





universal and that literacy as such will have benign effects” (Street 77). This broadening concept of literacy affords scholars the opportunity to remember the humanity of their subjects, people whose lives are everyday examples of how literacy must be considered within the spiritual, social, and political contexts of a community’s lived experiences.

While there are varying definitions of community literacy, my use of the concept gives the “communal”—the shared values, goals, and practices—a more prominent role. That is, community literacy, as I define it, focuses on how written and oral texts are used in community and educational sites, acquired tacitly through such informal ways as growing up inside the lived discursive practices of the home community; the intentional and unintentional modeling of predecessors, elders, and mentors; the everyday transmission of verbal customs from one generation to the next. Thus, in this definition, I emphasize the informal and formal ways that language and literacy practices are transmitted from community elders and leaders to younger members of the community.

For me, emphasizing the “communal” in community deals mostly with insiders—people of the community with a shared experience who have a discourse and consciousness of everyday survival to already deal with not only community problems but national and global problems. An example of how an “insider” notion of community literacy has historically developed in African American communities is evident in the stories of the relationships between Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and the African American communities that they serve. My undergraduate institution, Shaw University, provides a representative case study. In exploring Shaw’s history as an active agent in university-community literacy partnerships, I do not emphasize individual school-community literacy projects that are tied to specific curricular moments. Instead, in this article, I highlight how HBCUs, through the example of Shaw, have historically defined “community” on a much larger scale than the surrounding geographical community. Specifically, Shaw’s goal was to train its graduates to go wherever they



were needed in the city, state, country, and beyond to change the lives of black people be they ex-slaves in the 1870s or elementary school children in the early twenty-first century.

Bringing this communality of literacy to the fore demonstrates that Shaw believes in making lives; the university believes that success not only comes by hard work and determination but also by a moral and ethical value system. That system encourages students (as well as administrators, faculty, and staff) to display knowledge of putting their faith to work everyday to serve Christ and humanity, as suggested in Shaw's motto: "*Pro Christo et Humanitate*: For Christ and Humanity—that religion and learning may go hand in hand, and character grows with knowledge." It is this philosophy as expressed through the motto that characterizes Shaw's literacy partnerships with the broader African American communities that Shaw serves.

### **Early Beginnings: A Constituent of the Community**

Jacqueline Jones Royster and Jean C. Williams' article, "History in the Spaces Left," fervently challenges the narratives that have been told by well-known composition historians, such as James Berlin and Albert Kitzhaber, scholars who have discussed English studies and writing instruction in the nineteenth century to the twentieth century, to show how the field evolved to become what is now known as composition and rhetoric. However, as Royster and Williams point out, these scholars exclude historically black colleges and universities from their conversations, particularly when they discuss the making of land-grant institutions in the 1860s. They state: "Nowhere in his analysis, however, does Kitzhaber consider what this statement suggests regarding the seventeen historically African American colleges and universities that constitute what is popularly known as the '1890 institutions,' a label referring to the second round of land grant institutions for African Americans in states (primarily in the South). . ." (564-65). In 1862, Congress passed the Morrill Land-Grant College Act which afforded



opportunities to not just elite classes of people but all classes of people to attend college. But, as noted by Royster and Williams, those colleges were not open to all, so the 1890 institutions were established. However, within this thirty-year span, other kinds of black colleges were formed: private and religious-affiliated ones, like Shaw University. These colleges were situated in small black communities of the towns in which they were established. My university was no exception. Shaw University, the oldest historically black college in the South, was established shortly after the Civil War. Henry Martin Tupper, a white man, who was an ordained minister and retired soldier, founded the university on December 1, 1865. He received a charge by the American Baptist Home Mission Society (ABHMS) in New York to educate newly freed slaves in the South. He took this charge from the society without pay and left his home in Massachusetts with his wife, arriving in Raleigh, NC, on October 10, 1865. In spite of encountering antagonistic white residents who resented his mission, Tupper still found six ex-slaves and began giving them religious instruction, with the sole purpose of preparing these men to become ministers. The first class was not held in an official educational building but an old hotel in the city (Trotter and Fleming 251-52).

Tupper's interest in educating freed slaves was tied to larger ramifications. The American Baptist Home Mission Society was established in 1832 as the American Baptists' service arm to proselytize to ex-slaves; this organization was "an institutional manifestation of the broader home mission movement growing out of the Second Great Awakening" (Chang 6). According to Derek Chang's *Citizen of a Christian Nation*, American Baptists acted upon a faith conviction to help their fellow brethren:

American Baptists demonstrated an "evangelical nationalism"—the overlapping civic and religious belief in the exceptional, providential destiny of America as a Christian nation. This belief was fueled by the mandate to convert more souls and supported by geographic and demographic expansion. However, few other social and political



changes challenged the evangelical belief in a Christian nation so much as the release from bondage of millions of blacks. (7)

However, Tupper's interest was not solely in religious training of ex-slaves; he believed education to be of the utmost importance in the mission's project, so he channeled his energies into expanding the school beyond a religious focus. Tupper purchased land in 1866 to construct a building not only for the purposes of church but school; it was called the Raleigh Institute until 1870 when it was changed to Shaw Collegiate Institute. Out of appreciation and honor, the school decided to take the name of a woolen manufacturer from Wales, MA: Elijah Shaw. Through the solicitation of the ABHMS, Shaw donated \$5000 toward the purchase of new property for the school and loaned another \$3000 toward the erection of its first official building, Shaw Hall (Carter 3).

I pause here in this discussion to juxtapose my emphasis on the "communal" as reflected in Shaw's history with another definition of community literacy in the field. Bruce Herzberg's "Community Service and Critical Teaching" addresses the need to heighten the consciousness of students who participate in service-learning programs. These programs create opportunities for students to serve communities other than their own. Herzberg asserts: "What I want to focus on is how difficult my students find it to transcend their own deeply-ingrained belief in individualism and meritocracy . . ." (311-312). He challenges those in composition and rhetoric who have students participate in service-learning programs to move beyond having students write personal responses about their experience because writing is simply not enough to raise critical consciousness (308).

While Herzberg's focus on critical consciousness is important, implicit in his discussion is that students lack a critical consciousness. What if those who engage in community literacy already have a critical consciousness about the world? During the embryonic period of Shaw University's establishment, the overall Raleigh community was not



interested in the erection of a school for freedmen. Freedmen, however, were interested because literacy for them meant liberation for themselves and their community. They helped Tupper “fell trees” for the first story of the Raleigh Institute building in 1866, and they raised \$300 among themselves to go toward the second story of the same building one year later. Students made bricks for the erection of Shaw Hall (Carter 3-4). As exemplified by Herzberg, the trajectory of service-learning programs has been one of scholars removing the aura of intangibility and elitism that their universities maintain in the communities that they are located. But Shaw was founded with the purpose to serve, and it was built by the efforts of those it educated. As this history indicates, there is no need to heighten the university’s awareness of its self-indulgence and outsider status because Shaw never originated as that kind of university—a university apart from its community. Hence, even at the onset, Shaw’s students, like most who had been systematically denied basic rights and freedoms, including the right to literacy and formalized education, had already highly developed critical consciousness.

Shaw continued to demonstrate a commitment to service in its history. By the time the school was incorporated as Shaw University in 1875, Tupper had established a college department, divided into two sections of the Classical course and the Scientific course “for students who aspire to a more liberal education” (Carter 176). Exercises in declamations and essays were also a part of the curriculum well into the 1880s and 1890s. Thus, the classical curriculum was utilized to educate freedmen so that they may become productive American citizens. Tupper graduated from Amherst College in 1859 and Newton Theological Seminary in 1862, so the fact that he would adopt a liberal arts curriculum to establish a school in which he had a vested interest was reasonable. As a result, similarities with white counterpart colleges occurred, but Shaw’s purpose was not just to educate freedmen; it was to serve mankind. Hence, Shaw opened its doors with a focus on a connection between education and community service.



Shaw University's conviction in educating freed slaves did not stop with the education of black men, even though the initial classes consisted of only men. With the erection of "the finest School Building in the State," Estey Hall opened on the campus of Shaw University in 1873 for the education of colored females. While Estey Hall does not represent the first college or the first building constructed for the educational purposes of black women, its construction marked Shaw's commitment to the uplift of the entire black race—for both men and women. By 1874, clearly positioned as a black co-educational institution, there were 233 students enrolled at the university, studying in the College, Female, and Preparatory Departments. Of this number, 70 were female students. As celebrated in the 1874 *Shaw University Catalogue*, Estey Hall "is the pride of the Colored people of North Carolina, as it affords facilities for the education of their daughters which cannot be surpassed," and "the school is destined to be a Foundation of Light" (Shaw Digital archive).

Shaw University's service as a college for colored women was noted beyond the black community. Its prominence as a site of nineteenth century women's education did not escape the readers of *Godey's Lady's Book*, an affluent nineteenth century ladies' publication. In "Fashion, Fact, and Fancy," the mostly female audience was told of the state of women's education in the United States:

Of women's colleges alone there are only eight important ones—Vassar, New York; Wellesley, Massachusetts; Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania; Elmira, New York; Oxford, Ohio; Radcliffe, Massachusetts; Wells, New York; and Barnard, New York City. Colored women may receive training as the coeducational colleges for colored people at Claflin University, Orangeburg, S. C.; the Roger Williams University, Nashville, Tenn.; Shaw University, Raleigh, N. C.; the State University of Kentucky, and Wilberforce University, Wilberforce, O. (*Godey's Lady's Book*, 1896)



In addition to the selective list of educational institutions for white women, it is noted that the above reference does not list all of the HBCUs in existence at that time. But the article includes Shaw in a selective list of HBCUs. As such, Shaw University was upheld as one of the vanguard institutions of women's education in the United States, while servicing black women in particular. While there is no denying that Shaw was instrumental in defining the "True Womanhood" of African American women, more importantly, historical records show that Shaw was essential in African American women's literacy practices.

Still, Shaw University's service and good works in the African American community pushed it further on the national scene. Several newspapers in the United States carried stories about the university's growth and educational improvements as it gained support from the North Carolina State Legislature. For example, along side other notices of educational events at Whitman College, the University of Michigan, Harvard University, and Cambridge University, England, on May 15, 1884, *The Christian Recorder* reported:

One of the most interesting and promising institutions of the South is Shaw University for Colored People in Raleigh, NC. It owes its existence largely to the liberality of Mr. Shaw, of Massachusetts, Mr. Estey, of Vermont, and others, as well as to the self-denying labor of its president, the Rev. H. M. Tupper. In spite of much opposition in the past he labored on, until now the State Legislature has recognized the value of his work, and has given the ground on which to erect a Medical school. The city of Raleigh has also agreed to furnish the supplies for a hospital, which the college hopes soon to build. There are now in the college about 450 students, nearly all of whom support themselves wholly or in part, while persecuting [*sic*] their studies.

This article shows the growing interest and support of higher education institutions that were devoted to the African American people. Not



only does this article signal a growing national interest in Shaw University, but it also reflects Shaw's commitment to its surrounding black community, as it looked to the future health needs of black people through its community partnerships. In addition, this article reflects the self-determination of the students who supported their own financial needs while striving for educational uplift. These types of reciprocal and intersecting partnerships have sustained Shaw University to this day.

Along with other concerted efforts, president Tupper purchased additional land with his own money, and he received additional monetary gifts from ABHMS and northern philanthropists. Procuring donations helped Tupper establish, by 1893, nine different departments in operation at the burgeoning university: Preparatory, Normal, College Scientific, Estey, Medical, Industrial, Law, Pharmacy, and the Missionary Training departments (Carter 139). Establishing the professional schools was an enormous feat and was due to Tupper's gift in convincing ABHMS and northern benefactors of an evangelical commitment to help those less fortunate. Tupper told board of trustee members that "colored people at present are without educated physicians and thus are subjected to all manner of quackery and imposition, and many suffer and die for want of medical attention." Additionally, he saw a need to train ex-slaves in the legal profession so that they may understand the law and interpret how it could actually work for them. Tupper also knew that no law school existed in the South to educate ex-slaves, so the School of Law was opened on December 11, 1888 (Carter 29-30). Like other parts of its curriculum, the School of Law was meant to meet the legal needs of ex-slaves and other community members who still had virtually no legal rights.

Even though the country was changing due to rapid industrialization, Shaw never merely relegated its curriculum to industrialization. Chang notes that "as the Jim Crow regime forced its way into power, more and more philanthropic foundations that funded black educational institutions began to propound theories of black suitability for industrial rather than



classical education” (92). But as indicated in Wilmoth Carter’s history of Shaw, enforcing industrialization over literary and classical study became subject to scrutiny. Charles Francis Meserve, a white man and president of the university during that period of industrialization, felt too much emphasis was placed on the teaching of trades, so he said that the “industrial department should be reorganized in such a way that all work in the department would be along educational lines” (Carter 165). This reorganization led to a method of instruction that resumed the placement of a literate behavior that freedmen identified with which was one of liberation, cultivating the mind. According to Tom Fox, ex-slaves’ effort in securing literacy instruction “was an individual and collective argument against the various, increasingly absurd defenses of slavery in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century” (122). Because freedmen viewed literacy in this manner—literacy as liberation—many white southerners feared “the unbridled nature of African American literacy as its most dangerous feature.” As a result, white southerners “argued that formal schooling for slaves would better control the content of their learning and make slaves more submissive and industrious” (Fox 123). Due to this change, the former slaves’ learning and understanding became distorted once the Freedmen’s Bureau concentrated solely on schooling for domesticity and industry instead of “land reform and redistribution of wealth”; therefore, ex-slaves’ literacy instruction “switched from literacy for liberation to literacy for social control” (Fox 124-125). Shaw, as an institution dedicated to training ex-slaves and free blacks alike, became a threat for those whites who were threatened by this institution’s commitment to literacy for liberation.

What piques my interest here is that freedmen, along with Meserve’s keen awareness, already maintained a consciousness that exhibits Street’s emphasis on “the cultural and ideological assumptions” of literacy. Calling attention to the “communal” in community literacy also discloses the inner community’s way of thinking, a way of thinking that is part of their daily existence. Recognizing the “communal” urges one who studies literacy to deconstruct the larger ramifications of the



inner community's literate behavior that challenges the idea of literacy as neutral and value-free.

### **Graduates as Products/Producers of Community Literacy**

Through the years, Shaw's graduates have demonstrated the "communal" in community literacy by their use of lived discursive practices, modeling their predecessors and mentors, and transmitting verbal customs from one generation to the next. The four Shaw graduates who I highlight below are not important because they are famous or accomplished Shaw alumna; they are important because they are examples of what one institution can do with a mission of change for the lives of African Americans. Shaw's graduates were and are servants to their communities on a local, regional, and national scale.

First, Reverend Augustus Shepard was born a slave in North Carolina in 1846 but was emancipated as a young adult after the Civil War. His church sent him to the Raleigh Institute to pursue ministerial studies. Shepard spent two years at the institute before leaving to pastor a church and raise a family (Carter 154). Shepard passed on a distinct communal behavior to his fellow brethren, a behavior he learned at Shaw, reinforcing the university's partnering with a community institution: the black church. In the 1897 proceedings of the Colored Baptist Convention of North Carolina, Shepard is praised for his commitment to service: "He traveled through the State, the country, and in towns and cities, and wherever he went he organized Sunday Schools and churches and placed good books in the hands of young and old" (Trotter and Fleming 52). One can easily surmise that Shepard instilled a work ethic and philosophy of service to his son, James, also a Shaw graduate.

Second, James E. Shepard, an ordained Baptist minister like his father, graduated from Shaw University with his pharmacy degree in 1894. He also became a wealthy businessman, who helped to establish the North Carolina Mutual Insurance Company and Mechanic and Farmers



Bank in the late 1890s. These two highly successful African American companies—at one point North Carolina Mutual was the most successful black business in the United States—are still in existence effectively serving African American communities today. In 1910, Shepard received land on the edges of Durham and established the North Carolina College for Negroes because of his commitment to the education of his fellow brethren. He was displeased with the paucity of colleges available to African Americans in the state. While Shepard later sold the school to a rich northerner dedicated to educating African Americans, he remained president of the college until his death in 1947. The college is now known as North Carolina Central University (see Faulkner-Springfield’s essay in this issue). As demonstrated by the Shepards, literacy partnerships are grounded in the “communal” and are not restrictive; they do not limit their use to an immediate, surrounding location but extend across black communities. And the Shepards, through their roles as preacher, teacher, and businessman prioritized the spread of literacy to African American communities.

My third example, Ella Baker, a civil rights activist who helped organize many of the programs for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), graduated from Shaw in the 1920s. She also worked as the field secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). However, Baker’s activism was not solely a by-product of Shaw’s influence, for her mother was a missionary and very much involved in the community. In the book *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*, the author states how Baker’s mother “dragged her to missionary and community meetings across the state of North Carolina” (Ransby 192). After Baker graduated, she moved to Harlem. Remembering that “Shaw was a school that taught her to give of herself through community service,” she organized “educational and consciousness-raising programs for youth and young adults, like the Young People’s Forum” (50, 70). All of this was accomplished during her tenure as the Harlem branch librarian, where she exposed the youth to books and ideas, and she encouraged



them to discuss and debate controversial social, political, and economical issues (Ransby 70). Because of her belief in nurturing and supporting youth advocacy and involvement in the community and asserting that activism and leadership emerge from the bottom-up instead of top-down, Baker helped organize the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and they held their first meeting on the campus of Shaw University in 1960.

My final living example of Shaw's communal literacy is evident in my father's journey in learning. My father received his call to preach the gospel as a young adult, and at that time, he received no formal seminary schooling. However, his initial learning experience in the art of preaching came from a group now referred to as "old-time black folk preachers." He listened to their tuning, watched their rhetorical performances on Sunday, and studied their engagement with church and community members. While not all of those preachers were educated, some were alumni of Shaw University and members of the Baptist State Convention. Regardless of educational background, they all mentored and encouraged him to go to college and divinity school at Shaw University and elsewhere. Similar to the efforts of his Shaw predecessors, today he encourages members of his congregation to take a more active role in closing the academic achievement gap in a county public school system of North Carolina. In addition to stressing the value of the congregation spending personal time giving assistance with reading and school work to their respective children, he inspired the congregation to establish a Family Life and Community Center to serve not only the congregation but to serve neighboring communities. After-school tutorial programs, E.O.G. (end of grade) test preparation classes, and computer literacy classes are just a few of the programs in operation at the center.

Thus, the graduates engage in action and reflection in ways that prioritize literacy as liberation and uplift for black people. Shaw graduates looked inward first instead of outward. The inward view, as I have articulated



earlier in this paper, does not foster the sense that community literacy is devoid of intercultural conversations, for the “communal” promotes an embedded sense of spirituality and interconnectedness with all human beings, which stems from an African worldview.

### **Character-Building at the End of the Twentieth to the Twenty-First Century**

During the early 1990s, the president at the time, Dr. Talbert O. Shaw (no relation to the benefactor of the school mentioned earlier) established an Ethics and Values program into the curriculum of the university. Dr. Shaw closely examined the university in its current state and resolved that it needed to reconnect its historical commitment to empowering its community through critically conscious students, “emphasizing its commitment to high personal standards and citizenship in its graduates.” These courses are not just for lower-level Shaw students but for upper-level students as well; courses numbered from 100-300 levels are offered and titled as follows: “Foundation of Ethics,” “Ethical Concepts and Issues,” and “Professional Ethics.” Even though it may have appeared that Shaw University was overstepping boundaries by acting as parents who were instilling morals into their children, as some critics argued, Dr. Shaw had a very clear and focused vision on how this program would be instrumental in servicing the needs of the community. The incorporation of this program into the curriculum “challenges Shaw University students to ask questions about the social ills of the day and seek answers to those questions” (shawuniversity.edu).

Additionally, Shaw continues its efforts in community service and outreach to this day. This attention to community literacy and service is evident in its Pre-College Program in Mathematics and Sciences for middle and high school students, sponsored by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; its community development project, sponsored by US Housing and Urban Development to help small businesses; and its “Peers as Partners” program, which enables Shaw University students,



who are enrolled in the Ethics and Values classes, to help public school students with peer mediation and conflict resolution” (shawuniveristy.edu). Therefore, at a time when current universities are involved in service-learning programs in an attempt to dismantle walls of separation between themselves and the community, Shaw University may stand out not for its currency with programmatic thrusts of service like other universities of the twenty-first century, but they may stand out for reclaiming its historical commitment to partnerships with the community with critically conscious students.

## **Conclusion**

Emphasizing the “communal” in community literacy, as I have done here, this emphasis creates an implicit argument that permeates this discussion; that argument is an acknowledgement that literacy learning is grounded, to a greater extent, in communal (and cultural) knowledge and to a much lesser extent academic knowledge. I am not asserting that the pursuit of an education was not and is not valuable, but that communal knowledge and cultural knowledge are primary and secondary to one’s consciousness and disposition; academic knowledge is tertiary. Shaw University promoted community literacy everyday because their rhetorical situation urged them to develop strategies that would always already be of help to any African American person. More importantly, remembering Shaw University’s literacy and community partnerships reminds me to constantly stay attuned to the needs of others and commit to an investment in people during my academic journey by making lives through service.



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