

Introduction to Special Collection

Papers from the 5th Annual HBCU Symposium on Composition and Rhetoric

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In the fall of 2023, Jackson State University hosted the 5th annual HBCU Symposium on Composition and Rhetoric. The goal of this symposium is to center the research and scholarship occurring in HBCUs within the discipline of rhetoric and composition. This special issue of Reflections highlights the work of those scholars who presented or intended to present at this symposium. The theme of the conference, Re-Imagining Activism, Literacy, and Rhetoric in a Woke White America, was intended to present ideas and scholarship that challenged white perceptions of wokeness and explored how this perception is rooted in anti-Blackness, and how Black scholars at HBCUs responded to this recent form off anti-Blackness.

Readers should see this collection as more than about the study or teaching of composition and rhetoric. Readers should see this collection as a set of expert voices—in unison—arguing, cajoling, persuading, and, yes, teaching. Often due to the very institutions at which the scholars in this collection teach (HBCUs), their work, indeed their scholarship, is often underrepresented, if not undervalued and underappreciated. However, as these scholars will show: research happens at HBCUs, scholarship happens at HBCUs, intellectual greatness is achieved at HBCUs, and when it comes to anti-Black educational practices, I contend it will be the scholars at HBCUs and minority serving institutions to help lead academia to rid itself of its anti-Black practices.

This collection provides readers with emerging theories, continuing research, and evolving classroom pedagogies. Scholars such as Candace Wilkerson explore the importance of othermothering to Black male self-efficacy and retention of Black male students, arguing that “If we want to see better outcomes for Black males, an academic village has to be created and developed to teach crucial self-management practices on how to rebuild, redeem, restore, and retain Black male pride, self-identity, life purpose, and self-worth.” Additionally, Ondra Dismukes explores how students enact social justice in the classroom. Dismukes uses the five principles of social justice to scaffold her class and create writing assignments for students. Dismukes provides readers access to the types of assignments students can create when social justice is central to the class. One such assignment is the digital publication, [Voices](#), in which African American males showcase the rhetorical choices they make in an HBCU classroom to communicate issues of importance to them.

Brandee McCleese gives readers a birds-eye view of her first-year writing/composition classes, where social justice and resistance are

a central theme. Readers will gain perspective on the importance of social justice at HBCUs and gain insight into how HBCU students both perceive and respond to social justice assignments. Furthermore, Bill Ndi explores how the Quaker's use of polyvocality and silence as acts of resistance can inform social justice, advocacy, and protest. Benjamin Fishkin interrogates inherent biases in publishing companies that intentionally silence or eliminate African literary work. Fishkin asks what happens when "African literature exists within parameters that are drawn by someone else who is somewhere else"? This collection of articles, thoughts, and classroom stories may seem out of place (at first) for the discipline of composition and rhetoric, rhetorical studies, or writing studies. But this collection is not about the discipline. This symposium was about social justice. Rhetoric and composition are just a part of it.

About the Editor

Wonderful Faison is the director of The Richard Wright Center for Writing, Rhetoric, and Research at Jackson State University. She holds a Ph.D. from Michigan State University. Dr. Faison's research interests span a diverse range of critical areas in writing studies. Her work focuses on race and antiracist praxis in the writing center, African American Language and Rhetorics, Cultural Rhetorics, and Queer Rhetorics.

Her scholarly contributions include several significant works that have enriched the field of writing center studies, particularly in broadening the field's sense of who works in a writing center and whose language should be used. Most notable among her publications are the award-winning book, *CounterStories from the Writing Center* (with Frankie Condon). As shown in her article, "Black Rhetoric, Writing Assessment, and Afrocentric Rubrics," Dr. Faison's current research focuses on equitable classroom and assessment practices in first-year writing.

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