

# Editor's Introduction

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*A white double consciousness would not involve the move between white and black subjectivities or black and American perspectives, as DuBois and Fanon developed the notion. Instead, for whites, double consciousness requires an ever present acknowledgment of the historical legacy of white identity constructions in the persistent structures of inequality and exploitation, as well as a newly awakened memory of the many white traitors to white privilege who have struggled to contribute to the building of an inclusive human community.*

—Linda Martín Alcoff, *The Whiteness Question*

I recently attended the Rhetorical Society of America (RSA) conference in San Antonio and had the pleasure of listening to Linda Alcoff's key note address. The above quote I found on her website and speaks, in part, to this issue. If I could give this issue a name, it would be the Serendipity Issue (by the way, serendipity is one of the most difficult words to translate in the English language). Perhaps, a good

translation would be this is the issue of fortunate coincidences, discoveries, and collaborations. Candace Epps-Robertson e-mailed me a few months ago to say that she wanted to interview a Civil Rights Activist, Dr. Edward H. Peeples, from Virginia, as part of her many years of research with Prince Edward County, Virginia's school segregation and Civil Rights activism. Candace grew up in Farmville located in Prince Edward County, went to graduate school in the Northeast as did Peeples, and both did extensive research on Prince Edward communities focusing on Civil Rights. Although they are decades apart in age, Candace is African American and Dr. Edward Peeples is Southern white, they are dedicated researchers and activists in studying this rural Virginia community.

Also, this Editor grew up in Northern Virginia during the 60's and 70's. As a child in the late 1960's, I attended Stonewall Jackson Elementary school in Alexandria, Virginia. Every school day, I passed a portrait of Stonewall Jackson, a Confederate General. I recall one day when the principal singled me out as I entered the school, pointed to the Stonewall Jackson portrait, and asked me who that man was on the wall. I remember those stern blue eyes waiting for me to give her the answer this eight year old did not have. With tears in my eyes, she proceeded to tell me in an angry voice why the school was named after General Jackson and admonished me for my ignorance. Years later, I wondered if she had met my brown skinned Honduran mother and my Southern white father from Tennessee. Perhaps, she proceeded to make sure I knew the Southern white history she deemed important for me to learn. Years later, I would read this quote from Candace's interview with Dr. Edward Peeples that spoke to my Elementary school principal, "the preponderance of my whiteness education took place in Richmond, and the basic message was the same. I can recall sensing as early as about age five how much race mattered to adults."

At the RSA *Reflections* booth, Shirley Wilson Logan from the University of Maryland stopped by, and we talked about the title of this interview, "Where is the Finish Line in the Race Race?" This is an important question for Southerners like Epps-Robertson, Peeples, Logan, and this Editor. It is an important question for our Associate Editor, Willma Harvey, who grew up in Gulfport, Mississippi during

the 60's and 70's, as well as someone who went through Hurricane Katrina. And, I anticipate it is an important question for many of our reader activists who will find hope in one of the last lines of the interview, "So when prospects seem dim and thoughts of despair and foreboding creep into our head, it is comforting to know from history that the struggles for human equality and dignity are a multi-century movement, and we are really never alone."

At Farmville's Robert Russa Moton Museum's website <http://www.motonmuseum.org/>, it reads "The Student Birthplace of America's Civil Rights Movement." When we often think of student activism and community building, urban communities usually come to mind. The research on rural student activism and how it develops and thrives is not in many journals or books, and it should be. Farmville was indeed the "Student Birthplace," as Heather Lettner-Rust points out when "On April 19, 1951, a black ninth grader in a squalid segregated school, initiated a student strike of the educational inequities." More than 60 years later, Heather is working with her college students at Longwood University in Farmville, educating them on this past student activism. She also helps them develop ways of researching and connecting, in meaningful conversational ways, with their local Town Council by having them invite the Council to a dinner after doing extensive research on them. The only agenda for the dinner was for the students to get to know their Town Council. Lettner-Rust argues that medieval French rhetorician Madeliene de Scudéry's "On Conversation," focusing on the rhetorical power of private conversations in politics, was quite applicable to Farmville today. Southerners in rural communities value relationships that grow in trust through these types of conversations. These dinner partners made up of students and the Town Council were comprised of conversations centered on "the civic mission of the town." Students were able to achieve Scudéry's rhetorical motive of achieving positive civic relationships through polite conversations.

Through these dinner exchanges, students began to perceive themselves less as students and more as citizens of the town. The results of these conversations were that students joined town committees, created town council biographies on their website, and proposed ways to "increase pedestrian and bike traffic downtown"

by suggesting places for bike racks. What we witness in both the interview with Dr. Peeples and this article are specific ways of getting to know communities in Southern rural settings to build relationships and get things done whether it be helping with Civil Rights Activism within African American rural communities or strengthening small town and university ties. Those ways are often grounded in invitations to conversations that lead to improving these communities. Rural communities indeed have something to teach us as do those who research these communities. Candace and Heather were unaware of each other's research on Farmville before this issue, and they now correspond. Serendipity happily strikes again.

We'll leave the South now and head North to Chicago with Veronica Oliver's article "Recognizing One Another in Public: Reconsidering the Role and Resources of an Enclave." When I taught Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, I used to have students read the 1940 Supreme Court Case *Hansberry v. Lee* and the Chicago Racial Restrictive Covenants documents, so students would understand what African Americans residents endured during this time. This historical context of this play is critical for today's students. Cabrini-Green is part of that history, as Veronica Oliver points out in her article, "Recognizing One Another in Public: Reconsidering the Role and Resources of an Enclave" when she provides the historical context via David Fleming: "Construction of these public-housing units began in 1941 in response to the continual migration of African Americans from the South and returning veterans after World War II." Whereas in the past, it was more difficult to study how African American residents in Chicago developed coalitions to fight against Restrictive Covenants, today, with Cabrini-Green, Oliver and others have an opportunity to analyze "the digital paper trail of residents of the Cabrini-Green public-housing complex." What such digital paper trails provide is a way for Oliver to demonstrate the complexities of how Cabrini-Green residents succeed in "building a network of interconnected coalitions" and use their enclave as the central point of publicity to counter how others outside this community publicly represent them in negative ways. Oliver takes to task contemporary public sphere theorists like Catherine Squires with a particular emphasis on public-housing residents' use of "publicity" and "public artifacts" focused on their location and their acute knowledge of developing inner-community coalitions and beyond. These residents'

testimonies on the [cabrini-green.com](http://cabrini-green.com) website helped counter the negative dominant discourse of their community. As Oliver concludes in her article, “Residents of Cabrini-Green prove exemplary in their capacity to exploit their own position, one vexed by institutional racism, to expose not only local but also wide-reaching systematic inequalities.” With my daughter now living in Chicago, this article is particularly meaningful to me and a visit to Cabrini-Green is in order.

We’re moving farther North as we enter Michigan in “Helping to Build Better Networks: Service-Learning Partnerships as Distributed Knowledge Work.” In one of my undergraduate classes last semester, I asked students to create blogs focusing on how community literacy organizations used social media. I was amazed at what they found all over the world. Coincidentally, what came around about this time was a manuscript focused on a relatively new focus on service-learning, where “service-learning teachers are turning to digital media production as a new method of service.” And, the manuscript subsequently came back with excellent reviews and here we are with this article. This couldn’t be serendipity happening once again. What I particularly liked about this article is the empowering elements for students as they bring their community expertise to the stakeholders while simultaneously acknowledge the “community networks that pre-exist them.” The article creates a nice blend of the scholarship focusing on “emerging technologies in service-learning and community-based projects” with how this scholarship is enacted within FYC service-learning courses at Michigan State, particularly with an illustrative example of Eric, “an elementary school art teacher who creates digital documentaries with his students.” Such illustrative examples are important for our journal, and we encourage this blend of scholarship with real applications. It is what a journal devoted to public rhetoric, civic writing, and service-learning should do.

Now, on to the Book Reviews with Moira Ozia’s review of *Democracies to Come: Rhetorical Action, Neoliberalism, and Communities of Resistance*. The opening of this review fits nicely with many of the article/interview themes in this issue: “Community literacy workers and publicly engaged teachers of writing have long been concerned with questions not only of learning, but also of social change, equity,

and justice.” Certainly, we see this in Candace’s interview with Dr. Edward Peeples and his activism within and outside his classrooms. Indeed, Heather Rust’s quote from Freire that calls out universities who are “foreign” to its cities, speaks to the need for a book such as this one that critiques universities, as well as other locations in their “benevolent” elements that end up “reproduce[ing] capitalist and colonist orders.” Instead Riedners sees the importance within this work of students engaging in difference and educators employing reflective praxis to question power structures.

I’m particularly pleased that we had the opportunity to review Sister Elaine Richardson’s book, *PHD to Ph.D.: How Education Saved My Life*. When I was a graduate student, I read *Bootstraps: From an American Academic of Color*, and it changed my perspective on the value of lived experience in academic writing. If you’re wondering why my introductions to these journal issues have a personal flair, well Victor Villanueva is largely responsible, as well as Montaigne, Lynn Bloom, Ruth Behar, and a few others. As Mariana Grohowski says in her book review, writing the personal helps us see in Richardson’s memoir someone who is not “an agentless victim but as one who learns best from lived experience.” The hard road with drugs, prostitution, early motherhood, etc. teaches one to survive and thrive in oftentimes challenging academic environments. Language, culture, and history need to take a more prominent place in academia and, maybe, books such as Elaine’s, demonstrate how integrating one’s lived experiences into all three, benefits our colleagues and our students. If more of this took place in universities and colleges, we might just witness more collegial environments in and out of the classroom.

Last but certainly not least, we end with Steve Park’s *Gravyland*. Many of you may know Steve as the former Editor of *Reflections* and the fine job he did while in this position. I’ve known Steve for years, and we’ve worked on a few projects together. What I like about Steve is he’s quick to tell you what he’s done wrong and work to change the situation for the better. I suspect this is a driving force on why he’s been successful and why *Gravyland* is such an important work in demonstrating how he has worked to empower community members’ voices in Philadelphia. As Kelly Langan states, he “generously gives

the community sixty pages in his book “for their own writing.” In other words, it’s not just about him; it’s about the multiple voices of the communities he has served. Unfortunately, in academia, we see many faculty who do not get the work we do in communities (work that Steve has devoted most of academic career to). There are some of us in academia who believe in Freire’s quote from many years ago appearing in Heather’s article “A University foreign to its city, superimposed on it, is a mind-narrowing fiction [...] The university that is foreign to its context does not speak it, does not pronounce it.” *Gravyland* “speaks it” and “pronounces it” and for this, we are grateful. I leave you with these thoughts and enjoy the issue.