

# Locating Our Editorial and Intellectual Selves Through and Within the Pages of *Reflections*. A Personal Reflection

**Reva E. Sias,**  
California State  
University, Fresno

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*This article celebrates the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reflections Journal, as a premier publication in service learning, public writing, rhetoric, community literacy, and activism. The author applauds Reflections as a space that nurtures emerging voices and professional development, even prior to the printing of individual volumes and issues. In general, the author showcases four professional collaborations between doctoral students, early-career professionals, and/or more seasoned scholars that are demonstrated through and within select special issues in Reflections. More specifically, the author recalls successes and challenges of editorship when taking on the duties as a coeditor for an African American literacy special issue. The author highlights visible and mostly invisible editorial processes, reflects on the labor of editing submissions, and discusses high and low stakes editorial choices that impacted the final production of the special issue. The author makes the case that editing and editorial decisions may illuminate scholarly voices, show community engagement, and reify pre- and early-career professional development, which has been a twenty-year hallmark of Reflections.*

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The 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Reflections* is a tremendous milestone. I celebrate *Reflections* as a leading professional, theoretical, and pedagogical journal for public rhetoric and writing, service-learning, civic writing, community literacies, and community engagement. As a researcher, teacher-scholar, and writing program administrator, I embrace *Reflections* as a beacon for best practices and critical thought, as it offers a lens on writing and activism that highlights and adds to intellectual conversations, scholarship, research, and professional growth. *Reflections* is a space that represents and values many voices inside and outside of the academy: stakeholders, community partners, practitioners, students, part-time and full-time teacher-scholars, non-tenured and tenured professionals, to name a few. *Reflections* reinforces public writing practices and a community activism ethos that cannot be denied.

Even prior to publication, *Reflections* is a space that nurtures emerging voices and professional collaborations in rhetoric and writing studies, which lends to our cultural, pedagogical, and global understandings and intellectual commitments. Just as *Reflections*' articles, interviews, and reviews may speak to the merits of public writing, the mostly invisible processes and labor of editing submissions may also illuminate scholarly voices, show community engagement, and reify pre- and early-career professional development. As noted in the Coda (2009) of a special issue in the field,

Journal editing brings together perfectly the big three in the academy: scholarship, service, and teaching. When it works well, it's a pedagogical act, clearly grounded in professional expertise, focused on two things: constructing the conversation in the field and nurturing the creativity and careers of our colleagues. (175)

In this article, I highlight four respective editorial teams for four Special Issues of *Reflections*. I argue that the special issues, respectively and collectively, demonstrate "the big three: scholarship, service, and teaching," as the above Coda suggests. While it is possible to read journal articles to understand the scholarly trends and discourses in the field of rhetoric and writing studies, it is also possible to read the editors' introductions as micronarratives, where an editor or editorial teams may voice the *why* and *how* of "constructing the conversation in

the field and nurturing the creativity and careers of our colleagues” (Coda 2009, 175).

I was introduced to *Reflections* in 2008, when Steve Parks took over as editor, and the journal was housed at Syracuse University, in Syracuse, New York. I am mindful of one of the first articles that I read in the journal, when I was a doctoral student in the Composition and Cultural Rhetoric (CCR) Program. It was Allison Gross’s “Does the Academy Need an ‘Extreme Makeover?’” (2008). In the article, Gross argues for graduate student professional development and leadership. She laments that graduate students “were faced with the advice not to actively pursue public scholarship until tenure, and not to expect our academic commitments to be any less if we do pursue engagement with the public” (87). Gross’ attention on the balance between graduate students’ public and professional service and academic expectations rang true to me. I had similar concerns as a Ph.D. student. In contrast to Gross’ experience, the early professionalization and public activism of graduate students was encouraged in the CCR Program. The faculty in the CCR Program offered constructive feedback inside and outside of the classroom, and they mentored doctoral students to present papers at professional conferences, to submit articles for publication to journals, and to actively engage with the people and communities in Syracuse, on and off campus. For some students, active engagement was facilitated through professional collaborations, editorial production, and issues of *Reflections*.

Of the four members in my Ph.D. cohort at Syracuse, three of us participated, more or less, in the production and publication of the journal. With Steve Parks’ approval, my cohort’s contributions to the journal took two forms: (1) associate editor and/or (2) guest editor of a special issue. While Janell Haynes and I completed a guest editorship for respective special issues, Brian Bailie produced a special issue, and served as an associate editor of *Reflections*. In addition to our rigorous doctoral studies, we understood that “[e]diting special-issue essays can be more demanding than editing regular submissions, since [...] they don’t go to individual specialists for evaluation. With submitted essays the work involved in the dialogue with the authors is divided up; with special issues it falls more directly on the editor

or editors” (Brown 2009, 124). Even though editing does not qualify as an “extreme makeover” as Gross (2008) suggests, Janell, Brian and I were ready for the challenge, as we attempted to manage “the big three in the academy: scholarship, service, and teaching,” as the Coda points out (2009, 175).

For example, Janell Haynes had the opportunity to collaborate with Jonathan Alexander, from the University of California, Irvine, and Jacqueline Rhodes, from California State University, San Bernardino (now at Michigan State University). Their special issue on Public/Sex: Connecting Sexuality and Service Learning (Volume 9, Issue 2) was published in spring 2010. *Reflections* offered a platform for the editorial team to consider timely conversations, intersections, and discourses on queer theory, community engagement, service-learning expectations, pedagogical methods, identities, bodies, etc. The editors state, “Those of us who work specifically with issues of gender, sex, and sexuality are increasingly aware of what remains *unspoken* and *disarticulated* in many service-learning experiences” (2010, 2). They ask, “[W]hat gendered, sexed, sexualized, and even eroticized frameworks form the contexts in which much service-learning takes place, even as such frameworks remain often unacknowledged, perhaps even barely perceivable?” (3). The guest editors put forth eleven submissions in the special issue of *Reflections*, in response to their inquiry and call.

In Brian Bailie’s case, he was well-suited to develop a special issue with Collette Caton (Markwardt), since they both served as an associate editor of *Reflections*. Bailie and Caton’s special issue is Social Change through Digital Means (Volume 10, Issue 1), which appeared in fall 2010. The editors’ call juxtaposes Malcolm Gladwell’s claim that “the enthusiasm for social media is ‘outsized,’ and that 50 years after the Civil Rights Movement we’ve (“we” meaning Americans writ large) ‘seem to have forgotten what activism is’” (2010, 1). They state that “Gladwell fails to acknowledge” that “people are successfully using social network technologies towards achieving the traditional activist goals” (1). The coeditors present ten articles from scholars, activists, and educators that display how scholar-teachers and activists/organizers use digital technologies and literacy for social change. For the benefit of the journal’s readers, Bailie and Caton highlight

“the teaching of critical literacy practices, the utilization of digital technologies, and the importance of civic engagement” (4), as is demonstrated throughout this special issue of *Reflections*.

In October 2009, I approached the editor of *Reflections* with a request that I might produce a special issue. I met briefly with Dr. Steve Parks as he exited one of his graduate seminars. I quickly explained my idea for a special issue to draw attention to African American rhetoric, community literacy practices, and literacy partnerships with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). I emphasized the point that, while some journals in the field have published individual articles on African American rhetoric and literacy practices, and/or on HBCU partnerships, I knew of no rhetoric and composition journal to have published an entire issue in this area. Parks listened, but he suggested that a reason for little or no attention in other publications might be due to lack of readership or audience interest. He correctly stated that a journal editor must also give attention to the commercial value of each issue that is published. But he didn't say 'no' to my idea. Instead, the *Reflections* editor asked me to submit a formal proposal and rationale for a special issue on African American community literacy and HBCU literacy partnerships.

After a couple of weeks, I sent an email to the editor with a formal proposal and rationale for the *Reflections* installment. I explained the historical and cultural significance of African American rhetoric and literacy practices, and highlighted some of the literacy initiatives that were and are reflected in the Black Church, through and with HBCUs, at social clubs and Black Greek fraternities and sororities, at other formally and informally educational sites, as well as in and with community partners and stakeholders. In the rationale, I explained that early educational partnership and literacy practice methodologies did not use contemporary terms such as service-learning. But I make the case that there are many nineteenth- and twentieth-century examples of African American educational, religious, and community engagements and collaborative partnerships that may speak to current pedagogy, public writing, and service-learning practices. With that written proposal and rationale, it gained me an official meeting with the *Reflections*' editor.

At the conclusion of our second meeting, Parks gave a conditional approval for the special issue. His tentative agreement was based on me finding a recognized African American scholar in the area of community literacy to agree to coedit the special issue with me. I accepted the challenge since I was scheduled to attend the National Council of Teachers of English Annual Convention, and was planning to attend the Black Caucus meeting. My plan was to go to the Black Caucus meeting and beg Beverly J. Moss, from The Ohio State University, to be my coeditor because she was at the top of my wishlist. Although I did not find my coeditor at that meeting, I had an opportunity to speak briefly with Dr. Keith Gilyard, who offered me some encouraging feedback. That conversation gave me the courage to email Dr. Moss, when I returned to Syracuse. In my email, I introduced myself, presented my argument for the African American special issue, and attached a copy of my proposal and rationale. Dr. Moss' reply was not an immediate 'yes.' But she agreed to a phone call to discuss my idea. I am well aware that she could have said 'no' because she did not know me. But that phone call marked the beginning of our friendship, her mentorship, and collaboration as the coeditors for the special issue.

During our editorial collaboration and subsequent phone calls, Beverly's guidance was invaluable. Through her grace, patience, and example, I learned so much from her. We wrote and sent out our call for papers in February 2010, just before the next Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) convention. Once I arrived at the convention, I handed out flyers of the call for papers. I raced across the city, leaving copies in the convention's exhibit hall and in common spaces of hotels. With our call for papers and a plan of action in hand, Beverly and I had previously agreed to meet with the editor of *Reflections* to discuss the special issue. It was at that meeting that Steve Parks told us that our project had expanded, and it would be published as a double special issue on African American literacy. It was also at that meeting where we met with David Green and Ersula Ore, who were Ph.D. students from Penn State University, and who were introduced as two members of the editorial team that was assigned to manage the second part of the African American literacy series. On the one hand, I was happy that other doctoral students were able to cultivate their talents as editors, and I was extremely happy that African American rhetoric and literacy practices

had gained the editor's attention and showed commercial value as a double special issue. On the other hand, I wish that Beverly and I had been offered the opportunity to be a part of those conversations and editorial decision. After the convention, I revised the special call for papers, as "African American Contributions to Service Learning and Community Literacy," to indicate the double installment: Part I: *Historically Black Colleges and Universities and African American Literacy Practices* and Part II: *The Community Classroom: Literacy Training in the Black Public Sphere*. (See figure 1). On the revised call, I am listed as the contact person for both issues.

In hindsight, the double installment for *Reflections* presented an interesting problem in that it narrowed the proposed scope for our special issue and limited the number of submissions that we could accept. While it was always our plan to read all of the articles submitted, Beverly and I had to decide which submissions to keep and to determine which potential author's inquiry might be redirected and/or which article abstracts might be forwarded to the other editorial team, if we felt that an article did not fit neatly within our call for papers. After the selection of articles was made for our issue, Beverly and I divided the editorial labor based on our research interests. I offered support and feedback to our contributors who submitted interviews and to the authors who submitted articles from a historical perspective (i.e., nineteenth-century, early-twentieth-century, etc.), while Beverly offered feedback and support to the authors who submitted qualitative research and/or who wrote from contemporary points of view.

For me, as a doctoral student, the most significant part of the experience was how strongly Beverly J. Moss supported my intellectual and professional growth. For example, we completed regular phone calls to discuss the critical suggestions that were offered to the authors. After completing the editing process for our issue, Dr. Moss instructed and allowed me to take the lead, when communicating with the copy editor at the New City Community Press. She graciously suggested that I should write the argument, as we coauthored the introduction essay for the special issue. My rhetorical voice benefited from her critical critique of my drafts. Due to Dr. Moss' efforts and our lengthy conversations on the Black Diaspora, our time together



# African American Contributions to Service Learning and Community Literacy

will focus on literacy partnerships between historically black colleges and universities (HBCU) and community organizations and institutions. From their inception to the present, HBCUs have partnered with the communities that they serve to promote literacy in African American communities. Whether it was African American churches offering their physical space to begin a college in the 1800s or an HBCU partnering with a community center to promote digital literacy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, these literacy partnerships are sites of rich literacy practices and activities. We invite submissions that discuss HBCU partnerships situated within a historical and/or contemporary setting and from diverse scholarly perspectives (ethnography, case study, social policy, historiography, theoretical, and so on). We welcome scholarly articles that include visual elements. With this issue, we hope to turn a scholarly gaze toward the research practices and sites situated at the intersection of HBCUs and their community constituents. More specifically, we seek to highlight the community-school literacy partnerships that expand our understanding of collaborative literacy practices, that demonstrate complex collaborative relationships built around literacy, that model school-community literacy partnerships, and, most importantly, that contribute new voices to current scholarly conversations on African American literacy practices.

*The Community Classroom: Literacy Training in the Black Public Sphere* will focus on literacy practices and institutions in Black American communities. There is a long and rich tradition of community sponsored literacy training projects in Black American culture that has for years sought to complement or supplement formal academic education. We are looking for submissions that discuss from historical, ethnographic, or pedagogical perspectives different forms of literacy training in community-based projects or cultural centers. The editors also invite submissions of community-based writing itself – the pamphlets, testimonies, artwork, and memoirs that often emerge from such locations. With this issue we hope to contribute to a broader discussion of community literacy by exploring the relationship between the Black organizations and institutions

**Editors:** David Frank Green, Jr., Penn State University; Ersula Ore, Penn State University  
Sarah Ann Rude, Penn State University

We invite you to contribute to this special series. Manuscripts should be between 5000 and 6000 words and should be sent as electronic submissions to Reva E. Sias (resias@syr.edu). Please indicate for which issue you are submitting your piece. Submissions should conform to MLA guidelines. Please include a brief abstract (300 words) with your submissions. Attach the manuscript as a Word or Word-compatible document to an email. All manuscripts must be submitted before 12 a.m., September 17, 2010.



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felt like home to me, even as it shaped my understanding of African American rhetoric, literacy, and historiography writing.

Our special issue on Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Community Literacy Partnerships (Volume 10, Issue 2) was published in spring 2011. I offer a sincere ‘thank you’ to our contributors and to Lindsey S. Jordan, Jr., who was the graphic designer of our issue’s front and back covers. After a year of collaboration, Beverly and I looked forward to the double special issue on African American literacy. However, when our issue was printed, we learned that our HBCU issue was not presented jointly, as Part I of a double special issue. It was never communicated why the proposed double special series was not published, as discussed at the CCCCs planning meeting. Beverly and I assumed that both parts of the double special issue were forwarded to the New City Community Press at the same time, in the fall of 2010. We agreed that it would be a missed opportunity if all of the African American literacy articles were not published.

We questioned the journal’s invisible and less visible editorial processes. With the printing of the journal’s next issue, we were left to conclude that the submissions for Part II of the African American literacy installment were published consecutively, as the fall 2011 issue of *Reflections*. In fact, Volume 11, Issue 1, of *Reflections* is a special issue that was successfully edited by David Green, and that issue carries the unpublished double issue’s title, “African American Contributions to Service Learning and Community Literacy,” as it appeared in the revised call for papers. (See figure 1). I appreciate that there are many editorial decisions that are at the discretion of a journal’s editor (e.g., whether to publish or not to publish, whether to print submissions as a double issue or to print consecutive issues, etc.). Yet, these types of editorial choices may also serve as examples of the mostly invisible processes and labor of editing submissions.

Still, Beverly and I were excited to share the richness of the African American culture and traditions. In our introduction essay, entitled “Rewriting a Master Narrative: HBCUs and Community Literacy Partnerships” (2011), we draw attention to “Historically Black Colleges and Universities as overlooked sites in scholarship on

service-learning and university-community literacy partnerships in rhetoric and composition studies” (3). We acknowledge that current scholarship in rhetoric and writing studies signals a “public turn” that enables service-learning and community literacy practices. On the other hand, there is “a noticeable absence of scholarship that considers pedagogical collaborations between those schools—Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)—and the African American communities to which HBCUs have long devoted themselves” (3). We agree that the “articles and interviews offer only a hint of the depth, breadth and wealth of HBCU-community literacy partnerships, [but] we see them as making a significant contribution to rewriting the master narratives that have, in the past, left HBCUs out of the story” (12). *Reflections* facilitated our efforts to rewrite a master narrative. My collaboration with Beverly J. Moss truly represents “the big three in the academy: scholarship, service, and teaching” (Coda 2009, 175). The editorship for the special issue was truly a learning experience. Our *Reflections* issue was well-received, and was presented as a “Featured Panel,” on “What HBCUs Can Teach Us About Writing Instruction,” at the 2011 CCCC Annual Convention, in Atlanta, Georgia.

As a previous guest editor, I appreciate *Reflections* as a valuable platform in rhetoric and writing studies. In hindsight, as a Ph.D. candidate, *Reflections* allowed me to locate my editorial and intellectual self. Within and through the pages of *Reflections*, Janell, Brian and I, as well as other doctoral students and early career professionals, entered editorships and discourse communities that supported us, and encouraged our growth and leadership. Together and individually, through the editing and production processes, the special issues and its editors expanded best practices, discourses, and conversations on timely and relevant topics. In turn, *Reflections* welcomed the editors’ passions and scholarly perspectives, even as it allowed a space for emerging voices, professional development, and collaborations. With this understanding, *Reflections* has evolved over twenty years, and it is ever present to speak to, from, and about cultures, identities, communities, people, languages, and generations to come.

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**Dr. Reva E. Sias** is an Assistant Professor in the Rhetoric and Writing Studies Program, in the Department of English at California State University-Fresno. She specializes and teaches courses in cultural rhetoric, critical race theory, composition theory and pedagogy, and writing program administration. Her research interests, as well as her published works, include archival studies, rhetorical feminist historiography, cultural literacy, African American rhetoric, Black Feminist/Womanist Theory, and women's rhetoric. Currently, Reva serves on the NCTE College Section Steering Committee, and serves in the Modern Language Association Delegate Assembly, where she is the representative for Rhetoric, Composition, and Writing Programs.