing, music, visual art, or film. Whether all compositions (2) are the purview of Composition (1) is still out for debate.

**Studies, *adj.*** A term used to designate a subfield of study in the Academy not awarded the full respect of a Discipline. See: Black Studies, Women's Studies, Disability Studies, Queer Studies, Hiphop Studies

Taken together with the scholarship and teaching of those I will presently discuss, “hiphop composition studies” emerges as the theory and pedagogy of teaching writing and other communicative modes guided by the processes and products of hiphop. This area of study and teaching, which begins in composition studies but extends into rhetoric, English, literacy, and education, brings together a wide range of interdisciplinary teacher-theorists whose teaching and theorizing echoes hiphop priorities and practices like sampling and remixing; vernacular and resistive language choices; public and community-facing art and communication; collaborative creative processes like the cypher; and speaking truth to power for social change.

“Hiphop composition studies” begins with the work of folks theorizing hiphop from within my discipline, composition and rhetoric. Folks like Adam Banks, who theorizes the DJ as a digital griot, bringing African-descended practices of sampling and collage to bear on DJ culture and, ultimately, to the kind of teaching we can do in a contemporary college writing classroom. Folks like my advisor Gwendolyn Pough, who theorizes the rhetorical practices of Black women rappers “bringing wreck” to the public sphere. Or Todd Craig, using DJs’ sampling practices to retheorize fair use and citation, or Carmen Kynard using hiphop-language inflected writing to describe her students’ command of Black rhetorical powers. David Green’s explorations of hiphop as a metaphor for the work of composition, Austin Jackson’s experiment in liberatory hiphop pedagogies for freshman composition, Jason Palmeri’s theorizing remix as writing pedagogy for a new millennium, and Kermit Campbell’s locating African American rhetorical traditions in hiphop, not to mention the work of folks studying hiphop in writing instruction at two-year colleges like Sarah Wakefield and Jim Sundeen.

There are so many compositionists using hip-hop that I was able to conduct a survey, a small segment of the multiple research methods I discuss in the next chapter, of college composition instructors who are using hip-hop in their classes. I received 14 responses and am continuing to solicit recipients since each year's conference programs suggest more hip-hop compositionists I can recruit to take the survey. These 14 respondents included active professors, like Tamika Carey, Marcos Del Hierro, Faith Curtya, Anita August, and David Green, as well as graduate students Alexis McGee and Victor Del Hierro, all of whom use hip-hop materials in their writing courses and many of whom listed hip-hop as a primary research interest. Of the 14 respondents, 11 used hip-hop in freshman writing courses, 6 had students creating work in hip-hop genres like mixtapes, and 9 said hip-hop informed their pedagogical values.

But hip-hop composition studies is bigger than the college composition classroom, includes other interdisciplines like hip-hop literacy studies, which encompasses David Kirkland's study of Black high school boys struggling in school but writing and studying raps at home, Ruth Nicole Brown's creative and performative hip-hop pedagogies for Black and brown girls, and the considerable literature devoted to teaching English using hip-hop in K-12 spaces by folks like Marc Lamont Hill, Maisha T. (Fisher) Winn, Jesse Gainer and Diane Lapp, Jamal Cooks, Lauren Leigh Kelly, Ernest Morell and Jeffrey Duncan-Andrade, and Luke Rodesiler. It extends to hip-hop sociolinguistics, which includes the work of composition and rhetoric's ambassador to that world Geneva Smitherman, who wrote about rappin' in *Black Language* in her dissertation in 1969, and her students Elaine Richardson and H. Samy Alim, who navigate composition and rhetoric, English Education, and linguistics with their studies of how Black and Brown boys and girls use Black and hip-hop language. And surely hip-hop composition studies must include the hip-hop feminist writers who actively and innovatively theorize Black and hip-hop girls' and

women's use of language and writing, but who don't identify their work as composition or rhetoric or literacy Studies or any of the above—hiphop feminists like Brittney Cooper, Eve Dunbar, and Aisha Durham who theorize the hip-hop writing and teaching practiced by a new cohort of hip-hop feminists working in the academy, on the blogosphere, in literature, and on the streets, and the original hip-hop feminist Joan Morgan reflectively writing her politics into being, and Eve Dunbar writing about hip-hop fiction, and Treva Lindsay theorizing the oral and discursive practices of hip-hop feminist artists, scholars, and practitioners, and the hip-hop feminists remixing writing excellence in *Homegirls Make Some Noise: The Hip-hop Feminism Anthology*. And what about the hip-hop scholars who implicitly write about writing in that they write, sometimes frenetically, about hip-hop—folks like Mark Anthony Neal, Tricia Rose, Jeff Chang—this, too, could be in the purview of hip-hop composition studies. It might even extend to the work of hip-hop pedagogues like Chris Emdin who get science students writing raps and K-12 teachers tweeting about #HipHopEd hip-hop comp; Henry Louis Gates' rhetorical theory of signifying, the “slave trope” of revision and recontextualization without which hip-hop humor cannot be understood; books by hip-hop practitioners like Jay-Z, William Upski Wimsatt, KRS-One, Questlove, and others, and by hip-hop's video vixens like Karrine Steffans, Carmen Bryan, and Melyssa Ford? Or video and literary texts that depict Black women writing themselves into being like Ty Hodges's *Video Girl*, Sapphire's *Push*, Black Artemis's *Explicit Content*, or Issa Rae's web series *Awkward Black Girl* and TV show *Insecure*. Hip-hop composition studies can extend to the study of the writers and performers (not to mention lawyers, agents, and producers, each writing themselves) behind *Empire* and *Hamilton*, as well as to the actual hip-hop artists who theorize writing and composing in practice every time they spit or tag—Jean Grae, Lil Wayne, Lauryn Hill, J. Cole, Kanye West, the graffiti writers of *Style Wars*, the graffiti

writers who never had a documentary made about them—and so many more. They’re hip-hop composition studies too, right?

And what about all the writing—the proposals, tenure files, archive reading guides, course listings—that go into institutionalizing hip-hop in higher education—is that within the purview of hip-hop composition studies? Or the spoken-word student groups that exist at these and so many other colleges and universities? Or the spoken word and slam poetry groups and competitions for high schoolers like Chicago Young Authors, RYSE, Brave New Voices, and Louder Than a Bomb? What about the thousands of unknown kids in this country and all over the world who write and freestyle rhymes and make beats and doodle tags and do or don’t ever spray them on real buildings, are they writers too? Are they writing studies? Hip-hop composition studies?

*They call themselves writers. Who’s saying they aren’t?*

My positionality and my research have led me to tread carefully as I chart the purview of hip-hop composition studies. Naming a new area of study has benefits, but it also has risks. By naming, we can gain material benefits as scholars and teachers of hip-hop composition are able to recognize each other, share materials, and build scholarly community in the form of journals, conferences, textbooks, and more. However, naming also has drawbacks, especially when it comes from someone like me whose identity is privileged vis-a-vis the majority of the community being named. Naming can also compartmentalize, siloing revolutionary knowledge so that broader systems of oppression are protected. These risks asserted themselves to me as soon as it came to name this introduction. “Naming Hip-hop Composition Studies,” I tried. “Mapping Hip-hop Composition Studies.” I played with my verbs: *charting*, *locating*, *identifying* hip-hop composition studies. You see the problem, right? These all reek of the colonial. Here I

am, a white girl who has never cyphered in her life (ok, a few times), declaring that *I* have the power to name and to map this terrain that has existed since before I was born and is marked with the theories and experiences of communities of color. Who do I think I am—Cristobal Colon?

So, for a while, this introduction was called “Hiphop Writes: Colombusing Hiphop Composition Studies.”

Then I read Roderick Ferguson’s *The Reorder of Things*. This book helped me see how my desire to name hiphop composition studies—this feeling I had that if I could just name this subfield it would gain recognition in the eyes of the academy—recognition that could lead institutional resources like journals, special issues, edited collections, institutions, job hires, and grants—this feeling was (besides being colonial, because who am *\*I\** to be the one to name it, even if it gets named) is me being unknowingly conscripted into the production of the interdisciplines, those subfields and subspecialties like Women’s Studies, Black Studies, Native, Chicano, Latinx, Queer, Disability, Hiphop Studies, which have proliferated in the decades since the 1960s student movements and which, Ferguson argues, were and continue to be a way that the power and money of the university and the federal government contained and mitigated the demands of those revolutionary movements.

Now, allow me to pause on the history Ferguson tells, because it’s important in understanding how academia has come to be shaped like it is. By disrupting the centrality of Western man to the U.S. university, Ferguson argues, the student movements demanded not just new administrative structures (new tenure lines, new curricula), but a total “epistemic reorganization” (53) that challenged the very categories and truths the academy had previously held dear. For example, the Third College at the University of California – San Diego, formed



through the protests of the Lumumba-Zapata movement, forewent departments like medicine, sociology, English, and so on, instead building curricula around new areas of study like Revolutions, Economics, and Health, which each “presumed powerful challenges to the canonical orders of academic knowledge” (53). In order to contain these challenges, Ferguson writes, discourses of excellence arose which limited minority access to the very institutions they were trying to change, discourses which still today equate minority admissions to a lowering of standards. After a few years of increased minority admission to higher education, which I discuss in depth in chapter 3, universities began using admissions criteria based on “excellence” to re-whiten their campuses, then blame minorities for their own inability to be admitted. (As Carmen Kynard teaches, if “busing is the dominant trope for desegregation in K-12 settings [then] changes in admissions and enrollment...are the dominant discursive figures of desegregation in higher education” (151).) And so, in the mid-seventies, UCSD cut minority recruitment and minority enrollment, and the Third College imploded (Ferguson 74). Meanwhile, since Black and Brown knowledge had been contained within that college, the rest of the university curriculum—in medicine, economics, English, and so on—continued almost unchallenged. As I discuss in chapter 3, for example, the birth of Black and Puerto Rican Studies departments in the CUNY system meant that while there were African, African-American, Latin American, and Puerto Rican literature classes being taught in those departments, the English department could go on teaching a totally white, Euro-American curriculum unchallenged for years—and when university machinations shut down admissions of students of color, those departments suffered while the English department could proceed nearly unchanged.

Thus, what Ferguson’s study taught me is how naming a subfield—for example, hip-hop composition studies—makes that subfield vulnerable to compartmentalization, where it can be

undermined through policy shifts around funding, tenure, and admissions. Meanwhile, the critique of the larger systems of knowledge that guide departments—questions of whose texts are valid, what constitutes the canon, and who is qualified to teach and to learn—are contained, and the critique’s ability to effect wider change is forestalled. Thus, Ferguson’s insights challenged me to shift my priorities from naming hip-hop composition studies to centering the work hip-hop has done and continues to do throughout composition and rhetoric, leading me to challenge the way composition tells its history, and, particularly, how composition and rhetoric as a field has resisted acknowledging the contributions of creative writers to its development, particularly the teaching of creative writers of color. Hip-hop pushed me into “problem finding” (50), as a 1971 course guide from Medgar Evers College termed it, as opposed to mere problem-solving. Centering hip-hop to my research challenged me to see how compositionists’ theorizations of writing fall flat when deprived of the artistic and revolutionary communities who write in non-institutional genres like poems, stories, raps, protest signs, personal histories, manifestos, graffiti pieces.

Of course, composition and rhetoric as a field already theorizes wide-ranging writing and language practices, from the privileged discourses of academic departments and workplaces (Berkenkotter and Huckin; Devitt, Bawarshi, and Reiff; Dias et al) to the vernacular rhetorics of protests, digital spaces, and borderlands (Parks, Kynard, Banks, Milu, Scenters-Zapico). However, as austerity regimes have decimated funding for K-12 and higher education in the decade since the 2008 Great Recession, a powerful movement has emerged within composition and rhetoric, which I synechdochally refer to as the Writing About Writing movement, which has worked to close ranks around what its leaders deem the essential work of composition and rhetoric (Downs and Wardle “Teaching”). It makes sense that, in this moment of austerity and

collapsing funding for education, efforts have been undertaken to clarify the expertise of composition and rhetoric, a long-marginalized player in academic communities (Schell). The Writing About Writing movement makes important gains in clarifying our disciplinary expertise and solidifying our position as an academic discipline with specialized, research-based knowledge on “writing, rhetoric, language, and literacy” (Downs and Wardle “Teaching” 554). At the same time, the history of Basic Writing in the context of the 1970s student movements, which I discuss extensively in chapter 3, offers lessons for the present moment as to the ways neoliberal imperatives can coopt our best intentions as teachers of writing and literacy, and sanitize our field’s revolutionary knowledge in the interests of whiteness. As I theorize the WAW movement in chapter 4, I am mindful of the historical lesson that in moments of budget cuts and threats to the discipline of composition and rhetoric, we need to center marginalized students, faculty, and knowledges, lest we sacrifice our most vulnerable—and those whose work has been fundamental to the development of our discipline—in order to protect a more resilient (that is, complicit) version of the field.

Looking at my field this way, I have come to recognize that naming hip-hop composition studies as such foils a larger critique of my field in which hip-hop knowledges, methodologies, and ways of being, teaching, composing, and community building could be centered in the work of composition, rhetoric, and writing studies. Indeed, this is the critique Adam Banks makes when he argues for the inseparability, in both his books, of technology and Blackness to Afrodiasporic composing processes. As Ferguson allows me to see and to theorize, hip-hop and Black studies present fundamental challenges to the way the academy organizes knowledge, where studies of technology and intellectual property are imagined as somehow separate from studies of Blackness, race, and racial privilege. (We see this even in the caucus meetings at

composition's major conference CCCC, where the IP caucus and the ethnic caucuses all meet conterminously, as though they'd have nothing to say to one another.) Hip-hop's essential interdisciplinarity highlights how questions of technology, creativity, IP, race, popular culture, capitalism, protest, identity, and affect are deeply interrelated and interdependent, challenging the boundaries of major academic disciplines. Acknowledging this contradiction, and centering it in a critique of my already-interdisciplinary field, entails an "epistemological reorganization" of priorities, categories, and knowledges both within composition and rhetoric and throughout the university. It demands not a ghettoized hip-hop composition studies but rather a revisioning of composition and rhetoric *as hip-hop*. Thus, even as I see "hip-hop composition studies" recognizing a large community of teacher-scholars, many of whom are already in community with one another, I also use the term cautiously, and continue to insist that hip-hop composition has much to teach the broader composition and rhetoric community, and must be in resistive dialogue with it.

### The Blackness of Hip-hop—and Millennial—Composing Practices

What does it mean to say Comp/Rhet is hip-hop, or to take a hip-hop look at Comp/Rhet? For me, hip-hop has always been a space of contradictions. That's why my blog about teaching hip-hop is called Hip-hopocracy, a term coined by a student in the first hip-hop composition course I ever taught. On my About page, I mused, "What a resonant word. Its connotations swing from hip-hip-hooray to hypocrisy." Hip-hop is contradiction. Hip-hop is street art turned billion-dollar industry. Hip-hop is liberation music of the oppressed commodified and packaged for the children of the oppressors. Hip-hop is freestyle and creativity in community, but it is also misogyny,

transphobia, misogynoir, aggression. Hip-hop is poetics with a business plan. Hip-hop is Black art under late capitalism.

Hip-hop is Black—this much we know. In her seminal *Black Noise*, Tricia Rose traces hip-hop's musical basis in looped samples of pre-digital Black musics to Afrodiasporic cultural priorities of flow, layering, and rupture. In a careful chapter I've used to model academic arguments to freshman writing students, she goes back to Africa—to African musics—arguing that “rhythm and polyrhythmic layering is to African and African-derived musics what harmony and the harmonic triad is to Western classical music” (66). In other words, hip-hop's deep rhythms are African-descended cultural practices. The looping rhythms of hip-hop's sampled beats contain not just an orientation toward music and aesthetics but toward time and existence. Quoting literary theorist James A. Snead, Rose explains that while Western cultures privilege music and stories with a beginning, a climax, and an end—think the Christian ur-myth of Creation, Fall, Resurrection—African musics and Black culture prioritize repetition, circularity, the sense that things are always continuing. “In black culture,” Snead writes, “the thing (the ritual, the dance, the beat) is there for you to pick up when you come back to get it. If there is a goal...it is always deferred; it continually ‘cuts’ back to the start...Black culture, in the ‘cut,’ ‘builds’ accidents into its coverage, almost as if to control their unpredictability” (Snead qtd. Rose 69).

Beyond embracing “Afrodiasporic musical priorities” (75), Rose explains, hip-hop is Black (not just African) in that it emerged in the U.S. context in response to a specific U.S. political moment: the neoliberal divestment from communities of color in 1970s New York. This moment is why Rose spends an entire chapter—why I also will spend an entire chapter—discussing the divestment from Black and Puerto Rican communities that occurred in 1970s New

York. And indeed, hip-hop's Blackness does not preclude the involvement of non-Black peoples in its cultural production. Rose argues that hip-hop responds to the trauma of displacement by engaging those repetition-focused Afrodiasporic practices in order to "prepar[e] for rupture, find pleasure in it, in fact, *plan on* social rupture" (39). Further, hip-hop's Blackness is based in its purposeful engagement of earlier Black musics. By using digital samples of funk, soul, and jazz, hip-hop music performs a kind of cultural archaeology or cultural archiving. As Rose writes, "Sampling in rap is a process of cultural literacy and intertextual reference." Or as Biggie put it, "If you don't know, now you know." This portrait of hip-hop as fundamentally collaged, remixed, circular, technological, transnational, transtemporal, intertextual, dialogic, survivalist, African, American, reemerges in texts on hip-hop aesthetics and composing practices like Banks's *Digital Griots*, David Foster Wallace and Mark Costello's *Signifying Rappers*, William Upski Wimsatt's *Bomb the Suburbs*, and Andrew Bartlett's article "Airshafts, Loudspeakers, and the Hip-hop Sample," among many others. Hip-hop theory—and hip-hop artworks themselves—depict a deeply intertextual art form where meaning is made by commenting on other meanings—through juxtaposition, circulation, signifying, allusion, revision, remix. Descended from African cultural practices, these meaning-making methods are Black, and so too, often, are their materials: samples from soul, funk, blues, and even other hip-hop songs; music by Black people at home and abroad; the use of Black Language with its distinct syntax, pronunciation, sayings, and worldview; and the labor and creativity of Black people.

When I read Rose's *Black Noise* with my freshman composition students at Michigan, white students were resistant to Rose's insistence that hip-hop is fundamentally Black. In writing responses and in class discussions, they continually drew our attention to Rose's treatment, early in her book, of longstanding white interest in Black music and culture (4-5). I discuss this

moment more in my treatment of whiteness and hip-hop in chapter 2, but suffice it to say here that white students' preoccupation with this moment in Rose's text was an early indicator to me that talking about hip-hop in writing class touched a nerve when it came to U.S. racial politics and students' emotions and identifications.

Why does it matter to name Blackness? To fight the myth that hip-hop is made for and by all people?

Here's where millennial economics come back in. In recent years, the spread of Black culture—including Black language, fashion, and music—into mainstream pop culture has accelerated. Driven by social media, Black culture's steady appropriation by white culture, an American cultural fact since the slave days, has increased in speed. In several recent articles, young critical theorists have drawn linkages between the exploitation of Black internet cultural labor and Black culture's longstanding aesthetic priorities of signifying, revisioning, and circulation. In particular, Laur Jackson and Aria Dean (Dean writes citing Jackson) argue for the Blackness of memes, and investigate how memes' depersonalized circulation reflects longstanding Black patterns of meaning-making, circulation, and survival—you know, Crying Jordan, Mr. Krabby, TFW (the feeling when)—hastily made, endlessly reproduced, essential and ephemeral circulating visual moments through which invisible makers consistently respond to and trope upon the political and affective moment. Citing Smitherman's work on Black Language, Jackson sees meme movement echoing BL's ability to be “a diction, a style, a politics all at once.” Echoing theorizations of hip-hop, Jackson draws attention to “how memes in their emergence, development, transformation, and resurgence are imbued with a semantically Black mode of improvisation and revitalization...in a nutshell, signifyin(g).” She goes on: “Memes not only contain components of Black language, gravitate towards a Black way of speaking, *but in*

*their survival* latch onto Black cultural modes of improvisation to move through space and subsist in an ultra-competitive visual-verbal environment.” Ultimately, she concludes, “Ethically we might suppose familiarity with Black vernacular is a prerequisite to writing about meme culture.”

Dean picks up where Jackson leaves off, acknowledging that “this depersonalized blackness is shifty and hard to pin down.” It moves through music, fashion, television, and, increasingly, internet culture, and, Dean acknowledges, constantly having to name Blackness becomes tiresome. Dean expands on Jackson’s piece by highlighting the affective nature of meme movement and historicizing the circulation of disembodied Blackness as a process of commodification that dates back to the slave trade. Citing Hito Steryl’s “In Defense of the Poor Image,” Dean highlights the affective nature of memes:

[Steryl] describes the “poor image” as “a snapshot of the affective condition of the crowd... The condition of the images speaks not only of countless transfers and reformattings, but also of the countless people who cared enough about them to convert them over and over again, to add subtitles, re-edit, or upload them.” In other words: TFW Hito Steyerl defines TFW. (Dean)

Dean goes on to suggest that “Blackness, as poor image, as meme, is [also] a copy without an original...From the Middle Passage onward, we have been in circulation.” At the end of her piece, Dean gestures towards hip-hop, a culture which has remained backgrounded in her argument, or so saturated into it as to be invisible. “We have long been digital, ‘compressed, reproduced, ripped, remixed’ across time and space. For blackness, the meme could be a way of further figuring an existence that spills over the bounds of the body, a homecoming into our homelessness.” By invoking the language of digital music production, Dean draws a direct connection between the cultural priorities and processes behind hip-hop music and meme generation. If we bring Tricia Rose’s theorizations of hip-hop into the mix, we see how that Dean



and Jackson articulate in memes' circulation the same ability to "prepar[e] for rupture, find pleasure in it, in fact, *plan on* social rupture" (39) that Rose located in scratched and sampled hip-hop beats.

But white students are often unaware of the Black cultural roots of words from BL like *bae*, *on fleek*, *dope*, *ya bish* (not to mention older terms like hip, cool, talk to the hand, what's up, and more), an erasure of origins promoted by white publications' confused takes on these words, like *Time Magazine's* "This Is What 'Bae' Means" and *Vogue's* "What is Cuffing Season and Why Should You Care About It?" When we consider the question of hip-hop in the PWI, these words—which I see on white students' laptop stickers on my campus and hear echoing out of all-white frat parties blasting rap music—are the linguistic currency of a race-blind millennial narrative of "getting by," where everyone's hustling but somehow only the white folks get paid. Consider Chicago high schooler Peaches Monroe aka Kayla Newman, who invented the phrase "on fleek" while adlibbing for Vine. Of course, the authors of articles about this phrase are paid for their work, while Newman's viral language play gets her diddly. Meanwhile, Kim Kardashian's Kimoji app, which contains illustrated emoticons of dozens of terms from Black youth language including *basic*, *goals*, *slay*, *turnt*, *twerk*, *thot*, *snatched*, and *yass bitch yass* (Mason), also does not send royalties to Ms. Newman nor to the other Black and queer teens and artists who coined these terms. The Kardashians are surely the examples *par excellence* of the fact that "upwardly-mobile white women are leaders of digital linguistic change" (Abreu), responsible for taking up and disseminating—not to mention monetizing—Black, queer, and youth language practices. As a headline at *The Fader* put it, "Black Teens are Breaking the Internet and Seeing None of the Profits." This economic critique of language appropriation on the web was articulated best by a group of women of color new media writers in 2014 in a

manifesto brilliantly titled “This Tweet Called My Back.” In their piece, the self-identified group of “Black Women, AfroIndigenous and women of color” explain why they engaged in a “social media Blackout” to draw attention to their unpaid labor: the “hours of teach-ins, hashtags, Twitter chats, video chats and phone calls to create a sustainable narrative and conversation around decolonization and antiblackness” for which they are never paid, even as their words are quoted in countless articles and scholarship for which other authors profit, authors who work for institutions where these writers never can seem to get jobs. Indeed, I participate in these structural inequalities when I write about Black youth art from the inside of the academy which my physiognomic and linguistic identity have made possible and palatable.

Many composition teachers already include meme production and analysis in their curricula for freshmen writers. But if Jackson is right that writing *ethically* about internet culture demands attention to and knowledge of Blackness, we might expand that formulation to suggest that ethical *teaching* about internet culture also makes similar demands on us. In other words, any composition teacher reckoning with internet culture, I would argue, needs to teach students to acknowledge and name the Blackness that circulates as its “living tissue” (Jackson). At a moment when composition and rhetoric’s increasing attention to multimodality in the classroom has led Doug Hesse to look to creative writing for inspiration (Hesse), it behooves us to remember and to teach (white and nonwhite) students of composition about the Black roots of many of their favorite digital methods and forms.

In American culture, Blackness circulates constantly, often unacknowledged and, where noted, too often stereotyped, criminalized, abjected, subjected to violence. Compositionists have long wrestled with the question of whether it is our jobs, as writing teachers, to teach ethics, to train our students to be certain kinds of citizens, certain kinds of human beings. Historians of

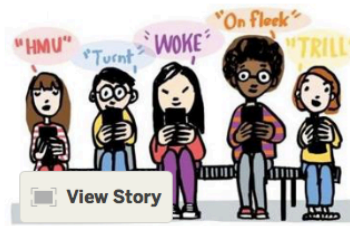
composition like James Berlin and Sharon Crowley have situated this debate within composition's evolution from a set of courses that trained early American college students to perform elite class status to a field with research supporting a descriptivist, not prescriptivist, relationship to language as it is used and transformed globally. For me, I believe that ethics and criticality are inherent in the teaching both of writing and of writing studies. Teaching writing means teaching students to read and think critically, to argue capaciously; it doesn't entail teaching a certain set of beliefs, but it does entail teaching students to engage deeply with the arguments they counter and forward, reaching down to the root of things in order to make the most persuasive arguments. Meanwhile, teaching writing studies for me involves teaching students to recognize the ways that language and literacy practices are instantiated within unequal social systems where power, including whiteness and capital, limit or valorize some people's language practices and access to literacy above others'. Thus, I believe that as teachers and researchers of writing, it is our responsibility to be informed about the shapes and ways of Black culture and to help our students see how Black cultural practices like remix, collage, and signifying, as well as the syntactical and phonological forms of Black Language, move through the language that they consume and produce every day. Indeed, acknowledging Blackness—and the whiteness that seeks to evade it—is a critical intervention in teaching literacies for solidarity as opposed to zero-sum individualism. Our students of all backgrounds are already drawn to Black culture by its affective potency, its embrace of That Feeling When, its deeply rhetorical solicitation of readers and listeners' ability to identify. But when identification happens uncritically, affective connection underwrites the white appropriation of Black culture and capital redistribution away from black creators and towards the white institutions and individuals who monetize these ephemera. Thus, throughout this dissertation, I advocate for writing

pedagogies that name and teach Black language, writing, and meaning-making practices while also asking students, teachers, and administrators to reflexively examine their own identities' locations vis-a-vis those practices. I argue that if the challenges to colonial and white-centered knowledge made by a hip-hop composition studies are to be sustained, we must release the compartmentalization of cultural rhetorics practices and instead work to envision a field where non-white, non-institutional, non-professional writing and meaning-making practices and products are central to our teaching, our research, and our conceptions of discourse.

### Solidarity, Competition, Affect, and Colorblindness in the Millennial Hustle

In December of 2016, when I was deep in the grind of processing my data and trying to articulate the argument for this dissertation, I came upon an article in the *Boston Globe* online: “Millennials aren’t lazy, they’re workaholics” (Johnston). In the article, which I read online, the author counters pervasive myths about young Americans’ unwillingness to work hard for success by noting that millennials are working harder than generations before in a market with fewer opportunities for success. As I scrolled down, I was struck by an embedded link to another page on the *Boston Globe* site: a “millennial slang quiz” offering to tell me “just how ‘trill’” I am.

So why are millennials bent on being workaholics? Even though the economy has improved markedly in recent years, young people in the workforce today have record levels of student loan debt. They are also less likely than previous generations to earn more than their parents, according to a Stanford University report. The percentage of children who are better off than their parents has dropped dramatically — 50 percent of those born in the 1980s have a higher standard of living than their parents, compared with 90 percent of those born in the 1940s.



## Just how ‘trill’ are you? Take this millennial slang quiz, and find out

Millennial slang is hype. It’s also pretty fire. Actually, scratch that. It’s *straight* fire.

■ Prenups for ideas are all the rage with millennials

■ 2015 | Ross: Boston turns its back on millennials

Figure 1: screengrab of the “Millennial Slang Quiz” on *Bostonglobe.com*

The link was topped with an illustration of a diverse cohort of millennials looking at the smart phones in their hands: in a row of 5 were two white women, a white man, an Asian woman with slanted eyes, and a Black woman with a gigantic head and Afro, writing the words “HMU,” “Turnt,” WOKE,” “On fleek,” and “TRILL.” Beneath the headline, a lede read “Millennial slang is hype. It’s also pretty fire. Actually, scratch that. It’s *straight* fire.”

When I clicked over to the quiz, I was surprised to see that the article introducing it repeated the stereotypes the previous article had rejected: “America’s least favorite generation might not be much for keeping jobs or securing their own housing, but when it comes to developing and cultivating popular slang terminology, it’s hard to argue that millennials aren’t on fleek” (Arnett). This article, and its accompanying illustration, root “millennial slang” in young people’s use of digital writing communications while also erasing these words’ roots in Blackness, Black communities, and Black people’s language practices. At the same time, the

illustration of a multicultural illustration attempts to appease demands for diversity while the article and quiz pointedly refuse to acknowledge how the appropriation of Black language exploits the labor of Black people and enriches white folks, like the (presumably white, right?) Dugan Arnett who wrote this quiz for the *Boston Globe*.

The juxtaposition of these two pieces of online media—the first article about millennials’ work ethic, which also offered a colorblind analysis that didn’t disambiguate millennial struggles along lines of race, class, or gender, alongside a quiz and illustration that exploited Blackness, posited diversity, and re-blamed young people for their ostensibly stupid media habits—struck me at a moment when I was trying to understand how Black language circulated among what Carmen Kynard calls the “race-evasive discourses” of neoliberalism (166). The assertion that “millennials aren’t lazy” acknowledges that, in a world of dwindling economic opportunities for young people, we’re all grabbing onto whatever we can—including me, a white Jewish girl trying to build a career in academia. But not acknowledging the exploitative economics of my building a career on hip-hop, on the labor and creativity of Black people, perpetuates a neoliberal myth that all young people have it equally as hard: the myth of the five diverse millennial ducks in a row. In fact, given that “upwardly-mobile white women are leaders of digital linguistic change” (Abreu), my hustle emerges in a system built to privilege me, allowing me to exploit the labor and language of others to further my success. My ability to articulate this, and my willingness to discuss it with you, is the product of a long reflective process I detail in the next chapter. As we work to understand, theorize, and reimagine hip-hop education in the primarily white academy, I believe understanding these cultural and political economies are critical to our success.

As a millennial myself, I find myself identifying as a hustler, another word from Black Language whose Blackness has been all but forgotten. As Jay-Z writes in his book *Decoded*, “I love metaphors, and for me hustling is the ultimate metaphor for the basic human struggles: the struggle to survive and resist, the struggle to win and to make sense of it all” (18). But I am also a privileged white woman hustling in a neoliberal economy where the deck is stacked against poor, Black, and brown people even as public discourses speak of meritocracy and work ethic. As Jay-Z writes later in that book, of the ironies of wearing a t-shirt with the image of Cuban socialist revolutionary Che Guevara, “I consider myself a revolutionary because I’m a self-made millionaire in a racist society” (26). Is Jay-Z’s hustle, the one that has inspired me and millions of other hip-hop kids struggling to make our way in a world where a few win and the rest lose, really the same as Che’s—that is, is Jay really as revolutionary as Che? Or is there a deep chasm between beating the system, as Jay has done, and breaking the system, as Che worked to do?

For seven years now I’ve been teaching composition using hip-hop materials and for four of those, working on a dissertation about hip-hop composition pedagogies. During that time, I’ve had conversations with loved ones as well as with strangers about what I do. Sometimes these conversations don’t make it past the fact that I’m a graduate student or a writing teacher; other times, folks ask about my field, and I need to explain composition and rhetoric to them as the field that runs the freshman writing class they maybe took, and which researches and theorizes argumentation, writing, and language practices in different communities. Among the most interested or most talkative conversation partners, a question will arise about my research or my teaching, and then I tell them that I teach my writing classes around hip-hop texts, and that my dissertation is about this subject as well. When I tell white folks what I research, the way they look at me changes: eyes flash, eyebrows raise, a smile widens. In a moment, I have become

cool. Suddenly, I am interesting. I am down, I am alternative, I am hip. I teach hip-hop and, among other white people, cultural capital flows towards me.

But not all people receive my work this way. When I share my research interests with people of color, especially women of color, I am met with suspicion—or more precisely, with a demand for accountability. For folks who have engaged with hip-hop culture and community their whole lives, who understand hip-hop as more than a set of circulating commodities, I am asked (whether explicitly or not) to be accountable to the people whose work I study and teach. Through the critical reflection practices I detail throughout this dissertation, I have come to release the benefit of the doubt I was raised to take for granted as a white woman, to recognize that doing this work demands accountability and responsibility for the ethics of my research.

In recent years, I've begun noticing these different reactions to my work, and I find myself wondering how hip-hop scholars with different identities than mine have their work received. Do people of color researching hip-hop get treated like their research is cool? Or are they worried their work pigeonholes them? In these moments of questioning how my identity shapes the reception of my work, my thoughts sometimes turn to Jordan Davis. Davis, a Black teenager, was listening to rap music in a parked car with three friends at a Florida gas station in 2012 when a white, middle-aged man in the car next to them opened fire. At his trial, Jordan Davis's killer, Michael Dunn, said that he was scared for his life and believed that the four Black teens said "Kill the bitch" and raised a shotgun to the car window (McLaughlin and Sayers). Yet no weapon was found in the teens' car.

In media analysis of what came to be called the "loud music" case, attention often turned to the Stand Your Ground laws invoked by Dunn and another Florida vigilante, George Zimmerman, which "allows people to use deadly force if they *feel threatened* regardless of



whether they can safely leave the scene” (Kolhatkar, emphasis added). The law, written by the American Legislative Exchange council, an organization of business groups and legislators, shifts the reasonableness of a capital crime to a “threatened” person’s *feelings*, feelings which critical media theorists have clarified are actively shaped by a media environment that criminalizes Black masculinity (Blair). Indeed, Dunn was reported to have said, “I hate that thug music,” when he pulled up to Davis’s car.

Dunn was ultimately found culpable in Davis’s death and sentenced to life plus ninety years, but that didn’t bring his victim back to life. Nor did ALEC’s decision, in the wake of high-profile shootings of Black youth like Davis and Trayvon Martin, to withdraw its support of Stand-Your-Ground-type legislation after a mass exodus of legislators and corporate partners unwilling to be associated with the legislation (Pilkington and Goldenberg). Jordan Davis’s story—the death sentence penned by his hip-hop soundtrack—sits hip-hop at the intersection of racial politics, history, critical media literacy, the profit motive, the justice system, and affect or emotionality. I think about how listening to rap music makes me cool and hip but it made Jordan Davis dangerous and dead, how the very danger that rap music describes—the danger of living in the world Jordan Davis died in—flows off of his body into the commodity market, where, through a series of transmutations, it makes me rich. Makes me more respected, not less. Makes my whiteness seem “diverse,” desirable, marketable, worth money, worth life.

Discussing hip-hop draws linkages across issues of identity, research, emotion, capital, and culture. Theorizing hip-hop’s rhetorical practices, and assessing its value for a writing classroom, cannot proceed honestly without attention to what Sara Ahmed might term the ways emotions stick to hip-hop bodies; the different ways hip-hop’s affective danger sticks differently to my body and Jordan Davis’s, and how that discrepancy is shaped by and reshapes movements of

capital and of cultural forms. As I'll argue in this text, emotions are deeply embedded in what it means to teach and learn literacy, to write and to learn to write. Are we writing to know ourselves, or to survive? Motivated by passion, or by dread? In an era when racist killers' feelings are used to successfully justify their actions in court, it is critical that we draw students' attentions to their own feelings and the ways that feelings themselves are shaped by ideological contexts.

I didn't always notice white folks' intrigued response to my research subject. That move is the result of years of studying critical race theory and beginning to have a reflexive relationship to my whiteness, entailed by a critical mindfulness that continually and dialectically looks at the world around me and then back at myself and my own place in it. Whiteness was not an original element of my research interest in hiphop, but now it is an irresolvable question in it, as I have come to see that I am not just teaching and researching hiphop but am now, have been since the beginning, teaching hiphop as a white woman to primarily white students in predominantly white institutions (in a white-supremacist nation and world). So now I ask: what is hiphop doing in the white college writing classroom? What am I doing with it? What can it, and I, do better? And how do we define and measure what we consider to be good?

## Chapters

As I near the end of this project, I feel passionately that hiphop education and research need to be theorized for white institutions and the white students who encounter it there as well as the students of color who flock to these courses in the context of a white environment. We also need more research on how young people produce viral internet content—their composing

processes, their language practices, and the platforms they use. In order to theorize best practices for teaching writing to today's college students, we need to better understand how a wide range of young people write and research in their daily lives, seeking contemporary answers to many of the questions Adam Banks raised a decade ago in his *Race, Rhetoric, and Technology*, questions like "What cultural retentions do African Americans and other people of color bring to the technologies they use?" and "How can African Americans counter the design processes and practices of technology firms that have rigorously excluded them?" (44). Thinking more specifically, I want answers to questions like, who writes and edits Drake's Wikipedia page? What technologies do young people use to create viral memes that respond almost instantaneously to pop culture happenings? How do the young people who annotate rap lyrics on Genius feel about their high school English classes? How do Black Language speakers contend with the Standard White English of Apple's Autocorrect? How do different groups of young people archive and manage images, videos, and gifs on their mobile devices? What are these young people's identities, and how do they understand their access to education, media, and work?

These questions emerge from my work teaching diverse, new-media-native cohorts of young people and studying the multimodal compositions of young people of color we know as the products of hip-hop culture. However, as I near the end of this dissertation project I also feel more strongly than ever that my work as a white researcher committed to social justice must return toward my own communities, especially my white Jewish community, and begin the even more difficult work of investigating and disrupting white Jews' and white women's investments in whiteness. I offer this research as a humble beginning to one white Jewish woman's encounter

with the powerful strategies of white supremacy as expressed in institutions of higher education and their writing curricula.

In chapter 2 I contextualize my methods for this research within feminist reflexive research practices and a review of the literature on whiteness in hip-hop and hip-hop studies. I describe the mixed methods I used for my research and introduce the conclusions I drew from these methods, discussed more extensively in later chapters. I chart hip-hop's dissemination into mainstream white U.S. culture and consider how my own positionality as teacher, researcher, and fan are implicated in that mainstreaming. I offer a survey of the literature on whiteness in hip-hop culture and an analysis of my own upbringing in 1990s Chicago toward an understanding of white individual and institutional uptake of hip-hop culture. I consider how hip-hop's identity politics encourage white listeners to both identify with Black hip-hop artists and abject Blackness as other. As hip-hop programming, institutions, and pedagogies continue to move into primarily white institutions, I argue that reflexivity and a politics of location are essential for those engaging with hip-hop in white spaces, including teachers, administrators, archivists, librarians, and students.

In chapter 3, I return to the student movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s with a focus on the protests and resulting Open Admissions policies at multiple campuses of the City University of New York. Drawing on departmental memos, student newspapers, course guides, and university publications, I argue that creative, identity-based rap literacies for social change emerged dialectically on CUNY campuses in response to the emergence and rapid dominance of race-evasive discourses of standardization and professional preparation. Building on the work of Carmen Kynard, I highlight the teaching of Black and women creative writing teachers in CCNY's SEEK Basic Writing Program to show how late 20<sup>th</sup> century developments in

composition pedagogy and theory were driven by creative writing teachers active in the Black Arts Movement. I also show how Open Admissions disseminated tremendous cultural, literary, and technical knowledge into New York City's Black and Puerto Rican communities, which I argue is essential context for understanding early hip-hop culture in New York. Using institutional documents from that period, I expand on Ferguson's theorization of Open Admissions by exploring how administrative priorities including funding, hiring, and institutional structure were intricately connected to curriculum and pedagogy. I argue that the record of Open Admissions suggests both the transformative possibilities of funded public education for communities of color, and also reveals the neoliberal strategies of white supremacy used, in that moment and in our current one, to forestall the transformative effects of this access to education.

In chapter 4, I offer a historically-situated critique of an emerging pedagogy in writing studies called Writing About Writing (WAW) and use data from four classroom studies to consider the possibilities and limitations of integrating a hip-hop composition approach into WAW-style courses. Drawing broad analogies with the conservative retrenchment that defunded Open Admissions, I position WAW's colorblindness and inattention to discourse diversity as a contemporary instantiation of the "linguistic innocence" Min-Zhan Lu identified in Mina Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations*. I argue that WAW's colorblind portrait of our field offers a concession to the preprofessional university even as it attempts to secure some portion of the university's diminishing resources for writing education. Drawing on four classroom studies of classes taught by myself and another instructor, Nana Adjei-Brenyah, I argue that student learning about writing occurs in the context of capitalism, which includes antiblackness, and that while hip-hop can deeply and rhetorically engage students in the writing process, teachers still

need to clarify their ideological stances if hip-hop is to be engaged critically and not merely as a commodity. I show that hip-hop's ability to solicit affective identification gives it a unique power to engage students in the college writing classroom. However, I find that this power can quickly be co-opted and deradicalized by the colorblind discourses of the primarily white classroom, which allow students' antiblack understandings of language to proliferate unchecked. I advocate a reflexive pedagogy of power and identity that asks students to locate themselves vis-a-vis power as a starting point for investigations of language and culture.

In the last chapter, I shift my attention to Nana, the Black male MFA student who taught two of the writing sections in the study. Drawing on extensive interviews with and observations of Nana, I consider how he improvised on and negotiated with the teaching demands imposed on him by the Department of Writing in which he taught. In this chapter, I place the pedagogical discussions of chapter 4 within discussions of writing program administration, including teacher training, disciplinarity, and labor relations within the contemporary education policy context of austerity. Drawing connections between Nana and educators working under Open Admissions, I advocate for administrative policies that center instructor identity and expertise, and highlight Nana's hip-hop-inflected tactics for negotiating the continually revised strategies of administrative power. I share a co-written dialogue with Nana in which we consider, together, what hip-hop and hiphoppas have to offer the composition classroom. I conclude with a brief Outro.

## CHAPTER 2

### #Itsaprocess: Critical Reflection as Core Methodology

“Being nice is the shit ... working on being a doper person #ITSAPROCESS.”  
- @kanyewest

When I talk about white institutional uptake of hip-hop, or young white consumers’ uptake of hip-hop music, style, and language through the purchase of commodities, I am implicated in those processes. As I discuss extensively in this chapter, I followed my ear and my pleasure into a universe of hip-hop fan-dom. And yet, as I acknowledged in the previous chapter, my pleasure does not occur in a vacuum but rather, as Tricia Rose has insisted, is “necessarily affected by dominant racial discourses” (5). As a young millennial woman myself, trying to build an academic career at a moment of diminishing resources for education, I’m hustling. And yet my hustle emerges in a system built to privilege me. As I work in this dissertation to understand institutional uptake of hip-hop in the PWI and hip-hop’s place in composition classrooms at PWI, a reflexive account of my own experience with hip-hop offers valuable data towards a deeper understanding of why white students love hip-hop and why (primarily or historically) white institutions might find it profitable to embrace an art form so critical of exclusive educational institutions. Beyond interrogating whiteness and hip-hop, this reflexive account—a critical reflection, which interrogates my relationship to my teaching and research of hip-hop—allows me to model reflexive writing and self-identification as a 21<sup>st</sup> century literacy skill that needs to be taught and assessed in college composition classrooms.

In this chapter and in this project, I embrace a view of methods and of truth that recognize all methods as shaped by a researcher’s positionality, whether that researcher acknowledges those limitations or not (Charmaz 4, Grant-Davie 247). I also subscribe to critical

methodologies that recognize the non-acknowledgement of a researcher's positionality as rooted in colonial and white-supremacist knowledge-making practices that saw Western colonial researchers as the owners and producers of knowledge (Smith, L.). This orientation to truth and to the research process underwrites my commitment to personal storytelling as methodology, an insistence that my knowledge and my conclusions have emerged from and in fact are inextricable from my own personal processes of research, growth, and self- and social-awareness. Or, as Kanye West has put it, *#itsaprocess*. Thus, although my third and fourth chapters contain discrete discussions of the historical and ethnographic methods that produced the research discussed in those chapters, in this chapter I center reflexivity as the central methodological concern that fundamentally shaped the inquiry and the conclusions of this dissertation.

### Personal Narrative in Composition Research

Personal narrative has a significant history in research by feminist, critical race, and hip-hop scholars, inside and outside of composition and rhetoric studies. Both feminist and critical race concerns are addressed in Jacqueline Jones Royster's *Traces of a Stream*, which, although mainly a literacy study of 19th century African-American women essayists, also enacts methodological reflexivity. In the first chapter of her book, Royster roots her interest in these essayists in an explosion of essays by African-American woman authors in the 1980s, a renaissance that in fact fueled the swell of personal narrative acknowledged by *Signs* during the following decade. Royster identifies the use of the essay as a generic choice in which African American women writers like Audre Lorde, Alice Walker, Nikki Giovanni, Toni Morrison and others engaged with audiences directly through their embrace of the personal, nonfiction "I" (21)



in order to rhetorically “generate sociopolitical action” (25). The work of Royster’s book is to show that these relatively contemporary writers are part of a long tradition of Black American women writing essays for social change.

In her last chapter, Royster practices reflexivity by placing herself in her own narrative as an African-American woman writer, scholar, and educator working at Spelman, a Black women’s college in Atlanta. In this chapter, Royster situates her process of researching and writing her book within her lived material experience of working with her Black women students at Spelman and helping them build their identities as scholars inheriting the legacy of Black women writers who it is her book’s project to resurrect. Her students’ response to this new information about their intellectual heritage leads Royster to advocate for pedagogies that draw students’ attention to “power and how individuals, including themselves, are affected by it” (219) including the power to shape curriculum for ideological purposes. Identifying herself as a member of the group she studies, that is, African American woman intellectuals, Royster lays out an “afrofeminist ideology” that centers research “in the knowledge and experience of the group,” including the production of research results that are intelligible and meaningful to group members themselves (223). Royster’s focus on accountability as a hallmark of her afrofeminist ideology extends beyond African American researchers, however. Of particular import to this study is her insistence that researchers from outside the community of study “have special obligations that begin with a need to articulate carefully what their viewpoints actually are, rather than letting the researchers’ relationships to the work go unarticulated.” She continues:

[N]oncommunity scholars are called upon by their outsider status to demonstrate respect for the communities they study. They are obligated (by afrofeminist ideologies anyway) to recognize overtly, the ways in which their authority, as it may be drawn from dominant systems of power and privilege, intersects with the authority of others. They are obligated to hold themselves, rather than just their subjects, accountable for and responsive to disparities. (226)

In context, Royster is talking specifically about researchers who are not Black women doing research on Black women, but her words are relevant to any scholar doing research on a community that is not their own, especially when the researcher is supported by “dominant systems of power and privilege.” For me, a white woman writer who is supported not just by the obvious power system of the academy but also by more subtle and powerful ideological forces like my use of standard white American English, it is not enough for me to simply name my location. Because colonial and white supremacist thinking is silent, hidden, and oblique, for me to “recognize overtly” my privilege and establish accountability to hip-hop communities and to communities of color at PWIs involves this chapter-long performance of reflexivity.

The Black woman essayists who open Royster’s book paved the way for the entrance of reflexive and memoiristic writing into the academy. In 1993, the women’s studies journal *Signs* devoted its review section to covering the dozens of recent publications in personal narrative, both works of narrative themselves and critical commentaries on them. Writing on the growth of personal narratives in literary criticism, literary theorist Sidonie Smith rooted the new interest in personal narrative in a shift away from the static Enlightenment self and toward a view of the subject as dynamic, fractured, and emergent—a view shaped by “Marxian materialism, Freudian psychoanalysis, and Saussurian linguistics” (393). Meanwhile, Camilla Stivers reviewed personal narratives in the social sciences, rooting them in a shift to a constructivist worldview which “rejects the sharp separation between investigator and field” (416).

These concerns are taken up for a composition and rhetoric audience by Gesa Kirsch and Joy Ritchie’s “Beyond the Personal: Theorizing a Politics of Location in Composition Research,” which, with its 1995 publication in *College Composition and Communication* marked an early discussion of feminist reflexivity practice within a composition journal. In this article,

Kirsch and Ritchie theorize the methodological, epistemological, and ethical implications of composition and rhetoric's necessary engagement with what Adrienne Rich called a "politics of location"—that is, the presence and scrutiny of the researcher's material position within her or his research. Whereas the early entry of personal narrative into academia was a tool for scholars of marginalized identities to valorize their experiences and ways of knowing, Kirsch and Ritchie rightly note that these goals need to be adjusted in the context of composition and rhetoric's overwhelming whiteness. Glossing Harding, they argue that "a 'politics of location' allows us to claim the legitimacy of our experience, but it must be accompanied by a rigorously reflexive examination of ourselves as researchers that is as careful as our observation of the objects of our inquiry" (9). Arguing that "race and whiteness structure our thinking" (10) and, ultimately, our research design, the authors advocate new methods that value the co-creation of knowledge between researcher and subject, and an ethics of caring for research subjects in place of methodologies that reject researchers' supportive or emancipatory engagements with their research subjects' lives. They suggest that researchers with complex identities can use the sites of their own marginality as a way to explore what marginality means, but they warn white theorists against overly centering their (our, my) own experiences at the risk of presenting them as normative. And in an article from 2012, critical linguist and compositionist Suresh Canagarajah places memoir and autoethnography on a spectrum without clean-cut generic dividing lines. He names journaling, writing reflective notes, and writing in response to prompts as some of the methods that appear in the methodological literature (121) and describes the work of autoethnography as a useful method for understanding multilingual writers like himself.

In including myself and my experiences in this study, I am following not only feminist and critical race theorists, I am also following the example of other hip-hop scholars. In the

introduction to her *Black Noise*, Tricia Rose describes her professors' benign dismissal of her interest in hip-hop. "They didn't discourage" her work, she writes, but "what worried them was that rap would disappear before I finished my research," rendering her "unmarketable as a job candidate" (xii). Rooting her book's "polyvocal" approach in her own complex identity as a Black woman, Rose brings personal narrative in throughout the book when it allows her to more fully explain questions of rap music's power and social imbrications. Bettina Love, another Black female hip-hop scholar, also begins her book with a story of hip-hop's organic pedagogy in her life. Like Rose, who claims of hip-hop, "I know it like I been studying it" (xiii), Love begins her book by identifying "Hip Hop...as my own personal tutor" which schooled her on the decimation of her central New York State community via violence and drugs (1). Love's reflexive interrogation of the role of hip-hop in her life allows her to explicitly identify with the young people she teaches and studies in her research on hip-hop critical literacy pedagogies (3). However, her reflexive practice also leads her to interrogate her own identity and how it impacted her initial read of her students. Two major blind spots she draws out are, first, the biases she held as a Yankee about Southerners and her students, who were raised and lived in Atlanta; and her queer identity, which she realized initially had her bonding more easily with her male students than her female ones. In fact, Love ultimately credits her female students with teaching her "how to be open and queer in the South" and "discredit[ing] my destructive perceptions of them and their Southern roots" (52). Her reflexive approach holistically impacts her entire project, and also shapes her decision to include a lengthy case study of Atlanta as the spatial-cultural site of her study.

Because of my whiteness, the politics of my use of reflexivity and personal narrative are very different than those at play in Rose and Love's texts. Kirsch and Ritchie's attention to how

the purposes and risks of a “politics of location” shift for white authors is crucial here. Because of my whiteness—because of the way I am read as a white woman, the way I use and deploy standard white American English, and the fact that I was reared, raised, and educated in segregated and stratified white-dominant spaces—my reflexivity needs to be a critical reflexivity, that is, a reflexivity explicitly dedicated to identifying the strains of colonial and white-supremacist thinking that have infected my teaching, my research, my writing, and my identity itself. Indeed, in the following chapters of this dissertation I argue that critical reflection is a writing skill that all compositionists and literacy instructors, both at the college, postgraduate, and K-12 levels, should assess in our students and colleagues, and that articulating self-awareness in a social context inflected by race, class, gender, ability, sexuality, citizenship and power is a crucial literacy skill for 21<sup>st</sup> century students and citizens.

#### My Theorizing Starts with Me: Hip-hop, Whiteness, Literacy, and Ideology

This dissertation advocates a shift from nonracist to antiracist composition practices, a difference perhaps best illustrated with a comparison between recent writings by Carmen Kynard and Jennifer Seibel Trainor. Consider Carmen Kynard’s 2015 article “Teaching While Black: Witnessing and Countering Disciplinary Whiteness, Racial Violence, and University Race-Management.” In this article, Kynard begins from the premise that the everyday experiences of racism shared by her students of color and herself are not “micro-instances of campus racism but [are] macro-pictures of political life in American universities,” and challenges us, her readers, to take seriously that racist acts and actors as “routine” in our schools and even in our field (15). Using a methodology of storytelling that centers the experiences of marginalized people (4),

Kynard shares multiple anecdotes of her students and herself being undervalued, disbelieved, surveilled by campus police, and unsupported by administrators. By placing herself within the field of composition and rhetoric, she also draws attention to the fact that white students who have made racist comments or resisted allyship with colleagues and classmates of color all leave her institution to become writing teachers of other students (6). Kynard calls out the double standard whereby “I have seen no evidence, across dozens of programs, of any interest in white candidates’ ability to work in classrooms with students of color, only an interest in whether or not young scholars of color will accommodate whiteness” (6). Kynard calls out antiracist writing that is “always ONLY imagining a white audience” and toward antiracist scholarship, pedagogy, and critique that centers the experiences of students, faculty, and staff of color.

Compare that take on the critical problems of racism in our institutions with Jennifer Trainor’s popular book *Rethinking Racism: Emotion, Persuasion, and Literacy Education in an All-White High School*. In her work, Trainor redirects her readers’ understanding of white high school students’ racism by arguing that students are not actually interested in defending white supremacy, but rather have learned “emotioned rules” of behavior from the hidden curriculum of their school that ultimately support racist utterances. For example, Trainor roots student assertions that Maya Angelou is “bitter,” “complaining,” “hates white people,” or creates difference instead of tolerance in the school’s individualist messages which teach students not to complain, to take personal responsibility for successes and failures, and to practice tolerance of difference (26-27, 53-54, 88-99). By focusing on the role emotion plays in rhetoric, Trainor asks why students find racist discourses persuasive and locates her answer in affect, ultimately arguing that racism “originates in passions which are not about race per se” (6). Trainor unpacks how, in this 100% white environment, white students’ relationships to racism often express

relationships to class status, as upwardly mobile students associate overt racism with lower-class whiteness (39). She also notes students' explicit awareness of their homogeneous learning environment and how that impedes any efforts to learn about diversity, as well as their sense that their "Byzantine" (45) senior project requirements are not related to their real-world needs or goals, which often do not include college. Indeed, the students seem highly aware of the contradictions in their high school environment, which projects tolerance and college prep but is in fact a highly homogenous environment whose focus on liberal arts education may prevent students from enquiring deeply into real community concerns, for example how they ended up in an all-white school district.

But reading Trainor's book with Kynard's critique of composition and rhetoric in mind suggests some blind spots in Trainor's work, which works to humanize students who make racist comments without acknowledging the violence those same comments do when students arrive on integrated college campuses months later, as Trainor notes when explaining her choice as a compositionist to study high schoolers (7). In fact, thinking of Trainor's work in terms of Kynard's is representative of how my own thinking about antiracist pedagogy has shifted since my early days teaching at Michigan. I still believe, as Trainor does, in the need to show white students empathy and love as they work through racist discursive practices in the classroom. However, some teachers' patience with white students working to decolonize themselves needs to be tempered with real awareness of the students of color in classrooms. In this way Trainor's study, which looks at students in an all-white environment, underplays the violence of white student racism when it arrives on increasingly diverse college campuses. Indeed, the need to decenter white students within antiracist pedagogy is becoming increasingly prevalent in antiracist literature, as scholars recognize that antiracist pedagogies which continually center

white students' feelings and needs are not that antiracist in the end. Instead, these pedagogies which focus on helping white students identify their privilege may actually lead students to "solidify and fortify their identities as whites" (Trainor 19), and do nothing to introduce white students to a decolonized environment where their needs are not at the center of classroom practice and goals (see also Brown, "Panel Review").

Because of my own research agenda, I was particularly attuned to Trainor's students' attitudes about assessment, language standards, and popular media. Trainor acknowledges that "films and pop culture are much more powerful in their lives than books are" (8), but the pedagogy in the study is a traditional literature curriculum that incorporates works by African American authors. Yet this shift away from white authors does not disrupt students' sense of living in segregated space. One student comments, "I don't even know any Black people. How am I going to know about racism when I've never even met one?" (68) Later, the experience of segregation is explicitly related to cultural representations of Black people. "You don't see Black people criticize themselves for like, whatever rap and ghetto lifestyle....It's a segregated school, it's all white people here, and we watch segregated movies and books. But we're supposed to like, be less racist....They should show *Die Hard*" (122). To me, these comments, and Trainor's call in the next pages for a "kairotic emotionally responsive antiracist pedagogy" speaks to the need for antiracist pedagogies that engage with the experiences of race students already have, experiences which in all-white environments largely come from popular culture and through the experience of segregated local space and place.

In the next, concluding section of this chapter, I'll introduce the concrete methods that produced the research relayed in this dissertation, which ultimately led to my conclusion that composition teaching for all students, even and especially in predominantly white contexts,



needs to address the antiblackness that circulates in millennials' assumptions about language and, too often, within the education we give them about the English language. But in the rest of this section, I want to discuss how these findings can be supported with and emerged from autoethnographic evidence from my own literacy experiences with hip-hop. Drawing on my autoethnographic writings as well as hip-hop scholarship that engages with questions of whiteness, I'll offer a memoiristic account—what we might call a hip-hop literacy narrative—that attempts to engage a case study of myself in order to further our understandings of hip-hop literacies in the PWI. In particular, this hip-hop literacy narrative helps illuminate how white hip-hop fans can hold antiblack views—or even, in my case, have antiblack elements in my classroom even as I taught a hip-hop composition pedagogy. In sharing this difficult narrative, I hope to foreground the workings of whiteness in my research and clarify how a critically reflexive methodology helped me locate whiteness in my upbringing, my relationship to hip-hop, and my research and teaching, allowing me to more deeply theorize the place of whiteness and antiblackness in hip-hop fandom and institutional uptake at PWIs. As a white hip-hop fan, I do not make the move to claim hip-hop's essential diversity or non-blackness, but instead reflexively ask why I gravitated toward and embraced hip-hop culture, Black culture.

In the first chapter of *Black Noise*, Rose moves to acknowledge and question the participation of white fans in the production and circulation of rap music in order to resist attempts to coopt hip-hop culture as not-Black. She poses the rhetorical question: “How can this black public dialogue speak to the thousands of young white suburban boys and girls who are critical to the record sales successes of many of rap's more prominent stars?” and answers it: “To suggest that rap is a black idiom that prioritizes black culture and that articulates the problems of black urban life does not deny the pleasure and participation of others” (4). Historicizing this

phenomenon, Rose points out that white youth have always been interested in Black culture, whether “blues, jazz, early rock’ n’ roll...white American has always had an intense interest in black culture” (4). White fans are “listening in on black culture, fascinated by its differences,” using it “as a forbidden narrative, as a symbol of rebellion.” But white interest does not mean Black music is *for* white people. As Solange has articulated most recently, “This shit is for us.”

When I taught *Black Noise* at Michigan, white students were interested in and defensive about this chapter, upset that Rose rejects their fandom as “dilution and theft.” I admit there is a defensive reaction in me too, a move that wants Rose to acknowledge, not question, my genuine love for the culture. But reading this text again now, I notice her comment that “young white listeners’ genuine pleasure and commitment to black music are necessarily affected by dominant racial discourses regarding African Americans, the politics of racial segregation, and cultural difference in the United States” (5). In this moment, Rose acknowledges my “genuine pleasure” but also cautions me to remember that my pleasure has been culturally shaped in white supremacy. While I initially felt defensive towards these pages in Rose’s text, I now read them as a call for reflection as a white fan. What are the roots of my “fascination” with Black culture? What “dominant racial discourses” shape my consumption of that culture? These are the questions I work to answer in this section.

I was raised in a highly segregated professional-class community of Ashkenazi Jews in downtown Chicago. Beyond living in the city’s predominantly white near-north side, I also attended a Jewish day school. Before I moved to public high school at age 14, I knew almost no people of color who were not working in a service capacity for my home or my school. Geographically, the only community of color that intersected my world between the Loop and Montrose Avenue was the Cabrini Green Housing Project, which my family often had to drive

through to see our grandparents downtown, always with the injunction to roll our windows up. My white, Jewish world began at the Water Tower building downtown and extended northwards along the Lake, past our neighborhood and into the densely Jewish North Shore suburbs to which so many of my classmates and cousins continued to relocate throughout my childhood.

Growing up in the 90s, I rarely interacted with Black people but my media were saturated with Blackness. Black musics reached into my bedroom via the 5-CD, 2-tape recorder boom box in the corner of the floor, where I could listen to pop, rap, and R&B on my favorite radio station, B-96. Michael Jordan was king of the Chicago Bulls and of the world, Oprah shot her game-changing television show from her West Loop studio, and I watched Black television programming like *Martin*, *The Fresh Prince*, *Moesha*, and of course *Family Matters*, which takes place in Chicago (see Kitwana 40-42). At summer camp with white Jewish girls, I learned the hooks to Biggie Smalls songs like “Hypnotize” and “Superstar” and choreographed a dance with my friends to Will Smith’s “Welcome to Miami,” using the hip-hop dance moves I’d learned at a class in the city, taught by a Black woman but with no Black students. My CD collection was built in installments of birthday and Chanukah gifts, and an early package from my grandparents included CDs by rapper Ma\$e alongside albums by Jewel, N’Sync, and Chumbawumba.

This was a world with thin, commercial impressions of Black culture, but no Black people. I remember being outside in my day school’s parking lot one day in middle school, standing in a circle with a group of classmates singing New Orleans teenager Lil Wayne’s chorus to the B.G. song “Bling Bling”: “Every time I come around my city, bling bling”—except these were the only words we knew, so we just kept repeating them over and over again. In this segregated white world, there was no cypher, no original raps or beats or breakdancing, only a bunch of kids in a circle parroting something they’d heard on the radio or seen on TV. Reflecting

on these moments now I see strongly how the spark of hip-hop sputtered and died in an all-white environment, as no one knew any other words to that song and no one could beatbox or freestyle in our would-be cypher circle outside. This was a world where hip-hop was not a culture but a commodity, something to be bought, not created. And yet, hip-hop's reach to us through the commodity marketplace still transported its powerful and transformational rhythms, which pulled us into a circle even if we didn't know what to do once we got there.

In art class in middle school, our teacher would let us play the radio while we worked, and I remember sitting around the broad blue tables while DMX's "Party Up (Up in Here)" played from the black boom box. We were all singing along, when one of my classmates enthusiastically yelled the lyrics as "Up in hell! Up in hell!"

"Up in *heah*!" we all corrected her. Even in this highly-segregated environment, some of us were already aware of another version of English that coexisted with the one we spoke, with different rules of pronunciation and a deep risk of uncoolness if one was to mistake it. And yet hip-hop wasn't up in heah. In our segregated school no one in our language arts class would teach us about Black Language or language diversity, and as I moved into public high school the pressure on me to uncritically master Standard White English for standardized tests would only increase.

It took until my upper-class years of high school for me to really begin identifying as a hip-hop fan. But that movement began in seventh grade. As my classmates and I entered puberty and the coming-of-age rites of bar and bat mitzvahs, norms and expectations around an assimilative and upwardly mobile white Jewish femininity began to close in on me, and even as a twelve-year-old I was acutely aware that my own sudden consumer longings for Michael Stars shirts, Kate Spade bags, and a new Nokia cell phone were making me unhappy. I ran in the

opposite direction, to a magnet program at a high school where, for the first time in my life, I'd be a demographic minority. As a new student at my neighborhood public high school, it seemed like every time I turned the corner in our small freshman building I heard someone singing "Back that Azz Up," a Juvenile track featuring teen rapper Lil Wayne. (Chicago's cultural geography—shaped by the northward movement of African-Americans during the twentieth century—meant that Louisiana music seemed to float up the Mississippi into our midst.) Wayne's contribution to the song was short, but it stuck in the craw of my mind, befitting the future best rapper alive: "After—you—pick it up then stop, and drop drop, drop, drop it like it's hot, drop drop it like it's hot." Four years later, my class would choose Juvenile's "Slow Motion" as the unofficial song of our senior prom.

Beyond encountering more hiphop music, at Lincoln Park High School I was also exposed to Black community for the first time, and not just the Black commodity culture I'd encountered on the radio and TV. The school was heavily tracked, with its large population of Black and Latino students largely locked out of the IB magnet program I was in, which was filled with students of European and Asian descent, many of whom were immigrants or the children of immigrants. It was my participation in our high school choir that exposed me to the Black genius in our midst. In choir, the white supremacist hierarchies of my school and my city toppled and I was the one who had to work twice as hard to succeed. Sometimes if I got to class early I would see my classmates gathered around the upright piano singing Black religious hymns. After school a couple of friends and I might stay in the library to watch my choir mates practice in the school gospel choir. They invited me to join, but it seemed against my religion to sing with such ardor about Jesus, a savior who wasn't mine.

At the beginning of high school, I was more into pop punk than hip-hop: Blink-182, New Found Glory, Something Corporate, American Hi-Fi, Eve6. I wore Converse and liked jumping around. Then, suddenly in 2002 the music softened, the alternative radio station Q101 started playing Dashboard Confessional and Modest Mouse, and the culture lost me. I must have had more pent-up anger and energy than I knew, because I had no interest in emo and that's when I started shifting heavily towards rap. Something to blast in the car and bang your hand on the wheel, ya' know? In hindsight, I can see my adolescent interest in the forceful, energetic rhythms and melodies of pop punk and then hip-hop as an effort to rebel against a culture that was trying to discipline me into a white femininity that involved suppressing my appetites, straightening my hair, and sanitizing my language. In high school, I had a big mouth, I liked to swear, I liked to eat, I had a big personality, and I was quickly developing a curvy figure. My culture's responses to my being were suppressive: longstanding scripts of American white femininity found my family and taught me to talk quieter, eat less, lose weight, be polite, focus on my schoolwork, and were inscribed in specific cultural literacies like writing thank-you notes and mastering the SAT. In contrast, the Black expressive culture I encountered at Lincoln Park had different values that I was looking for at the time, including valuing curvier female bodies and open physical and artistic expression. Rose acknowledges that for white writers, Blackness has often functioned as a "symbol of rebellion," and Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark* also charts the ways white writers use Blackness uncritically as a symbol for danger and the unknown. But when I look back at my experiences with Black music, I see how engaging deeply with those music is and was an act of rebellion against whiteness, because hip-hop music contains radical truths that my white upbringing sought to obscure from view—from the racist policies that segregated my

hometown, to the realities of settler-colonialism that displaced and abused Palestinians in the Israeli nation I was raised to unquestioningly support.

When Kanye West's debut album *The College Dropout* dropped in the winter of my senior year of high school, I recognized the world it emerged from. His samples of spirituals, soul music, and two-steps were sourced from the Black community I'd had the privilege to sing with and dance with over the previous four years. For me, that album was a door that opened onto hip-hop. File-sharing services like Napster and Kazaa had revolutionized music acquisition during my late high school years, and after buying Kanye's album I used the desktop in my bedroom to download albums by his guest artists like Talib Kweli and Mos Def. I even went online and found mixtapes by Kanye where he rapped over beats like Kelis's "Milkshake." In college, I would keep buying albums by Mos Def, Lauryn Hill, and a Tribe Called Quest, and use file sharing services to begin acquiring artists' whole discographies. Hip-hop has welcomed me with incredible generosity: there are always more albums to listen to, more hip-hop arts to explore. Hip-hop's cultural production is inexhaustible.

During this time, I also learned the limits of my community's tolerance for my interest in diversity. There was a strange refrain that circulated in my household, a comment my mom made: "Grandma and Papa [her parents] used to say they'd rather me marry a Black Jewish doorman than a white Christian doctor." The surface purpose of this phrase was to establish to my siblings and me the importance of eventually marrying another Jew and, I think, model a reflexive anti-racism that insists that our family's insistence we marry Jews was not racist, but a measure for religious survival. Jennifer Trainer observes a similar phenomenon in the white students she studied, in which she sees professed non-racism functioning less as a correct reflection of a student's beliefs than a learned way to demonstrate higher class status than openly

racist, ostensibly lower-class white classmates (39-40). Trainer's interpretation of some white students' insinuations that they are not racist helps me understand the complexities of my family's strange refrain about the Black Jewish doorman. Now I see the improbable (though not impossible) figure of the Black Jewish doorman as doing two things: marking my family as not-racist and not-classist, and disguising latent racism as simple religious conviction, using a straw man figure of a Black Jewish doorman who is highly unlikely to exist. Although there were other comments like this in my household, I resist listing them here, given Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's reminder that for white folks, "disclosure" of personal and families' racist infractions, and then working to distance themselves from these views, is itself a form of colorblind and self-excusing discourse (92).

It is enough to say that I was raised by my Jewish parents to invest in whiteness and in the zero-sum logics of capitalism as a way to get ahead and attain security for myself and my future family. These priorities had dimensions in affective, physiognomic, and literacy realms: for example, I was raised to straighten my curly hair and stay thin, an impetus I know understand as one to visually pass as Anglo white—that is, to adhere to Western and Northern European beauty standards; and it was demanded that I master the Standard Written/White Language of the SAT in order to procure admission to an elite college. In fact, my mother sent me to private SAT tutoring to raise my already high scores, despite my disinterest in doing so both because it was boring and cumbersome and because I felt that spending money to raise my test scores above my classmates' was classist, racist, and unethical. The neoliberal whiteness of my mom's priorities here are embodied for me in her often-repeated response to my complaints that I needed to "play the game." In the neoliberal game for success, moving ahead and working to win necessarily entail the losses of others.



Playing the game involved investing in whiteness—in my language, my self-presentation, and my bodily comportment. It involved suppressing my authentic self in terms of how I spoke, how my body naturally looked, my concern for others, and my desire to express myself through language, music, and art. Working to get ahead and succeed did not make me happy; rather, this suppression of authenticity made me anxious. In one of the great paradoxes of hip-hop's interactions with whiteness, one of the ways I expressed this anxiety was by listening to music whose anger and resistance I identified with—first, the pop-punk music I moshed to in my early high school years, and later, when the anger of pop-punk made way for the dreary sadness of emo, to hip-hop. Hip-hop contained a rich affective universe I was unable to access in my own being; instead, I took up the commodified and contained angers and pleasures of this music, based out of the experiences of Black people but packaged and sold for alienated white consumers like me—what R.A.T. Judy distinguishes from empathy and instead calls “the moment of consumption of...affect” (112).

These experiences resonate with the existing literature on whiteness and hip-hop, especially the contradictions inherent in white-identified consumers identifying with the alienation expressed in hip-hop even as they reject solidarity with the Black communities represented visually by commodity hip-hop. The first investigation of whiteness and hip-hop may be David Foster Wallace and Mark Costello's 1990 book *Signifying Rappers*, in which the co-authors seek to understand hip-hop music itself as well as their attraction to it as two white male graduate students. Writing from a consumerist rather than participatory position in hip-hop culture, the co-authors situate their inquiry within heavily segregated Boston, where busing efforts across racial lines demarcated by highways did little to ease tensions between the city's lower-class black North Dorchester and white South Boston neighborhoods. Investigating their

own interest as white intellectuals in what they deem a “highly time-and-place dependent” (29) “black music, of and for blacks” (23), the authors recognize themselves within the history of white fascination with black musics. But their astute contextualizing within the segregation, gun violence, and consumer capitalism of the late 1980s allows them to see this as “no simple reenactment of past crossovers” (7). Costello and Wallace see white interest in rap as deeply instantiated in white criminalization of blackness during the post-Reagan years. “Most hard raps,” they write, “seem to launch themselves through the window toward white listeners as from the point of view of the nighttime footsteps that make us quicken our pace” (36). I see the authors’ motif of the window through which white listeners view or hear rap as a timely metaphor for an era of Black and white contact precluded or mitigated by the construction of superhighways built through Black neighborhoods, designed to take white commuters through and past Blackness. (Indeed, it is this history that is invoked when contemporary BlackLivesMatter protestors block highways as sites of protest – see Badger.) Ultimately, Costello and Wallace locate rap’s appeal to whites in its nature as a “closed” music, likening their interest to someone chasing a woman precisely because of her disinterest (32). Like Rose in *Black Noise*, they are also attentive to the condescension of the white music critics who cover rap with “a mix of sociological ‘objectivity’ and extreme personal discomfort” (45), unable as Costello and Wallace seem to be to acknowledge their own anxiety as white outsiders even as they recognize the musical and technical genius of an art form that draws broadly from across pop culture, “blend[ing] homage and rampage” (73) to become “quite possibly the most important stuff happening in poetry today” (114). Indeed, Costello and Wallace suggest that perhaps white rock critics are so anxious because hip-hop’s ability to be self-consciously self-conscious actually “usurps the (‘serious’) outside critic’s hallowed interpretive function” (113).

Costello and Wallace's treatment of rap and white involvement is thorough, but incomplete. In terms of their study of rap itself (as opposed to its cultural context as a crossover phenomenon), their biggest contribution may be their extensive exploration of the technical and cultural nature of sampling, including in-depth treatment of several songs. Although they acknowledge rap as Black music and even its roots in the West African griot tradition, it took until Rose's 1994 *Black Noise* for a deeper engagement with ethnomusicology and the linkages of rap's distinct multilayered rhythms in African musical traditions. Further, Costello and Wallace miss the economic roots of white interest in hip-hop culture even as they hover around the centrality of "feeling" to in their own interest in rap (xiii, 24), wondering whether it is "fear and strangeness" that unites Gen X hip-hop crowds (32). Costello and Wallace resist critiquing capitalism in their analysis of why white fans gravitate toward hip-hop culture.

It takes Bakari Kitwana's 2005 *Why White Kids Love Hip Hop* to hit the nail on the head: white kids love hip-hop because it voices their alienation with a late capitalism that has lowered their prospects for success, even if less so than for Black communities. His text traces a rising focus on white consumers of hip-hop and the anxiety it engenders for both Blacks and whites: a Black fear that their culture will be appropriated and their contributions erased, as has happened to previous Black American musical forms like jazz and rock 'n roll; and a white anxiety that what he calls Black "pathologies and immoral behaviors [will]...infect the young whites" interested in hip-hop culture (1). Kitwana's book is full of contradictions, but it holds lessons for us. He suggests that the visibility of contemporary media will ensure that Blackness stays at the heart of hip-hop culture, and he sees hip-hop as creating public spaces for new political coalitions that cross racial divides even as he mischaracterizes the '90s and 2000s as past the era of segregation, when in fact segregation began increasing again in the 1990s (Hannah-Jones). In his

centering of white experiences and white hip-hop fans he plays into the conservative moment that he critiques and expresses a broad, paradoxical anxiety about the impacts of “prison culture” even as he works to protect hip-hop’s Black origins and critique mainstream media efforts to whitewash hip-hop’s history throughout the ‘90s and 2000s. To me Kitwana’s major contribution is his observation that hip-hop has become a “scapegoat for declining American values” (19) and his understanding of the role a declining economy has played in bringing white fans to hip-hop. I quote this economic analysis at length:

First and foremost among the reasons white kids love hip-hop is the growing sense of alienation from mainstream American life they experienced in the 1980s. As the 1970s turned into the 1980s and America moved into what was billed as a new economy, Americans, regardless of race and class, began to feel increasingly uncertain. For African Americans, specifically hip-hop generationers (those born between 1965 and 1984), this economic shift made itself felt in the now well-documented underground economy, crack cocaine wars, paramilitary policing units and their aftermath, the busting-at-the-seams American prison system. The generation of white kids in the same age-group, dubbed generation X, was confronted by socioeconomic issues that alienated them from the mainstream as well. Although the employment prospects facing young whites entering the job force in the 1980s and 1990s were not as bleak as those facing their Black and Latino counterparts, those in the middle and working classes faced slimmer prospects than their parents’ generation had. (24)

Kitwana goes on to note that despite “longer work days...wages continued to fall” and the “superrich got richer” (24). “By the mid-1980s,” he writes, “young whites’ sense of alienation intensified even though Blacks were to some degree a buffer.” Meanwhile, rates of prescription drug use skyrocketed among youth in the 1990s. Thus he argues that “the story of post-1970s era is the tale of how we as a nation have abandoned our young” (9). This economic story is vital in understanding white interest in and uptake of hip-hop but it needs to be contextualized, as Kitwana fails to do, in the reality of segregation throughout this period.

Yet segregation appears throughout his book as Kitwana acknowledges the dangers of commodified stereotypes of blackness circulating among white teens who know very few Black

people, a reality made possible only by trenchant and lasting segregation, something grappled with by Costello and Wallace, but not Kitwana himself. Kitwana sees hip-hop's promise for political transformation in its creation of public spaces where a "new racial politics" can emerge. However, reckoning with the careless bias that emerges from segregation is critical if those new politics (and new pedagogies) are to occur, especially if white students at PWIs are coming to us from resegregated hometowns. It seems reasonable to conclude that white kids love hip-hop because they have become alienated under capitalism, but also because they are racist, a racism nurtured by segregation and the suburbanization that William Upski Wimsatt, another hip-hop writer, resents. Kitwana's throwaway comment (quoted above) that Black suffering served as a "buffer" to white alienation is actually critical to any understanding of the social role hip-hop was mobilized to play in the across-the-board economic decline of America under neoliberalism. Indeed, Stuart Hall and co-writers suggest that the image of Black male hypercriminality that reemerged with the specter of "mugging" in the late 60s did so as a social pushback to Black American's gains in rights and visibility in the 1960s.

Drawing on Judith Butler, Krista Ratcliffe theorizes disidentification—the opposite of identification—as rendering an other "abject" (62). White consumption of images of black criminality via hip-hop allowed (and still allows) white fans to see themselves as better off than and more deserving than an abjected Other. At the same time, white consumption of hip-hop is facilitated by affective identification with Black rappers' anger and alienation under a neoliberal economic and political regime that continuously fails to live up to the projections of growing prosperity that emerge in televised depictions of the superrich. Thus, white consumption of hip-hop is a paradoxical both-and, a consumption based on identification and disidentification, solidarity and abjection.

These postmodern contradictions are called up by literacy scholar David Kirkland in his study of high school Black male students who struggle at school yet write and study raps in their free time. Drawing on bell hooks, Geneva Smitherman, and the New English Education, Kirkland uses “postmodern blackness” (hooks qtd. Kirkland “A Rose” 71) to center hip-hop as “a radical, new literacy” (72) for all students, not just Black students. He quotes hooks: “The overall impact of the postmodern is that many other groups now share with black folks a sense of deep alienation, despair, uncertainty, loss of a sense of grounding, even if it is not informed by shared circumstances” (hooks qtd. 72). Kitwana quotes a white woman who argues that listening to hip-hop gave her a critical analysis of American hegemony:

If you look at what has happened to Black people in this country you can basically learn all you need to know about the government and the way it’s set up, and the inequities... Because hip-hop is a culture of resistance, it’s given me the ability to think critically... Always a part of that thought process is how anything is affecting the hip-hop generation and more specifically how it’s affecting African Americans. (68)

Kirkland’s analysis centers Black literacy practices but builds bridges to white students by positioning hip-hop as a discourse that has worked through and developed critical resistance to neoliberal policies which harm Black communities first and most, but effect and restrict our entire society. He quotes hooks’s suggestion that hip-hop “could be fertile ground for the construction of empathy—ties that would promote recognition of common commitments, and serve as a base for solidarity and coalition” in evolving literacy classrooms (hooks qtd. in Kirkland 72-73). The challenge for us moving forward is to devise pedagogies that build solidarity across racial lines, orienting students to the injustices they all face under neoliberalism, while not erasing the material reality that neoliberalism hurts some communities more and in fact has trained white students to abject Black and brown classmates in order to maintain a marginal and tenuous advantage within the zero-sum logics of neoliberal culture.

Of all these texts, perhaps my own experience resonates most closely with those of two white Jewish men from Chicago, William Upski Wimsatt and Kevin Coval. In his 1994 book *Bomb the Suburbs*, Wimsatt, a graffiti writer active in the 1990s, bridges the spaces between Costello and Wallace's interrogation of white interest in hip-hop and Kitwana's and Kirkland's suggestion that hip-hop creates space for interracial solidarity and uplift. Explaining his title, Wimsatt writes that "bomb the suburbs means let's celebrate the city" (11), arguing that the suburbs "abandoned" the city and its people, foster "segregation and mistrust," and "erode the sense of history," leaving whites feeling innocent of the problems they left behind (13). Thus, the suburbs become a metaphor for white innocence and abandonment, as white suburbanites are interested in consuming Blackness, but not liberating Black people. Yet Wimsatt sees opportunities for solidarity in white interest in hip-hop, since "the most promising thing about the cool white, the white b-boy, wannabe (or Mailer's white nigga) is that he is defying in some way the circumstances of his birth. He harbors curiosity for a people his people have stepped on" (33). Wimsatt is reflective as he acknowledges the own stages of his interest in Blackness as a white Jewish boy growing up in Chicago's south side Hyde Park neighborhood. Charting a trajectory I identify with, Wimsatt writes of his movement through phases of awareness as he first recognized his privilege as a white person, then moved through a white savior phase vis-a-vis his Black peers in the Chicago hip-hop scene, before finally finding a community membership based on mutual respect and collaboration, identifying "affirmative action" as a "personal policy": "Rather than writing as though I myself am black," he writes, "I work collaboratively with black writers" (40). This move is emphasized in his book which features interviews with mostly Black female and male members of Chicago and Detroit's hip-hop communities, including Reginald Jolley, Sabrina Williams, Lesley Thomas, Wendy Day, Aaron Brown, and Super LP

Raven. Wimsatt paints a portrait of hip-hop's oppositional literacies exploited by an industry that "created gangsta rap" in order to commodify Black pain and criminality. He writes, "Rap is in many ways our attempt as a generation to fill in the literary gap left by the abandonment of good books" (67), and notes ironically that for "hip-hop to achieve its [social and political] goals, it would have to disappear. Wack public schools breed hip-hop" (151). Wimsatt's conclusions ultimately are that hip-hop can be a vehicle for to a social transformation in which white hiphoppas can be allies for the Black folk whom suburbanization disproportionately demonizes and criminalizes. Through his interviews and personal musings on the subject, Wimsatt not only investigates white involvement but also sketches a portrait of Chicago and national hip-hop culture as one invested in transformative literacy that critiques neoliberalism and moves toward social change through community building.

Meanwhile, Coval delves more deeply into the ironies of specifically Jewish white American identity as a hip-hop community member. His 2013 book of poems *Schtick* is deeply Jewish but at the same time charts an alienation from his Chicago Jewish community and even his own family over his questioning of Zionism and Israel's settler colonialism. In poems that evoke by name and by Rabbi's name the synagogue and Day School I attended for over a decade in Chicago, Coval identifies "white Abraham/ white Moses/ white David" as symbols for the answer to one poem's titular question, "why i stopped going to shul." In another, "explaining myself (for my father)," Coval pens a critical literacy narrative that roots his coming-to-awareness against Israeli apartheid within his reading practices. He pleads with his father:

dad, i am a student of this country's history...*you* only have one side of the story i have gotten the israeli side, the american side, the columbus discovered a land without people for a people without a land side my whole life i didn't. until i decided to learn, to seek and sit and listen and know some of the many stories. (195-196)



In these poems, Coval, who has worked for years as the creative director of spoken word program Chicago Young Authors, a program which has spawned rappers and poets like Chance the Rapper, Mick Jenkins, Noname, Jamila Woods, and Nate Marshall, charts a process I deeply identify with, the research and reflection work of a white Jew coming to recognize the privilege and the falsehoods bound up in American Zionist Jewish mythology.

As I have evolved as a teacher, moving through patronizing assumptions about my Black students and students of color, through a centering of white students' efforts to confront racist ideas, and towards an articulation of an identity pedagogy of passion, solidarity, and antiracism, I identify with Wimsatt's commitment to celebrate and center hip-hop artists of color as a continual reparation for the benefits of his structural privilege, and with Coval's deep interrogation of white Jewish communities' perpetuation of racism and settler-colonialism. A continuous practice of critical reflection has become an integrated and central element of this dissertation and indeed of my intellectual life. Research from composition and rhetoric and from feminist and critical race theory in other fields positions researchers' reflexive presence in their own research as central to producing research that is responsible and accountable to the communities and concepts under study. As such, I do not want to present my ideological stance in this dissertation as static. I did not come to my doctoral study already possessed of the explicitly pro-black, decolonial, Marxist stance I hold now, which itself continues to be a process requiring continual action and is not a "place" I have arrived at and can remain without continued action and solidarity. Rather, this orientation to my material emerged from a rejection of white innocence and a willingness to know, through purposefully pursued literacy practices of reading and writing, including the normal course of my doctoral study but also, particularly, discrete

reflective methods and my acculturation into a radical community of activists fighting racist and sexist austerity measures at Syracuse University.

### Critically Reflexive, Mixed Methods Research Practices

This dissertation was written in response to two broad research questions, broken down for different elements of the study below, one which gestures at objectivity and the other which acknowledges subjectivity:

1. What is hiphop doing at the PWI? More precisely, what is hiphop doing in four writing classrooms at one PWI?
2. What am I (a white Jewish urban millennial woman) doing with hiphop at the PWI?

These questions began emerging for me when I started teaching composition as a 23-year old in 2010. In 2010, when I was a second-year MFA student studying fiction writing at the University of Michigan, I was tasked (along with all my classmates) with teaching a required section of the freshman composition course, English 125. Because this class was required for both me and my students, I decided to have some fun with it, and designed a class built around Kanye West's debut album, appropriately titled "College Writing on *The College Dropout*." The Writing Program, housed in the English Department, put very few requirements on us beyond that students write 25 pages of revised prose over the course of the semester. Since I wasn't so far out of college myself (I'd graduated in 2008), I leaned heavily on my undergrad education when designing my course, pulling together a course book that featured James Cone's *The Spirituals and the Blues*, Elijah Anderson's *Code of the Street*, Tricia Rose's *Black Noise*, structured and scaffolded around the album to help students make meaningful, humanities-style academic arguments about it. Back then, I just thought of this as "academic writing"—building on the

freshman writing seminar I'd taken as a freshman at Princeton, I led my students through a sequence of writing tasks that had them writing increasingly complex humanities papers that added sources, complexity, and page count through each cycle of prewriting, drafting, peer review, and revision. I didn't yet have a sense of Writing Studies or Comp Rhet as a field, nor had I learned the critique of Princeton and others' writing pedagogy that suggested that students should learn a wide array of academic and nonacademic genres, not just humanities research that precious few of them (especially at the professionalizing university) would actually pursue. After two more years teaching this course and other hip-hop writing classes as an MFA student and then an adjunct Lecturer at Michigan, it was my sense that I had a lot more about writing pedagogy to learn—and that hip-hop was doing something special in my writing classrooms worth researching and defending—that sent me back to school for my PhD.

When I first designed this freshman writing syllabus, I hoped and imagined that it would attract primarily students of color to my class, who'd be excited and grateful that I designed a writing class for them. It didn't take long for me to realize that this attitude was both patronizing and naive, both because I wasn't some white savior for my students of color who definitely didn't need me to explain their culture to them, and also because my hope betrayed a basic lack of understanding of how the logistics of course enrollment worked. Basically, nothing differentiated sections of the course from one another until students showed up for the first day of class, and so my class represented the demographics of the larger university, which was, as they say, Primarily White. As I taught my course—I'd teach eight sections of this evolving freshman writing course before I left U of M—I began to see that my white students, who I hadn't initially focused on, were responding strongly to the material. Together in an integrated classroom, we talked about the processes of deindustrialization and suburbanization that had

created the segregated geographies they grew up with. I recognized my own experiences growing up in segregated Chicago in the stories white students shared of learning to roll up their windows in certain parts of town or of hearing stories about racial profiling of drivers of color in their own all-white neighborhoods. I tried to exercise empathy and patience as my white students, many of whom had been raised to think that “you can’t talk about being white, or it’s racist” (Trainor 72), discovered a critical language with which to discuss their highly raced contemporary environment.

When I brought my interest in hip-hop writing pedagogy to Syracuse for my PhD, I explicitly had these white students’ critical consciousness in mind. But as I read more literature on composition theory and critical race theory, and began to observe my own classroom and that of another instructor, a Black man, for this study, I was jolted out of my easy centering of my white students’ needs and comfort in my classroom. The fact is, the “primarily” white classroom is not the “exclusively” white classroom, and during all those courses when I gave my white students space and empathy as they worked out a language to discuss race, there were Black students, Latino students, Asian students, Native students in the room for whom my patience with their white classmates was silence in the face of rhetorical violence. One moment stands out to me from those years: a lesson in an intermediate argumentation class when I was teaching about sampling, how sampling had the power to call forth another era, another context, through the simple inclusion of a digital sound. In particular, we were listening to Kanye West’s song “Jesus Walks”; in West’s evocation of a contemporary Black urban ghetto, he samples Curtis Mayfield’s 1971 track “If There’s a Hell Down Below (We’re All Gonna Go).” I played the two songs for my class, then asked if they had heard the sample, where Mayfield calls out “Niggas!” from inside West’s track, artistically linking problems of the urban present with those from forty

years earlier. As I said the word—“niggas,” I said it—the only Black male student in the class caught my eye, and I knew I’d done something really wrong. Something fucked up. In that moment, all the explanations I had about how I didn’t censor language in my class, and my choice to let students say or not say “the n-word” in class, flew out the window, because the fact is that I did not, do not, will never know how it feels to be the one Black kid in a class full of white people when the white teacher says Niggas.

During those early years of teaching composition, I started a blog, *Hiphopocracy*, named for a word a Michigan student invented in class. Many posts on my site work through my identity as a white woman teaching hiphop and the sticky problem of the n-word in a writing class built around hiphop texts (see Brown, “If This Is,” “And Now,” “I’m Good Enough”). In those posts, I was so convinced of my own rightness as I insisted that we needed to talk about, air out our feelings around, “the n-word.” I still think we need to talk about that word. But I believe now that that conversation needs to be approached not as though the word circulates on its own but rather contextualized by a discussion of our own identities and how language’s meanings shift in context. It took me several more years to really listen to Black folks who say that white people using that word is violent, at which point I stopped using the word in my classes. That meant I also stopped discussing it with students, going back, essentially, to ignoring its powerful presence in our discursive lives. I still believe the word needs to be talked about (if not in a language arts classroom, where else?) and I see now how it was colorblind of me to discuss the word without discussing my own identity and privilege vis-a-vis that word. I need to center the feelings and safety of students of color, who already have a relationship with this most American of racial slurs, over the need of white and nonblack students to negotiate or identify their relationship with that word. In one blog post, I note that no Black students participated in

one class discussion in which students acknowledged or discussed whether or when they say “nigga” out loud (“And Now”). Despite the difficulty of this word, it may be the perfect vehicle through which to teach students the meaning of the contextuality of language, a topic taken up in a recent article on a graduate student seminar on Bakhtin (Lensmire et al).

I began doing this research in earnest in Fall of 2013, my first semester at Syracuse, when I filed for IRB clearance to do a study on the section of freshman writing I was teaching that term. The research questions for this segment of my study were as follows:

How does integrating hip-hop and pop culture texts into sections of Writing 105 and 205 taught by the researcher at one PWI affect students’ understandings of literacy and language diversity? How does it affect them as writers? What kinds of conversations around race, class, and spoken language does hip-hop invite into the writing classroom?

In those first IRB forms, I described how I was integrating multimedia and print texts from hip-hop and pop culture into writing-studies focused curricula for WRT 105 and 205, our freshman fall and sophomore spring required writing sequence, and posed the questions above. I hypothesized “that using these [hip-hop] texts in the WRT 105 and 205 classrooms will expand students’ understanding of literacy and offer them broad, diverse models of what literacy and composing can be.”

Approved in October of 2013, this clearance approved me to begin taking ethnographic notes during and after my current class and the class I would teach the following semester; at this time, I recruited student participants in my then-current class using a consent form. I informed them these forms would be held by my advisor, who was present, until I had turned in grades, so that their participation would be unknown to me. Students had options as to what kinds of materials (print only, audiovisual included, with or without in-class comments) they wanted to include in the study, and whether they wanted to be identified by their first name or a pseudonym. Students also indicated on the form whether or not they would participate in a one-

hour exit interview with me at the start of the following semester. Ultimately, 14 students from my WRT 105 class allowed me to analyze their writing materials and 6 participated in an interview; the following semester, in my 205 class, 13 students allowed me to analyze their writing materials and 6 participated in an interview. Students were not compensated for participation in the study.

The interviews were semi-structured, so I prepared a list of questions but also informed students at the outset that it was a conversation and they should share whatever comes to mind as well as feel free to direct questions at me. Following a feminist ethics of care, I conducted interviews not as a dispassionate observer but rather as an invested researcher and the teacher of the participants, invested in their success and their continued learning. The interview questions were designed to prompt students to assess the value of the course texts vis-a-vis their own learning experiences. I asked students to discuss texts and concepts they remembered as valuable or as difficult, before offering them the syllabus to jog their memories. I asked students to narrate some of the writing they did for the course and their opinions and feelings about the multimedia content of the class. I asked students how they thought hip-hop and pop content affected their learning compared with the writing studies content of the course. And I showed students excerpts of their writing I was interested in and discussed those moments explicitly with them.

Throughout the second half of my 105 teaching and during my 205 teaching, I collected copies of student work as it was submitted, deleting materials after the end of the semester when I saw which students had not participated. I also began open coding students' writing and my notes, as well as transcribing interviews, looking for themes in these data. During this time, I noted identity, affect, genre, and transfer as preliminary themes, and noted the ways that students were affectively identifying with characters in hip-hop and non-hip-hop texts, identifications

which scaffolded learning. I also began noticing the prominent role of confidence in students' writing and interviews.

In fall of 2014, I expanded my IRB protocol to cover two sections of a hip-hop-themed 205 course taught by Nana Adjei-Brenyah, a second-year MFA student in fiction at the time. The research questions for this portion of the study echoed those for classroom studies of my own classrooms but also refined them, as in this course of interviews I explicitly asked students to identify themselves and consider how their identities impacted their learning in the hip-hop composition classroom:

How does integrating hip-hop and pop culture texts into sections of Writing 105 and 205 taught by Nana at one PWI affect students' understandings of literacy and language diversity? How does it affect them as writers? What kinds of conversations around race, class, and spoken language does hip-hop invite into the writing classroom? How do students understand the role their identities played in their writing and learning experiences?

How does integrating hip-hop into two sections of WRT 205 impact Nana as an educator, a graduate student, and a writer? How does Nana understand the disciplinary distinctions between his work as an MFA student in an English department and a composition instructor in a Writing Department, and (how) does using hip-hop help him navigate those distinctions?

During the fall semester, Nana and I began meeting to negotiate the parameters of his participation. The following term, he would teach two sections of WRT 205 and would use some of my course materials in his hip-hop-focused inquiry. In particular, he decided to use *Style Wars*, *The College Dropout*, and Hanifa Wadilah's "A Bitch Ain't One," as well as use a course WordPress blog as I did. We decided that I would recruit students a few weeks into the semester and observe his classes three times over the course of the semester, as well as interview him three times over the semester. We also decided that I could write about casual conversations between us in my ethnographic notes and add them to the research record. In addition to Nana himself, 33 of Nana's students participated in the study, with 7 participating in interviews,



leading to a total of 60 student participants with 19 of whom I conducted interviews, in addition to Nana's participation and interviews with him. As I discuss below, the 19 interviews with undergraduates plus 3 with Nana would become the heart of the student data for analysis. Added to these data were the autoethnographic data I produced about myself.

During this time, I was immersing myself in feminist methodological literature, working to make this study more reflexive, more transparent about my location, and more accountable to the populations I was studying. Adding Nana to this study was one step toward these goals because it decentered my own teaching and added classrooms taught by another, nonwhite instructor to the data set. Simultaneously in the Fall of 2014, these priorities were forwarded by my participation in a Feminist Narrative course with Minnie-Bruce Pratt in which I set the intention to write about and interrogate my relationship with hip-hop. In my writings for this course, I explored the following research questions:

What has been my relationship with hip-hop and with Blackness? How have segregation and white supremacy shaped my relationship to the hip-hop cultural products I research and teach? How have multiple facets of my identity, like my Jewishness, my womanhood, my urban Chicago upbringing, my shifting class status, my experiences of sexual violence, shaped my relationship with hip-hop and shaped my teaching and my research design? (How) can my experiences help me understand white uptake of hip-hop?

Professor Pratt's guided series of "prompts" in the class became the raw autoethnographic data I analyzed to produce many of the insights in this chapter and this dissertation regarding my own acculturation into white womanhood as a girl, teenager, and young woman and how hip-hop figured in that process. In the two courses I took with her, "Creative Nonfiction" and "Feminist Narrative," Pratt had us read examples of the personal narrative-infused scholarship which so changed the academy, as detailed above. She also had us do a tremendous amount of writing. The dozens of writing prompts Pratt had us respond to both during class and as homework prompts led us down a path of systematic self-inquiry that focused around exploring how our

raced, gendered, classed, and abled identities were shaped by the people, systems, and discourses we'd grown up with. They were also designed to bring us into contact with questions and knowledges that we'd ignored or repressed thus far—the class, Pratt said, “uses prompts to scare up the birds from the bushes.” In preparing this chapter, I compiled and printed out the majority of the prompts I'd written for both classes—some seventy single-spaced pages of material—and went through them by hand, open-coding them for grounded categories as well as for the issues of identity and personal literacy that had emerged out of my students' writing. In a conversation Pratt and I had about her pedagogy as the basis for my autoethnographic work, my teacher articulated the prompts as a loose sequence that “draws the writer out from the self-absorbed ‘I’ into larger and larger circles of meaning and context.” The process leads writers through a personal dialectic, continually grounding in material moments, memories, and observations even as the writer pushes outward toward contextualization and historicization of the moments and memories she recovers.

Another insight that emerged from those writings was that, in the exit interviews I conducted with my own students, I had not asked them to identify themselves in terms of age, race, nation, gender, sexuality, or any other identifier. Although some students disclosed identity markers in their in-class writings, I never asked for self-identifications for differentiating data by the identities of the students. This was a methodological oversight, and I remedied it in my interviews with Nana and his students by explicitly asking them to identify themselves and using that question to ask how their identities may have shaped their experiences of the course. Beyond correcting this oversight, however, I also sought to reflect on it: if I wanted to draw racialized conclusions, how could I have overlooked asking students to identify themselves? From this challenging moment, I began to recognize the way whiteness structured my teaching and my

thinking (to paraphrase Kirsch and Ritchie), and I began theorizing this project more deeply as about the colorblind classroom. Had I assumed, on some level, that I had the power to identify students myself? Based on what—my visual impressions of them? This moment taught me about the colorblind classroom and its assumptions that everyone is white unless they purposefully or visually disclose otherwise. This phenomenon resonates with work from composition and rhetoric and disability studies which questions the need for students to disclose disability to receive accommodations (Hitt). Like disability scholars who advocate universal design that welcomes all students' learning styles and identities into the composition classroom, this moment challenged me to envision an identity-conscious pedagogy that disturbed the PWI's assumption of whiteness. Drawing on my efforts to clarify my own identity as a white Jewish woman, I hypothesized that bringing students' identities into the classroom would begin with me bringing my own identity into the classroom. Indeed, one student commented in his exit interviews with me that he would have liked me to bring more of my personality into my teaching. This resonated with my own sense, reiterated by professors who had observed me teach, that I had a tendency to ask leading questions and not open class up to true debate. I began thinking about ways I had internalized dominant scripts of white U.S. femininity which taught me to be maternal, private, politically neutral (and colorblind), and to obscure the reality of my body, and how I could move toward a teaching style that was vulnerable, emotionally available, and transparent about my identity and my motivations. These resolutions were affirmed by observing Nana teach, who—as I discuss more in chapter 5—opened up his teaching with a declaration of his identity as a hip-hop head, was emotionally available to students, and allowed debate to flourish.

In their discussion of “critical imagination” as a methodological hallmark of feminist rhetorical scholarship, Kirsch and Royster define it as encompassing the following: “listening deeply, reflexively, and multisensibly; grounding inquiries in historical evidence with regard to both texts and contexts; creating schemata for engaging critical attention; and disrupting our assumptions regularly through reflective and reflexive questions” (21). This ethos guided me as I sought to answer the question “What is hiphop writing/doing in the primarily white institution?” After conducting my classroom studies, I decided that answering this question demanded more data than I could glean from reviewing the literature and studying classes taught by me and a colleague at a single institution. Thus, in winter of 2016, I expanded by IRB protocol to cover a survey of college writing instructors using hiphop materials at other institutions. This survey received 14 responses, discussed in chapter 1. This survey attended to the following research questions:

How many composition instructors are using hiphop in their writing and rhetoric courses? Who are these teachers, where do they teach, what texts do they use, and how do they understand the value of hiphop to the teaching of writing and rhetoric?

In conjunction with the review of literature, these survey results attest to the breadth of hiphop composition teaching already underway across the country.

The final step in contextualizing and historicizing my classroom studies was, well, to do historical research. From the beginning, my literature review had involved tracing hiphop’s presence in composition, rhetoric, and literacy scholarship. As my project increasingly considered how my identity as a white woman interacted with this legacy, it became ever more important for me to highlight the important work scholars of color had done to bring hiphop into the PWI, to counteract any perception of my work as novel. In other words, in order to avoid appropriating the work by scholars of color, it became important for me not just to review the

literature but to actually decenter myself and critically examine how my uptake of hip-hop, and my pedagogy which re-centered whiteness in my classrooms, was part of the university's appropriation of and depoliticization of Blackness, Black studies, and the theory and stories of non-Anglo-European Others. As I traced hip-hop in composition and rhetoric back, all roads led to Geneva Smitherman, the pioneering sociolinguist and compositionist who began theorizing Black Language for language and literacy classrooms as early as her 1969 dissertation. The late sixties were a watershed moment for composition and rhetoric, as national uprisings demanding civil rights spilled into the Conference on College Composition and Communication in 1968 and shaped our field through the desegregation of higher education and the emergence of Basic Writing in New York City and nationwide from the late sixties through the early seventies. It occurred to me that stories of hip-hop's birth in the Bronx at DJ Kool Herc's 1973 back-to-school party coincided both temporally and geographically with the desegregation of the City University of New York and the birth of Black and Puerto Rican studies there from 1968 through the mid-1970s, but no one had interrogated this confluence before. Thus, I set out to add to my research a historical study of this moment and possible linkages between desegregation at CUNY and the birth of hip-hop culture in New York. In my historical research, detailed more extensively in the following chapter, I pursued the following research questions:

Did CUNY Open Admissions shape early hip-hop culture's products and processes of raps, DJing, graffiti, breakdance, and dropping knowledge? Can we find evidence of hip-hop culture present either within writing classrooms or elsewhere on CUNY campuses during Open Admissions? What broad kinds of literacy practices were being taught and learned under CUNY Open Admissions, both in writing classrooms as well as in other kinds of classrooms and in other spaces on campus, and do those practices bear any resemblance to the practices of hip-hop culture? How did the economic and policy shifts from investment in to divestment in public higher education in New York shape the landscape of early hip-hop culture?

Answers to these questions were pursued through literature review and archival research at multiple CUNY campus archives across New York City as well as in the personal archives of CUNY writing Adrienne Rich and June Jordan at Ratcliffe College Archives and Audre Lorde and Toni Cade Bambara at Spelman College Archives.

After data collection came analysis. Following a grounded theory methodology (Charmaz), I open-coded and wrote coding memos throughout the data analysis process. These memos prompted me to write out insights and patterns I noticed as they occurred to me, forming the basis for my theory. By the end of my data collection and open-coding process, I had collected a tremendous amount of data I was trying to draw conclusions from. These included over 230 pages of interview transcripts; survey responses from 14 composition instructors who used hiphop materials in their college writing courses; 61 pages of archival notes from 7 archives; and 69 pages of autoethnographic memos from Minnie Bruce Pratt's courses. I also had ethnographic notes from my and Nana's courses; the writings of my and Nana's students, including students who had and had not given exit interviews; archival photos; coding memos; and the writings from my blog, which I did not subject to the coding but returned to as prompted by the codes. In January 2017 I conducted another round of coding on the limited data set of the interview transcripts, survey results, archival notes, and autoethnographic memos with an eye towards creating categories and ultimately a theory that would have explanatory power that traveled across all these data: the student interviews, Nana interviews, archival materials, survey responses, and autoethnographic writings. Using these materials, I went through each set of data again and wrote new coding memos that attempted to articulate relationality between concepts (Saldana, Charmaz) in a series of assertions. Then, I organized these sets of assertions into thematic groups, ultimately comparing the categories across data sets.

My final round of coding was shaped by the logistical need to limit my data set for analysis as well as by my feminist methodological valuing of contextualization. This contextualization, which I expand upon in chapters 3 and 4, allowed me to see how discussions of transfer, that is, the question of whether students' learning "transfers" out of composition classrooms into other writing contexts (whether curricular or not), can be caught up in the difficulty of measuring such a phenomenon (Wardle 785). Instead of working to assess my students' writing and "grade" them in my coding process, deciding for myself how much they learned and whether it "transferred," instead I decided to focus on students' interviews and let students tell me for themselves what they learned, how they evolved as writers and critical thinkers, how they felt about the writing courses in the study, and how they understood what was valuable, useful, and meaningful to them.

This methodological move to focus on interviews not only allowed me to significantly narrow my data set, it also fit with my feminist methodological principles of contextualization, historicization, and co-creation of knowledge with research participants. It also allows me to echo the tensions in assessment priorities expressed in my historical study, in which teachers like Toni Cade Bambara and June Jordan insisted on assessing students in holistic ways that responded to students self-assessments, and resisted the standardized and decontextualized assessment priorities set by CCNY English department and instituted by WPA Mina Shaughnessy. It could be argued, however, that one limitation of my focus on interviews is that it limits my analysis to commentary from students who not only opted in to the study but also opted in to the interview process. As you will see below, this sampling bias is reflected in the overwhelmingly (though not exclusively) positive assessments students had of the course and their own learning about writing. Thus, these data illustrate how and why hip-hop worked in the

composition classroom for students who responded positively to the material. But given several factors—these students’ extensive discussion of their positive relationship to the material compared with some of their other literacy instruction experiences; the fact that many of them did not begin the course as hiphop fans; and the fact that these 20 interviews represent a full quarter of the students in the four classes Nana and I taught—their commentary has significant veracity in helping us understand how hiphop works in a college composition classroom at one PWI.

As I coded these 20 interviews, I continually looked back across the data sets of autoethnography and history in order to produce theory with explanatory power across my mixed-methods study which could answer the question, “What is hiphop doing in the college writing classroom at a PWI?”. Ultimately, I performed a final round of coding on the transcripts of the 20 interviews I conducted with students from four classes: one section of a freshman writing class taught by me, one section of a sophomore writing class taught by me, and two sections of a sophomore writing class taught by Nana. By repeatedly coding these 20 transcripts and theorizing across the historical and autoethnographic data sets in order to consolidate and clarify my codes, I ended up with 8 main codes, discussed at length in chapter 4. This coding process uncovered the trenchant antiblackness in my students’ relationships to hiphop, standard English, and Black Language, an antiblackness that existed among students who were Black and white, longtime hiphop fans and new to the genre. The coding process also revealed to me students’ deep response to hiphop pedagogy as a rhetorical act of identification with a pedagogy, taught by both Nana and myself, that was designed for them; that is, a rhetorical composition pedagogy, tailored to its situation: millennial students in a colorblind PWI, where Black language and antiblackness travel, incredibly, together.



Hiphop, a contradictory art form which is both resistive and commodified, *rhetorically appeals to students learning in the contradictory ideological context of antiblack commodity capitalism*. As such, teachers have to make personal decisions, rendered public to students, about whether hiphop will be mobilized merely to engage students in the acts of writing and research for individualistic gain or whether hiphop will be critiqued towards solidarity-building understandings of literacy, writing, and discourse which are consistent with the knowledge of our field.

## CHAPTER 3

“What We Intend to Be: Ourselves”:  
Creative Writing for Social Change at CUNY Under Open Admissions, 1967-1977

“In sum, diversity arose as a way of preempting redistribution.”  
— Roderick Ferguson, *The Reorder of Things*

When I came to composition, I thought I was jumping fields, leaving creative writing behind. But as I’ve studied hip-hop’s place in composition and rhetoric, my research has continually taken me back to creative writing. Hip-hop in composition and rhetoric echoes and reinforces creative writing’s invisibilized presence in composition and rhetoric across issues of pedagogy, assessment, labor relations, and the theorization of writing products, practices, and communities. In his introduction to a *Callaloo* special issue on hip-hop culture, R. Scott Heath argues that “hip-hop studies, done consciously, argues for the necessary development of a mechanism to attend to the present crisis of representation of people of color, of women, of nonheterosexuals, and of the poor” in academia. As I have pursued the research for this dissertation, I have come to see how forwarding the marginalized in composition and rhetoric often pushes us to reconsider the boundaries of the field, where composition bleeds into creative writing and those creative academics who push the margins and the envelope too easily get cut from its disciplinary memory.

As compositionists and rhetoricians increasingly embrace the term “cultural rhetoric” to describe rhetorical analyses that center communities of cultural and artistic meaning-making outside of colonial and imperialist Euro-American institutions, creative writing re-enters our visual field as a marginalized element of our field’s historical and contemporary engagement with non-institutional writing practices. Meanwhile, re-engaging creative writing with a

commitment to hip-hop texts, methods, pedagogies, and values motivates a consideration of how composition and rhetoric's dismissal or evasion of its engagements with creative writing have been shaped by the forces of neoliberalism, including racism, sexism, respectability, wage inequality, and standardization. Returning our attention to creative writing in composition and rhetoric with a commitment to hip-hop enjoins us to consider literacy practices of self-expression and self-actualization as cultural rhetorical practices entwined with commitments to social transformation.

In this chapter, I offer established histories of hip-hop and CUNY Open Admissions as coterminous New York stories that can enrich how we read and research both. I describe why and how I returned to the archives to look for elements of hip-hop culture at CUNY's Open Admissions. My analysis of the archival materials I uncovered demonstrates how writing faculty at CUNY were engaged in an ideological and affective battle as to how best to motivate students—intrinsically, by appealing to their passions, interests, identities, and community attachments, or extrinsically, through the promise of rewards via standardized assessment or the future employment. In this analysis, I highlight the forgotten contributions of nontenured creative writing faculty in CUNY's celebrated Basic Writing program during that era, especially women, queer women, and women of color including June Jordan, Adrienne Rich, Toni Cade Bambara, and Barbara Christian. I articulate the community-centered creative writing instruction of these teachers as critical to inspiring passion, confidence, and reflexivity among students in a moment of social upheaval and redistributive potentiality and pressure from administration and various (white) faculty to motivate students extrinsically through tests and job prospects. I situate these creative writing instructors' pedagogy of what I call "creative writing for social change" among the Black Arts Movement and other artistic and rhetorical movements for freedom taking place

in NYC and nationally during this civil rights/Black power/student movement moment. Into this moment, I also situate the outpouring of student creative writing being undertaken in student publications across CUNY campuses. Finally, I identify areas for further investigation suggesting possible linkages between CUNY creative writing and early hip-hop culture in mid-1970s New York. I argue that early hip-hop history must be understood in the context of the Second Reconstruction and Second Post-Reconstruction and the brief expansion and contraction of funding and support for creative writing instruction for social change at CUNY campuses.

Hip-hop's unique blend of critical, creative, and protest writing was on display at the 2017 convocation of the Hip-hop Literacies Conference, held this year at John Jay College. The two-day conference blended theory with praxis, as we heard from scholars, poets, breakdancers, and activists, many leading participatory workshops. Along with Dr. Elaine Richardson, co-organizers Dr. Carmen Kynard and Dr. Crystal Endsley named the conference "Hip-hop Justice," and their call for papers framed the conference—and the present moment—this way:

The late critical historian, Manning Marable, always called the years after the Black Freedom Movements of the 1960-1970s the Second Post-Reconstruction. Like with the First Post-Reconstruction a century before (the era immediately after the emancipation of enslaved Africans), the white backlash against the relative gains in freedom and sovereignty for Black masses was swift and unrelenting.

The second Post-Reconstruction, achieved most significantly by the campaigns of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, arguably witnessed the birth of Hip-hop. Hip-hop, however, was always more than a mere reaction to or resistance against the global oppressions of Reaganomics and Thatcherism when these regimes unleashed the IMF, World Bank, global warming, and a host of calculated attacks on Brown and Black peoples worldwide. Hip-hop was a radical (re)vision and (re)valuing of life and cultural survivance. This year's Hip-hop literacies conference urges us to see the writing on the wall: we are now entering the Third Post-Reconstruction. ("The 2017 Call for Papers")

This call for papers actively positions the present moment in relation to the Second Post-Reconstruction of the 1970s. Following critical race theorists and those who write in their tradition, in this chapter and the next, I identify this 1970s moment of investment and then

divestment from poor and working-class students and students of color as instructive for our present moment. In fact, it was in this moment that standardized literacies and discourses of excellence emerged to “forestall redistribution,” as Ferguson has argued—and in so doing created the ideological context of capitalism and antiblackness in which our contemporary students of all identities still labor and learn. I suggest in this chapter that the identity-based literacies that eventually became hiphop emerged in this moment coterminously with and against neoliberal, individualistic discourses in order to call out and counter the truth claims of assessment regimes that professed their own ability to define and police achievement and success. Identity writings and critiques of the profession attacked the very validity of these assessments, using theorizations of writing, expertise, and the labor structure of the university to challenge emerging neoliberal evaluations of Black and Puerto Rican students, educators, and programs.

### Writing Hiphop and Open Admissions Toward One Another

As a literacy researcher interested in the community production of texts, I see hiphop historians’ interest in the question of “why New York?” as an interest in the origin of the genres of hiphop culture. In 1993, Amy Devitt directed compositionists and rhetoricians’ study of genres to the “origins of genres,” arguing that “genres develop because they respond appropriately to situations that writers encounter repeatedly” (88). As composition and literacy researchers, working to understand hiphop culture is an effort to understand a set of genres that emerged in the 1970s in New York: the rap song, the DJ’s break beat, the break dance, the graffiti piece. Following Devitt, understanding these genres as rhetorical demands a deep

understanding of the contexts—the rhetorical situations—in which they emerged. Working toward a fuller picture of 1970s New York is critical to understanding hip-hop genres. As we enter what some have termed a “Third Post-Reconstruction” (“Hip-hop Justice”), it is critical to understand the Second Reconstruction of the Civil Rights Movement and the Second Post-Reconstruction which occurred in the conservative retrenchment of the 1970s, a movement of which the rise and fall of Open Admissions was a major and telling drama.

In this chapter I’ll perform an act of what Kirsch and Royster have called “critical imagining,” as I suggest that the stories we know about Basic Writing and Hip-hop are more closely related than we’ve thought in the past. But to start, let me tell these two stories separately, how they’re usually told—the origin story of Basic Writing and the origin story of Hip-hop. They say hip-hop was born at a back-to-school party hosted by a Jamaican-born teenager, Clive Owens, and his sister, Cindy Campbell, in their apartment building in the Bronx in late summer, 1973 (Chang, Rose). The hip-hop historians focus on the chaos of the time: the gang violence, disruptive city planning policies, Daniel Moynihan’s suggestion in 1970 that Black and Brown communities be handled with “benign neglect” (Chang 14). But in 1973 two Jamaican immigrant siblings made flyers and charged \$5 at the door of their building’s rec room. Owens, who called himself “DJ Kool Herc,” used his dad’s speakers and record collection to throw a great party. Herc had been paying attention to the “break” in his dad’s favorite soul records, in which the instrumentation would drop, the drums would bang, and the people would dance. By setting up two record players with the same disc and using his fingers to manually rewind each one to replay the break, Herc invented the “break beat.” And when he picked up his microphone and began rapping over this new beat, well, that’s how hip-hop was born (Chang 67-70).

Now another story, subject already to perhaps more deconstruction than the first: the story of Basic Writing. In the aftermath of Black and Puerto Rican protestors' fight to desegregate the campuses of the City University of New York, CUNY changed its admissions requirements so that anyone graduating in the top half of their class from a New York City public school was guaranteed entry to a CUNY campus, and anyone graduating at all would be guaranteed a spot in the city's community colleges (Kynard 171). Beyond opening their doors to these students, the university also undertook an enormous expansion of their remedial offerings and developed highly experimental and transformative pedagogies to support their new underserved students, many of whom came from high schools that were not up to par. Led by Mina Shaughnessy, CUNY's new Basic Writing remediation program brought literacy instruction to thousands of underprepared incoming students (Malloy). Despite the successes of Open Admissions, however, in 1975, citing the budget cuts entailed by President Ford's veto of bailout funds to New York City, admission standards were reinstated and tuition was charged for the first time, leading to a contraction in CUNY's opportunities for students of color and others. Open Admissions' openness continued to shrink into the 1990s, when Open Admission was formally abolished.

Looking at these two stories together, as coterminous and possibly related, and looking anew at the SEEK and Basic Writing archives with an eye toward the hip-hop arts, gives us new information about the kinds of literacies, teaching, and administration present under Open Admissions, and also offers new answers to the perennial hip-hop history question, Why New York? In this chapter, I offer a revisionist history that centers funded, open-access public education as well as creative writing education to the history of composition and rhetoric and the history of hip-hop culture. In returning to the CUNY archives for further research, I also deepen

our understanding of the writing and rhetoric pedagogies being taught across CUNY campuses, beyond Basic Writing programs, and the ways that the rhetorics of protest, ethnic studies, and Black Arts were taken up, furthered, and invested in during the years of 1967-1977 at college campuses across New York.

In particular, looking for hip-hop literacies in Open Admissions continues the project of decentering Mina Shaughnessy from the narrative of Basic Writing's success. As R. Scott Heath indicated near the beginning of this chapter, bringing hip-hop into the frame redirects our attention to youth of color composing when dominant narratives tend to center white heroes. In the case of Basic Writing, we have a white woman heroine, Mina Shaughnessy. Although Shaughnessy's successes with the Basic Writing program at CCNY were widely lauded, "since 1980, the nature of her legacy has also been the focal point of considerable controversy" (Soliday 65). Perhaps the most lasting critique of Shaughnessy's work has been Min-Zhan Lu's 1991 analysis of the "linguistic innocence" of Shaughnessy's teaching and pedagogy writing, which Lu alleges obscures the power relations students and all language users navigate when they make rhetorical choices. In a recent article, Sean Malloy productively returns to Shaughnessy's archives and argues that despite Shaughnessy's continued "controlling influence" on the entire field of Basic Writing, her success was shaped by her accommodation to bureaucracy, particularly her implementation of wide-scale, high-stakes standardized testing of the Basic Writing students.

The project of decentering Shaughnessy has perhaps been embraced most fully by Carmen Kynard, whose book *Vernacular Insurrections* fundamentally refigures our understanding of why Basic Writing was so successful. Kynard rewrites the Black Arts Movement into the history of Basic Writing, arguing that the new literacies of Black and Puerto



Rican student protestors, embedded in chants, signs, demands, leaflets, course proposals, and other extracurricular writings (Kynard 125) “redefined what it means to be successful and literate” (65). Repositioning Geneva Smitherman as a heroine of this era and a foil to our field’s focus on Shaughnessy, Kynard argues that Smitherman’s theorization of the Black Arts Movement and Black Language for composition and rhetoric was “an attack on the field’s prior definitions of what counted as writing and who counted as writers,” establishing “a seamlessness between Black students’ composing rights and the Black Arts Movement” (123). Kynard recenters Black and Puerto Rican students, legislators, and scholars to many of our field’s contemporary interests, arguing that “movements in our field that have been related to social justice, radical multiculturalism, Black and Brown solidarity, multimodal communication, and visual rhetoric have ideological and intellectual roots in BAM” (122), in addition to contemporary studies of “transcultural, border crossings, [and] cultural rhetorics” (131). As I’ll discuss in a moment, my research expands on Kynard’s project by adding the adjunct lecturers of Basic Writing under SEEK—mostly women, women of color, and queer women, both white and of color—creative writers all, to our history of this time, and considering how these women theorized writing as a community-embedded social practice for social change that conflicted with the standardized assessment regimes of higher ups in the CUNY ecosystem. I expand on Kynard’s claim that Smitherman’s work presaged contemporary compositionists’ interest in social action, multimodality, community literacies, and translingualism by firmly rooting these notions in the teaching of women, queer, and Black creative writers teaching at CUNY.

Interestingly, the history of the Black Arts Movement and the student movements are often absent from hiphop histories, for example Jeff Chang’s *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop* and Tricia Rose’s *Black Noise*. Both of these books contextualize hiphop’s birth in the early 1970s within

political, economic, and development trends of the period, with a focus on the massive deindustrialization occurring in New York City in the sixties and seventies, the way Black and Brown youth hacked technologies like the turntable, amplifiers, and aerosol spray paint, and the presence of Caribbean migrants in the U.S., like Jamaican immigrant DJ Kool Herc and the Jamaican traditions of versioning and sound clash he and his community members brought to the U.S. Chang and Rose both devote considerable attention to the construction of the Cross-Bronx Expressway, which displaced 170,000 Black, brown, and ethnic white residents of the borough and epitomized the city's new financial and structural commitment to white commuters and white-collar jobs over the rights and livelihood of the city's working-class and working-poor residents. These narratives of hip-hop's roots focus on the devastation in New York City from which hip-hop's cultural forms of graffiti, rhyming, DJing, and breakdancing emerged, and allow Chang and Rose to theorize the birth of hip-hop culture as Black youths' powerful survivalist response to structural devastation. However, this dominant narrative overlooks New York City's saturation with Black and Puerto Rican rhetorics of protest and art throughout the 1960s and early 70s, and also overlooks the brief period of state and city investment in Black and brown communities during Open Admissions, from 1968 into the late 1970s. Kynard does composition *and* hip-hop history a service by reminding us of the fight to desegregate New York's public schools happening throughout the 1960s and the extensive Black arts organizations like theaters, publications, and schools that existed at the time.

Overlooking the mass protests and arts production by Black and Puerto Rican New Yorkers at this time also obscures the historical processes at work. In particular, the theory of interest convergence and divergence is critical to an understanding of this time and was an important key to interpreting the archival materials I encountered, which told the story of an

extremely rapid investment in and then divestment from higher education of Black, Puerto Rican, and poor students in the CUNY system. Based in the work of critical race theorist Derrick Bell, interest convergence holds that the advancement of Black people in the United States is not a story of continual progress, but rather a cycle in which advancement occurs when Black and marginalized folks' interests align or *converge* with the interests of the ruling elite, an ephemeral "progress" which is invariably rolled back when white power's interests no longer align with those of the marginalized. As writing researchers Kynard and Steve Lamos as well as literary theorist Roderick Ferguson discuss, the mass protests of the late 1960s—including uprisings in Philadelphia, Watts, Newark, Chicago and Pittsburgh as well as student protests across the country—coupled with international pressure the United States felt to live up to its Cold-War era discourse as the protector of freedom and liberty, put it in the white power structure's interests to make concessions to the demands of marginalized groups—for example, the higher-ed investments advised by Nixon's 1970 President's Commission on Campus Unrest (Kynard 120, Lamos 23-24). Compared with the narrative of racial progress, interest convergence and divergence better explain how between 1968 and 1969, 700 institutions added "ethnic studies courses, programs, or departments" (Ferguson 33) and by 1971 600 PWIs had created remediation programs for newly admitted poor students and students of color (Kynard 166), yet, by changing admissions tuitions requirements, the presence of people of color in higher education collapsed from the mid-1970s into the 1980s, with Black enrollment in CUNY decreasing by as much as 65% in a single year with the implementation of tuition in 1976 (Jordan "Statement"). Further, Jewish mobilization against Open Admissions—despite CUNY's role supporting Jewish immigrants in the early twentieth century who at that time were also viewed as a threat to that WASP-y space—also suggests that power and resistance are not

uniform or monolithic, but that individual social groups have interests that converge and diverge at different historical moments.

Writing hiphop's and Open Admission's stories toward each other enriches our understanding of both. For compositionists, putting hiphop in the frame deepens our sense of the rich cultural context in which Open Admissions occurred. For hiphop historians, acknowledging the student movements, civil rights battles, and new educational opportunities opening up in New York in the years before hiphop broadens our sense of hiphop's roots not just in local divestment and abandonment but in moments of local community organizing and community-led public education initiatives.

### Feminist Methods in Historical Recovery

In the previous chapter I offered Kirsch and Royster's attention to "critical imagination" as a feminist methodological practice that, among other directives, asks researchers to "ground[] inquiries in historical evidence with regard to both texts and contexts" (21). By bringing historical inquiry into my study of hiphop at the PWI, I attempt to do just this. Further, interrogating hiphop composition at PWIs from a politics of location—asking not just what hiphop composition is doing in these spaces but what *I* doing with hiphop in the PWI—speaks to my commitment as a scholar informed by feminist theory, critical race theory, and hiphop culture itself to be explicit about my location. Asking what I am doing with hiphop in the PWI recognizes that my identity as a bougie white Jewish girl from Chicago, not to mention a creative writer and someone who has worked and been educated in PWIs, essentially shapes the type of teaching, research and writing I produce and also places ethical commitments upon my

work. As Jacqueline Jones Royster writes in her seminal discussion of an Afrofeminist research ideology, researchers from outside the community of study

are called upon by their outsider status to demonstrate respect for the communities they study. They are obligated (by afrofeminist ideologies anyway) to recognize overtly, the ways in which their authority, as it may be drawn from dominant systems of power and privilege, intersects with the authority of others. They are obligated to hold themselves, rather than just their subjects, accountable for and responsive to disparities. (226)

Given that my research focuses on teaching the arts of people of color in primarily but not ever exclusively white contexts, Royster's words guide my commitment to interrogating my own biases and holding myself accountable to an explicit ethics of care towards the communities about which I research, communities whose art and company have deeply enriched my life. As Gesa Kirsch and Joy Ritchie remind white scholars of composition and rhetoric, we need to attend to how "race and whiteness structure our thinking" (10). Thus, my interest in what *I* am doing with hip-hop asks me to consider how my teaching hip-hop as a white woman is part of the PWI's appropriation of and even sanitation of hip-hop's revolutionary new literacies, and to continually work to disrupt that. It also demands that I bring my own identity into my research, for example my attention to the ways Jewish communities responded, often adversarially, to the Open Admissions movement at CUNY.

Consistent with my methodological focus on critical reflexivity, I want to mention here that the research trip that grounds this chapter was funded by the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship, a fellowship I received as a college undergraduate which has significantly underwritten my undergraduate and doctoral study, including a large grant to fund this research trip. MMUF's website describes its mission thus:

The fundamental objective of MMUF is to address, over time, the problem of underrepresentation in the academy at the level of college and university faculties. This goal can be achieved both by increasing the number of students from underrepresented minority groups (URM) who pursue PhDs and by supporting the pursuit of PhDs by

students who may not come from traditional minority groups but have otherwise demonstrated a commitment to the goals of MMUF. (“Mission”)

According to Ronald Roach, this open-ended language—the language by which I pitched my application to the MMUF Committee as someone who had “demonstrated a commitment to the goals of MMUF” even though my white Judaism did not meet the spirit of the program was a response by the Mellon Foundation to direction from the Bush Administration’s Office of Civil Rights for “colleges and universities to change or drop race-and ethnic-specific academic enrichment and scholarship programs” (Roach). Despite complaints from the NAACP’s Legal Defense and Educational Fund, this anti-affirmative action direction from the Bush Administration opened the way for white and structurally privileged students like me to take advantage of programs and funds meant for structurally disadvantaged students of color.

As we consider in this chapter how neoliberal discourses emerged to “forestall redistribution,” it’s important for me to acknowledge my complicity in policy regimes that use colorblind language to enact racist ends. I believe highlighting my use of MMUF funds for this research is necessary for several reasons. First of all, this example clarifies what is at stake in colorblind racism, which perpetuates not only some vague thing called “privilege” but more concretely involves the reallocation of capital from historically oppressed individuals to those who have been historically uplifted and protected—I received this fellowship; someone else, perhaps someone with financial need, didn’t. Secondly, my focus on critical reflexivity compels me to share this information not as an empty exercise in confession but because my critical reflexivity is based in the belief that although different members of our society experience intersecting oppressions differently, critically and honestly rendering any of our singular experiences can illuminate much of the same system. My efforts to illuminate how racist capitalist education impacts all our lives, including my students’, would be incomplete if I did

not carefully detail my own place in it. While I am proud of MMUF's support of my work and while it motivates me to stay accountable to the spirit of the program, I also recognize how race-evasive language, under direction from the Bush Administration's OCR, shifted funds away from their redistributive intentions to my benefit. These are the stakes of race-evasive language in education policy.

Since whiteness tends always to center itself, the historical inquiry in this chapter began with a desire to deflect from the novelty of my white self doing hip-hop studies by deeply historicizing my presence within a long history of hip-hop research in composition, rhetoric, literacy, English, and education studies by scholars of color, including work by Adam Banks, Todd Craig, David Green, Gwen Pough, Carmen Kynard, Elaine Richardson, David Kirkland, Marcelle Haddix, Kermit Campbell, Houston Baker, and Tricia Rose. I traced this history backwards, all the way back to Geneva Smitherman's pioneering work on Black Language and Black Poetry as early as her 1969 dissertation. If my research purpose was to understand what hip-hop literacies are doing in the PWI, it seemed critical to investigate the moment, untheorized within both composition and hip-hop studies, when the rap literacies practiced by Black and Puerto Rican youth of New York were instrumental in the fight to desegregate White higher education there.

So, last summer I traveled to several archives to see if I could find anything suggesting a relationship between SEEK, Open Admissions, and early hip-hop culture. My interest in hip-hop, with its diverse communicative arts of DJing, rapping, breaking, graffiti, and dropping science, meant that my archival research understood writing and rhetoric practices at CUNY as happening more broadly than in writing classrooms. Put differently, this was not an interrogation simply into Basic Writing programming at CUNY campuses during Open Admissions, but rather

a more open-ended investigation into writing and rhetorical practices on CUNY campuses during the Open Admissions years, years leading up to the birth of hip-hop culture in New York. On my research trip, I visited institutional archives at CCNY, Hunter College, Medgar Evers, and Bronx and Queens Community Colleges, and also traveled to Radcliffe to look at Adrienne Rich's and June Jordan's papers, both writing instructors in SEEK, as well as to Spelman to look at Toni Cade Bambara and Audre Lorde's papers. I used my knowledge of hip-hop's roots in musical, poetic, technological, and protest traditions to guide my research: beyond looking at institutional documents relating to SEEK, Open Admission, and Basic Writing, I also looked at yearbooks, student publications, and in course catalogs at departments of English; Ethnic, Black, and Puerto Rican studies; Music; Speech; Visual Arts; and Engineering. This purview allowed me to expand earlier historical studies of Basic Writing to consider broader rhetorical production on CUNY campuses during Open Admission and expand on the work of scholars in our field (Lamos, Soliday) whose focus has been limited by the disciplinary walls of writing studies at CUNY and on other campuses.

I arrived to the archives with my classroom studies already behind me, already thinking in terms of analytic categories like affect/emotion, disciplinarity, and labor relations. As I worked through the archival materials, my attention settled on several interrelated sites: the creative writing teachers employed by Basic Writing whose pedagogies encouraged self-expression, community engagement, and social transformation; the students writing poetry, news, reviews, institutional histories, and community manifestos for campus publications; and the landscape of poetry institutions, interest, and support throughout New York City at the time, an ecosystem that interacted with campus writing scenes through teachers' readings and presentations at libraries, salons, and K-12 schools, as well as students' invitations to Black Arts



Movement poets and artists to perform, read, and teach on campus. My attention also focused on several movements unfolding in a contrasting vein: the continued budget shortages for SEEK and open admissions programming; tensions between Basic Writing administrators and non-tenure-track educators around issues of assessment, representation, and job security; and the written records of widespread resistance to the desegregation of CUNY.

### Motivation and Despair in the Archives of CUNY Open Admission

When I began my review of the literature on Open Admissions at CUNY, looking for any mention of recognizable early hip-hop culture in writing classrooms, I came across an essay written by Adrienne Rich about her time teaching Basic Writing in the CCNY SEEK program from 1968-1972. She wrote:

Some of the most rudimentary questions we confronted were: how do you make standard English verb endings available to a dialect-speaker? how do you teach English prepositional forms to a Spanish-language student? where are the arguments for and against “Black English”? the English of academic papers and theses? Is standard English simply a weapon of colonization? Many of our students wrote in the vernacular with force and wit; others were unable to say what they wanted on paper in or out of the vernacular. We were dealing not simply with dialect and syntax but with the imagery of lives, the anger and flare of urban youth—how could this be used, strengthened, without the lies of artificial polish? How does one teach order, coherency, the structure of ideas while respecting the student’s experience of his thinking and perceiving? Some students who could barely sweat out a paragraph delivered (and sometimes conned us with) dazzling raps in the classroom: how could we help this oral gift transfer itself onto paper? (261)

I find this passage remarkable for so many reasons. First of all, it is the first text I discovered which confirmed my suspicions that rapping was very much present in the writing classrooms of Open Admission, and laid the foundation for my further historical research into the archives of SEEK instructors extraordinaire Rich, Bambara, Jordan, and Audre Lorde. Although Rich uses

the word “rap” to describe a verbal art and not the rhymed couplets set to music we think of as rap now, rap music gets its name from the rappin’ Rich described here. Also incredible is Rich’s sensitivity (which she extends to the whole community of SEEK English teachers) of questions that still dog the field of composition and rhetoric about the uses, limitations, and pedagogies of Black Language and Chicano English, including her anticipation of the argument, known as bidialectalism, that BL should be engaged in the class only as a gateway to learning the more economically valuable SWE.

In considering the questions she lays out above, Rich writes that, fundamentally, “my job was to ‘turn the students on,’ to acclimate them to the act of writing” (260). In the listed tasks of this statement, motivating students—“turn the students on”—and bringing students to practice and perhaps feel comfortable writing—“to acclimate them to the act of writing”—are parallel, if not intertwined tasks. This brief statement captures the attitude I saw throughout documents from SEEK programming in the late 1960s which centered student affect—specifically emotions of pleasure, interest, and identification with course texts—to the work of improving students’ writing practices and eventually, products. This concern for student affect had implications for pedagogical practices like assignments and course texts as well as labor implications, since SEEK Basic Writing and Speech at CCNY specifically chose non-researcher instructors to better motivate students. In her institutional history of “The Pre-Baccalaureate Program” which became SEEK, Barbara Christian addressed the recurring question of how to “keep the student’s interest in courses in which he was doing a great deal of work but for which he would not get credit” (7). She reported that the pre-bac program decided

that the teachers of these compensatory courses [should] be interested more in teaching than in research. Personalized teaching was a necessity... For the purposes of the program, [administrators] felt a PHd. [sic] might be a hindrance, for the degreed teacher

is generally more interested in research which allows him chances of promotion than in the teaching of students. (4)

In these remarks, we see how concern for motivating student affect was related to issues of pedagogy, labor relations, and notions of writerly and teacherly expertise.

A 1967 report on an “Experimental Summer Enrichment Program” (Sternslaus) contained individual reflections as well as syllabi and activities from the multi-disciplinary faculty who taught sections of the course, including Barbara Christian, Addison Gayle (English), Marion Klein (Reading), Sylvia Rackow, Kren Satran, Nina Steinsland (Speech). With lessons focused around *Lord of the Flies*, *The Tempest*, *Man Alone* (“an anthology of essays on the theme of alienation in modern society” [1]), *The Souls of Black Folk*, *The Making of the Modern Mind*, and *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, the teachers’ reflections suggest that these pedagogies were driven by an understanding that teaching for student affect and engagement with their real worlds and cultures was indivisible from teaching toward any standardized notion of success. The lessons from the summer enrichment program show these teachers in action as they worked to stimulate student interest in reading and writing. For the lesson on *The Tempest*, Sternslaus reported that “The combined impact of the magnified pictures and the recording was highly effective in terms of getting students interested in the play....This lesson pointed up to the instructors the motivational value of carefully selected, stimulating materials.” (7). Meanwhile, for a lesson on *Man Alone*, where students studied the structure of academic prose by careful attention to the text, Sternslaus remarked that, among the instructors, “It was felt that the relatively high interest shown in this discussion was due to the choice of topic, i.e., alienation in modern society, and the fact that the students could readily identify with the problems set forth in the essay.” (10) For homework, “Students were asked to select a line from the essay or any other assigned reading in *Man Alone* with which they empathized and to locate or write a poem which

would serve as a compliment to the line” (11). Another lesson on poetry and DuBois’s *The Souls of Black Folk* listed “Objectives – c. Examine the folk-song as an expression of protest and as a tool for over-coming alienation” and the report described students comparing lyrics from Bob Dylan, folk songs, and Negro spirituals. The report concluded with a reminder that one of the pedagogy’s main goals was “generating excitement” (16).

Another early SEEK report, on an NEA-funded summer seminar from 1968 (Shaughnessy et al.), also highlights how creative writing teachers were at the helm of motivating newly-admitted students through a variety of reading and writing exercises designed to introduce them to Black and Puerto Rican studies as a way into their own communities, cultural heritages, and contemporary passions. In this summer seminar, instructors Mina Shaughnessy, Fred Byron, Toni Cade, Barbara Christian, David Henderson, and Addison Gayle were given significant freedom to design their own courses, then were each tasked with describing and reflecting on their assignments’ successes. In the instructors’ descriptions of and reflections on their courses, we can see how, although all the teachers were deeply invested in their students’ successes, the white teachers tended to teach toward school literacies, forwarding the discourses of lack that plagued the students, while teachers of color and creative writing teachers were more driven by introducing students to the unseen richness of their home cultures.

For example, Addison Gayle’s class centered on storytelling culture from African and African American history, and worked to root students’ writing and storytelling in a grand literary culture. He reflected that

we also made the point that many of the successful black writers have also excelled as orators, in the cases of Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, Eldridge Cleaver, Malcolm X, and Lester. And that as orators they were aware of the way words sounded to the ear and of the order in which a talk is organized. This knowledge, we maintained, was an essential element in the discovery of one’s own voice. (26)

In this section of the course, students focused on two main texts: *Look Out Whitey, Black Power's Gonna Get Your Mama* by Julius Lester, and *Tales from the Arabian Nights*, by Richard Burton. Gayle built up student confidence not by directing students to school culture but by turning them away from it to reconsider the home cultures and heritages they could draw upon. He wrote:

we held a lot of discussions. We had the students relate anecdotes, write them down and then compare them...We talked a great deal about the oral tradition in Africa. Of how African people were used to hearing news and stories instead of reading them. We read *The Arabian Nights* and talked a great deal about the literary devices employed in the rendering of these tales by Shahrazad...We also had the running assignment of interviewing our older relatives, our grandmothers and grandfathers, grand aunts and the like, so as to give us clues to the ways of our clan. We discussed at length the fantastic Odyssey of Alex Haley, the editor and compiler of the *Autobiography of Malcolm X*, in discovering and tracing his ancestors back to a small town in Africa. In general, we attempted to provide our aspiring writers with a base from which to work. And to buttress them with historical fact and tradition. (26-27)

In her reflection, Barbara Christian noted that she built her class around student interest in “a course that they would like,” leading to a “focus on Black literature, contemporary preoccupations, techniques of argument” (10), using texts like Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth*, Eldridge Cleaver’s *Soul on Ice*, and LeRoi Jones’s *Home* to study, at the students’ prompting, “Colonialism, Neo-Colonialism, and Liberation.” Beyond recommending newspapers to them, she wrote, “good libraries and bookstores were suggested to the students” (1).

Barbara Christian defended her choice of texts thus:

The students suffer from a lack of awareness of the importance and relevance of their own lives. The most frequent complaint in just about any beginning course is “I don’t have anything to write about.” And particularly for our students, who are mostly black and Puerto Rican and who therefore have seen little resembling their own lives in a written form, the problem is compounded. The books that I chose to work with in this course, then, were crucial. (17)

She continued on to discuss her section’s focus on integrated discussions of literature and music:

I had intended *Blues People* to be a counterpoint to *Invisible Man* since it is primarily a book-length essay rather than a novel. But the students saw a tie-up between Ellison's constant use of the blues in his novel and Jones' analysis of them. We got into the music much more than we did into the essay form. They all knew this music, some of them were ashamed of it, some proud but they were all surprised to see that it could be analyzed, discussed and related to a cultural history of a people. Along with the reading of the book, I brought records to class, dating back from Work Songs, Early Primitive Blues all the way to Contemporary Rhythm n blues and New Jazz. It is particularly noteworthy that most of the students were not aware of Contemporary Jazz and had not even heard of such classic names as Charlie Parker or John Coltrane... I left the summer session with a feeling that we had just gotten started, that the jump to more rigorous writing could be made in a few weeks, that some though not all of the students had begun to overcome their fear of writing. (18)

In Gayle and Christian's reflections we can see the similarities between their pedagogical strategies and the work of cultural rhetorics, as they drew students' attention to the rhetorical practices they had already, perhaps unknowingly, learned from their home cultures, or could root in their cultures' historical and current practices.

This approach differed from those of Gayle and Christian's white colleagues, Fred Byron and Mina Shaughnessy, who taught toward school literacies and seemed more attuned to what students lacked than the cultural resources they already held. For example, Shaughnessy's reflection relays that "The students in this class wanted to work on theme writing....I have often noticed, for example, that students usually 'talk' a better-organized paper than they write" (30), but doesn't make any note of the primacy of oral communication in Black cultures. And Fred Byron, teaching an all-male, almost all-European syllabus of Chekhov, Sartre, Akutagawa, Stevenson and plays from Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and Shakespeare, wrote that "My particular aim in the scope of this summer course was ...to provide these students with a broad (liberal arts), classical foundation or background of knowledge." He continued:

I am sure that I am not alone in having been told by students as they have sat in my English classes that they are sorely "lacking" or "deficient" or "weak" in background reading, especially the "classics," and so they are pitifully unable to make the necessary cross-references or to understand the allusions which continually barrage them in their

English and Social Science/Humanities courses. Hence, my two summer seminar courses (which I trust will be readily replicable) were, in a sense, attempts to supply this much-needed background material to students who feel inadequate. (6)

To his credit, Byron goes on to describe some very successful lessons, noting that students “began to radiate with confident knowledge and rewarding self-achievement” (6) after delving deeply into the character of Iago. But his focus on student deficit regarding European classics and student acculturation to white liberal arts study is a different approach than that of some of his Black colleagues, Cade, Christian, Henderson and Gayle, all of whom were writers active in the Black Arts Movement.

Taken together, these reflections show a program of writing teachers working collaboratively and reflectively to support experimental pedagogy that engaged students’ hearts as the way to their minds. All the teachers were deeply motivated by igniting student pleasure in learning—Shaughnessy concluded her reflection by remarking that, “I can only say that we seemed often to be talking about writing in a way that made sense to the students and a way that they seemed to enjoy” (34). But when we think back to the innovations and student successes under SEEK Basic Writing, it behooves us to remember and foreground the major pedagogical contributions—in what today we’d call multimodality, translingualism, remix theory, and cultural rhetorics—of teacher-practitioners active in the Black Arts Movement and foundational to Black Studies like Toni Cade, Barbara Christian, and David Henderson.

Indeed, rhetorical education under SEEK was transdisciplinary, culturally situated, and arts-heavy. This trend extended from the arts-heavy curricula of Writing, Speech, and Reading Courses into other areas of the program. Faculty remarked regularly on the need for pedagogies to build student confidence and the role that creativity, performance, and cultural relevance played in achieving that goal. Betty Popper wrote in May 1968 that “One really great advantage

of the [Pre-Bac Theatre] Workshop is the feeling of success which each member feels when they have performed before an audience....This sense of self-fulfillment is a major achievement for each one....Miss [Toni] Cade has been of invaluable service to the Workshop as a co-advisor in developing increased rapport with the students.” In another report, Martha Weisman wrote, “I do believe we contribute to enhancing the self-concept of our students and developing their creativity...Our hope is that SEEK students, with the confidence they gain in the basic courses, will continue to have opportunities to express their ideas and feelings in upper level courses as well.” Ironically, this comment was followed by a call for further research, highlighting the programmatic challenges associated with hiring teachers to teach and not to do research. Or, as another Speech report put it more bluntly, “We want to build egos, not destroy them” (“Department of Speech and Theater”).

Student affect was also invoked in departmental statements detailing how SEEK programs engaged with students’ dialect diversity. In a 1969 article for the *Educational Record* on “University Programs for Urban Black Youth,” Leslie Berger wrote that although faculty recognize “standard English” as “a skill needed for success in many fields of endeavor,” teaching it “as a second language” to Black Language speakers needs to be done sensitively and respectfully. “Before studying standard grammar,” Berger wrote, students “are taught to perceive how their own dialect functions as a legitimate language system. If it is handled sensitively by the teacher, this approach, which is more an attitudinal approach than a linguistic method, will not be interpreted as denigrating the students subculture, nor will it make them feel that the college is trying to ‘change’ them.” This sentiment was echoed by at a 1971 conference on Open Admissions, when one instructor, speaking of language change, argued that, “Without surrendering responsibility for exposing our students to the standard English which is required



for so many rewarding occupations in our society, I nevertheless see our first task as inspiring some interest in language, any language, and some confidence and fluency in using it” (Gibson).

In his essay, Berger continued by noting that:

In a recent speech contest at City College, in which most of the contestants were advanced liberal arts students, two of the eight finalists were in the SEEK Program, and a freshman SEEK student took second place. This finding, not at all surprising, exemplifies a fact too often overlooked when dealing with the so-called ‘disadvantaged.’ For while it is true that they have been handicapped in the acquisition of many basic educational tools, they are nevertheless frequently verbally adept and socially sophisticated when compared to their white middle class counterparts.

In this statement, Berger acknowledges how regard for student pleasure and comfort emerged in the context of prominent discourses of lack that circulated about the competence and potential of students admitted under Open Admissions, specifically into SEEK. In fact, many SEEK faculty and instructors were surprised at the acumen of their students, to the point that they wondered, as Barbara Christian did in her institutional history of the Pre-Bac Program, “Did anybody try to teach these persons anything in high school?” Yet this interest in student pleasure did not extend to the CCNY English department, whose examinations often seemed expressly hostile to student pleasure, passion, home language practices. Indeed, Kynard argues that “the professionalization of departments”—and the resulting adjustment in assessment priorities—was “part of the response to the 1960s social justice struggles” (16). One Proficiency Exam essay topic from 1972 went like this: “The world that college graduates will be entering requires writing and reading skills of a high order. I refer not to the ‘gift of gab’ but to those forms of communication that have been developed for the academic, political, and scientific professions..... They [laborers] will have to carry on the counseling, conferring, interviewing, proposing, reporting, reading, interpreting, and writing that most jobs are already requiring.” (“Essay Topic”)

By contrast, financial and existential threats to the program, as well as implementation of and increased reliance on standardized assessment, were associated with negative affect. In a

“Report on the Proficiency Examination” from Spring, 1972, the author wrote:

When writing about abstract topics, however, their thinking and writing deteriorates. This occurs partly, I think, because their feelings are not engaged, because instead of writing about matters that concern them deeply, they feel themselves forced to write about topics that do not interest them. As one student wrote at the end of an essay on job opportunities, “Fuck you and your concern for my writing!” The other reason for their decreased performance on analytical papers is a real distrust of abstractions and an inability to handle them. Although we seem to be getting fewer profoundly alienated students than in the past few years, our freshmen are still distrustful of institutions and abstractions and suspicious of mere “words.” (3)

They continued, “One of the emotionally loaded words on this campus is ‘standards,’ a term frequently invoked to support the status quo” (4). In the same document, another instructor wrote, “It is possible to be deeply depressed reading the Proficiency Examinations. The mere sight of 1200 Blue Books is in itself enough to cause the heart to fail, and the hundreds and hundreds of routine, pedestrian, drab papers written by students seemingly without creativity or spark/or even a real desire to have college kindle that spark—can be dispiriting” (17). In this comment, we can see student despair at the assessment regime spreading up to the teachers. As this regime extended through the 1970s, despair increased. At Medgar Evers, an 1974 article in the student paper *Adafi* called “Why are M.E.C. Faculty Leaving” concluded the loss was largely due to faculty “apathy...because of gradual deterioration in school services and subjective administration policies.” And in 1977, a SEEK Speech Department conference attendee painted the issue of faculty despair in systematic terms:

The most critical issue for the Conference to tackle, in my judgment, is the deteriorating morale of the Faculty—the feeling of impotency that pervades the campus. Many faculty members have given up. Some are taking out their frustrations on students...Many feel that CC is a ‘a sinking ship’ and that it is impossible to effect changes....Even though we were often frustrated, we still believed in our students. We still believed in the power of education. I never had to justify Speech as a discipline before our Academic Director and

Coordinators as the Speech Department had to before the College Administration in 1975 (when it was prepared to dissolve our Department). (Weisman 6-7)

Student, faculty, and administrator despair flowed through the archival documents as stakeholders contended with the tide of funding and institutional support moving out from SEEK and Open Admissions programs almost as soon as it had rolled in. In 1967, when SEEK was still a part-time, pre-baccalaureate program established by New York state legislators of color, SEEK administrators pleaded that “For the second consecutive year this Committee is forced urgently to request amendments to the State Budget with regard to the SEEK program of the City University of New York” (“For the second”). These budget woes continued after Open Admissions was implemented and as SEEK expanded into a full-time, degree-granting program within multiple CUNY campuses. In 1970, one student in Hunter College’s SEEK program wrote in the *SEEK Communicator*, a student paper, that “Each year the dormitory and the entire SEEK program face an annual budgetary crisis” (C14). Coverage of budget crises saturated writings from administrative reports to student publications, so that Mina Shaughnessy proclaimed in her 1976 speech to the Conference of the CUNY Association of Writing Supervisors, which congressman Andrew Young included in full in the Congressional record, that “Open Admissions at CUNY is being trimmed and tracked to death.”

Amidst this tension between people-led possibility and administrative defunding and doublespeak, individual teachers like June Jordan and Adrienne Rich worked to theorize and teach writing as a practice that would allow students to intervene in worlds that sought to control and limit their fates. Kynard roots what compositionists call the social turn, usually dated to the 1980s post-process movement, as pioneered in Black freedom movements for literacy education extending as far back as Black students’ protests at Fisk University in the 1920s. She defines the social turn thus:

(1) literate activities that deliberately challenge the social order; (2) stances and practices whereby literacy is developed as a collaborative and socially interactive process; (3) understandings and critiques of disciplinary, educational, and subject formations according to economic, social, and political circumstances. (*Vernacular* 33)

These orientations to writing are visible in the teaching materials of Jordan and Rich, both of whom taught in SEEK's Pre-Bac and then Basic Writing program. In her 1978 eulogy for Mina Shaughnessy, Rich attributed this social-constructivist understanding of language to Shaughnessy: "For many of us, teaching in SEEK was a form of political action, believing as we did, and as Mina did, that education was not only a means of access to power, but a form of power in itself: the power of expression, of language." This was echoed in one of Rich's Basic Writing syllabi, from 1971:

This class will start from the idea that language – the way we put words together – is a way of acting on reality and eventually gaining more control of one's life. The people in the class and their experiences will be the basic material of the course, about which we will be talking and writing. In writing, we will be trying to define the actual experiences we ourselves are having, and to make others more aware of our reality as we perceive it. The reading will consist of writings in which the authors or their characters have tried to understand and criticize their situations, and to change or move beyond them.

In this framing, we see a social constructivist view of language offered as part and parcel of a literature-heavy writing course with assignments in both creative and expository writing, indeed without strong lines drawn between genre types. In Rich's introduction to her course, identifying with characters in literary texts is offered as motivation for students to invest in their own writing processes, with characters offered as models for how students might change the world through writing. In a 1969 syllabus, Rich wrote that "I am concerned with the student's response to literature as a part of his life, rather than as a preparation for scholarship in an English Ph. D. program; and with his discovery that one writes because one needs to say things to others, that he himself has much to say, and that when writing effectively one is addressing a potential reader, not simply fulfilling an academic requirement" (2). Among Rich's papers from teaching Basic

Writing were assignment sheets and writing prompts asking students to, among other things, describe a place, describe a person, write various types of dialogues, write a story, write a comparison essay about two texts, write a neighborhood analysis, describe practices in students' own cultures, and compare students' experiences with their parents'—alongside handouts she authored about language vs. dialect vs. lingo, proofreading, structuring a story, writing dialogue, and revision practices. Among the texts that Rich assigned were books by Douglass, Malcolm X, Plato, LeRoi Jones, Sartre, Ibsen, Lawrence, Rothenberg, as well as a dictionary. One handout listed unassigned “Books to buy, beg, borrow, steal, or read standing-up in the bookstore” (Rich “Books to buy”).

June Jordan also expressed a social constructivist view of language, one more explicitly rooted in her experience as a Black woman. In a handwritten journal entry from 1969, Jordan wrote, “Now language is our medium of community.... For these reasons and for other reasons, reasons I hope our course of studies will articulate and analyze, language is always political. Always political...As a Black person and poet, I entertain an excruciating sense of language as political” (12-13). Perhaps because of her race and her racialized solidarity with her students, Jordan was more tuned in to the demeaning discourses that circulated against them and the linguistic tricks administrators and legislators used to evade the promises made with Open Admissions. Her challenges were offered early to her boss, WPA Shaughnessy, and later expanded into articles, essays, speeches, and open letters. Jordan was early aware of disciplinary discourses that would undermine her expertise, noting sardonically in 1967, “It seems the College entertained an experimental program resting on the oddity of having writers teach students how to write” (“From Tomorrow in English” 2). In 1970, Jordan penned an extended letter to Mina Shaughnessy highlighting her students' work investigating issues in their

communities in papers with titles like “Inferior Education in the Williamsburg Community”, “Self-Concept As A Determining Factor in Choice of Occupation: The Black Male Hustler,” “Inadequacy of Acceptable Food and Inadequate Systems of Food Supply in Harlem,” “Crime and the Community of Harlem,” and “Drug Addiction in the South Bronx” (1). In this letter, Jordan also inveighed against the testing regime Shaughnessy implemented for the English Department. She wrote:

I object to the value placed upon writings accomplished under stress...If you want to know what a student thinks, how a student can synthesize different ideas and aspects of material given to him, then so-called leniency should be the rule. Leniency: Extra time granted, as requested, consultation of books, as desired, and so forth....[C]onsider what our literary heritage would be, if writers were forced to submit their manuscripts, ready or not, on the day of the contracted deadline. I guess I am saying that the problem papers, for example, reveal more important data about a student, when the student is working hard, and trying for excellence, than any contrived examination-essay. (2)

In this passionate statement, Jordan draws on her own expertise as a writer working in the marketplace to fundamentally challenge the validity of timed, standardized tests. With its plea for “leniency,” this statement challenges the validity of the “standards” students at CUNY were held to, arguing that such standards are arbitrary, “stress[ful],” and invalid measures of students’ thinking and writing skills which bear no resemblance to the demands of real-world writing situations.

By 1976, as the defunding of Open Admissions deepened into crisis and full reversal, Jordan spoke more holistically about the role of standards and testing in the oppression of Black and brown students. In May 1976, she wrote,

We intend to present you with the reasons for our pledged resistance to CUNY Retrenchment, the ending of Open Admissions, and the imposition of tuition...we speak to you as Black educators....Now, the powerful say, ‘alas:’ The color of the students, the rhythms of the music, the speech patterns—these things have changed... Now, the powerful say, ‘alas:’ CUNY is no longer ‘a great university;’ it has become a ‘jungle’, a ‘carnival’, ‘an unmanageable problem.’ What do they mean?...We say that the judgement, the aim, and the consequences of this changed attitude towards the City

University, we say that the Kibbee Plan, Marshak's Retrenchment Proposals, we say that the impending end of Open Admissions, the impending establishment of tuition requirements are, one and all, racist events that we cannot countenance, nor in any wise [sic] accept. If you do not agree with this analysis then how can you explain the elimination of The Hostos and Medgar Evers Colleges as fully operating, distinct schools serving predominantly Black and Hispanic students?...How can you explain official estimates that the proposed transformation of the City University will result in a 65% decline in Black enrollment, come September, 1976: Sixty-five percent! [Yet this is] the City of New York that can spend more than two hundred million dollars on Yankee Stadium... ( "Statement by June Jordan" 1-4)

This statement has commonalities with Jordan's 1969 essay "Black Studies—Bringing Back the Person," which Ferguson discusses in his book. According to Ferguson, Jordan's careful efforts to clarify the racist effects of race-evasive funding decisions occurred in response to the move by state powers in the post-Civil Rights era to "construct racism as an increasingly illegible phenomenon" (58). By calling for "Black studies as life studies" (Jordan qtd. in Ferguson 109), Jordan works to rhetorically analyze the race-evasive discourses of standardized assessment and dispassionate financial policy decisions that profess equal access to all while materially damaging the possibilities for Black and brown lives.

The quoted statement above was written in May 1976. In August of that year, Jordan received a dismissal notice from the college which noted that "The College's budget for fiscal 1976-1977 compels us to discontinue the services of persons currently holding appointments. The reason your services are being discontinued is that all employees in the rank of Assistant Professor with less than four years of continuous full-time service are being discontinued" (Marshak). Jordan was then rehired in 1977, but lost her seniority (Malkoff). Meanwhile, in 1975 Adrienne Rich was granted a "Special Leave of Absence" through January 1976 with no loss of seniority (Marshak). These disparities between the institutional treatment of Rich and Jordan are reflective of the ways that funding cuts disproportionately affected women of color instructors, especially vulnerable because they were often adjunct instructors, off the tenure track, who had

been recently hired. For example, in 1970 the *New York Times* covered 10 SEEK lecturers' claim that they were "purged" from the SEEK program at CCNY for being disruptive, that is, for protesting with students (Farber). Meanwhile, a letter from the Black and Puerto Rican Faculty at John Jay College from 1972 informed the Personnel Review Committee that three-fourths of the adjunct faculty not rehired were women of color.

In the spirit of critical imagining, it is worthwhile to consider these firings and layoffs juxtaposed with the extremely rapid promotion of Mina Shaughnessy, a process carefully reconstructed by Sean Malloy. Malloy finds that "in the spring of 1967, Shaughnessy was hired as an untenured lecturer" in City College's new SEEK program; "before she even started work in September, Shaughnessy was promoted to be SEEK's English Coordinator" (106). Malloy continues:

As a City College lecturer with no PhD and almost no academic publications, Shaughnessy normally would have had little hope for a tenure track appointment. But in the chaos of open admissions, normal faculty politics were temporarily suspended. In December of 1969, Shaughnessy was promoted to assistant professor....The new English Chair Ted Gross noted that Shaughnessy's abilities had already "won her recognition, unusual for one of lecturer rank, throughout the college" (1969 3). Even for a promotion endorsement, Gross's personal admiration was remarkable: "A woman of rare and keen intelligence, poetic sensibilities, and humane warmth, she is an extraordinary teacher and a fine human being who has won the unstinting admiration of her students, her Seek staff, and her colleagues in this Department" (1969 2)....Gross named Shaughnessy as "an Assistant Chairman in charge of all composition work in the English Department" (Gross 1970). Shaughnessy now administered all City College composition courses and all writing placement tests for incoming students (Shaughnessy 1970). She quickly expanded her program and asserted her authority over it. (114-115)

Mina Shaughnessy was not the most qualified lecturer employed by the new SEEK program in 1967. Indeed, June Jordan was also an untenured lecturer in the program, but one who was a published writer and had already successfully run writing workshops for teens of color. It is important to consider Shaughnessy's rise in the context of other forces at work at CUNY, not all of which supported the equalizing mission of Open Admissions. That Shaughnessy's rise was



supported by Theodore “Ted” Gross is also noteworthy. In many ways, Gross—who left his position in the English department to become a Dean—was responsible for turning the public against Open Admissions. In 1978, the *Saturday Review* published a salacious excerpt of his forthcoming memoir, with the article titled “How to Kill A College: The Private Papers of a Campus Dean.” The article, in which Gross pays lip service to Open Admissions’ mission but insists it led to a lowering of standards and student quality, led to public outcry from students and a public repudiation by City College president Robert Marshak. To Gross’s description of “black, Puerto Rican, Asian, and varieties of ethnic white [students] playing radios, simulating sex, languidly moving back and forth to classes, dancing and singing, eating and studying and sleeping and drinking from soda cans or from beer bottles wrapped in brown paper bags” (Gross “How to” 78), Marshak wrote in a public letter:

I find it hard to believe that the Dean of Humanities would publish an article so deeply offensive to our students and faculty and so devoid of understanding of the progress made in the past few years at City College...I also question the tone, style, and insensitivity of your article. Your use of code words and stereotyping language about women and minorities constitutes a dangerous appeal to the forces of unreason and bigotry in our society. (“Open Letter”)

As we reconsider the pedagogies and personnel decisions that shaped the cultural rhetorics education of Basic Writing under SEEK, we must remember how the forces of white supremacy still constrained the teaching and promotion opportunities for writers and teachers of color on the faculty.

### Rap Literacies and Self-Definition in Student Rhetoric Under Open Admissions

In this educational context, the “power of the rap” emerged as a literacy practice driven by students’ empowered quests to explore and change their own lives. Back in the report on a

summer 1968 seminar for SEEK students, discussed above, Toni Cade described how she empowered students by asking them at the end of every course she taught how they would have designed such a class. I quote Cade quoting her student at length giving a disquisition we'd be wise to consider as an oral assessment of class content:

At least one hour was given over to students...The last meeting, for example, ran two hours over the usual end because one student needed "uninterrupted time to rap." He delivered non-stop machine gun style interrupting his interrupters on the third or fourth syllable a two and a half hour dissertation on at least 80% of themes we had touched on in the last two and a half month time and hit upon related ideas which cemented the themes together: the irrationality of logic, the impossibility of objectivity, the stultifying [sic] effects of the English language, the masking role of reason which makes mental gymnastics pass for reality, the defects in Black Nationalism, the holes in Fanon, the criminality of education, the paternalism of the Seek Program, the stupidity of students who kept raising their hands to challenge him as he spoke ("Do you think Paul McCartney and John Lennon ran all the way up to the mountains to bug the guru with 'hey Mahareeshi, you wrong baby'? No, they sat and listened.") point omega in one's consciousness, the square people versus the globular people, the evolution of the Black man, the foolishness of "things are getting better," the limited role of regular teachers as opposed to real mentors. After his treatise on the freedom and limits of learning, he offhandedly congratulated the instructor as the only one who had sense enough to listen and urged the others to realize that had they been sure of who they were, they would have felt no compulsion to argue audibly but would simply have checked him out and separated the brass from the gold quietly, privately, within their own "globe." Quite a wind-up. (11)

Rapping as an individually-motivated literacy practice for self-expression toward understanding and social change appeared prominently in student writing for campus publications specifically by and for the Black and Puerto Rican students of Open Admissions and SEEK.

The three student papers I studied, from Hunter, Queens College, and Medgar Evers, all used the language of "rap" to describe speech that was purposive and productive, whether describing letters to the editor, exchanges with faculty, or conversations between friends. "The Last Word," the SEEK paper at Queens College, proclaimed at the top of its letters to the editor page: "We say let: the People Rap!" ("Letter from the Editor.") These publications also demonstrated a tremendous interest in poetry among youth of color in New York, and

specifically articulated a BAM-aligned orientation to poetry that was about self-definition, community uplift, and political action, with all three papers, not to mention several yearbooks from these years, devoting significant space to student poetry. In the first issue of Hunter's *SEEK Communicator*, the Information Officer Joel Washington penned a "Philosophy and History – What we Are About—What We Intend to Be: Ourselves." He wrote, "seizing the opportunity to introduce ourselves, we have decided to rap a little about definition. We are about meaningful expression...We are about being a workshop...We are about culture" (7). In a later issue, a student named Yvonne Stafford penned an extended history of SEEK which rooted the program in the rise of Black Power, the rhetoric of Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael, the English translation of Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, the rise of Black Art as defined by LeRoi Jones, the music of James Brown, Aretha Franklin, Coltrane and others, and Black dance like the Jerk and the Boogaloo ("The Idea of Student Action in the SEEK Program"). Stafford's shift into institutional history is interesting given a poem she wrote in an earlier issue which asked, rhetorically, "If we wrote them a revolutionary poem/ Would they read it?" ("IF"). In fact, this paper devoted two pages in every issue to student poetry, and in one issue from 1970 the editors remarked:

So far we have received a great deal of poetic material. Because of the tremendous interest in poetry, we think that it would be a good idea if the COMMUNICATOR sponsored and invited some well-known poets of the Third World to Hunter College....The over-all purpose of such a meeting would be to discuss methods and ways to improve, and, moreover, create more effective poetry, and thus better poets. ("Editor's Note")

This wasn't an idle hope, since the papers from both Hunter and Queens described campus visits by BAM poets Amiri Baraka and Nikki Giovanni. Further, the personal archives of poets June Jordan and Audre Lorde contain evidence of the wide support for Black poetry in New York during this period, as both writers' files documented readings at schools and institutions across

New York City and held flyers and reports from organizations supporting Black writers in New York.

These student papers penned by newly admitted students of color contained creative writing, institutional histories, reviews of popular cultural events, and opinion and reporting on issues like international politics, socialism, campus administrative policies, and local and state education policy. In the Medgar Evers ADAFI, student writers chronicled the decay of school funding and morale as policy priorities shifted. In 1974, amidst the joy at receiving teacher certification capabilities, the paper noted that faculty were already leaving due to quote “apathy...because of gradual deterioration in school services and subjective administrative policies” (“Why are M.E.C. Faculty Leaving?”). Amidst coverage of underfunding and the state’s plan to begin charging tuition for the first time in CUNY’s history, the paper reprinted protest cries as headlines: “Don’t let them kill free tuition” and “Medgar Evers must not die twice.” Amid a 20% overall drop in applications to CUNY for the 1976-1977 school year, the paper published a special issue to be distributed within Brooklyn, countering the rumor that the school had closed and informing community members about new federal grant programs. But the paper’s archives abruptly end after 1978, suggesting the end of the story students had fought so hard to keep alive.

As we consider this history as informing hiphop history, it’s important to recognize the porous boundaries encouraged between schools and surrounding communities at this time. Perhaps one of the most important insights I gleaned from this research was the fact that New York City’s Black and brown communities were hotbeds of poetry writing, reading, and sharing during the late ‘60s and 1970s. BAM poets flowed into CUNY as guest speakers and as teachers, and BAM teachers working at CUNY were giving readings throughout the city and

indeed, the country, throughout this time. Amiri Baraka's books were not only assigned in classes; his poetry was reprinted in student papers and he visited Queens College in 1973 to give the keynote for the Black Symposium, the first event of a new African Studies and Research Institute ("Baraka Opens Black Symposium"). A year later, Nikki Giovanni came to give a reading on campus. ("Nikki Giovanni"). And in 1975, Medgar Evers hosted poetry readings by Florence Cronin and Oscar Rubin ("Poetry Readings"). Meanwhile, CUNY teachers, working writers themselves, were participating in artistic communities off-campus. June Jordan's work teaching poetry to young people in the 1960s is well known, and she delivered the Met Museum Centennial address in 1969 ("Africa/Harlem on My Mind").

The most wide-ranging portrait I received of Black poetic writing in New York in these years was from Audre Lorde's papers, since Lorde read and spoke widely around the city and also collected clippings documenting growing national attention to Black poets, all while she was a teacher at CCNY and then at Lehman College. Lorde's papers included references to numerous grassroots organizations for Black poets in the city, including the Harlem Writers' Guild, Black Poets Reading, the Black Academy of Arts and Letters, and the Langston Hughes Community Library and Cultural Center. Lorde also visited multiple area high schools, and judged the New York City High School Poetry Contest, hosted by the Parks and Recreation Cultural Affairs Administration, in 1969. Her papers held a clipping from a 1972 copy of the new publication *Essence Magazine* on "The Explosion of Black Poetry" which highlighted the role of identity and self-definition to the new Black poetry. The article quoted June Jordan as well as Lorde herself on this subject, with Jordan stating that "Poetry is the way I think and the way I remember and the way I understand or the way I express my confusion, bitterness and love," and Lorde adding, "I am Black, Woman, and Poet—in fact and outside the realm of choice. I can

choose only to be or not to be, and in various combinations of myself...The shortest statement of philosophy I have is my living, or the word ‘I.’” (66) In 1977, Colombia and the Frederick Douglass Creative Arts Center on 104<sup>th</sup> co-hosted a Cultural Festival in which Black poets were featured prominently. Organizer Quincy Troupe told the *New York Times* that

black poetry was “entering a new phase, evolving.” “It is drawing more on personal experience,” he explained, “becoming more personal and relating back to the African-American folk roots, especially in its use of idiomatic speech, colloquialisms and the vernacular. It is also drawing on the rhythms of jazz and blues...[It] has located itself in black American culture and, like a tree, it is branching out to communicate internationally with cultures around the world...We are being listened to now...The speech and language of the African-American has had an impact. (Fraser)

This widespread support for poetry in New York City in the 1970s is an essential, but strangely overlooked, element of the historical and cultural context of the emergence of hip-hop in New York. Open Admissions did not create this interest in poetry, but rather the curricular support for poetry—including poetry in classrooms, readings by poets, and funding for student publications—magnified the reach of BAM poetic culture in New York.

This magnification was a virtuous loop enriched by the deep transdisciplinary education offered to the tens of thousands of Black and brown students who streamed into CUNY during these years. My archival notes contain pages of innovative courses offered across CUNY campuses during these years that centered the experiences, history, cultures, and systemic oppressions of Black and brown people in the U.S. and globally. Black, Latino, and Caribbean literatures were included in the SEEK curriculum at CCNY as early as 1969, with remedial courses in Black Literature and Latin American Literature and Romance Languages Department courses in Puerto Rican Literature, Contemporary Spanish, and Spanish American Literature. In fact, these offerings echoed New Literacies understandings of language itself, with the Romance Languages Department stating in the Course Guide that “The emphasis will be on correct,

everyday contemporary Spanish, while the fact that language is a living thing and that the student member of a ghetto population has something to offer to the language in terms of expressions developed in his daily life will not be neglected” (“The City University of New York University Center Seek Program 1969-1970 Catalog” 17). Meanwhile, students in the Music Department could take a course called “History and Literature of Jazz” offering a “return to personalized expression in rediscovery of origins leading to ‘soul’, rock, etc. and experimentation and development of new techniques” (“Spring 1970 Course Descriptions”). During the early years of SEEK, these offerings were also supplemented with film screenings and theater workshops that similarly blended white institutional boundaries between literature, music, and visual art.

Hunter College’s Department of Black and Puerto Rican Studies also offered significant coursework in nonwhite literatures, a context which influenced students’ understanding of their own heritages of cultural rhetoric and which may have shaped early hiphop culture. In 1972-1973, the department’s courses included “African Literature,” “African-American Literature,” “Puerto Rican Literature” (Hunter College Bulletin 72-73). By 1975, offerings had expanded to include “Puerto Rican Folklore,” “The Image of the Puerto Rican National Identity in Its Literature,” and a course called “Language and Ethnic Identity” in which students would explore “The role of language in the perception of self and world. Basic notions about language and dialectical variations with field examples from dialects of English, Spanish and Swahili; particularly Black English and Puerto Rican Spanish.” Courses were also offered in Afro-American Humanism, African Literature, Afro-Caribbean Literature, Puerto Rican Literature, Spanish Language in Puerto Rico, and Autobiography As a Special Theme in Black Literature (“The Hunter College Bulletin 75/76”). However, as Ferguson has theorized extensively, demands for disciplinarity are contradictory and ironic. The growth of these courses in an ethnic

studies department meant that the English Department was insulated from change. In the 75-76 course catalog, only one writer of color was mentioned in any of the class descriptions—Ralph Ellison, included in a description for “Later Twentieth Century American Prose” (“The Hunter College Bulletin 75/76”).

Of course, coursework centering on the Black and brown experience was most extensive at Medgar Evers College, founded in 1971 to serve Brooklyn’s populations of color. By contrast to the English Department at Hunter and multiple History, English, and Economics Departments at CUNY, all departments at M.E.C. highlighted and centered the work of Black and brown people. For example, an English course from the first year of the school’s operation, race-neutrally named “Contemporary American Fiction,” “emphasiz[ed] the contributions of such writers as Ellison, Baldwin, Attaway, Himes, Williams, Demby, Kelly, Jones, and Brown.” (“The Hunter College Bulletin 75/76” 45). That same year, students in the Music Department could take “Afro-American Music,” a “Survey of Afro-American music from its background in Africa to the present, with special emphasis on interrelationship of music and culture and the evolution of protest in music” (48), as well as “History and Literature of Jazz,” a “Critical examination of the history and literature of jazz from its roots in the folksongs of black Americans to the present times.” The Economics Department offered courses like “Economics of Poverty and Racism” and “Economic Development of the Inner City.” In Sociology, courses included ““Protest Movements and Counter-Culture,” “Reform and Revolutionary Movements,” and “Community Organizations.”

As a new school, Medgar Evers’s course offerings expanded quickly. The following year, new courses included “The Folk Tradition in Afro-American Literature,” with a description noting that “Special attention will be given to collecting folklore in Central Brooklyn” (MEC



Bulletin 1973/74 62). Strangely, however, that year 's "Survey of African-American Literature I and II" was not required of English majors, but "Survey of American Lit I" was required, with its "special attention to...Hawthorne, Poe, Melville, Emerson, and Thoreau" (62). That year, the Spanish Department added Introduction to Hispanic Literature I and II, Commercial Spanish (67), Contemporary Literature of the Spanish Caribbean, Puerto Rican Literature, Intro to Spanish-American Literature I and II, Contemporary Spanish-American Novel, Don Quijote, and a new Swahili Department opened its doors. In the Ethnic Studies department, students could take a course called "Black Philosophy." In the Speech Department, "Fundamentals of Speech" offered an "Analysis of the elements of speeches by Frederick Douglass, Marcus Garvey, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and other such famous personages" (81), and "The Black Woman Speaks" promised "Oral interpretation of the poetry of Gwendolyn Brooks, Margaret Walker, Sonia Sanchez, Mari Evans, Nikki Giovanni, and practice in analysis to determine imagery, thought, and mood" (81).

The teachings of these courses are all reflected in the social analysis and transnational rhythms, stories, and references of hiphop. Of course, hiphop also includes musical arts that depend on technical skill in voice control and media production, as well as business and finance acumen. Medgar Evers had courses in these areas as well. In the 1974-75 school year, the Media department offered a course in "Communications Technology Systems" covering "advanced techniques in video and audio taping and editing" (104). In a "Radio Production" course, "the student will learn the use and function of equipment and microphone techniques, research techniques, script writing, talent selection, contracts, copyright procedure, sound effects, performing, station management, logging traffic, and program continuity. Participation at the local radio station will be required in addition to activities at the University's studios" (105). In

the Music department, the “Voice” class covered “Fundamentals of breath control, posture, tone production, and articulation. Group instruction for non-majors” (108). And the following year, offerings in both departments were extended.

Beyond course offerings, newly admitted Black and Caribbean students at multiple CUNY campuses were involved in numerous clubs that reflected the influence of the Black Arts Movement and rising ethnic solidarity throughout the city, the country, and the globe. At Bronx Community College, these clubs included ethnic solidarity groups, like the Simba club for African and African-American “political, historical, and social movements,” but students of color also joined existing clubs like the Debate Society and the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (*Genesis* 1967). By 1976, the student club pages in the B.C.C. yearbook had expanded to encompass a Caribbean Club, Dominican Club, Film Workshop, WBCC Radio, Music Club, Latinos Unidos Club, Yoga Club, the Committee Against Racism, Gay Integrated Group, and the Haitian Club, as well as a Black Student Union and a Caribbean Student Union (*Going Places* 1976).

And these clubs had a dope soundtrack to bounce to. The 1971 B.C.C. yearbook included a photo of Black and white students dancing at a “Record Hop” (150). In 1977, Mitchie’s Record Shack at 803 Nostrand took out an ad in the Medgar Evers ADAFI advertising its “Reggae/ Calypso/ Soul Old and New Hit Records” and its position as the “Sponsor of Miss Adafi Contest” (“Mitchie’s Record Shack”). And in 1978, M.E.C. students placed second in the New York Reggae Festival Song Competition, singing an original song about Jamaican women’s role building the modern state of Jamaica (“Everites Place 2<sup>nd</sup> in Reggae Contest”). These extracurricular attractions built on the growing attention to pan-African art forms circulating through New York City and being taught in CUNY classrooms across the boroughs.

These archival materials highlight the ways that interdisciplinary education, with a focus on student-driven Black and Puerto Rican studies, brought what was then called Third World cultural knowledge into the predominantly white academy, charging a re-orientation to rhetoric, knowledge, and the role of the academy in enriching communities outside its walls. When we think of hip-hop's emergence in mid-to-late 1970s New York, we must remember the decade beforehand when tens of thousands of students were educated in Black, Caribbean, African, and Latin American studies; free books and theater tickets were distributed by SEEK; the academy directed newly admitted students to their home bookstores and theater workshops; a large network of community literacy and poetry organizations received city, state, and national funding and attention; students received education in media production in TV, radio, and sound engineering; and wide swaths of students at the college and high school level brought the lessons of the Black Arts Movement into their lives, using first-person poetry, fiction, and essays to define themselves in the context of their cultures, their communities, and their plans to change the world. As hip-hop embraced the commodity market at the beginning of the 1980s, this move must be situated in the rapid defunding of social services for Black and brown young people in New York, including the violent shuttering of access to CUNY and its rich offerings of culturally relevant and student-driven coursework, visiting artists and lecturers, and student media outlets.

## CHAPTER 4

### A Rhetorical Classroom: Twenty College Students Explain Why Hip-hop Composition Appeals to Them

I start to think, and then I sink  
Into the paper, like I was ink.  
When I'm writing I'm trapped in between the lines.  
I escape when I finish the rhyme.

- Rakim, "I Know You Got Soul"

"With the Politics of Pleasure I begin to argue that  
what's missing is language, and I really wanted to  
begin to articulate language and introduce pleasure  
as a feminist priority for Black women."

- Joan Morgan (qtd. in Crosley)

This chapter has been difficult to write. As I sit here, surrounded by drafts that date back to the fall of 2013, I am in mind of a quotation DJ Eric Sadler gave Tricia Rose about the difficult work of composing digital samples into a piece of music: "It's like someone throwing rice at you. You have to grab every little piece and put it in the right place like a puzzle" (80). As I've worked to synthesize years of research, literature review, and twenty students' discussions of themselves as writers and their writing and research processes, it seems fitting that I have at times felt myself trapped in my own writing process, struggling to make this chapter work. I think of one of the interviews I held with Ruth, a student of Nana's who came in to my shared basement office, exhausted during finals period, and proceeded to talk with me, rapid-fire, for an hour. Passionate and driven, Ruth had felt challenged and empowered in Nana's class to find herself as a writer and build connections between hip-hop culture—a culture she'd grown up with as a Black kid in New York, but now sometimes felt alienated from—ultimately pursuing an exciting research project about hip-hop in the recent Egyptian uprising, which connected to her

major in International Relations. At one point, Ruth turned the conversation to me and my research. “For somebody like me, who’s an undergrad,” she told me, “people in Master’s or PhD programs are amazing...What does that feel like?”

“Feels crazy, kind of,” I said, answering honestly. I explained that “I’m not someone that thinks of myself as very organized, but I feel like I always am having to catch up, you know like I need to get more organized since my life is getting more complicated.” I told her about a moment I’d shared with her teacher, Nana, the previous fall:

We had a meeting and I sat down and I like took out all my files and laid them out and here’s the consent form your students are gonna sign – he’s like whoa, you’re so organized and I was like, what, wow, thank you, I didn’t know where that – I guess I am like, it – I think it just you know you learn the skills that you need for the stage that you’re at.

We continued talking, with Ruth sharing her fears and me trying to encourage her, trying to continue the work of teaching this thing called process, which is so much bigger than a single paper or class.

Ruth: That’s encouraging, cause I’m like sitting here frightened about the future.

Tessa: Yeah. It’s like you don’t have to write a dissertation tomorrow, you know, you just have to write the thing that you have to write now.

Ruth: I guess I’m looking for like this formula that everybody, I’m like what’s the formula? You know, how do you get to be that ambitious? How do you get to like – and I guess it’s just, you learn as you go.

Tessa: Yeah, I think if you just keep setting goals and try to just keep up with yourself, you know?

Ruth: Yes, you’re right, you’re right.

Tessa: That’s how it’s been for me at least, you know, you just kinda – you keep applying for things and they’re always a little hard – you know I think if you reach – if you set good goals, the next thing is always a little out of your comfort zone and then you kind of have to catch up to it, you know?

Ruth: Yeah, that's really interesting. That's actually funny because one of the things that I realize in my life is that I haven't really accomplished a lot, I, I have, but like I don't think I really earned a lot, so sometimes I doubt my own abilities, like sometimes opportunities especially from where I come from, they're presented to you and you do have to compete for it just a little bit, but you know you don't have to compete for it that much, so you get put into positions you do things, but I don't know if I really had the skills to do well with those, so I always question my writing, question everything, my own abilities which is why you know teacher, their input means a lot to me just because I'm like okay, you're now telling me, you're confirming to me that I can do this and so I guess moving forward like that's like – I love talking to professors, reviews on my papers, critique, all that works because that lets me know kinda where I'm at in my abilities, so, wow. Thank you for that, I'm sorry I'm really talking.

This exchange stands out to me because it highlights how much *feeling* students bring with them into the writing classroom—their previous successes and failures, their sense of worth or worthlessness, their years of hard work—as well as the ways that students' feelings themselves are ideological, as ideological scripts teach young people how to understand their achievements, their desires, and their values. In Ruth's comments we see how she has internalized conservative scripts that say that Black urban youth actually have it easier than other young people, leading Ruth to question her accomplishments and her value. As I considered the affective commentary made by students in the interviews I analyze in this chapter, I became increasingly aware of the interrelationship between their feelings and their ideologies, the way feelings reflected ideologies, and how questioning ideologies in class can lead actual feelings to change.

Later on in the interview, Ruth described in more detail how her childhood experiences shaped her feelings about education, hip-hop, and upward mobility. She told me,

I'm from the Bronx, New York. There we go. I was born in Harlem, but I'm from the Bronx. I say it that like we slept there but we went to school and our activities and all our programs were in Manhattan... My mom, you know, my grandma, she didn't live in the best neighborhood and that's where we were born and we lived from time to time, but I think my mom, she didn't – she always wanted us to step out of that area and so you know she sent my brother to a good boarding school in Massachusetts and my sister went to Missouri though but I went to school downtown for most of the time and so that definitely changes my view of like Black culture and hip-hop as well, you know, and it's funny cause while I was taking this class I thought about it, I was like you know I

listened to a certain hiphop that I associate with my childhood, but then it stops, and I remember I stopped going to those programs in Harlem where you would play the music or you hear the music in those neighborhoods and that was a part of my association with those songs and then eventually I totally changed styles of music and so I love those old songs that I associate with my childhood and before that, but after that I don't really listen to hiphop anymore, so, I'm sorry, I am from the Bronx, New York, oh gosh, please stop me, please.

Of course, I didn't. I asked her to go on describing how her identity and her background shaped her experience of Nana's class. She said,

I don't know if this answers the question, I'm hoping it is but I know that while I listen to Kendrick Lamar's album and you know listening and talk about social change, I was really happy to hear him take like a total different side of the argument as far as the relations between Black people— and this probably comes from my upbringing and my mom, you know, she was not – she's not – I don't wanna say she's not a African American supporter, but she's always on the side of the argument you know take responsibility and that's kind of how I've grown up and you know I debate with my mom back and forth cause I think like she's a little too conservative, like ma you have to acknowledge some of the systems of oppression too--and this is something she always does is like oh, those – that person did this, that person all right they're not doing this, well I go mom there're also other reasons behind why certain things are you know social economics you know it's different things, but I will say this, I did appreciate you know listening to artists who took a different stance, like took that responsibility stance.

In these comments, Ruth describes appreciating Kendrick Lamar's demand for personal responsibility from the Black community and the fact that Nana didn't take an explicit stance around Black social politics in class, unlike other teachers she'd had in college.

Thus, in this chapter we see how the market ideologies students have internalized powerfully shape their relationships and choices around their engagement with their writing class, and I explore how hiphop intervened in students' understandings of college as a marketplace into which they invest what meager resources they have available—time, energy, interest—in hopes of various returns—grades, jobs, knowledge. As I recursively coded transcripts of twenty student interviews, trying to make theory out of them, a line from a Drake song started playing on repeat in my head: “I just wanna be, I just wanna be successful”

(Graham), and I find myself wondering how hip-hop's appeals to young people, myself included, manifest in the context of austerity and diminishing possibilities for my generation. Like Ruth, I am also "sitting here frightened about the future," wanting to secure something for myself, learning that security for myself means security for my peers, for young people, for my students who are my peers and my generation. I am reminded of Ralph Cintron's interpretation, in *Angels' Town*, of a young boy's fascination with baseball and cars in the context of his own marginalization as a Latino child of immigrants, labeled with a learning disability, living on the outskirts of Chicago. Of the posters that cover the boy's wall, Cintron writes:

These little stories and facts are the close-ups that begin to fill the emptiness of the consumer with an identification, a relationship with the exotically distant.... Out of this want, an entire economy is manufactured in which the exotically distant is peeled of its abstraction so that it can begin to inhabit intimately the very life of the consumer... The marketing of mass images [evoke] and depend on an "empty" consumer "wanting" identification with something almost totally out of reach... The emptiness that is inside all of us always chooses how it desires to be filled and with whom and what. (120-121)

Cintron's comments gesture towards the ways that capitalism creates desires and then offers to fill them with commodities. As a contradictory commodity product that can both "retain the mass-mediated spotlight on the cultural stage and at the same time function as a voice of social critique and criticism" (Rose 101), hip-hop texts become a cultural space where students can negotiate the way ideologies shape their lives on the level of the affective. In the student interviews I discuss in this chapter, we hear students working to fit their writing classes into their efforts to be successful, making judgments about writing courses' worth, making decisions about how much energy, time, and effort to invest in the study of writing—all in their efforts, ultimately, to be successful in a world where success is hypervisible yet always seemingly out of reach.



In this chapter I feel the researcher's burden of proving to you that this hip-hop composition pedagogy actually *\*works\**—that students really did respond to hip-hop in their required writing classes with passion, pleasure, attention, investment, and a willingness to confront difficult truths—and that at the end of the semester they found themselves to be more patient readers, researchers, and writers, willing to dig deeply and compose carefully, trying to write themselves into difficult conversations about race, gender, class, prejudice, culture, language and literacy many of them had studiously and up to this moment learned to avoid. In this chapter I also confront uncomfortable phenomena that emerged from my data, in particular the persistence of the white habitus in Nana's and my classrooms and the ways both whiteness and antiblackness continually circulated unnamed. Thus, this chapter charts my growth as a researcher and teacher, as I expanded my methodology in order to account for my own blind spots in both roles. In so doing, this chapter confronts one of the most central challenges of this dissertation, its efforts to critique whiteness and colorblindness, concepts defined by their very evasiveness and resistance to being named, as I attempt to locate these evasions in my classrooms and in our field. How do you critique a pedagogical movement for what it doesn't say? How do you code classroom data for an evasion? The recursive research, writing, and editing practice that produced this chapter challenged me to locate whiteness and colorblindness not just in composition and rhetoric but in my own teaching and research design. This process has challenged me to take a more explicitly political stance in my future teaching, and to clarify for my students how the best research in the field highlights language's power to exclude, criminalize, and demean, as well as empowers all people to use language to understand, uplift, and resist.

More than anything, my most challenging and loftiest goal in this chapter has been to represent the richness of the testimonies 20 students gave me in their exit interviews, conversations in which students shared their insecurities and strengths as writers, their dreams for their educations and futures, their frustrations and pleasures in previous classrooms, their relationships with print and digital literacies and communication technologies, their evolving relationships with hip-hop and the contemporary media landscape, and their efforts to understand and engage with difference, violence, and complacency on their campus and in the world.

In the following pages, I offer hip-hop composition pedagogy as a critical intervention into the Writing About Writing pedagogy designed by Elizabeth Wardle and Douglas Downs. While I agree in many respects with the WAW pedagogy's efforts to teach the content of writing studies to our freshman and other undergraduate students, in this chapter I argue that WAW's narrow portrait of our field, our conception of writing, and our sense of those qualified to teach writing, is shaped by colorblind discourses that attempt to appeal to the false ideological neutrality of the corporatizing university. In particular, I extend Min-Zhan Lu's critique of Mina Shaughnessy's "linguistic innocence" to WAW, drawing parallels between the university and our field's mobilization of Shaughnessy in the '70s and current valorizations of WAW. Drawing on theories of whiteness and colorblindness, I offer a critique of WAW that demonstrates how WAW depoliticizes research in our field around language diversity, translingualism, and writing expertise. I argue that WAW's erasure of difference and of the scholarship of people of color on which its theory is based offers a colorblind narrative for the present moment which in many ways parallels the "integrationist narrative" offered by Mina Shaughnessy's *Errors & Expectations* (Kynard 150). In both cases, mobilizations of WAW and Shaughnessy's work occurred and occur in the context of national policy regimes designed to reverse the advances of

students of color attained over the previous decade, while providing rhetorical cover for that move. As I share 20 interviews with students from required freshman and sophomore writing courses that engaged hip-hop texts, taught by myself and Nana, a Black man and an MFA student in fiction at my same institution, I argue that hip-hop in the composition classroom enlarges the conceptions of writing and writing expertise we offer our students in ways that engage students' interest in literacy and the writing process, build their confidence, and empower them to articulate and confront social injustice through language.

### Whiteness, Colorblindness, and Linguistic Innocence in the Writing About Writing Movement

My efforts to understand what hip-hop is doing in writing classrooms is indelibly shaped by my experiences and my location, as I discuss in chapter 2. Part of that location involved my institutional context at Syracuse, including the parameters inside which instructors were asked to teach the required freshman-sophomore writing sequence, WRT 105 and 205. When I taught the section of WRT 105 that is included in this study, I was required to use the first edition of Doug Downs and Elizabeth Wardle's introduction to Writing Studies reader *Writing About Writing*, a text and a movement which are quickly gaining traction in composition and rhetoric. This context shaped my study and pushed me to consider how centering hip-hop in composition education works with and against the Writing About Writing movement. As I discuss in this chapter, I see hip-hop composition pedagogy simultaneously and paradoxically working both with and against the WAW movement. As I discuss below, hip-hop composition pedagogy has the potential to reinforce many of the goals of WAW, including the focus on teaching composition and rhetoric's content to freshman writing and undergraduate students so that they become more reflective and flexible writers. At the same time, using hip-hop texts that foregrounded literacy

alongside the WAW reader quickly foregrounded the linguistic innocence of the textbook, as I discuss below.

Since the publication of their “Teaching About Writing, Righting Misconceptions” (2007), Douglas Downs and Elizabeth Wardle’s “Writing About Writing” approach to teaching first year composition has taken hold in university writing programs across the country, and its influence seems poised to expand. Their approach, which advocates shifting FYC into an “Intro to writing studies” model, builds on our field’s longstanding insistence that, contrary to popular misconceptions of our work, “college writing” does not exist “as a set of basic, fundamental skills that will apply in other college courses and in business and public spheres after college” (“Teaching” 553). Drawing on our hard-won disciplinary expertise, Downs and Wardle propose an introductory writing course whose content is writing studies. They argue persuasively that, by fostering an awareness of writing as a situated practice whose conventions vary with context, and encouraging students to inquire into their own writing practices through research and reflection, an Intro to writing studies model has the potential to do more for students’ long-term writing success than a model that teaches some correct “academic discourse” which proves unsuited for students’ work outside the humanities.

In designing their curriculum, and compiling the contents of their textbook, Downs and Wardle make decisions about what topics constitute writing studies. These subjects are variously described as “writing, rhetoric, language, and literacy” (“Teaching” 554), and “writers, writing processes, discourse, textuality, and literacy” (Downs 1). In part, the choice to focus on questions of literacy, discourse, and genre seems focused on fitting the research of composition and rhetoric to the needs of our freshmen students. Downs and Wardle make a persuasive case that, beyond uniting our teaching practice with the field’s theory—our longtime insistence that

“writing cannot be taught independent of content,” (“Teaching” 559) and thus FYC courses cannot be about just anything—having freshman writers study writing studies is both in our own interest and the interests of our students’ writing. Wardle insists that asking students to engage with disciplinary texts “nearly requires students to reflect on their own writing practices and the writing practices in courses across the academy,” therefore facilitating the transfer of writing knowledge and awareness to their work in other fields (785).

How Downs and Wardle define composition and rhetoric is related to their institutional goals for what they call writing studies: namely, its recognition by the university as a unique field of study with its own experts, teachers, course content, and, presumably, departmental status. Part of Downs and Wardle’s defense of WAW is that it serves as an ambassador for the field of study in the wider university. They write that “the [new FYC] course has the added benefit of educating first-year students, adjuncts, and graduate students about the existence and content of the writing studies field” (“Teaching” 578). This bid for departmental status emerges at a particular point in history, in the context of austerity’s cuts to budgets and resources across educational spheres and the implicit and explicit demands that educators posit the values of their pedagogies in terms of students’ future careers (Scott and Welsh 10-11). Although Downs and Wardle insisted in 2013 “that writing-about-writing pedagogies are [not] an attempt to seek status *for the sake of status*, [but rather seek] status toward the end of better writing instruction” (“Revisiting”), the historically materialist analytic I engage throughout this dissertation, including my discussion of theories of interest convergence and divergence in chapter 3, asks us to consider pedagogical movements outside of their originators’ intentions and rather ask why certain pedagogies become mobilized in certain moments. In his close study of the institutional analysis offered by Elizabeth Wardle in one article, Robert Samuels suggests that she

insufficiently attends to “social power” as a category of rhetorical analysis alongside pathos, logos, and ethos (A5). This oversight is necessary but must remain hidden, as the movement projects ideological neutrality and the supreme value of students’ learning in the context of Writing Studies’ bid for disciplinarity. As Samuels puts it, WAW’s appeals to the “dominant university paradigm” is inherent in WAW’s implicit belief “that by focusing on a social science research agenda through the use of the concepts of transfer, genre, and metacognition, writing programs will enhance their disciplinary prestige, and this will bring more resources and tenure-track positions” (Samuels A3).

In his 2015 CCCC’s Chair’s address, Adam Banks identifies this debate over the soul and mission of composition and rhetoric as a question of respectability, a question of whether our field will norm itself to those in power or retain our identity and history in service to the underserved. He preaches:

I want us to take off our own respectability politics for a minute and realize that no matter how much we push our students to dismiss their home languages for some assimilated standardized version, respectability will not save them, or us....I want us to realize that all our citations of high theory will not save us, and neither will trying to show that we are as rigorous and as serious as our literary colleagues save us. And I want us to realize that even the respectability of bigger budgets will not save us. As real as our struggles are, we act like being broke is new. We always been underfunded. We always been figuring it out as we go. We always been dismissed, disregarded, disrespected. But we served anyhow. We took care of our students anyhow. We transformed one discipline and created our own anyhow. And it was women who did that work. It was people of color who did that work. It was queer folk who did that work. It was first-generation students in New York City and across the country demanding open admissions who did that work. It was people of all backgrounds teaching four and five courses a semester, contingent and full-time and sometimes even more time, who did that work for us, building and running programs while they taught and theorized. (271)

In this excerpt and in the rest of his speech, which mobilizes “funk” as a guiding principle for composition and rhetoric’s historical roots in the messiness of intellectual life and discursive production—and which had audience members literally standing in the air and crowing

“Hallelujah!” at Dr. Banks’s impassioned and compelling delivery—the medium is the message, as Banks employs Black discourse practices from his formal repetition down to his BL syntax to model what he means when he defends nonwhite English practices and roots compositionists’ commitment to access in our institutional history. Like Samuels, Banks sees movements in our field jostling for institutional recognition and making moves which threaten to dismiss not just our core values, but many of our most marginalized and most important students, teachers, and theorists in the process. In his analysis, which reps for cultural rhetorics in its very copulas, Banks links the present moment’s bid for recognition in the context of austerity to compositionists’ work fifty years ago teaching deserving and underserved students under Open Admissions.

I see the contemporary bid for recognition and respectability Banks discusses embodied in the Writing About Writing movement. In particular, I argue that the movement’s bid for increased institutional recognition for a particular vision of Writing Studies is deeply colorblind, a contemporary manifestation of the same linguistic innocence Min-Zhan Lu critiqued in Mina Shaughnessy’s work of the 1970s and saw reappearing in the culture wars of the 1990s. Lu defines linguistic innocence as a “view of language as a politically innocent vehicle of meaning” which imagines that meaning exists prior to language, so that that language doesn’t make choices that impact meaning but rather expresses a preexisting meaning (772). Drawing on “Marxist and poststructuralist theories of language” which see “language as a site of struggle among competing discourses,” Lu reminds us that, “because different discourses do not enjoy equal political power in current-day America, decisions on how to respond to such dissonance [between competing discourses] are never politically innocent” (773). Lu asserts that teaching students to negotiate this dissonance is part of a writing teacher’s job and indeed was one of the

goals Shaughnessy herself set for her and her colleagues' basic writing pedagogy at CUNY.

I see linguistic innocence in the Writing About Writing movement's erasure of difference and power in the interest of generalizability, even as the theories Downs and Wardle's writings engage—on literacy as situated practice, genre as rhetorical response to regularity, discourse as shaped within communities—deeply engage the hybridity of language and the power of language to gate keep and exclude. Consider this comment from the introduction to the first edition of Downs and Wardle's *Writing About Writing* reader, which frames WAW as poised to take advantage of students' "multiple literacies." They write:

[College] students are expert language users with multiple literacies: They are experienced student writers, and they're engaged with many other discourses as well—blogging, texting, instant messaging, posting to social networking sites like Facebook and YouTube.... *Writing About Writing* asks students to work from their own experience to consider how writing works, who they are as writers, and how they use (and don't use) writing. (Writing About Writing v)

This paragraph's nod to "multiple literacies" reflects the book's colorblind approach to literacy, which locates composition students' multiple literacies in work, school, and technological literacies but resists recognizing, in any major way, multiple literacies across actual languages, and further marginalizes the scholars in our field researching, teaching and publishing about language users negotiating difference in Black Language, Chicano English, borderland rhetorics, global englishes, and code-meshing (Young et al, Scenters-Zapico, Horner et al). In fact, neither the first nor second edition of the WAW reader include any texts which are themselves codemeshed or written in nonstandard academic English or which even study codemeshed or nonstandard English writing practices—scholarship which is amply reflected in our field (Canagarajah "Literacy", Horner et al, Young et al). The first edition of WAW even includes writing by Junot Diaz, renowned for the vibrant Dominican Spanglish prose of his Pulitzer-



winning *The Brief, Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, which is written completely in Standard English.

WAW's focus on inviting students to interrogate their own literacy practices is supported across writing, research, and literacy studies. However, much of that research is by scholars of color and specifically acknowledges the identities of non-white students; meanwhile, the WAW movement does not acknowledge difference in student identity, language practices, or experiences of structural power and inequality. Research from across composition, rhetoric, and literacy studies suggests that students learn best in the writing classroom when their complete identities, including but not limited to their linguistic identities, are welcomed into the room. In their survey of this literature, Arnetha Ball and Pamela Ellis wonder explicitly whether "supporting and affirming students' identities of themselves as writers [leads] to improved writing for students from diverse backgrounds" (499). Indeed, the successes Downs and Wardle report in their own pilot study of WAW, especially in building students' "self-awareness about writing and improved reading skills" ("First Year Writing" 572), is consistent with Ball and Ellis's sense, glossing Roz Ivanic, that "teachers who want to shape students' identities as writers can do so by drawing on students' own experiences—by relating writing to students' personal and/or cultural experiences" (505). Research also suggests that students' identities are involved when they digest knowledge so that it can be transferred to future situations. Rebecca Nowacek suggests that transfer is a "complex rhetorical act" (3) and that students call upon their identities and ways of knowing when they transfer knowledge between situations. She writes, "As individuals make connections among various disciplinary and social contexts, the identities associated with each context prove a significant avenue of connection" (24). These theories are also supported by my findings, in which students brought their identities as language users,

technology users, athletes, artists, family members, intellectuals, and future workers into their evolving understandings of literacy and language.

Downs and Wardle's 2013 article responds to critiques of their pedagogy by expanding the possibilities for their vision, a response I discuss more thoroughly in the following chapter ("Revisiting"). Downs and Wardle reiterate their commitment to pedagogies that introduce all students in composition courses to the research of our field, asking, "What are our field's threshold concepts, and where and when (and how) should they be taught?" This question anticipated Wardle's next project, a co-edited volume with Linda Adler-Kassner: *Naming What We Know*, an effort to define the central concepts of our field, presumably so they can be taught in a curriculum that centers writing studies. Adler-Kassner and Wardle draw on the concept of "threshold concepts" from Jan H.F. Meyer and Ray Land, identifying their four central characteristics. Each of the four characteristics of threshold concepts is defined in terms of their transformational effects on the learner, the learner's identity, and the learner's worldview. "Threshold concepts" delineate difficult, often counterintuitive concepts whose incorporation by learners mark the "thresholds" between being inside and outside the discourse community of a discipline. I quote:

- Learning them is generally transformative, involving "an ontological as well as a conceptual shift...becoming a part of who we are, how we see, and how we feel" (Cousins 2006)
- Once understood, they are often irreversible and the learner is unlikely to forget them.
- They are integrative, demonstrating how phenomena are related, and helping learners make connections.
- They tend to involve forms of troublesome knowledge, what Perkins refers to as knowledge that is 'alien' or counterintuitive (qtd. in Meyer and Land). (Adler-Kassner and Wardle 2)

Geared toward a disciplinary audience, *Naming What We Know* enlists dozens of highly regarded experts in our field to explain our disciplinary knowledge. In brief, lucid sections, the book

explains that writing is a technology which produces knowledge, that the meanings of words and genres are intertextual, that the circulation of genres define discourse communities and express values and identities, that writing is a social and continual process for all writers, and that writing is an embodied and a cognitive act. Like *Writing About Writing*, *Naming What We Know* gestures towards multiculturalism by including some scholars of color and touching on issues of identity, ethics, and politics. However, both texts evade what for me was a central threshold concept of our field: the notion, best articulated in the Students' Rights to Their Own Language resolution in 1972, that "the claim that any one dialect is unacceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another. Such a claim leads to false advice for speakers and writers, and immoral advice for humans." Or, as Geneva Smitherman and H. Samy Alim put it 40 years later, "Hatin on a particular language is linked to hatin its speakers, straight up" (169). For me, reading the SRTOL document as a new graduate student in composition and rhetoric was an *experiential* encounter with a threshold concept. It was integrative, answering questions about the intractability of differences in racial achievement I could never answer before, using knowledge from writing studies. So I was surprised to find it missing from both *Writing About Writing* and *Naming What We Know*'s portraits of the field of composition and rhetoric, which they call writing studies.

In a recent article, Samantha Looker considers overlaps between the Writing About Writing framework, which seeks to teach writing studies content to freshman writing students, and the Students' Right to Their Own Language resolution and the many contemporary composition, rhetoric, and literacy scholars who write in SRTOL's tradition of studying students' diverse language practices and supporting students honing those practices in the writing classroom. Looker writes that, "In my experience, these two traditions and the values behind

them are deeply compatible, working together to nurture linguistic versatility and rhetorical savvy in students from a wide range of backgrounds. Thus, I have been surprised to see, so far, little scholarship that explicitly connects the two” (176). Looker traces a wide range of contemporary writing studies scholarship on hybrid language practices, code-meshing, and dialect diversity back to the research behind and spirit of the 1974 SRTOL document. (Although she does not engage hip-hop, it’s important to note that much of the research on hip-hop in composition and rhetoric also invokes SRTOL.) Looker notes that this tradition is represented by Paul Kei Matsuda in his entry for *Naming What We Know*, in which Matsuda describes the threshold concept of Writing Studies that “Writing Involves the Negotiation of Language Differences.” At the same time, Looker challenges contemporary frameworks that see teaching linguistic diversity as only relevant to students of color or students who do not speak standard White American English. By recognizing language diversity as relevant to all students, Looker argues, we not only acknowledge the fact that all language users make errors and all language users negotiate language difference, we also open up academic discourse itself as a set of language practices to be interrogated and visibilized for how it grants and restricts access according to historically-situated power structures like race, class, and citizenship.

Looker is right to identify SRTOL and others in its legacy as advocating education on language difference for all students, not just minoritized ones. In condemning the rising phenomenon of standardized tests, which are linguistically and culturally biased toward those who speak the standard (white) dialect, SRTOL argued that the tests “ultimately penalize those who do well and those who ‘fail’”:

Those who succeed may become so locked into the rewarding language patterns that they restrict their modes of expression and become less tolerant of others’ modes. Those who do not succeed may be fluent in their own dialects but because they are unable to show their fluency, get a mistaken sense of inferiority from the scores they receive. (16)

Since then, scholars within composition and rhetoric as well as literacy studies have called for pedagogies and assessments that recognize language diversity and reward excellence in writing and argument across a range of discourses and compositional styles (Alim, Canagarajah, Richardson, Young et al).

Near the end of her piece, Looker reflects on how her experience teaching a FYC course that centered language diversity shifted when she moved from a school with large populations of students of color to a PWI. In her attempts to clarify the value of teaching dialect diversity, language change, and academic writing as discourse to linguistically mainstream students, Looker highlights the essential location in which WAW and SRTOL fail to overlap—in their values. She writes:

...just as discussions of language diversity can be an essential academic self-preservation tool for students who often face language-based prejudice, they are equally essential, from both WAW and SRTOL standpoints, to have with students who are unaware of or unaffected by such prejudice (and may even perpetuate it). *In WAW terms*, students who are white (and/or) native speakers of English need to have these discussions *so that they can be rhetorically flexible* in academic settings and interculturally *savvy* in society more broadly. *In SRTOL terms*, they need to have these discussions because, by encouraging students to examine how language connects to our identities and to question why some language is considered more “correct,” “proper,” or “intelligent,” we encourage more *inclusive* understandings of academic discourse and linguistic standards. (188, emphases added)

What Looker points to here is the gap in ideology between WAW’s investment in neoliberal transcripts of education for career readiness versus SRTOL’s orientation toward social justice and social transformation. In the language I italicized above, we can see how Looker’s defense of her pedagogy “in WAW terms” appeals to students’ individual successes, while defending her pedagogy “in SRTOL terms” involves an appeal to “inclusiv[ity],” that is, to anti-racism, solidarity, and communal uplift.

The gap in values between SRTOL and WAW Looker identifies makes visible the evasions of difference in WAW's professed ideological neutrality, an evasion often known as "colorblindness." Colorblindness is an ideology and a set of rhetorical practices that uphold white supremacy by marking conversations about race as taboo or even racist themselves (Bonilla-Silva, Hutter and Nettles). Because we live in institutions that are deeply racist, not talking about race supports the status quo and is therefore racist. As Bonilla-Silva puts it in his *Racism Without Racists*, "color-blind racism serves today as the ideological cover for a covert and institutionalized system in the post-Civil Rights era" (3). In his analysis of interviews with contemporary white people and people of color on the subject of race, Bonilla-Silva demonstrates how colorblindness as a rhetorical strategy for racism manifests in contemporary whites' near-inability to discuss racial realities in clear terms, a phenomenon which emerges in my interviews with my students as well.

Colorblind discourses' evasion of race as a topic of conversation ironically project ideological neutrality while actually taking the side of a racist status quo, by evading potentially disruptive conversations around race. Because "'whiteness' refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed" (Frankenburg qtd. in Hunter and Nettles 388), when critiquing dominant disciplinary texts we must look closely not only at what is said but what is unsaid, what is included as well as what is omitted. Taking a stance against colorblindness and whiteness means not just acknowledging difference but actively assuming an "antiracist," versus a nonracist, stance (Bonilla-Silva 15-16). Thus, part of WAW's and *Naming What We Know's* colorblindness resides in the two texts' unwillingness to vocally frame equity or justice as one of the goals of writing education, as well as their disinclination of SRTOL (as theory and as history), the signal expression of such values in our field. We must contrast these two texts'

colorblindness with an array of publications that are at once deeply writing studies and at the same time forward issues of dialect diversity, difference, and equity. In particular, David Green's recent edited volume *Visions and Cyphers: Explorations of Literacy, Discourse, and Black Writing Experiences* specifically uses the hip-hop cypher as guiding metaphor for African American composing practices. Green's volume highlights the central contributions of scholars of Black language and discourse to writing studies in particular, offering a fresh vision of writing studies—not to mention curriculum design—as fundamentally hip-hop.

My study's findings illuminate the antiblack attitudes that students carry when they enter our composition classrooms, and why colorblind composition pedagogies must become a thing of the past. Students of all backgrounds held antiblack language attitudes that the courses only began to challenge. However, my study shows that hip-hop in the context of a writing studies curriculum foregrounds the social construction of error, that is, error as a political rather than a linguistic reality—a concept central to research on translingualism, language hybridity, and codemeshing, all areas of research absent from the WAW readers—and hints that hip-hop is the perfect vehicle through which to address this complicated concept with students. In the following sections, I present my study and its findings in order to consider how hip-hop in the context of writing-studies focused writing courses promote students' writing practices, knowledge of writing and discourse, and confront antiblackness and colorblindness in their own language and literacy practices.

The Study: What is hiphop doing in the college writing classroom at PWIs?

Early in the semester of my first class taught at Syracuse, the WRT 105 section of freshman writing included this study, my students and I had an in-class discussion about an excerpt from Jay-Z's book *Decoded* in which the rapper describes the years in his teens and twenties when he juggled his growing interest in writing and performing raps with his lucrative and dangerous career as a drug dealer. I framed the excerpt as an example of a literacy narrative, and asked students to consider it in light of the notion of sponsorship we'd recently learned about reading an excerpt of Deborah Brandt's *Literacy in American Lives* in the WAW reader. I drew the class's attention to a few lines from Jay-Z's text:

I laid my little verse down, but when I went home I couldn't get [Big Daddy] Kane's freestyle out of my head. I remember one punchline in Kane's verse: *put a quarter in your ass / cuz you played yourself*. "Played yourself" wasn't even a phrase back then. He made it up right there on that tape. Impressive. I probably wrote a million rhymes that night. (16)

Attention fell to the misspelling of the word *cuz*. One student, David, spoke up forcefully. It didn't matter how good Jay-Z found that line to be, David said, because the misspelling would lead it to be dismissed by "the majority of people." Who was "the majority of people?" I asked. David looked around at his classmates. "Just, like, most people," he said. While I had tried to lead a classroom discussion focused on hiphop as a literacy sponsor, using Deborah Brandt's work to help us understand Jay-Z's development as a writer in hiphop community, David's preoccupation with the spelling of "cuz" derailed our discussion of a Black community's literacy practices and instead centered white linguistic norms and standards. Resisting ascribing these values to himself, David indicated an invisible majority who, despite our best efforts to discuss



Jay-Z's writing from a position of respect, would invalidate our conversation based on a standardized assessment of his spelling.

As a teacher for whom writing studies knowledge was new, it took me a moment to decide how to proceed. Ultimately, I decided to intervene in the students' conversation about "cuz," to make visible the whiteness of that "majority of people" who determines whether or not someone's writing or spelling is valuable. I pointed out that the word "twerk" had just been added to the Oxford English Dictionary post-Miley-Cyrusification even though that word had existed in African-American communities for years (see Crunktastic). So, I told them, race, class, and power operate through language and writing. The students kept talking, trying to parse whether "cuz" was an error or not. Their move was toward value judgments, adjudicating what uses of language were right or wrong. I tried to clarify that our role as literacy scholars was not to determine what was right or wrong, how cause or cuz should be spelled, but rather to notice and explore how power functions through language, coloring our everyday judgments—assessments—of writing's value.

When I first started writing about this research, David was the focus of my attention. I was interested in the white linguistic norms he brought into our classroom, and his development throughout the semester, as he described the stress of the SAT prep that consumed his affluent community and how my classroom's focus on hip-hop allowed him to access writing as pleasurable and passionate, leading him to ultimately write and record a rap for a final project. However, my critical reflexive practice ultimately led me to revise my focus on a normative white male student and open my gaze to all the students I worked with; I was also challenged to see the problematic choices I had made in not inviting all interview participants to self-identify, something I remedied when I interviewed Nana's students. In this section, I draw from coded

interview transcripts with 20 students to share my findings about the role hip-hop plays in composition classes at one PWI. I find that commodity hip-hop is a powerful player in the university market for students' investments of attention, time, and energy, strongly contributing to a WAW-style effort to introduce students to writing studies concepts, theory, and practices. My findings suggest the value of hip-hop-centered WAW-style classes that root the study of literacy, discourse, and rhetoric in students' own lives, interests, and media diets. Comparing my classes, which took a writing-studies approach, and Nana's classes, which did not, I find strong support for Downs and Wardle's central thesis that learning writing studies concepts boosts students' self-confidence as flexible writers across a variety of contexts. However, I also find that hip-hop supports these goals by motivating student investment in the writing and research processes and by forwarding politicized understandings of writing studies topics in literacy, discourse, and rhetoric, in particular, the social construction of error. I find that hip-hop supported students' critical listening and reading, inviting them to confront ambient antiblackness and the white habitus's injunction not to speak about race or racism in class. Ultimately, my findings support the implementation of a writing studies pedagogy that centers hip-hop content in order to confront the racist implications of pervasive discourse norms and literacy myths with our students.

In chapter 2 I discussed at length how this classroom research involved a recursive process of literature review, research design, data collection, preliminary analysis, critical reflexive practice, and further revised iterations of the classroom studies. Ultimately, I collected data from four classroom sites, which I describe in more detail here. Two classes were taught by me—one section of freshman writing and one section of sophomore writing, taught in fall and spring of the same year; and two classes taught my Nana, identical sections of a sophomore

writing class, taught simultaneously the following spring. (All syllabi and assignments are available in the Appendix at the end of this dissertation.) In my studies of all four of these classes, I pursued the following research questions:

How does integrating hiphop and pop culture texts into sections of Writing 105 and 205 taught by the researcher and a colleague at one PWI affect students' understandings of literacy and language diversity? How does it affect them as writers? What kinds of conversations around race, class, and spoken language does hiphop invite into the writing classroom?

During my autoethnographic writing practices in Minnie Bruce Pratt's class that I describe in chapter 2, I wrote about my challenges in identifying my students and Professor Pratt highlighted my methodological error and oversight in not inviting students to identify themselves, whether in their class writings or during our interviews. This critique enabled me to add an interview question to my exit interviews with Nana's students; thus, these students gave fuller accounts of their own identities and how those identities impacted their experiences of the course, in response to the additional research question:

How do students understand the role their identities played in their writing and learning experiences?

In interviews with my own students, some of them spontaneously identified themselves; in the discussion of student interviews that follows, I identify students by race or other signifiers only when they did so themselves; I do not identify students for myself. According to the preference they noted on their consent forms, some of the students I discuss are using their real first names, while others are using pseudonyms. When sharing student interview excerpts, I removed some fillers (um, like, you know) but retained some to preserve the flavor of students' language. In keeping with my understanding of the social construction of error, I do not use [sic] markings.

This study closely analyzes interviews with students who were exposed to three separate curricula: my freshman writing course; my sophomore writing course; and Nana's sophomore

writing courses. Each of these courses adhered to departmental guidance for the required undergraduate sequence of freshman writing, “WRT 105: Practices of Academic Writing,” and sophomore writing, “WRT 205: Critical Research.” My 105 and 205 courses had strong WAW influences, in which hip-hop texts with focuses on writing studies topics like literacy, discourse, the writing process, citation use, and Black Language practices were integrated with non-hip-hop texts from writing studies. Meanwhile, Nana’s course focused on hip-hop culture as a subject of inquiry. Although he did not incorporate many texts from writing studies, he presented rappers as writers making purposeful writerly and rhetorical choices, and challenged students to see rappers’ lyrics, musical choices, and visuals as purposive, meaningful, and contextually responsive. All three classes opened with and were framed by Tony Silver’s graffiti documentary *Style Wars*, which explicitly engages questions of writing, multimodality, rhetorical effectiveness, and the writing process, as well as with either the entire album or tracks from Kanye West’s debut album *The College Dropout*, which both implicitly demonstrates and explicitly engages with questions of rhetorically appropriate discourse choices and African-American compositional style. All students also read Joseph Harris’s chapter “Coming to Terms,” from his book *Rewriting*. Students in my classes engaged with writing studies scholarship by authors like Deborah Brandt, James Paul Gee, John Swales, and Rebecca Moore Howard, as well as writing studies scholarship that more closely addressed hip-hop and Black language and rhetorical practices by authors like Tricia Rose, H. Samy Alim, Geneva Smitherman, and David Kirkland (“The Rose”). Nana’s sophomore students also engaged with dialect diversity through June Jordan’s essay “Nobody Mean More to Me Than You and the Future Life of Willie Jordan.” Students were also exposed to an array of film and music clips, with my students engaging with the “Shit Girls Say” videos on YouTube and Kanye West’s

infamous Hurricane Telethon clip, while Nana's students engaged rapper Mick Jenkins' metaphor-rich music videos for "Jazz," among others.

Exit interviews were semi-structured, meaning that I had a script but also asked follow-up questions and informed students that this was a conversation and they could share whatever came to mind or ask me questions as well. I asked students the following questions:

Who were you as a writer before this class? What was your relationship with hip-hop before this class?

What texts do you remember most vividly from the course (e.g., articles, songs, films, etc.)?

What texts, if any, presented a challenge for you?

Which texts did you use most prominently in some of your writing assignments? Why? What were your independent projects about?

How did you feel about watching TV shows, listening to rap songs, or watching film clips in class? Compared with scholarly articles we read, did these texts affect your understanding of concepts like literacy, sponsorship, discourse, or composition? How?

How might your experience of the class have been different if these texts were included, and you only read print articles?

Students from Nana's classes were also asked the following questions:

How do you identify, in terms of race, age, ethnicity, nation, religion, gender, urban/rural/ suburban, style, and/or any other identifiers you wish to share? How do you feel that your identity impacted your experience of the course?

As I discuss in chapter 2, I ultimately limited my coding to interview transcripts, a choice which has benefits and drawbacks. The benefits of this choice were that it centers students' voices and agency and the co-creation of knowledge in an interview setting where students could clarify their answers to my questions and were outside the assessment regime of the course. This choice was also a logistical decision on my part to limit my data set for analysis. Because students and I discussed their writing in the interviews most of the noteworthy phenomena I

noticed in students' writing were brought up in their interviews. Possible objections to my approach include the self-selection of students for interviews, which could lead to an inaccurate reflection of the total experience of students in the course. I interviewed 20 students out of the 60 who participated in the study and the 80 who were enrolled in the four sections that contributed to the study. Although these interviews reflected broad enthusiasm for the hip-hop content of the course, that enthusiasm extended into the writing of students who did not come in for interviews. One possibility for further developing this research could be to situate the interviews within an analysis of a broader sample of students' written materials. Another objection to my research methods could be that focusing on interviews instead of assessing student writing limits my ability to judge whether students' writing has actually improved. However, Downs and Wardle themselves have already acknowledged that improvement within a single course is insufficient in determining "far transfer," that is, the transfer of writing knowledge beyond the course ("Teaching" 557). Thus, assessing student writing from the semester would not solve this problem. Further, in keeping with the distinction between listening to student voices and mass-assessment I note in chapter 2's historical study of Basic Writing at CUNY, analyzing student interviews is also a methodological choice that reflects my feminist ethics of care and co-creation of knowledge, as I valorize conversations with students over their submissions of writings for high-stakes assessment by me for a grade. Further, this choice was shaped by the politics of affect that run throughout this dissertation. In choosing how to analyze the vast corpus of data I collected for the study, I listened to my own affect which was much more drawn to students' interviews than to the papers and assignments that Nana and I had already graded.

## Findings

Ultimately, I ended up with 8 coding categories. These categories reflect student learning in the context of the neoliberal, colorblind language politics of a contemporary PWI. I briefly describe the codes and numerical results below before expanding on my findings in the remainder of the chapter.

1. **Identification grounds investment.** This code emerged from my efforts to link students' affective and ideological relations to the course. It was used whenever students remarked that their investment in or engagement with course materials and assignments was facilitated by the relevance of course materials to their own experiences and interests. *19 out of 20 students exhibited this phenomenon, 7 of Nana's 7 students and 13 of my 14 students. 15 out of those 19 students explicitly linked hip-hop with their identifying and investing in the course.*
2. **Metacognitive understanding of writing as a process.** This code describes any utterance where students described their own writing process, recognized it as evolving in the class, and/or recognized writing as a process all writers go through. *20 out of 20 students exhibited this phenomenon and 10 out of those 20 students explicitly linked hip-hop with their understanding of the writing process or their metacognitive reflections on themselves as writers.*
3. **Literacy as an evolving, situated practice.** This code describes any utterance where students displayed an understanding of literacy as a broad array of reading and writing practices that occur in situated contexts and evolve over time. *9 out of 20 students exhibited this phenomenon, 0 of Nana's 7 students and 9 out of my 14 students. 8 out of those 9 students explicitly linked hip-hop to their understandings of literacy.*
4. **Social construction of error.** This code describes any utterance in which students acknowledge that error is a political rather than a linguistic reality and that error and correctness are not static but are rather rooted in rhetorical situations. *5 out of 20 students demonstrated this understanding of error, with 0 out of Nana's 7 students and 5 out of my 14 students exhibiting this understanding. 4 out of those 5 students explicitly linked their recognition of the social construction of error with hip-hop.*
5. **Texts, genres, and discourses as rhetorically situated.** This code describes student utterances that recognize all texts, genres, and discourses as responding to rhetorical situations that involve audiences, goals, physical contexts, timing, community norms, and other rhetorical parameters. *13 out of 20 students demonstrated this knowledge, 3 of Nana's 7 students and 10 of my 14 students. 8 of those students explicitly linked their understanding of rhetoricity with hip-hop.*
6. **Reading or listening more deeply.** This code marks utterances where students said the class has led them to interrogate texts more deeply, whether reading more deeply into written texts or listening more carefully to hip-hop or other music. *9 of 20 students*

*described this phenomenon, 5 of Nana's 7 students and 4 of my 14 students. 8 of those 9 students explicitly linked listening or reading more deeply to hiphop.*

7. **Depictions of antiblackness.** This code describes utterances where students affirmed or confronted stereotypes around Black people or Black musics, including that they are illiterate, ungrammatical, angry, unintentional, as well as white students' comments that they have been derided by white peers for enjoying Black musics. *14 out of 20 students gestured toward antiblack viewpoints in their interviews, 6 of Nana's 7 students and 8 of my 14 students. 13 of those 14 students located those antiblack views in common scripts around hiphop.*
8. **Encountering the white habitus in class.** This code describes comments students made, with or without naming whiteness, that affirm white discourse norms in class including fear of discussing race or the whiteness of the classroom environment. This code marks places where students of color identified racialized tensions in class as well as where white students affirmed that there was no racialized tension in class. *11 out of 20 students articulated elements of the white habitus in class, 5 of Nana's 7 students and 6 of my 14 students. 5 of those 11 students explicitly linked hiphop with encountering the white habitus in class.*

In the remainder of this chapter, I illustrate these phenomenological codes using extensive examples from students' interviews. Because the phenomena in student data were extremely prominent—with students often saying very similar things to one another—in my selection of the data I try to highlight the voices of women of color, students of color, and women whenever possible.

**1) Identification grounds investment.** The two most prominent codes were closely linked—"Invested in class and the writing process because enjoyed and identified" and "Displayed metacognition as a writer." Taken together, these codes describe the phenomena that challenged me to code my data in the first place: the prominence of student affect and identity engagement as students negotiated their relationships to writing and their writing class. The phrase I ultimately chose for my first code, **identification grounds investment**, reflects how I came to understand students' identity work as occurring in the context of neoliberalism, in which school is understood as delivering a commodity and everything is described in the language of



the market. Under this framework, it was easier for me to see how students saw school as a market into which they were tasked with investing limited personal resources of time, interest, and energy in order to make the best possible returns—whether in grades, skills, or knowledge. In this marketized educational context, students compared the value of Nana’s and my classes with other writing, English, and other classes they’d taken in college and in high school, contrasting the ease or difficulty they had investing into our and other classes in order to earn their just returns. In evaluating my and Nana’s classes, students described how the hip-hop content and multimedia course texts felt “relevant,” “relaxing,” “enjoyable,” “comfortable”; that it was easier to pay attention and understand course concepts from writing and hip-hop studies when introduced through multimedia hip-hop texts; and that investing time and energy in the writing process felt easier because of the relevance of hip-hop and the freedom students had to choose an area of hip-hop or pop culture that resonated with them to research and write about.

These comments were almost ubiquitous in student interviews, with 19 out of 20 students saying they could invest in the course because they enjoyed it and identified with the materials. All of Nana’s students associated their investment in the class with hip-hop, and 8 of my 14 students did. Describing her experiences in Nana’s class, Sabatina, a Haitian American student, told me,

That’s why I like this course—cause when you write something you want to be able to like it, be interest in it so that make it more interesting, do more research cause you’re eager to learn about the subjects...Hip-hop kept the fire going...you go in classes in college, people don’t give any attention.

For Sabatina, her interest in the class emboldened her to raise her voice and share her opinions. And like many of the other students, Sabatina understood hip-hop’s presence as making a necessarily difficult process easier. “I heard 205 is so boring and it’s a lot of hard work,” she said. “When I heard it was about hip-hop I thought it was gonna be interesting—it was gonna be

challenging but at the same time it was gonna be something I was interested in learning so it was gonna be like more of an easy process cause I'm more interested in hiphop and can relate more to it." Chrissy, Sabatina's white classmate who grew up loving hiphop and R&B, much to the confusion of her friends, said class was never boring, and told me, "it makes you want to write and it makes you want to do the work if there's like a personal relation to your interests."

Jonathan, a Black man in my sophomore 205 class who was surprised to learn about Black Language because he had always been stigmatized for "talking white" growing up, described how his interest in the course material engaged him in the class, got him speaking up and participating more, and anchored him in his research process. In Jonathan's comments you can see how codes 1 and 2 overlapped, since Jonathan's investment in the course was deeply manifested in his investment in his personal writing process. A computer science major, Jonathan relied heavily on the language of investment in explaining his enjoyment of the course:

...like with me picking my own topic and me actually investing—basically if you wanna invest my time into actually doing this project, cause I'm not giving in like two hours after I've started writing—so it's like, this is not so bad, I'm reading all these stories that either a) I've read before or b) I actually enjoy reading about the person, so I'm going to keep reading, keep researching, taking this information and producing something worth the professor reading basically.

Jonathan contrasted this investment with a feeling he usually encountered in his writing process of "giving in" when he didn't want to write or research any longer. Jonathan felt that instructors "should like, pay attention more to tailoring our prereqs to be meaningful to what we actually wanna—basically, make it something that we would want to invest our time in." Jonathan even went so far as to suggest that this engagement in and identification with the course protected him against committing plagiarism, a comment that was also echoed by Nana's student Sabatina. This comment was deeply affective, as Jonathan charted the spectrum between "the fear of

plagiarizing” when writing about “old texts” and the “refreshing” sense of creating new knowledge:

This whole like fear of plagiarizing, as well, is very hard when we’re like recycling these old texts, and it’s like, there’s only so much that can be said about this text that has been around like forty years, I’m pretty sure half, or the majority of things that can be studied of them, have been said, so it’s like what more can I say when I’m researching all these things....So since hip-hop is relatively new, the time frame is thirty years, there’s not that much done on it yet, and we were bringing out relevant, like even, more relevant topics that happened in the last ten years, so like, that was a very refreshing thing, like, oh I can let out all my thoughts and it not be mistaken for someone else’s...it’s either that or like, what more can I do with this text that I don’t even, I don’t even relate to, I don’t even, basically care about, like tomorrow I’m not even going to be thinking about this topic after I turn in my paper. But I’m always gonna be thinking about what [artist] Frank Ocean is doing next, I’m gonna go check on this blog and things like that, so it’s like, I wanna just invest everything I’m saying and all the thoughts I have into this paper and if I don’t there’s no need to really plagiarize.

Anum, one of my sophomore students, compared her and her classmates’ use of technology in my class with that in other classes, appealing as many of the other interviewees did to young peoples’ fluency with audiovisual material.

I loved it because I thought it was – it really set aside the norm of being in class and just – instead of just sitting in class and hearing you talk for an hour and a half and you bringing in the clips really made it intertwine with the world outside of that class, you know? It really made it seem as if we were learning about modern events or current events that happened and instead of just sitting down and reading or analyzing a lyrics from songs, it was more about what we thought about the world outside of that class, does that make sense?

When I asked Anum how she felt class would be different without the audiovisual materials, she told me:

...what you just mentioned about not having videos, I had the exact same writing class my first semester freshman year. It was very, very boring, everyone in the class dreaded it, it – the professor would just talk for an hour and a half and everyone would bring their laptops and I would look around and everyone would be on Facebook or Twitter or YouTube or anything, and then when I came in this class, people were on YouTube or stuff but they were doing the work that you asked for, you know what I mean? Like people were more invested in this class than my class freshman year.

Anum continued comparing my class to her 105 experience, suggesting that her excitement and interest in the class allowed her to invest and ultimately improve. “I didn’t see myself improving in that class at all, whereas here, you did tell us to write reflections outside of class [like her 105 teacher did], but it meant—it definitely helped me understand more about how I approach articles and how I think about articles and I saw, um, I saw myself improve in that context.” For Anum, having hip-hop in the classroom helped her feel understood. Professors, she told me, “they don’t come from the same environment as you did...they had way more than you did...the majority of them will probably not have the same connection as artists or rappers will, you know?” When I brought in hip-hop into the classroom, she said, it made her feel like “she [Tessa] doesn’t have the same past as I do, but she definitely does understand and I feel like students do see that, you know?” Anum’s comments were echoed by many students who said that the presence of audiovisual materials in class made paying attention easier and scaffolded course concepts.

One of my sophomore students, Rob, clarified to me that my approach had been essentially rhetorical, because this kind of teaching appealed to the students: “For me personally,” he said, “if I can connect to something I understand it more...So, I guess, even if it wasn’t hip-hop, or music at all, it could’ve just been film, or sports, but if you can draw something to appeal to a student it will help them grasp it better.” Despite Rob’s ecumenical stance that hip-hop could have been replaced by other relevant subjects, other students rooted the course’s appeal specifically in music, and in hip-hop music Nana’s student Ruth, with whom I opened the chapter, appealed to the feelings hip-hop music produced in her discussions of class and of her research into hip-hop in the Arab Spring. She told me, “it was nice to come to class and not be given you know something to read every time but you’re listening to the music or he’s

playing music while you're talking and then you're starting to get a feel for hip-hop or—it was, I'll say it was very relaxing.” For Ruth, the same feelings that engaged her in class were what made hip-hop universal. She described sharing a song she was researching with a friend:

I had a friend last night listen to one of the songs that I was listening to, can't understand what it's saying but it has such a nice beat and it's one of those songs like it's the beats that I associate with that feeling that makes me had it with hip-hop and so she was listening to it – she's like this is nice and I'm like right and I even – it's a song for the revolution tell people to – the revolution has just begun, long live Egypt and all this stuff but she just listening to the beat even if I didn't see that, just the beat, you know, already has me...

Ruth's classmate Rachel reiterated the power of music to identify with students. She told me, “there's something to the way a song makes you feel when you hear it” that engages students in a way written texts can't.

Interestingly, my sophomore student Anum, who identified herself as a major hip-hop fan, located hip-hop's ability to ground student identification and investment in the neoliberal scripts of overcoming or bootstrapping that were inherent in the music. This comment significantly illuminated for me the paradoxical workings of commodity hip-hop in the PWI context. She told me,

Hip-hop especially it's something that people who didn't have much when they were younger express how they don't—how they didn't have anything when they were younger and they come out to being this successful and especially like Eminem and Kanye West and people who didn't have the stuff that we have...the messages behind those songs really show students that it's not really about what other people say, it's about what you could do and I feel like that motivates them to be able to be in class and it doesn't really matter what people say about how illiterate you are or about how you come from this environment so you can't do this and it really eliminates that aspect of them and just makes them believe that they can do whatever they can or whatever they want... That's why I love Eminem is because he brings up his past and tells people that this is what I had...I had less than you have and I came out to be this successful so if you have this then you can be even more successful...It lets them know that these rappers are with you and they know how you feel and they're rooting for you to be able to achieve whatever you can. I think that's why people relate to hip-hop is because they know that message and they just keep going for it.

In a turn that surprised me, Anum related this observation to a criticism she had of classmates who “cheat their way through high school and college” instead of investing energy in the work of success. She told me, “hip-hop sends a message that if you want to do what you want to do in life then you need to work your way through it.”

**2) Metacognitive understanding of writing as a process.** For Nana’s and my students, their ability to relate to the course material and invest their energy into it also underwrote their investments in the writing process and supported their evolving metacognition as writers. Every student I interviewed evidenced metacognitive awareness of their own strengths and struggles as writers and a recognition of writing as a process that could be improved upon, with 10 of them directly associating hip-hop with this understanding. For many, recognizing writing as a process built confidence, echoing Downs’ and Wardle’s pilot study. As Ruth described it, Nana’s depiction of the writing process—through class activities, considerations of hip-hop artists as writers with writing processes, and acknowledgements of his own work as a writer—helped her to see that “we are all capable of being great writers... becoming a writer is something that you go through various stages.” For both Nana’s and my students, this emerging metacognition was deeply affective and emerged through taking pleasure in and investing in the writing process. Nana’s student Dan told me, “I have become a much more confident writer because I took interest in the things that I am writing about and discovered that I’m actually a good writer.” Echoing Jonathan above, Sabatina observed that when you’re “actually into what you wanna write about [that makes it] more interesting to do more research.” One of my freshman students, Dana, described how the combination of studying hip-hop and writing in new media engaged her in the writing process and helped her feel more confident. She told me,

I actually liked this class cause like I think it made me a better writer like I definitely saw some transformation from like day one till like the end. I also found this very interesting

cause one of my friends were in 105 didn't use rap music or anything or blog posts so I kind of feel like that was kind of cool cause I'd never written a blog before....I think it made me like a better writer and like more prepared to like take other classes in college cause like now when I have like – I have a paper due in my History class the next week and it's like 5 pages and before I would've like freaked out and like, oh my God 5 pages is so much, but now it's like a lot easier to like write, now I think about like 15 pages is like absurd.

Many of my students comments bolstered the WAW theory that learning writing studies concepts promotes reflectivity and leads to improvements in writing practices and products” (Wardle). In particular, the majority of my freshman writing students, the only student in the study who directly used the Writing About Writing reader, described how coming to understand literacy as a broad array of writing and reading practices beyond the English classroom made them feel confident in this class and others. Martin reflected on his first assignment for that class, writing a literacy narrative. He said:

That was the assignment that gave me the most confidence, because I got to college thinking that these classes are going to be really hard, I'm not that well of a writer, and then ...when you told us to write a blog [about our personal literacies], I really enjoyed writing the blog, so once I started writing the blog, my confidence in writing just grew more.

Later, he continued,

As a kid I never really liked reading. I was always, whenever they would ask me to read something in school, like, “Read this book,” it was always like I had to do it for school, I would never do it on my own....But then, when we did the literacy [unit] I realized I've been reading magazines my whole life. I actually have been reading, I am reading, I just never saw it as reading because it's something I really enjoyed.

Martin went on to explain how the literacy units put him in touch with his visual literacies as a runner, in which “often I look at other runners while they are running and I can tell if they have used those shoes for a while or what terrain they have been running in.” Martin told me, “I can relate that to different readings—when I'm reading I can kind of see what the author is saying

because I kind of pay attention to small details,” a skill he also associated with “tak[ing] out the small details” when working on a word problem in a math class.

In this class, in which hiphop composing strategies were offered alongside academic composing strategies, Martin also connected to strategies like sampling that are not represented in WAW’s portrait of our field, even though compositionists like Adam Banks and Todd Craig have theorized sampling as a composing practice to be shared with student writers. Martin described how he identified with the practice of sampling once he learned about it:

Sometimes in my text that’s what I often do, sometimes, use older texts and, well, then I source them, and then I use, something that I’ve written before, I use it into a new essay that I have to write, or something that I read from, I base my work off of that, to make it better....Yeah, and every time I listen to a song, I’m like, Oh, sampling!

Sabatina described becoming deeply engaged in the research and synthesis process for the first time in her life, and how it allowed her to succeed in a Native American literature class she was taking at the same time as her Writing 205 class. Repeating the word “actually” as though she was surprised at how well the writing process works, Sabatina told me that for her research paper for Nana’s class she “actually” went to the library to do research, not just doing internet research as she usually would, and became a more confident writer after Nana told her she could be. She told me, “actually I feel like if you do more research and you actually learn what you writing about your paper will actually turn out way better and you get a better grade, and it’s not only benefit with your grade like its benefiting your knowledge and makes you think about certain things definitely as far as life.” In this statement we see how the pleasure she took in writing for Nana’s course allowed her to recognize investing in her education as giving her not just material rewards in terms of grades but immaterial rewards like the ability to think more deeply and understand her world. She described how, in previous writing assignments, she used to do only internet research and then just copy and paste, but now she found herself “putting it in my own



words...I actually used that in my Native American essay paper,” leading her teacher for that class to congratulate her on her significant improvement. Sabatina echoed the comments of other sophomore students who felt that their interest in the course material grounded them through a research process when in other experiences they’d often given up mid-way or taken the easy way out, leading to metacognition of herself as a writer, improved confidence, improved performance, and a sense of inquiry towards life itself.

Jonathan described how his interest in the subject matter bolstered his confidence and helped him invest in the writing process, allowing him to know himself better as a writer and recognize writing as a process. He confessed:

So like reading and writing are actually two of the subjects that I don't enjoy the most, and especially writing, because I get really bad writer's block when I do write academically, but in terms of social media, that's mainly where I write...[But now] I don't really see myself as that horrible of a writer any more...I guess my confidence kinda grew....I feel like this time around I actually felt as if I, in all aspects of my topic, I knew exactly what I was talking about. ‘Cause sometimes I understand the gist or I get the writer’s project, I guess what I want to do, but at some points – because you know when you actually write it you don’t write about that many points but then when you do your body paragraphs you have to expand on different elements of the text or things, and um sometimes I don’t really understand all of the elements fully, so it’s like, eerrhhh, I’m kind of confused on the situation but I don’t have time to discuss it or research it anymore.

It was in this context that Jonathan commented that it’s at this point of despair or giving up that he finds himself at risk of plagiarizing, a fear he did not feel in this course.

Throughout the interviews, many students highlighted common struggles in the writing and research process and displayed growing metacognitive awareness of the parts of writing and researching like locating sources, critically reading them, synthesizing them, narrowing the subject matter for investigation, balancing this narrowness with a richness of analytical detail, revising, looking for one’s argument inside drafts, and responding to peer critique with further

revision. Following a feminist ethics of care, in multiple interviews I engaged with students about their writing processes and encouraged them to stay the course, as in the moment with which I opened this chapter. After describing the vicissitudes of her writing process, Anum confessed that “it's like mid through the essay I finally figure out what I'm trying to say.” I told her that this was common, and that “writing itself is an act of discovery.” Anum expressed some exhaustion with this reality, telling me of her research project on Eminem, “it took me like at least 6 or 7 hours sitting down just to find out what I was trying to say and...I decided to just list out all the sources that I had and find out what was in common with them...so it took a lot but I finally narrowed it down to like a main point, which was hard to do...it was very time consuming.” Anum's classmate Rob told me, “I'd done outlines before, but this time it was something that interested me, so I seemed to have more space filled out throughout my outline.”

**3) Literacy as an evolving, situated practice.** The results from this code affirm elements of the WAW pedagogy, since 9 of my students came to understand literacy as an evolving, situated practice while none of Nana's students exhibited this understanding. That 8 out of my 9 students who exhibited this understanding associated this new knowledge with hip-hop attests to the powerful role hip-hop played in helping students access this critical concept from writing and literacy studies. One of my sophomore students, Rob, described how hip-hop integrated into his new understanding of writing:

It definitely changed in my eyes. Walking into class, I had felt writing was just sitting down and writing either—just a book or some assignment that was handed to you, and afterwards, I also never really considered hip-hop or rap to be poetry, really, but after going through the course really opened my eyes... [And literacy is] definitely more broad than I thought it was, I thought literacy was just, you can read and write, or you can't, and now I guess that kind of ties in with the whole BE or English dialect, but without a doubt, those who can't necessarily follow grammatical rules but can write down words and come up with raps and stuff, they're, I would consider them completely literate....The Black Language [reading by Geneva Smitherman], definitely, I think changed my mind about the whole thing.

Students from my freshman 105 class made similar comments. Nina told me, “my views on writing have changed...like rap—that's really writing, like you can nit pick, you can pick it apart and it's like a whole story, so that's writing.” Her classmate David, whose anecdote opened this section, stated similar views: “I can now look at different things as writing,” he said. He now recognized “how literacy isn’t just in writing in books, like classic books, it’s in text messages and instant messages and rap, as specifically like all song lyrics are also literacy.” David compared his experiences in my course with “all my other classes that I’ve ever had for English or Writing [where] we always just focused on like the classics and we broke down a book.” For Rob, Nina, and David, rap fit perfectly into the new understanding of literacy they were offered by studying texts from composition, rhetoric, and literacy studies. As I continue discussing below, it’s important to note the latent antiblack discourses that were challenged by explicitly including rap in this new portrait of literacy. For example, Rob noted that his new view of literacy allowed him to recognize rappers as “completely literate” even though they use BL.

**4) Social construction of error.** The name of this code comes from Chris Anson’s article in which he coins this term as he surveys the considerable composition and rhetoric literature acknowledging that all writers and speakers make errors, but that which errors get focused on are often shaped by cultural scripts. He encourages teachers to be reflective in order to recognize how their own biases shape their responses to student error.

The results of my study recognize the value of a writing-studies-focused pedagogy in drawing student attention to how notions of error are socially constructs rather than linguistic realities: none of Nana’s students acknowledged this concept in their interviews while 5 of my 14 students did, with 4 of the 5 relating this knowledge to the hiphop content of the class. In my sophomore class, this phenomenon was associated with the excerpt we read of Geneva

Smitherman's Talking and Testifying, while in my freshman class, we did not read about BL but David's comment about Jay-Z's spelling, described above, brought the question of error into conversation. One of my sophomore students, Anum, deftly clarified how antiblackness leads to discrimination against the Black Language practices of rappers. She referenced our class discussion of Kanye West's song "We Don't Care," in which I drew attention to West's choice to use the BL language structure of the dropped copula in his affirmation "We smart." Anum told me:

The quote that you used was "we smart."... So, I didn't really think about this before this class that a lot of the lyrics from like Black English is—it's not really known as grammar. It's usually known as Black people can't or they can't—they're not as literate as white people are or people in the society and it really opened my eyes trying to figure out that they are—they are literate, they just choose to make it their own language to speak out to the um—they try to make a message out to society and I thought that was--I didn't really think about that before this class.

Anum's classmate Rob remembered more of the history of BL, noting that Smitherman "talked about how when the slaves were coming over to America, they needed a language of their own, kind of, so that people could understand, and that has transformed over years and generations into—not, into what we, they speak now, but it helped the dialect, I guess." Meanwhile, Rob and Anum's classmate Jonathan affirmed that learning about BL helped him make sense of why he was always told as a kid "that I talk very white." He went on: "that always confused me cause, I always saw it, thought it as I'm speaking proper, but like, to say, oh I'm not speaking black enough, is kind of um, well not kind of, it's very insulting, and um to connect improper speech with Black dialect is very, kind of, annoying, I guess, to say."

In my freshman class, we didn't read any texts specifically about Black Language; student learning around this concept emerged from the class discussion that frames this section.

In his exit interview, David brought up that classroom moment as one of the most memorable in class.

David: I just remember one of the things we did was we talked about the way he [Jay-Z] spelled something, and how most academics, or people who teach classes, wouldn't like ever think to teach that type of lyric or that artist just cause of the way he spelled—I think he spelled “cuz” like “c-u-z” when it was really supposed to be “because.” And I made the point in class that we wouldn't, we would probably overlook that a lot of the times, and I thought one of the coolest things about this class was we like really dove into learning about that and we said, like, beyond the way it's spelled, it has a lot of meaning in reality.

Tessa: ...Do you still, like, when you think about grammar and what's correct spelling, or rap lyrics, do you feel like that moment still has lessons for you?

David: Do I still think, even though it's spelled wrong or something, that it still means a lot?

Tessa: Yeah.

David: Yeah, totally, I mean I don't really care if something is spelled wrong as long as I can find meaning in it for myself, and I think others can too if they just look past the fact that it's spelled wrong. I think people who are teaching—I don't know, I just have this feeling that people who are really into reading classics mainly, like high-level academics would just look past that as, like, not-good writing, but just because it's spelled wrong I don't think changes the validity of it.

In the interview, David also clarified that he had already found meaning in hiphop texts before class, but that “I had always been taught in school” to dismiss language not written in “correct” standard white English.

In her interview, David's classmate Nina also commented on this moment, and her own evolving views of correctness and contextuality. Referring to Jay-Z's language, she told me, “some people would say it's improper way of speaking, but really like it fit the text perfectly like it made complete sense like where he's coming from. Later in the interview, she reflected again on this moment when thinking of how her views of literacy had changed.

I just thought literacy was very interesting in general because like texting-wise, at least for me—I like people spelling out everything like in a full way, like using proper grammar, and talk about literacy and referring like to the Jay-Z text and him using what I probably would be considering improper grammar, changed my views on that, I guess? ...I'm looking at other things, looking at other types of writing, or looking at these rap lyrics I could understand it more, a lot more and don't think it's improper anymore. I think it's proper like the way they're using that.

Anum, Rob, David, and Nina's comments powerfully attest to the role a writing-studies focused classroom can play in opening students' eyes to the variety of contextual language practices they already are familiar with. Given the predominance of standardized testing in college admissions, this focus on the social construction of error with college underclassmen is an important intervention into social scripts that have taught them, as David discussed, to dismiss nonstandard varieties of English as invalid or unworthy of attention. Indeed, using hip-hop texts during these conversations foregrounds the trenchant antiblackness of these social scripts around language and error.

**5) Texts, genres, and discourses as rhetorically situated.** This code describes a broad array of student commentary that acknowledges the rhetoricity of texts, as appealing to situations; of genres, as responding to recurring situations; and discourses, as emerging from situated community norms, practices, and boundaries. 13 out of 20 students demonstrated this knowledge, with this knowledge emerging more prominently from my students—3 of Nana's 7 students and 10 of my 14 students recognized rhetoricity in their commentary, with 8 of the total students explicitly linking their understanding of rhetoricity with hip-hop. For example, Nana's students Ruth and Sabatina both described rhetorical analysis in Nana's class in which they looked for rhetorical features of a hip-hop song including who its audience was, what its purpose was, what its genre was, and so forth. Among my classes, all 6 of my sophomore students recognized rhetoricity while 4 of my 7 freshmen did. Many of my sophomore students were

particularly engaged with the concept of kairos, which I illustrated in class by showing the clip of Kanye West famously going off-script in the Hurricane Katrina telethon to declare, “George Bush doesn’t care about Black people.” Multiple students found themselves using the concept of kairos to engage more deeply with social media texts; Jonathan’s research paper on Frank Ocean focused on how Frank Ocean timed his coming-out with his album release, and his classmate Courtney noted that using Twitter in class to rapidly tweet with scholar David Kirkland “really made me appreciate the kairos.” Courtney also reflected on becoming more rhetorically savvy herself, remarking that “I think the biggest skill that I’m using is having a good perspective on the audience, and a good perspective on who I am as a writer. Just identifying the roles I play at different times is crucial.”

Among my freshmen students, our major classroom focus on rhetoricity was discourse’s situatedness in communities, and interviews reflected this fact. Many students demonstrated understandings of discourse communities in their interviews, with several students referencing the John Swales article we read from the WAW reader, Kanye West’s “We Don’t Care,” and several “Shit Girls Say” YouTube videos we watched in class. Two students also remarked that understanding discourse communities shaped their engagement with real classmate communities. Augie told me that researching international students led him to the conclusion that, contrary to his original assumption, international students are not a discourse community. He told me:

Going into it I thought, oh I have a grasp on this, but in that situation I did have an “ah ha moment” where I realized like international students are just like not a discourse community. ...After I got through it I realized like I was wrong...That was just like something that I had seen pretty prevalent that kids seemed separated from them, they’re not from here, um, but yeah, so I thought that was pretty interesting that I got tricked myself, but I taught myself something. I thought that was interesting.

Augie’s comments illuminate how campus politics lead students to make assumptions about one another, in this case that all international students know one another. After doing research and

interviewing multiple international students, Augie realized this was not the case—there were no common language practices among international students, despite what he perceived as their shared rhetorical situation.

A different expression of this code emerged from Nana’s students, one which illustrates how creative writing and composition and rhetoric teaching can productively overlap. While my students may have had more success identifying the rhetorical and discursive features of texts and communities outside themselves, Nana’s students were more likely to comment on the rhetoricity of their own compositions. Many of Nana’s students commented on their efforts to craft papers that would appeal to their classmates and their professor, often attesting to the stress Nana put on writing for “engagement,” something he discusses himself in the following chapter. Although some of Nana’s students “look[ed] for genre and audience” in course texts like Ruth did, for example, more typical of Nana’s students was Cathryn’s comment that peer revision activities in Nana’s class helped her craft a paper that is actually rhetorical:

All of the writing I’ve previously done has been in terms of look at this text and write about it, and this class was definitely more of take an issue that you’re passionate about...and write about it, but write about why it’s important and why someone would want to keep reading it...[Now] I know what I want out of a paper and how what I want as a reader as well.

Comments like this from Cathryn and her classmates show how a creative writer like Nana can help students use peer editing in the classroom to write rhetorically-situated compositions for real audiences—classmates and the teacher.

**6) Reading or listening more deeply.** Of course, students’ growth as writers did not only come from the hiphop materials. Several of my students described their deepening appreciation for Joseph Harris’s chapter “Coming to Terms” and how its meaning unfolded over the course of the semester for them. One of my sophomore students, Yetunde, told me



what I got from it was to read in-between the lines and really try to take – it's not about regurgitating what [an author] had to say and just summarizing, but about realizing what they had to say and then taking it a step further by what that means for you, what they're implying by even saying it in the first place and maybe thinking about the setting, um, the time period that they took it in, that they wrote it, and, yeah, just like all the – you had to really see it from all the perspectives instead of just what is there sitting in front of you.

Yetunde was not the only student who described this text and others as being challenging at first, but then opening up through class discussion and continued critical engagement.

I hope that this level of critical reading would emerge from many writing courses. In reflecting on their hip-hop writing courses, however, Nana's and my students also prominently described critical engagement in terms of listening, and listening more deeply. Because of the deep antiblackness that governs popular representations of hip-hop, students learning to listen more deeply was often a confrontation with antiblack discourses that paint hip-hop and hip-hop artists as unintelligent; this listening also supported students' growth as critical readers, listeners, and researchers. One of Nana's students, Sarah, a longtime hip-hop fan and music writer, and a white woman, found herself "listening to [albums] deeper, just listening on a level I hadn't before, and being able to form questions and descriptions based on that." Sarah's classmate Chrissy, also a white woman, explained that learning to listen to music more closely "taught me a lot...like not judging right away, not just skimming the surface, you know, like looking a little bit more deeper into different things." Multiple students from both my and Nana's classes said that their critical engagement with music in the class had changed how they listened to music on their own. My sophomore student Rob told me, "before this class it was kind of, like, bobbing my head, like listening in my car, but now I kind of listen to lyrics more. So, my favorite rapper, or hip-hop artist is Eminem, and after this class I started to listen to Nas a lot...I think he's like, one of the best storytellers. So that's how my relationship changed with hip-hop, now I like to listen to it—and understand it--more than just, bounce to it." Chrissy told me that although

people think “hiphop is ignorant,” she found that “as we picked apart pieces of the songs, you realized that they have a lot more meaning,” a process which changed how she listens to music. My freshman student David told me that “one of things I liked the most was when we broke off into like different groups” to close read a Kanye West song. David remembered the activity as delicious: “we just like devoured that whole song and broke it up and talked about ...what the discourse audience was really that he was speaking to and how it changed from verse to verse.” In fact, multiple students told me that some of their favorite activities were close reading, whether close reading lyrics or close reading visuals like music videos and album covers. Many of Nana’s students cited a classroom activity where he had them exhaustively identify details from the spare album cover for Biggie’s *Ready to Die* before working to make claims about what the visuals meant. Another frequently cited activity was the assignment Nana and I both gave for students to listen to Kanye West’s *The College Dropout* album in its entirety, an activity which led students to confront the antiblack discourses that frame rappers as unintelligent (Jenkins). Nana’s student Tamika told me that while listening to this album,

I delved more into under the surface...Just because around the surface Kanye West is a really big cocky rapper, just always in everybody’s face about everything, but then some of his lyrics were just so deep and I didn’t even realize it just reading it through at first, but then it took me going back a couple times and being like, oh, okay, that’s actually like a really smart – a really smart way of thinking, that I’d never thought about before.

Because we framed rappers and hip-hop artists as composers students could relate to, students told me that digging deeper into writers’ choices and processes helped them understand their own processes as well. Nana’s student Ruth described how “realizing that there were so many different elements that went into making [a given] project” led her to “[think] about my own project, like the project I would create and how much work I put into a project.” She continued:

So it’s the same thing when it comes to an album or music, you know it’s takes work, it takes – there are a lot of influences, it takes revision, it takes so much and so um, really

that helps you appreciate, I mean I like hip-hop but I wasn't, not modern hip-hop, but even the hip-hop that I think is lame today or that you know ah devalues hip-hop, I still find a beauty in it because it still took a lot of creativity to create and so um that was one of the things that I noticed like for finding purpose and realizing that something is a project and trying to break it down like that was a really, really helpful.

**7) Depictions of antiblackness.** Both code 4, **social constructions of error**, and code 6 above, **reading or listening more deeply**, overlapped significantly with code 7, **depictions of antiblackness**. In discussing error and listening students visibilized prominent antiblack discourses that dismiss rappers and Black Language users as ignorant and illiterate and therefore not worth listening to. In the discussion of code 4, **social construction of error**, we saw students from multiple demographic backgrounds relay how error had socially been constructed to privilege white standard speech, leaving them thinking that Black speech and Black speakers were ungrammatical, lazy, or wrong. For many of them, class introduced them to the idea that Black language choices are purposive, meaningful, contextually appropriate, and rooted in the languages of the African diaspora. In code 6, **reading or listening more deeply**, we saw how antiblackness and the latent notion of Black speech as meaningless or less intentional also shaped students' listening and reading habits, so that many of them, including active hip-hop fans, didn't listen to hip-hop's language because of a sense that it was meaningless, a habit that changed for many students in the study. These findings are consistent with Zandra Jordan's research suggesting that views on Black Language as inferior exist even among speakers of BL themselves (Jordan).

6 out of Nana's 7 students and 8 out of my 14 students, 14 out of 20 total, referenced antiblack social scripts in their interviews. Luckily, these scripts were often challenged by students' comments. One of Nana's students, Chrissy, a white woman, described being called an "Oreo" and a "40 year old Black man in a white woman's body" by her white female friends for

preferring rap and R&B to the white pop music her friends liked. However, she still believed that “even though people say that rap is like just talking and yelling, I think that like those two types of music [rap and R&B] you honestly have to have the most talent for.” A white male, Nana’s student Dan, shared similar experiences, commenting that “my friends always made fun of me...for listening to too hard of rap...and my parents were always against it whenever I played it in the car they’d always be like all this foul language, how do you listen to this.” In these comments and the comments I shared in discussions of codes 4 and 6 above we can see how centering hiphop in a writing studies curriculum allows students to confront the antiblack language politics that lead them to dismiss BL speakers.

**8) White habitus in class.** The hardest part of analyzing these data was working to identify racialized discourses and ideologies circulating in class. Because of the nature of contemporary colorblind discourse, student commentary about racial politics in class was often characterized by evasion or absence, or approving comments on classroom harmony and classmates’ respectfulness for all opinions. However, as I dug deeper into the data I began to see some patterns emerge, for example the overrepresented tendency of women to identify tensions in class and students’ desires to engage with difficult subjects despite their common perceptions that classmates were afraid of saying the wrong thing or offending somebody. Ironically, it was two vocal male students in my freshman class who told me in their interviews they’d wished their classmates would have talked in class more, without acknowledging the racialized and gendered dynamics in class that may have left other folks scared to speak up, a dynamic I insufficiently confronted as their teacher. Ultimately, following Asao Inoue and Bonilla-Silva’s theorizations of the “white habitus” as normative practices into which whites and others are socialized, in particular the inability to forthrightly discuss race. Multiple students struggled to

discuss race in their interviews but also told me that escalation of the Black Lives Matter movement protests in response to racist violence, coupled with the content of the courses, encouraged these discussions, often in contrast to other classes they'd taken at school. 11 students depicted the white habitus in their interviews—6 out of Nana's 7 students and 5 out of my 14—with 5 of these students, all of them Nana's, referencing hip-hop in their depictions of a white habitus.

Multiple students expressed gratitude for the opportunity to confront racial injustice in class. Nana's student Tamika, a Black woman, told me that she was glad to explore issues of racial injustice in class, especially since "this whole year has been like not overly shitty but like more shitty for African Americans than in the past." "I have a brother, I have a like a young like Black cousin," she told me, and "this class is definitely a good way for me to like incorporate my culture and my identity and my beliefs into my paper." A pre-law student, Tamika hoped that "in law school I'll be able to use my own voice and have my own stories to use... in the past as a student here I haven't really had the chance to use my own personal beliefs as like a basis and for a research paper."

Both white students and students of color described the white habitus of the classroom as inhibiting conversations they were eager to have, even if it made them all feel afraid. Chrissy, who was white, told me that it's hard to talk about race in class, but that current events had brought racial politics to the fore.

The main issue is kind of just brushed aside until as of recent with all these riots and everything... I feel like even in class it's like too heavy of a subject if someone is African American in the class, it's just a really, really touchy subject to talk about in a classroom with people you don't know so you don't know how you're gonna offend somebody and especially like if our professor's African American.

Chrissy went on to explain that she had become friends with a person “who is really into these types of issues” and was glad that she had someone to digest them with. “Just because I’m White doesn’t mean I don’t care about the issues.” When I asked if she had any insights for how to discuss racial injustice in the classroom, she said, “I think that you just need to be flat out open and just be like hey we’re gonna talk about some serious stuff, you can say whatever you want and like don’t get offended because you know like these are your classmates.”

Chrissy’s white classmate Sarah echoed the sense of fear she believed white students felt around saying the wrong thing. For Sarah, whose mother was a lawyer who worked with low-income communities and who felt a lifelong awareness of racial injustice, she was thrilled to see the class open to these discussions, telling me, “I loved it.”

I think it needs to happen more in every class, in every possible way. I just think that the problem is that a lot of people are afraid of talking about it, and it’s a sensitive topic so people dance around it. But it’s a topic that really needs to be addressed... especially with things like police violence and all the shootings that have been happening, it’s really important to address things like that and this is still the only class that I’ve ever taken that’s really like looked at what is happening right now and how it relates to other contemporary things like the music of right now...by being in a class that’s willing to talk about it, um, I think you sort of just become more comfortable with the language surrounding it and being able to talk about it yourself and being more educated about it, so, I think it’s really important. I liked it.

I followed up to Sarah’s comment, sharing that in my experience I’d seen “white students especially really don’t know how to talk about race and they’re agitated, you know?” She replied:

I’ve seen that too – especially again in white students, like they’re – like there’s even a fear to say the word Black, um, or a fear to even like acknowledge anything because they just don’t wanna step on any toes, ...I think honestly there’s something like when people do acknowledge what is happening, um, I think it’s almost braver and be more appreciated by like anyone in the class or whoever you’re having a conversation with because there’s an element of just like I’m willing to admit that this is – you know like that this is what people are doing and we can talk about it and it’s okay, and even if I’m wrong in my language I’ll be open to correction, um, but I will say like our class, for the most part, seemed okay about it, um, I don’t really – I don’t really – like there were – I

recall that there being like a few comments here and there that it was sort of like naaa, not. I was kind of like I don't know what just happened or what is going to happen, but um, for the most part everyone seemed pretty comfortable talking with each other, um, and not – no one was hostile or anything and it seemed fairly productive, um, so.

Chrissy and Sarah's valuing of forthrightness was echoed by Yetunde, a Black student in my sophomore writing class. But while Yetunde echoed the value of clarity and forthrightness, she also felt more tension around racially charged moments in class. She said:

I just remember like moments in class where it was like really tense because people were talking about um, things that kind of – people don't like to talk about, but it was okay because it was in the text and it was part of the assignment, so like you could tell like they were uncomfortable, but they really want to say it so they were like really – you know you felt like the energy coming from them when they were talking about ... whether [for example, hiphop] should be incorporated or not into the classroom.

Yetunde went on to clarify that she enjoyed these moments not because they ostensibly supported her but rather that she was glad to see students working through their own issues. Her comment suggests that discussions of racialized topics in class had been implicitly been structured around white students' needs, a problem I discuss in this chapter's conclusion and am working to correct in my teaching.

I wasn't glad that they were like siding with me because I'm an African American woman and this text promotes the culture that I'm supposed to identify with...but I was happy that they were like being honest with themselves about how they felt about it, you know? And not really being afraid to express that, so it wasn't – it wasn't moments about me, but more about I'm glad that I'm here with other people as they're getting through that, like they're working through that.

In particular, Yetunde reflected on an exercise in class when I had illustrated the rhetorical concept of *kairos* by showing the infamous moment when Kanye West went off-script in the Hurricane Katrina Telethon to declare that "George Bush hates Black people." In discussion of the video clip, class seemed to split along racial lines in condemning or approving of West's choice. Yetunde said,

Ah, the Hurricane Katrina Telethon – yeah, I really liked the day that we looked at that in class because that was like a really progressive class because everyone was telling how they felt about it and some people were like super offended that he did it, and like mad because it was taking away from the issue, and other people were like, no, this is really great, and like he’s um, changing the game, so it was – it was cool to see that everyone was expressing their opinions and even though it got tense it wasn’t like anarchy or anything, so, that was interesting to watch.

For Yetunde, discussing race in the Obama era felt auspicious, and she was glad to see these conversations being aired.

I also discussed classroom racial dynamics with Yetunde’s classmate Courtney, a Native American student who wrote about her identity in writings she turned in but never mentioned her identity in class. When I asked her about that choice in her interview, she told me:

Being the only Native American in the class, like if – kind of if I did express it I don’t know how many people would be able to connect with what I was saying. I mean we did have other races as well, but I mean I don’t know how much we could’ve built off of it if I did bring it up...a lot of the girls didn’t really know too much about the hip-hop, I feel like as much as the guys did, um, a lot of the male White students did express their views more so than anyone else. I don’t know if that means they connected more with it or if they had more ideas, but they definitely do have some level of um, connection to it.

I asked Courtney, “Do you think they were just being more vocal in class or that they were big fans?”

“I think they were just being more vocal,” Courtney said. “I mean we didn’t have too many like African American male students. I don’t know if that would change the dynamic if we did – if maybe they would have arguing viewpoints and express it more so.” Courtney’s comments describe a white habitus that made her feel uncomfortable speaking from her own identity and experiences in class, especially in the context of white male classmates dominating conversation. In observing Nana’s classes and comparing them with my own, I noticed that although students still struggled to name racism and race, there was a much more equitable distribution of classroom commentary across races and genders.



For Yetunde and Courtney's classmate Jonathan, my class could have gone much farther in using hip-hop to engage issues of racial politics not just in the nation but on Syracuse's campus, a critique I deeply agree with. To Jonathan, seeing "a group of diverse students," including white students, enjoying hip-hop, attested to the music's power to bridge difference. He told me,

Hip-hop is actually a thing that can like unify students, because it's something that we all indulge in, especially because coming from Syracuse, it is like a known thing across the campus that we're like sort of self-segregated? So like, knowing that I guess the Black community takes so personal as hip-hop is something that we could possibly share with every other culture on this campus as like unifying a topic of interest, and bring it to our discussions in class, and out of class... 'Cause one of the things about hip-hop is it's kind of an art of truth in things, and one of the truths of Syracuse is the climate our campus has, and discussing the type of environment we live in would be I think beneficial for everyone...and I think throwing in things like the hypersexualized activities and drugs and things, things that like hip-hop are always mentioning, throwing those in there as well, cause again that's like another issue or topics that Syracuse University students can relate to.

In this comment, Jonathan breaks through the stereotypes that criminalize Black and brown youths while white students engage in the same behaviors with impunity, by associating the drug and alcohol abuse and sexual violence on campus with the behaviors described in hip-hop texts. While Jonathan sees hip-hop generally associated with Black students on campus, being in class with white hip-hop fans opened his eyes to hip-hop as an opportunity to bridge racial divides on campus, starting in the classroom.

I am heartened by these students' comments, and their recognition that learning to talk about race—disrupting the colorblindness of the white habitus—is scary but necessary. Of course, not all students—a disproportionate number of them young men—recognized tension in the classroom. Dan, one of Nana's students, told me, "there were a good amount of Black students in our class...and there was never an issue brought up about oh, someone said like the wrong thing...but I've done presentations on African American cultures and the use of the N

word in other classes and I've never seen a problem or a student have an issue.” Also interestingly, two different male students from my freshman class, David and Augie, complained in their interviews that their classmates didn’t speak up enough. Yet neither of them seemed aware that their own vocality in class could be related to other students’ silence.

### Implications of the study

My findings have several important implications. First, in many ways they support Downs’ and Wardle’s Writing About Writing pedagogy that insists we teach writing studies content in the classroom. Freshman students who received the pedagogy that hemmed closest to WAW demonstrated the strongest awareness of writing studies concepts like literacy, discourse, and contextuality. However, these students also insisted in interviews that their understanding of and engagement with these concepts was significantly underwritten by the presence of audiovisual hip-hop texts in class, including songs and film. This suggests that appealing to student interests, identities, and learning styles—that is, creating an “Intro to writing studies” class that is itself rhetorical—is critical to student learning and success in our classrooms. In particular, my findings—especially considered alongside the historical study of the previous chapter—suggest that attention to student (and teacher, faculty, and administrator) affect is crucial. This finding collides with growing attention among preeminent hip-hop feminists to pleasure. Quoted in the chapter epigraph, Joan Morgan’s increased attention to pleasure alongside her colleagues, the “pleasure ninjas” Treva Lindsey, Esther Arma, Yaba Blay, Brittney Cooper, and Kaila Story. Morgan writes: “As black feminist theorists, we’ve made a commitment to reframe the existing narrative about black female sexuality by positioning desire,

agency and black women's engagements with pleasure as a viable theoretical paradigm"

(Morgan "Why" 36). A responsible pedagogy of pleasure in the classroom will be one that is accountable, first and foremost, to Black and women of color's pleasure in the classroom, even at PWIs, and that ensures students are not experiencing pleasure at the expense of marginalized members of the classroom.

My findings suggest that hiphop can contribute to a rhetorical freshman writing classroom: a classroom that responds deeply to its rhetorical situation, including local factors as well as pervasive factors like our students' media habits, everyday writing practices, interests, and attitudes about language. Responding to student interests does not need to detract from the writing-studies-centered classroom. Hiphop is not an arbitrary presence in the writing classroom, but a rich literacy culture in which written, spoken, and painted artistic texts reflect explicitly on discursive choices and communities. Hiphop scholarship on composition, rhetoric, and literacy is already a vibrant part of our field that should be centered and celebrated, not marginalized and ignored. My findings show that students understood their time in college as a marketplace into which they invested limited resources of time, energy, and attention in order to maximize their returns in grades, job readiness, and knowledge. Given this orientation to courses—and our field's close relationship with rhetoric—we must consider how to make composition courses rhetorically appeal to our students so that they recognize themselves in our course materials, identify with course concepts and characters, and invest in the task of learning about writing and practicing writing.

My findings also suggest that including hiphop artistic and scholarly texts engages students in understanding some of the most perplexing questions of their colorblind world: the increased visibility of racist violence and the return of widespread protest, the persistence of

racial discrimination, and pervasive dismissals of rap music, a genre many of them are deeply invested in. As white supremacy has re-entered the political center since conducting this study, centering language discrimination and debunking static notions of error in our writing classes are more important than ever.

In so doing, we must name whiteness, Blackness, and antiblackness more explicitly than either I or Nana did in our classrooms. As I continue to discuss in the following chapter, identifying these difficult topics begins with teachers acknowledging their own identities, something I did not do. Although students in all classes challenged antiblack stereotypes that paint nonstandard language users like rappers as ignorant or stupid, the discursive construction of these stereotypes by whiteness was not explicitly discussed in class, because whiteness as a set of discursive practices was not sufficiently addressed. More can be done in the writing classroom to discuss not just Blackness but whiteness as a discursive construct that is reproduced and mediated through language, including classroom language. As I continue to discuss in the following chapter, this reflexive approach to a writing studies course demands that both students and instructors be actively invited to locate themselves and their language practices in their speech and writing for class. Dismantling whiteness in the writing classroom by teaching how the social construction of error is linked to antiblack, unscientific notions of language is consistent with the best research in our field while also supporting the flourishing and political agency of our diverse and deserving students.

## CHAPTER 5

### “It’s Lit!”: Hip-hop Language and Graduate Student Labor in the Composition Classroom at One PWI

In the days before their first meetings, Nana sent his new two sections of Writing 205 an email with the subject line “It’s LIT. Class that is.” Using a pun on “literature” and “lit,” a BL and youth language term meaning fun, hype, or awesome, and often used to describe a party, Nana welcomed his students to their new required writing class. He wrote:

Our 205 course is a research class that will be using the MC as a writer and Hip-Hop as a social/cultural entity as it’s inquiry of interest. That means we’ll be discovering our own capacities to be literate and expand our own literacy and ability as writers using hip-hop as the lens through which we study. Dope, no? If you aren’t already sold hopefully the time in class will win you over. If not, I don’t know what to tell you, have fun elsewhere? Seriously though, I look forward to getting to know y’all as students and I hope you will be an engaged, active member of what I hope will be an enlightening and pretty fun class.

In this email we see Nana working to join our field, adopting a view of literacy as situated practice, even as he puns the class as a “lit”—that is, literature—class.

Following this e-mail, Nana opened his class by rapping a verse to Kanye West’s song “All Falls Down.” In a co-written dialogue we worked on together, Nana wrote:

The very first day of class I sat among the students and waited as if I were one of them. I got to chat really candidly with them about the new semester--one student was lamenting the fact that he was in the course at all. Without my prompting I got to talk to students about music. It was a way to make the first day purposeful, to get to see them without the traditional teacher-student formality. I like to do this every new semester: After like thirteen minutes of waiting, about the time when nervous mutterings start shifting to panic, I’ll tell one of the students I’ve been chatting with, “Just so you know I’m the teacher, I’m about to get up and start class.” And the student will just look at me confused. I do that to force myself up, since at that point even I have started to believe the charade. But after I tell the one student I’m committed, so I get up and as I’m standing I say, “She’s so self-conscious, she has no idea what she’s doing in college,” it’s the start of a verse a lot of them familiar with, Kanye West’s “All Falls Down,” and I recite the whole thing and before I finish a bunch of students are rapping along with me, some just staring cause they’re still not sure I’m legit till I hand the syllabi out. It’s dope to see. I hope it lets them know I’m into the content we’ll be using in a real way, and also I’m willing to make myself vulnerable which is essential to meaningful discussion. I’m also

establishing I'm totally and literally willing to sit among them, to listen as much as I speak.

Nana's students, experts in distinguishing the hip from the clueless, the down from the out, took heed of Nana's language choices and what it meant about the community they were about to enter. As one of Nana's students, Chrissy, told me in her exit interview, "I remember he said 'dope' in the email and I was like, okay, [this is a] young person and then it's a hip-hop class, so like it just has everything that a young person would want."

Nana's language practices were a major asset that he brought to his composition teaching. Throughout this dissertation, interrogating hip-hop's place in composition and rhetoric has occasioned critical interventions in the field. In this chapter, I shift the focus of the previous chapter on undergraduate student learning to another aspect of the study, graduate student learning, teaching, and training, in some ways returning to the questions of labor, disciplinarity, and institutionality raised in the historical study of chapter 3. I ask how the field might use hip-hop to better open up composition teaching to folks like Nana, whose identity and language practices could be marginalized or embraced by those preparing him to teach composition. In this chapter I focus on Nana alongside myself in order to consider the institutional implications on a disciplinary and labor level of hip-hop in composition and rhetoric, exploring how hip-hop composition and rhetoric concerns not just undergraduate students and how they learn writing, but also how graduate students teach, as well as the question of graduate students' inclusion in and access to the field and the labor of composition, alongside questions of disciplinarity as they relate to creative writing and Black creative expression in writing and writing studies. Just as hip-hop foregrounds questions of identity and access in discussions of pedagogy and curriculum design, it also foregrounds these issues in questions of graduate student teachers' training, labor, and retention. As with other facets of composition and rhetoric, bringing hip-hop into the frame

foregrounds questions of race, difference, and creativity to questions of graduate student teaching, labor, training, and disciplinarity. Ultimately, including Nana in the study allowed me to approach a more specific research question embedded within my others: “How does looking at graduate student teachers teaching hip-hop from two different social and institutional locations clarify the work hip-hop does and can do in writing classrooms at one PWI?” In this chapter, I offer hip-hop in composition as a critical intervention that promotes inclusivity not just for undergraduates but for graduate students as well, as I consider how welcoming hip-hop into the classes he taught offered Nana a more inclusive vision of our field, a vision he worked to pass on to students.

As I discuss below, in this chapter I resist portraying Nana as the research subject to my expert, dispassionate research. Rather, Nana is a colleague and a friend with whom I collaboratively worked to expand the pool of students in my data set and to better understand, together, what it means for graduate students in creative writing to teach composition using hip-hop practices and texts. In this chapter, I draw on the three interviews I conducted with Nana throughout the semester in which I studied his classes, and also share some of his instructional materials and other writings. Although he is a Black man with African immigrant parents and I am white Ashkenazi Jewish woman, Nana’s positionality as an MFA student in fiction tasked with teaching composition mirrors the institutional position from which I began teaching composition myself. When I began teaching hip-hop composition I was a second year MFA student in fiction, just like him. But as I described to Nana’s student Ruth and relayed in the previous chapter, I was surprised when I began my study with Nana to find that I had become a researcher. And yet now, Nana’s and my identities and relationship have evolved even further, as Nana has graduated from his program, moved to a faculty fellowship at a new institution, and

secured a book deal for his first collection of short stories and a future novel. Only time will tell what role composition will ultimately play in Nana's career, but the fact remains that teaching composition was his first teaching role and I'm sure he will continue teaching writing with hip-hop as a major presence in his classes. One of the things I value most about working with Nana is how what began as a mentorship-type relationship evolved into a partnership, with us sharing teaching ideas, challenging each other, and eventually co-authoring an article for a journal and working through the peer review process together, albeit ultimately unsuccessfully. Our partnership is complex, too, because since Nana's career trajectory is still firmly in creative writing, he has different publication and conference demands than me, but I do hope to co-present our research at some point.

Building on the previous chapter, this chapter asks how a vision of composition and rhetoric *as hip-hop* can widen access to disciplinary knowledge on literacy, genre, error, disciplinarity, and writing process for graduate student instructors who are marginal to our discipline in multiple ways, whether because they hail from a different field, speak varieties of English that are not widely valorized in the academy, or inhabit identities that are marginalized in our field and in the academy. Drawing on research about austerity and labor in composition, I argue that creating inclusive visions of composition and rhetoric for graduate student instructors is critical, given the large numbers of graduate student instructors from outside the field who teach composition, and the relative inattention to non-disciplinary graduate student composition teachers in the research literature. Given Nana's and my similar trajectories to composition teaching from an MFA in fiction to teaching composition, our interviews became an opportunity for us to chart agreements and disagreements about the role of hip-hop in the composition classroom and the disciplinary quirks of teaching composition as an MFA student in creative



writing. As I analyze Nana's negotiations with composition and rhetoric, drawing parallels and comparisons with my own experiences coming to composition from creative writing, I ultimately ask how composition and rhetoric can do a better job offering an inclusive vision of our field to new composition instructors while also recognizing and amplifying the writing expertise that students in creative writing already hold, helping them to transfer that knowledge into composition and rhetoric's terms, priorities, and classrooms.

### Graduate Students Teach Composition: Language, Expertise, Identity, Labor

Like other chapters in this dissertation, this chapter draws from research within and outside of composition and rhetoric in order to illuminate the work of hiphop composition in PWIs, specifically with regard to graduate students teaching composition. In particular, I'll use research about composition and rhetoric's labor and disciplinarity which is coalescing under a subfield of composition studies known as WPA, or Writing Program Administration, to situate Nana's participation in the study within our field's considerations of austerity, non-tenure-track teaching labor, and disciplinarity. I'll then consider Nana's language choices in the context of composition and rhetoric as a discourse community, before offering a co-written dialogue Nana and I submitted to an academic journal, ultimately unsuccessfully. My conversations with Nana contribute to the argument, weaving throughout this dissertation, that creative writing and creative writers' contributions to composition and rhetoric need to be recognized and celebrated. Creative writers have passion and writing expertise that is valuable for composition students and composition, rhetoric, and literacy scholars' conceptions of writing. At the same time, we have research-based knowledge that builds on and clarifies much of what creative writers already instinctively know about writing, especially around the writing process and the ways that writing

in different genres and voices responds to different rhetorical situations. Ultimately, I advocate for graduate teacher training practices that build connections between composition and rhetoric's expertise and the powerful writing expertise of creative writers, so that our undergraduate students have writing teachers who deeply understand their own literacies in service of students' locating their own.

In his *Terms of Work for Composition*, Bruce Horner "identif[ies] a tension between composition and rhetoric's desire for disciplinary status and its material location(s)" (xv). Offering a "cultural materialist critique" of our field, Horner insists that successful pedagogies in composition classrooms must emerge out of our material locations and constraints. His view, which is in dialogue with other research in the composition subfield of Writing Program Administration studies, involves rooting our theorizations of our field in the material contexts of our teaching, including details such as the disciplinary location of our courses (are they housed in an English Department, a Writing Program, or elsewhere), the makeup of our teaching force (by tenure-track or adjunct faculty, or my graduate students from any array of departments), the financial structures that constrain us, the local and state assessments we must or choose to undergo. Further, Horner works to "redefine the work of writing as material social practice," arguing that a materialist understanding of our socially located work undergirds a sense of writing itself as taught and valued for the "specific and various uses to which it may be put" (xxiv). In this chapter, I continue my efforts to depict a composition and rhetoric that has always and continues to be shaped by the teaching labor of creative writers. In focusing on Nana as a creative writer and graduate student, a Black man and a hip-hop community member, and his work teaching composition, I ask how we can welcome teachers like Nana by building bridges to their expertise that recognize our shared interest in and experience with writing.

In her article “Materializing the Material,” in which she clarifies different uses of the terms “material,” “materialism,” and “materiality,” in our field, Eileen Schell notes that our field can be characterized by its attention to “*material conditions*—conditions of pay, contracts, professional status and respect” (124, emphasis original). Throughout this dissertation, I have also engaged a another way of thinking materially—that is, historical materialism, Marxist in origin, which, as Schell defines it, “acknowledges materialism as a process in which material life shapes consciousness, not consciousness shaping material life” (125). It was along these lines that I critiqued the WAW pedagogy as limiting our conception of writing through its prioritization of a certain vision of writing studies as a discipline. Throughout this dissertation, I have forwarded a historically materialist argument that suggests that the material realities of composition and rhetoric’s institutional structures—that is, the economics of composition and rhetoric within specific institutional locations—have limited the field’s theorizations of writing, often at the expense of better understanding the full diversity of writing and rhetoric, including hiphop. Finally, in this chapter I also draw on literature on the history of composition and rhetoric as well as on the disciplinarity of composition and rhetoric and creative writing, written from the perspective of both fields, in order to best situate Nana’s teaching, and my own, within relevant discussions of our work teaching composition as graduate students.

Since the inception of freshman composition at Harvard in 1878, questions of labor, language, and access have always been interrelated and omnipresent in our field’s attempts to teach and theorize writing. Crowley explains how Adams Sherman Hill’s institution of the freshman entrance exam in English literature at Harvard in 1878 worked simultaneously to standardize English language practices, standardize high school literature curricula, and valorize the labor of English professors at Harvard, while also creating work for English tutors for those

who failed (72-73). These variables continued to fluctuate in relationship throughout the twentieth century. The invention of freshman English in the wake of the entrance exam necessitated the creation of a discipline full of paper graders around whom an endless effort would be waged to “cut costs” (Berlin 23). The “monumental task” of grading papers (Berlin 22) pushed composition to devise pedagogies that shifted the work of grading away from professors. These innovations included using graduate students and other non-tenured instructors to teach and grade (Berlin 22-23), but also involved technological developments in assessment. In the early part of the twentieth century, members of the efficiency movement devised “quantitative evaluation scales” to assess student writing more quickly (Berlin 54). Berlin reports that the influence of scientific positivism continued into the century and “resulted in the use of intelligence tests and grammar-usage tests and organizational tests...[as] attempts to develop objective scales to measure the value of student essays” (59). Thus we see how assessment technologies, labor efficiency, and standardization of argument, grammar, and usage all move in relationship. Crowley and Berlin both note that even the pedagogical breakthrough of process pedagogy in the sixties and seventies was related to labor issues, in that having students do prewriting and workshop one another’s work functioned to divert grading away from overworked teachers and back to the students. Throughout these periods of pedagogical change, textbook companies also worked to produce new readers and handbooks that kept pace with the times even as they codified and extended the reach of whatever pedagogies were currently in vogue.

Although it is not in the purview of this chapter to discuss at length, it is important to acknowledge that questions about austerity, labor, and disciplinarity are also occurring across the hall or across the campus in creative writing programs, where faculty are also working in

insecure labor conditions and students of color are also advocating for recognition and pedagogical reform. Several scholars, writing within composition and rhetoric but with personal experience of creative writing in academia—including Kelly Ritter, Douglas Hesse, Wendy Bishop, and others—have written about the complex and often underattended-to disciplinary, pedagogical, and theoretical overlaps and tensions between composition and rhetoric and creative writing. In both fields, long discussions have ensued about what type of writing instruction is best suited for the university classroom; in creative writing circles, writers have bemoaned the domestication of creative writing by the academy, for example in Chad Harbach’s much-hyped 2014 book *MFA vs NYC: The Two Cultures of American Fiction*. Junot Diaz’s 2014 *New Yorker* article “MFA vs. POC” challenged Harbach’s binary as a false one, arguing that the real divide in American fiction is not between institutionally or non-institutionally located writers but rather between a white literary center and its continued marginalization, both on-campus and off, of writers of color. A recent article by Viet Thanh Nguyen for the New York Times argues that the professed ideological neutrality of the writing workshop invisibilizes the “workshop’s origins,” offering a history of the workshop that roots the pedagogical form in focus on the individual as a response to a “midcentury American fear of Communism.” As I consider intersections in this chapter between creative writing and composition and rhetoric from the perspective of graduate student labor, it is important to remember that creative writing has its own perspectives, histories, and critiques of our intersecting histories and evolving institutional locations.

Writing for *College Composition and Communication* in 2010, Douglas Hesse argued for greater communication between creative writing and composition programs and teachers, suggesting that while composition and rhetoric has developed more pedagogical theory and

writing research than creative writing, creative writing's continued popularity speaks to contemporary digital writing practices defined by their circulation and virality (32, 43). Hesse also acknowledges the ways that, in an ever-tightening job market for academics, writers, and essentially all workers, creative writers often rely on composition for employment when loftier writing dreams don't pan out (32). Yet, as Kelly Ritter has pointed out, creative writing programs often resist acknowledging the labor realities for their students and many of their graduates' reliance on composition jobs, not to mention the reliance of creative writing programs themselves for funding via graduate student teaching jobs within composition and rhetoric. Wendy Bishop and David Starkley's 2006 book *Keywords in Creative Writing* offers "Adjunct and Temporary Faculty" and "Teaching Jobs" alongside publishing industry keywords like "Agents" as some of the many avenues creative writers take to make a living. Summarizing the reasons creative writers are attracted to composition and rhetoric, they write that more and more creative writers are moving into composition and rhetoric "because that field is offering interesting avenues for enhancing a creative writer's understanding of his or her own writing practices and supporting his or her work as a writing teacher" (40). As austerity regimes threaten budgets and resources for the arts and humanities, we need solidarity between creative writing and composition and rhetoric so that we can push for improved resources for all of us, rather than fighting for the same sliver of an ever-shrinking pie.

As instructional budgets shrink, more and more teaching is shifted onto low-cost teaching labor, including that of adjunct and graduate student instructors. Since a 1969 report on a Workshop, written up in CCC, on "Training Graduate Students to Teach Composition," too little has been written about graduate student instructors of composition, a lack this chapter addresses. Although some such research does exist, most notable Jessica Restaino's book *First Semester:*

*Graduate Students, Teaching Writing, and the Challenge of Middle Ground*, growing attention to the labor crisis in composition and rhetoric must continue to center graduate students alongside adjunct instructors in its analysis. Further, relatively little attention has been paid to graduate students teaching composition while studying in other fields, including creative writing, and literature on graduate students teaching tends to assume a normative white population without attending to differences of socioeconomic status, race, sexuality, and ability which have become more regularly attended to in literature about the undergraduate students we teach. As with the place of creative writing in composition and rhetoric more generally, we need more research about graduate students teaching composition that looks across disciplinary boundaries and normative identities to question how graduate students from multiple fields, with multiple identities and language practices, and with multiple and varying relationships to and theorizations of writing are teaching composition. As I discuss below and consistent with chapter 4's theorization of WAW as colorblind, I advocate a research approach that illuminates diversity instead of working to norm, discipline, and homogenize difference. This view is consistent with that of Annie Mendenhall, who argues that we must recognize the flexibility and variability of composition expertise as shaped by the various institutional locations in which we exist and the various institutional uses to which our flexible expertises are put, a flexibility to which Mendenhall attributes the growth of tenure-track positions in Writing Studies. "Instead of trying to articulate (and agree on) our area of expertise," Mendenhall writes, "we need to interrogate how our location, faculty positions, and labor structures shape our expertise—historically, theoretically, and pedagogically" (14). Paying attention to graduate students teaching composition must be an essential component in understanding the flexibility of composition and rhetoric labor and laborers.

In the case of graduate students in creative writing, we must recognize their flexibility as writers and teachers as a strength even as we build on those strengths to prepare them to teach composition using disciplinary knowledge from our field. In their 2013 “Reflecting Back and Looking Forward: Revisiting Teaching about Writing, Righting Misconceptions Five Years On,” Downs and Wardle revisit their pilot study in light of Writing About Writings’ successes as well as in order to respond to criticisms. While they continue defending their original thesis that the content of composition and rhetoric should be taught in all composition classes, starting with FYC, and that students learn to write better when offered research on writing that prepares them to confront a wide range of situations, they also revisit their concern about what they called in 2007 “the elephant in the room,” namely, “who *couldn’t* teach a writing studies pedagogy” (“Teaching” 575). In the 2013 article, Downs and Wardle admit that they were “too certain” about who is and isn’t qualified to teach writing. In fact, they say, “we have found our ensuing experience to disprove our own claim that courses about writing can’t be taught by those without graduate work in rhetoric and composition.” Rather, they find that “people who work with texts and are familiar with genres and conventions in a variety of disciplines, professions, and civic pursuits bring an abundance of expertise to the table as writing teachers,” expertise that can be built on. As I share my discussions with Nana, I hope to argue that creative writers have particular expertise that needs to be taught to and solicited when we teach creative writers how to teach composition.

Preparing creative writers to teach composition effectively is an essential task given that austerity lowers opportunities for artists to make a living, pushing them into composition and rhetoric, even as composition and rhetoric continues to rely heavily on adjunct and graduate student teaching labor by instructors from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds. Two recent



edited collections draw special attention to the ways university labor, and composition labor in particular, have been shaped by the post-Great Recession austerity regimes: Nancy Welch and Tony Scott's 2016 *Composition in the Age of Austerity*, and Seth Kahn, William B. Lalicker, and Amy Lynch-Binieć's *Contingency, Exploitation, and Solidarity: Labor and Action in English Composition*. Kahn, Lalicker, and Lynch-Binieć's book opens with an foreword by Eileen Schell which situates the text within several decades of research into contingent labor in composition and rhetoric. Schell draws readers' attention to questions of difference and how that difference shapes the experiences of adjuncts, asking,

How is contingency tied to the bodies of workers and students that are marked as non-normative and different? In a globalized economy, white women, women of color, and men of color, working class men and women (see Dew), people living with disabilities, and queer and trans people are often treated as an exploitable and expendable workforce; how does higher education mirror that exploitation? (xiv-xv)

Like June Jordan writing forty years earlier, Schell calls on us to ask where tuition and tax monies are going and ask, "Why are instructional budgets so flat or diminishing even as the leaders of colleges and universities authorize university budgets to be spent on a growing array of administrative positions... and real estate, gleaming new buildings and recreational centers?" (xvii) Following Schell's call for solidarity with "both graduate and undergraduate" students (xvii), we must expand her attention to the working conditions of graduate student teachers from marginalized identities.

An essay in the same collection, Allison Laubach Wright's "The Rhetoric of Excellence and the Erasure of Graduate Student Labor," brings attention to graduate student labor, pointedly analyzing the ways and reasons why this labor is too often erased. Wright's essay argues that graduate student labor has been invisibilized by the work of Tier One Universities as they work to cultivate a "brand of excellence" (266) which depends on graduate student research to

function and yet would be undermined by publicly declaring the extent of undergraduate teaching performed by graduate student teachers. In the context of composition and rhetoric, Wright draws special attention to “English departments, where four year universities have graduate students teaching the labor-intensive first year writing (FYW) course while minimizing both the presence of the course and the work of the graduate students” (266). She continues:

...even though FYW courses make up around 70 percent of undergraduate courses offered, those courses appear as two or three entries in the course catalogue, where they are taught by “STAFF” rather than a named individual (Slevin 5). At large research universities, FYW courses are generally taught by graduate students, whose names are absent from the course history of the university. (266-267)

In Scott and Welch’s collection, Shari Steinberg’s “Beyond Marketability” further develops attention to graduate student labor by highlighting the affective dimensions of graduate students’ struggles to retain relevance and marketability within higher education and advocating for a politics of location that visibilizes graduate students’ diverse identities as they lead classrooms. Steinberg’s essay opens with graduate students’ “anxiety...fear...[and] angst” about the job market, “anxiety that seems to increase as job prospects in English decline” (191). In a neoliberal academic labor market with declining opportunities for livable employment, every task becomes “a test of future success. [Graduate students] know they must compete and win in a game that may not be winnable” (191). Steinberg’s attention to the affective dimensions of financial austerity resonates with my claims throughout this dissertation, from my historical discussion in chapter 3 to my pedagogical discussions in chapter 4, asserting the negative affective consequences of austerity and arguing that attention to pleasure in the classroom—for students, graduate students, instructors, and staff—is an important strategy for disrupting neoliberal prerogatives.

Steinberg acknowledges the ways that neoliberal's affective effects impact how graduate students express their identities. For students with marginalized identities, these effects can be particularly insidious, functionally monetizing students' identities in terms of their value. She writes:

Austerity's ideological consequences determine who and what is deemed valuable, who and what counts as a 'good investment'...This pressure to perform the self as a 'good investment' narrows choices about self-representation, [making it] ...difficult for teachers to re-present their identities" (qtd. Brannon et al) – "too" something identities become "an excessive subjectivity in need of discipline" (191)

Thus, Steinberg's portrait is of a field allowing its graduate students' identity presentations to be disciplined by neoliberal norms that demand graduate students marketize and standardize their self-presentations. But working through a series of case studies of graduate student instructors who visibilized their identities in the classrooms, Steinberg instead advocates a feminist "located agency, a practice that includes examining, valuing, and taking responsibility for our locations" as an "alternative to neoliberal values and effects" (192). This critical insight means that graduate student training for new composition instructors needs to invite them to interrogate their own locations, identities, and literacy practices as a way into the theory and pedagogy of our field. We'll see below that for Nana, recognizing his own language practices and his expertise in hiphop and in creative writing allowed him to invest in his teaching and built his confidence, just as hiphop grounded investment and confidence for his and my undergraduate students. As a field, we need to recognize that knowledge about writing comes not just from research but through reflection by writers. Engaging creative writers' reflective knowledge about writing is an essential step in opening our field's concepts to them by relating it to their own experiences with the writing process and writing for different situations.

## The Negotiation Tactics of Nana

Nana came to teaching enthusiastically, having reflected on the teachers who had impacted him as an undergraduate. He felt confident about teaching composition, having successfully written academic prose across his undergraduate institution. He told me that “What creative writing brings, for me, is teaching a sense of being an engaging writer, and that there are a lot of ways to represent sensory experience”—but he was also conscious of composition courses as teaching different skills and content than creative writing courses. As he put it, “a critical summary is so different from a Denis Johnson story.” Nana valued the instruction he received from his required writing practicum, noting that he’d felt “afraid” before teaching for the first time. At the same time, participating in my study, in which I supported and mentored his efforts to integrate hip-hop into his curriculum, helped Nana ground his new knowledge in his own identity and bring that unique knowledge into his teaching and his professional development. He told me, “when I heard what you did [teaching hip-hop in composition courses] it made me feel like I had a legitimate avenue to exercise my expertise. When I wrote my teaching philosophy on fellowship and job applications this year, I talked about how hip-hop helps students express their own expertise, and it gets them more engaged.”

In a recent work, *Rewriting Composition*, Horner frames “difference as the norm of language” (56); because language is always emergent, he writes, in the composition community we need to be open to the ways that new teachers and students challenge our norms by making them their own. How can we open our field to the dopeness of writing teachers like Nana, demonstrating that his knowledge about writing, language, and pedagogy—his identity itself—has value for our classrooms? As we negotiate what it means for instructors outside writing studies to teach our courses, we must also remember to center instructors with marginalized

identities and linguistic practices and make sure we are not just assimilating them to our discipline. In the case of creative writers in particular, we have an opportunity to let these writers bring their creativity as writers to the essential work of composition that is writing and designing pedagogical materials like syllabi, lesson plans, and assessments. Horner writes that beyond the teaching and administration and scholarship, the real labor of composition is writing, composing: “Writing language is the labor of composition.” As graduate student instructors teaching composition at Syracuse, part of this labor entailed re-writing the department’s Writing 205 syllabus for our own classes. When Nana and I met to plan our study, among the materials I shared with him were my syllabi. He told me, “It was super helpful seeing your syllabus...—like you had a syllabus that *was* hiphop—that put me in a frame of mind, seeing what readings are out there.” These comments suggest that Nana didn’t initially see the syllabus as a space where he could apply his expertise as a creative writer. It was only after looking at my syllabus, which incorporated hiphop lyrics and language, that he realized he could make space in composition labor for his linguistic identity. In the syllabus I showed Nana, I included section subtitles like “Free.99,” “Get Open,” “Come correct,” and “Don’t Bite.” Consistent with my exhortation throughout the syllabus to “read everything twice,” I also interspersed a line from a Kanye West song that says “Top five MCs you ain’t gotta remind me, top five MCs you gotta rewind me.”

In Nana’s syllabus, which you can see in the appendix, a large white space at the right shows that his is a more faithful remix of the departmental template, a little less fluently his own. But at the same time the course description forwards hiphop content from the jump, beginning with a quotation from rapper Nas and questions about the nature and development of hiphop culture. In the next paragraph, Nana tells students that “We will be discovering our powers as writers through the lens of hip-hop,” and defines “the MC as active participant in a literary

community,” that is, as a writer. Instructing students that “We will aim for depth in all our research and observations,” Nana quotes Jay-Z: “Do you fools even listen to music or do you just skim though it?” Later on in the syllabus, Nana intersperses quotations from one of his favorite rappers, J-Cole. He quotes: “Either you whine or you climb, I choose the latter... Either you whine or you climb, I choose the ladder...” By framing sections on work and grading with these quotations, Nana prepares his students for the hard work of the course but also uses J-Cole’s lyrics to motivate them, disassociating hard work from the mindless grind of academia and instead with hip-hop cool and hip-hop hustle. These codemeshed syllabi—both Nana’s and my own—deeply affirm the teachings of translingualism and codemeshing which challenge writers to play with (or should I say remix?) established academic and professional genres. Our codemeshed syllabi affirm the value of codemeshing and translingualism for all writers writing in all contexts, even professional writing situations.

The title of this chapter is a reference to “The Assimilation Tactics of Nate,” a chapter from Carol Berkenkotter and Thomas Huckin’s 1995 work *Genre Knowledge in Disciplinary Communication* in which the two scholars study the quote “assimilation tactics” of a pseudonymous doctoral student learning quote the “conventions and conversations of an academic disciplinary community.” Because language use is integral to identity, Nate’s changing language as he learns the moves of his new field coincides with his identity development as well. When Nate, outed as compositionist John Ackerman, reflects on the study in a postscript, he describes graduate school as quote “a struggle for identity in a contested professional space defined by genre activity, quarrels over epistemology and method, and a search for affiliation.”

Early on in my study, I began thinking of Nana’s participation as a kind of remix of Nate, as Nana also engaged with a new field, performed its genres, learned to use its language, and in

doing so developed his own professional identity as a composition teacher. And yet Nana's engagement with composition and rhetoric could not be described as "assimilation." As we co-drafted a dialogue about our study for a journal, I asked Nana about a comment he'd made in our interviews when he said, "I really defer to the Writing Program. I trust them a lot." Referring to the practicum leader, a member of the Writing Department's staff, he said, "I'm one [her] little soldiers, I'm from her school." I asked Nana how it felt to be recruited to composition and rhetoric, by the department and by me as well. In our drafts, he wrote,

To some extent I appreciate the department's use of creative writers, and maybe not for the reason they'd like....I think having teachers who aren't necessarily thinking in the same compositional space is like fresh air. Despite all I've said about deferring to the department, I am a creative writer and I value hip-hop and other artistic communities infinitely and in ways that I don't necessarily value the writing department's Writing Studies concepts. So I pick and choose what I like from them and maybe neglect what I don't think is super helpful.

Of course, this is not the statement of an assimilationist, but a negotiator. And in fact, no one who joins a discourse community ever assimilates all the way. Rather, discourses change, depending on how much they discipline members of their discipline. Nana's negotiation with our field challenge us to see how we "discipline" the linguistic and generic norms of our discipline in ways that are colorblind, limiting the acceptable language practices and therefore identities of members of our field. At the same time, I think Nana could have learned more about our theories of translingualism, genre, and the social construction of error. But his comments above suggest that we didn't do a good enough job inviting him to locate these concepts in his own experiences of language and literacy.

## Players' Ball: Two Graduate Students Talk Composition, Creative Writing, and Hip-hop Pedagogies (A Dialogue)

Last fall, I asked Nana if he'd want to co-write a dialogue-style article, based on our interviews, for a special issue of a journal on hip-hop in English studies. Ultimately, after going through the peer review and revision process, the article was not accepted. Among other lessons, this moment taught me that academic mentorship is a commitment not to be taken lightly: if I ask someone to do the unpaid labor of working on an article with me, I better know what I'm doing. Ever gracious, Nana permitted me to share some of our dialogue in this chapter with you, and I hope doing so foregrounds his voice and his labor in this chapter. Talking about hip-hop composition pedagogy with Nana—and watching him teach—challenged me as a teacher and reminded me, most fundamentally, that disciplinary knowledge is never created alone and that hip-hop meaning always emerges from communities of playas pushing one another to their highest levels of expression.

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*It's funny how things change. When we started this study, Tessa was a doctoral student in Composition and Cultural Rhetoric with five years teaching composition and creative writing under her belt and Nana was an MFA student in his second semester of teaching, ever. Now, as we collaboratively write toward publication, it's three years later, Tessa is still in her doctoral program--editing, not teaching--and Nana is a faculty fellow at a new institution, now with experience teaching composition, contemporary literature, and creative writing, with a fresh book deal to boot.*

*In this dialogue, we reflect on our collaboration, our labor as graduate students teaching composition, and the place of hip-hop in the composition classroom.*



Nana: We'd talked about hiphop casually before meeting for the study. I got the vibe that we could do it in a way that felt like an organic and constructive extension of an actual conversation rather than homework. That manifested in some pretty tangible ways—I got a nice set of material to consider using, *Style Wars*, *The College Dropout*, Hanifa Wadilah's "A Bitch Ain't One," to name a few. I thought having to verbalize my thought processes, chop it up about what was working and what wasn't in the classroom, would help me be a better teacher.

Tessa: I'm glad you felt that way, because part of what drove my engagement with you was a feminist, even what Jacqueline Jones Royster calls an Afrofeminist ethics of care which says that—especially with me being a white woman studying and teaching Black culture in the classroom, and you being a Black man—the research process has to be beneficial for you too. And "beneficial" not just as I have defined it, which would be patronizing, but those benefits emerging from a genuinely collaborative research process.

*From the beginning, this study engaged questions of expertise. What is a writer? What is a writing teacher? Who are the communication experts--are they who we expect? Do they look, speak, write how we expect? Hiphop foregrounds these questions, because hiphop culture is a counternarrative to racist, classist, ageist mythologies in our society that say young Black men are illiterate, young people of color and poor people don't work hard, aren't productive, don't have anything to say. And yet—as the first line of *Style Wars*, a graffiti documentary we both taught, makes clear-- "They call themselves writers."*

Tessa: I love showing clips of *Style Wars* on the first day of my classes because it immediately foregrounds priorities from New Literacy Studies that highlight the way people do writing every day. For college students who often think of writing as a difficult classroom task they're continually failing at, *Style Wars* draws their attention to writing as pleasure, as creativity, as self-expression, as collaboration, as process. And in *Style Wars*, the graffiti writers are the experts and the film respects how they define themselves. "They call themselves writers."

This question of expertise was foregrounded in this study, by accident and by design. Am I the expert here? When we started, I had more teaching experience, and I was a doctoral student in the Department of Writing Studies, Rhetoric, and Composition at our institution. You were a creative writing MFA student in the Department of English, a separate department whose master's students taught in the Department of Writing, and were required to take a pedagogy colloquium co-taught by staff and doctoral students from my department as well.

Nana: Right. So I was an MFA learning how to teach from the Comp crew--

Tessa: Which included other doctoral students in my program. So in some ways our institutional locations and our teaching experiences suggested that I had more expertise than you. I'm thinking of Doug Hesse's article "Creative Writing in Composition Studies," which talks about tensions between Comp and Creative writing across multiple areas, and even mentions--which you and I can both attest to--how many graduate students in creative writing dismiss teaching composition as a "regrettably necessary rite of passage" (32). I feel like you and I both were excited to teach composition, but many of our creative writing colleagues weren't. And this dialogue is an opportunity to figure out what about teaching with hip-hop helped us feel excited

and passionate about composition, and what hiphop brought to composition for us. I think what hiphop also asks us to consider is how these tensions around disciplinarity and graduate student teaching between composition and creative writing are raced and gendered as well.

Nana: Yeah, there was kind of a nice exchange between the Comp and Creative Writing departments. And prior to starting, I wasn't aware of the tension that exists between comp and creative writing in academia. Hesse talks about that dynamic and suggests "that creative writing and composition studies would do better to keep open borders" (43), so that a broader understanding of writing hopefully would pass to students. I tend to agree with him. Learning from composition writers who were open to my ideas allowed me to be an expert. I try to look at expertise as fluid when I think about teachers and students. In my class I try from the beginning to establish with students that I'm standing in the front, but learning is cyclical here. Or maybe it's an series of explosions. Whatever, but it's never one-directional.

As I teach more and more classes, get exposed to different students and grow more comfortable with myself being a leader of a class, I've learned different ways to foster that kind of environment. How to learn who they are and give them spaces to feel comfortable speaking up. And I've grown more comfortable with myself. With really believing I deserve to lead a class.

In terms of my identity, I also know that I fall on different sides of stereotype and privilege. I'm a heterosexual male, so I have privilege in that sense. Privilege that we aimed to unpack in the class. But I'm also Black and in academia. Being Black I think sometimes my students give me some slack considering my hiphop knowledge. And part of the early challenge was to diminish the idea that I was some all-knowing regarding the culture.

But it is true that you are a white, Jewish woman. I'd guess students don't meet you with those assumptions. When you taught using hip-hop, how did you negotiate that fact about yourself in the classroom?

Tessa: Not as much as I should have. You know, I've taught composition courses with hip-hop content for a long time, and especially at the beginning I thought a lot and even blogged a lot about what it meant for me personally as a white woman, as a Jewish woman, to be engaging with hip-hop culture professionally. But I never really brought those questions into the classroom and considered them with my students. Doing the research for my dissertation taught me to see this omission in my teaching. I actually had a student in an exit interview tell me I needed to bring my personality into class more, and I had several students ask if I like hip-hop or developed this curriculum myself because they couldn't even tell in class that I was passionate about the material, I was so task-oriented. And then I'm analyzing students' writing and interviews and seeing how much identity is important to their learning, how much better they learn when they can process concepts through their identities and identify with the artists and writers we're studying, and reading feminist and critical race theory about the role of identity in knowledge production, and it was like, damn, my identity has been missing from my classroom, and if I want students to bring their whole selves into the classroom I need to bring my whole self, too. So I'm still learning how to be the teacher I want to be, the teacher my research suggests I could be. It sounds like you're finding that balance as well.

Nana: It's a continually evolving process. For example, the way I dress sort of helped me feel like I was really there to do work. And on some level in my mind it compensated for my age, like if I had a tie on they would forget the fact that I was only a few years older than them.

But in terms of my personality and who I am, sometimes I feel I bring a little too much of my personality into things. I joke a lot. Like I try to be my most charismatic self, mostly as a means to make everyone feel comfortable and seen. A lot of teaching for me is performance, and at the same time, ideally I like to feel like I'm not "acting."

Tessa: So, what kind of relationship do you have with hip-hop, to bring it into your composition course?

Nana: I'd say it's my go-to safe place musically. It's also a text I'm constantly reading. Constantly unpacking. That moment when a line clicks in your mind. When I'm with my friends it's the language we speak. It's the references we make. It's the dances we do. It's a lot of things. And I knew that it's bigger than what it is for me, so it was a well that would never dry with my students.

I'm thinking about what you said about students using their identities as a way to produce knowledge. Being essentially you and projecting that into the world somehow. I think about how *Style Wars* set a kind of introductory bedrock for the class and how so many of those young artists, who were doing groundbreaking work whether on the sides of trains or on smoothed out cardboard boxes, were so concerned with having their own style and how negatively they responded to biters. That translates pretty easily to creating a unique and distinct argument that is aware of the larger conversation but is also adding something new.

Tessa: I also love how the writers in that film have such clearly established writing processes. I feel like that's something else we as creative writers bring to composition, our deep dwelling with writing process, almost a fetishization. And hip-hop artists also write about their writing processes, invention and drafting and collaboration and editing and all that.

Nana: *Style Wars* showcases pride in creating something others can't, and the art is reflective. I love artists like Lupe Fiasco because of how explicit and clever he is about speaking about his craft. I'm thinking about songs like "Adoration of the Magi" and "Dumb it Down," both of which I've exposed students to.

I also loved teaching *The College Dropout* at a PWI because it subversively asks students to question the environment and its whiteness in a way they just hadn't before. I think a lot of students, especially younger students, in the PWI don't really question how and why it is that they are enrolled. It's just the path that was expected and so they're on it. The album really specifically questions higher education as an enterprise and that questioning, when we read the album closely, leads to other questions. Why is it that I'm made to be here? Who is profiting? Who is excluded and how? What is unfair about it? The album helps students garner some intention about their presence in the classroom. And I think the questioning process helps them liberate themselves a little.

Tessa: When I taught my first composition class at my MFA institution, which was built around that album, I envisioned the class as tailored for students of color. But I was teaching at a PWI so the students were predominantly white. And they really took to the class—they already listened

to hiphop, but without African American history or cultural studies behind that, and they lived, like we all live, in this highly racialized world, but they didn't know how to talk about it, and hiphop gave some access, some language for these important conversations that we needed to have. But something I realized analyzing the courses I taught for this study is that I still even in this study really centered whiteness in my teaching. And ironically, I think foregrounding my identity more is the way to disrupt that, to say, hey, I'm white, we're in a white school, whiteness has power here, but we're going to try to disrupt that and really all listen to each other and value each other's voices in here, and to help us do that let's compositions made by the most marginalized people in our society—Black and brown kids, Black and brown women, youth, queer youth.

Nana: When I was making the class I'm not sure exactly what I imagined. But I also taught predominantly white sections, although by chance and maybe a little due to early semester class shuffling (students going to their friends after the first day and telling them to switch in), they were still the most racially diverse classes I've ever taught.

There were students you could tell were in heaven immediately. And most of them were generally happy because even before we started working they felt like this was something they knew. On the flipside of that there were students who had some anxiety. They could sense some of their peers were more familiar with hiphop and it was important to let them know the class was for them too. Some were on guard, afraid, and I had to reassure them it's not gonna be a rapping class, I'm not gonna make you produce a record.

But overall, it works. In class, hiphop is like a battery and a car—it drives students, it keeps them interested and connected to social issues. The hiphop opens students up, immediately

makes them more receptive. It's so accessible. Students got to address arguments artists make through a mode they're familiar with. Hip-hop adapts to trends super fast. It values the new, the original, but because it's popular culture it's also a safe avenue to talk about world issues. For example, it's shown us how feminism is so necessary. We looked at the Hanifa Wadilah article you suggested, "A Bitch Ain't One: Hip-Hop's Gender Crossroads and Its Reluctance to Embrace the Feminine Creative Process," which inspired so many students, and we really looked at her analysis of this live concert moment between Jill Scott and Erykah Badu, Wadilah's deep interpretation of this single powerful moment.

Tessa: That text is important to mention because I got it from another teacher, Dr. Gwendolyn Pough, in her hip-hop feminism course. That really challenged me to see the way that I've centered cisgendered, heterosexual Black male voices in my hip-hop curriculum, and how I need to do better in highlighting women, queer women, queer people, global voices. Hip-hop contains multitudes but the most visible stuff is always hypermasculine, criminalized Black males. Dr. Pough's teaching reminds us that the work of teaching hip-hop rhetorics is not just to challenge students to unpack mass-produced stereotypes through rhetorical analysis, but also offer them alternatives and say: these are also hip-hop, here are other ways artists are asserting their identities through hip-hop discourses and composing practices, and hip-hop is bigger than what the white-owned media mass produces and has been able to profitably commodify.

But the stereotypes are real. If you had to pick a number, what percentage of students would you say unpacked stereotypes in their writing?



Nana: Ha. Like 90%?? Very high. If they didn't at all, there was something wrong with their engagement in class. From the very first two days students began recognizing stereotypes, working through their resistance to this music. Multiple students who began the semester thinking the music condones violence came to see it as an honest reaction to circumstances. One of my favorite moments in class was when this one student, a white male, came up to me before class and said that he was listening to hiphop a lot more now that he was around it all the time in college, and he started noticing that hiphop was a good storytelling mode, and that he's a big Billy Joel fan and it's actually really similar. I loved how the class was legitimizing it in his mind. Students are constantly, in academia and otherwise, affirmed of the legitimacy of white men doing things, from Shakespeare to Frost to Billy Joel. Here's a chance to say, "Well let's look at all these creators of color for a minute."

The class also helps students notice songs aren't just created by iTunes, they have a purpose, they're made by writers who are pursuing mastery of a craft—whether that artist is Lauryn Hill or OG Macko. During one class we listened to Lauryn Hill's "Doo Wop (That Thing)" followed by an OG Macko song, "FUCKEM x3"—it's easy to write off OG Macko's as ignorant or simple or stupid, but I challenged them to take it seriously and give it the same respect. That wasn't their first inclination but eventually our conversation led to maybe in that moment of anger and violence, eloquence isn't appropriate. Maybe OG Macko was saying exactly what he wanted to say in exactly the way that was most effective. I want to challenge this good/bad hiphop dichotomy.

In another class I projected the iconic album cover of Biggie's *Ready to Die* on the overhead and had them write down everything they could describe about it. It's a really spare cover—a baby on a white background and some text—but they came up with so much—and

only then did we start making claims about it. These kind of exercises, they challenge their fear of finding the right text that's gold and instead say, you have to be the gold, you have to be the powerful close reader who can create interpretive gold anywhere, even in less obviously "meaningful" texts. It's fun to study work that hasn't been beaten to death in other people's scholarly work.

Tessa: I love that about teaching hip-hop: students can write something critical and it's truly never been written before. They are producing new knowledge. I love getting into the car after the end of a busy semester and hearing all these rap songs I haven't heard yet but my students all just wrote about them. Hip-hop invites living media discourse into the class.

Nana: Yes. And it makes the class feel more alive. But like we've been saying, the creation of something new is important. As is the chance to show students that this art, these images, this music, this culture was and is made by young people of color. This art that most of us consume readily. This culture that is deeply embedded in American culture and cultures abroad as well. The constant discovery that's happening in the class, which is enabled by hip-hop's continual evolution—there's just an energy that comes with that.

Tessa: I keep going back to this recent article, Laur Jackson's "The Blackness of Meme Movement," most essentially her basic claim that "internet culture depends on Black people"—Black people's labor, creativity, and longstanding cultural practices, practices which intersect with hip-hop's digital methods like sampling, remix, and recontextualization. As composition studies continues to be interested in digital composing methods and even uses the language of

remix—sometimes divorced from hip-hop and DJ culture, sometimes not (see Banks, Craig, Palmeri)—one of the things I value about hip-hop in the composition classroom is that it foregrounds the fact that the people producing viral content we consume every day—the vanguard of viral media production—are unpaid Black, brown, often queer teenagers making memes, writing blog posts on Tumblr, writing rap songs, making beats, making viral videos with their friends.

One of Hesse's closing points is that, given that more and more writing happens not just for teachers and colleagues but for online readers and for enjoyment, composition needs to take from creative writing a sense of writing for engagement. For me, hip-hop foregrounds the fact that the experts in doing that, in creating viral digital compositions, are Black and brown kids.

Nana: You missed the first two words of Jackson's quotation. She says: "We know internet culture depends on Black people." And I think it's true that some of us do, but a lot of our students, a lot of our teachers even, and especially at the PWI, don't actually know that. Some of what the class does is make what might be implicit explicit regarding Black creation.

I think Hesse understands an obvious truth academia sometimes ignores: people want to be entertained, engaged, and connected with. Students will tell you straight-up or with eyes drifting to their phones, or with their absence, when they aren't feeling it. I think some creative writers teach for engagement because most artists know a large part of the craft is to create an engaging experience for the consumer of the content. Engagement is key in my classroom. And one of the most important things I've learned teaching is engagement can be taught. That is, you can wire it so students come to expect the class to be a place where they are valued and heard and they'll come to enjoy it if you listen to them.

Tessa: Yes!

Nana: I think now, having had several different groups of students evaluate my classrooms, I've come to teaching for engagement as a forgotten necessity. Often my students will say they loved the class and add something like, "it was fun, but I still felt like I was learning." That recurring word "but" tells me that even as freshmen and sophomores, they've come to believe that learning shouldn't be fun, that college is just do-this, get-money. I might be overstating it, but some of my students seem to really hate the *class* part of being in college. They feel like they've been reduced to letters on a Scantron, then numbers on a transcript, so anytime they get to have a voice is sort of special. I reject that school must be sorrow and actively try to upset that paradigm. Hip-hop helps me do that because pleasure is built into its purpose. It wants to have a message and make its listeners happy. You can learn from and enjoy something at the same time. And the people who made that, this viral, global arts culture, are young people of color.

Tessa: This last semester you posted on Facebook a video you made with your most recent class of you guys doing the Mannequin Challenge. How did you get the idea to do that activity? How do you see it fitting into a writing class? And is that hip-hop writing pedagogy?

Nana: I did that in a creative writing class this year and I framed it as a collaborative creative project. I wanted to show that we could use this new (to us) viral genre to tell a story. The first step was to discuss what it was and how it worked. So we watched a few examples to understand the features of the genre. And when we were watching, in most cases it was young people of

color who were featured. We thought about how we could use what we had: ourselves and the classroom and our abilities as storytellers. We decided a story we could tell was that of an unruly class. Each of the students became a “character,” using their bodies to write themselves into the narrative. I think the exercise showed how good young people are at not just consuming media but producing media when they put their minds to it. We had to be intentional about what worked and what we thought we could do specifically that would make it so we weren’t just copying one of the videos we’d watched.

The most obvious way the Mannequin Challenge is hip-hop is how all the videos use Rae Sremmurd’s song “Black Beatles” as their soundtrack. But like Jackson says about viral memes, there is also something hip-hop in the way the challenge spread like so many of the dance videos we see—but this one is sort of an anti-dance video. An observation of stillness. I got the idea to do it because it was everywhere and it was something I knew my students would enjoy. Then I just had to sort of critically reverse engineer the challenge myself and see what could be pulled from it so we were thinking as we did it. And I think this exercise would work equally well in a composition class, especially how we looked at the creation of this new genre.

Tessa: A theme that came up a lot in my interviews with you and with both of our students is the question of confidence. Students insist a lot that this class builds confidence, and I think you and I both go into class explicitly trying to build students’ confidence: to show them that they already write and compose in all these different ways, and that the creatives they admire are young people creating through process and in community just like they are. But something that struck me in our interviews were your comments that teaching with hip-hop helped build your

confidence as well. One of the things you mentioned early on in the interviews was, you referred to me as your fairy Godmother. I guess that would make you Cinderella.

Nana: Ha. Yeah. Well, having someone legitimize the use of hiphop as a composition class inquiry was one way you sort of helped get me to the ball. Also I think the chance to share content and, as I've said before, having a mode of reflection was helpful too.

Tessa: That comment played a bigger role in an earlier draft of this piece, and there was a challenge to that framing from one of our reviewers. I want to be transparent about that. But that comment has stayed with me because it makes me feel like some part of you felt you needed permission to bring your knowledge, your expertise in hiphop into the classroom. I mean you started your class rapping, you did the Mannequin Challenge—I would never do that. I guess there's a catch-22 to a system that would deny you your expertise in the classroom when embracing it helped your confidence grow.

Nana: When a student is noticeably different from having taken my class, and tells me so—that builds my confidence. When the energy is that every single person feels welcomed, that makes me feel like I'm doing something right and I think my confidence grows from that. Teaching with hiphop, the way students were able to use the inquiry to find a voice, made me feel like I had a voice. The energy was good all around.

Tessa: I learned so much from watching you teach, watching the way all your students felt valued and listened to in a way that I don't think mine did. We've been talking about how hiphop

centers Black and brown youth's trailblazing digital production in the classroom but you were able to do that not just with your assigned texts but with your body, rapping, doing the Mannequin Challenge. I think what I'm still learning, especially as a white woman teaching in PWIs, is how to center the work not just of youth of color I assign but of the youth of color who are sitting right in front of me, who sometimes bring that work into their assignments but, in my class at least, aren't getting the props they deserve. I'm thinking of that hashtag #myPWI. Do you follow that?

Nana: I have followed that. And it just goes to show how large the fight is. How constantly students of color are really fighting to make a space from themselves in higher ed. As someone at the head of a classroom, I think "still learning" is the important part of what you're saying. In a predominantly white space the process of valorizing voices of color in any context is a challenge. I worked hard in the classes you observed and, as it always does, it goes back to students who connected with the material and also were ready to speak before I got them. I just tried to keep their flames going. And of course not all students were able to connect. There's always the challenge of finding what works with the students in front of you. Being aware and learning how I help my students feel like they have power is important to me.

Tessa: I'm not in the classroom right now--I'm editing for the Writing Center this year. But when I get back, I feel I need to be more transparent and intentional at the front of the room. Something working with you has taught me is that we need hip-hop texts in the writing classroom, but they don't do the work themselves. Studying hip-hop does not automatically make a writing class anti-racist or anti-sexist or build solidarity across interests groups. It's only a first

step. You can't take the second step without the first, but what comes next? As a white teacher, I want all my students to see the amazing creativity of young people of color, I want my students to work through the ideologies they've inherited that have kept them from recognizing that brilliance, and then I want them to produce too--to feel safe being vulnerable without ever getting singled out. Is that possible?

Nana: Introducing the content may not even be the first step. We need to go in knowing there are some real problems that we're trying to work against, and there are some real joys that the content is inhabiting. Starting from there and using that paradigm to form a class is big for me. The content helps carry central messages of empowerment and anti-racism/anti-sexism, and the limitations of some of the work helps us explore those issues as well. Knowing students as individuals. Speaking to them, letting them tell you what would help them, sometimes as a group, sometimes one on one. And that can only come meaningfully after they've come to see you as someone who is committed and values their voice. Listening to them and tailoring lessons around really specifically getting students to feel as if the classroom is a place they can thrive. Those are some of ways I try to make the class the place I want it to be. Is it possible? I think it is.



## OUTRO

This dissertation began with two questions: what is hip-hop doing at the PWI, and what am I doing with it? Let me begin with the first question, and my findings' implications for my field, composition and rhetoric, as well as literacy studies. Throughout this dissertation, I have tried to demonstrate how hip-hop's affective, rhetorical power promotes its uptake by individuals and by institutions. However, because of hip-hop's contradictory existence as a lived counterculture and as a commodity, hip-hop can be superficially absorbed into white spaces even as its resistive politics are left behind, or its inclusion can be a gesture towards diversity without genuine redistributive teeth. Although teacher-scholars of color often explicitly invoke hip-hop towards social-justice-oriented educational ends, as hip-hop continues entering white spaces and is institutionalized by white actors, it is imperative that those implementing and teaching hip-hop courses, initiatives, and institutions stay active and vocal about their own political commitments on campus, to their students, and to broader society. This includes a commitment to reflexivity from all teachers and administrators involved with hip-hop curricula and programming, wherein teachers, administrators, and staff are forthright about their own locations vis-a-vis hip-hop culture, their students, and the school community. It is also critical that these programs and curricula all contain a reflective element that asks participating students to interrogate their own locations and identities vis-a-vis the hip-hop practices and products they participate in and consume. This kind of persistent reflexive practice is one way to insure that hip-hop institutions at PWIs stay accountable to communities of hip-hop practice and the young people of color who primarily comprise them, and that university community members participating in hip-hop activities stay accountable to those with marginalized identities in those spaces.

Beyond responding to the growth of large-scale hip-hop programming at colleges and universities, this dissertation is a call for all composition and rhetoric teachers to recognize the research of their colleagues who teach and theorize hip-hop for composition classrooms, and to seriously consider hip-hop composition scholarship as an essential part of any survey or introductory course in our field. Hip-hop compositionists like Adam Banks, Carmen Kynard, David Green, Todd Craig, Elaine Richardson, and others have produced cutting-edge research in our field that unites areas of study that often don't talk to one another like translingualism, Black Language studies, cultural rhetorics, critical historiography, autoethnography, intellectual property studies, and multimodal and new media composing. Centering hip-hop texts and hip-hop scholarship in more of our composition classrooms is a critical opportunity to model to students how our field is engaging with the real ways people use, produce, and consume language every day. We should follow hip-hop compositionists as they lead the way in theorizing how 21<sup>st</sup> century writers and mixed-media composers use digital technologies to make meaning in a fragmented, hypercirculatory media environment.

Part of this move involves recognizing the value of creative writing to our composition classrooms and the historical and current presence of creative writers teaching and enriching composition and rhetoric. In multiple ways, this dissertation recognized the role creative writers have long played and continue to play in teaching and theorizing composition and rhetoric. Historical recovery work demonstrated the significant but forgotten role played by writers June Jordan, Adrienne Rich, Toni Cade Bambara and others in the success of the Basic Writing movement during the Open Admissions years at CUNY. I see composition and rhetoric's collective amnesia—a strange unwillingness to claim truly renowned American authors as a part of our history—emerging out of two problematic trends: first, a racism and homophobia which

too easily focused on white heterosexual cisgendered woman Mina Shaughnessy as the heroine of Basic Writing; and a paranoia about protecting the discipline of composition and rhetoric, a fear which has led us to disavow anything that might blur the boundaries between our and other fields. Yet the fact remains that even in the present moment, creative writers teach composition as graduate students, Ph.D. holders, and faculty across the country, and they do so with a keen recognition of their own processes as writers and an understanding of the work of crafting engaging media for real audiences. Returning to composition's history and recognizing its present, compositionists must do more as a field to foster respectful, productive relationships with the creative writers both in our field and adjacent to it, all in the service of bettering our understanding of how writing happens and how best to serve our students as writers and composers.

Part of recognizing what creative writers have to give to composition classrooms is a continued reckoning with our history and a centering of disciplinary history to the work of composition and rhetoric. As movements like Writing About Writing and *Naming What We Know* invite us as a field to continue consolidating and clarifying our disciplinary expertise, historiography must be a central part of that project. Indeed, it is only by continuing to revisit and produce historical work on composition and rhetoric as a field that we can trouble any narrative that attempts to close ranks around our discipline or paint our knowledge as static. Instead, we must encourage historical interrogations the history and disciplining of composition, rhetoric, and literacy studies as a centerpiece of understanding and creating ourselves as a discipline or a set of related disciplines. Encouraging the work of disciplinary history among composition and rhetoric researchers actively counteracts the continual processes of white

supremacy and neoliberalism which will continue to center white narratives and white actors in our field's practices and historical memory.

One of the most striking experiences of this dissertation process was reading through the archival materials at CCNY, the first archive I visited, and feeling in myself the emotional rise and fall that came with the rush of investment in students of color and culturally sustaining pedagogies in the late 1960s, followed by a rapid retreat of that same investment and attention a mere few years later. Bolstered by critical race theorists' understandings of interest convergence and divergence, my exposure to these archival materials has instilled in me an understanding that the war for racial and gender justice and inclusion is never over, and is never won, but rather must be continually fought as the forces of capital, white supremacy, and social control continually contend for their own position. Thus, the fight to put scholars of color on every curriculum; to protect undergraduates, graduate students, faculty, staff, and administrators of marginalized identities from discrimination and erasure; to celebrate, theorize, and teach the vernacular literacies of communities of color; to procure and protect funding for scholars and students of color; to produce and keep in print texts by and for these same authors and audiences—this fight will never end. As we continue as a community to agitate for increased equity and diversity in our field, we must grapple with the endlessness of our task and consider mechanisms for activism that demand long-standing commitments in place of one-time concessions that are easily revoked. The history of composition studies is itself a testament to the dynamism of the fight for inclusion in this field; the legacy of the fight for students' composing rights is a testament to the longstanding commitments to equity in our field as well as to the continual obstructions this fight has faced within the field itself, as well as from outside it. As teachers and scholars of composition, rhetoric, and literacy, as well as academia more broadly,

continue engaging with the contradictory arts of hip-hop culture, we must continue recognizing how hip-hop can serve the struggle or the status quo, solidarity or conservatism. Reflexively interrogating our own locations, studying and teaching our history as a field, and working continuously for socially just pedagogies and outcomes for our students are several of the strategies we will need to ethically engage hip-hop composition's enormous potential for theorizing and teaching writing and composition and rhetoric for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

This dissertation has also been an intensely personal process for me, challenging me to recognize my own complicity with white supremacist thinking even as I began engaging with hip-hop in my composition teaching. I always loved writing, and I always loved hip-hop. In 2010, when I was a second-year MFA student studying fiction writing in Michigan, I, like many before me and many after me, was required to teach composition. I thought—this is required for me, this is required for my students—I'm gonna make it fun, for all of us (there's that affect again). So I built a class around the debut album of Kanye West, my fellow Chicagoan, called it "College Writing on *The College Dropout*," and a journey began. I started writing a blog. I dreamed of writing a book. Something was happening in my classes, something I didn't understand, as my students grappled with language and meaning and the injustices they witnessed every day without words to describe them, words they'd been taught to forget. I went back to school to understand my own classrooms, to research them, to craft an argument about what I'd found.

Seven years later, I've made a disciplinary home for myself in composition, rhetoric, and writing studies. I've learned how to be a researcher, how to make academic arguments, how to teach in new ways. More importantly, I've found answers to questions I've asked since I was a child. Why is Chicago so segregated? Why is my diverse high school so tracked? Why are there

so few Black or Latino students in my AP classes, when they're more than half the school? Why is the SAT so important? And: why do I love hip-hop so much? Why does it make me feel so good? Why do so many people hate it? Why can't they see it for its brilliance, resilience, pedagogy?

Hip-hop is the rabbit I followed down the rabbit hole. A white girl from the white side of town, I heard the bass line drifting through segregated streets, and I stalked its trail. For years and years, I listened, I danced, I mouthed the words. My final paper in my own freshman writing course was about hip-hop. I designed courses built around it. It lured me to doctoral study, then jumped from behind the door with the bait and switch: critical race theory. I was asked to confront myself, my culture, the history I had learned. I was interrogated: Why was I creeping on Blackness? Didn't I have my own culture to research? Why did I feel so entitled to scrutinize someone else's? Stay in your lane. Collect your people. Clean your own house.

The lane is whiteness. The people are whiteness. The house is whiteness.

Hip-hop has been a plumb line that has helped me right my world. Hip-hop has escorted me into Black studies, women's studies, labor studies, and said, here, look, you wanted to know, you wanted to understand? Here are the structures of domination, here is one people's resistance. Not your people's—but you can listen to the music, you can dance with us, you can sing with us, write with us, if you'll fight with us. As I've reflected on what I'm doing with hip-hop in the PWI, my own actions mirror broader institutional trends. Hip-hop has made me feel good, feel progressive, feel down as a teacher. But at the end of this dissertation, I recognize that I also need to continue following my own advice as I've articulated it throughout this dissertation. I must continue to interrogate my own positionality and continue working as a teacher to bring reflexivity and accountability into my classrooms, so that even as I honor Black composing

practices in my teaching, I also teach toward dismantling white supremacist attitudes and ideologies that circulate through language and make persuasive appeals to my students.

Hiphop is a challenge to composition and rhetoric. Chest out, chin cocked, hiphop calls our bluff. Oh, you wanna talk *composing*? You wanna talk *all the available means of persuasion*? You wanna talk audience, context, ethos, pathos, logos, craft, memory, diction, delivery, citation, new media, multimodality, community publishing, intellectual property, circulation, identification? You wanna talk the intertextuality of language? The situatedness of genres? The writing process? You wanna talk *remix*—and you don't wanna talk hiphop? Son, you already *is* talking hiphop. But watch yoself: because crate-digging unearths hard truths. And once we acknowledge hiphop, acknowledge Blackness, then unseemly fellow travelers enter the frame: white supremacy. Antiblackness. The slave trade. Settler colonialism. Power. All played out through language, through rhetoric, through composing. Hiphop challenges us to craft rhetorical curricula that deeply engage all the situations in which our students encounter language and meaning.

Hiphop is not a toy. Hiphop is not a trick. Hiphop is not a cheat code. Hiphop is a culture set to bass drum and snare, spun out on cardboard, thrown up on train cars and abandoned brick walls. Hiphop is a human culture built by our country's most expendable—pressed out of schools, crushed into ghettos, criminalized for their own murders—a culture so powerful it could reach out of the radio in a bougie Jewish girl's bedroom and whisper—

So you down to listen, or nah?

## APPENDIX: Syllabi and Assignments

This appendix contains condensed versions of syllabi and assignments for the courses taught in this study: my section of WRT 105 (freshman writing), and my and Nana's sections of WRT 205 (sophomore writing).

### Tessa's WRT 105 Syllabus and Assignments

#### WRT 105 – Practices of Academic Writing

**Instructor:** Tessa Brown

**Required Texts**

Downs and Wardle, *Writing About Writing*  
Wysocki and Lynch, *The DK Handbook*  
Miscellaneous texts on Blackboard (Bb) and  
the course blog

*I start to think and then I sink  
Into the paper like I was ink  
When I'm writing I'm trapped in between the lines  
I escape when I finish the rhyme.*

*Eric B. and Rakim, "I Know You Got Soul"*

**Required Class Sites**

[Blackboard](#)

Wordpress site

**Course Description**

Welcome to WRT 105! This course is an introduction to the field of Writing Studies. While we'll be doing a lot of writing, we'll also be reading about writing, and studying our own and others' writing practices, both here in class and over the course of our lives. This semester, you will write, revise, edit, and reflect on your writing with the support of your teacher and peers. The writing you produce will become a part of the course curriculum, which focuses on articles, book chapters, songs and even films which explore writing and literacy. Some of these texts will invoke my research interests, but I hope you'll bring your own expertise into the class through your writing. We each have our own literacy practices. Exploring them through reading and writing will be the central pursuit of this course.

What does it mean to write in the academy? In the course of your career at Syracuse, you may write history papers, lab reports, poems, newspaper articles. You surely will also be writing e-mails, text messages, Facebook posts, job applications, resumes, flyers, and more. This course will not present a singular model of what "academic writing" is supposed to be. Instead, I hope this course will help you notice the different ways we read and write every day, so that we become more adept at writing in any situation we're faced with.

But it is also an assumption of this class that this task will involve critical inquiry into the media and institutions which surround and shape us. We'll have to push past the impulse to dismiss the



unfamiliar, and create space to unsettle the familiar. And we'll strive to make compelling arguments about what we discover, to persuade our audiences using rhetoric and evidence, to open doors our readers didn't even realize were closed. As Rosenwasser and Stephen claim in *Writing Analytically 6<sup>th</sup> edition*, analysis "is a form of detective work that typically pursues something puzzling, something you seek to understand rather than something you believe you already know. Analysis finds questions where there seem not to be any, and it makes connections that might not have been evident at first" (53).

My hope is that the twenty-one of us will become a learning community: reading and writing together, understanding the language and literacy practices at SU and in our own lives.

### **Course Goals for WRT 105**

1. By engaging with issues of diversity and community and considering issues of power and difference that shape every rhetorical act, students will compose texts that are ethically responsive to different perspectives.
2. Students will practice critical techniques of reading and will compose texts that draw on the ideas, positions, and voices of others.
3. Students will practice analysis in all areas of writing, reading and research: from topic invention, to source evaluation, to deepening their understanding of issues.
4. Students will develop knowledge of basic rhetorical principles and the ability to draw upon those concepts as observers, readers, writers, and citizens.
5. Students will develop varied invention strategies, such as drafting, brainstorming, observing, and researching.
6. Students will develop an awareness of the role of research in invention and argument and a working knowledge of introductory research methods, such as primary research and use of library resources.
7. Students will explore how various genres and writing technologies affect rhetorical reception, production, and circulation and will develop abilities to understand genre and technology as responsive to rhetorical context.
8. Students will develop an understanding of generic conventions and will compose essays that encompass a variety of genres, including analysis, argument, and synthesis.
9. Students will assess the reliability of sources and will summarize, synthesize, and integrate source materials into their writing.
10. Students will learn and enact rhetorical and ethical source use, including proficiency using MLA/APA citation conventions.
11. Students will develop revision and editing strategies for organization, prose style, and technical control.

### **Coursework**

Articles, blogs, essays, tweets, film, journals, rap: in this course you'll read and write (and listen and watch) them all. During the course you might be asked to annotate readings, keep a record of ideas and responses, jot down observations, take notes on class discussions, experiment with different styles and organizational choices, and engage in a variety of drafting and revision

activities. All these activities are important and will have an impact on your development and success as academic writers (and your final grade).

As you will see in the grade breakdown below, your final grade comes from not only the formal assignments, but also the invention work and reflective writing included in each unit. Most of this work will be posted on the class blog, and I will post feedback on Blackboard using a  $\sqrt{}$ ,  $\sqrt{+}$ ,  $\sqrt{-}$  scale. You will get a zero for work you do not complete or that you don't submit on time. The work should be referenced in your reflective writing at the end of the semester, and easily accessible to me on the blog or on Bb as the assignment requests.

You will also be assigned regular reading assignments. Doing the reading allows you to participate in class discussion, and gives you the theoretical grounding you'll need to complete weekly writing assignments and unit assignments successfully. Not keeping up with weekly reading or writing assignments will negatively impact your unit grades (because you won't be prepared to complete them) and your final portfolio grade (because you'll be missing material).

### **Feedback and Grading**

You will receive many different kinds of feedback during this course. Some will come from fellow students and some will come from me. Both are important; they tell you in various ways how your readers are responding to your writing. This feedback will also help you learn how to assess your own work.

The grade for the course is based on a 500-point scale. There are three units in the course; each will lead toward with a written assignment worth 100 points. There is also a final culminating portfolio, which includes one piece of writing you'll choose to revise from the semester, selections from your invention work you wish to highlight, and reflective writing about your work.

Unit 1 Assignment: Blogging about 21 <sup>st</sup> c. literacies	100 points (due week 5)
Unit 2 Assignment: Analyzing discourse and identity	100 points (due week 10)
Unit 3 Assignment: Inquiring into "academic" writing	100 points (due week 14)
Culminating Portfolio: Revision and Reflection	200 points (due on final day of course)

### **Course Policies**

Writing studios are courses in language learning, and language is learned in communities; therefore, it is essential that you attend class and participate. Absences and lack of preparation for class will affect your classmates' work as well as your own. The work you do in class, the work you do to prepare for each class, is as important as any polished assignment you turn in for a grade. In addition, each unit calendar is only a projection and may be subject to occasional changes and revisions as it seems appropriate, necessary, or just interesting. That is another reason why your attendance is vital.

If you must miss a class, you are responsible for work assigned. Please realize, however, that class time cannot be reconstructed or made up, and that your performance, your work, and your final course grade will be affected by absences. Because presence and participation are essential

to your learning and performance in the class, you will be dropped a full letter grade at your fourth and another at your fifth absence. If you miss six classes (three weeks) you will fail the course. If you are absent you are responsible for any missed work and any modifications of the syllabus and/or assignments.

You must complete all of the primary assignments to pass the class. Also, failure to turn in a completed portfolio at the end of the term will result in failure of the class.

Unless you talk to me before the due date, I will only accept late papers under extenuating circumstances. I also reserve the right to deduct points for late work.

Let's all just agree to do the work, come to class, learn a lot, and make the course a meaningful experience.

### **Student Writing**

All texts written in this course are public to the members of our class. You will often be asked to share your writing, whether by posting on the class blog or by participating in in-class discussions. You will also be asked to sign a consent form requesting the use of your writing for professional development, teacher training, and classroom instruction within the Syracuse University Writing Program.

### **Blackboard**

Our course is loaded on blackboard, a University on-line teaching support system. I will teach you how to access our section of WRT 105 on blackboard, and will then expect you to be able to locate, download, and link to a range of course materials with some regularity throughout the semester. I will also contact you regularly via the blackboard course listserv, which has already been created using each student's "syr" email address. Please check your @syr account at least once daily throughout the fall. The URL for blackboard is: <http://blackboard.syr.edu>. Once you access the main page you will be asked for your user ID and password. The following is from the student help page of blackboard:

### **Social Media**

This course will ask you to post on a variety of social media sites, most centrally our blog on Wordpress.com., [www.wrt105f13.wordpress.com](http://www.wrt105f13.wordpress.com). I will regularly post on our blog and ask you to respond to that week's readings, reflect on recent writing assignments, or interact with classmates. You should subscribe to our blog so that you receive an e-mail when I write a new post for your consideration. Your responses should be 7-10 sentences, should make direct references to the text(s) in question, and by the end of the term should be using correct online notation, like hyperlinks or embedded images and video.

We may also use Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram, and other sites as the course progresses. At semester's start, our Wordpress blog will be visible only to the members of our class community. As we move into other social media domains, we'll talk together about how public we want our

course conversation to become. **I will never ask you to put public content on the web if you don't want to, nor will I publish your work without your consent.**

## **Class Notes**

Each class session, we will have at least two students taking notes that will then be posted on the course blog for everyone. You should be prepared to take notes a few times this semester and send either text or an image of your (legibly written) notes to me. Every student will be expected to participate.

## **A Respectful Classroom Community**

I consider all of the above to be part of good classroom conduct, which should be governed by ideals of respect and consideration towards your classmates, their time, their work and learning, their intellectual property, and the intellectual property of the wider academic and hip-hop communities.

Some of the texts that we will consider in this class contain obscenities. We will treat all texts as academic texts and therefore will not censor them: you should be prepared to quote this type of material verbally and in written work. This does not mean, however, that our own language will employ this register. In other words, keep the cursing inside the quotes.

During this semester we will explore our own lives and the issues that shape us. Some of our discussions might be heated or difficult. To my mind, respectful classroom behavior has two components: speaking thoughtfully and listening generously. That means, choose your words carefully when you speak--and, just as importantly, give your classmates the benefit of the doubt when they say something you don't like. If something offends you, please speak up, and we'll work through our vocabularies together. That said, egregious or consistently disrespectful language will not be tolerated, and will be met with serious discipline.

## **Unit 1: Blogging about 21<sup>st</sup> Century Literacies**

### **Texts:**

Richtel's "Blogs vs. Essays"

Harris's "Coming to Terms"

Chalfant's "Style Wars" (excerpt)

Danielle DeVos et al's "The Future of Literacy" (WAW 1<sup>st</sup> edition)

DK Handbook

Deborah Brandt's "Sponsors of Literacy" (WAW 1<sup>st</sup> edition)

Jay-Z's Decoded (excerpt)

## **Assignment: Blogging about Personal Literacies**

During these opening weeks of the semester, we've read, watched, and listened to multiple sources where stories of personal literacy helped an author make an argument about the nature and challenges of literacy today. Your Unit 1 Assignment asks you to write a blog post in

which you invoke your own experience with literacies to explore and defend claims about the nature and challenges of contemporary, shifting literacies. Your blog post should be around 1000 words, should include images and/or video, and should ultimately be posted to our class blog.

**In your post, you might:**

- reconsider the assignments you did for WRT 105 so far this semester, or for other classes you're taking this term
- directly engage with writing (or other media) you've created in the past
- articulate moments of triumph, struggle, or learning in your own literacy development
- examine how features of your identity like race, class, community, dis/ability, nationality, or language influenced your literacies
- consider the educations you received: what worked? what didn't? when did you self-educate? who sponsored your literacies, and to what ends?
- discuss how the authors we've treated so far (DeVoss, Brandt, Jay-Z, Dead Prez, Chalfant) use stories about literacy to make claims about reading, writing, learning, or education
- support, refute, or adjust the conclusions drawn by the authors we've treated this term
- expand the definition of literacy as "practices of reading or writing" to include other practices, activities, or media
- critically address the strengths and weaknesses of the blog format as the vehicle for this assignment

**What I'll be looking for when I evaluate your work:**

- Deep engagement with our course materials, both in weekly work and in this final
- Some specificity to your claims: a selection of material from your own life and from course readings that resists covering everything in favor of exploring something precise
- A critical evaluation of your own experiences which acknowledges complexity - not a mere success narrative
- An awareness of the conventions of the blog, and the needs of your reader
- Responsible and transparent engagement with the words, images, and videos of others
- Evidence of thoughtful development and revision across drafts

**Unit 2: Analyzing Discourse and Identity**

**Texts:**

Kanye West's "We Don't Care"

James Paul Gee's "Literacy, Discourse, Linguistics" (WAW 1<sup>st</sup> edition)

"The Wire" (excerpt)

H. Samy Alim, "Preface," You Know My Steez

Elijah Anderson, Code of the Street (excerpt)

Swales, "The Concept of a Discourse Community" (WAW 1<sup>st</sup> edition)

"Shit Girls Say"

Mirabelli, “Learning to Serve” (WAW 1<sup>st</sup> edition)  
DK Handbook

### **Assignment: Investigating a Discourse Community**

In this unit, we’ve investigated the concepts of discourse and discourse communities from multiple angles. We’ve read literacy studies on discourse from James Gee and John Swales; read ethnographies on discourse shifts among urban youths of color by Samy Alim and Elijah Anderson; watched popular representations of urban discourses in *The Wire*, in Kanye West’s song “We Don’t Care,” and in the “Shit Girls Say” Youtube videos; read a belletristic essay on a fracturing discourse by Joan Didion; and, you’ve investigated discourses yourselves by performing ethnographic interviews with discourse community members.

For this assignment, please write a 6-8-page academic paper that draws on our course texts and at least one of your interviews to make a specific, sustained argument. The content of this argument itself is up to you. Some possibilities include:

- Consider or prove whether a given group of people/texts does or doesn’t constitute a discourse community
- Examine tensions within a discourse community, between discourse communities, or that arise when one person moves between discourses
- Discuss how discourses operate in your own life
- Compare the results of your research with the content or results of any of our course texts

Your paper should use the conventions of an academic, scholarly paper. While this still leaves you room to be creative with your register (for example, see Alim) and your disciplinary conventions (e.g., are you writing ethnography, composition studies, cultural criticism, a nonfiction essay), your paper should make a clear argument, should closely examine its evidence, and should use a consistent citation style (MLA, APA, or CSE). You should include a Works Cited page, title your paper, and have 1-inch margins, double spaced, Times New Roman in 12 pt font. You are invited, but not required, to include 1-2 outside sources that help you describe or situate the discourse community you study. Please include a full or partial transcript of one of your interviews as an appendix.

In addition to the above, I would like you to write a 1-paragraph abstract to be included with your first and second drafts, and a 1-page reflection letter to be included with your second draft.

This assignment is about discourse, but it also asks you to participate in a larger, scholarly discourse. While your Unit 1 blogging assignment limited your audience to members of our class, this academic paper assignment asks you to enter a discourse community which extends beyond our class to include other scholars of discourse and literacy. In your reflective letter, please make clear what academic discourse community you are writing towards.

### **Unit 3: Inquiry into Composition**

#### **Texts:**

Tricia Rose’s “Soul Sonic Forces” from *Black Noise*

Rebecca Moore Howard et al, “Writing from Sources, Writing from Sentences”  
Rebecca Moore Howard, “Is It Plagiarism?” (video)  
Kanye West, “School Spirit”  
Aretha Franklin, “Spirit in the Dark”  
George Orwell, “Politics and the English Language”  
Jay-Z’s “Life + Times” website

### **Assignment:**

For this assignment, please create a short composition that answers the question, What does composition mean to me?

### **Unit 4: Final Portfolio**

### **Assignment:**

Your final portfolio is an opportunity for you to look back at the work you’ve created this semester, to return to some of it, and to highlight—that is, curate--some of the best work you’ve completed this term. Research in composition shows that understanding your own development and process as a reader and writer will help you approach similar tasks once you leave this class. Our use of portfolios is intended to help you study your own writing practices, including critical reading, collaboration, revision, editing, and how genres and technologies shape writing.

This portfolio assignment is worth 40% of your grade, or 200 points. **All of its components should be posted on your personal class blog.** The components are as follows:

#### **Homework Inventory and Showcase – 100 points**

For this portion of the portfolio, please create a hyperlinked inventory of the homework you have completed this semester. This blog post or page should mention all the blog comments and blog posts you’ve completed (in a list, a table, or in prose sentences), including hyperlinks to them on your blog or the class blog. This inventory should also feature links to the workshop letters you wrote for units 1, 2, and 3 and links to your class notes on the class blog.

For this portion of the portfolio, please feature three examples of homeworks that you feel influenced the final assignments for any of the units and a discussion of how they influenced your unit projects and why, using direct quotes both from the homeworks and the projects.

More than helping me with bookkeeping, this element of the portfolio is meant to ask you to look closely at your work this semester, the work you’ve created this semester, to remind yourself of the different sources we treated in class, and to get you thinking holistically about all the concepts and skills we’ve covered since August. A high grade on this section will mean both that you completed all your homework this term and thoughtfully curated your inventory and highlights.

## **Revision and Final Drafts – 50 points**

For this portion of the portfolio, please perform a deep revision of one of your unit assignments. This means that your blog post, paper, or composition should undergo significant reworking in terms of goals, argument, use of evidence, structure, and style. Think of this as another stage in the original drafting process. These revisions will be graded based on how much your unit project changes and/or improves. Therefore, you can revise a project that originally received an A or a C or any grade in between. Writing is a long, recursive process and any work you created this semester can receive this deep level of attention and revision.

For this revision, I encourage you to choose the work you care the most about and are most invested in. You are also invited to combine multiple assignments into a single product, if you so choose. For this revision, don't worry about the original assignment sheet and instead focus on making your writing/composition the best it can be, even if that means a revision of its goals. Your revision should evidence all of the skills that we worked on this semester: detailed anecdotes, thoughtful arrangement and structure, careful editing. Besides inclusion in your portfolio, I invite you to submit this work to *Intertext*, a campus journal for student writing. (see Lesson Plan for 11/21 for more information)

## **Reflection (3 pages/~750 words) – 50 points**

The last portion of your portfolio is a reflection that should introduce and orient a reader to the contents of your portfolio. This reflection should refer explicitly to different elements of your portfolio and in particular should discuss the revisions you performed on your revised unit project. Your reflection should make and defend claims about the story told by your portfolio. Don't feel compelled to tell a dramatic story of progress. Instead, think of your portfolio as your evidence—study it carefully, and make claims about any patterns or changes you see in your work this semester.

This reflection will be the first thing I read when I look over your portfolio. It should be detailed and orient me to the contents of your portfolio. Strong reflections will be detailed, insightful, helpful to me, and closely rooted to the contents of the portfolio. In your writing, you might consider the following questions:

- How have you worked on the process elements of the class (drafting, developing ideas through your work, revising)?
- How have you responded to the work of your classmates?
- How have you used the responses of your peers and me to revise?
- What can I determine about the rigor with which you have approached your work on the three assignments?
- How does your deep revision reflect your engagement with the concepts and skills covered in the course?

This portion of your portfolio also includes the credit for your thoughtfulness in designing and arranging the different parts of your portfolio for viewers.



## WRT 205 Syllabus: Critical Research and Inquiry—Hip-hop, Literacy, and Writing

### COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Welcome to WRT 205, a sophomore level writing course focusing on critical methods of analysis, argumentation, and inquiry. In today's information-saturated media environment, knowing how to locate, assess, and engage sources are crucial literacy skills. We also have to learn how to ask smart questions of the sources we find, and develop strategies for putting sources in conversation with one another.

In the course of this semester, we'll learn how to locate sources, read them critically, and ask the kind of insightful questions that lead to powerful arguments. To do so, you will read and write regularly, share your work with your classmates, and develop and revise projects of your own. Over the course of three units and a final, you'll generate a set of reading responses (Unit 1), analyze a single artist's literacy footprint (Unit 2), and write a traditional research paper (Unit 3), which will be presented visually and reflected on in a final portfolio at the end of the semester (Unit 4).

This class will focus on hip-hop culture and artists as the centers of a powerful literacy enterprise. We'll consider rappers as prolific writers and composers, and also look at the exploding amounts of writing and composing that happens surrounding hip-hop texts and within hip-hop culture.

What does it mean to be il/literate?

Where can we locate reading and writing, that is, literacy events, in our public discourse?

How does hip-hop intersect with literacy?

### COURSE GOALS

WRT 205 focuses on the rhetorical strategies, practices, and conventions of critical academic research writing.

1. Students will investigate a shared topic of inquiry and develop research questions that engage the complexities (social, political, ideological, economic, historical) of and current debates about that topic.	7. Students will produce texts that demonstrate a nuanced understanding of and an ethical relationship with sources and research participants.
2. Students will learn multiple research strategies, including primary research, and develop more extensive knowledge of library databases in order to identify sources appropriate to their research questions.	8. Students will demonstrate how their dialogue with sources has broadened and enhanced their own thinking about the issue.
3. Students will evaluate the validity of their sources in the context of their research questions.	9. Students will practice and produce analysis, argument, synthesis and summary as central components of researched writing.

4. Students will read sources rhetorically, which involves considering authors' positions in relation to audiences, recognizing points of congruence and difference among texts, and establishing a genuine dialogue with others' ideas.	10. Students will write a series of informal assignments as part of their composing process, and at least three sustained, finished texts that respond to specific rhetorical situations.
5. Students will understand the role of genres, sources, styles and media in communicating with particular audiences and for specific purposes.	11. Students will practice the strategies of incorporating the research of others into their own texts in a variety of ways (including summary, paraphrase, quotation) and will provide textual evidence of where, how, and why sources are being used.
6. Students will understand the ways in which digital media shape all stages of the research and writing process—invention, composing, revision, delivery—and will understand how the effects of digital media vary according to audience, genre, context, and purpose.	12. Students will develop revision and editing strategies for organization, prose style, and technical control.

## **COURSE MATERIALS + PLATFORMS**

- All assigned readings will be posted on the course blog. You are required to print them and bring them with you to class. Consider this the cheaper alternative to buying a course pack. You need to print articles so you can annotate them.
- You will need access to Blackboard and your .syr e-mail using your SUID and password.
- You will need to access our course blog by creating a Wordpress account.
- You will need a Twitter account.

## **GRADING**

### Unit 1 Response Portfolio - 20%

- You will be asked to compose 4 critical summaries of assigned readings, and submit revised versions of them along with a 2-page reflection on your interests and questions relating to our course subject

### Unit 2 Literacy Footprint presentation - 20%

- You will be asked to research the “literacy footprint” of one hip-hop artist (or pop culture artist, event, film, or television show) and present your findings in a multimedia presentation that accounts for the various kinds of sources that constitute this footprint

### Unit 3 Research Paper - 25%

- You will be asked to write a traditional research paper of 8-10 pages, for an academic audience, which advances a narrow, significant argument building on your research and reading in Units 1 and 2.

### Unit 4 Translation and Reflection - 20%

- You will be asked to “translate” your unit 4 paper into a visual or multimedia project that conveys your argument using visual rhetoric for a mainstream audience, and write a reflection that justifies your choices.

### Homework - 10%

- You will have regular reading and writing assignments in addition to the above. This grade reflects your prompt and regular completion of these assignments, which will each receive a grade of 2=exemplary, 1=acceptable, 0=incomplete or unsubmitted.

Engagement - 5%

- In lieu of the “participation” grade, “engagement” respects that some students engage differently than others. This grade reflects your attendance and engagement in class and your completion of class notes at least 2 times during the semester.

## **ATTENDANCE & ENGAGEMENT**

Regular attendance and completion of assignments in this class is critical. Your absences will effect your classmates’ work as well as your own. All the work is designed to develop your research skills and will feed directly into your unit assignments. Repeated tardiness, misbehavior, or absence from class will directly effect your “Engagement” grade and will indirectly effect your unit grades. **Ten or more absences will result in an automatic failure of the course.**

I will ask two students to take notes during each class session, to be posted on the course blog. You can post them as comments, email them to me, or, if you hand write notes, I can take photos of them. You are required to take notes for the group at least twice during the semester.

The course schedule is outlined below, but changes may occur so please listen for announcements in class. If you are absent, it is your responsibility to be in touch with me and make up any missed work.

## **INSTRUCTOR MEETINGS**

You are required to meet with me once during the first unit, so that I can get to know everyone in class a bit. Appearing for this meeting counts as one homework. You are encouraged to come see me at other times. I am always happy to discuss an assignment or a draft with you. Stop by my office during office hours, or e-mail me to set up an appointment at another time.

## ***STUDENT WRITING***

All texts written in this course are generally public to the members of this class. You may be asked to share them with a peer, the class, or with me. I will always ask your permission to share your work with the entire class, however you may be asked to share work with a peer.

## ***SOCIAL MEDIA***

In this class we will produce work on Wordpress.com and communicate, at times, via Twitter. You are required to have a Wordpress account and a Twitter account. The Wordpress blog is private and will only be visible to members of our class. It is your decision whether to use accounts you previously hold or create a new one that is only for the purposes of this course. Because a lot of exciting scholarly conversation takes place on Twitter, I encourage you to experiment with bringing your research into the Twitter account you already have—I promise this class will not hijack your Twitter feed. You may also choose to create or upload content on Youtube, Soundcloud, Prezi, etc. Whether your accounts are public or private is up to you. I will never ask you to post public content on the internet if you don’t want to.

## **Unit 1: Critical Summaries**

### **Texts**

Chalfant's Style Wars

Harris's "Coming to Terms"

Rafcliffe's "Rhetorical Listening" (excerpt)

Kirkland "The Rose that Grew from Concrete"

James Paul Gee's "Literacy Crises and the Significance of Literacy"

Smitherman, Talkin and Testifyin (excerpt)

### **Assignment: Critical Summary Portfolio**

Over the next few weeks, you will be assigned a number of texts on hip-hop and literacy and will be asked to generate various kinds of writings in response to them. Much of this writing, like tweets, blog comments, and in-class writing, will be informal; however, you will also be asked to write four Critical Summaries, which will go through a revision process and become part of your Unit 1 Assignment. **Ultimately, your Unit 1 Portfolio will consist of four Critical Summaries and one short essay.**

You have likely been asked to write summaries before. It is a necessary early step to learning more about a subject. As a researcher in this course, it will be important for you to do more than simply report someone else's words in a smaller form. In fact, as you'll see when you read the first chapter of Harris, this is not even really possible, because each of us comes to a text with our own perspectives.

A "critical summary" asks you to shift your focus from merely noticing what the text is saying, to investigating *how* and *why* it is saying what it's saying—in other words read for what the writer is trying to do in the text [this is what Harris refers to as the writer's "project"]: that is, how the writer gets from point A to point B; how the writer works with and through a question or an issue; how the writer evolves his or her thinking. Look at the underlying structure of the text—what's repeated? what seems significant or strange or important?

A critical summary is a fair and generous overview of a text, but an overview that takes into account the fact that as a researcher you will have a project of your own in mind and that there likely will be some principle other than simple "coverage" that helps you select the information you decide to highlight in your summary.

In the university, as you may have already learned, the word "critical" or "critique" does not mean that you are necessarily criticizing in a negative way. A "critical" summary indicates that you are reading a text (or image, or film clip) in order to evaluate not just its content or reliability, but also why it was written, by whom, and under what conditions and context. A critical summary also addresses how a text fits into your own thinking, interests and exploration of a topic.

When writing your critical summaries, be mindful to:

- Read carefully. Be sure you fully understand what the article is saying.

- Find a focal point or “flashpoint” (Harris), something that transcends simple “coverage” or representation (Harris) of the ideas in the article. Think, for example, of where this text fits in with what you currently recognize about the course inquiry: What is your “interest” in the text, in the course inquiry? What would you like to make visible to others through your summary?
- Choose key words or phrases that help you show YOUR reader a perspective on the article. Even if you don’t integrate the words and phrases into your summary, keeping a log of text-specific vocabulary and quotes is an excellent reading strategy.

Your Unit 1 Portfolio will consist of

- 4 Critical Summaries – they can be on any of the assigned texts from Unit 1, including the film “Style Wars,” each of 400-500 words (1.5-2 pp)
- 1 Reflective Letter of 400-500 words

Your reflective letter should introduce a reader to your collection of Critical Summaries, discuss any relationships between them, and generate a set of specific research questions as you move into Unit 2. These questions should be specific and should represent areas of inquiry that interest or perplex you and that might fuel further research for you in this course.

## **Unit 2: Literacy Footprint Project**

### **Texts**

Fahnestock and Secor on audience + exigence and Ramage on kairos;  
 Purdue OWL “The Rhetorical Situation”  
 Purdue OWL on citation  
 Tessa Brown’s “Yeezy Rising”  
 Kanye West and Mike Meyers at the Hurricane Katrina Telethon

### **Assignment: Literacy Footprint Project**

**Literacy footprint:** the collection of literacy events or texts (e.g., newspaper articles, blog posts, social media accounts, user comments, YouTube videos, Instagrams, tweets, scholarly articles, books, fan art, forums, etc.) extending out of a single individual, event, or work of art.

In the first unit, we looked closely at a selection of texts I chose about hip-hop, literacy, and writing. In the second unit, you are going to pursue independent research of your own that centers around or extends from these initial subjects of inquiry. In this unit you will also take more responsibility for sharing your research with the class.

The learning goals for unit 2 are for you to:

- identify a subject of inquiry and investigate it independently using multiple types of search methods and discovering multiple kinds of relevant sources
- evolve your research questions based on your findings
- learn some basic principles of rhetoric and use them to analyze different types of sources
- discover the “literacy footprint” of an artist or artifact that interests you
- learn and employ the MLA or APA citation styles for different kinds of sources

In the course of Unit 2 you will create:

1. **a running research journal that documents your findings (15%)**  
[create a website on which you post detailed entries that document what you find and how you find it – search terms, links to sites of interest, an evolving set of research questions]
2. **a selective annotated bibliography about your discovered sources (15%)**  
[an MLA or APA formatted bibliography of 15-20 sources each with a short paragraph describing it in rhetorical or Harris’s terms and explaining how you expected to use it for your presentation]
3. **a live entry into the “literacy footprint” you are researching (5%)**  
[write 200+ words in a public blog comment, wiki, forum, RapGenius entry, etc., that extends the literacy footprint you’re researching. In your annotated bibliography, please mark with an asterisk (\*) and describe the source you modified.]
4. **a mini-presentation to the class on some element of our research (5%)**  
[give a 5-minute presentation to the class, alone or in concert with your classmates, that uses visuals posted to your research journal site ]
5. **a presentation, in the format of your choice, on the “literacy footprint” you investigate**  
[present the contours of the literacy footprint you discover to the class in a rhetorical way that highlights the features/sources/patterns that seem most important to you]
6. **a 1-2-page rhetorical defense that explains and defends the rhetorical choices you made in your presentation (60%, together with the presentation)**  
[write a short, detailed essay describing and defending the choices you made in your presentation]

### **Unit 3 – Listening Closely: Academic Paper**

#### **Texts:**

Joseph Harris, “Forwarding and Countering”

#### **Assignment:**

In this Unit we will focus on:

- Argumentation: making a specific, sustained argument composed of claims, defended by evidence
- Structure: building an argument that is responsive to a reader’s needs when receiving information and which supports you as you build to your conclusions
- Drafting: honing style, structure, and argument through multiple drafts and peer workshops
- Style: editing closely, implementing proper citation methods, using language thoughtfully
- Reflective writing: using reflection to create awareness of our own strengths, struggles, and best practices

Assignment:

**The short of it:**

**Write an 8-page paper** that makes a specific, sustained argument about a selection of primary and secondary texts you've studied, using the tools of rhetorical analysis tools to formulate your claims. Your paper should:

- be double-spaced; 12-pt font, 1-inch margins, and titled
- use a correct citational style
- be thoroughly revised from your earlier draft

Your paper should also be accompanied by a **1-page reflective letter** that describes your revision process in detail, making explicit and specific references to your drafts, feedback from peers, and/or feedback from me.

**The long of it:**

In your Unit 3 paper, you will position yourself in relation to the topic or an issue you've been studying and build a case for understanding or action. The essay should not be an informative research report; it requires you to take an explicit position in relation to your topic, to analyze and complicate your topic, and to use your sources sparingly but strategically. Now is when you get to respond to your sources and to assert your thinking about your research topic.

You'll practice using other sources-- illustrating, authorizing borrowing and extending--to forward your own ideas. It may help to think about it in the way Harris offered, as a part of a conversation where you are offering your perspective in relation to others you have been learning about from your sources. In your unit 3 paper you will make a case for a particular way of seeing your topic in relation to what other participants in the scholarly and popular conversations have to offer.

In addition to entering the conversation, you will aim to provide a new perspective. Your contribution should stem from the research that you take on—that is, your insights should stem from your own close analysis of source material you conduct. As we work on this unit together, our focus will be on helping you clarify this perspective; creating a structure to support a complex argument; thinking about what kinds of evidence, including (perhaps) your own experiences, help support this argument; and using editing and a citation style to polish your piece.

Throughout this process, we will do reflective writing exercises, in class and at home, to keep us keyed into our own writing processes and to cultivate our own self-awareness as writers. Your final Unit 3 paper should be accompanied by a 1-page, single-spaced letter describing in detail your revision process and the evolution of the drafts. This letter should make claims about your process that are defended by evidence—in this case, direct quotes from your drafts, peer review letters, earlier reflective writing, and/or feedback from me.

## Unit 4

### Assignment: Visual Translation + Class Magazine

For the last unit cycle of the semester, we will convert our work as a class into a **shareable web magazine**. For the next few weeks, we will think about presenting arguments and content visually, using web, images, video, links, and more. Depending on how sophisticated our design team is, this can be completed on Wordpress or Tumblr for sure.

Some of you will take a more managerial or editorial role; others will be responsible for translating the content of your Unit 3 paper into a new medium, like a dynamic blog post, a film, or a piece of visual art.

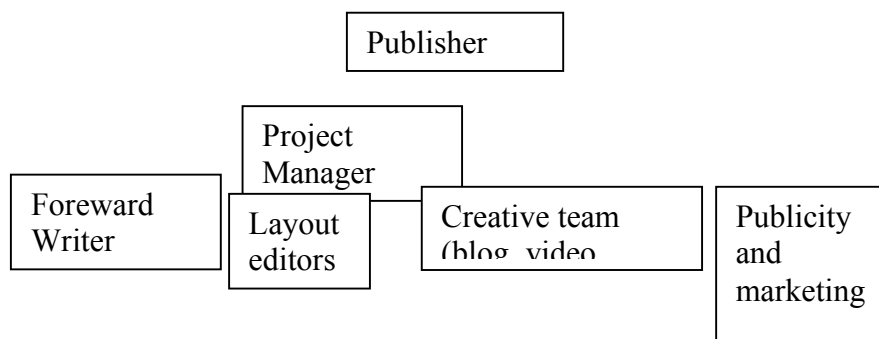
#### Positions:

Editing team:

- Foreward writer (1-2)
- Project manager (1-2)
- Layout editors (2-3)
- Copyeditor (1)

Staff writers/artists:

- Blog post (4+)
- Video (2-3)
- Artwork (2-3) incl. cover/heading art.
- Publicity and Marketing (1-2)



At the end of this unit, you will submit an **invoice** that describes your job description in detail and what tasks you actually performed. It should include a tabulation of hours worked over the course of the unit and a self-evaluation.

#### *Job Descriptions*

The **publisher** is me, Tessa. My job is to do as little as possible unless something goes terribly wrong. (Just kidding. I will be floating around helping everyone.)

The **project manager(s)** are responsible for overseeing the entire operation. They oversee deadlines and check in with everyone to make sure they are on task. If folks have questions or concerns, they should check with the PM as well as with me. The PMs are responsible for knowing what's up with everyone and keeping things running smoothly.

The **foreward writer(s)** will introduce the contents of our magazine to the readers by writing a well-crafted 350-500 word letter that describes the contents, relates them to one another, and draws out themes. They set the tone for readers of the magazine.

The **layout editors** are responsible for the design of the site, creating a working, hyperlinked table of contents, and making sure all pages are functional. Within the layout team, the **copy editor(s)** checks all writing, captions, and images for correct grammar, placement,



tags/categories, and working hyperlinks and also manages content submissions (i.e., creatives turn in your work to them).

The **creative team** is responsible for translating their Unit 3 papers into the content for our magazine. They will also serve as a collaborative editing team, vetting one another's work:

- **Blog writers** will translate their Unit 3 papers by editing/rewriting their papers into a blog/newsmagazine tone that begin with an enticing lede and include well-placed visuals to entice their readers. They should include tags for easy navigation through the site.
- **Video producers** will translate their Unit 3 papers into some kind of video that will play on the site; they will also workshop the visual artists.
- **Visual artists** will translate their Unit 3 papers into a static, visual art presentation and also workshop the videos. One person on the creative team is also responsible for creating **cover art** to accompany the Foreward and potentially a header as well.

The **Publicity and Marketing team** is responsible for promoting our magazine over social and physical media (i.e., twitter, flyers, campus media placement), creating hype for our magazine, and promoting it once it is released. They are responsible for writing one 350-500 word press release. After the last day of class, we will all join the PR team by hyping our product through Friday, May 2.

# WRT205

Critical Research Hip-hop, Literacy and Writing

Instructor: Nana

E-Mail:

Phone:

Office:

Office Hours: TBD

## Course Description and Rationale

In 2006 Hip-Hop icon, Nas claimed, “Hip-Hop is dead.” Years later, culturally at least, we know that hip-hop is as popular as it has ever been. So what did he mean? How can a musical genre be dead? And, more importantly, what does it mean when an art form is “alive?”

Our 205 class is a research and writing course concerned with understanding our dynamic capacity to be literate in a world where new literacies are constantly emerging. We will be discovering our powers as writers through the lens of hip-hop. We will study what it is to be an MC and understand the *MC as active participant in a literary community*. And from this starting point, we will ask ourselves questions about the ways MC's display their abilities as literary figures.

We will engage with various sources that will help us understand what hip-hop is as a culture and art form, and we will also explore where it fits into the larger culture. We will aim for depth in all our research and observations. “*Do you fools even listen to music or do you just skim though it?*” asked Jay-Z on the song Renegade. We will never skim. We will always drive for depth. We will approach our subjects with reverence and respect. All the while we will be considering who we are as writers and how you can grow. We will continuously be in conversation with sources you will connect with and draw from as we develop arguments. We will become well versed in our own literacy and we'll learn to identify what methods work best for each of us.

Just as the MC is an active participant in a literary community, we will grow to become active, independent writers. As we move through the semester we will conduct research and develop arguments that fit the class mold but are born directly of your own interests. I'll be here to help you create researchable questions – it will be your job to bring those questions to life.

**And the Hook Goes... (Course Goals)**

Course Readings :

Most of the reading  
for the course will be  
PDF's I post to  
Blackboard,

- a. To develop ourselves as thorough **READERS**. We will work towards discovering researchable questions framed by the course inquiry. We will investigate hip-hop and with it as a lens we will engage it for its complexities (social, political, ideological, historical etc.)
- b. To learn and grow as **RESEARCHERS**. We will come to understand the necessity of narrowing our scope when it comes to research, while at the same time being able to see the complexities and implications of our discoveries.
- c. Using out secondary research we'll develop our ability as **WRITERS** and display our capacity to work critically. We'll work on out awareness of audience, genre, mode, persona and several other authorial considerations. We'll keep in mind that all writing is situated and we'll look at the secondary work we engage and hip-hop songs as situated works of analysis or art.

#### How will we do this?

1.Students will investigate a shared topic of inquiry and develop research questions that engage the complexities (social, political, ideological, economic, historical) of and current debates about that topic.	7.Students will produce texts that demonstrate a nuanced understanding of and an ethical relationship with sources and research participants.
2.Students will learn multiple research strategies, including primary research, and develop more extensive knowledge of library databases in order to identify sources appropriate to their research questions.	8.Students will demonstrate how their dialogue with sources has broadened and enhanced their own thinking about the issue.
3.Students will evaluate the validity of their sources in the context of their research questions.	9.Students will practice and produce analysis, argument, synthesis and summary as central components of researched writing.
4.Students will read sources rhetorically, which involves considering authors' positions in relation to audiences, recognizing points of congruence and difference among texts, and establishing a genuine dialogue with others' ideas.	10.Students will write a series of informal assignments as part of their composing process, and at least three sustained, finished texts that respond to specific rhetorical situations.
5.Students will understand the role of genres, sources, styles and media in communicating with particular audiences and for specific purposes.	11.Students will practice the strategies of incorporating the research of others into their own texts in a variety of ways (including summary, paraphrase, quotation) and will provide textual evidence of where, how, and why sources are being used.

6.Students will understand the ways in which digital media shape all stages of the research and writing process—invention, composing, revision, delivery—and will understand how the effects of digital media vary according to audience, genre, context, and purpose.	12.Students will develop revision and editing strategies for organization, prose style, and technical control.
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*Either you whine or you climb, I choose the latter...*

### **Work of the Course**

You will devote time, thought, and energy to a variety of informal and formal reading and writing practices. During the course you might be asked to annotate readings, keep a record of ideas and responses, jot down observations, take notes on class discussions, experiment with different styles and organizational choices, and engage in a variety of drafting and revision activities. All these activities are important and will have an impact on your development and success as academic writers (and your final grade).

A note about the importance of keeping up with your reading assignments: writing well depends upon reading well. The course texts will provide you with ideas and arguments, concepts and key terms. They will prompt thought as you agree or disagree or qualify those ideas. They enlarge the context for our class discussion. And they illustrate choices other writers have made as they composed. Writing and reading are interdependent practices, and you will move between the two regularly throughout the course.

### **Feedback and Grading**

*Either you whine or you climb, I choose the ladder...*

Unit 1: Flashpoints Portfolio (20%)	You will compose critical summaries of four inquiry-specific readings and also write an accompanying reflection.
Unit 2: Primary Research Texts (20%)	You will conduct two or three types of primary research specific to your research question/project, and represent your research in appropriate forms.
Unit 3: Synthesis Essay (30%)	You will compose an 8 page synthesis essay drawing on a small pool of secondary sources and primary research. You will also determine an appropriate audience and venue for your essay.
Culminating Reflection (10%)	You will compose a culminating reflection, looking back on the work of the course and making claims about your engagement with the inquiry and your identity as a writer, reader, and researcher.

Invention Work (20%)	All of the informal work of the semester.
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Unit 1: Flashpoint Portfolio: Using shared texts we'll write CRITICAL summaries. The summaries will get us started and rooted out consistent critical analysis and engagement. We'll also establish some context regarding hip-hop and our understanding of it as a literary community.

Unit 2: Primary Research: We'll dive into some primary texts and conduct research that is refined, narrowed and complicated.

Unit 3: Research Synthesis Essay: We'll conduct our own secondary research related to questions we've developed and synthesize critical essays expanding on researchable questions.

### Course Policies

Writing studios are courses in language learning, and language is learned in communities; therefore, it is essential that you attend class and participate. Absences and lack of preparation for class will affect your classmates' work as well as your own. The work you do in class, the work you do to prepare for each class, is as important as any polished assignment you turn in for a grade. In addition, each unit calendar is only a projection and may be subject to occasional changes and revisions as it seems appropriate, necessary, or just interesting. That is another reason why your attendance is vital.

If you must miss a class, you are responsible for work assigned. Please realize, however, that class time cannot be reconstructed or made up, and that your performance, your work, and your final course grade will be affected by absences. If you are absent you are responsible for any missed work and for attending to any modifications of the syllabus and/or assignments. If you miss six classes (three weeks) you will fail the course. Don't let that happen! I don't imagine anyone will be in that situation, however, so let's all just plan to come to class, do the work, learn a lot, and make the course a meaningful experience.

### Student Writing

All texts written in this course are generally public. You may be asked to share them with a peer, the class, or with me during classroom activities or for homework. You will also be asked to consider signing a consent form requesting the use of your writing for professional development, teacher training, and classroom instruction within the Syracuse University Writing Program.

### WRT 205 Feat. .... Class Observation / Study Participation

Our class will partake in occasional observations that will include the choice to have your work taken to further the study. We'll talk more about this in class. It is totally up to you whether or not you want to participate in terms of class writing. I will have no knowledge of who is and who isn't participating in the study and it will have no bearing on your grade.

Final note. This class will cover a lot. There will be a lot of work and reading. We will also have fun. If you think that reading/writing and fun are contrary ideas hopefully that will change by the end of the semester. It is my hope that learning to invent and foster ideas will be exciting for both

you and me. We will work together to expand our powers over the written word and beyond. I sincerely look forward to the great things we will accomplish. Let's get it.

## **Unit 1** **Texts**

"The best you can do as a reader is to try to show *why* you view a text in a certain way, both in terms of the values you bring to the text and the moments you notice in it. Your readers can then point to different values and different moments, and your ways of reading the text can then be contrasted and argued for, if not resolved.

You can see quotations as *flashpoints* in a text, moments given a special intensity, made to stand for key concepts and issues. A useful rule of thumb, then, is to quote only those phrases or passages that you want to do further work with or bring pressure upon—whose particular implications and resonances you want to analyze, elaborate, counter, revise, echo, or transform." (22)

Toni Blackman's "Getting Open"

Joseph Harris's "Coming to Terms"

Hanifa Wadilah's "A Bitch Ain't One"

Kanye West's The College Dropout

Style Wars (excerpt)

June Jordan's "Nobody Mean More to Me Than You and the Future Life of Willie Jordan"

### **Assignment:**

# Flashpoints Portfolio

## WRT 205 Unit 1 Assignment

We will begin our semester of research writing by doing readings on hip-hop. We are starting with readings, reading practices, and learning about the rhetorical aspects of a text because strong writing starts with effective reading. In order to write effectively with sources, we need to be able to talk about the nuances and specifics of each author's arguments. Although summarizing a text may seem like a simple task, being precise with how we talk and write about what a text does is actually quite challenging.

In terms of our class's trajectory for the semester, the Flashpoints Portfolio assignment sets you up to start your own research project. Good research isn't just about finding a few sources that reinforce what we already think; rather, it's about reading in a subject area with the intention of finding out more, of complicating our assumptions and belief systems, and being generous with the new ideas we encounter. Reading then is an important step in the development of a research project. In fact, my hope with the Flashpoints Portfolio assignment is that you become an

invested and curious reader who tunes in to the conversations specific to hiphop, and that you then develop your own relevant, meaningful, researchable questions.

### **The Flashpoints Portfolio has 3 essential parts:**

#### **First: Summarize & Revise & Polish**

Joe Harris explains that our summaries are never neutral and objective, that we always understand a text's project through our own interests and experiences. You will need to revise the summaries you wrote for homework this unit so that they accurately and precisely represent each writer's project *and* your particular take on or curiosity about or investment in the project. Your understanding of the unit texts is bound to deepen as you re-read them, as we discuss them in class, as we share our initial summaries, and as we scrutinize our flashpoints. Your revising of the critical summaries, then, is *crucial*; you want the summaries you turn in for a grade to reflect the newest, most updated, richest engagement with the readings. You also want to be mindful of and attentive to the important balance between the flashpoint that prefaces each summary and the summary itself; the one needs to speak to or reference or interact with the other.

#### **Second: Generate Keywords & Potential Research Foci**

For the second part of the Flashpoint Portfolio you will collect keywords and concepts specific to our course inquiry, and use your lexicon to do some preliminary searching on the web and in select library databases. The point is to see what sorts of research projects arise from hiphop, who's pursuing these projects, and what disciplinary arenas are represented.

#### **Third: Reflect & Ask Questions**

The third part of the Flashpoint Portfolio will be a one page reflection on the collection of flashpoint summaries and lexicon. Your reflection should begin to pinpoint your interests in hiphop and should function as a jumping off point for further research; in other words, what are you interested enough in to keep researching, reading, and writing about? Include in the reflection 3-4 researchable questions that these readings have led you to ask—and, that you might continue to investigate during the rest of the semester.

Assignment Breakdown—

- 1 page summary of each of the four shared readings; these should each be framed by **one crucial flashpoint** from the text.
- 1 page lexicon and summary of your preliminary research.
- 1 page reflection on the shared readings and the lexicon that ends with a set of research questions you might be interested in pursuing.

### **Unit 2: Primary Research**

#### **Texts**

Mick Jenkins's "Jazz" (video)

Notorious BIG's *Ready to Die* cover art

Kendrick Lamar's "The Blacker the Berry"

#### **Unit 2 Assignment**

What can we do as researchers to make our inquiries in hip-hop come alive—for ourselves *and* for our readers? How might we establish a greater sense of interest and urgency regarding our

topics? How can we tackle our research foci with active, creative, hands on projects? **Primary** research does all of those things, and more.

Here's a reminder of the different forms research takes: **secondary research** brings you into contact with the ideas, claims, theories, and research data of *other* writers; **primary research** brings you into closer contact with a research focus or topic or site and inspires you to generate *your own* ideas, claims, and theories and data about the topic.

Think of the difference in terms of our shared inquiry: In Unit 1 we read *A Bitch Ain't One* in which Walidah used a moment she observed between Erykah Badu and Jill Scott, as well as several other observations, to argue a point about the way gender dynamics have influenced hip-hop. The Walidah reading, then, would be a secondary source. (She's done the analysis that you "borrow.") If *you*, for example, were to analyze the interactions of performers (or students) at a concert — conduct interviews, and take notes on (or photographs of) what you saw and experienced, the interviews, pictures and the notes would become primary research data, and would require *you* to analyze them, to make them significant in some way.

Primary research might also help you narrow the focus of your research topic, or might even inspire you to tweak or change your focus.

In Unit 2 you will conduct two forms of primary research specific to one of the research foci you may have identified in your Flashpoints Portfolio, and you will create compositions that are appropriate vessels for your research. You will also compose a reflection in which you analyze how the primary research has impacted your understanding of and your relationship to your research focus.

I will introduce you to a range of primary research options, and we will practice doing primary research in class.

### **Primary Research Options (select 2)**

**Observation:** Observations involve taking careful, thorough and organized notes about occurrences in the world. Observations provide you with insight on specific people, events, or locales and are useful when you want to learn more about patterns or to ground or contextualize your research focus. How is hip-hop in the culture as you experience it?

**Interview:** Interviews are one-on-one or small group question and answer sessions. Interviews can potentially provide a lot of information from a small number of people and are useful when you want to get an expert or knowledgeable or experiential opinion on a subject. Interviews provide particular illumination on a subject; they depict real people, with real voices and perspectives that can serve as interesting counterpoint to your own voice and perspective or the voices and perspectives of secondary sources.

**Representational Examples:** You might locate and analyze a specific example of something related to hip-hop that you are interested in looking more closely at, such as, an entire album or specific songs/verses or a music video. Whatever you chose, you'll need to take careful notes on the example, looking with fresh eyes for emerging patterns or interesting binaries. Though it's



important to recognize the limits of generalizability this kind of primary research can often help you get a better sense of depth for your topic, and may also help you with further defining or focusing your research question. Close-readings of lyrics will be great example of analyzing a representational example, maybe a thorough analysis of an image in a magazine or a video.

Are *you* analyzing or are you using someone else's analysis to find points to discover new ways to engage your researchable question is a good way to think about whether or not you are doing primary research.

### **Unit 3: Research Synthesis** **Texts**

Assignment: Research Synthesis Paper

#### ***Unit 3—Research Synthesis Assignment***

*“...academic writing responds to the texts and ideas of others... the goal of such writing is not to have the final word on some subject, to bring the discussion to a close, but to push it forward, to say something new, something that seems to call for further talk and writing.”*

*~Harris, Rewriting*

#### *The Writing*

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In unit 1 you read a small set of texts related to the broad topic of Hip hop and began to get a feel for the concepts and issues and arguments surrounding the profound cultural shifts we are experiencing as the genre grows and develops in and out of the popular culture. The purpose of that first portfolio was to practice reading texts—all different genres of texts—and to situate yourself in the course inquiry. In unit 2 you selected a particular source from within hip hop of further exploration and pursued two forms of primary research specific to that topic.

In unit 3 you will write a **synthesis essay** drawing on the primary research you have conducted (or will conduct) and secondary sources you find that address your topic or an issue related to your topic. The goal is to use this small but carefully selected group of source materials to “update, or complicate, or enrich her own perspective on a topic...” and to develop a project that “presents this updated and enriched perspective” to your readers. The project will be posted to either the class blog or handed in physically. If you choose to use the blog, I invite you to be as creative and interesting in the presentation of your ideas as you’d like--using visual communication through select images, choosing small pieces of your writing to highlight in pull-quotes, including hyperlinks—and any other ideas you have for enhancing the reader’s experience.

Regardless of the form your essay takes, you’ll practice using other sources— illustrating, authorizing borrowing and extending—to forward your own ideas. You will, in essence, join a conversation. But unlike a face to face conversation, as Harris helpfully notes, “academic writing

is almost always intended for a *third* reader. One scholar will criticize the work of another less in the hope of having her rival recant than in persuading other readers to see the good sense of her... views” (36). This is essentially your task in the unit 3 project: you will make a case for a particular way of seeing your topic in relation to what other participants in the “conversation” have to offer.

The next weeks of the course are devoted to practicing how to analyze primary research applicable to your place, how to engage critically and ethically with secondary sources, and how to synthesize effectively. It is imperative, then, that you keep up with the homework and attend class.

### Source Requirements

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I would like you locate and use a range of sources (4-6 in total) (please, no more than **four** secondary sources, however):

- 1) **Secondary sources** that offer an interpretation or argument about your topic or issues related to your topic, at least one of which must be a peer-reviewed (scholarly) source.
  - 2) **Optional:** a secondary source that provides historical context on your topic.
  - 3) **Primary research** specific to your topic.
- 

### Attention to Rhetorical Issues

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We will address rhetorical issues and deploy rhetorical awareness as we research and write our own projects. Specifically, in class *and in your project* I’ll expect you to

- *assert why* your issue interests you or matters to you (and why it should interest and matter to your readers) at this particular historical moment. In other words, compose your argument considering kairos and exigency.
- *recognize and attend to* what your readers will need in terms of explanation/preparation/contextualization. Make sure to, among other things,
  - define key terms and concepts,
  - carefully introduce your sources,
  - anticipate confusion or resistance,
  - use rhetorical appeals and strategies appropriate for your rhetorical situation and
  - anticipate counter-arguments.
- *articulate* a particular perspective; that is, be explicit about how your ideas fit into the ongoing debate/conversation.

### Nitty Gritty

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Your project and culminating reflection are due on **Tuesday, April 28** and you should upload them to your blog or hand me a physical copy. **This project, along with your reflection, is worth 40 % of your course grade.** Your project grade will be based on your ability to construct a well-organized, rhetorically sensitive, coherent, thoughtful synthesized perspective on your topic. **Getting Started**

One way to think about a synthesis is that you are being asked to come up with an *idea* from your sources. It doesn’t need to be an idea that changes the world, but it should be a “unique perspective” you can offer a reader—something new or interesting. Composition scholars Rossenwasser and Stephen offer the following characteristics of an “idea,” which may be helpful to you in getting started in your thinking toward your topic.

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## VITA

NAME OF AUTHOR: Tessa Rose Brown

PLACE OF BIRTH: Chicago, Illinois

DATE OF BIRTH: June 10, 1986

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

Princeton University and University of Michigan

DEGREES AWARDED:

Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing (Fiction), 2011, University of Michigan

Bachelor of Arts in Religion and Creative Writing, 2008, Princeton University

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

- Graduate Editing Center Editor, Writing Center, Syracuse University, 2016-2017
- Teaching Assistant, Department of Writing Studies, Rhetoric, and Composition, Syracuse University, 2013-2015
- Lecturer, English Department Writing Program, University of Michigan, 2011-2012
- Graduate Student Instructor, English Department Writing Program, University of Michigan, 2009-2011