

The Risky Business of Engaging Racial Equity in Writing Instruction: A Tragedy in Five Acts

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This article and its five authors investigate how writing programs, writing instructors, and the profession itself engage in the erasure of race—of blackness and brownness specifically—and perhaps most importantly in a hesitancy to address white privilege.

Race and writing instruction is not exactly a road untraveled. Racial equity work in composition has had its moments of high visibility and has often been examined through a number of scholarly lenses: how to assess grammar or value students' primary languages, what curricular materials and assessments should be used within developmental education, and which hiring practices can attract more faculty members of color. However, many of these conversations have devalued the emotional components of racial equity work and diminished ways in which these conversations continue to perpetuate institutional and personal violence against black and brown bodies: students, faculty members, and staff. In fact, many of these innovations have continued to center white masculinity while students of color continue to be failed by the institution.

This erasure of race is especially perilous for students and faculty of color. We reflect all of this, the erasures and the hesitations, the perils and the pain, and as none of this is neat or orderly work, the piece reflects this roughly ordered, even fragmented state. We align ourselves in this approach with educational researcher Gloria Ladson-Billings, in that we are “attempting to speak to innovative theoretical ways for framing discussions about social justice and democracy and the role of education in reproducing or interrupting current practices” (9). That our primary mode of doing so is storytelling is not an accident; it underscores our belief in a foundational principle of critical race theory (CRT) to disrupt dominant racial narratives by “analyz[ing] the myths, presuppositions, and received wisdoms that make up the common culture about race and that invariably render blacks and other minorities one-down” (Delgado xiv).¹

The contributors to this piece are members of an urban two-year college English department that has adjusted its curriculum to better reach our culturally diverse student population, a student body that has grown to 58 percent students of color at a site where over eighty languages are spoken (“Campus”). As we broadened

our work from curricular diversity to more diverse hiring practices, which later led to addressing our own persistent white privilege, things institutionally broke down. Three years later we are still broken and breaking. We attempt to shine light on those breaks both to aid in our own healing and to offer readers a kind of case study from which others might learn how to proceed in undoing the lingering race privilege shadowing all our institutions, as proceed we must.

Act I. What We Saw and What We Did: Racial Equity and Developmental Writing

Michael Kuhne

SCENE 1. "OLD WHITE GUYS"

When I started teaching in 1995 at Minneapolis Community and Technical College, it wasn't even MCTC yet; it was still Minneapolis Community College, a liberal arts two-year college that shared a campus with Minneapolis Technical College, a career and technical education institution. (The two colleges would merge, by way of legislative mandate, in 1997.) I joined the English Department when I was thirty-six years old, and I was the second youngest faculty member; the youngest faculty member, a woman of color, stayed for two years before she left for another community college position in Massachusetts.

At that point, the English Department was white, predominantly male, and older. Other than being relatively youthful, I fit in perfectly. Meanwhile, the students of color represented 34 percent of the student body (Coulter and Kuhne 11). However, this percentage of students of color was not mirrored by the employees of the college. At that point, only 10 percent of the college's administrators, only 9 percent of the instructors, and only 25 percent of the staff were people of color (41–45). Over the years, the percentage of students of color would continue to increase, becoming the majority of the students at the college in 2010, while the percentage of employees of color did not increase significantly (*MCTC*).

This snapshot portrays a history of inequity at our college. There was much that was wrong in the late 1990s. What we in the English Department saw—what we were willing and able to see—was an ineffective developmental writing curriculum. We worked to address this, as our training taught us. What we didn't see, however, was our colleagues of color struggling and frequently suffering within our department and institution.

SCENE 2. HIGH-STAKES TO PORTFOLIO-BASED OUTCOMES

In 1995, the college's developmental writing curriculum was a sequence of three courses, each based on a formal, structural approach to composition. The first course—Fundamentals of Written English I—focused on “parts of speech, sentence patterns, sentence combining, punctuation and spelling [with an] emphasis on writing and revising one-paragraph summaries of short essays.” Student achievement was evaluated based on a timed writing test given during the final day of

class (*Minneapolis*). Students would not produce any writing that originated with their own experiences; rather, their goal was to write a one-paragraph summary of someone else's writing.

After Fundamentals of Written English I, another course followed in which students would continue to work on “grammar, punctuation and spelling rules [. . .] and effective sentences and [. . .] composition of the paragraph.” Once again, student achievement was determined by a timed writing test (*Minneapolis*). As much a test of endurance and persistence as it was of writing development, the lucky few students who got through these first two courses still had one more hurdle between them and a college-level writing class: Fundamentals of Written English 2, in which students were to continue “to generate [. . .] a unified, coherent paragraph,” which was—not surprisingly—evaluated at the end of the course with a timed test (*Minneapolis*).

In 1995, we required three courses, three quarters, and ten credit hours before a student who tested into developmental writing *could even start* a college-level English course. While we do not have retention information from that era, one can predict the abysmal rates of completion just to get to a college-level English course. For instance, in Mike Rose's *Back to School*, Rose cites a study that indicates “only 16 percent of students at this level complete the entire remedial sequence” (84). That's not 16 percent of students who start in developmental courses who go on to get a degree; this is 16 percent of students who test into a developmental course and are able to progress into a college-level course. We have no reason to believe that our college's results would have been any more promising nor any less dispiriting.

There were many English faculty members invested in the three-course developmental writing curriculum, and it would take another six years, after many retirements within the English Department and additional hires who brought with them composition and rhetoric backgrounds, before we were able to make a change to streamline the curriculum. In 2001, the department invited Linda Adler-Kassner to lead us through a three-day curriculum revision workshop. We moved from a three-course sequence of developmental writing courses with high-stakes testing to one developmental writing course with a portfolio-based outcome. Students would now produce a body of their work from the developmental course (two revised essays and a reflection letter) that would then be evaluated by two other developmental writing instructors.

To many of us, this curriculum revision represented profound progress. While this change was no doubt an improvement over the old three-course sequence, it was not long before we began to realize that it was not going to be the answer to our problems of retaining developmental writers through the end of the semester. The new portfolio-based course worked remarkably well for students who made it to the end of the course and submitted a portfolio: time and time again, over 95 percent of those students earned passing evaluations. The problem, however, was that too few students were making it to the end of the semester. Term after term, completion rates averaged between 55 and 60 percent. Once again, students of color—in particular African American men and Native American students—were

disproportionately negatively affected. Portfolio-based outcomes, while certainly better than high-stakes testing, was still not effective enough in getting students into college-level writing environments.

SCENE 3. PORTFOLIOS TO ACCELERATED ENGLISH

In 2012, Kathleen DeVore went to Baltimore for the Accelerated Learning Program Conference; she returned with the curricular innovation of accelerated English, an approach pioneered by the Community College of Baltimore County, and we began the necessary work to implement the model at the college. (Readers interested in learning more about the Accelerated Learning Program should view the data-rich website, *ALP Accelerated Learning Program* at <http://alp-deved.org/>). This approach enrolled students who tested into developmental writing into college-level English courses with a small cohort of other students. The ten students in the developmental writing cohort experienced the same course as the other fifteen students who had tested into college-level writing. Immediately after the first class ended, the cohort would meet for an additional fifty minutes with the same instructor. This support hour created an environment where students could continue the discussions they had begun in the college-level class and receive individual student-with-instructor writing assistance. (Also, these sections have always been scheduled for computer classrooms.) In the two years the college has offered accelerated English, we have seen retention and completion rates increase across all race and class demographics (see Table 1).

Students of color in the accelerated curriculum completed the course and passed at a rate of 67 percent, which surpassed the traditional curriculum by 13 percent, and this 67 percent pass rate slightly surpassed students of color who were placed directly into the college-level writing course (64 percent). Comparable improvements can be seen across the board. Of particular interest are the success rates of African American males: within ENGA 0900/1110, African American males had a 53 percent pass rate. Compare this with only a 44 percent pass rate in ENGL 0900, and a 59 percent pass rate in ENGL 1110 (Cressman). The 9 percent increase in pass rates for African American males who took the accelerated English instead of the more traditional developmental writing course was encouraging. However, the gap between African American males and other demographics has persisted, and frankly, a 53 percent pass rate is neither laudable nor acceptable.

Accelerated English has helped many students move into college-level writing courses more quickly and less expensively. It is not, however, *the* answer; rather, it is but one answer to an ongoing and persistent set of questions about equity and developmental writing curriculum. As a group, the department is already considering further changes to move more students from developmental writing to college-level English.

That's what we saw.

TABLE 1. MCTC Pass Rates for ENGA 0900/1110, ENGL 0900, and ENGL 1110, Spring 2013 to Spring 2015

Demographic Group		ENGA 0900/1110			ENGL 0900			ENGL 1110		
		# Passed ³	# Enrolled	% Passed	# Passed	# Enrolled	% Passed	# Passed	# Enrolled	% Passed
Gender	Female	215	288	75%	719	1,177	61%	2,441	3,502	70%
	Male	107	184	58%	556	1,124	49%	2,130	3,269	65%
Pell Eligible	Yes	263	402	65%	1,067	2,044	52%	2,782	4,452	62%
	No	29	35	83%	117	155	75%	788	1,075	73%
	Un-known	30	36	83%	94	107	88%	1,013	1,263	80%
Student of Color	Yes	267	401	67%	1,082	2,005	54%	2,685	4,168	64%
	No	51	67	76%	190	288	66%	1,876	2,589	72%
	Un-known			100%			46%	22	33	67%
First Generation (MN Definition)	Yes	126	174	72%	533	962	55%	1,246	1,928	65%
	No	182	276	66%	706	1,264	56%	3,244	4,735	69%
	Un-known	14	23	61%			49%	93	127	73%
African American Males		55	104	53%	311	713	44%	605	1026	59%
Total		322	473	68%	1,278	2,306	55%	4,583	6,790	67%

SCENE 4: WHAT WE DIDN'T—OR COULDN'T OR CHOSE NOT TO—SEE

At the same time that the English Department was addressing retention and completion issues in its developmental writing curriculum, the department was also experiencing a number of searches for new hires. As a department, we worked hard to change our demographics as we assertively sought teaching candidates of color. On one level, we were successful in hiring a number of highly qualified faculty of color. On another level, we failed miserably to make important changes in the culture of the department and the institution (more on this later).

However, I have come to learn something about my role in the English Department specifically and the larger institution generally. When we started to

change the developmental writing curriculum, I was active in making the changes. I was the department chair, for instance, when we made the change from high-stakes testing to portfolio-based outcomes, and I was one of the coauthors of the accelerated English curriculum change. What I saw was the abysmal rates of completion among all of our students. I saw the 2010 statistic that frankly haunted me: only 9 percent of African American males would finish a certificate, diploma, or degree within three years at our college. We worked hard to make changes, and while the situation of many of our developmental writing students has improved, there is still much work left to do.

What I didn't see was born of my naïveté and white privilege, and this speaks more directly to issues of equity with and among my peers. Although I served on search committees, I was not able to see that simply hiring faculty of color without changing the culture within the department and institution would not move equity forward. Adding faculty of color to the department was not enough; we had to change the culture, one where white patriarchy had been an almost unquestioned way of doing things.

I think of the curricular changes we made and juxtapose that with the slow, inexorable, painful changes we have made among ourselves within the department. While making the changes to the curriculum took time and effort, and while those efforts continue in earnest, those changes were what I was trained as a graduate student to do. The equity work is harder in many ways because it demands that I connect my head with my heart, hands, feet, and voice. This kind of work was definitely not part of the graduate school curriculum.

And yet, without doing this hard work, many people will suffer. My peers have suffered and will continue to suffer. The students I teach will suffer. The communities from which our students come will suffer. While doing equity work is hard, not doing equity work will continue to produce misery and trauma.

Act II. How We Broke

Kathleen Sheerin DeVore

Beyond the curricular changes to portfolio assessment and accelerated pedagogies, changes driven by a desire to increase student success—new practices that have been deep successes for the department—we then attempted cultural competency and white privilege work with English instructors as a community, and there we failed spectacularly. The student populations who had been most vulnerable in our basic writing (BW) curriculum were working-class students of color—particularly African American and Native American students. At great risk of oversimplification, we have found that recent immigrants from Somalia, Ethiopia, Mexico, South America, and South Asia had some access to communities where home languages and cultures were practiced, as well as English language learning (ELL) coursework prior to BW or college English, while African American and Native American students often had little or sometimes no access to either of these resources and had for generations lived under the heavy white dominance central to American colonial expansion.

And so those students often arrived in their BW or college English classes with home languages and cultures that for generations have been deeply devalued if acknowledged at all by the dominant cultural practices surrounding them. It is no accident that these are the cultures most damaged by American settler colonialism and therefore most damaged by the ongoing colonization echoing through our white-dominant classrooms.

In hindsight, the curricular changes described in Act I perhaps served as a setup for the deeper white-privilege work we then undertook but failed at spectacularly, as that earlier curricular work, while considerable, engaged hardly at all with our own racial identity formation understandings as a white majority faculty. Attending to patterns of racial exclusion in our curriculum did lead some of us more intentionally to ask why our faculty remained so white dominant, which then led to more racial diversity in our hiring and to new faculty of color naming persistent white privilege in the department and suggesting we attend to it. That last bit is where the breakdown occurred.

Here is a brief version of our racial equity story as I saw it, with a focus on points of breakdown and the consequences of these breaks reverberating still, as some of us have begun to dig through the wreckage and to construct a strategy from the pain. I'll list ten parts here but focus more specifically on three. Bear with me as my goal is to cover ten years in a couple of paragraphs:

A Tale in 10 Parts: A Racial Equity Story From 2005 to 2015 at MCTC

1. Some successful pedagogical shifts and a badly broken affirmative action committee: "We don't legally 'need' to do more in racial equity hiring."
2. A noose is hung followed by a college-imposed silence.
3. CRT hiring language leads to more racially diverse hires.
4. An equity program (a year of readings and discussions on race and privilege for the ENGL Dept.) created by a new hire.
5. Diversity VP position created and a fantastic hire found.
6. Formal discrimination and harassment charges made against for four members of the English Department.
7. New diversity VP's departure after nine months due to "unhealthy climate."
8. An approach then a retreat from racial equity.
9. A colleague of color's third racial discrimination charge in three years, the first with a guilty finding and mandatory diversity training with the diversity manager in a position that faculty member herself pushed to create.
10. Now, much discomfort and deafening silence; personalizing of all racism, inability to address structural patterns that racial equity work generally and that CRT specifically allows us to dismantle.

Let me go back to just a few parts from this "Tale" to offer some explanation, though seeing it condensed here reminds me that we really were in the midst of a kind of perfect storm. As student racial diversity reached nearly 60 percent students of color, our department tried to grapple with the persistent white dominance throughout the rest of the institution, but college and union leadership really

had neither the skills nor the political will to address the issue and therefore could offer no support in engaging such complexity. We really were on our own, and particularly new faculty members of color were left largely on their own, as we lurched, inelegantly, forward.

Part 3: CRT hiring language. As the college's enrollment numbers grew—particularly with increasing numbers of students of color—our faculty hiring lines also increased, and so some of us became active on hiring committees. Once there, we asserted more intentional racial equity language, and honestly it was then that we became more fully aware of CRT as scholarship that could push us past the largely ineffective boilerplate Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) hiring language. For two years, our position descriptions for potential new hires requested “an awareness of Critical Race Theory and demonstrated connection to communities of color,” in addition to fairly typical community college English instructor requirements. There was some anxiety on the part of the largely white and white-identified committee about what exactly CRT was, and even though we mentioned it in the introduction, it may be useful to provide a definition here: “‘CRT begins with the notion that racism is ‘normal, not aberrant, in American society’ (Delgado xiv), and, because it is so enmeshed in the fabric of our social order, it appears both normal and natural to people in this culture [. . .]. Thus, the strategy becomes one of unmasking and exposing racism in its various permutations” (Ladson-Billings 7). And more specifically, on a critical race curriculum in the field of education, as Chicana@ Studies professor Tara Yosso explains: “A critical race curriculum reveals the multiple layers of racialized inequality perpetuated by traditional curriculum processes. Therefore, it challenges educators to recognize deficit-based practices that deny students of color access to ‘college bound’ knowledges.” And finally, Yosso notes, “A critical race curriculum exposes the white privilege supported by traditional curriculum structures and challenges schools to dismantle them” (93). Our use of CRT in hiring simply referred to the need for applicants who understand that we live and teach in a nation with a raced social order. The common white-dominance demand that pretends this is no longer the case with barely conscious assertions that “slavery was a long time ago” could no longer suffice in a faculty responsible for educating a student body 58 percent students of color.

The position description language enabled interested candidates to look up CRT and tailor their applications to this stated preference, while simultaneously allowing a department-wide conversation on it as well—teachable moments all around, it seemed. That was not the case, however, in our department, where fear and an underdeveloped awareness of racial identity formation dominates, a lack of awareness not unique to our department. However, we were able to push the language through and found ourselves with more diverse pools of candidates than ever, which resulted in five hires of color and one white ally with demonstrated work in racial equity within a two-year time span. This was game-changing in a department of twenty-six FTUs, as about eight of us—nearly one third of the tenure lines in the department—were faculty members engaged in antiracist work.

(We can at times have as many as twenty-five adjunct instructors, who serve at the will of the dean and whose voices are often restrained due to this vulnerability.) Due in part to the position description language and hiring committee discussions with applicants, most of the new hires saw a climate in which they could further antiracist and equity work, and so they began not only in their classrooms, but also by convening with panels among the broader faculty and workshops within the English Department. However, before long the charges of discrimination began to trickle in.

Part 6: Discrimination and harassment charges. Shannon Gibney writes below about the ways in which women faculty of color have been charged by students and institutions with discrimination at vastly greater rates than their white peers. Here I focus only on the discrimination and harassment charges filed against four members of the English faculty: one new-hire of color, two white members of the hiring committee, and one supportive white colleague. As one of the charged, I can speak specifically to this instance where a white male job applicant, who was also an adjunct employee in the department, charged each of us with using language that discriminated against and harassed him as a white male. Our work generating the CRT hiring language and discussions of white dominance in the faculty had resulted in some tense department meetings. Given the low level of facility with discussions of race in our workplace, it was not surprising that anxiety was pretty high. Add that to the ongoing exploitation of contingent hires in our writing program, as well as the top-down and overtly legalistic leadership style of the administration at that time; we are aware in hindsight that we should have seen these charges coming.

The short version is that the four of us were charged with having said something that discriminated against and racially harassed our white male colleague. A yearlong investigation was initiated by our campus legal affairs officer, which included calling in sixteen English department members as witnesses. The case required union representation for each of us, individual interviews with Legal Affairs for the four charged and the sixteen witnesses, and so this involved twenty members of the department over ten months; and all were sworn to secrecy for the duration of the investigation. It was a very, very hard year.

Ultimately, we four charged were found not guilty, and yet the vice president overseeing the case made the determination that we could no longer use CRT hiring language as it might exclude candidates “unfamiliar with this particular theory.” We went through the looking glass here with institutional obfuscation, even idiocy when we were found not guilty but nonetheless punished in our innocence, and we were to go even further through that glass over the coming months. At the same time that half the English Department was being investigated or called as witnesses, one new hire of color had initiated a reading and discussion program on racial equity that would allow us to explore white privilege as a community of teachers for the first time in the college’s one-hundred-year history and then think through ways to mediate that privilege to increase success for students of color. This would be hard

work in the best of circumstances, but done during discrimination and harassment investigations, we found ourselves tumbling roughly across nearly unbroken ground.

Part 8: Approaching then retreating from racial equity: After six months teaching with us, one of our new hires of color offered to pull together a panel for the college's fall opening days with colleagues she knew from the University of Minnesota whose work addressed racial equity and white privilege. The panel was very well received by most faculty, and some folks within English asked for ideas on continuing this work. Our new colleague with assistance from the department chair secured funding to bring one University of Minnesota colleague, Tim Lensmire, associate professor of education, to run a yearlong workshop series for us. Lensmire's work focuses on race and education and, he explains, "especially on how white people learn to be white in our white supremacist society. Grounded in critical whiteness studies, [this] work contributes to the ongoing effort to figure out how best to work with white people" ("Timothy"). With Lensmire's assigned readings and two planned discussion sessions per term, we began a yearlong racial equity program.

After just one workshop a majority of faculty of color asked to caucus out into two groups, one for faculty of color, one for white faculty, as levels of experience, awareness, and understanding of white racial identity formation and white privilege were painfully low in the combined session. In short, white dominance persisted in the sessions themselves, which was taxing for faculty of color; however, this common move in racial equity work—caucusing out into affinity groups—was unfamiliar to most white faculty and one male faculty member of color. Feelings were hurt, anger surfaced, attendance dropped off at subsequent workshops, and for those who did attend, the focus became the fact of faculty of color separating off, and the shaming felt in the process, more than the readings Lensmire had assigned for discussion. We began to break. In May at our final faculty meeting of the year, the new hire who had led us into the white privilege work, who herself had dealt with student racism and harassment charges for teaching structural racism, and who had grown ill from the tensions and hostilities at our institution, made the decision to resign, shared that decision at that final meeting, and named quite specifically and unapologetically what it had been like for her to work among us for those eighteen months. Two more women of color faculty then described their own struggles working among white dominant teachers so little aware of the pain and damage our own unexamined privilege was causing colleagues and students of color. And this was in Minnesota, where a smiling passive aggression actually has a name: Minnesota nice. It was a tough meeting.

I don't have the space here to do justice to the complexity of emotion in that room; there was much silence, there were tears, there was a simmering anger. Some white colleagues tried to offer apology and emotional support; many remained silent, no doubt overcome with a range of emotions. The meeting ended very quickly, there were some hallway one-to-one connections, and that night my phone blew up. There were emails critiquing the tone of our resigning colleague's comments, urging the need for "civility" and "collegiality." More emails supported

the “courage” of those asserting civility, but there was silence regarding the substance of our peer’s critique of the heavy white privilege she was leaving a tenure-track job to escape. Now, three years later, we still have not returned to antiracist work as a community, or even to that final department-wide conversation; the 2015 Conference on College Composition and Communication Convention in Tampa was one of the first times we had spoken of it. Even writing of it here, my stomach freezes with the memory. We broke. We are still broken.

Act III. Contentions: Race, Evaluation, and Retaliation in the Classroom

Shannon Gibney

After my daughter died, I knew I had to go back to work. A stillbirth for reasons still unknown, she had decided at forty-one and a half weeks that she did not, in fact, want to come here. I had no choice but to respect her decision, but it was a devastating truth to face. My body still had not reconciled the loss when I stepped into my mass communications class that first day back from maternity leave. Everything was shiny—almost too shiny. Formerly blunt edges of desks became sharpened as I navigated past them, in my still-too-big postpregnancy body. And everything out of my mouth, all the *Hello*s, and *I’m okays*, and *Thank-yous* felt like they were balled up in knots in my mouth. Nothing came out right. But I knew it was just a day. One day out of a season of my life. A dead season, but one that would pass eventually . . . although never out of memory.

I don’t know if she was with me when I began my class that afternoon, but I do know she was not not there. With her small head and brother’s nose and long limbs. She was always beside me, if not inside me. I was a body divided that day—there with her, there with my students—but I had been divided in other ways, and taught before. And I had always been a black woman instructor before. Which is why it was such a shock to meet the heat of a small group of students who became angry during a discussion initiated after another student’s presentation on people of color in newsrooms nationally. What they said was, “Why do we always have to talk about this?” *This* meaning the legacy of ongoing racism in American life? *This* meaning something that they did not want to talk about? *This* meaning topics in mass communications? I blinked at them in confusion, and at the general energy of the class, which was not downright hostile, but could not be described as welcoming by any stretch of the imagination. The students had had a substitute—a very capable and kind white woman—for the first five weeks of the course, while I had been away. They were understandably a bit off-kilter, wondering how the course would proceed, with this whole new person at the helm. But there was something more to it, something that could be seen as intangible, but that was to me all too familiar in its ease of location: animosity at this black female body in front of them. Leading the class with authority. Determining the terms of the discussion and course content, deciding whether each of them passed or failed. That was the *this* they objected to. *This* was not the class, the world they had signed up for.

My body was tipsy with loss, my heart still far from healed, but I tried my best—what was my best in that moment, on that day, anyway—to moderate. I mentioned the ongoing history of white domination in newsrooms, as well as in every other aspect of American life. I said that I was definitely *not* talking about individuals, as in, “You! White person over there!” but rather, about whiteness as a system that privileges certain groups of people while it penalizes others. When mentioning the long tradition of newsrooms dominated by white, middle-class men, I was conscious that my voice was not as solid as it could have been. I could see in their eyes that they weren’t convinced. No, they were angry. And feeling dangerous. While I was tired, and feeling broken.

The document that was issued after exhuming and examining the dead body of the classroom encounter—that is, the written reprimand that the college’s vice president crafted after the legal affairs department had finished their “investigation”—certainly found that I had been in egregious error. The reprimand referred to my tone as “defensive, angry, and disrespectful” and took me to task for violating our college’s nondiscrimination policy. The vice president said that he found it “troubling that the manner in which you led a discussion on the very important topic of structural racism alienated two students who may have been most in need of learning about this subject.” I was directed to meet with our college’s chief diversity officer for two training sessions on “managing diversity flashpoints” in order to help me learn to model “civility.”²

Perhaps I should not have been surprised by the letter, and the outcome of the institutional investigation, but I was. I can remember holding the letter in my dining room, reading it incredulously, my hand shaking. My faculty union grievance representative, who had represented many, many faculty during institutional “investigations” like this, had assured me after our interview with the head of legal affairs that “they have nothing. This is completely ridiculous. It will come to nothing.” And yet, out of around 172 student complaints of faculty that year, I was the only one that had been ruled in violation of policy, and the only one that had been disciplined. As tenured faculty in what was arguably the most powerful department on campus, I could not be fired out of hand. But what I could be was disciplined for not conforming to the status quo on another issue.

I appealed the policy violation determination, as well as the discipline, through my institution and the system’s approved structures. Via breathtaking feats of illogical logic, misreading and misapplication of policy, and extreme structural violence, the appeal was denied. I then appealed everything via my faculty union’s formal grievance process. Although the union fast-tracked my case, it still took seven months for it to reach the final step of the grievance process, arbitration, in which each side presents their case to an impartial adjudicator, who assesses all the evidence and later comes to a final and binding decision. Arbitration decisions and materials become part of the public record once a decision is reached, so my union grievance reps and legal counsel were not exactly surprised when the president of my college wrote me a letter stating that he was removing the letter of reprimand from my file, right before arbitration was scheduled to begin. I was surprised—flab-

bergasted, shaken to the core, more like—when, right before this, I was offered “a blank check” to leave MCTC altogether. I just blinked at my union representative when she told me this and asked her to say that again. Never, in all my years as a writer, teacher, and scholar, had I entertained the notion that it might be possible to get paid *just for being me*. Of course, if that were the case and I did take the money and run, it would have to be a *very quiet version of me* . . . which wouldn’t be me at all, of course. All of which made the decision already determined. It just seemed that offers like this happened to people in other universes than mine. I could not fathom that I was that much of a liability to my institution and system. Then again, here I am, sharing this story here. . . .

We were facing around a \$44 million system deficit, and the “leadership’s” biggest priority was getting rid of a nonconforming black female faculty member who wasn’t afraid of talking to the press? The whole thing was just profoundly demoralizing. But as I hope this article has demonstrated so far, far from being an outlier, my story reflects all of the tensions and contradictions present in the (degraded) state of higher education, and its classrooms, today. This whole ordeal was *my* education I slowly came to realize. And as painful as it was, it was also absolutely necessary.



For women of color faculty who, like me, are extremely vocal advocates for our most vulnerable students (disproportionately first-generation college students and people of color), especially in institutions that have historically not served or even taken advantage of these students, our reputations inside the institution may become even more suspect than they might be for those who simply inhabit female and brown bodies but do not actively challenge the status quo. In the market-driven and extremely competitive higher ed landscape, in which “diversity” is seen as capital, we are expected to be “grateful” to be even granted entrance into the rarified, predominantly white, older, middle-class world of faculty, administration, and higher ed governance. The presence of our bodies themselves is supposed to be “evidence” of the institution’s “commitment to diversity.” Our bodies are not supposed to act, speak, or, god forbid, contradict this narrative of sanitized “progress” in this sphere, and if we do, we are instantly labeled as *unprofessional, not collegial, angry, aggressive, racist*, or any other host of pejorative adjectives routinely used to keep women of color in our place. This was the context in which my story is located, the room into which I stepped on that fateful day in October.

My institutional reputation was peppered with the adjectives I just shared with you, and although all institutional players, and the so-called college and system leadership knew that our institution was, and, I would argue, still is, not a well-functioning one (sadly, not uncommon at many institutions of higher ed now), they saw me and my nonconforming black female body as a huge part of the problem. I had been disciplined for “not following procedure,” I had been warned that I was “not collegial enough with colleagues.” The first black female head of my department, I had been told in no uncertain terms that I would not be renewed in this

position. After challenging the administration's mishandling of concurrent enrollment, I had received a written reprimand in my permanent file, for representing my entire department's viewpoint on institutional letterhead. I had been issued a warning from my dean after sitting outside the meeting a fellow black female faculty member was having with administrators about her performance (I was there for support, and because she asked me to). A few years before, a white male student at the student newspaper had filed a complaint of racial discrimination against me, for asserting that the fact that the staff was all white, as well as the fact that a noose had been hung there some years before, might have something to do with their lack of "diversity," and the fact that few people on campus took them seriously. A few years after that, a disgruntled white male adjunct in the department had filed another complaint of racial harassment against me and three other colleagues (the rest of them were white) after we had lobbied hard to include the phrases "knowledge of Critical Race Theory," and "demonstrated connection to communities of color," under "Preferred Qualifications" in the department's Call for Applicants during a hiring phase. Although I was eventually cleared on both counts, the legal affairs department had slapped my hands by performing lengthy, fairly terrifying top-secret "investigations" and issuing me letters of expectation. In the last case, the administration ultimately pulled the preference for knowledge of CRT in the Job Call, stating that "it would be wrong to favor one theory over another" in our workplace. All of these incidents, as well as many more that it would take far too long to explicate here, are why I became an institutional target for moderating a discussion on structural racism and representation in a mass communications class. And also, they are decisively *not* why I became a pariah for such pedagogy. Very simply, the reason why I became an institutional target for moderating a discussion on structural racism and representation in a mass communications class was that I was a black woman faculty member who dared to demand that I be treated the same way as any other (read: white) faculty member.



In the end, each of us will have to begin where we are, naming and sharing our experiences as women of color faculty in the Empire of the Academy as we go through them, and building our networks of resistance as we live our stories. The professionalization of the academy, like the corporatization of the academy, has not benefited us, precariously located as we are, since these systems require absolute silence and compliance for membership. I was told while going through my ordeal that I should not speak, that I would lose my job, that I would be kicked out of higher ed forever, that my name would be mud. All by well-meaning, well-respected friends and colleagues at various institutions. And they are probably not wrong—who knows if I will ever be offered another job at an institution of higher ed, after they have seen exactly what kind of person I am and, as my then-dean said once, how little I care for "how things are done." However, I believe that I have something far more valuable, and that is the ability to sleep at night, secure in the knowledge that I have tried my best to live my values, and that I have stood with and leaned on

community in every step of this journey. I will always be an outsider in the academy, and I will always find my worth from my community. As the *Presumed Incompetent* editors write, “the business of knowledge production, like the production of tea, spices, and bananas, has an imperialist history that it has never shaken. Inventing the postcolonial university is the task of the twenty-first century” (Gutierrez et al). This is not a task that will be completed lightly, but it is a task as urgent as any other on our national agenda, I believe. There will be tremendous losses and incremental gains, as there are in every social justice movement in history. What we cannot do is bow to the status quo, to capital, to white supremacy. We have to organize. We have to take courage, stand up, and risk something. We have to speak.

Act IV. Check Your Ego and Open Your Mouth

Renee DeLong

Over the past fifteen years I’ve taught at schools that are majority-white institutions and schools that are over half students of color, and each institution has its own flavor of racist white dominance coated with a light veneer of diversity-speak. In each place, there has been a small group of people willing to talk about racial equity, and often this conversation happens among white women who see part of their work as allying themselves with people of color. In some ways, this conversation about racial equity feeds into the comfortable stereotypes around white heterosexist femininity and its caretaking functions. All of this makes me queasy—as a white child-free lesbian. I feel alienated in this department for several reasons, and this outsider perspective allows me to analyze the ingrained culture of white heteronormativity.

It was May 2011, and we were preparing for the second-to-last department meeting. The day of the meeting I read through the agenda and stopped short when I saw the AA in creative writing was going forward. Before the department meeting, I cornered Shannon in her office to say that I’m not comfortable endorsing this program and I didn’t want to be quiet. At another institution I saw how the energy given to the creative writing program contributed to and stemmed from the race-blindness of the faculty members in the English department. Part of the reason I applied for a job at MCTC was to work in a place where racism in higher education was being grappled with on a daily basis. When I saw that CRT was part of the job description, I figured that I could join colleagues who didn’t need any schooling on the subtleties of racism. Then I saw this item on the agenda and decided it was time to say something about how unspoken racism within our field influences the decisions we make as a department. Before the meeting, my colleagues and I conferred. I elected to speak first because I’m new and I’m more likely to be heard. They warned me that people would get defensive but agreed to back me up.

It was the last agenda item, and I steeled myself to speak about race blindness and creative writing. Once I got my few sentences out, we had a short and tense discussion, and the decision was tabled until the final meeting of the year. When I read the notes from this meeting, my name did not appear as one of the people in the discussion, but Shannon’s and Tai’s names did. This was my tip-off

that racial critiques are seen in this department as the work of black women—not white women. I was just erased.

At the final meeting we finally got more time to talk about the ways that creative writing is racialized in higher education, and the ways in which the “writer” is filled with assumptions about gender and race. This is a conversation that many of us have been having covertly in women’s bathrooms and across café tables for years, and it was exhilarating to imagine how we can have it in a more public way. The rush to vote reminded me again that institutional processes always enforce the privilege of the comfortable majority—even when sustained and difficult debate about the values of the department reflect the spoken values of many of the members present. In other words, using an essay like “Poetry Is Not a Luxury” by Audre Lorde in your classroom is easy, and many white heterosexual instructors pat themselves on the back for their inclusivity. Now how would you treat Lorde if she came back from the dead and in all her righteous glory told you that the department you shared was riddled with racism, sexism, and homophobia? Readers of this article, how willing are you to speak those difficult words and risk being seen as a troublemaker—within your own mix of privileges and oppressions? Too often, white and heterosexual faculty members assume that the people of color will talk about racism and the LGBT folks will comment on homophobia. Then the important/unimportant work is being done, and the faculty members with the most privilege sit back and watch the show.

Although I was surprised at how quickly the discussion at that department meeting became polarized, I’m glad that we spoke up. We lost the vote, but we forced everyone present to get on the record, and the rift it made forced some of the people who had been cruising on their privileges to realize that the political makeup of the department had changed. This vote also helped me see who my allies would be in this department.

This story is just one moment in which the racist and sexist hierarchy silenced a white lesbian, although I know that it disciplines faculty members of color, some of them who are also queer, in more nefarious and systematic ways. This happens in many institutions, though. We’re really not special.

To short-circuit the ways in which white heteronormativity ignores racism, homophobia, and sexism, let’s prioritize queers of color—particularly women—as we work toward equity together. This reformulation of who can be on our team and what our work can be may seem surprising in a classroom of presumably white, wealthy, and heterosexual students, but by reconfiguring our target audience and stretching our own pedagogical voices, we may create revolutionary space in seemingly mundane places. There are many precedents for this.

In the Combahee River Collective’s Manifesto, written in 1977, the group explains that its organizing principle does not rest on diversity but on interwoven oppressions that constitute their lives. According to the statement, “we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based

upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking” (Combahee 9). This explanation of how interlocking and interrelated oppressions impact their lives and the unspoken disgust with the notion that oppressions can be ranked in order of importance or prioritized make the statement striking and complex. Dr. Kimberlé Crenshaw is credited with the first academic writing on intersectionality in the 1980s, but Combahee River Collective set up this analysis even earlier. As a discipline we must be willing to examine the assumptions of our work with the lenses of both critical race theory and queer theory—especially if this makes the most privileged faculty members uncomfortable. White faculty members also need to be willing to “stay in the room” when privileged white folks act out—and they will.

White faculty, we need to take on the work of educating other white faculty about racism and asking tough questions on a regular basis. Our colleagues of color are already asked to be on more hiring committees than we are, their pictures are used to fill up the college’s website, and they are mentoring many more students informally than you or I will ever see during office hours. The hypervisibility of faculty members of color also makes them more likely to endure more emotional mentoring work on top of the outward abuse and daily (or hourly) microaggressions. There are some useful passages in *Citizen: An American Lyric* by Claudia Rankine that can help white faculty understand how faculty of color are regularly reminded of their unequal status. Read it with other white faculty and host a public conversation about racism on your campus. Additionally, really use the texts likely already in your libraries and take up the challenges white readers so often leave unexamined. In “Eating the Other” bell hooks advises white people to analyze the racial politics of their daily interactions:

That simply by expressing their desire for “intimate” contact with black people, white people do not eradicate the politics of racial domination as they are made manifest in personal interaction. Mutual recognition of racism, its impact both on those who are dominated and those who dominate, is the only standpoint that makes possible an encounter between races that is not based on denial and fantasy. For it is the ever present reality of racist domination, of white supremacy, that renders problematic the desire of white people to have contact with the Other. (28)

This pedagogical desire to be close to people of color is echoed in every statement about teaching at my and most institutions. “I just love the students here,” colleagues say over and over. “The students are the best part of the job!” White instructors, I ask that we problematize this reflex. Why do you love “the [black and brown] students here”? Because you feel like you get to atone for your white privilege by driving all the way across town to work with them? Because you imagine yourself as their white savior? Too much of the narratives around the work that involves students who have been oppressed by racism and classism is linked to a sense of noblesse oblige. Passion and teaching reaches a new level of dysfunction when white faculty members link their identities to their work “saving” minority students. Do not be deluded by good intentions and the sense that your identity is wrapped up in fixing

“these” students. This grandiose vision of pedagogical prowess leads to the racist and patronizing interactions burdening, excluding, and even damaging the health and lives of colleagues and students of color alike.

Act V. You Can Miss Me with That, 'Cause Plantations Were Diverse, Too: A Personal Narrative as a Window to Possible Strategies for Supporting and Engaging Equity in Writing Instruction and Institutional Transformation

by Taiyon J. Coleman

If you would have told me when I first attended college that I would end up teaching as a career and vocation, I would have said that you must be smoking crack. Dude. For real. Statistically, I wasn't even supposed to pass my first-year composition course as a first-generation college student born and raised in the inner city of Chicago, and I didn't. Statistically, I wasn't even supposed to be a black female tenured faculty writing instructor at a two-year college in Minnesota, but I am. For real, for real. Doe (Mike S).

When I attended a professional discipline-specific conference a couple of years back (much like the conference at which this now-article was a presentation), I immediately felt an unease when I entered the convention venue, and at first, I couldn't understand why. Attendees seemed outwardly nice, and I had been teaching writing at the college and university level for over fifteen years. I had just completed my terminal degree in the field along with scoring a first-round job interview. By all accounts, it should have been good times. But while I walked around the conference venue politely seeking gentle smiles, hellos, and nondescript informal greetings with those who were now my colleagues, I had a hard time meeting their eyes, and most of the attendees, who were socially, historically, and institutionally constructed as white, rarely met mine.

On the second day of the conference as I sat at an empty table to eat lunch, and a black woman came to my table and asked if she could sit and eat with me. I said, “Sure.” It was then that I realized why I was uncomfortable at the conference. I remembered, I reassessed, and I re-viewed back to the previous day when I first arrived. For the most part, I was among the few racially constructed blacks in attendance, and I reluctantly realized that the well-meaning eyes, demeanors, and dominant demographics of my colleagues facilitated a type of PTSD in me, and I surmised in them, too. For the first time, I started to confront the unlikelihood of me being in *that space*. I was *not supposed* to be there, and if my conference colleagues acknowledged me in any substantive way, I would actually “pop” materialize their (read, dominant) reality. (Isn't there some fable that if one doesn't believe in fairies, they cease to exist? It was like that.) So rather than confront the stressors that the social contradiction of the very presence of my black female body in *that space* created, the dominant collective, subconsciously or consciously, decided that I was not there. I couldn't be there; thus it was like a *Star Trek* Ferengi Cloaking device: sci-fi, movie magic: poof! Now you see me; now you don't. (See Lindsay Pérez Huber and Danile G. Solorzano on racial microaggressions.) Jazz hands, and I'm gone!

So what happens when a group's actual invisibility, which can also be read as an absence or failure, is normalized, subsequently making that very invisibility *central to maintaining* a larger structural reality of dominant whiteness within institutional spaces? What departments and their institutions are constantly trying to place the *other* back into the *places* and *spaces* (the trauma) that they thought they had survived by failing to recognize the micro- and macroaggressions experienced by the *other* within the writing classroom, faculty spaces, and the larger institution?

Have you taught at institutions where poor, brown, and black students consistently fail writing classes or fail to successfully matriculate through the institution over semesters and then over decades and respond and act as if *that* is normal? Do you have *that one other* student, faculty, staff, or administrator, and you believe that your department/college is doing a great job at diversity? (To be read in a cheerleading voice, although I was a pom-pom girl, not a cheerleader, as even here there is a hierarchy.) Do you teach at an institution where the demographics of the students and the communities that you serve are starkly different than the demographics of the faculty, staff, and administrators, and you believe that this is normal? Do you enter into a predominantly white classroom, faculty meeting, staff meeting, or administration leadership meeting and question if the racial makeup of the bodies in the room is equitable, or have you been desensitized and “read” the racial makeup of classrooms and other institutional spaces, if you even notice it at all, as normal? Do you even see it, or do you even want to see it?

What does it do to the teaching and acquisition of writing when the experiences and identities of the *other* are silenced physically and intellectually through the complicity of the very people who consciously claim (for example, through assigned readings and office and hallway posters of equitable writers) to support equity and inclusion? How can racial equity exist in writing instruction and student outcomes when equity does not exist among those faculty who teach writing nor within the institutions that house and serve them? What more explicit evidence of the historical legacy and contemporary status of the violent impacts of structural racism and its cumulative barriers than to enter into writing classrooms and other educational spaces and confront identity disparities, either through the actual disproportionate absence or presence of certain of bodies relative to other bodies or the disproportionate, repeated, and patterned failure of certain students in writing classrooms and programs? To rationalize the disparity, consciously and subconsciously, is to actively perpetuate racism.

I get it, and I am compassionate. When Officer Ben Fields, a grown ass man, “grabs . . . [the black female] student by the neck, flipping her backward as she sat at her desk, then dragging and throwing her across the floor” in Columbia, South Carolina (see Fausset and Southall), it's much easier to cue the elevator music and wonder why, what happened, and to patiently ask and to be “deeply concerned” for the facts first, then to actually believe, accept, and take action regarding the daily physical, mental, and emotional realities, literally and analogically, for marginalized bodies within classrooms and other institutional spaces. I was not supposed to be a successfully matriculated college student, a college graduate, and a writing and

literature teacher looking for a tenure-track faculty position. If I am not supposed to be there through the continued normalization of racially constructed and dominantly white spaces, places, and teaching positions, then who, too, is still not socially, historically, and institutionally constructed to be in the writing or literature classrooms? I guess I got out of the Fields chokehold and off the floor (so I think), but there are countless others still not able to fully breathe . . .

I teach at a local college where the majority of my writing department colleagues (all excellent, well-meaning, well-intentioned, and good people) are institutionally constructed as white, but the majority of the students and the communities that we and the college serve are poor and of color. As at many writing programs and the institutions in which they are housed, the matriculation rate for students of color is challenging, and there are structural issues with the recruitment and retention of faculty of color. Although we (brown, black, poor, and gendered bodies) are in the classrooms and the institution, our marginalized bodies are systematically subjected to “macroaggressions”: “institutional racism” and “racial microaggressions” (Huber and Solorzano, 6). It is the failure of those with power and privilege within the discipline and the institution to actually look, see, recognize, and act to change historical and *now contemporary* patterns of exclusion of which we are all a part and perpetuate, consciously and unconsciously. As established by my colleagues earlier in this article, this willful ignorance continues the systemic oppression of brown, black, poor, and gendered bodies on every finger and thumb of the institution’s hand: the students in the classroom, the faculty instructors, the staff, the administration, and the communities that the college serves.

In the writing department, I have witnessed faculty of color and their white allies (metaphorically flipped out of their institutional chairs) be accused of being noncollegial, incompetent, intimidating, angry, racist, and bullies because they have attempted to address issues of equity and the intersections of identity and experience as it relates to curriculum, pedagogy, student success, and faculty of color recruitment and retention. These disparaging and unprofessional insults and labels have become the subsequent consequences of those who dare to see constructed black and other marginalized identities and bodies and their experiences within the discipline of writing instruction and the larger academic institutions in which they are housed. Subsequently, these microaggression experiences of faculty of color mirror the experiences of students of color in writing classes and within the larger college, and they also mirror the recruitment, retention, and the experiences of staff and administrators of color within the college.

Walking around the conference and seeing my well-meaning and well-intentioned constructed white colleagues gave me flashbacks to my first-year composition class, when I was a first-generation student from Chicago’s South Side attending a predominantly white public university in the Midwest. My well-meaning and well-intentioned white first-year composition teacher consistently told me, in her written feedback and final grade assessment of my paper assignments, that she could not understand what I was writing because it did not make any sense. Usually, I wrote about what I knew, which was being female, black, poor, urban,

and being a first-time college student, away from home, attending a predominantly white college in the middle of the Midwest. Eventually, someone like Officer Fields was not called to the classroom, but I stopped attending class, and I failed my college composition course although some of the essays were being published in campus-wide publications. A year later, after failing first-year composition like most students within my identity intersections, I dropped out of college. It would take five years before I would develop the courage and opportunity to return, let alone retake first-year writing. Sixteen years after completing my bachelor's degree, I can still walk into institutional venues for educators, and the educators are and were, still, primarily socially, historically, and institutionally constructed white, and no one seems or seemed uncomfortable or aware. This constructed and dominant whiteness in the field and discipline has been and is still completely normalized.

If we as teachers of writing normalize (read, accept) the dominant presence of constructed whiteness in the field and discipline among our students and colleagues, how might that consciously or unconsciously affect our teaching in the classroom and the assessment of students? What is the constructed identity of our students who are prepared for college writing and who successfully matriculate through our college writing classrooms? Is it that these numbers reflect a reality or reflect a constructed reality that we, being liberal, well-meaning, and well-intentioned educators, help to construct? Do we merely watch, show concern, and amass facts and other data? How might educators, writing instruction programs, and institutions work to get up from under this social, historical, and institutional bias that we have inherited through no fault of our own?

In response, I suggest the following steps as a start, not an absolute solution, toward equity in our classrooms and institutions:

- > Fully understand what silence (lack of accountable, consistent, and transparent action) conveys.
- > Avoid rationalization. There can only be one or two outcomes; either the failure of people of color and their infinite intersecting identities is normal inside and outside of the classroom, or there are institutional barriers that have prevented their very presence and success in the actual spaces that you and those of us with privilege inhabit.
- > Don't ask and expect those who are the most institutionally and historically vulnerable among you to do the actual work of equity. The power of leading (big word) *equity* must reside within the leadership of the institution and must be embedded within its core cultural and institution-wide commitment—real, documented, and accountable pervasive policies and practices. If not, those who do equity work where there is no demonstrated and documented larger leadership institutional commitment become sacrifices like lambs to be slaughtered.
- > There must be some other oversight body, which then has the power of holding individual institutions and instructors transparently accountable when equity situations are dire; this is not a system of blaming, but don't just dance and listen to the orchestra while the *Titanic* is slowly sinking. This does not mean that individual programs are not free to construct their models

relative to the communities and students that they serve, but to assume that individuals, who are well meaning and well intentioned, can autonomously maintain equity without a transparent checks and balancing system in the face of decades and sometimes centuries of exclusion is to underestimate (ignore) the legacy and power of structural and institutional unconscious and conscious racism and bias.³

- > If you are in any space or room where there is a dominant majority, don't normalize their presence or lack thereof and ignore it; ask yourself what social, historical, and institutional actions might have happened that may have affected people directly and personally, which prevented them from being in that (read, your) time and space.
- > Commit to working toward dismantling institutional and structural inequity as an institutional goal (practice): mission statement, hiring practices, curriculum development and assessment, and permeate it throughout the body and life of the institution.
- > Recognize that institutional consequences are disproportionate for the same institutional actions. Because of cumulative and historical and structural inequities, any institutional practice that disparages any member works to disparage the more vulnerable members of an institution even more.
- > As has been said numerous times in many other places, inequity is the canary in the coal mine. Recognize that achieving equity benefits *all* members of the institution and the communities that we serve.

The demographics of that conference space, like the spaces of my first-year composition course, our classrooms, our departments, our conference spaces, and our larger institutions, did not just happen. They are a result of the cumulative legacies of violent, historical, cumulative, contemporary, and ongoing institutional exclusion and oppression. We will never get it right in these spaces until we first understand, acknowledge, respect, and synthesize this historical reality into our work, at every level, moving forward collectively. ◀

Notes

1. Much of this article began as a presentation at the 2015 College Composition and Communication Conference in Tampa, Florida. Thank you to those who came; sharing the story with an audience inspires our writing now.

2. Even here in the publication process, copyright law is the silencing of how white privilege functions, as we cannot include the letter in this article because we do not have the permission of the “writer” (who we suspect, as in many institutions, was merely a functionary signing off on a document someone else had produced in order to give cover to the institution). Even now, we have to hide the “evidence” to be heard at all.

3. Good times! For example, see the swift and subsequent suppression of voter rights in the US after the Supreme Court struck down key provisions in the Voting Rights Act (Levy).

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