



**Listening**  
*to our*  
**Elders**

*Working and Writing  
for Change*

*Edited By*  
Samantha Blackmon  
Cristina Kirklighter  
Steve Parks

**Listening to Our Elders:**  
Working and Writing For Change



# **Listening to Our Elders: Working and Writing For Change**

## **Edited by**

*Samantha Blackmon*

*Cristina Kirklighter*

*Steve Parks*

## **Research Associates**

*Timothy Dougherty*

*Nicole Gonzales-Howell*

*LaToya Jackson*

*Ben Kuebrich*

*Justin Lewis*

*Nicole Navickas*

*Jennifer Sano-Francini*

*Melissa Watson*

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# Contents

<b>Introduction: Listening to Our Elders</b>	9
<i>Samantha Blackmon, Cristina Kirklighter, Steve Parks</i>	
<b>American Indian Caucus</b>	
<b>“We wanted to have an open and welcoming space”</b>	13
<i>Cristyn L. Elder, Alexandra Hidalgo, Laurie A. Pinkert</i>	
<b>“Work to be done”</b>	28
<i>Resa Crane Bizzaro</i>	
<b>Asian/Asian-American Caucus</b>	
<b>A Career of Acting “Ill-Mannered”</b>	35
<i>Jolivette Mecenas</i>	
<b>Black Caucus</b>	
<b>A Conversation with James Hill</b>	53
<i>Kendra Mitchell</i>	
<b>Committee on Disability Issues in College Composition</b>	
<b>“I simply gave up trying to present at CCCC...”</b>	56
<i>Committee on Disability Issues in College Composition: Jay Dolmage, Samadhi Metta Bexar, Brenda Brueggeman, Susan Ghiaciuc, Patricia Dunn, Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson, Sushil Oswal, Margaret Price, Nicole Quackenbush, and Amy Vidali</i>	
<b>Language Policy Committee</b>	89
<b>Latino/a Caucus</b>	
<b>Chicana Trailblazer in NCTE/CCCC</b>	90
<i>Itzcóatl Tlaloc Meztli</i>	
<b>“When I came to the Caucus...”</b>	102
<i>Dr. Iris Deana Ruiz</i>	
<b>Progressive Caucus</b>	
<b>Combating Institutional Neutrality</b>	114
<i>Timothy R. Dougherty and Justin Lewis</i>	

<b>Queer Caucus</b>	
<b>Renaming Curiosity/Resisting Ignorance</b>	124
<i>Martha Marinara and Mark McBeth</i>	
<b>Working-Class Culture and Pedagogy SIG</b>	
<b>The Conflict with Class</b>	144
<i>Pamela F. Roeper, The University of Akron</i>	
<b>Working-Class Culture &amp; Pedagogy SIG and Bring-A-Book</b>	157
<i>Bill Macauley</i>	
<b>Editor Profiles</b>	163

# Introduction: Listening to Our Elders

*Samantha Blackmon, Cristina Kirklighter, Steve Parks*

“The real enemy is ignorance, and we can work together to combat ignorance with knowledge”

*Charlotte Brooks 1976*

## Origins

In 1979, J.N. Hook, Executive Secretary of National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) from 1954-1960, published *A Long Way Together: A Personal View of NCTE's First Sixty-Seven Years*. His description of the new voices and identities in one of his latter chapters entitled “Human Equation, 1968-1978” marked the early days when identity based groups and activists began writing, speaking, and working for change that not only changed the face of NCTE but the nation with their identity-based initiatives and revolutionary ideas. As an identity-based collective, our “long way together” for the most part began in the ‘60s, and it has been a long, challenging, and uplifting historical road of heartaches and breakthroughs.

In 2011, our “profession” will turn one hundred years old, at least if we mark our beginnings as the formation of NCTE. Still, it is probably more accurate to say that our profession is endlessly beginning, constantly changing its identity and purpose as new voices and identities claim their rights in our classrooms and in our country. The recognition of such claims, however, does not occur without a struggle, without collective work.

*Listening to our Elders* attempts to capture the history of those collective moments where teachers across grade levels and institutions of higher education organized to insure that the voices, heritages, and traditions of their students and colleagues were recognized within our professional organizations as a vital part of our classrooms and our discipline. As will be detailed in the chapters that follow, this recognition was not always easily given. Instead, whether the issue was race, sexuality, class, or disability, committed activist organizations have often had to push against the existing limits of our field and its organizations to insure that a broader sense of common responsibility and humanity was recognized.

In part, then, this book records those moments when the field did not live up to its highest ideals—those attitudes and practices which acted to exclude the insights of its broad disciplinary membership:

- Louie Crew tells about openly homophobic comments made at a session of the Conference on College Composition and



Communication (CCCC) the emergence of a “queer identity” in the field.

- James Hill discusses how faculty in Historically Black Colleges and Universities were overlooked in the 1960s, a period in which “whites” became “instant African-American scholars.”
- Jeffery Paul Chan talks about how textbooks companies failed to represent the diversity of Asian/Asian American experiences, leading to a manifesto being delivered by himself and Frank Chin—the classic “Racist Love.”
- William Thelin and Bill Macauley speak to the ways in which working-class teachers lacked place to develop progressive pedagogies, research agendas, and outreach projects to support working class writers.
- Geneva Smitherman speaks to the ways in which language rights at NCTE and CCCC were enmeshed in national movements for political, educational, and economic rights.
- Malea Powell and Joyce Rain Anderson speak to the need to develop strong support networks for young scholars committed to expanding the scope and range of American Indian scholarship.
- Jay Dolmage, Patricia Dunn, Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson, Sushil Oswal, and Brenda Brueggeman write about how the profession has struggled to see issues of access and disability as a central part of our institutional, pedagogical, and professional work.
- Louise Dunlap reminds us how space needed to be created to insure a working-class politics that reached an alliance with non-academic workers in the struggle for economic justice.
- Carlota Cárdenas de Dwyer and Victor Villanueva’s work reminds us how our field has failed to create systemic supports to insure a diverse teaching and research faculty in our field.

Yet what is most important about these individual stories is how they initiated a collective response, how they led to special interest groups, caucuses, and task force committees designed not only to study but to change the very conditions described above. These individual examples, that is, are not meant to represent the lone individual against the “machine.” Rather they represent the labor of these individuals, in concert with many others, to form the following collective efforts which have so benefitted our field; efforts such as the Asian/Asian American Caucus, the Black Caucus, the Committee on Disability Issues, the Language Policy Committee, the

Latino/a Caucus, the Native American Caucus, the Progressive Caucus, the Queer Caucus, and the Working Class Culture and Pedagogy SIG. To a great extent, then, this is a book about the value of such collective organizations within our national organizations, NCTE and CCCC, and, more broadly within our profession. It is about the importance of their legacy to our field's emergent and continually developing commitment to and struggle for social and economic justice.

### **Putting "Listening to our Elders" Together**

In putting together *Listening to Our Elders*, we recognized a responsibility to insure the individuals and organizations represented had final control over what was published. Too many of the individuals and organizations included in this book had "their story told for them." Too often, these histories were not told accurately and not in the genre and traditions which represented the vision of the collective.

With that in mind, we established a process where each special interest group, caucus, and taskforce was asked to provide the names of key founders who would be interviewed about the political and disciplinary context out of which their organizations emerged. Recognizing the importance of bringing the next generation into the conversation, we also asked each organization to appoint a junior faculty member or graduate student to conduct the interview. Once the interview was complete, we worked with the interview/interviewee to make sure that the final essay represented what each wanted to say, insuring that their viewpoint was accurately represented.

One result of this process was to produce a collection rich in diversity of styles, from single voice narratives, to traditional interview formats, to online group discussions. Moreover, within each essay, the rhetoric and styles of argument reflect the particular traditions and heritages out of which a special interest group or caucus emerged. And within the task forces, you will often read discussions among committee members about how to structure meetings, objectives, and reports that respect and reflect this diversity. Throughout, you will witness individuals and collectives strategizing, struggling, and succeeding in bringing issues of diversity, race, and justice to the conference rooms and official policies of NCTE and CCCC.

### **More Than A Book: A Digital Archive and Community**

The *Writing and Working for Change* project is more than a series of traditional books that tell the stories of the activist organizations that have pushed us to stretch our understanding of what it is to build and main-

tain a community in an ever-changing and diverse world. This project also includes an online communal space that houses not only digital copies of a number of key historical documents, but also includes video and audio interviews with founding members of the caucuses, special interest groups, and task forces.

In addition to simply being a storehouse for digital artifacts, our online community will offer all members the ability to communicate with one another online, share important events and announcements, and to network with one another in ways that will only serve to strengthen the members of the various organizations and aid in activist activities.

As social networking becomes ubiquitous, it is imperative that our organizations come together not only to build an archive that will help to detail their histories, but that we build a community that will help us bridge both spatial and temporal gaps. Newcomers to the community will be able to learn more about the respective groups, meet members online, and begin their networking before they arrive onsite at the national conventions and caucus meetings. This gateway to the organizations will help build membership in these organizations, provide support for new members, and (hopefully) ultimately aid in the retention of budding scholars and teachers in the field. You can find the site at <http://ncte.connectedcommunity.org/NCTE/WW4C>.

Our celebration is particularly important for the NCTE 2011 Centennial Celebration because many of these identity groups were not part of earlier celebrations throughout NCTE's one-hundred-year history. Through these interviews, it is our time to shine for this one-hundred-year celebration and demonstrate how the recent changes and contributions we represent in NCTE's history embrace diversity through these different participating identity groups. We now have histories to tell and celebrate with the membership.

# American Indian Caucus

## “We wanted to have an open and welcoming space”

A Conversation with Malea Powell

*Cristyn L. Elder, Alexandra Hidalgo, Laurie A. Pinkert*

### Introduction

*Alexander Hidalgo*

The following interview with Malea Powell was originally shot as a video interview. I am working with Samantha Blackmon, Cristina Kirklighter, and Steve Parks to produce a documentary component to the Writing and Working for Change project. The video interviews, shot by different caucus members and myself, seek to explore the history of the caucuses and SIGs. By conversing with founding members and scholars who have exercised leadership positions in their particular organizations, we hope to provide viewers with a sense of the major events undergone by different caucuses/SIGs, as well as the aims, tone and ideologies that define them. The final product, which I am editing, will showcase two or more members of each caucus/SIG and will portray different members' voices in conversation with each other. Malea came to Purdue University, where I am working on my Ph.D. in rhetoric and composition, to present as part of our Hutton Lectures Series. In spite of having a very tight schedule, Malea generously made time for a video interview.

My fellow Ph.D. students—Laurie A. Pinkert and Cristyn L. Elder—volunteered to interview Malea while I filmed the exchange. Laurie and Cristyn wanted to know about the American Indian Caucus specifically, but also about the ways in which different caucuses interact with each other and the insight Malea has gained from being the Program Chair for CCCC 2011. Their perceptive questions allowed Malea to revisit her experiences founding and leading a caucus, as well as what it has meant to be a woman of color and a scholar. One of the points Malea often returns to in the interview is the importance of collaboration between the caucuses and between scholars of color in general. She explains how, when she was a student and there was no Native American group at CCCC, she attended the Latina Caucus (as she sometimes calls it), where she developed strong and lasting bonds with its female members. She later turned to these women for advice when she decided to create the American Indian Caucus, just like the founders of the Asian/Asian American Caucus turned to Malea when they wanted to found their own caucus.

Not only is collaboration between caucuses important to their survival,

but as Malea explains, so is the collaboration that occurs within caucuses. For example, the American Indian Caucus has been co-chaired by Malea, Resa Crane Bizzaro and Joyce Rain Anderson from its inception; Malea can't imagine it ever being chaired by one person alone. In the most heartfelt moment in the interview, Malea describes the joy she feels whenever she is able to mentor younger scholars and help them evolve. She is committed to addressing the needs of graduate students and has scheduled a forum during CCCC 2011 where graduate students can come together and discuss their needs and the ways in which they can be addressed. Being Program Chair has also allowed her to see how some things she previously thought might have been done with the purpose of excluding the American Indian Caucus were instead probably the result of administrators' attempts to put the program together as best they could. As she argues, "I don't feel like there's some invisible hand anymore. The invisible hand is the body of CCCC members; it's not in Urbana. It's the body of CCCC members. So, I think that makes the caucuses even more important." With its brilliant and candid insight, this interview provides readers with an insider's understanding of not only the American Indian Caucus, but caucuses in general and how they function to make CCCC a more diverse and just place that better serves the needs of its members and the students we instruct around the country.

### Interview

**Laurie Pinkert (LP):** So when did you first attend CCCC or NCTE?

**Malea Powell (MP):** The first CCCC I ever went to was in 1990 in Chicago. I was a sophomore in college and I worked in a writing center. I had been cocktail waitressing my way through college and I got plucked from that by the person who actually was creating the writing center at the university where I was going. So, he decided that all of the peer tutors should go to the CCCC, since it was in Chicago. He was getting his degree from Illinois in Chicago, so we all went to a big workshop on peer tutoring, and then I stayed because another professor of mine was going to let me stay in her room, and I had a great time. The people in the workshops were lovely, there were really only three tutors there and we were all from the same place, and I had a good time, and I thought, "I'm going to go back and I'm going to do this more and more." So I've gone every year since 1990, and while there have been years that I considered not going, I always relent and go to the conference.

**LP:** Can you tell us about how accepting of college students CCCC

and also the faculty and scholars in the field have been and tell us whether you think that acceptance has changed over the years or has stayed the same?

**MP:** I mean, having gone to CCCC as a student the first two or three years, I felt really supported. I went to a caucus on the status of grad students for the first four years that I went to the conference, and then that caucus got dissolved by one of the chairs. It was one of those sort of three-years committees that was appointed by the executive committee, and the executive committee apparently decided they no longer needed a special committee for grad students. So, I kind of felt a little at sea. I joined the Latina Caucus because those were the women I had come to know, and that seemed the friendliest to me as a grad student, and that was true, I'd say, all through grad school. I'm continually disappointed that there isn't a place for undergrads and grad students at the CCCC that's marked as "theirs," and that's one of the things I want to change, to sort of reinstitute those special committees on the status of grad students at least. But, I think that my relationship with the CCCC has been really complicated. Like I said, as a grad student I felt supported by the people of color at the conference. I didn't feel supported by the organization at all. In fact, I felt as if I was the irritating, you know, insistent child at the convention for a long time, and I have to say in any given year, it was the caucuses that made me feel supported, not the organization or anything that any program chair set up at the convention.

**LP:** When you began attending CCCC, were there any Native American or American Indian groups existent at the time or pockets of people, or could you say?

**MP:** Not that I could tell. When I first started going to the CCCC, there weren't any Native people that I could tell. There might have been Native people attending the convention, and in retrospect I know that somebody like Jill Hodges was probably there, but I couldn't find her. So I remember really clearly, in 1993, Scott Lyons did a presentation on the Indian-only composition classes at the University of North Dakota. I saw him in the program and I went to his session. I thought, well, if he isn't Indian, he at least knows something about Indians. And so, it turned out that his presentation was very much the kind of stuff I had been thinking about, and we exchanged information and got to know each other, and I eventually recruited him to come to Miami of Ohio where I was doing doctoral

work. In 1994, I was named Scholar for the Dream, then two years later, Janie Gould was named Scholar for the Dream, and by then there was a very small group of Native people going to the CCCC, and we all knew each other. Scott, me, Joyce Rain Anderson, Resa Bizarro started showing up, Amanda Cobb appeared. And we had these sort of informal meetings with each other that weren't really caucus meetings but were caucus-like. Many of us still belonged to the Latino Caucus. And one year, actually, I tried to think about it this morning, I think it was 1997 because Scott and I were roommates, and that was my last year at Miami, we just decided to propose a real caucus session, and we did, and we got on the program. Sandra Gibbs saw us on the program and said, "I'm going to make you an NCTE Caucus—you guys need to be an NCTE Caucus." But it was like a very informal and slow process of finding Native peoples based on what the titles for their presentations were, and just trying to figure out, you know, who were going to be our allies and who were going to be just, not allies. How's that? Not allies. That's a nice way to put it.

**LP:** Can you tell us what your initial goals were when you formed that caucus, as it came into being an institutional sort of body? Were there any stated goals, or maybe they were unstated?

**MP:** We named the caucus the Caucus for American Indian Scholars and Scholarship. The goal was to get people together who were doing work around Native studies and to have a discussion about what kinds of methodologies were going to be acceptable, what kinds of theoretical work were people doing. So part of it was sheer support and part of it was a kind of quality control moment where we could really think about how we wanted to talk to folks that were doing work that seemed too stereotypical, too offensive, you know? What I would call, like, too beads and feathers, like, people needed to cut out the flute music and do the actual work. And, so the caucus title was important for us because in Native studies there are all sorts of arguments about authenticity and identity, and we wanted people doing work in the area, whether they were or weren't Native to feel welcome at the Caucus. And that made us different than at least one of the other big caucuses. I would say the Black Caucus has always been very specific about their membership and the Latino Caucus has always been more open about their membership. They encouraged all of us to join, and were very open and welcoming. And so, we wanted to have an open and welcoming space as well. Especially because

non-Natives doing research are at risk for not having access to the appropriate methodologies. And that's worked really well for us, even after Sandra changed our name when we became an NCTE Caucus, mostly to make it parallel with the other caucus names. We've always been able to draw everybody who's doing work in the area, instead of just drawing Native people. Now that makes the caucus a different kind of space. It's not so much that you can always divulge all of the awful things that are happening to you in a kind of confessional way. But it has added the advantage for non-Native & for young scholars, as they come into the field and want to do work in Native studies, to know that they can come to the caucus and get advice and support. And in truth, those folks are just as important to the caucus founders. There aren't as many of us that we can afford to say, "Well, we don't want these people, and we want these people." We want everybody doing work on American Indians to have access to good methodologies, to actual Native scholars in the field. And so that's become more and more important. You know at first, I think it was just like, "We should have a caucus. There are enough of us now." And in fact I think it was, I can't remember the years, the third or fourth caucus meeting in Minneapolis, we had like fifty or sixty people attend. And for us that seemed to be a real statement that what we were doing was necessary.

**LP:** You mentioned Sandra Gibbs was one of the initial proponents for the Caucus. Could you tell us more, maybe reiterate how she supported it as well as discuss other strong proponents for the Caucus?

**MP:** Sandra had a unique role in relation to the Caucus at the NCTE. She was basically our advocate. She made sure our caucus sessions got on the program; she would help us collaborate. For several years at the NCTE, there has been a collaborative event sponsored by the Black Caucus and the Latino Caucus. Sandra was, in some ways, our first official link with the organization. And so for me, for a long time, she was the face of the NCTE. And Sandra was fierce, she could be scary, but she was always really welcoming. She'd ask us some pretty hard questions. I mean, she said, "Are you going to let non-Indians join?" and we said, "Yes." She said, "Why?" And so Joyce and I told her why we thought that non-Indians should be a part of it, and every year, for a few years, she would ask us that same question, "Is this still true? Can non-Natives still be a part of the Caucus?" And when she first started asking the question I read it as a censorious question, like she



didn't want us to do that. But, as I got know her, I realized she was just trying to reiterate back to us what we had said to her, and make sure we were still on board with the same values, and that she fielded questions from people all the time about this. So Sandra was probably our biggest supporter in Urbana, at least in our imaginations. But all the other folks that had supported our scholarship: Victor Villanueva, Jackie Royster, Beverly Moss, Gail Okowa—they were all very encouraging and helpful and said they were glad to see us have a caucus. The women from the Latina Caucus, I always think of it as the Latina Caucus cause that's my connection with it, right? Ceci Milanés, then Dora Ramirez-Dhoore, and Cristina Kirklighter, they were all happy we had our own caucus. And you know, we'd arrange some little caucus overlaps sometimes so that we could all see each other again. And so, that felt good. It felt like the people that were my family at the convention wanted us to have a place at the table.

**LP:** Can you tell us what some of the biggest obstacles were, if there were any that you faced in that process?

**MP:** I think that in terms of obstacles some of them were self-created. We imagined much more resistance than there actually was from the organization. Having been on the other side of that table now, I realize you just look at those proposals and you're like, "Oh, there's room on Friday night, just put them in." But in our imaginations, we had built up a different kind of resistance. I think that one of the hardest parts of the Caucus is that balance between finding support for people doing work and not encouraging people who come and ask questions that seem really uncomfortable. At the last caucus there was a woman there who asked how many of us spoke our language, and people just sort of didn't answer her. I don't know if she'll come back or not. But that sort of people keep coming and asking really inappropriate questions, like they think that they'll come to the caucus and they can ask these research questions about Native culture that come out of a more anthropological mindset, with the ideas that Indians are vanishing and we've given up our traditional cultures and all that kind of stuff. So, we've always had those moments, not every year but enough, like every other year, every two or three years, enough to make us feel more likely to not answer than to turn around and snap at someone these days. But you can see, you can always see, the newer scholars get really uncomfortable in that moment. I think that watching that discomfort is a measure of how much people know, right? 'Cause only the people that know what's inappropriate

squirm.

**LP:** You mentioned some cross-caucus mingling. Could you tell us more about any cross-caucus collaborations that you've seen as really meaningful?

**MP:** Well, yeah, there have been a lot of cross-caucus collaborations, some of them official, some of them sort of unofficial. I mean, an important one is when Morris Young and Lu Ming Mao wanted to start the Asian American Caucus. They came to us to ask us how we did it, because we were the people who had done it in the most recent memory. I think at least twice the Latino Caucus and the Native Caucus have gotten together to do a workshop for women. That would be like a big Wednesday workshop where we brought in people. One year we did a mentoring workshop and brought our mentors from other fields to it— Chicano studies mentors and Native studies mentors. That was a lovely workshop and people talked really honestly about their work. We've had a lot of collaboration between the women in the caucuses, in relation to things like the committee on the status of women. In the years that they decided to look at women of color, there's always some collaborative work in a behind-the-scenes way from the women of color who are going to be there about what we're going to talk about. So I think there have been those official ones and the unofficial ones, where we just, like, stop meeting early so we can go talk to each other. I know I keep emphasizing the Latina Caucus but I think that the kind of communities that women of color make with one another are really different than the kinds of communities we make when we're in mixed-gender groups, and I think especially, and at least in the CCCC, and in my other experience in Native studies, you know, as a literature studies person as well. Native women and Latinas have a lot in common, and we have a lot of similarities in how we talk to each other. And I think that that's been a real place of support for a lot of folks who go to CCCC. We go to each other's sessions and we support each other.

**LP:** You just mentioned being a literature person, as well as a rhetoric and composition person, and I am just interested in hearing your comments on how your position or your interest in Native studies allows you to do both - how those things are bridged because for a lot of people those are two separate things. Could you speak to that?

**MP:** I think that having an interest in literature as a rhetoric person is one of the commonalities you are going to find among what they call the "ethnic caucuses" - the Asian American Caucus, the

Black Caucus, the Native Caucus, the Latino Caucus. I think that's something we share, a lot of, a lot of folks of color enter a sort of "publicness" through literature, through our literatures. And at least in a lot of undergraduate programs, that's the place where you're going to find the folks whose life experiences are more like yours. And so, it's not unusual for us to be literature scholars, publishing poets or essayists, or fiction writers, rhetoric scholars all at once. So, I think for us it's not a tension so much as a commonality, you know, it's just not cool if you're doing Asian-American rhetoric not to know what's going on in Asian-American literature. It doesn't mean you're in that field, but you have to know what's going on it. For me, Native studies is always a bridge out to other things and to other disciplines, and it's been an extremely instructive bridge. I think that folks who shut themselves up inside a narrow version of the discipline and don't try to bridge don't get that instruction about the flexibility of theory, about the importance of human experience in our work, about the kind of catlike reflexes you have to have if you're going to teach undergraduates. You know, there's that body of knowledge you can draw on, so for me, it makes a deeper well. I mean when I came into comp rhet., when I decided on composition studies, the big debate over literature in the classroom was raging, and that was the basis of my entire application to graduate school: I was going to bring multicultural literature into the composition classroom. And I understand the terms under which that argument took place as terms that have to do with disciplinarity, and staking out territory, and rationalizing a discipline outside of literary studies, but I don't agree with it. I think it's a narrowing we don't have to have, and being in a program where students don't have any instruction in literature at all or literary studies, I have to say it's hard for me sometimes if I'm working with a student who wants to do post-colonial rhetorics and we're talking about theory and I say, "Well, you know in *Jane Eyre*," and he's like, "I've never read *Jane Eyre*," and I say, "What literature have you read?" and there's nothing. And I'm like, "Wow, that isn't really what we wanted, is it?" Like, that isn't what we wanted for our discipline, was it? We wanted something else while we were having that argument that had to do with status and our work being valued. We didn't want students who haven't ever read anything we could use as a common text to talk about. So I think it's important. I think it's gotten increasingly important. I think that younger scholars don't find that split to make much sense in their experiences. So it's always

a bridge. I mean, we're rhetoricians, aren't we supposed to be able to talk about form and content? Well, how can you teach students the right form for the message if they don't have substantial experiences with a lot of the forms? You know, I mean it's actually a kind of exigency.

**Cristyn L. Elder (CE):** So, could you talk a little bit about what difficulties the caucus has faced, and maybe how the leadership responded to those challenges?

**MP:** There were a couple of incidents that happened where the Caucus had to respond, and one of them made a pretty big impact, actually. We were invited to an event where all the caucuses were invited to come and sort of, like have five minutes to say something about the CCCC and their relationship to it, in a kind of collaborative way, and we were invited to it and we agreed to participate even though the folks that invited us had had some negative interactions with members of the caucus previously. So, this will be a part that will have to be edited, like, completely. So, we'd been invited to this kind of like collaborative event on Wednesday night. There was going to be free food, the event was clearly designed to get as many people there as possible. Lots of folks were invited to present. And, like I said, you know, five minutes on little panels of like three with breaks in between for people to eat, and it all seemed like a fairly good idea. We were nervous because, like I said, the invitees were people that had had some negative interactions with people in the Caucus, but we were like, okay, whatever, that's a personality problem, this is something else. So we went, and there was an incident that included a Cleveland Indians ball-cap and a Washington Redskins t-shirt—I won't go into details about it to protect the so-called innocent. But this was upsetting, as you might imagine. Infuriating is really the correct thing to call it. So several of us from the Caucus are sitting at the same table, and we hadn't actually had our time to speak yet, and so we decided when the person got up to speak for our caucus they would say something about this. And notice how careful I am not to identify anyone. And so, when our representative got up to speak they said, you know, this is an example of the ways in which Native people are disrespected at the convention. You know, here we are at a place that's supposed to be a gathering, a collaborative space, and what we have instead is someone wearing something that's deeply offensive to us. So, it caused quite a ruckus. You know, the person wearing the items claimed to not know they were offensive,

and other people who had organized the event explained that this wasn't the point of the event and we were using this as a way to push our own agenda. And so, we left the event and haven't participated in any subsequent of those gatherings. And I would say that it's, you know, there's still a bad taste in our mouths about the incident at that sort of collaborative gathering, and you just can't find a member of the Caucus willing to go to any of those events. And I think that's a shame on the one hand. On the other hand, I'm not going, you know?

**CE:** So what goals has the Caucus reached that you believe are important? What are you most proud of?

**MP:** I think the thing I'm most proud of with the Caucus is that we exist and that we've managed to maintain a level of support for scholars entering the field who want to do work on Indians that wasn't there when I was entering the field. There's a place to go, there are people to ask, there's a body of work that we've published. I mean you still do a search and it doesn't look like there's very much, but there's about a hundred times more out there now than there was before. We're included in all the sort of big calls for everyone to contribute. We're seen as one of the special interest groups. Some people would say that that isn't an achievement, but for me it is an achievement that Native people have a place and always have a face. Joyce [Rain Anderson] and Resa [Crane Bizzaro] have been extraordinarily persistent with going to every committee on convention concerns and asking questions about the representation of Native scholarship on the program. They've been incredibly good at being supportive in a kind of hands-on way when people are trying to put proposals together, you know, trying to put panels together, at giving feedback to people who've never written a proposal, at helping folks get panels together for the convention, providing people with all kinds of information. I mean the Caucus list isn't hugely active, but you can write and say, "I need a book that does this" and people will talk to you about it. So, to have that level of support professionally, for me, is a real achievement. It wasn't there. There was no one to give me those answers, and so to be able to provide them is huge. It's a thing. We created a field. And that, to me, is a big deal.

**CE:** Can you talk a little bit about the other ways that being a Caucus member has enriched your life?

**MP:** I think that being a Caucus member has been good for me professionally, because it's given me an audience in my mind now that isn't a kind of random, put-together, all-the-people-that-might-

like-me audience. It's a real audience of people I want to speak to who have knowledge about what I do and who hold me to a level of accountability that might not have been there otherwise, and that's made my work better. It's made me able to think of my work theoretically in a much richer way. These are also my friends. These are people that I've known for a long time, whose lives have enriched mine. So you know, when Joyce got involved with a Wampanoag language program or when Resa had a baby, we talked about it and we talk all the time about our aches and pains as well. Just that, having that group of sort of friends in your field is really unusual and a luxury and I totally treasure it. The degree to which, in the last five years, young women who want to do Native studies and Latino studies who come to the Caucus and I have gotten to know. I don't actually have real words to describe how that feels—to watch them turn to me, to Joyce, to Resa as mentors, as people who have value and worth in their lives, not just in terms of “I read your scholarship” but “how do you do this, how do I go up for tenure, what should my tenure narrative look like?” all those everyday academic life questions. Like, the whole spectrum of interactions you can have with someone, from being a close, close friend to being someone you mentor and get to know over a period of years, has been a gift, a huge gift. I teach in the summer, it's usually a Native rhetorics class, and I've had students come to know me from the Caucus and then come to the class from Texas, from California. It's a gift; it's just a huge gift. I look around at my colleagues and I can't say that everyone gets that. And, I think the Caucus fosters it.

**CE:** What do you think should be the Caucus's future goals? Where do you think it's headed?

**MP:** I think that's a good question. I actually think the question of where we're going and what our goals should be has been at the forefront of my mind. It's something that Joyce and Resa and I have talked about. Joyce and Resa and I are still listed as the co-chairs of the Caucus. We've been co-chairs of the Caucus for a decade, at least. Partly because we were the ones who had jobs and could do it, partly because, you know, it's easier to do it if we all do it together. I don't know that our caucus will ever have a single chair. I don't know that we're arranged that way, but we've talked a lot about the fact that there's a critical mass of next-generation folks moving up, and I think it's time to hand the job of the Caucus to them, and to kind of step back and watch it evolve. I think we have to do that for the Caucus

to grow. I think that that there's been a lot of talk about publication projects. Angela Haas and I are working on a publication project on Native rhetorics now that was sort of fomented in the caucus. We've been good about getting on the program at the CCCC and doing a kind of the status of the Native rhetorics kind of thing. And I think that the Caucus can serve as a gathering place for folks who want to push the edges a little more. I'm hyper aware that me being elected to the position of program chair, then associate chair of the CCCC is a big deal for the Caucus. It's a huge sort of moment for us. And I, in the days that I can't stand to think of myself as a big target, I think that I'm not there really for me, I'm there because this pushes our scholarship to the fore and our ways of thinking about scholarship to the fore, and that that's a moment we have to really take advantage of in order to move the field forward. But again, I always think that the best thing an organization can do is train a pipeline of leaders. Members of our caucus tend to be leaders in the organization. I think that's true of all of the caucuses as well.

**CE:** How do you see the Caucus fitting into the larger parent group of CCCC or NCTE?

**MP:** I think the caucuses are important. Before I saw the inner workings of how those organizations work, I felt the caucuses were important because we were a constant voice in the ear of the organization to make sure, to pay attention to diversity. The caucuses have been hugely supportive of Scholars for the Dream, and are the people that show up at the Scholars for the Dream reception and showed up to be members of the Scholars for the Dream network when it was active. And so, I think that we've helped diversify the organization, even when it wanted to diversify and didn't know how. And I think, from an inside point of view, it's clear to me that the organization, people in the organization, want to change and move forward. They don't always know how to do that. And I think that the caucuses bring in a lot of imaginative and innovative thinking that the organization can take advantage of. Again, I see caucus members, not just Native Caucus members, but all the caucus members, the Queer Caucus, you know, the Committee on the Status of Women, the Labor Caucus, all the ethnic caucuses, I see them. Those are the people that I see at the executive committee meeting. They're the people on the ballots. They're the people saying yes to that invitation to be considered for leadership. I see them as real leadership pipelines for the organization. It's clear to me, as someone who's an officer of



the organization, that building future leaders is one of the best uses of the caucuses. True, there's a sort of private use of the caucuses that's for building scholarly support, but there's an organizational function there. They're pipelines for leadership. That's the way you find out who's willing to stand up and do the work, and who's willing to take the chances. So from that point of view, I know now that there's no secret person resisting at Urbana, but there are feelings about the people in Urbana that come out of the caucuses that sort of pretend that there's a secret resisting person. All of my interactions with of the folks who run the NCTE and the CCCC on a daily basis have been nothing but helpful. I use an example of the cover of the program for the convention in Atlanta. You know, I met with Tom, the dude who does the cover, and we talked a lot about what I wanted and I said, "I'm going to send you some images and some other stuff." And so, you know we're back-and-forth online, so he writes to me and he says, "Can you get, you know the CCCC, the Conference on College Composition and Communication, or just the CCCC and the date and place of the convention in Cherokee? Can someone translate that into the syllabary and can you send that to me?" And I'm like, "Yeah." And it's really exciting. And I'm thinking even at the level of design, right, there's people who are excited about the opportunities of trying things that are challenging to them. All of my interactions with the convention managers have been the same way. They're like, "What do you want? We'll make it happen." My interactions with Kent had been amazing. I think Kent's very forward thinking, and frequently gets written off as the white guy in the way of progress. And I mean, Kent tries to herd the cats that are the various elected members of the NCTE and CCCC and I don't envy that position. But you know, he and I had a really honest talk when I was having a hard time with the call and he said, "I think that you just have to do what you can to move the organization forward, that it's really important that you do that." So, I don't feel like there's some invisible hand anymore. The invisible hand is the body of CCCC members; it's not in Urbana. It's the body of C's members. So, I think that makes the caucuses even more important.

**CE:** The next two questions are related and they actually arise from a personal interest of mine. Earlier you were questioning whether undergraduate and graduate students have a voice and a place at C's. My colleague Megan Schoen and I are two of the co-founders of WPA-GO, the graduate student organization for CWPA [Council



of Writing Program Administrators]. We've been thinking about starting either a sig or a caucus at C's, so my question for you is, first of all, how do you know when you need a caucus? And second, what advice would you give for people who want to establish a caucus?

**MP:** I think you know when you need a caucus, when you feel like there's a gap: that there's a space that could be there that isn't there. And SIGs sometimes serve a temporary function, right? A group of people think that there's an issue that they want to work on, and so they can propose a SIG for three or four years. They get the work done, they're kind of not interested in keeping it up, and they go away. Sometimes special interest groups form because there's a real hole in the fabric of the membership, and some folks want to try and find a space to gather in order to provide support for people who are, you know, in that gap. I think that the fact that we do not have a committee on grad student concerns is reprehensible. We always point the MLA out as the evil, awful empire, right? The MLA has a committee on grad student concerns. It's an executive level committee. They meet twice a year in New York City to discuss issues of importance to grad students in literary studies. More than literature studies, rhet. comp. studies depends on its grad students, not just as the future of its disciplinarity but as a labor force, right? That we don't have a committee for grad student concerns is ridiculous. And there's all sorts of ways I can analyze this and I probably won't on the record. But, part of my mission when I become chair is to make that space. So this year, on Saturday afternoon, one of the Saturday events is a grad student forum that I'm holding at a time when there are no other sessions, specifically to have a conversation with graduate students about what they want. Do they want an appointed committee on the status of graduate students? Do they want to organize themselves into a caucus? Do they want both? In my experience, the best way to do something that's helpful for graduate students is to ask them what would be useful and give them the opportunity to build those structures themselves. I know it seems radical and crazy! But I mean, for me, this is a hole. There are gaps in the way that we approach graduate education, there is a paucity of scholarship on pedagogy in graduate classrooms. And I don't think that people will pay attention until there's a substantial force or reason to pay attention. I can easily envision a grad student caucus meeting on Saturday afternoon and having hundreds of people show up on a regular basis. You know, in my opinion, grad students do the most

interesting work in the field. They have the opportunity to do some of the most interesting teaching work in the field. And for them to not have a space is ridiculous. It's just silly. It's totally silly. I love this discipline in all of its quirkiness, including its incredible blind spots.

### **About the Interviewers**

Cristyn L. Elder is a doctoral candidate in the Rhetoric and Composition Program at Purdue University. Her specializations and research interests include writing program administration, writing center theory and practice, and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). Cristyn currently serves as the Workshop/WAC Coordinator for the Purdue Writing Lab and teaches a service-learning-based first year composition course. Cristyn is also a co-founder of WPA-GO, the Writing Program Administration Graduate Student Organization and a co-founder of *Present Tense: A Journal of Rhetoric in Society*.

Alexandra Hidalgo is a Ph.D. student in Rhetoric and Composition at Purdue University, specializing in documentary filmmaking, film, public rhetorics, women's studies and race. She teaches film and English composition. Hidalgo's scholarly work has appeared in *Open Words: Access and English Studies* and *Films for the Feminist Classroom*. She is a founding editor of *Present Tense: A Journal of Rhetoric in Society* and the editor-in-chief of *agnès films*, an online community of female filmmakers that seeks to bridge the gap between filmmakers and academics. Hidalgo's documentaries often deal with women's issues, including breast implants and female immigrant experiences in New York City.

Laurie A. Pinkert is a Purdue University doctoral student in rhetoric and composition with specializations in writing program administration and professional writing. At Purdue, she has worked as the Assistant Director of Introductory Composition, the Writing Lab's Business Writing Coordinator, and the Writing Across the Curriculum Coordinator for Animal Sciences. Laurie's research engages the intersections of composition theory and pedagogy, writing in the disciplines, and community engagement. Her current engagement projects include partnerships with St. Elizabeth's School of Nursing, the Oncological Sciences Center at Discovery Park, and the City of West Lafayette.

## “Work to be done”

Native Americans and Visibility in English Studies

A Discussion With Joyce Rain Anderson, Bridgewater State University

*Resa Crane Bizzaro*

### Introduction

Joyce Rain Anderson is a faculty member at Bridgewater State University in Massachusetts, near her Wampanoag ancestral grounds. For more than twenty years, she has been an educator and activist in indigenous issues. Anderson has been a member of NCTE and CCCC for a number of years, winning a CCCC Scholars for the Dream Travel Award in 1996. This interview was conducted via email in the fall of 2010.

### Interview

**Resa Crane Bizzaro (RCB):** When did you first attend NCTE or CCCC meetings? Were there Native American groups at the conferences?

**Joyce Rain Anderson (JRA):** I had been a member of NCTE for a while, but I first attended CCCC in 1995 in Washington, DC. I went just to see what the conference was like. The next year (1996), I submitted a proposal and attended as a Scholar for the Dream. At the time, there were no Native American groups at CCCC that I was aware of, but Joy Harjo was a speaker at the conference.

**RCB:** I know you were one of the founding members of the Native American Caucus. Can you tell me how that organization came about?

**JRA:** At the CCCC in 1997, a small group of American Indian scholars and non-Indians working on scholarship in American Indian studies were called together in an ad hoc fashion by Malea Powell<sup>1</sup> and Scott Lyons<sup>2</sup> to discuss forming a caucus. We all thought a Native American Caucus would be a good place for us to bring more visibility for Native American scholarship in composition and rhetoric. The founding members saw pressing needs to make American Indian scholars more visible at the annual conference, to advance the scholarship within the larger field of composition/rhetoric, and to gather with other Indian peoples for support.

This last thing is especially important because—as Heather Bruce

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1 Currently at Michigan State University.

2 Currently at Syracuse University.

notes—“the university can be an alien place for many Indians” (12). American Indian scholars often feel isolated within their individual institutions. Ginny Carney, a Cherokee scholar, gives this idea more clarity, saying that, “Native students and teachers continue to be muted in the academy... The ways we as Indian scholars are often forced to deal with cultural insults, identity questions... [and other issues] would be cause for legal action if directed at other people of color.”

The Caucus began by having email discussions and submitting a proposal to meet. We decided on calling ourselves the Caucus for Native American Scholars and Scholarship to be inclusive. We also wanted to promote positive and accurate representations of American Indian educators and students, and we hoped that developing a formal caucus would help us to do that.

Before our group was established, some of our founding members had been meeting with other caucuses at CCCC, such as the Black Caucus and the Latino/a Caucus, in order to have some kind of space to be heard; these affiliations are still strong. Yet, as more Indian scholars started coming to CCCC, a need arose to have our own space.

**RCB:** Who were the biggest supporters/helpers in establishing the Caucus?

**JRA:** Over the years, we’ve had stops and starts in getting to be recognized as a caucus, but—then—the recognition issue is not a new concept for Indian peoples. For the first couple of years, we needed to submit a proposal which included justifying our organization’s inclusion in the program every year.

For our membership, Malea Powell and I kept the proposal going each year until we were finally “recognized” and established as an annual caucus at CCCC in 2002. Scott Lyons and Janice Gould, another Caucus member, also contributed. The Latino/a Caucus also gave us strong support and advice (Malea was a member), and the Black Caucus was supportive. From an administrative point, much of the credit for keeping us going should go to Sandra Gibbs<sup>3</sup>, who helped us with getting space to meet, making sure we were represented, helping to keep track of members, and giving us visibility.

We formalized some aspects of the group, including creating a mission statement. It took most of a year of emailing to find language

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3 Gibbs was employed by NCTE for a number of years and assisted in organizing annual caucus meetings.

that we agreed opened our caucus to important issues for Indian peoples. Our mission statement says:

The American Indian Caucus supports the teaching and research of indigenous literature, rhetoric, and literacy, with a specific interest in promoting Native sovereignty, indigenous intellectual traditions, and positive and truthful public representations of Native peoples.

**RCB:** What were the biggest obstacles in establishing the Caucus?

**JRA:** There weren't obstacles as much as there were issues with trying to become part of the "established" groups. As I mentioned earlier, we had to submit a proposal to meet every year for the few years until we were "recognized." Membership was spotty in the first few years, too, because sometimes people couldn't afford to attend the conference every year. This problem is pretty consistent from year to year even now and particularly because of the current economy. So we've always had a fluid group.

**RCB:** Over the years, what difficulties has the Caucus faced? How did the leadership of the caucus respond to these challenges?

**JRA:** Getting established as an "official" caucus was the biggest challenge. Membership has been up and down, as I just said. Some meetings were attended by only six or so folks due to funding and travel expense issues. One of our decisions as a caucus was to base our dues on financial ability to contribute, rather than having a set amount. So—unlike other caucuses—we have few funds to work with.

Another challenge we faced was establishing caucus procedures. At one point, we attempted to have election of officers because we thought we should rotate those responsibilities. But the volunteers were all non-indigenous peoples. We feel that it's important to have Native presence in the leadership roles. Too often, Native American groups have formed in other organizations which then become led by non-Natives who make decisions for the Native peoples. Given the long history of these associations, we decided to keep at least one leadership position for a Native person. As a group, we thought we wanted to better maintain an indigenous vision, so we decided to keep the officers consistent. In that way, we felt that Native peoples could control the Caucus and its mission. With the constant presence of Malea, you, and I, we know at least one of us will be present for the annual meeting.

More recently, there have been others who have helped improve

internal communication. Jim Ottery kept a webpage for us for a few years; Steve Brandon took on the listserv; and Angela Haas and Qwo-Li Driskill started our blog. So we've really relied on allies, those who speak and work with us. And we have been grateful for the support of our allies and members.

Each year, CCCC is a different place to be. Sometimes we feel invited, and sometimes we feel silenced and obscured. Some past chairs have worked with us, asking for our input on speakers and sessions, and others have not done so.

One constant issue has been with the scheduling of panels. The few panels on indigenous scholarship seem always to be scheduled against each other. Two years in a row, the Native person selected as a Scholar for the Dream has been scheduled on the last day of the conference in the last sessions. These choices make us feel pushed to the edges—invisible.

However, we voice these problems at the Convention Concerns meeting and find our allies among the folks running the show. We work to remind those in power that they are here on the blood and bones of Indian peoples and that Indian peoples remain. We may not get all we want, but we still speak and tell our stories. And—while there is “work to be done,”<sup>4</sup> we can hold each other up while we keep at it.

**RCB:** So how do you see the Native American Caucus fitting into the larger “parent” groups of NCTE and CCCC?

**JRA:** While the caucuses are given space by NCTE/CCCC on the program and a room to meet in each year, they are not truly an official group within the NCTE structure. Unlike some special interest groups and other kinds of affiliates, caucuses are not provided with any amenities from NCTE/CCCC. Caucuses exist solely on their own, and each caucus structure is a little different from the rest. Caucuses by definition are meant to be the gadfly; they are there to watch and guide the organization. When something is not being addressed or is wrong, they are to “pester” and “bite” to make change.

As Caucus co-chair, I attended a three-day meeting in 2007 to discuss incorporating the caucuses into NCTE/CCCC. So NCTE/CCCC invited the caucuses to a two-day meeting in Alexandria, VA, to discuss adding us more formally into the organizational structure. The two days were very intense. While the administrators felt strongly about having a more formal relationship with the caucuses, most of

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4 See Driskill.

us were resistant to being absorbed into the structure—as it would defeat our purpose to act as groups which stir things up.

The meetings were very difficult, but we gained strength for one another. In the end, caucuses refused to accept the potential roles offered by NCTE and CCCC because we believed we were better able to achieve our missions and serve our membership if we remained more autonomous.

In some ways, the organizers were disappointed, but there were many points which they listened to. Also, we were able to demonstrate how much NCTE/CCCC must do in terms of how they treat people of color within the organizations themselves. As a result, there were a series of cross-caucus panels on racism at the 2009 CCCC in San Francisco. This collaboration, we hope, is the beginning of more such cross-caucus presentations.

Another problem for us is that all SIGs/caucuses have the same assigned meeting time at CCCC, so we are not able to attend more than one group's function. Those of us with multiple identities or who believe in ally-building and peace-building coalitions are either trying to decide upon which identity is most important on Friday night at CCCC or which identity we should choose over another. We raised this issue at the Convention Concerns meeting in 2008, asking to have a cross-caucus meeting following the scheduled business meetings each year, but that opportunity was not offered until 2010, when Gwendolyn Pough organized a reception after the meetings. We need to continue seeking opportunities for cross-caucus interactions, so everyone feels welcomed and important in the larger organization.

**RCB:** What goals have the Caucus reached that you believe are important? Which things are you most proud of being associated with?

**JRA:** Establishing the Tribal Scholarship Fellowship Awards is the biggest contribution we have made thus far. To give you some history, in 2001 Mia Kalish started the Caucus discussion of how to achieve greater representation from tribal college faculty at CCCC. Scott Lyons took on a leadership role in pushing CCCC to grant travel scholarships for those teaching in tribal colleges. Scott drafted a proposal, and the Caucus members helped revise it.

At that year's conference, we gained the support of other caucuses—especially the Black and Latino/a groups—and the Progressive Caucus sponsored a button campaign in support. Scott

was on the Executive Committee at the time (in 2003), and we brought the proposal to CCCC and had little opposition. We've sponsored about ten tribal college faculty and Caucus members have chaired the Selection Committee every year.

In addition, the Caucus has increased its membership over the last three to four years; we're happy to see more native scholars joining us and the profession at large.

Other positive things that have happened include being recognized and established as a caucus; being consulted about speakers and convention concerns; and being asked about the broader aspects of CCCC. There are still places where we believe we need to bring attention to issues that affect indigenous peoples in NCTE, CCCC, and English studies, in general. So our work needs to go on. Mostly, it's good to have a space for us to talk about our scholarships and how we are treated by the larger organizations—how we can become more visible. Having Malea Powell serve as this coming year's CCCC Chair is a wonderful opportunity for us in that regard.

**RCB:** What do you think the Caucus should do in the future?

**JRA:** I really believe we need to mentor our “young” scholars in more formal ways, so we can support ongoing work in our disciplines. We need to establish and have stronger participation with our newsletter and blog. I'd like to see better connections to other organizational groups. Although we have discussed the issue of Native American mascots, we have not yet developed a statement about it. Maybe this year will be the time for that task.

I'd also like to see support for book-length publications from indigenous scholars. Right now, Rose Gubele, Lisa King, and I are editing a collection on teaching indigenous rhetorics. This book will be based—in part—on work used in our CCCC workshops. Angela Haas and Malea Powell are editing another similar collection of essays.

Finally, I'd like to see some of our members get into NCTE and CCCC leadership roles; that is, I'd like to see people on the CCCC Executive Committee, Nominating Committee, and others. We need more cross-caucus work, as well.

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### **About the Interviewer**

Resa Crane Bizzaro, of Cherokee and Meherrin descent, lives in western Pennsylvania with her husband, Patrick, and son, Antonio, and teaches at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Resa is co-chair of the Conference on College Composition and Communication's American Indian Caucus. She is also a co-founder of Blankets for the Elders, a non-profit organization that provides blankets and warm clothing to indigenous peoples living on reservations in the U.S

# Asian/Asian-American Caucus

## A Career of Acting “Ill-Mannered”

Jeffery Paul Chan on Reviewing Textbooks for NCTE and Teaching Ethnic Studies (Because it is Good for People)  
*Jolivette Mecnas*

### Introduction

So two Asian American writers go to Urbana, Illinois...

In June of 1971, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) invited to Urbana a select group of specialists on Chicano, African American, American Indian, and Asian American literature to review college textbooks used in American literature courses. During a week of working sessions, the Textbook Review Committee—a sub-group of the NCTE Task Force on Racism and Bias in the Teaching of English—evaluated a dozen or so of the most common literature anthologies. They worked under newly developed guidelines for combating racism in the teaching of English and literature, toward the objective that “the truth and reality of our nation’s history and literature be embodied in its texts and other teaching materials, and that includes the fact of the racial and ethnic diversity of its peoples” (Kelley).

For Jeffery Chan, a lecturer for the English department and for a newly conceived Asian American Studies Program at San Francisco State University (then College), the experience confirmed what he already knew about Asian American representation in American literature: there wasn’t any. Chan evaluated anthologies with his colleague, Frank Chin, who was also on hand to lend editorial expertise on Asian American literature. By the end of the week, they produced what Chan describes as a “fairly massive screed on the whole idea of any kind of representation of Asian American literature” (personal interview). Although the Executive Committee expected review essays from all contributors, they were unprepared for the two Asian Americans’ treatise on the oppressive function of stereotypes in literature. The textbooks illustrated what they saw as two models of racial stereotypes: those that are “unacceptable” and those that are “acceptable” to white dominant culture—or “racist hate and racist love” (Chin and Chan 65). Jeffery Chan and Frank Chin’s controversial essay, “Racist Love”—which has initiated a decades-long conversation on Asian American identity (and in particular, on Asian masculinity) in literature—was a direct product of this weeklong meeting of the Textbook Review Committee. Yet the essay would never appear under any auspices of the NCTE.

On a typical blustery day in San Francisco, during the spring of 2010, I interviewed Jeffery Chan about his contribution to the NCTE Textbook Review Committee. In the process, Chan disclosed what happened that week in Urbana, almost forty years ago, and how it resulted in an essay that he attributes mostly to Frank Chin.

“If you’ve ever read Frank you know that it’s very difficult to get a word in edge-wise.” He pauses. “But we did turn it in as a team because we thought it would be stronger.” And he laughs.

During our interview, Jeff’s laughter and mischief take me back to a creative writing class I took with him almost a decade before, when I was a graduate student at San Francisco State. He taught creative writing in the Asian American Studies Program, from which he is now retired as Emeritus Professor. Like many others before me, I was drawn to study with a writer long recognized for his contributions to Asian American literature. First of all, he was one of the editors of *Aiiiiiiii!* and *The Big Aiiiiiiii!*—two early anthologies that introduced readers to the writings of Joy Kogawa, John Okada, Carlos Bulosan, Marlon Hom, Milton Muriyama, and many others. I remember reading Frank Chin’s contribution, an indictment of popular female Asian American novelists, specifically Maxine Hong Kingston. As an undergraduate, I did not like Chin. By extension, I was skeptical of Jeff Chan and the rest of this seemingly “boy’s club” of Asian American writers. And I was extremely skeptical of the narrow parameters of a “real” Asian American identity and a “real” Asian American literature offered by Chin, Chan, et al. in these early anthologies.

Yet despite my skepticism, I enrolled in Jeff Chan’s Creative Writing/Asian American Studies course during the spring of 2001. I think it was the first creative writing workshop in which I did not feel markedly “other.” We had to explain our editorial decisions, sure, but we never had to explain who we were, or what we represented. We were writers sorting out our own questions, consciously or unconsciously, of what Asian and/or Asian American-inflected prose or poetry might be. I appreciated that space.

A couple of years later, as a doctoral student in my first semester at the University of Hawai’i, I was pleasantly surprised to learn that Chan had been invited by the English Department to read from his recently published book, *Eat Everything Before You Die* (2004). Narrated by the middle-aged Christopher Columbus Wong, the story is a non-linear gallop through the life of a “Chinaman in the counterculture,” with international Chinatowns as the backdrop, and the slurping of *mein* as the soundtrack. When we first meet Chris Wong at the beginning of the novel, he confides:

I know my history matters not a whit to those who came before;

I'm speaking to the anonymous generations who left us orphans in a Chinatown diaspora, to invent ourselves as we might. The dead are dead. But there is that gnawing desire, always, to link ourselves to some past.

Chris Wong offers his experience of diaspora as an ever-present yearning to be anchored in history, and in absence of that, to invent one's own self anew. These are themes salient in the fiction and poetry of Asian Americans born before the Chinese Exclusion Act was repealed in 1943, and before the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 relaxed immigration<sup>5</sup>. In Chan's novel, as in his earlier short stories, generations of paper fathers and sons seem orphaned into chaos, a spectral China forever shadowing their lives in the United States. Throughout his career, Chan has maintained his position that stories written by Asian Americans about Chinese and other Asian diasporas in North America have an important place in the teaching of college writing and American literature.

*"Racist Love": A critique, and its rejection*

Jeff Chan laughs as he recounts his improbable invitation to weigh in on the inclusion of literature by U.S. minorities in college textbooks for the National Council of Teachers of English—what must have seemed the paradigm of academic establishment to him at the time. Only a couple years before, he had participated in the famous 1968-1969 Student Strike of San Francisco State as supportive faculty. The five-month strike was led by minority and "third world" students on campus, who protested the lack of minority representation and access at the university, and in higher education overall. As a result, San Francisco State established the nation's first and only College of Ethnic Studies. Shortly thereafter, Chan was tapped to develop and chair the Asian American Studies Program within the new College, which would also include programs in Africana, American Indian, and Raza (Latino) studies.

At the same time, Chan was also teaching for the English Department at State, and he credits the department chair, Carolyn Schrodes, for encouraging him to develop Asian American literature courses. She also urged him to participate in the Textbook Review Committee. He recalls his conversation with Schrodes upon his return to State from NCTE headquarters in Urbana, Illinois:

When I came back from [Urbana], I went to Dr. Schrodes' office and said "I think I blew it for you."

"No, this is what you were supposed to do!" she said. "We were

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5 Chan was born in Stockton, CA. in 1942 (Chin et al. 11).

hoping you would do this! Everybody was hoping you would cause a ruckus. We want this [lack of minority literatures] spoken of.”

Jeff Chan must have been aware of his colleagues’ support, because he and Chin did exactly what his chair expected of him: caused a ruckus.

“So we decided that we would go with the general attack—attack is probably the word—the general attack that we initiated here at San Francisco State condemning all of the entire American literary canon and all of the organizations, not just NCTE, but MLA, for ‘gross negligence of’ dot, dot, dot.” Chan recounts how the other members of the Textbook Review Committee understood that they were challenging academia’s approach to ethnic literature. But they were caught in the awkward situation of criticizing the very professional organization that was hosting them as guests.

“We were being poor guests.” Chan wags his finger in mock admonition and laughs again: “. . .of course, that was our whole point, I think. It was going to be bad mannered, ill-mannered.”

By “ill-mannered,” Chan is referring to their essay, which begins: “White racism enforces white supremacy. White supremacy is a system of order and a way of perceiving reality. Its purpose is to keep whites on top and set them free. Colored minorities in white reality are stereotypes” (Chin and Chan 65). “Racist Love” proposes that stereotypes of Asian Americans have led to their self-contempt, and to their “neutralization” as a “social, creative, and cultural force” in American literature (67). Furthermore, Chin and Chan posit, white supremacy denies Chinese Americans a “whole identity,” including the development of “Chinese American English” and a “recognized style of Chinese American manhood” (76). This last point illustrates the equation of an “Asian American sensibility” to one that is explicitly male and heterosexual, highlighting one of the major critiques in “Racist Love,” which is that male Asian American writers who exemplify this gender performance—this “sensibility”—do not get published, and therefore they are excluded from “the mainstream of American consciousness” (77). Secondly, the authors assert that female Asian American writers who are promoted by white publishers are complicit with white culture in subjugating Asian American men. In the essay, Chin and Chan posit that because they are more present in the mainstream American consciousness through literature, these female Asian American writers “feminize” Asian Americans. “Racist Love” also critiques white publishers for confusing Asian writers with Asian American writers, when in their view, only those born in the U.S. can convey a true Asian American sensibility (77).

At the end of the essay, the authors return to the notion of Chinese

American English, which is an early argument calling for mainstream publishers to acknowledge language variety in minority literature as a function of self-determination. Chin and Chan conclude with an excerpt from a letter that Jeff Chan received from an editorial representative at Houghton Mifflin, requesting that the title of his contribution to the first anthology of Asian American literature be revised<sup>6</sup>. The title of the story is “Auntie Tsia Lays Dying,” and the editor requests to change “Lays” to “Lies” in order to reflect word usage in Standard American English. “Racist Love” ends with a scathing, personal attack on the editor, who is identified by name in the original manuscript. In the later version published in the anthology *Seeing Through the Shuck*, the editor’s name is withheld, but she is denounced as a “Great white bitch goddess priestess of the sacred white mouth [...]” (79). They direct their fury toward the editor for her correction of Chan’s English. The conclusion of “Racist Love” is a militant re-appropriation of “proper” English, a no-holds-barred struggle for editorial authority. What fuels this anger is their experience that Asian Americans can be writers, university professors, and consultants for NCTE, but still have their English corrected, and their authorial voice questioned. The vernacular of Chinese American English, they argue, must be voiced as representative of “real” Chinese American literature; the policing of their language for proper grammatical usage is akin to the subjugation and erasure of a Chinese American voice. Unfortunately, while indicting the oppressive force of “state language” on Asian Americans, Chin and Chan replicate the same oppressive, patriarchal methods by mocking the Houghton Mifflin editor’s power and denigrating her as a “bitch.” Chin and Chan’s failure to recognize these parallels between racist and sexist methods of oppression in “Racist Love” and in their other collaborations would become the focus of criticism by later Asian American literary scholars, such as David Eng.

Meanwhile, an exchange of letters from that summer between Robert F. Hogan, NCTE Executive Secretary, and the NCTE counsel, Philip C. Zimmerly, and between Frank Chin and Jeffery Chan and Hogan, reveal further details of the essay’s earliest reception: it was rejected explicitly for the legal protection of NCTE. In a letter dated July 14, 1971, Hogan writes to Zimmerly about the Textbook Review Committee meeting: “Two of the participants were representing Asian-Americans. During their time here they drafted an ‘Asian-American’ position paper. They left behind a copy” (Hogan). Hogan admits that he is troubled by the essay, and is also concerned that publishing the essay, with its attack on the Houghton Mifflin

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6 Hsu, Kai-yu and Helen Palubinskas, (Eds.). *Asian-American Authors*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1972.

editor, would leave NCTE legally “vulnerable.” The attorney responds with his advice to Hogan about publishing “Racist Love”: “[S]tick to your guns and refuse to print” the essay, Zimmerman counsels Hogan (Zimmerly).

Hogan had also communicated his concerns about the essay to Frank Chin and Jeffery Chan. Their response, written by Frank Chin, is inflexible on the matter and retains a similar mocking tone. In a letter dated July 9, 1971, and signed by both Frank Chin and Jeffery Chan, Chin dismisses Hogan’s concerns for the Houghton Mifflin editor. Chin references a “last satirical tag” he uses in the essay, and suggests to Hogan: “[I]f you’re real uptight about it...that tag, you can substitute the word ‘bleep’ for those words you feel are too charged and offensive” (Chin and Chan). One can only speculate as to which derisive words Chin is referring, and what was meant to be satire when “Racist Love” seems to end with sincere rage.

### *The critical legacy of “Racist Love” continues to be debated*

In my interview with Chan, he recounts how the essay was soon published in an anthology edited by Ishmael Reed, titled *19 Necromancers From Now*. Here he is mistaken, as Reed’s anthology was published in 1970 by Doubleday – before the Textbook Review Committee’s 1971 meeting in Urbana. Reed’s anthology does include an excerpt from Frank Chin’s novel, *A Chinese Lady Dies*, but it does not include “Racist Love.” Rather, this essay was published in another anthology, *Seeing Through the Shuck*, edited by Richard Kostelanetz. Soon after, in 1974, Jeffery Chan and Frank Chin, along with Lawson Fusao Inada and Shawn Wong, co-edited the anthology *Aiiiiiiii!*, which was published by Howard University. The fact that the press of an historically black university, rather than a mainstream commercial publisher or another university press, agreed to publish the anthology is important to note, as Chan points out in the interview. Chan recounts feeling like the *Aiiiiiiii!* editors were “welcomed with open arms” by Howard University, after the anthology was rejected by Doubleday books.

In 1991, Chin, Chan, Inada, and Wong published a second anthology, *The Big Aiiiiiiii!: An Anthology of Chinese American and Japanese American Literature*. By then, the second anthology is picked up by Plume, a division of Penguin that in its early years focused on publishing multicultural literature—works by authors previously unpublished by mainstream presses. Reading the introductory essays of both anthologies, it is clear that “Racist Love” was the seedbed for Jeffery Chan’s and Frank Chin’s later work, the testing out of their well-known arguments on Asian American identity and literature. Several scholars have since critiqued the narrow

definition of “Asian American” as proposed by the Aiiieeee! anthologies which represent only Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino Americans (by the second collection, Filipinos were dropped). Furthermore, their view of Asian Americans recognizes only those born and raised in the U.S. Because of steady immigration from Asian countries other than China, Japan, and the Philippines since 1965, scholars have since called for a more inclusive approach that acknowledges the transnational, migrant, and foreign-born as emerging Asian American identities (Huang 12).

The ideas outlined in “Racist Love” and in the Aiiieeee! anthologies have also been criticized as a masculinist approach to Asian American literature, one that fails to recognize the intersection of race and gender. David Eng, for instance, writes: “In their obsessive focus on—in their incredible anger over—the feminization, emasculation, and homosexualization of the Asian American male, the Aiiieeee! editors advance an untenable solution for the redress of these exclusions” (20). Eng finds that their strident proposals for what may constitute “authentic” Asian American literature (or manhood, or writers) do not question the racist and heterosexist structures that have historically rendered Asian American men as effete and culturally “other” in the first place. As a result, the cultural nationalism that we first see taking shape in “Racist Love,” and then see more fully outlined in the Aiiieeee! anthologies, replicates the same structures of oppression that Frank Chin and Jeffery Chan decry.

### *Conclusion*

We were challenging the whole determination of how academia was going to take on this idea of ethnic literature.

*Jeffery Chan*

In introducing the transcript of my interview with Jeffery Chan, I feel strongly about the need to orient readers to the time period during which the Textbook Review Committee met, and during which Chan and Chin initiated the ideas they set forth in their rejected position paper for NCTE. The Civil Rights movement created a momentum for minority groups to articulate their demands for reform, undoubtedly. But the student uprisings in cities worldwide in the years of 1968 and 1969 illustrated the energy of student activism at the time, fueled in part by anger, but also by tremendous optimism and vision. As I mention earlier, Jeffery Chan participated in the Student Strike at San Francisco State, which resulted in the formation of the College of Ethnic Studies. But the effects of the strike had other wide-reaching, long-term effects on higher education. In 2008, acknowledging the fortieth anniversary of the strike, the city of San Francisco proclaimed



that in 1968, San Francisco State students paved the way for “programs that today inspire hundreds and thousands of students across the world to unite in the struggle for social justice, liberation, and access to quality education that truly represents the vast experiences of all Americans regardless of their race, class, gender, religion, sexual orientation or physical ability” (Krasny). Programs such as Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) were created directly after the strike, in order to help first generation and/or low-income college students stay in school and reach their goals. Jeffery Chan stepped out of this environment of activism and tangible reform, into his role as a textbook reviewer for NCTE. And although he and Frank Chin had been given criteria for how to review the textbooks, they had some ideas of their own, and they were going to state them to the largest professional organization of K-12 and college educators in English and literature. As Chan explains, they sought to institutionalize “the charge that the American literary canon ignored American minorities in the extreme,” and from Chan and Chin’s perspective, Asian Americans were especially disregarded as significant contributors to American literature by textbook editors.

After the meeting of the Textbook Review Committee at NCTE headquarters in 1971, radical change did not happen amongst editors of college textbooks. Guiyou Huang, editor of *The Columbia Guide to Asian American Literature Since 1945*, points out that since the publication of the first edition of the Norton Anthology of American Literature in 1979 until the publication of the fifth edition in 1998,

[...] little changed in terms of coverage of Asian American authors, except for the addition of an excerpt from Kingston’s *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book*, even though by then Asian American studies had become an established discipline in many university campuses, and its literature had been taught at almost all universities and colleges in one form or another, whether in an entire course or as a selected text in a course (11).

NCTE rejected Jeffery Chan and Frank Chin’s position paper, through which they had attempted to institutionalize change, and that could have been the end of this story. In fact, the rejection is only the beginning of the early history of Asian American literature and studies. It is important to trace the influence of “Racist Love” in the early scholarship and activism of Asian American writers, in light of its critical reception over the years. Even Eng points out the value of how these early writers, scholars, and activists initiated the analyses of how U.S. racism is shaped by material conditions, such as immigration, through the experiences of Asian Americans. Their writings also explored the psychology of minority identities, and the

value of doing so through literature and literary analysis. These approaches are foundational to contemporary thought in ethnic studies, which as Chan points out in the interview, is once again under attack. Chan references recent moves by the Arizona state government, which in May of 2010, passed HB 2281, a bill that bans Arizona public schools from teaching ethnic studies, particularly Chicano studies<sup>7</sup>. Chan shakes his head in disbelief that, more than forty years after the Student Strike and the resulting establishment of the College of Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State University, “we’re in the middle of this debate again whether ethnic studies is good for people.”

Although his participation in the 1971 meeting of the Textbook Review Committee would be his first and only contribution to the Task Force on Racism and Bias in the Teaching of English, or to NCTE overall, Jeffery Paul Chan has widely influenced the teaching of Asian American literature and writing in the forty-five year span of his career. In this brief introductory essay to the interview, I have focused on only a specific episode of Chan’s significant career, and that is his weeklong consultation for NCTE. But as I hope to have made evident here, this brief episode has had tremendous impact on the study of Asian American literature and ethnic studies, and on the study of American literature overall, until today—as we continue to question the tenuous relationships between identity, citizenship, immigration, and public policy through the narratives that we write and teach.

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7 The bill states that schools that teach classes promoting resentment toward a race or class of people, that are designed primarily for students of a specific ethnicity, that advocate ethnic solidarity rather than individuality, and that promote the overthrow of the U.S. government—all of which fall under the purview of “ethnic studies,” according to the authors of the bill—fail to comply to HB 2281. Such schools could have as much as 10% of their state funds withheld monthly (Santa Cruz).

## Interview

**Jolivette Mecnas (JM):** This is the NCTE Writing and Working for Change project. Interview date May 24 2010 at San Francisco State University with Jeffery Paul Chan, Emeritus Faculty in the Asian American Studies Program. Can you please describe your past and present roles and titles as faculty at San Francisco State?

**Jeffery Chan (JC):** Yes, I was a graduate student at SF State in 1966-1967 and I was offered a job teaching English composition to help balance the lack of ethnic participation—ethnic representation at the university, and I was delighted, of course (laughs). I had a job.

The English Department and the university formed something called the Educational Opportunity Program and they decided to dedicate a number of sections in English, speech, philosophy, and mathematics for students coming in under the wire who were academically remiss in some fashion or other, didn't pass high enough on their English skills test. They put me on that staff I was made the coordinator of that. There were seven or eight of us at that time.

In 1968-69 there was a strike at San Francisco State, which I participated in, but the English Department supported my job teaching off campus and things like that. They appointed me part-time lecturer in the English Department, more out of spite than of anything else.

I taught part-time '67-'68 and in 1969 helped form the School of Ethnic Studies, and within that division formed the Asian American Studies Program. I was put in charge of more English and my responsibility was to develop a literature program, which I did as a part-time lecturer. Finally, I think in 1971, I was teaching full-time and they decided that they would try to normalize the School of Ethnic Studies with the participation of different colleges that already existed, so I was granted a joint appointment with the English Department and the newly formed School of Ethnic Studies.

I served as I taught composition. I helped to develop the Asian American Studies literature area. I served as chair of Asian American Studies Department from, jeez, I served twice as department chair, and I taught for the next forty years, both in the English Department but mainly in the Asian American studies area until I retired in 2005.

**JM:** Is there anyone at NCTE whom you consider a mentor or otherwise influential colleague? Or if not a member of NCTE anyone else you consider a mentor at this time?

**JC:** At the time the chair of the English Department, who was so supportive of affirmative action in the English Department and also sent me to NCTE for this conference, which turned into this committee. Her name was Carolyn Schrodos and I think she was very active in the National Council of Teachers of English. Actually this was my first and only experience at the NCTE and she was very encouraging. What can I say, she's the one who caused the university to form EOP [Educational Opportunity Program] sections in English, to remediate the freshmen comp classes. When I came to her with the idea that we were going to start a separate literature program, which of course would be competing with the English Department literature program, she was very supportive. So I consider her to be something of a mentor, for sure.

**JM:** And what dates was she chair of the English Department?

**JC:** She was chair while I was a grad student here. She was probably the chair from 1966 until the seventies for sure. You might want to check the [NCTE] membership lists.

**JM:** You mentioned that she asked you to go to a conference of NCTE. Do you remember when that happened?

**JC:** No. I believe that would be March or April. I think it was during spring break of 1970. I believe that's true, [but it] might have been the year before.

**JM:** In the document that I've given you there titled "Searching for America," which is dated Nov. 26 1970 and is published by the CCCC and NCTE, you're listed as a member of the Textbook Review Committee.

**JC:** Yes.

**JM:** And as an author of this document.

**JC:** Yes.

**JM:** Can you please describe the objective of this committee and why you joined it?

**JC:** [*Chuckles softly*] the objective of the committee was to review contemporary anthologies of the time that represented the American literary canon, what was being taught in the English departments, especially in sophomore literature classes—surveys. And we were formed to look at ethnic representation.

We were there to review literary anthologies that were used in freshman and sophomore comp classes and to determine whether in fact they represented fairly or they represented at all ethnic minorities' cultural contributions in literature. Our job was very

easy because there were no Asians in the uh... Frank [Chin] and I [determined] there were no Asians in any of the texts. The African American contingent... the Harlem Renaissance was represented, a bit of James Baldwin. The Latins, Latino, La Raza group - they were highly critical of the text. There was an American Indian representative. I can't remember who that was now but I think there was the "Constitution of the Iroquois" or something like that [in the anthology].

But we had a week to look through the texts and to simply to write [that] nothing represents Asian American experience, not even the Asian experience. Sometimes they'll throw in something. But there wasn't anything in any of the texts. So we sat back and listened to what everyone had to say from their perspectives. And began trying to figure out what our contribution was going to be other than just a negative one. We had to say something. So. We knew we had to come up with some sort of position paper at the end of the week, so Frank was on that like a flash [*laughs*]. He saw the chance to crank out fifty pages *quick* [*laughs*].

**JM:** So it was weeklong conference?

**JC:** It was a weeklong conference. We met every day [for] working sessions; we were fed very well. Southern Illinois is the South—I've never eaten a hush puppy before [*laughs*].

**JM:** What difficulties did you encounter in achieving the goals and in participating in the work of this committee—if any difficulties?

**JC:** Uh...well. I think we probably presented the difficulties. At the end of the week, there were two days devoted to the position papers that each group would write, and we produced a fairly massive screed on the whole idea of any kind of representation of Asian American literature. I mean just from the very beginning we were teaching everyone—I think we were teaching ourselves at the same time—that there was an enormous difference between Asia and Asian Americans and what Asian Americans do about Asia and what they would represent and all that sort of stuff. So we decided that we would go with the general attack—attack is probably the word—the general attack that we initiated here at San Francisco State condemning all of the entire American literary canon and all of the organizations, not just NCTE but MLA for "gross negligence of" dot, dot, dot. And I think all the papers were about 40 pages long. By the time Frank gets finished with it, it's an 80-page dump: plunk! I think everyone knew. We all had the same background in education. Everybody knew what

was up, that we were challenging the whole determination of how academia was going to take on this idea of ethnic literature. Especially we could use the Asian American issue as the example. But I think the committee itself was caught in a political dilemma. That is we had been paid and fed well—not paid, but fed well and housed—to come to the national headquarters to do a specific task and that was to review the textbooks and find out if they were wanting and to say so. In our case that was a very easy task. But we wanted to initial our position in the largest venue that we could find and NCTE provided that.

The committee finally - although I don't think in their heart of hearts the committee wanted to censor our paper. In fact there were many arguments that we should. The chair did point out that we were taking advantage of making the objectives of the task force and the agenda and the venue that the NCTE had provided—we were sort of taking advantage of that. We were being poor guests. I think essentially we were being [*wags his finger disapprovingly*]...manners again, that whole business, which of course [*laughs*], that was our whole point, I think. It was going to be bad mannered, ill mannered. So they determined at the end there that they would leave it up to the national organization whether they would include our essay with the rest of essays that would be published for this task force. I think we were informed a couple of weeks later that our essay had been turned down. And they had in fact contacted a professor here in World Literature Dr. Kai-yu Hsu, eminent Asian scholar as the biographer of Chou En-lai [*laughs*] and everyone else in the world, and they asked him to write a position paper about the lack of representation of Asian American and Asian literature in the American literary canon, and he did so and they did publish that. The essay that we had presented to the committee was immediately sent around, and it was picked up by a friend of ours. We ... [*laughs*] I think I had it planned. Ishmael Reed—prominent African American writer who teaches at Berkeley—he had just started a publishing company called I Read Books and he had a contract with a major publisher in New York to do an anthology of position papers on American minorities' voices on American literature called *19 Necromancers From Now*. And he was delighted with the essay, of course—it filled a big space and he needed the point of view.

**JM:** And the essay title?

**JC:** We titled the essay “Racist Love,” and so it was published. And

has been published elsewhere over the years as kind of the first take on stereotypes and cultural stereotypes and their effects on Asian American sensibility and literature.

**JM:** How would you describe the historical importance of this committee's work to the field of English and American literature?

**JC:** It came very early in the whole business of trying to reconstitute what literature curriculums were supposed to be about, what the American literary canon was about. We had begun complaining officially and institutionally here at San Francisco State as soon as we started this whole notion of an Ethnic Studies Program. The first courses were offered in 1969 and there we were in April '70, I think, in Urbana Champaign at the NCTE, listening and institutionalizing, really, the charge that the American literary canon ignored American minorities in the extreme, especially Asian Americans anyway, from our point of view.

**JM:** What is your sense of the work that needs to be done today and in the future concerning bias and racism in the teaching of English and American literature?

**JC:** Big question! Giant question! Well, it breaks down into so many parts. I taught English Comp for forty years—forty-five years, actually. And I've watched successive generations of students come through writing programs. It's gotten better; the teaching has gotten a lot better in terms of just approaching composition and all that. The recognition that so many of the students, especially here at SF State came from an Asian background, [that] they were either immigrants themselves or they were second generation born here in the United States, and either their English skills were wanting or they felt their English skills were wanting in some fashion or another. So all of these notions we had about making culturally sensitive writing curriculums were incorporated—are incorporated today. We see it especially even more in the TOEFL programs. The TOEFL programs are whole hog into writing about and using the materials that were developed very early on, particularly memoirs. It's not so much literary study but they're used as compositional tools to encourage writing: "You can write!" and all that. What needs to be done? Umm, I don't know, turn off the TV! [*Shakes his head*].

**JM:** [*Laughs*].

**JC:** Writing skills—my major concern over my entire career was making sure that what they were writing about was as close and heartfelt to them, to my students, as possible, and that the reading material that

they had reflected that. There's a case to be made that it's probably better to have them describe a tomato being sliced. And I understand that argument too. Sometimes [*laughs*] when I'm desperate we'll go to the completely objective example that they don't have to think too carefully about, it's just a mechanical thing. It's a balance; it's always a balance. After forty years, I can say, yeah, it has to be a balance.

**JM:** Okay you talked about your essay that you co-authored with Frank Chin, "Racist Love"...

**JC:** Co-authored is probably too strong of a word. If you've ever read Frank you know that... it's very difficult to get a word in edge-wise. But we did turn it in as a team because we thought it would be stronger [*laughs*].

**JM:** Is there any other type of archival materials surrounding this time period or your committee work that you think should be collected? Any other documents, or writings, or photographs, or...?

**JC:** Ha. Give me an example.

**JM:** Well, let's see. If we had never corresponded I think the fact that this essay ["Racist Love"], which you mention has been re-published elsewhere, would have never been connected to this committee, and so it's an important piece of writing that should be included in the archive. So I'm just wondering is there anything else you think should be mentioned?

**JC:** From the essay, it was an opportunity to spit it out to our peers in a way that made sense to everybody. Whether the organization published it or not was beside the point. Everybody listened very carefully to what we had to say. And from there we went on to produce a literary anthology. We were turned down by Doubleday. We got an interview with Doubleday and they finally said, "Gee, no we can't do this." It was Howard University that picked up the anthology and published it, and published the next one that came way later, but they were our major support.

**JM:** This was The Big Aiiiiieeee! ?

**JC:** Well it was the little Aiiiiieeee at first, Aiiiiieeee!, and then The Big Aiiiiieeee! I think we were the only non-African Americans that they published in their history—I'm not sure of that, but we were contacted very early. I have a feeling that people talked so that they knew that we had an idea that would ignite more interest than just our particular concerns about the lack of representation of Asian American literature and Asian American writers. We were welcomed with open arms.



## Listening to Our Elders: Working and Writing for Change

When I came back from the conference I went it to Dr. Schrodes office and said, “I think I blew it for you.”

“No this is what you were supposed to do!” she said. “We were hoping you would do this! Everybody was hoping you would cause a ruckus. We want this spoken of.”

All of that I suppose is not part of any archival record. But the institutional support one receives from colleagues over the years I’ve discovered is absolutely amazing and oftentimes you have no idea, they let you run rampant [laughs].

**JM:** Wow, that’s great. My very last question: Is there anything else about your contributions or work with NCTE or your experiences at this period that we have not discussed that you would like to add?

**JC:** Well, here we are ...I don’t know how many years later, forty plus, and Arizona is... we’re in the middle of this debate again whether ethnic studies is good for people. It’s so strange how it keeps coming back, what can I say? I guess we’ve done enough now to disturb a number of people, they know what to call it, they know why they condemn it, and people know why they support it. I’m sort of nonplussed really [laughs] I can’t believe it.

**JM:** On that, did you hear about the Texas Board of Education that voted to change the textbook curriculum for K-12 education, take out certain parts...

**JC:** Right, right.

**JM:** Maybe we should send you and Frank over there.

**JC:** Don’t send Frank! He’d have something to say about Christianity overall. It’s an amazing time in the American social dynamic. We’re lucky that we come from places where in fact the whole notion of being an immigrant—second, third generation—is so easy, just easy! In other regions of the country, it’s not an easy task for them because they don’t see enough. Frankly, they don’t watch the kids grow up and all fall into the pop culture and be absorbed [laughs]. Some absolution in that!

**JM:** Well that’s the end of my interview. Thank you so much!

**JC:** You’re welcome.

The interviewer wishes to thank Cristina Kirklighter and Jennifer Franchini-Sano, who conducted archival research at NCTE headquarters. The introductory essay for this interview would not have been possible without the archival documents that they digitized and shared.

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### About the Interviewer

Jolivette Mecenaz was introduced to Asian American literature as an undergraduate at University of California, Santa Cruz. She completed her MA in English at San Francisco State University, and her Ph.D. in English at the

## Listening to Our Elders: Working and Writing for Change

University of Hawai'i-Manoa. Currently, she directs the Writing Program at the University of La Verne (Los Angeles County). Her research focuses on publics and civic discourse within the framework of diaspora and transnationalism. She also writes about writing program administration work, and has contributed a chapter to the collection *Representations: Doing Asian American Rhetoric* (Utah State Press 2008). She is a member of the Asian/Asian American Caucus of NCTE/CCCC.

# Black Caucus

## A Conversation with James Hill

*Kendra Mitchell*

### Introduction

When I reflect on my conversation with Dr. James Hill, I am reminded of a pivotal Toni Morrison quotation toward the end of *Beloved*: “It was not a story to pass on.” The genesis of the Black Caucus is an education that should not be passed on by any person—not just Blacks—because it is all of our history and its future is all of our responsibility. I knew that I wanted and needed to be a part of capturing this monumental period. Therefore, when I was presented with the opportunity to learn more about the Black Caucus, to allow my future to converse with his past, I felt compelled to say yes. If not, I would have missed something important, something that I should know in order to move forward. Something that, like Toni Morrison warns in *Beloved*, that I should not pass on.

Currently, Dr. James Hill is a professor of English and chair of the Department of Modern Languages and Mass Communications at Albany State University. His recent accomplishments include being elected to the Board of Directors of the Council on Undergraduate Research (CUR) stationed in Washington, D.C. He has also recently secured a \$20,000 nationally competitive grant, *The Big Read*. This National Endowment of the Arts (NEA) initiative aims to reestablish the importance of diversified reading in the fabric of American culture. As one of 269 community partners, Albany State University joined with its local library and other affiliates to host a series of events based on Ernest Gaines’ *A Lesson before Dying*, culminating with a teleconference with the noteworthy author.

Hill’s commitment to the betterment of education, especially for marginalized youth, is no new endeavor. Instead, he has made his life’s career out of being an advocate for these voices, notably beginning with his involvement in the Black Caucus. He credits much of his early involvement with the Caucus to his mentor and Black Caucus founder, Marianna White Davis. She, on the other hand, acknowledges Delores Minor as being the one who began the informal talks during the 1968 Convention in Hawai’i concerning the disparity within NCTE concerning fair treatment for Blacks. However, it was under Davis’ leadership that the Caucus materialized. She led a small group, including Hill, in a fight for adequate representation of Black scholars at the 1970 Seattle Conference on College Composition and Communication or the “CCCC.” The product of this

organized complaint led to the Caucus' consistent demand for qualified, Black representation, from the conference panelists to representation in the NCTE headquarters. As a result of the lists given to Virginia M. Reid, NCTE President, during the 1972 Minneapolis Convention, Dr. Sandra E. Gibbs was appointed Director of Minority Affairs. Gibbs became driving force for the Caucus on a national level. Davis records this history in her 1994 publication *History of the Black Caucus: National Council of Teachers of English*.

Prior to the interview with Dr. Hill, I did not know how to access this rich history. We were attending the 2010 NCTE Black Caucus meeting where I realized how much I didn't know about the founders of this group. The extent of my understanding about the founding of the Black Caucus was tenuous at best. In fact, myself and another colleague found ourselves in our first Black Caucus meeting during the 2010 Conference on College and, thus, members. We had driven across several states to experience the grandeur of the CCCC for the first time, absorbing the wealth of knowledge in each activity presented. Although I learned a great deal from chairing a session, I remember feeling as though the Black Caucus meeting aligned me to a cause larger than my own. Having a strong foundation in building community and being an advocate for the underrepresented, I was eager to help out as much as I could. I offered my suggestions but, more importantly, I voiced my desire to know more about the history of this great organization.

I specifically recall asking about the origins of the Turner and Barksdale Scholarship, a question I had asked during my first caucus meeting. Dr. Hill shared the instrumental role that Darwin Turner and Richard K. Barksdale played in initiating the 1970 Seattle Stance during the 1968 NCTE Convention in Milwaukee, Washington. In fact, Davis dedicates her 1994 publication to these two scholars.

I enjoyed listening to veteran members discuss the direction of the Caucus, but I knew there was a foundation, a rootedness that fueled their commitment, that only an informed member could have. Dr. Hill, along with other veteran members, eagerly shared the legacy of forerunners such as Dr. Sandra E. Gibbs when asked, but I wanted to be a part of the team who were remembering on purpose; I found that opportunity through this project.

Although I embraced this interaction as a great professional opportunity, I also recognized it as a stimulus for personal growth. My conversation with Dr. Hill has challenged me, above all, to be the change that I seek. I was inspired to seize opportunities to make a difference now—not when it

is convenient, not when the conditions are acceptable, not when I can see an immediate, tangible return. But I, like my predecessors, should invoke the change that can often be ignored or understated while I am a graduate student, just as Dr. Hill and so many others did. I can work within and across professional and cultural boundaries to create better programs and organizations for present and future marginalized voices. And, this challenge—this charge to be greater than the past—I appreciate and accept.

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**Interview**

**About the Interviewer**

Kendra L. Mitchell is a second-year doctoral student and a teaching assistant in the first-year composition program at Florida State University. She is currently the Coordinator of the Undergraduate Tutors in the Reading/Writing Center and the liaison for the learning studio set to open in the fall. Her research interests include the rhetoric, epistemologies, and pedagogical practices unique to historically black institutions, interests that stem from her undergraduate career at Florida Agriculture and Mechanical University (FAMU) and her extensive tutoring experiences in its writing center. She will present her interests at the 2011 Conference on College Composition and Communication.

# Committee on Disability Issues in College Composition

**“I simply gave up trying to present at CCCC on learning disabilities because I needed to get myself on the programs”**

*Committee on Disability Issues in College Composition  
Jay Dolmage, Samadhi Metta Bexar, Brenda Brueggeman,  
Susan Ghiaciuc, Patricia Dunn, Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson,  
Sushil Oswal, Margaret Price, Nicole Quackenbush, and  
Amy Vidali*

## Introduction

Disability has a troubled history in college composition. For most of the twentieth century, people with disabilities were institutionalized in asylums, “schools” for the “feeble-minded,” and other exclusionary institutions: locations deemed the inverse of the college or university. The ethic of higher education encourages students and teachers alike to accentuate ability, valorize perfection, and stigmatize anything that hints at intellectual (or physical) weakness.

Yet, the composition course has also been seen by others within academia as a remedial space, the place to temporarily store, fix, and cure students deemed unready for college. College is both a landing and launching space for the “most able.” But the composition classroom has always been located slightly off this runway.

In the excellent histories of composition that we have at our disposal (see Berlin, Crowley, Shor, Clark, Fox) we see that the early role of writing classes at schools such as Harvard was to sort society, and to attribute illiteracy-as-disability to unwanted ethnic, class or gender groups. The ability or inability to write has been used to mark biological and cultural difference, as it has been used as a chute or ladder of class movement.

Beyond histories of writing instruction, when we look directly at the history of disability in our disciplinary literature, we find only sporadic attention; most of what we find is a little bit scary, or a little bit embarrassing, depending on the angle. Take for instance, Ralph M. Williams’ “A Method for Teaching Spelling to a Group of Seriously Retarded Students,” published in *College English*, 16.8 in May of 1955. Williams recounts “four years of experimenting with groups at Trinity College” to address what he saw as a generational spelling deficiency: “the widespread feeling among college teachers that the spelling of college students has deterio-

rated since World War II” (500). He uses the word “retarded” to refer to the fact that many spellers tested at levels four or more years behind their age – so the word has a sort of literal meaning. But he also suggests that these same students, “who have been bad spellers for any length of time are emotionally ‘blocked’ in varying degrees” (501). This early article summarizes almost four previous and four subsequent decades of college composition’s attitude about disability/ability: the teacher’s job is to diagnose a lack in a group of students; this diagnosis likely carries forth from, or puts forward, some form of social or cultural stigma about that group of students; and then the teacher’s job is to develop means to fix these students.

Other subsequent articles take on a similarly diagnostic and/or prescriptive perspective: “A Clinic for Misspellers” *College English* (1978); “Strophosymbolia: A Possible Strategy for Dealing with It” *College English* (1981); “Recognizing the Learning Disabled College Writer” *College English* (1989); “Review: Learning Disabilities: New Doubts, New Inquiries” *College English* (1990).

On a similar note, the NCTE archives hold a short record of a “Proposed Committee on Dyslexia, 1985,” that seems to never have come to fruition. These bubbles of interest in disability, then, all seem to be generously motivated and well meaning. But they isolate disability within one specific student group, use a diagnostic rhetoric, and seek remedial means to correct “problems.”

It wasn’t really until the late 1990s that disability—as a question of human rights, as a critical modality, as an identity category—came into the common consciousness of the CCCC. As Jennifer Clary-Lemon writes, “until 1990, most dis/ability scholarship focused around a medical model of disease and rehabilitation” (28). As she suggests, the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990 allowed “issues of disability and oppression [to come] to the fore in America” (28). In writing studies, this meant greater administrative attention to the accessibility of programs, an expanded disability rights-based research agenda, and the push for a more accessible national conference.

Several scholars at this time studied the “LD” label, and the controversy surrounding it, looking at how learning disability was often conflated with basic writing. Patricia Dunn’s landmark *Learning Re-Abled* (1995) examined the writing practices of students with learning disabilities and, notably, allowed these students to speak for themselves. Lennard Davis published “Deafness and Insight: The Deafened Moment as a Critical Modality” in *College English* in 1995. And Brenda Jo Brueggemann’s “On (Almost) Passing” was published in 1997. Further, some of the most impor-



tant scholars in composition studies—such as Tom Fox, Sharon Crowley and Mike Rose—looked at access issues in higher education without mentioning disability specifically. Yet their work still had a shaping impact on disability studies scholarship. In a short period of time—between 1989 and 1997—someone interested in studying disability in college composition went from having scholarship only about being able to “recognize” or “deal with” disability, to having several articles and books that challenged stereotypes, offered means of critical engagement, and recognized disability as an important and challenging category of identity.

In the transcripts that follow, however, the participants will refer specifically to this era, suggesting that even at this point in time some scholars and teachers, discouraged by rejection of CCCC proposals in which “disability” appeared in the title, created titles to appeal to a broader audience. At the same time, conference attendees with disabilities were being consulted about accessibility issues, but even this dialogue was fraught.

A ground-breaking moment came at the 1999 CCC Convention in Atlanta, leading both to a major publication, the multiply authored “Becoming Visible” essay in the journal CCC, but also leading to the organization of a critical mass of like-minded individuals. The first edited collection devoted to disability and composition, Lewiecki-Wilson and Wilson’s *Embodied Rhetorics: Disability in Language and Culture*, was published in 2001. There was now significant momentum and increasing visibility. This led to the creation of the Committee on Disability Issues in College Composition (CDICC) in 2003, and the CCCC Policy Statement on Disability Issues in 2006. The statement focused on the rights of students with disabilities, on the rights of CCCC members with disabilities, and on the importance of disability studies as a critical modality and identity category, rather than as a condition that must be diagnosed and cured.

Since 1999, there has also been a huge expansion of writing and research on disability, as well as a huge expansion in the presence and role of the CDICC within CCCC. In the transcripts that follow, you will find much of this recent history illuminated from a number of important perspectives. In the bibliography attached at the end of this chapter, you’ll see a list of some of the key scholarship in the field in the last ten years. Themes in current disability studies scholarship within rhetoric/composition include autism and neurodiversity; digital rhetorics; mental illnesses and chronic illnesses; disability and metaphor; and disability and literacies. Bibliographies addressing several of these themes, as well as syllabi and other resources, have been gathered at the website of the DS special-interest group for CCCC, maintained by Amy Vidali ([www.disabilityrhet-](http://www.disabilityrhet-)

oric.com). The active and collaborative nature of the SIG, which branched from the CDICC, speaks to the growing recognition and importance of disability studies in composition and rhetoric.

More members join the SIG each year, and disability-related concerns have been active topics on listservs including WPA-L and tech-rhet. In summary, while the “DS in rhetoric and composition” group fifteen years ago was small and rather embattled, today disability studies is gaining wider recognition and importance in writing studies. But it is important to keep in mind that these are recent developments. We cannot forget that the long legacy of stigmatizing attitudes and approaches to disability in higher education and in college composition still condition much of what we do. These biases have not been shaken. They are built into our campuses, classrooms, and they are part of the fabric of our discipline, just as they are woven into our broader social structures. The “Policy on Disability in CCCC” co-authored by members of the CDICC includes among its claims that “CCCC understands the participation of educators, staff, and students with disabilities requires fully inclusive environments.” While this policy indicates that CCCC members agree with this practice in principle, continuing to enact it will require changes in actions and attitudes from all members of CCCC.

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### **On-Line Discussion**

*Email Transcript from Discussion on the DS-RHET Listserv, November 2-4, 2010*

*History of the Committee on Disability Issues in College Composition*

From Jay Dolmage (November 2):

- > Hi All,
- > I am sending this email in advance of the “CDICC History” chat that will take place from 2pm to 3pm Eastern Time, Monday, November 8th (next Monday).
- > I thought we might use this list to lay some groundwork in advance of that chat, or at least as a place to gather some materials that would help us to think about the history of Disability in CCCC, before and after the CDICC.
- > As Brenda pointed out, the “Becoming Visible” article did some of this back in 2001. Here is a summary of some points from that collaboratively written article:
- > “This struggle to get over, around, and through the multiple intellectual and physical barriers we felt were still strongly in place around our profession became the subject of passionate discussion at the 1999 ‘Teaching about/with Disability SIG’ held during the Atlanta CCCC Convention, the theme of which was ‘Visible Students, Visible Teachers.’
- > Late on a Thursday evening, some forty people—double and then quadruple the numbers that had attended the 1997 and 1998 SIGs

## Committee on Disability Issues in College Composition

respectively—filled the room.”

- > “CCCC has recently and significantly begun to attend to the elements of access and accommodations for disabled students and teachers who want to fully, equally, meaningfully participate in its annual convention. It is only rather recently that CCCC teachers and scholars have begun to imagine richly the ways that an awareness of and attendance to disability furthers much about and in our field and our own classrooms.
- > It is only recently that CCCC members have gathered to seriously consider the presence (and absence) of disabled students and teachers in our midst. Past CCCC Chair Cindy Selfe’s response to a 1997 Sense of the House motion at the CCCC Business Meeting that asked the organization to begin including disability within its other ‘diversity’ considerations was to put in place the Disability Issues Task Force (DITF). In addition, the 1999 Program Chair,
- > Keith Gilyard, and his assistant, Debi Saldo, did so much to work toward an accessible convention, and they also had the insight to imagine the promise of inviting Simi Linton to take a featured place in the program. Linton’s presence—her visibility, as it were—was one major mark of CCCC’s recent attendance to and imagination in the realm of disability.”
- > Also, in the notes to this article, the authors mention a “fuller, four-page history of ‘the disability movement’ within CCCC,” and suggest that those interested contact Brenda. Brenda, would you still happen to have this?
- > I wonder if we can do some further expansion on this history—Cindy, can you add some of the history of the CDICC? Amy, do you have some of the figures on Disability-Themed presentations and SIGs? What featured speakers have we had following Simi?
- > We have also had some key moments in Disability scholarship in the field, and it would be great to get a sense of that, too.
- > Those are my initial questions—and I will try and add as much as I can here. Maybe we can work on this as an evolving document?
- > Jay

From Brenda Brueggeman (November 3):

- > Jay and all:
- > Looking forward to the chat next Monday, Nov. 8. Thanks for pulling up some starting points here, Jay.
- > And sadly, I do NOT have the “longer” history I first wrote (but then

## Listening to Our Elders: Working and Writing for Change

pared back to a few paragraphs for the article itself). It went down in a hard drive crash back in 2006 in fact. (And yes, I should have backed all the files... live and learn!)

> Brenda

From Patricia Dunn (November 3):

> Thanks for starting this off, Jay.

> I'll see if I can find some of the older CCCC programs to see what was going on re disability in the early to mid '90s.

> I don't think there was a ton.

> Patty

From Margaret Price (November 3):

> I have a personal anecdote to add, in regard to the DS workshop that took place at my very first CCCC (Minneapolis. Was that 2001?)

It was very small, but transformative. I've written this privately to Brenda, but wanted to relate to the group: She was wearing a pink suit, and I tiptoed into the (gigantic) ballroom feeling completely un-entitled to be there. She turned around, saw me tiptoeing in, and welcomed me with open arms. It was an amazing moment for me, and the beginning of my understanding that one does not have to be a "special superhero" to be interested in, and welcomed into, DS.

> Will we be getting directions about how to join the chat?

> Margaret

From Jay Dolmage (November 3):

> Hi Margs (and all):

> This story is awesome.

> Maybe others can share similar stories? My feeling is that these stories are as much a part of our history as anything else.

> My own personal story was less romantic – in Chicago in 2002, simply walking around the book exhibit and picking up Jim and Cindy's book, as well as the Selzer and Crowley book, and Patty's second book. And this led me to choose to go to Miami to work with Cindy. But I relate this to the booth we have now – the visibility matters, and is a recurring theme.

> I do anticipate getting the instructions about the chat soon, and I'll pass these on.

> Jay

## Committee on Disability Issues in College Composition

From Cindy Lewiecki-Wilson (November 3):

- > One of my own high point memories of CCCC and disability is the time my husband Jim and I met Brenda for coffee at the Palmer House—it must have been the 1997 or 1998 CCCC? I recall it was crowded and noisy and Brenda had a packed full schedule of events, but she was generous enough to make time for us and we got together and talked about disability studies and her upcoming symposium at OSU (so it must have been 1998!). I also recall attending several DS sessions then. Jim and I had a CFP out for Embodied Rhetorics, and had received some submissions and proposals, and we tried to visit all the sessions given by people who had submitted something to us. We had Sam in tow, and I distinctly remember him hugging Ellen Barton—who did not quite know who or what had hit her, he moved in that fast for a squeeze.
- > I presented in 1999 on disability, I think, but in 1998 on teaching AAVE/multiple literacies. I was on the Executive Committee of CCCC from 1999 through 2001, and I recall that at one of those meetings, Victor Villanueva led us in rethinking the “categories” under which people can check off for presentations, and it was no trouble at all to add “disability.” So for a few years, it was an official category. I’m not sure when that went away..
- > I also recall that CDIC was formed by the Executive Committee in 2003, and Brenda was the first chair. She couldn’t go to the 2004 meeting in San Antonio, and asked me to co-chair. Which I did. At that time, Cheryl Glenn was on the committee and an advocate for it. Then I became chair in 2005, I think.
- > Okay, memory cells are fading out...
- > Cindy

From Patricia Dunn (November 4):

- > I remember when I was first working on my dissertation, back in 1990. Any CCCC proposals I sent regarding LD were rejected; any CCCC proposals I sent regarding anything else were accepted. For several years, I simply gave up trying to present at CCCC on learning disabilities because I needed to get myself on the programs.
- > Then one year I went to any presentation I could find on at CCCC on disability. That was in 1998. Although I’m not great at approaching people I don’t know, I went up to each of them after their presentations and asked them if they’d like to do a panel the following year. Those people were Brenda, Barbara Heifferon, Linda

## Listening to Our Elders: Working and Writing for Change

White, and Johnson Cheu. They all said yes. The next year, in 1999, our panel was accepted, and we presented in Atlanta. Then Brenda suggested that we send our papers in—linked together—as an article for CCC. After many emails and drafts back and forth—and I remember meeting together at a conference at least once to discuss this project—we submitted it, and it was accepted. That was the “Becoming Visible” piece.

- > I’ll keep trying to find those old CCCC programs and see if anything else sparks my memory.
- > Patty

From Ellen Taber (November 4):

- > Patty, what a wonderful and enlightening memory. As pioneers, you all seemed to set the stage for DS awareness.
- > As a relative newcomer, I am enjoying the memories that folks are posting. What valuable contributions.
- > Ellen Taber

### Online Chat Transcript

*History of the Committee on Disability Issues in College Composition*

*November 8, 2010 at 12:54 PM*

**Moderator:** Hi Jay!

**(Sushil) Oswal:** Hi Jay!

**(Jay) Dolmage:** Hi Sushil. Do you need to have voice, or does this interface seem usable for you to just type?

**Moderator:** Hello everyone. This is Mila from NCTE. If you’d like the chat box to be slightly larger go to your menu bar and select VIEW. Then select Layouts. Then select wide layout.

**Oswal:** Jay, turn on voice because the site is not talking.

**Moderator:** Sushil, this wasn’t set up with voice. It was chat only. I’m talking to Jay now.

**(Amy) Vidali:** I am here - Amy.

**Vidali:** I do not have a microphone.

**Vidali:** Hello?

**(Patricia) Dunn:** Hi, Patty here. I’m going to try to use a mic, but I may not get it to work. The sound is not great.

**Vidali:** Yes, my sound is not good either, and no mic.

**Dunn:** Should I just type my responses?

**(Margaret) Price:** Hello everyone ... just saying I’m here.

**(Nicole) Quackenbush:** Hi, it's Nicole Quackenbush here! I can't figure out how to use the microphone on my computer but I hope that I can join in by typing. This is a test run. Sorry to interrupt!

**Dunn:** Hi Margaret.

**Moderator:** Jay, let me know when you'd like me to start [audio] recording.

**Vidali:** (I can hear Sushil.)

**Dolmage:** Hi All.

**Dunn:** Hi Jay.

**Moderator:** [Audio] Recording started.

**Dolmage:** Sushil and I will be talking, so if you want to use your speakers and microphone, please feel free. But the "record" they will keep will be of the text we write. [NCTE also recorded the voice conversation.]

**Vidali:** Okay.

**Dunn:** Okay.

**Price:** I can hear the conversation.

**Vidali:** I can hear, just cannot speak.

**Quackenbush:** I can hear the conversation, but I can't talk!

**Moderator (Jay Dolmage):** I'm going to go ahead and put up one of the questions to get us started.

**(Susan) Ghiaciuc:** I can hear the conversation, but I don't have a microphone.

**Moderator (Fuller):** Hi Susan, it's chat only unless you have a microphone.

**Moderator (Dolmage):** So one of the things that they are interested in is the political context around the creation of the committee. Any thoughts on this?

**Price:** I think Patty is the one here who has been with the committee since its inception.

**Vidali:** The typing is the record.

**Moderator (Dolmage):** Patty just asked for a minute to think about this.

**Dunn:** I remember when I was first working on my dissertation, back in 1990. Any CCCC proposals I sent regarding LD were rejected; any CCCC proposals I sent regarding anything else were accepted. For several years, I simply gave up trying to present at CCCC on learning disabilities because I needed to get myself on the programs. Then one year I went to any presentation I could find on at CCCC on disability. That was in 1998. Although I'm not great at approaching people I



don't know, I went up to each of them after their presentations and asked them if they'd like to do a panel the following year. Those people were Brenda, Barbara Heifferon, Linda White, and Johnson Cheu. They all said yes. The next year, in 1999, our panel was accepted, and we presented in Atlanta. Then Brenda suggested that we send our papers in—linked together—as an article for CCC. After many emails and drafts back and forth—and I remember meeting together at a conference at least once to discuss this project—we submitted it, and it was accepted. That was the “Becoming Visible” piece.

**Moderator (Dolmage):** Hi Nicole – we'll write everything down here. [The moderator transcribes all spoken input into the written chat as the discussion moves along.]

**Dunn:** I would leave LD out of my title, and call it something else:

**Dunn:** Using sketching or graphing to revise writing—non-traditional approaches to revising—that kind of thing. Then I could get proposals accepted.

**Moderator (Dolmage):** So people were likely camouflaging talks that were about disability as talks about something else.

**Moderator (Dolmage):** How many people in that chat have done that?

**Moderator (Dolmage):** I have.

**Price:** I don't think I have, although I remember in 2000 and 2001.

**Price:** I would try to really “broadcast” the wider applicability of

**Price:** my DS work.

**Vidali:** I would actually say that I've always overtly mentioned disability. Though I agree with Margaret that I was broadcasting, assuming people didn't have a clue.

**Vidali:** (by people I mean audience)

**Moderator (Dolmage):** That's what critical race theorists call “interest convergence.”

**Price:** In queer studies, it has been called “covering.”

**Moderator (Dolmage):** Sushil: remembers doing a CCCC talk in Cincinnati on being a blind administrator and people who came were there because they had blind students – a direct interest.

**(Cindy) Lewiecki-Wilson:** Hi Sushil and everyone: I think the Cincinnati conference was 1992.

**Moderator (Dolmage):** Sushil was referring to 1992.

**Lewiecki-Wilson:** I think my first CCCC paper on disability was in 1999; it was overt but I remember the audience warmed to the parts of the paper narrating my own life experience with disability and not so warm to the social construction of disability.

**Quackenbush:** I haven't had to personally, but I didn't come to disability and rhetoric until 2006—and that's when I began my reading, starting with the “Becoming Visible” article. So I had existing conversations to use to back up what seemed initially to some not to be an academically rigorous area of study.

**Dunn:** Sometimes a panel on disability would have better luck than an individual proposal.

**Price:** One time when I proposed individually on DS, I was put on a panel with McRuer (whom I had never heard of, at the time :) and someone else whose paper had nothing to do with disability.

**Lewiecki-Wilson:** My first disability paper was on a mixed panel; mine was the only paper on disability.

**Moderator (Dolmage):** Cindy and I once presented and we were put on a panel with a woman talking about “advanced” or “exceptional” students

**Price:** I remember a sense of sort of discovering a secret world (at the Minneapolis CCCC).

**Dunn:** 1999 was also the year we did a panel on disability. It was called “Challenging Constructions of Disability: How Writers with ‘Disabilities’ Contribute to Composition Practice.” That panel included Brenda Brueggemann, Johnson Cheu, Barbara Hefferon, Linda White, and me—the one I mentioned above.

**Moderator (Dolmage):** Just to respond to Sushil from earlier, it seems sometimes people came to panels to get disability “fixed.” They have one student with a particular disability..

**Lewiecki-Wilson:** As I mentioned on our listserv last week, when I was on the C's Executive Committee, around 2000 the categories were changed and for awhile “disability” was a strand that could be selected when submitting a proposal. I think this only lasted about two or three years.

**Moderator (Dolmage):** Can we make some connections between this and the formation of the CDICC?

**Lewiecki-Wilson:** We still have difficulty attracting large audiences when we have all disability panels perhaps because CCCC members don't think of disability theory broadly.

**Dunn:** Something Brenda mentioned last week was the Special Interest Group she organized with Mark Willis at the 1999 CCCC.

**Lewiecki-Wilson:** As to Jay's question, I'm not sure what the connection is but maybe the Executive Committee formed the CDICC subcommittee at the time the strand was eliminated?

## Listening to Our Elders: Working and Writing for Change

**Vidali:** To respond to Patty, it's not clear to me when the DS SIG died, before I restarted it in 2006.

**Quackenbush:** I have noticed this dynamic of not thinking of disability theory broadly—it still seems to be considered something “Other”—as in, we're exploring ideas that benefit a particular “marginalized” community instead of ideas that would benefit the whole of rhetoric/comp studies.

**(Samadhi) Metta (Bexar):** Nicole—very good point.

**Moderator (Dolmage):** And actually, we see this in the charges we have been given as a committee.

**Price:** I have an anecdote about Nicole's point: At a panel in 2006 or so, I was sitting next to someone who made a disability-related comment

**Price:** at a non-DS panel. I invited her to the DS SIG

**Price:** but she sort of recoiled from me and said, “Oh, that's not my area.”

**Metta:** Research showed me that some theorists/ scholars perceive DS as not very broad. I worked specifically on MS and other neuro disabilities

**Moderator (Dolmage):** Sushil says: my experience from 1992 on there was an ongoing argument with me and Urbana for making arrangements for my disability. I argued that they need to make accommodations for everyone. And they always just wanted to know how to give you what you needed. “We will accommodate you (singly).” But they would never admit they needed to be an organization that needs to be accessible to everyone.

**Lewiecki-Wilson:** Do you all feel when you make disability presentations that you still need to include an argument about why disability studies is broadly relevant?

**Vidali:** To respond to Cindy, yes. Margaret, Jay and I were having a conversation at the last CCCC, and we talked about writing that portion.

**Dunn:** Cindy: Yes, I still feel I need to do that.

**Metta:** I tend to, unless it's a specifically targeted conference or meeting.

**Vidali:** To be honest, I sometimes wonder if I don't oversimplify things by trying to do that in a short paragraph.

**Quackenbush:** Not necessarily when I'm on a panel but when I am submitting an article to a rhetoric/composition journal or, for example, explaining my work to my department.

**Moderator (Dolmage):** I definitely still do that, and sometimes I really

want to, and it adds to what I am doing. Other times it feels like a concession.

**Metta:** Jay—I hear you, because there are times I want to speak to other disabled scholars/ theorists/ activists, and then there are times I want those not personally involved so much to acknowledge the importance. I don't think many in my English program think too deeply about the issues

**Lewiecki-Wilson:** I think this is ironic, because it seems to me that our colleagues in literary study are moving boldly ahead with all sorts of disability study, with no apologies no arguments for its relevance. Why is comp/rhet behind in this?

**Dunn:** Cindy: Perhaps because of comp/rhet's relative position in English depts?

**Vidali:** You may be right Cindy. Though some of that literary work, to me, is not really DS.

**Price:** Yet I would add that that literary work is getting a LOT of attention. E.g. Quayson's book.

**Lewiecki-Wilson:** In my university, I think the best allies are those working at the intersections of queer theory, disability, and minority studies.

**Quackenbush:** Cindy, it is so funny that you say this. I was teaching a rhetorics of the body class last semester to graduate students at the same time that a literature colleague was teaching a medieval literature class. The colleague was using "monster theory," and students in my class who were also taking her class saw the connections between monster theory and the DS work we'd done—which seemed to legitimize for them my insistence on including DS theory.

**Dunn:** Comp/rhet also deals with teaching—lit studies usually doesn't. Perhaps that's why we're not paid attention to as much.

**Metta:** Cindy- I'm at a community college, so even though we have many disabled students, we don't really think about them or the idea of DS very much. It's ironic and shameful.

**Lewiecki-Wilson:** I agree with the point that in community colleges, there are many students with disabilities but pressures not to theorize disability, but to think of it in terms of students' bodies.

**Price:** I do think that mindful coalitions (minority studies, vulnerability studies) seem to be the way to bring rhet/comp and other humanistic studies together under a DS umbrella.

**(Brenda) Brueggemann:** I joined in about 5 mins. ago... hi there.

**Dunn:** In some ways, I think pedagogy needs more attention as well.

**Price:** If the CCCC higher-ups are going to read this it seems to me that we should take notice of the fact that comp/rhet does a brilliant job with various “hot” topics, including critical race studies, DS, and new media—ALL OF WHICH WORK TOGETHER.

**Ghiaciuc:** I wanted to add that legal studies which can be cross-disciplinary might be useful to think of in our discussions of DS. I find some poli sci and anthro faculty be great advocates for DS.

**Brueggemann:** I joined in the middle of the “ironic” discussion about how we can get the CCCC to really pay attention to DS scholarship/issues... while our colleagues in MLA/literary studies are waaaay ahead of us...

**Price:** We (rhet/compers) are always wringing our hands about our lack of national attention but the tools are in our hands.

**Brueggemann:** Um, yeah. This is the conversation we were having “back in the day” that got the CDICC started ... and also the reason why, after 3 solid years of trying... I just gave up and stopped going to the CCCC, focused on MLA instead.

**Price:** I am curious ... and maybe this is a terribly impolitic question... but does CCCC seem to have some kind of “special” (word chosen deliberately) problem with disability?

**Vidali:** Interesting question Margaret.

**Price:** That it doesn't have with, say, critical race studies or new media studies?

**Price:** Perhaps there is a sense that there's a danger that focusing on DS would push us further into the “service” stereotype?

**Brueggemann:** about the “special” problem the CCCC might be having... it has always seemed that they have been very afraid of COSTS (at least originally).

**Vidali:** Doesn't seem to me that critical race studies or new media studies really ask CCCC to change the way it does things in the same way. But service is also a good point.

**Lewiecki-Wilson:** I think Amy is on to something important, that DS does ask for changes right away, changes in the conference.

**Moderator (Dolmage):** Sushil agrees – COST has always been a problem.

**Brueggemann:** Yes, excellence costs.

**Price:** I know I'm preaching to the choir, but the worries about “cost” are always blown out of proportion. The “real” cost is changing one's thoughts and behavior

**Price:** which I see as one reason why there was so little uptake of Shelley Rodrigo's inspiring declaration on WPA-L. [Recently, there was discussion on the WPA-L about making CCCC presentations more accessible, and Shelley Rodrigo was part of this discussion.]

**Brueggemann:** Perhaps the CCCC membership "fear of cost" does go back to our long roots as perceived "service" in the academy... we are typically the ones asked to watch, manage, cut costs... and the first kinds of programs to be cut when costs really come to matter... So, it's a long learned fear...

**Lewiecki-Wilson:** I think we should also not underestimate the fact that students with disabilities have historically been excluded from the university, and there are deep roots of exclusionary thinking.

**Moderator (Dolmage):** Sushil: some of the things that they could change to help all attendees for example would be that the layout of the whole conference has always been confusing.

**Brueggemann:** Some (one or more of us) would probably do well to write something really meaningful about "how much does disability (really) cost?" You know, a "rhetoric of costs" kind of piece.

**Moderator (Dolmage):** Okay, to summarize:

1. There seems to be a historical thread here: we've always felt forced to make our work about the service we can do for others. This has marginalized us. Even the CDICC policy statement on disability was in part framed that way. And the charges that the CDICC has been given are about "taking care of" a few people, or making DS (Disability Studies) "popular" or useful for everyone.

**Lewiecki-Wilson:** How about "Containing DS" in certain ways?

**Moderator (Dolmage):** I like that: "Containing DS." But we did put things into that policy statement trying to address this problem. And then another point to summarize: DS has always been attached to cost in a troublesome way. "Cost" and "Containment" are two themes.

**Dunn:** I like Brenda's idea about coming at "cost" from another direction: The cost of not including people.

**Lewiecki-Wilson:** I feel that the "cost" issue, along with fear of litigation, is really built into the ADA which guides organizations.

**Moderator (Dolmage):** Sushil: it is ironic, particularly when the ADA is something that isn't about financial awards—courts don't award damages—only small amounts, to third parties. Like a "donation."

**Moderator (Dolmage):** Sushil: I am currently working on a chapter, and I haven't seen any NCTE policies about disability for NCTE publications.

**Lewiecki-Wilson:** Brenda's idea, a big piece on the rhetoric of cost, is certainly timely with regard to the current political scene.

**Metta:** I would agree that the relative costs of ADA compliance, accessibility, etc, is more than offset by the gains in opening up the conversation to those who have a lot to say.

**Dunn:** It might be an angle that can cut through assumptions-

**Brueggemann:** The themes of COST and CONTAINMENT, as Jay points out, are what we seem to be humming here.

**Brueggemann:** And those two are definitely intertwined.

**Lewiecki-Wilson:** Yes, "cost" becomes a commonplace to do a lot of political work of containment!

**Brueggemann:** Perhaps, dare I suggest, it might be time for us to actually collaboratively write something on these themes.

**Dunn:** Cost and education are hot topics now.

**Brueggemann:** It has been known to happen (and well) before, this collaboration among us.

**Moderator (Dolmage):** One thing that the CCCC always wants us to do is find funding sources for an ADA consultant as a charge to our committee. That is cost and containment right there.

**Brueggemann:** With a few hours together online or especially face-to-face (at the CCCC) we could probably quickly draft out the outline, assign some parts, even talk/record our way through it.

**Metta:** I would hazard that the cost of not educating or making people aware is a lingering misapprehension in the future.

**Dunn:** I'm in—a collaborative piece!

**Brueggemann:** perhaps even make an educational-rhetorical little video about this that we could circulate... kind of like that fabulous little video about Svetlana and the inaccessible textbook!

**Dunn:** And hope it goes viral!

**Vidali:** And maybe this could shift the discussion. Move beyond the "I'm glad somebody is working on that, what nice people" response.

**Oswal:** Does anyone know if CCCC accounts anywhere show how much money it spends on accommodations every year? Could we ask for it to get a sense of these cost issues?

**Moderator (Dolmage):** I think we could ask for that...

**Metta:** I guess I'm heavily invested in the politicizing of DS, because I fear in academics and elsewhere the reality of disabled lives is becoming invisible. On the other hand, I want to explore why even a well-educated academic is loath to be fully 'out' as disabled neurologically.



**Quackenbush:** I might be way off, but I am wondering if disability studies doesn't present an intimidating challenge because it posits disability as both a social construction and as material and embodied experience. So people not familiar with DS or disability have to deal with challenging normative discourses of the body and at the same time they have to deal with actual bodies, and accommodating bodily difference on a very concrete level. I think most people are still deeply entrenched in the medical and charity models of disability, and therefore the work we do still challenges some fundamental assumptions that people have learned to live by (as I re-read this I know I'm being vague when I say "people," and I might accidentally be implying that these "people" are "villainous," that's not what I mean to say!). This is picking up on Amy and Margaret's points. It's also related I think to cost and containment. Because DS is never only theoretical but immediate and concretely and bodily applicable it introduces all this alarm. What immediate change do we need to make now and what does that mean about control—control over cost, control over how we categorize people... ?

**Vidali:** Nicole, I think you are right. But at some point, I think we can expect more. I expect the CCCC higher-ups to know more than run of the mill folks. They can read our work. [Smile]

**Dunn:** The assumptions are just so deep—very difficult to break up.

**Price:** I think we have a couple of "rhetorics of" strands going here. One is the "rhetoric of charity"—"Oh, I'm so glad those nice people OVER THERE are working on this."

A second is the "rhetoric of 'cost'."

OK, I'm going to quote myself: "Budgets are rhetorical devices."

**Moderator (Dolmage):** And both of Margaret's rhetorics are about containment.

**Price:** RIGHT! (to Jay)

**Price:** I have to go soon.

**Brueggemann:** You know, metaphorically, I keep thinking about how I can't ever keep any containers in my cupboard without losing their lids...

**Metta:** Nicole- the fright some disabilities seem to bring up for some people is different in some ways from some reactions to visible difference marked in other ways, including skin color. There's a real primitive response to disability I see in academics and certainly the wider world. Part of me wants to use that to educate, and part of me wishes people could get over it already.



**Dunn:** I think the cost—literal and metaphorically speaking—might be a powerful way to change assumptions.

**Lewiecki-Wilson:** Nicole, I think your analysis is right on. I just came from a DS class I'm teaching, near the end of the semester, I thought the students were really "getting it" but then they said, "what do they [people with disabilities] want from us?" And I was flabbergasted, and exhausted.

**Moderator (Dolmage):** It is interesting because the CCCC itself, as an organization linked to a conference, is always about location (containment). There are these interesting geographical tropes here.

**Brueggemann:** Hi. I would like to suggest some closure moves here... I think some of us will need to go in a minute (me too).

**Brueggemann:** We will get the transcript/notes from this discussion, correct?

**Vidali:** Cindy, I hear you. I'm wondering if we can expect more from CCCC.

**Brueggemann:** Would it be too much to suggest we might all look at the notes and then perhaps plan a video or text-making session at the CCCC itself. (I would volunteer my hotel room!)

**Lewiecki-Wilson:** Yes Brenda.

**Moderator (Dolmage):** Okay – how about I ask for the transcript, and a few days to mull it over and add to it over email. I'll send it out to everyone, and we can all add to it for a day or two.

**Dunn:** Sounds good.

**Brueggemann:** I have a feeling we will all likely have more to say when we see the full transcript and back away from this powerful discussion.

**Quackenbush:** Thank you Jay, and to you all—it was great to be part of this! I'll be at CCCC and would be delighted to participate in the follow-up.

**Brueggemann:** I've lost my lids!

**Price:** Yay for cripp time!

**Email Transcript from Ongoing Discussion on the DS-RHET Listserv Following the Chat Session on November 8th**  
*History of the Committee on Disability Issues in College Composition*

From Jay Dolmage:

> Hi All,

## Committee on Disability Issues in College Composition

- > Please find the relevant links and attachments here, below my note.
- > I wonder if we can take a day or two and reflect on some of these things and write a bit more through the Listserv. I think it would be especially great if we can make some connections to a few of the questions that were suggested for us.
- > Those questions are:
  - > 1. What was the political context nationally as well as in the discipline that led to the formation of the CDICC?
  - > 2. What were the earlier movements/actions that led to its creation?
  - > 3. What was its role, mission, goals?
  - > 4. Were those goal achieved? How? What difficulties did it face?
  - > 5. Did the CDICC try to align with other groups? To what end?
- > I know it may not be easy to make these connections. But it seems to me that we can give this a try. I also fully support the idea of working collaboratively on a CCC article on Cost/Containment, and I say we do this through the Listserv too.
- > Jay

From Brenda Brueggeman (November 9):

- > Hello Jay and Comrades:
- > Jay, I first want to thank you for facilitating and “firing up” this conversation. I will indeed review this transcript. And meanwhile, I would like to say that my offer/suggestion to have a number of us meet to perhaps discuss the development of a video or text about “cost and containment” as dominant rhetorics that keep “disability issues/studies” at some distance from our field... well, that offer still stands. I can/would try to help us arrange a time to have this discussion at the CCCC.
- > Meanwhile, right now, I can offer some comments, briefly, to each of these questions we were “charged” with. \*See below.\*
  - > 1. What was the political context nationally as well as in the discipline that led to the formation of the CDICC?
- > I think some of this was discussed in the “Becoming Visible” article. The MLA’s leadership was very significant in this. And obviously, the ADA was important too (although note that all this “began” after the ADA was actually in place for nearly 10 years.)
- > In the discipline I think that, speaking for myself and my own sense of it, knowing I would/could have “allies” in the CCCC/NCTE leadership at that time really did matter.
- > Those people were:

## Listening to Our Elders: Working and Writing for Change

- > Andrea Lunsford
- > Who was my OSU colleague/senior mentor at that time and actually on the MLA Exec. Cmte. when I took leave of absence at OSU to try to decide for myself if I really could do the job/be a professor... it didn't seem to be working and I didn't really know what "access" or "accommodations" to even ask for). Meanwhile, a few others (David Mitchell & Sharon Snyder; Rosemarie Garland-Thomson) had already banged on MLA's door about some "disability issues" actions... so it was Andrea, I believe, who suggested the MLA form a standing cmte. on this and then also put my name in for the cmte. And obviously, Andrea was a major player in the CCCC as well and once the MLA did form its cmte. and I was on it, she implored of me to also push this agenda with the CCCC.
- > Cheryl Glenn
- > Who was always, from the start, a strong ally.
- > Cindy Selfe (immediate past chair of the CCCC at the time we began to form). Cindy "got it" and "believed in it" but wasn't sure what it all meant (she even said that to me recently).
- > Victor Villeneuve (past chair before Cindy).
- > Victor also "got it."
- > Others in leadership were clearly (to me at least) not so much allies... and in fact, rather surly blockers. But I don't suppose I should name names? (I'll not do so for now then... but yes, I could offer those. I think it best, however, to accentuate the positive... as best we can.)
- > 2. What were the earlier movements/actions that led to its creation –
- > Again, I think some of this is documented in the "Becoming Visible" piece. A really significant turn out for our SIG down in Atlanta (when Keith Gilyard was Chair... forget the year). Bringing Simi Linton is as a special feature speaker. Approval of a "good feeling" proclamation about the inclusion of People With Disabilities that we brought to the CCCC Business meeting at this convention that same year. There could be things before this... but as someone who was attending the CCCC even a decade before that, this year. 1998?
- > 3. What was its role, mission, goals?
- > I think this can easily enough be found in the official records/ documents regarding the formation of the CDICC?
- > 4. Were those goals achieved? How? What difficulties did it face?
- > To my mind, this is largely where our chat-meeting/discussion centered today... a considerable amount of frustration (still) with unachieved goals and plenty of difficulties.

## Committee on Disability Issues in College Composition

- > 5. Did the CDICC try to align with other groups? For what end?
- > We were, as I've already said, consciously trying to build on (and referring to) all the amazing activity going on with the MLA initiative. In the earlier years (late '90s and early 2000s) we made several runs, I know, at getting young scholars with disabilities recognized as candidates for the Scholars for the Dream award. We were rejected/failed on that one...

From Cindy Lewiecki-Wilson (November 9):

- > Jay and all: Thanks for doing this important work of beginning to recover a history and leading us in discussion about how we should move forward. I'm going to take a stab at adding to what Brenda has recalled in regard to the questions you posed below—copied in here.
- > 1. What was the political context nationally as well as in the discipline that led to the formation of the CDICC?
- > If we take the years 2000-2002 as the ones immediately preceding the EC's creation of the CDICC, then I consider some of the following as historical context:
- > Disability Studies in the humanities in the United States was less than 10 years old. The MLA group of DS started in the 94-95 period I think (is that about right, Brenda?). The Ann Arbor conference on DS in the Arts was in 95. Brenda held a wonderful DS conference at OSU in 98. Brenda, Rosemarie and Sharon were editing their MLA volume, which came out in 2002. Embodied Rhetorics came out in Fall 2001, actually in Sept.
- > Sept 11 2001 was very much a backdrop, politically, as were a series of Supreme Court decisions limiting the scope of the ADA (Garrett, for example).
- > So politically gloomy times, but for DS in the humanities a lively new growth period. It should be mentioned that print journals in our field supported DS work—in addition to CE and CCC, JAC is noteworthy. Lynn Worsham (and later with Julie Jung) has always supported disability theory/articles. Also I think Pedagogy is supportive of DS pieces.
- > In the CCCC, there were a series of socially progressive leaders—Brenda mentioned some of them—but race/gender/ethnicity were always the front burner areas of their interest and activism. Disability was on the horizon but seen by many as an “add on,” not central to the cause of progressive inclusiveness. I think our Position Statement tried to address this. But still as Brenda mentioned, the organization

## Listening to Our Elders: Working and Writing for Change

- was not interested in nominations of disabled students for Scholars for the Dream.
- > 2. What were the earlier movements/actions that led to its creation?
  - > This is harder to judge. I think Brenda is right that it may have been because of personal relations, or the activism of just one or two people like Andrea and Cheryl.
  - > 3. What was its role, mission, goals?
  - > The charge to the CDICC has been pretty much the same since its formation, and it was emphasized to us on the committee (and to me as chair) that we were not allowed to stray far from the charge.
  - > 4. Were those goal achieved? How? What difficulties did it face?
  - > We achieved almost all the charges/goals set for us (except for finding a corporate sponsor), and several chairs of CCCC told me at the annual meetings that we were one of the most active subcommittees. One thing I made sure to do as chair was designate all our meetings as “open,” anyone could come, and that way we attracted a number of new scholars who became active in our committee.
  - > 5. Did the CDICC try to align with other groups? For what end?
  - > We tried to align with the Queer Caucus and 7Cs (the computer group) and did so to varying degrees. We sent reps (Margaret attended the Queer Caucus). We both had in common the desire to broaden the Scholar for the Dream mandate for inclusiveness. The Computers/technology group has become an ally, chiming in for instance on ways to make the conference more accessible.
  - > Cindy

From Jay Dolmage (November 9):

- > Thanks a lot for this Cindy.
- > I can definitely gather any and all thoughts that we share on this List, to add to the transcript of our “Chat.”
- > I had a few other thoughts following the discussion yesterday. One was on this idea of “interest convergence” – the idea that the advancement of marginalized groups often needs to be seen as ALSO benefitting the dominant group. This is so much a part of the DS movement within the CCCC, and we have oscillated from being somewhat comfortable to being very uncomfortable with this “convergence” throughout our history.
- > For instance, from the Disability Policy Statement:
- > “CCCC affirms that people with disabilities bring a valuable source of diversity to college composition classrooms, university communities,

## Committee on Disability Issues in College Composition

- and to our professional organization.”
- > “Learning about the history of the exclusion of people with disabilities enables a better understanding of issues of access and inclusion affecting all people, particularly excluded or marginalized groups.”
  - > At times, we have to strategically make these arguments.
  - > Also, at other times I think we have tried to make a very strong statement that disability is about more than “fixing” things for a few people – DS is a rich and vibrant field within comp and rhet.
  - > For instance, from the Policy:
  - > “CCCC acknowledges the important contributions disability studies makes to composition and rhetoric, to the promotion of access, to literacy studies, and to theories of difference, especially in its critique of “norms” and “normalcy.” The questions posed by disability studies ask us to rethink language, the body, the environment, identity, culture, power, and the nature of knowledge itself, enabling a meaningful engagement at multiple levels: bodily, personal, social, cultural, and political.”
  - > “Disability studies as it intersects with composition, rhetoric, and literacy studies has enlarged knowledge in our field.” And so on.
  - > The Policy statement has a strong Disability Rights approach, it also makes strong practical statements about what the CCCC does for access, and it then also makes statements about the intellectual goals and benefits of DS. How we move between these three modalities might be seen to characterize different eras of our history, but also different goals – we talk about rights sometimes, about theory other times.
  - > Okay. Those are just a few random thoughts!
  - > I also wonder about expanding our “Cost and Containment” article idea to also include “Compliance” as a key vector?
  - > Jay

From Cindy Lewiecki-Wilson (November 9):

- > Cost, Containment, Compliance—the other 3 Cs. I like it!
- > Cindy

From Margaret Price (November 9):

- > I see that “like” and raise you a “YAY!”
- > (And just to confirm, I would love to be involved in co-writing a Something-Something on this.)

## Listening to Our Elders: Working and Writing for Change

> Margs

From Jennifer Clary-Lemon (November 10):

> Hello All,

> I've been a lurker on this great development, but just to put in my two cents, I wrote my dissertation on how issues of representation (race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and disability) worked their way (or didn't) onto the pages of CCC and CE from their inception until 2006. I have record of every article in CCC that has touched on disability in some way. As part of my research I looked to uncover historical/national political moments that supported this work (much from the '70s, '80s, and '90s), as well as internal CCCC conversations. Because there was no written history of the work of the CDICC (as there is a published history of the Black Caucus)—i.e., to confirm what Patty has said about the gap pre-DS and Policy Statement—much of that research went unwritten. I can dig out relevant chunks of the diss if you all think it would be useful to frame the national context pre-2000.

> I'd be happy to add what I can where I can, or to act as a researcher in collaboration.

> Sincerely,

> Jen

From Amy Vidali (November 10):

> Hi there,

> Just a few things to add - namely that I want in on the collaborative project! Woot!

> In addition to the journals Cindy mentioned, I would say that Rhetoric Review has been supportive of DS work.

> The "new" DS SIG also networked with the medical rhetoric SIG. And if there is mention of the SIG, I think a way to frame it might be CDICC as the "out-group" (to change CCCC, etc.) and the SIG as the "in-group" (that is, the SIG primarily serves us). Of course those intersect, but perhaps a useful loose framing.

> AV

### **About the Participants**

Those in on the conversation via chat and email are all current members or advisors to the CDICC. Those involved seem to fall into three groups. Patricia Dunn, Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson, Sushil Oswal, and Brenda

Brueggeman are the true pioneers in bringing disability studies into the field of composition and rhetoric. Brenda and Cindy are also past chairs of the CDICC. Brenda is Professor and Vice-Chair of English, and the Director of the Rhetoric, Composition and Literacy (RCL) Program at Ohio State University. She initiated the Disability Studies Program and American Sign Language Program there. She is currently co-editor of *Disability Studies Quarterly*. Cindy is Professor and Director of Graduate Studies in English at Miami University. She works in rhetoric and composition, disability studies, and feminism, and is the author or co-author of articles, book chapters, and the edited collections: *Embodied Rhetorics: Disability in Language and Culture* (SIUP, 2001), *Disability and the Teaching of Writing* (Bedford/St. Martin's, 2008), and *Disability and Mothering: Liminal Spaces of Embodied Knowledge* (Syracuse UP, 2011). Patty is associate professor of English at Stony Brook University in New York. She has published two books: *Learning Re-Abled: The Learning Disability Controversy and Composition Studies* (1995), and *Talking, Sketching, Moving: Multiple Literacies in the Teaching of Writing* (2001), both from Boynton/Cook. Her work on disability has also appeared in *CCC*, *Kairos*, *Rhetoric Review*, and in edited collections. Recently, she was Guest Editor of a themed issue of *English Journal*, "Re-Seeing (Dis)Ability" (November, 2010). Sushil Oswal is a Technical Communication faculty member at the University of Washington with research interests in Disability and Accessibility, Environmental Communication and Postcolonial Theory. Sushil also serves on the Committee on Online Writing Instruction of College Composition and Communication.

The second group or "wave" of scholars includes Margaret Price and Amy Vidali, who began the Disability Studies SIG at the CCCC several years ago, and have been responsible for much of the recent organization (and scholarship) in the field in the past eight years. Amy runs the *disabilityrhetoric.com* website that gathers resources, and she runs the DS-Rhet listserv that was used in this exchange. Amy is an assistant professor of English and Director of Composition at the University of Colorado Denver, as well as book/media reviews co-editor for *Disability Studies Quarterly*. Margaret is an associate professor of writing at Spelman College and co-reviews editor of *Disability Studies Quarterly* with Amy. She is the author of *Mad at School: Rhetorics of Mental Disability and Academic Life* (University of Michigan Press, 2010). Jay Dolmage is the current chair of the CDICC, and he joined the group around the same time as Margaret and Amy. Jay is also the editor of the *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies*, and has published work on disability studies, writing, and



rhetoric in *Rhetoric Review*, *JAC*, *College English*, *Prose Studies*, *Cultural Critique*, and several edited collections. Jennifer Clary-Lemon has also been involved actively in the CDICC the last five years. Jennifer is assistant professor of rhetoric at the University of Winnipeg and editor of *Composition Studies*.

Nicole Quackenbush, Samadhi Metta Bexar and Susan Ghiaciuc are newer to the conversation, but have been involved in the DS SIG, listserv, or other important conversations for several years. Nicole Quackenbush is an Assistant Professor of English at the University of Wyoming. She earned her Ph.D. in Rhetoric, Composition, and the Teaching of English from the University of Arizona in 2008. Her research interests include rhetorics of the body, disability studies, composition pedagogy, and issues of difference and inequality in the academy. Susan Ghiaciuc is an Associate Professor in the School of Writing, Rhetoric and Technical Communication at James Madison University. Her research interests include literacy, participatory action research, invisible disability, legal studies and social justice. Dr. Samadhi Metta Bexar is Professor of English at Arizona Western College in Yuma, AZ.

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Listening to Our Elders: Working and Writing for Change

Southern Illinois University Press, 2001.

## **Language Policy Committee**



# Latino/a Caucus

## Chicana Trailblazer in NCTE/CCCC

Interview with Dr. Carlota Cárdenas de Dwyer:

*Itzcóatl Tlaloc Meztli*

### Introduction

In 1968, “Enter, unbidden and, occasionally, unwelcome, a new generation of English teachers of color, ready, willing, and determined to enact in their own profession the changes occurring so dramatically in the rest of American society. We were armed with both a high level of professional expertise and prepared to channel it through the deep wells of our own unique, personal, ethnic, and cultural experience. We brought to the NCTE in those years what classroom teachers across the country needed and what the deeply rooted resources of the NCTE were unable to offer. It was this partnership that activated the NCTE of today, as it strives to meet the needs of a society still in flux.” Carlota Cárdenas de Dwyer, one of the original founders of the NCTE’s “Chicano Teachers of English” (CTE), which eventually morphed into the “Latino Caucus” at CCCC.

### *Prologue: An Interviewer’s Personal Note*

In the late sixties, a small group of Chicano NCTE members formed the “Chicano Teachers of English” (CTE) in 1968; by 1971, during the Las Vegas NCTE conference, this group began to educate teachers and students alike about Chicana/o literature—which, at the time, was experiencing a renaissance of sorts. Leading members of this group were Felipe de Ortego y Gasca and Jose Carrasco but it also included one other towering figure—Carlota Cárdenas de Dwyer—at the time, one of the first Latina/os to receive a Ph.D. in English with a dissertation on Chicana/o literature.

Smart, savvy, and articulate, Carlota educated conference participants on Chicana/o literature through workshops, seminars, and presentations in the NCTE/CCCC. As a pioneer in what had become the “Chicano Caucus” at CCCC, Dwyer deserves a special place in the history of NCTE. Since the “Chicano Caucus” has now morphed into the “Latino Caucus,” I decided to interview Carlota—on behalf of the NCTE’s Writing and Working for Change (WWFC) history project—to reflect on her most significant work with NCTE, where she held various leadership positions for almost four decades.

As an undergraduate at the University of Texas (UT) at Austin, I came

to know Dwyer, or my friend, “Carlota,” as a UT English professor in the seventies; thus, I will discuss her status as role model—a Chicana educator/scholar—who mentored young Chicana/o students in the field of English. She inspired many struggling Mexican American students—Chicana/os such as me—not to give up, as we tried to navigate—and survive—the institutionalized maze of a large, state-grant university, such as UT-Austin, with a student body of more than 50,000. But, more importantly, Dwyer encouraged us to consider graduate school, not only to study English but also, more specifically, to write, analyze, and critique Chicana/o literature, and that is why Carlota Cárdenas de Dwyer towers as a true, genuine contributor to the history of NCTE/CCCC, because she pushed all of us to maximize our teaching and scholarship potentials.

In short, because of Dr. Cárdenas de Dwyer’s role model as Chicana teacher/scholar/mentor, she inspired me to follow my perennial dream to become an English professor, and I wouldn’t be successful now if I hadn’t seen and experienced her academic triumph first. When I was seriously contemplating pursuing graduate studies in English, I told myself, “If Carlota can make it, so can I!”

## Interview

### *The NCTE Years*

**Itzcóatl Tlaloc Meztli (ITM):** Carlota, how did you get started with NCTE/CCCC?

**Carlota Cárdenas de Dwyer (CCD):** I first joined NCTE in 1961 when I was a junior at the College of St. Teresa in Winona, Minnesota and doing student teaching. My “Teaching Methods” course instructor was a very professional classroom teacher, and almost from the very first day of class she required us to join NCTE; thus, I’ve maintained ever since my NCTE/CCC membership until 2003, when I retired.

I think that the first NCTE committee meeting that I attended in Urbana must have been in 1967 or ‘68. It was a committee on censorship, and I think Paul Dietrich from the ETS [Educational Testing Service] was chair. My district Language Arts supervisor, Dr. Roseann Knudson, sent me in her place for some reason, and it was my introduction to “by invitation only” meetings at NCTE. I now remember that I was just gathering information for my first Bibliography of Chicano Literature project and had to ask Janet Emig, from Rutgers University, on how to proceed with it.

After that, I was invited by Bob Hogan, who was NCTE’s

Executive Secretary at the time, and Nancy Pritchard (his right-hand person) to meet and interview with Toni Morrison, [future recipient of the 1993 Nobel Prize for Literature] in a hotel room in Chicago. I'm not sure I even knew whom Toni Morrison was, at the time, or why I was there, as she was still working as an editor for one of the big publishing companies, Random House, I believe.

A while later, I also remember being invited to another small meeting of NCTE luminaries, including head of the CCCC at the time, David Lloyd Jones (or "Jix"); at this meeting, we were to write a NCTE statement, entitled "The Student's Right to His Own Language," or something like that. There were around 8-10 of us, including Bob Hogan and Nancy Pritchard, and after talking and talking each person got an assignment to write on a section, then and there. We sat in our corners quietly and wrote it. This was my first real experience in writing for major publication; however, fortunately, they gave me some simple tasks, which I managed to do.

When I got home, I remembered, telling my husband, Walter: "Oh my gosh, we just sat once and wrote for publication!" I couldn't believe it; I felt completely over my head. My hubby said, "How old were they?" I replied, "Around in their 50s." At the time, I was in my late 30s or so. Walter answered, "When you're 50, you will then be able to sit and write for publication." This was a sea change in my sense of whom I was as a professional: It was a giant leap from the perimeters of a single classroom to the world. And now, of course, I take it for granted.

Overall, I attended almost all the NCTE/CCCC national conventions during those years and also served as an assistant local host in 1986 when the NCTE National Convention took place in San Antonio, TX. Moreover, when I was teaching at UT-Austin between 1973 and 1982, I attended not only NCTE conventions, but also CCCC, MLA, WLA, etc.

**ITM:** Specifically, tell us how you helped to form the Chicano Teachers of English (or "CTE")?

**CCD:** In 1967, I was teaching in Hicksville, NY and I got sent to a NCTE meeting in Champaign Urbana. One thing led to another, and within a few years, I met Roseann Dueña Gonzalez at a national meeting in Tucson AZ in the late sixties. Within NCTE, in 1968, we had just started a caucus—the Chicano Teachers of English (CTE). At the same time, Sandra Gibbs was working with the African Americans as well. Also, Felipe de Ortega y Gasca was very active

in the Southwest, especially in the states of Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and California; Ricardo Sanchez, now deceased, also attended these national meetings.

I remember that during the 1970s and 1980s, Roseann Dueña Gonzalez, Felipe de Ortego y Gasca, and I steadily labored to make sure that Chicano literature and the teaching of Chicano literature were solidly represented at NCTE conventions. We presented pre-convention, all-day workshops, in addition to regular program presentations, where we knew that a majority of English teachers would be attending. So, to these national assemblies, we duplicated and brought copies of Chicano literature that were unavailable in many standard textbooks at the time. We all traveled and spoke extensively during these two decades.

**ITM:** By getting actively involved with the Chicano Teachers of English at the NCTE/CCCC, how did you contribute to the introduction of Chicana/o literature into the mainstream of American Literature and its pedagogy?

**CCD:** As part of the Chicano Caucus, I led program presentations on the teaching of Chicano Literature in all-day workshops right before the NCTE conventions. [In the appendix is an archival copy of one such presentation given to a 1975 NCTE Spring Institute.] While at UT-Austin, I had gathered, by 1975, enough samples of Chicano literary works—many original Chicano poems, short stories, and plays, which had never been published by any major publishers—to organize an anthology of Chicano literature. *Chicano Voices* was then published by Houghton Mifflin [now Houghton Mifflin Harcourt] in 1975, with Tino Villanueva as editorial adviser. At the time, the only other Chicano text on the market was *Mexican American Literature*, mainly folklore, which had been edited by Américo Paredes. Thus, both *Chicano Voices* and its accompanying, separate text, *Instructor's Guide to Chicano Voices* (1975) were published by Houghton Mifflin, Boston, and both directed toward high school and freshman college English classes.

**ITM:** When and where did you first meet some publishers, in order to accomplish your goal to introduce Chicano literature into the teaching of it in the high schools of America's mainstream?

**CCD:** At a NCTE national convention in Chicago, around 1976, I was approached by an editorial representative from Scott Foresman [now Pearson Scott Foresman, a leading publisher of secondary English textbooks], who asked me about my interest in working

with the publishing company, in order to help them prepare the 1979 Medallion edition of their American Reads literature series. Eventually, Roseann Dueña Gonzalez, Felipe de Ortego y Gasca, Raymond Rodriguez, and I worked on textbooks at various grade levels, submitting stories, poems, essays, and drama by Chicano authors whom the publishers in Glenview were totally unaware of. When the Medallion edition appeared in 1979, it contained not only these Chicano literary works—new to a national audience—but also essays and supporting teaching guides, written by all of us. Chicano literature and its pedagogy were finally in required textbooks distributed to a national audience, statewide adoptions included. Since that time, individual Chicana/o authors, such as Sandra Cisneros and Richard Rodriguez, to name just two, have enjoyed the success of a national audience. NCTE Chicano scholars—who laid the foundation on many levels: textbook, pedagogy, national networks—helped also to create a springboard for the next generation of Chicano authors, as Cisneros and Rodriguez, to flourish.

**ITM:** How were your original experiences with the publisher, Scott Foresman, whose representative you met at an NTCE conference in the mid-seventies?

**CCD:** Well, Roseann Dueña Gonzalez and I were signed on as editors for Scott Foresman for high school literature books, working on a number of textbooks. As members of the Scott Foresman editorial staff, we would meet with others and collaborate on the design of a new series of textbooks. It was a highly intense and intellectually rigorous process. We would “vote and talk and vote and talk” on each title in the tables of content with seven or eight sections per new textbook. Each editorial adviser would write an introductory essay to each section and then the materials for all the selections. The Medallion series offered a literature anthology for each grade, from 7 through 12, with the 11th grade focusing on the literature of the United States.

**ITM:** What was the spark that compelled you to become an editorial adviser for Scott Foresman and introduce Chicana/o texts to the literate masses? Can you remember an early point when you experienced the intersection of your involvement with the NCTE and Chicano literature?

**CCD:** It was in Tucson, AZ, at an NCTE pre-convention conference, where I first saw one of the dramatic works of Luis Valdez—whom many consider to be as the “father of Chicano theater”—

performed for an audience of English teachers. In fact, in 1965, he formed El Teatro Campesino, a farm worker's theater troupe, developed primarily to promote the goals for the farm workers union. Eventually, Valdez became a prominent, media figure in El Movimiento Chicano of the Sixties.

Valdez was presenting his play, *Los Vendidos*, which at the time was unpublished script. I thus urged members of the troupe that very afternoon to give me one of their loose paper copies, and I therefore decided to include it in an anthology I was then developing. So, in 1975, the anthology *Chicano Voices* became part of the first wave in the publishing of Chicano Literature. Subsequently, a second wave, which included Sandra Cisneros, Richard Rodriguez, and other authors, started publishing nationally in the early Eighties.

**ITM:** In what avenues did you find original and creative Chicana/o texts?

**CCD:** I remember publishing poems that were merely scribbles on pieces of paper. That was how I discovered the Chicano poet, Alberto Baltazar Urista, whose nom de plume is "Alurista." Like Felipe de Ortego y Gasca and several others, who were Ph.D.-trained scholars in American literature, I immediately recognized the network of American, English, and Spanish literary traditions evident in Chicano literature—from free verse, idiomatic discourse, and elements such as the "agit-prop" theater tradition at the roots of El Teatro Campesino. At the time, Chicano literature was not readily available, and I would have to scour barrio newspapers and bookstores, where Chicano literature was being printed, really as underground literature and the like.

Basically, when it's all said and done, critics may view me as part of the bridge between publishers and Chicano writers. Roseann, Felipe, and I were able to help the NCTE offer teachers and students alike the ability to work with Latino student classroom materials and methods specifically grounded in their experience and lives. I, but more importantly the NCTE were the ones who gave Chicano literature the visibility it desperately needed; and because of the NCTE, it gave credibility to publishers on our behalf, as both Chicano writers and scholars. Thus, NCTE opened up not only Chicano literature but also—and more importantly—its pedagogy into the academic mainstream. In short, because I knew how "to talk the talk and walk the walk" academically, it then allowed me to introduce, influence, and/or impact the young field of Chicano

literature into mainstream academia.

**ITM:** According to Ortego y Gasca, since "...teachers of American literature were unfamiliar with the various minority cultures of the United States let alone know anything about the writers of those minority groups," how bad was it in the late sixties when it came to the academic and cultural dissemination of Chicana/o literature?

**CCD:** From the very beginning, these [American] lands were multicultural but we never saw this [acknowledgment] in the American Literature anthologies. So, in effect, I was one of those literary pioneers to include multicultural authors in American Literature anthologies.

In fact, my introductory sentence for the 1979 American literature textbook's first historical unit was as follows: "From the beginning, the European discovery and settling of the Western Hemisphere was an enterprise of many nations." Up to that time, it was all—and only—the English tradition, exclusively John Smith and the Puritans, true but "monocultural" and historically incomplete, as well as inaccurate! When I worked on that Scott Foresman series, I truly felt, that everything "I had ever experienced and everything I had ever learned," informed every sentence I wrote. Cabeza de Vaca was placed before John Smith and Teresa Palomo Acosta and Tino Villanueva next to May Swenson and Howard Nemerov. American literature would express a "new world" all over again!

**ITM:** Were you considered a "strident advocate" of Chicano literature in academia, especially when you were teaching at the university level?

**CCD:** When I first arrived at the University of Texas at Austin, I was ABD, and so my rank was "instructor;" in 1976, however, I completed my dissertation, entitled *Contemporary Chicano Literature: The Flowering of the Southwest* and thus received my Ph.D. in English from SUNY-Stony Brook. I was then promoted to Assistant Professor and went up for tenure in 1981; after I was denied at UT, I left the University in the spring of 1982. I would have considered myself as "strong advocate, tenacious, and totally dedicated" to the field of English education and Chicano literature, rather than "strident."

But, I clearly remember an interesting episode while at UT-Austin—one that had a big impact on my academic career: When I first arrived at the university, I taught Freshman English for Mexican-Americans, which was originally listed as a "Q" course, one designated for "foreign students." Previous Mexican American/



Chicano faculty had taught the course with that listing, but I had a personal interview about it with the chair of the Freshman English department, followed up the next semester with a memo, and then finally petitioned and insisted that the course be listed correctly as a standard English course; eventually the change did occur, but only after several years when I finally threatened to refuse to submit my semester-end grade sheets unless the course was listed appropriately. I wanted the UT-Austin administration to make the change, and while they never argued against it, the action was not taken until I insisted. Maybe I was uncompromising but I could not accept less than to expect that the Freshmen English for Mexican Americans course be listed correctly in the course schedule as we were not “foreign students!” The irony here was just too cruel.

In addition to Freshman English, I taught a sophomore survey course of minority literature, as well as English 376: Life and Literature of the Southwest, the core course of Chicano literature at UT-Austin’s English department. At various times, I had split appointments with both the Center for Mexican American Studies and the Department of English Education; specifically, I taught courses in the area of secondary education preparation at the University’s Education department. [See appendix for Dwyer’s CV.]

### *Cárdenas de Dwyer’s First Fulltime Teaching Job in Academia*

In the early 1970s, when I first met—as an undergraduate at the University of Texas at Austin—Carlota Cárdenas de Dwyer, I always had the utmost respect for this young, vivacious, Chicana instructor who was teaching young Mexican American students at a major educational institution such as the University of Texas. She inspired many of us—young, bright-eyed students—to finish college and succeed in our various chosen professions. As a freshman in college in 1970, I still considered myself as a “hyphenated” Mexican-American, but after Carlota arrived at the scene at UT-Austin, she not only helped us to perceive our identities as “Chicanos/Chicanas,” but also to push us all to earn and finish our respective college degrees.

**ITM:** As an undergraduate, when I first attended the University of Texas state system in the early seventies, I had the opportunity then to meet you at the Austin mainstay campus, where you had gotten your first fulltime job as English instructor after graduate school. At the time, were you aware that many of us viewed you as a positive role model, especially to young Chicana/o undergraduate students like me



attending UT-Austin?

**CCD:** The term, “Chicano,” was a moniker to assert ourselves in the late sixties and early seventies; in the literature, the prior usage was “Mexican American” until post 1965, with the rise of the Farm Workers Union in California and El Movimiento Chicano [The Chicano Movement].

As to being a positive role model, I think I was aware that a lot of people were looking at me, and I had not been in that position before. I was a straight English teacher, but when I arrived at the UT campus, it was the first time I viewed myself as a “Chicana,” especially in a hostile environment like Texas. I noticed that everyone was looking at me, but I wasn’t sure why that was the case.

I was in the state of Texas where I had never lived before; I had visited it but never lived there for any amount of time. It was 1973, and I related to all the Latino students but I didn’t worry too much about it, because I was a very dedicated English teacher. To my face, everyone was really nice to me—to a certain extent, but I was very much of an “odd fish” because I had always lived in the North but not really in the South. I was always the one to ask about and critique cultural assumptions concerning Chicanos in general. So, in the early 1970s, I believe I caused a lot of confusion because I frequently questioned academic and cultural assumptions and stereotypes in a language and parlance that existing powers considered strictly as theirs alone.

In fact, while at UT’s English Dept, I was in numerous committees, and I was even asked to teach a Chicano graduate seminar class as an extra course—which I did. I did everything I could to be accepted as a team player—which I definitely considered myself to be—one who believed in the organization of structure. But, once they found out they couldn’t control me, that was it—even though I was a model faculty person, both as a minority and as a woman.

Since I challenged the academic as well as cultural status quo, many viewed me as being so-called “strident,” but I didn’t consider myself to be it. This “not-fitting-in” approach of mine is probably why I didn’t get tenure at UT-Austin in the early eighties. By the time, that decision came, other Latina/os were already on their own, respective paths to success in the English Department, so I decided to move on, as I had a husband and another home, 75 miles down the road in San Antonio, TX.

*Post-University Level Teaching*

**ITM:** After not receiving tenure at UT-Austin in the early eighties, it is my understanding that you left university academia to teach at the secondary education level. Can you tell us a bit about that tectonic shift in your teaching career?

**CCD:** Before I left UT-Austin in the spring of 1982, my husband and I had been living in different cities: I in Austin, and he in San Antonio. So when I was denied tenure, I left Austin and moved to be with my husband, Walter Dwyer. Although I was bitter about not getting tenure, Walter advised me to return to teaching, but in high school where I had always been happy in the past. So, to me, it was a great career move as I eventually became “Teacher of the Year” in high school. But I also did test writing for the ACT and the Educational Testing Service (ETS), and I was still working with Scott Foresman as well as with the National Board for Teaching Standards and the College Board. Since I was writing curriculum for small publishers, I think I continued to influence the writing and publishing of classroom textbooks and supplementary materials for high school students. I really enjoyed teaching high school and felt totally satisfied professionally.

Luckily, after I left UT in ‘82, I was immediately hired in San Antonio, in the fall of that year, as a high school teacher. I taught at Clark High School, with the Northside Independent School District (NISD), from 1982-2003. At Clark High, my teaching specialty was junior year English, a chronological survey of American literature. In addition, I served as lead coach for teams of Academic Octathlon and Academic Decathlon. I also served as Campus Coordinator for Academic University Interscholastic League (UIL) competition, and I led teams as coach to state championships in Literary Criticism and Current Events numerous times. In 2003, I finally retired from the teaching profession.

After denying me tenure in the early 1980s, the University of Texas at Austin has now welcomed my archives, and they have been placed at its famed Benson Latin American Library. After all the trouble the UT-Austin gave those of us who were committed to La Causa [The Cause] early in my teaching career, the University finally recognized my contributions to Chicano Literature and the very literary pieces so many critics had found unworthy of library acquisition. Now, I find that quite ironic!

*Dwyer's Retirement*

**ITM:** After almost half a century of being involved in teaching, you retired from your profession, so can you say something about the people who inspired and guided you along the way?

**CCD:** Academically, I was propelled by the women I worked for. In the early sixties, I taught at a Catholic high school in my hometown, Chicago, IL; and at the start of my second year there, 1963-64, my principal said, "I hate to lose you but you are a great teacher and need to go to graduate school and get a master's." I told my mother about it, and she said, "Where do you want to go?" I applied to the University of Illinois and started in September, 1964. On practically my first day there, I met Walter Dwyer, my future husband-to-be, who was in a M.S./Ph.D. program in aeronautical engineering.

We both stayed in school, and when I received my MA degree in 1966, we married in June of that year. After that, Walter supported all my education. When we moved to Long Island, New York for his first job, I taught at Hicksville Junior High School. My Language Arts supervisor, Dr. Roseann Knudson, first sent me to Harvard for a summer, then to Oxford for another summer, and finally, for my Ph.D. degree, to SUNY-Stony Brook, one of the State University of New York's four University Centers. Knudson guided and inspired; Walter encouraged and subsidized!

As a final note on Dr. Roseann Knudson, she told me that the only way to develop as a writer is "to write, write, and write. Write the minutes of a meeting; write a notice for a door, and etc." To this day, I follow her advice, and in my new life as a retiree, I write everything I can: For example, articles for a newsletter, or writing a handout for a book group, or to present a final committee report to a city hall meeting of the City of Shavano Park [a San Antonio suburb]. I find I love it all. There is power and joy in the words involving all kinds of situations. But, all in all, I've had a great life!

APPENDIX

SAMPLE

PRESENTATION

"Teaching Chicano Literature"

NCTE Spring Institute

At: Columbia, South Carolina

On: 24 March 1975

[Insert pdf file here]

### **Brief Biography of Carlota Cárdenas de Dwyer**

Born in Chicago, IL, Dr. Carlota Cárdenas de Dwyer earned three degrees in English: a BA from the College of Saint Teresa in Winona, MN; an MA from the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana; and a Ph.D. from State University of New York-Stony Brook. Dwyer is one of the first Latina/os to receive a Ph.D. in English who wrote a dissertation about Chicano literature.

Overall, Dwyer taught approximately for forty years at both the high school and college levels. After teaching at the University of Texas at Austin from 1973-1982, she then taught at Clark High School in San Antonio, TX for the next 21 years until she retired in 2003.

Author of *Chicano Voices* (1975), a high-school textbook, and its accompanying *Instructor's Guide* (1975), Dwyer also wrote numerous articles on Chicano Literature, as well as worked as an editor with the Scott Foresman publishing company. Carlota Cárdenas de Dwyer's main contribution to Chicana/o Literature is serving as the bridge between the NCTE/CCCC and major publishers of high school textbooks. Her archival papers/materials will be stored at the Benson Latin American Library at the University of Texas at Austin.

### **The Latino Caucus of NCTE/CCCC**

The Latino Caucus of NCTE/CCCC is a network of Latina/o educators in English studies, literacy, and language arts. Its purpose is to exchange ideas; to serve as a resource for members, the educational community, and the general public; and to support activities that promote the learning and advancement of students and teachers of color. Any Latina/o educator, or like-minded educator, or pre-service educator who is a member of NCTE, is invited to join the Latino Caucus, which usually presents a half-day Latina/o writing and mentoring workshop at CCCC national conventions.

About the Interviewer: A Chicano born in the city of McAllen in South Texas, Itzcóatl Tlaloc Meztli has a BA in Liberal Arts and MA in English from the University of Texas-Austin, as well as a Ph.D. in English from The Ohio State University-Columbus. As a tenured Assistant Professor of English, Meztli currently teaches at Slippery Rock University,

located within an hour's drive of Pittsburgh in western PA. Meztli's Ph.D. dissertation is entitled, *The Intersection of Ethnicity & Sexuality in the Narrative Fiction of Three Chicano Authors: Oscar Zeta Acosta, Arturo Islas, & Michael Nava*. She has taught at Michigan State University-East Lansing as well as at Bloomfield College in the New Jersey-New York City metropolitan area. Meztli also participated in a national conference panel with Chilean-born author Isabel Allende, at a 2005 NCTE National Convention in Pittsburgh, PA, and is a regular workshop facilitator with the Latino Caucus Workshop at national CCCC conventions.

### **"When I came to the Caucus there were only three members"**

An Interview with Dr. Victor Villanueva  
*Dr. Iris Deana Ruiz*

#### **Introduction**

##### *Biography*

Victor Villanueva, a Brooklyn-born Puerto Rican high school dropout, entered community college after the military (1968-1975), earning his Ph.D. in English from the University of Washington (with an emphasis in rhetoric and composition studies) ten years later. He is currently a Regents Professor at Washington State University where he has been the recipient of numerous awards, including the Edward R. Meyer Distinguished Professorship in Liberal Arts. He has worked as an Equal Opportunity Program Director, Writing Project Director, a Director of Composition, Department Chair, Director of the Program in American Studies, and Associate Dean. He chaired the Conference on College Composition and Communication in 1999-2000 and was the chair of its annual meeting in 1998. He was declared the 2009 Exemplar for the Conference on College Composition and Communications and the 2008 recipient of the National Council of Teachers of English Advancement of People of Color Leadership Award. The Young Rhetoricians Conference declared him "Rhetorician of the Year" for 1999. As well, Dr. Villanueva is the winner the 1995 NCTE David H. Russell Award for Distinguished Research and Scholarship in English and the Conference on English Education's Richard A. Meade Award for Distinguished Research in English Education. Both awards were for *Bootstraps: From an American Academic of Color*. He is the editor of NCTE's *Cross-Talk in Comp Theory: A Reader* (currently in its second edition), and is the co-editor of *Latino/a Discourses* (2004), *Language Diversity in the Classroom* (2003), and *Included in English Studies*

(2002). He has edited a special edition of *College English* and has co-edited another, has three other books in various stages of development, has published 45 articles, book chapters, or reviews, many of which have been anthologized, and has delivered over 100 presentations, nearly 40 of which have been keynote addresses, including a distinguished visiting professorship address. His current projects concern the rhetorics of the indigenous of the Caribbean and what those ways with words can tell us about current Latinos and Latinas in college composition classrooms, and the connections among economics, racism, and language. He once wrote that he was a professor, a husband, a father, and a happy man. All that remains true.

### *Research Interests*

Villanueva's research concerns the interconnectedness among rhetoric (in its broadest sense), ideology, and racism, and their manifestation in literacy and literacy practices. To this end, his research takes him through classical and contemporary rhetoric, cultural studies, world-systems theory (as an approach to political economy), critical race theories, and composition studies (particularly contemporary theory). His current projects concern the rhetorics of the indigenous of the Caribbean and what those ways with words can tell us about current Latinos and Latinas in college composition classrooms.

### *Graduate Teaching Interests*

Villanueva's research interests are reflected in his graduate teaching: composition theory, the rhetorics of political economy, the rhetorics of racism, and contemporary rhetorical theory. Villanueva finds his greatest graduate teaching to be the kind of one-on-one work involved in advising graduate students through MAs and Ph.D.s.

### *The Interview Process*

This particular interview took place over a series of e-mails between Victor and myself. I have had the pleasure of working with Victor Villanueva as part of my doctoral committee, so our electronic correspondence was common practice. While there are many aspects of interviewing that can get overlooked when not interviewing face-to-face, the following interview shows Victor's extensive history with CCCC and the Latino Caucus—it is eye opening. We also learn of two publications that may want to be revisited by composition and rhetoric scholars interested in recovering the history of ethnic studies and CCCC. It is a nice compliment to the other interviews in this collection as it shows how one Latino and his works can

have a tremendous impact on not only scholars of color but mainstream scholars as well. Anyone who is interested in the ever-expanding Latino/a population in the United States and their changing role in Composition classrooms can benefit from having an intimate conversation with Victor as I did. Much of our current success relates directly to the influence of mentors, such as Victor Villanueva, who have paved the way for other Latino/a Composition and Rhetoric scholars in the twenty-first century. Included in this interview transcript are a few “cuentos,” which are little anecdotes that show the extent of Victor’s influence on members of the Latino Caucus even when they were not well acquainted. Victor’s influence is vast, well respected, and foundational.

### *Why I decided to interview Victor (first e-mail to Victor):*

- > Dear Victor:
- > Before going on to the actual interview questions, I would like to let you know why I have decided to choose you to interview as a brand-new, freshly minted Dr. (this is supposed to be humorous). About 10 years ago, I was introduced to your book *Bootstraps*. Interestingly, this was the first composition studies book that I had read by an academic in this field that is “of color.” As a Latina, it was very important for me to be exposed to this book and the reasons for this importance are manifold. The first is that at my institution, I was also one of the very few composition studies graduate students of color and I often experienced feelings of being an imposter in this place that I was always unsure of as far as my place there. I felt as if I was an alien in the space of academia and seeing and reading this book, as should be the experience with any well-written book, made me feel that I was not alone and I was not an imposter. I also very much appreciated the genre the book was written in, because up until this point, I had only read books that were very linear in structure with often objective accounts of what good academic writing is supposed to be. I am reminded of David Bartholomae’s “Inventing the University,” because it was another reading that helped me to understand why I was having such a difficult time producing academic prose that would warrant above a B- grade in graduate school. This article was very objective but well argued. It made sense to me that I had to learn the ways of the academy and the ways of communicating in the academy. However, it was linear, was written by a white man, and, thus, I could not relate to the experience that this author did not convey. Thus, another reason I appreciated your

book was the level of integration of academic, educational and literary theory that was apparent throughout the book. It let me know that you were reading the same stuff that I was reading and that, although comprehensible, was allowing me to deconstruct, question and be critical of my own journey through education as you were being in your accounts of Gramsci and the notion of hegemony. These foreign concepts, after experiencing your engagement with them did not seem so foreign anymore. So, even though you did not know it at the time, you were my mentor and you did not even know it. This experience meeting you through reading the book was during my Master's education and it was not until I began Ph.D. studies that I met you in person. You then became my mentor on another level. You took me under your wing, helped boost my confidence, told me I was so good that I was dangerous and you pushed me up high upon a pedestal. Now that I have my Ph.D., Victor, I would like to give back to you, pay you back for all you did for me. I want to show this tribute to you as one that is over-deserved and long called for. You should be at the front lines of CCCC for accomplishing such feats as being a mentor without even knowing it. I am not saying that all authors are not mentors, but the way in which you mentor is path breaking, fundamental and powerful. You are dangerous, but in a good way. You inspire me.

### **Cuentos: Reminiscing on Victor and the CCCC Latino/a Caucus**

*Cecilia Rodríguez Milanés, Professor of Latino/a literature and writing, University of Central Florida*

I've known Victor Villanueva for a long time and wish to share a particular story about him that I've told before but remains a pivotal one for how I do the work that I do—in the teaching of writing as well as in my own writing. Anyone who knows Victor personally, knows him to be a funny, brilliant, kind and caring individual; a leader not just for the Latino/a Caucus but for all educators, one who has done so much for so many of us. I'll begin with the words he once gave me in order to help me through the difficult cross-genre writing I was attempting: "Do what comes natural."

The first time I met Victor was at my second CCCC meeting – this one in San Diego in 1993. He was co-chair of the Hispanic Caucus, a name all of us present at the meeting decided needed to be changed to Latino/a Caucus. What an impression he made—I was struck by his ease, humor and passion. He encouraged us to become involved in the profes-



sion through membership and service to CCCC. Many of us there had just endured an extremely trying and racist display during Renee Moreno's presentation, one of the first Scholars For the Dream. Victor was as outraged as we were and yet he managed to convince us to convert our frustration and anger into something transformative; we were to return to the conference and tell our stories, share our scholarship, and demonstrate the wealth of talent being ignored or dismissed. It was clear to me that Victor was the type of leader who expected conflict and challenges but met them head-on, within the context of solidarity and, dare I say it again, passion. Why must I repeat this aspect of such a renowned rhetorician, scholar, and teacher? Anyone who hasn't had the distinct pleasure of seeing and hearing Victor speak, who only knows him through his powerful writings, may not fully understand the blessing of passionate conviction. I have taught his works, cited his scholarship, quoted him in my own talks many, many times, but in his presence I, and many others, am transformed. Year after year, I, like many other new and returning Caucus members, would come to our CCCC Friday night Business Meeting feeling weary, discouraged, alienated only to leave feeling buoyed by Victor's inspirational leadership.

Throughout my leadership of the Latino/a Caucus, a role he passed on to me, he didn't need to promise to help; I knew I could count on him any time. I still can. And so can any Caucus member. He has served as an outside reviewer on my tenure and promotion application, wrote letters of recommendation for me when I was on the job market and has given me so much guidance throughout the years that I can't imagine not having his seal of approval on any academic endeavor now or ever. He has helped others in these ways and more. To speak more personally, I want to add that so impressive was Victor's impact on me that it put all of my graduate education into perfect context and I felt liberated as a teacher and more importantly as a writer (of cross-genre academic work as well as creative writing).

I hold Victor Villanueva Jr. in the highest esteem—as a scholar, educator, writer, leader and, most importantly, as a beloved friend.

*Dora Ramirez-Dhoore, Assistant Professor, Department of English  
Boise State University*

I first joined the Latino Caucus in 1999 in Atlanta, Georgia. That is where I met one of the most inspirational communities of scholars I have known. Victor Villanueva was the Chair of the conference that year, and I distinctly remember attending the breakfast for the Scholars for the Dream recipients. That is where I first met Victor and as we all know his laughter is unforgettable and a bit contagious. At that breakfast, Victor told the

group about the caucuses, including the Latino Caucus, and I decided to attend. It was there that I was also introduced to a group of scholars and mentors that have been inspirational to me on many levels for many years: Cecilia Rodríguez-Milanés, Cristina Kirklighter, Renee Moreno, Octavio Pimental, Jaime Meijia, Raul Sanchez, and many others whose advice has helped me understand the academy and to not be afraid of celebrating my successes. I often say that the Latino Caucus is the reason I go to CCCC every year—and the reason I come back. The Caucus has provided me with new perspectives, and most importantly has helped me to understand that my perspectives are not outside of the boundaries—just within the boundaries of a borderland that we theorize, compromise, and complicate as we learn to educate students across the nation.

*Luisa Rodriguez, Author of “Transcultural Rhetorics,” Member,  
Latino/a Caucus  
Luisa and the CCCC/NCTE*

I was a re-entry student who finished her Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in California. Not finding full time employment with the Master’s degree, I participated in a program that led me to the University of Arizona where I began my doctoral program in Rhetoric, Composition, and the Teaching of English. I had read the CCC Journal and College English for years, but I had never presented at the annual conferences. At the University of Arizona, Duane Roen and Thomas Miller worked with several of us to prepare our entries for what was my first visit to the College Composition and Communication Conference. Since it was my first trip to the conference and I am a Latina, I was eligible for the “Scholars for the Dream” award which netted me funds to the event held in San Diego. I delivered my first address at a major professional conference: Conference of College Composition and Communication Presentations: “Kenneth Burke’s Identification and Native American Rhetorics.”

During this conference, I met and was befriended by Cecilia Rodríguez-Milanés, Amanda Espinosa Baca, and Victor Villanueva, Jr. I found the group small that first year, 1993. Over a period of time the membership grew, leadership shifted from Victor to Cecilia and our voices slowly increased in size and number.

The workshops that the Latino Caucus developed allowed me, among many others, to practice public speaking presentation of ideas and issues so we (I) could work together. Doing this was good for us individually and as an organization. Later, when Cecilia became our stalwart leader, I listened to what she and others indicated needed to be done. Like other members of

the group I volunteered on issues I thought to be important.

Some of my contributions included participation in a meeting at Temple University held by Steve Parks with Ira Shor, Harriet Malinowitz, Seth Kahn and others. The question was whether or not it benefited the Latino/a Caucus to link up with the progressive SIGs (Special Interest Groups) and caucuses. At the time, there was little linkage among the various groups and the idea was to work in such a manner as to provide more clout to smaller groups within the CCC organization. Cecilia and the Caucus decided to maintain a connection with Steve Parks' group and to this day there are many ways that members of the Latino/a Caucus work with PSCC.

At another time, when the conference was to be held in San Antonio, I worked with Steve Parks to generate the funds to get a poet, Jimmy Santiago Baca, to come to the conference, speak at a meeting for the PSCC where the general public would come, and then have Baca speak at the Latino/a Caucus. The coordination of work between the Caucus and PSCC was crucial, as the Latino/a Caucus could not have managed the costs on its own.

In addition to helping out the Caucus, as we all did, I was able to collaborate with several members of our caucus on panels presenting papers we had worked on. One presentation that I remember included Raul Sanchez, me, and the leader of our panel, Geneva Smitherman.

We have all participated in reaching out to new members as they entered the profession. All in all, the work of the Caucus is not only one of personal attachments, it provides a place for us to grow and demonstrate the great and varied talents of its memberships. I see more and more people joining the Caucus and that gives me cause to celebrate the Caucus' future in the realm of not only the academic venue which supports it, but the contributions its membership will offer the field of education in its myriad ways.

*Lisa Roy-Davis, Collin College, Plano Texas, Professor of English.  
Victor to the rescue!*

I was a newly minted Latina scholar back in 2003. Having survived my dissertation process, a move to a new state and a new baby, I was suddenly faced with my first interview after going on the job market. Although my initial application had caught the department's attention, they asked for a statement of teaching philosophy and I suddenly found myself in uncharted territory. The job required half of my load in composition. I hadn't been teaching writing, just literature—what on earth should I say?

When I queried the Latino caucus listserv for contacts at the school I was interviewing at, Victor responded.

We had only met once before, at a CCCC convention—but he reached out through email and helped me build a teaching philosophy, using the theorists I named and sending me resources for thinking about what that document should sound like. I was stunned and honored to have his attention, his good advice. Although I didn't get the job (but did get the next one I interviewed for!), I was struck by his generosity to someone he had only met briefly. All these years later, after conferences, caucus meetings, and shared good times, I'm thrilled to call him a colleague and a friend. Victor, thank you for all you did to launch us pobrecita newbies out into the world...

## Interview

**Iris Deana Ruiz (IDR):** If you can describe it in a paragraph or two, what was your main motivation for your first book?

**Victor Villanueva (VV):** Actually, my main motivation was to provide very nice but ignorant people a glimpse from those they wish to do something about. At the time, there was an awful lot being written about folks of color, but it was as if they did so without talking to us directly; but I had faith in their good hearts. Cristina Kirklighter's book, *Traversing the Academic Borders of the Essay* does a pretty good job of saying more about what I had told her when she asked this question. The other reason, of course, was gaining tenure, though I didn't know if an experimental genre would sink my chances for tenure more than enable tenure. It was a risk I was willing to take, 'cause I was prepared to walk away from this business anyway.

**IDR:** If you could point to one pivotal moment during this time that would have the most historical significance for the Caucus, what moment would that be? How would you explain it to new members?

**VV:** Heck, I don't know. When I came on to the Caucus, there were only three members—Kris Gutierrez, Roseann Gonzalez, and me. But maybe a pivotal moment was when Bobbi Houtchens and others decided to put together a resource book for those wanting to include Latino literature into their curricula. It was a great project that had the potential to broaden our presence within NCTE and CCCC. I don't know what became of the project.

**IDR:** What particular archival material would you suggest members collect to better understand the Caucus during this time period?

These could be articles, books, position statements, photos, minutes,

and other relevant material.

**VV:** Well, that resource book would be particularly important. We were struggling in those days. And about the most significant stuff we did was prepare folks to get involved in CCCC and NCTE governance. The three of us (Kris, Roseann, and me) did a lot of committee work. And Roseann and I did a lot of stuff with the Rainbow Strand. That was great stuff. I'd bet NCTE would have records of the precursor to Rainbow (which was just Roseann and Kris) and the first few years; there would be a lot of stuff, since there were flare-ups and attempts to get Roseann out of the secondary section planners, and attempts to have someone other than me be a part of it every year. It was kind of exciting.

**IDR:** What work would you advise the current co-chairs to pursue that would uphold the historical goals of this caucus?

**VV:** What they're doing right now is wonderful—the website is great; the newsletter is more professional. But—I would suggest that they get ahold of Rene de los Santos at DePaul in Chicago. He has taken the lead in forming the U.S. chapter of the Latin American Rhetoric Society. The Latino Caucus should be attached to that (and the U.S. chapter should attach to us—we made our debut at RSA, but we should also have a presence at CCCC).

**IDR:** What else would you like to say about your experiences with the Caucus?

**VV:** I would have never made it in this business without family. The Latino Caucus and the Rainbow Strand Planners (and Sandra Gibbs) were my professional family. So the most memorable set of events for me that are positive all concern putting together the national conference. When I first got elected to Assistant Chair (the year before the conference), the Latino Caucus and some folks from the Black Caucus threw a party for me. It was way cool. Ira Shor joined in. I always admired his work. Well he grabs some chips, scoops up a giant glob of Pico de Gallo and proceeds to cough and tear. For the rest of the night, whenever anyone got near the Pico, he'd tell them, "That stuff's hot." I still laugh when I think of it. But more important, for the meeting itself, I put our stuff on Main Street. The convention had a Spanish theme (someone thought it was obscene; I don't remember who, but thought I had written *cuntos* instead of *cuentos*—always thinking the worse). Culture night had a Puerto Rican traditional troupe that played *Bomba y Plena*, with kids dressed in traditional clothes, clothes that look no different from what the

Black American slaves wore in the 19th century. It was nice to show folks my cultural ways, the ways in which the culture reflects the indigenous, the European, and the African. (The conference manager went crazy because I hadn't ordered chips and salsa for the cultural night. What it was was that I advertised that there would be Bomba, Plena, y Salsa—our music, not Mexican food!) And then I got folks to go the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum in the Pilsen district (where there was salsa), to celebrate the Scholars for the Dream Award winners, so that folks could see yet another Spanish culture and hear yet another kind of music. So, for a short time, our collective Spanish-American ways were not a little workshop on a Wednesday morning or a small meeting on a Thursday night; for a little time it was our conference. And I had the help of Ceci in discussing things and Jaime and Ann Feldman (who was my assistant chair and got me the connect with the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum). This was the highlight of my career, when our ways were up front, on Main Street.

**IDR:** You have been chosen for this interview because you have been a mentor who is involved with the Latino Caucus and have been very influential on future Latino/a compositionists. How do you define your role as a mentor for this SIG and why is it important for the rest of the professional community?

**VV:** I might be wrong, but as far as I can figure or remember, I was the first Latino in rhetoric and composition as it came to be defined in the 1980s. I was far from being the first Latino in the national organizations, but the first to focus on rhetoric and composition (with my mentors having been a Latina linguist and a Latina who remains very influential in early bilingual ed.). Although I wasn't really conscious of that role at the time, it did come to define what it means to be a mentor—the one who had gained insights into the workings of the national organization (and it isn't really, by NCTE/CCCC terms, a SIG; it's a Caucus—a caucus is a closed gathering of folks for political power; as such, we represent a political group, Latinos and Latinas who are teachers of English—and any number of Special Interests; one Caucus, many potential SIGs). My job, then, becomes passing on those insights even as I gain insights from folks who have had to confront new sets of obstacles (intentional or not). If we are to gain the kind of political power our demographics would suggest we should have, we need these conversations. Mentoring, then, includes clarifying expectations given disproportionate power

relations, guiding research and scholarship, providing feedback on teaching when possible, and removing also, to the degree that it's possible, impediments to success.

**IDR:** Do you remember what year you became chair of the Task force on Racism and Bias in the T of E? Do you remember Roseann D. Gonzalez and did you appoint her or the other way around? I'm trying to get a good timeline going for my cross-generational comparative approach.

**VV:** Roseann and Kris Gutierrez recruited me into the Hispanic Caucus (although I was already a Ph.D. and Kris was an A.B.D. – in bilingual ed. – at the time; Roseann was already a big name in linguistics). I became chair of Racism and Bias (it was a committee by then) in 1987. I don't even remember if she was on that committee, but she had been in charge (with Kris) when it was a Task Force. I was recruited by them for the Caucus. But I think I got on that committee because of an article I wrote on Richard Rodriguez that showed up in the *English Journal* that Sandra Gibbs really liked.

**IDR:** Interesting. You wrote a piece on Richard Rodriguez? Is this essay available? What is the title?

**VV:** It was my first big pub. Its title is “Whose Voice is it Anyway?” It's anthologized a lot, but it came out in *English Journal*. I'd bet it's easy to find.

### About the Interviewer

Iris Ruiz, a Central Valley-born Mexican-American “high-risk” teenager, had her first child when she was nineteen, graduated from high school two years later, entered community college on a miniscule scholarship, dropped out two semesters in a row, and then, at the age of twenty-one, decided she was going to be an English major. She earned her first of four college degrees at the age of 23 and now holds an Associate of Science in Human Services, a Bachelor of Arts in English, a Master of Arts in English with a focus on Composition Theory and has recently earned her Ph.D. in Literature from the University of California, San Diego, under the direction of Linda Brodkey and Rosaura Sánchez. She has been involved with academia as a student and then as a Teaching Assistant for a total of 18 years and is currently a lecturer for the Merritt Writing Program at the University of California, Merced (back in the Central Valley). She has been a recipient of the Scholars for the Dream award, the Chair's Memorial Scholarship and the UC, San Diego Social Justice Award.

Her dissertation, *Shattering Glass Mirrors: A Case for Historio-*

graphic Theory and Writing in Composition, elaborates the theory, history, and practice of critical historiography as a pedagogical approach for students who live in an increasingly multicultural, multilingual society. Critical historiography is founded on the premise that the lost histories of composition, which are inextricably tied to Midwestern and black normal schools as well as schools that catered to students of color and lower class students throughout the twentieth century, at once call into question established histories of composition, and serve as models for developing alternative pedagogical approaches to the teaching of composition today. She promises that it will be published in book form within the next year.



# Progressive Caucus

## Combating Institutional Neutrality

Remembering the Progressive Composition Caucus with  
Louise Dunlap, Karyn Hollis, and Frank Gaik  
*Timothy R. Dougherty and Justin Lewis*

### Introduction

Founded in 1982 by an editorial collective of friends anchored around Karyn Hollis, then a Ph.D. student at the University of Southern California, the Progressive Composition Caucus (PCC) served as a clearinghouse for activist writing teachers and scholars to share news, ideas, pedagogies, and calls for action during the lean years of the Reagan/Bush era from 1982-1992 (the newsletter lasted until 1988). As Hollis put it in a recent email exchange, “the PCC was a general leftist, activist, political group working with the other caucuses to affect progressive change in local and national venues of all kinds...we tried to be committed, activist, public intellectuals.” A brief perusal of the PCC’s quarterly newsletters reveals the multifaceted approach by which they pursued their agenda across these venues. Members seized the opportunity for activism in multiple contexts: from the individual writing classroom to the institutional structures of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, from the pages of journals to conference panel presentations, from advocating for resolutions against the U.S. invasion of Grenada to standing on the picket line with striking hotel workers at the 1986 CCCC in New Orleans to helping ensure that the Students’ Right to Their Own Language statement survived the attacks to alter it in 1984. In short, the PCC was busy.

Perhaps the best way to get a general sense of the organization’s commitments is to consult their statement of purpose, first included as the header to their newsletter in Issue #6 from 1984:

The Progressive Composition Caucus is composed of composition instructors who view writing as a potentially liberating activity and teach from a leftist-feminist perspective. Our curriculum often emphasizes non-canonical literature, and exposes sexist, racist, political and corporate manipulation of language. This newsletter provides a forum for organizing around pedagogical and political issues at the national meetings of the CCCC and other professional organizations as well as a place to share writing assignments, course outlines, bibliographical information and any other material which contributes to a student-centered writing curriculum.

Hewing closely to the tenets of critical pedagogy as understood at the

time, their newsletters are peppered with pedagogical tips. For instance, in Issue #4 (October, 1983) pedagogical resources range from a full syllabus for teaching composition as a feminist endeavor to quick suggestions for texts or techniques to use in the writing classroom, to publicizing important radical research on topics ranging from the politics of literacy to the insidious nature of standardized language testing. As you might expect, the decades may change, but the basic issues tend to continually resurface in new and often disturbing ways.

Because of this, it's important that we remember the lessons and commitments from the PCC's experience spanning the decade from 1982-1992, and find ways to carry their banner for social justice into our current context. As noted above, these commitments are certainly pedagogical. But they are also political, in ways that called CCCC to take stands on issues in international politics. For instance, Frank Gaik, another member of the PCC's editorial collective, had this to say about his time with the PCC:

My fondest memory comes from the mid '80s, when we actually got a motion from the floor to condemn the Reagan administration for its illegal (according to the World Court) interference in Nicaragua's social revolution precisely because, and here is where it gets local, Nicaragua had made such great strides in its literacy campaigns and schooling. At the time, the president, whose name escapes me, but she was from Texas and was co-author of an established text in composition, gave a little speech about how there were plenty of politics within our field of composition, within English departments, and campuses, and that we were either distracting the profession or wasting our time. In hindsight, I am glad that we made a stand, but I also did not foresee the extent to which the politics of composition would become so heavy—with textbook companies trying to standardize curriculum and testing, with English departments ridding themselves of composition doctorates (as my own school, USC, did within a decade), and with educational departments coming to dominate the teaching of composition with technocratic and cognitive models that deny the students their place in the social world of literacy. Nor could I imagine the budget cuts, the increased class sizes, and the "outcomes movement," nor, the union bashing that would take place locally and nationally. In short, there have been plenty of reasons to fight for the right to teach critical literacy to our students, and my political energy has been tested doing so. Meanwhile, back in Central America, the Sandinistas basically gave the people the right to vote them out of office—an improvement; and Daniel Ortega now campaigns on an anti-abortion platform. (Personal communication)

In the face of corporatizing universities, tenuous university labor-

administration relations, and consumptive education models, Gaik's anecdote reminds us that activist groups like the Progressive Composition Caucus advanced the ethical, political, and social causes that many caucuses and SIGs continue to pursue to this day.

But this work didn't remain safely ensconced in the board and business meetings of the annual CCCC conference. Depending on the exigencies facing them at any given moment, the PCC also took to the streets. And it is these moments that founding members like Hollis are most proud of. When asked to note the PCC's most significant accomplishment, Hollis had this to say:

I think our biggest accomplishment was when we lent our support to striking hotel workers at the Hyatt Hotel in New Orleans. We put up a table in the exhibition hall with leaflets and buttons in support of the SEIU strike and we urged CCCC members to march with the picketers outside. Many people participated on the picket line with us and the hotel threatened to call the police—and perhaps did. Ask Louise Dunlap. She held down the fort (table).

In what follows, we took the advice of the PCC's founder and interviewed Louise Dunlap to hear more about the SEIU action at the 1986 CCCC in New Orleans. In conjunction with Hollis, Dunlap played a key role in the Progressive Composition Caucus's successful action in solidarity with the local labor struggle in New Orleans that year. Though she is now more involved with community writing groups, and actually began teaching in the School of Architecture and Planning at MIT in the 1980s, Dunlap has been a writing instructor since the 1970s, and tells us that CCCC has always felt like a professional home for her. Her latest book is entitled, *Undoing the Silence: Tools for Social Change Writing*, and is intended to help folks unlock their power to advocate for and effect social change through writing. We caught up with her on the phone across multiple time zones on a snowy day in early January 2011.

### Interview

**Tim Dougherty (TD):** Could you start by telling us how you originally heard about the Progressive Caucus? Were you active in other caucuses at the time? What led you to join the Progressive Caucus?

**Louise Dunlap (LD):** First of all you need to know that until 1980 or 1981 I was a "normal" teacher of literature and writing in an English department. Around 1980 I shifted the focus of my academic work and began teaching writing in the School of Architecture and

Planning. At that point I had few English colleagues that I saw on a regular basis. I had a lot of progressive colleagues in my new surroundings; however, I didn't have any English teaching colleagues. So, for a while, CCCC was extremely important to me, as it was where I maintained my disciplinary connections as a writing teacher.

I don't remember when I actually first heard about any of the caucuses; however, I was extremely glad to have found the Progressive Caucus when I did. The most important work I did with Karyn Hollis occurred in 1986, so it must have been a little earlier in the '80s when I first ran across the PCC. In the late 1970s and early 1980s I had experienced CCCC as a fairly progressive organization – especially when compared to MLA. It was an organization that prided itself on confronting the difficulties of teaching writing in big public universities and other institutional settings. CCCC was also interested in issues of class, ethnicity, gender – really all of the issues we began devoting ourselves to as writing teachers in the late 1970s. At that time I was teaching at UMASS Boston where the environment was very progressive. We even had Paulo Freire come to give a talk and we attempted to put some of his teaching into practice. Most folks on that campus were very progressive. But, somehow, when I attended any of the MLA conferences it was like going to a strange land. CCCC was a much more friendly kind of space and certainly more democratic compared to MLA. So, despite not feeling a lack of progressive politics at CCCC I was excited to have found a smaller contingent of explicitly progressive folks in the Progressive Caucus.

It is interesting because every group I've ever been a part of—professional, spiritual, cultural, environmental—has a tendency to ignore some of the most important problems besetting us. About that time in the 1980s I was becoming very involved in thinking about issues from a labor perspective. I wasn't in a union myself because no faculty unions existed at MIT in the 1980s; however, I sympathized with that perspective and was really, really excited to find an organization within CCCC that actually organized over labor issues. My colleagues in urban planning at my own university were very progressive and helped me think about social justice in a much more “global” way. As I became more interested in progressive politics I ended up taking some classes in political economy and sought out the Progressive Caucus at CCCC as an outlet for those creative, activist energies.

As a result—in my books, writing, thinking, and teaching—I’ve been centrally concerned with how academic thinking tends to drift towards the neutral. I call this trend “neutral writing” or “neutral thinking” – a kind of neutrality that refuses to take a position on things. I think this particular concern is central to the whole misunderstanding concerning the idea of scholarly objectivity. It seems that every organization’s politics tend to gravitate toward the neutral. When I ended up getting involved with the Progressive Caucus I could see that CCCC’s own politics was very neutral too. Through the PCC, I was able to use a little active conscience to awaken the conscience of those that had drifted toward neutrality. That’s what this story I intend to tell you today is actually about. Does that answer your question?

**TD:** It certainly does, and provides a good backdrop for the action in 1986 with Karyn Hollis and the rest of the Progressive Composition Caucus. Can you let us know what was going on at that particular conference?

**LD:** I think this story is very important. It’s the sort of thing that we should continue to do over and over and over again. In 1986 CCCC was scheduled to be held in New Orleans. A few months before a lot of my Boston colleagues had visited New Orleans for the Super Bowl and came back with stories about a labor struggle occurring at the Hyatt. The housekeeper’s union had repeatedly negotiated contracts with the Hyatt management; however, management had refused to sign any of them. So, as you might expect, the housekeepers continued working without a contract for quite some time. The union was a local Service Employees International Union (SEIU)—Karyn’s husband worked for another chapter in Pennsylvania and I had a friend in another SEIU chapter near me—and they continued to negotiate without any hope of resolving the contract disagreements with management.

At that time I knew Karyn through my work in the PCC. I contacted her and said, “There’s a big struggle going on in the Hyatt that CCCC is being hosted at this year—but no one in CCCC knows anything about it. So, what are we going to do?” We only had about a week to organize our action, get the contacts of the local SEIU, and put together a resolution for the business meeting. We even hoped to show solidarity with the local union by organizing a joint-participation picket line. We—I mean Karyn and I—ended up creating some very inexpensive, bright orange stickers that said,

very visibly, “Support the SEIU Local 100 - Boycott the Hyatt.” We handed out a ton of those stickers and saw folks wearing them a lot over the course of the conference. We also created a leaflet that explained the labor dispute and handed it out at the PCC table which, famously, was located directly inside the Hyatt main lobby. Of course the Hyatt’s private police force wasn’t particularly keen on our informational booth and told us that we weren’t permitted to distribute that leaflet there. The leaflet boldly proclaimed, “Let’s Support the Hyatt Boycott” on the front and included all the information about the contract disputes, the strike, and why it was our business and responsibility as writing teachers to support the workers. It also included information on what you could do as a CCCC member to stand in solidarity with the SEIU Local 100.

We gave out a lot of leaflets—perhaps thousands—and folks began to know about the issue. One of the things that the leaflet suggested was that people could change their registration to a union hotel and we provided a list of such accommodations. A few people did that; however, since most folks’ rooms had already been taken care of by their universities they couldn’t really back out of their reservations. For those that were stuck at the Hyatt we said, “You can wear this sticker and support us by coming to the business meeting where we’ll have a resolution about this issue.”

We gave out a lot of leaflets and a lot of excitement was generated when I almost got arrested for handing out a leaflet! At a table! When confronted by security I just said, “Well, this is my writing – this is a writing teachers’ conference and we have a right to give out our writing!” And they said, “No.” A lot of people stepped up to support me then because they didn’t want a writing teacher to be arrested for sharing her writing – that would certainly bring bad press for the Hyatt.

Anyhow, we participated, we educated ourselves, and we educated others. We talked to CCCC members and hotel workers. We showed solidarity by wearing the orange boycott stickers. We joined the picket line in between meetings to express support and solidarity with the porters, bellboys, and housekeepers and we encouraged everyone we could to attend the business meeting where we presented a two part proposal that asked the CCCC chair—and the organization as a whole—to contact the New Orleans Hyatt manager John Orr in order to let him know why we were boycotting and to ask him to please sign the union contract. We even asked folks to let the

national Hyatt management know that we would boycott all Hyatt locations until an agreement was reached with the New Orleans SEIU Local 100.

The other provision put forward in the business meeting was a more long-term goal. We hoped CCCC would develop a process for looking ahead to the labor situation in every city the organization makes plans with. Despite the fact that CCCC makes plans three-four years in advance, we asked “If a labor dispute develops at any time after advance plans are made CCCC should exert pressure on hotel management to resolve the dispute equitably and prior to the CCCC event. If the dispute is not settled before the convention, registration packets sent out prior to the beginning of the conference should include information on the dispute including solicited statements from union leaders and a list of alternative hotels.” The resolution also stated that, “If a dispute arises after the packets have been mailed but before the conference begins, CCCC should notify members in a special mailing in the same manner as above.” In other words, we were trying to ensure that this sort of thing didn’t happen again in the future. They ended up passing our resolution by a vote of 106 to 13.

**TD:** Wow. You crushed it.

**LD:** Yeah, I guess we did. We definitely made a splash and it even made some news in the national labor publications at the time. The Local 100 members were very happy to have our support and we felt really good that we had an eye out for this. I think the actions at that convention did build an interest in the PCC. It drew attention to the fact that the PCC wasn’t some wild, far-out splinter group, like some of the groups today; rather, it was a group interested in ensuring that all CCCC members could act according to their beliefs because—just by the nature of their jobs—many of them were already union members. Though the labor dispute at the Hyatt wasn’t necessarily at the top of most folks’ agenda when they headed to New Orleans it was at the top of our agenda and, I suppose, it ended up at the top of most agendas. It was just one of those things that Karyn and I worked our butts off on. We put these things and this action together before a lot of the functionality created by the Internet and word processing software – I mean, the leaflet was created on an old typewriter with cut-and-paste graphics!

**TD:** So what exactly drew you to the Hyatt workers union contract dispute in the first place?



**LD:** Well, this union—I happen to know a lot about hotel workers unions as I am familiar with some in the Boston area—is almost exclusively comprised of folks that were black. Because of the secret networks of stairs, elevators, and passageways that the staff uses to stay out of the public eye there is something of an apartheid occurring in these spaces. Further, because most big city hotel staff are people of color we thought it was important to address these race-labor issues in order to raise consciousness on multiple levels. I was very, very happy with the work of the action and I was very glad that there was a PCC to take it up.

**TD:** So how did the work you did at CCCC in 1986—and with the PCC in general—influence your future work, even to this day?

**LD:** Well, that's a good question. I had always wanted to work less with the neutral university setting and more where people are taking action and every move I made in my career was always moving closer toward that goal. Also, because I wasn't cut out to be a medieval literature professor—which is what I thought when I was in graduate school and when I wrote my dissertation—I naturally gravitated toward work centered around writing for social change and social justice.

People at CCCC nowadays are very dedicated and good hearted about their work. If I stand up and say, "How is this going to change things in these communities?" or if I say, "Let's think about critical thinking and how we can get people to question our military mentality!" people are generally receptive. You can be a spokesperson for that sort of thing within a relatively neutralist organization but you can't do that all by yourself. You need colleagues whose eyes you can catch and they will give you the thumbs up, you know? Then they'll get up and say something similar. There is such a pressure toward this neutralist inertia in all of our institutions and progressives need to be together one way or another to enliven that and bring some reality back to it. As my sister used to say, "Be real!" Being real is very important.

**TD:** There is a current state of national and international politics that seems to cry out for the PCC's vision of a more politically committed writing teacher cohort now more than ever. So, what do you see—as someone who has been continually moving in a more progressive direction with your work in the community and the profession—as the future of writing teacher-scholar political activism?

**LD:** I think I see the future as being not all that different from the



past. I have to say I only go to CCCC or hang out with writing teachers about once every three to four years so I can't really speak very well about this, but the last time I went was just like the first time I went to CCCC. I was very moved to see that there are people in just about every university expressing progressive ideas. Further, most of the SIGs and most of the caucuses were also concerned with progressive politics; there are plenty of people at CCCC that have progressive values. They may not label them as progressive but they are doing progressive work. I think it's always difficult when you organize as a progressive subgroup because, and I remember this back from the 1980s, some people who think they are progressives say, "well, I'm not that progressive" or there is an othering that goes on by people who acknowledge themselves as progressives. There is a sort of dualism that I don't think serves us very well. It is an us/them mentality on both sides actually.

I am even less dualistic myself these days. I want to mainstream progressivism and, unfortunately, the current Congress is going to force us to do that. There is a risk in mainstreaming the movement. When you do that sort of mainstreaming you run the risk of getting what we got with Obama—which is to say that the person who gets elected isn't quite as progressive as you might have thought. I just know that we need to stay in solidarity with each other as progressives and support each other in order to awaken those people who don't really prioritize action. This is what my work is about now—as a community writing teacher people come to my workshops in their communities and are appalled by the way the world is going. They realize that they haven't done much to shift the consciousness and direction of things, except maybe voting. Yet, they have so many ideas. My work now, I see, is to try and get these people who were sort of neutralized in the middle to raise their voices, to lift their voices for social change. I guess that is my theme overall.

**TD:** Well, Louise, thank you so much for your time today, especially in the midst of a short timeline and your upcoming trip to Japan.

Do you have any final thoughts to leave us with some sense of hope or something that helps you get out of bed in the morning as you continue in your work as a change agent?

**LD:** I think the only thing that helps me get out of bed in the morning is having more conversations like this - finding that the people of a new generation are interested in history and knowledge about the state of the world. We have a huge task and the only thing that gets

me out of bed is knowing that I have other people like yourselves doing it with me.

# Queer Caucus

## Renaming Curiosity/Resisting Ignorance

Interviewing Queerness

*Martha Marinara and Mark McBeth, 2010 Co-Chairs, Queer Caucus*

The word unsaid will stay unsaid/Though there was much to say.

—A. E. Housman

Curiosity, or the desire to know within the work of learning, is, after all, a symptom of our sexuality.

—Deborah Britzman, *Lost Subjects, Contested Objects*. (77)

Ignorance is a strange “benefit” for responsible educators to be recommending.

—Louie Crew, “*Before Emancipation*” (23)

## Introduction

If we think the idea of naming is important, the changes indicated by renaming may indicate even more significance. Since the inception of a GLBTQ-affiliated SIG in the 1970s, the group has changed names various times: Committee on Lesbian and Gay Male Concerns in the English Profession (1972); Lesbian and Gay Male Caucus (1976); Lesbian and Gay Professional Caucus (1992); Queer Caucus (2000). But as Paul Puccio warns in a recent forum about the term queer, “Simple name changes do not resolve complex problems. (“Using the Term ‘Queer’” 56). In the past three decades the current Queer Caucus, evolving through a variety of names indicative of their purpose and context, has continuously served the increasingly more visible and “out loud” needs of the CCCC GLBTQ community. Even in its earliest days this affiliation of gay and lesbian teachers would raise nuanced issues of the poly-glottal, poly-racial, poly-gendered, and poly-contextualized differences of its members. In its current name—Queer Caucus—“homosexual” identity as defined by heterosexism remains constantly in question while its anti-homophobic intentions remain undeniably intact.

While the interview with Louie Crew represents the sentiments of an early founder of the Queer special interest group, many people through various decades and variety of actions have supported the NCTE/CCCC GLBTQ cohort. All of the queer leadership recognized that without the

necessary leadership to voice the needs of this group they would, again, repeat a historical (and clichéd) refrain when they “could not say their name.” While Louie Crew’s early (and continuing) activist work addressed the lack of support for gay and lesbian teachers, others such as Harriet Malinowitz explored research devoted to queer students in the composition classroom. As an ever-present and energized queer presence at CCCC, Paul Puccio has represented the queer voice in many venues, committees, and initiatives undertaken by our flagship composition/rhetoric conference. (What a relief and joy to have his friendly, smiling queerness greet you at the Newcomer’s Table!) An entire plethora of people have endeavored to fulfill the overall NCTE mission of promoting “the development of literacy, the use of language to construct personal and public worlds and to achieve full participation in society,” while simultaneously examining how queer viewpoints help shape this vision. They have resisted the heterosexism and heteronormativity that occurs on their local campuses and brought those issues to the CCCC table for productive inquiry and possible resolution. As Harriet Malinowitz reported in *Textual Orientations*:

Behind the media glitz and hype, most academic institutions and the communities that contain them are still homophobic enough to discourage teachers and students from coming out or even speaking out strongly for change. Many schools and colleges still lack policies against discrimination based on sexual orientation. (7)

While unspoken (silencing) policies still obscure GLBTQ topics on many campuses, the CCCC queer membership has remained consistently noisy about this sanctioned quietism. Moreover, they have ensured that the composition and rhetoric association remains critically aware of its own possible slippage into bureaucratic normality, where policies and procedures can often systemically undermine the creative rights and divergent possibilities of its members. If J. L. Austin’s performative utterance—how to make words do things—has become a mainstay in theory for queer studies, the Queer Caucus members have in praxis remained acutely attuned to what words people use and what exactly those words do to others. This type of queer linguistic and, yes, ethical vigilance sustains the integrity of the overall CCCC mission, deters unacknowledged repression, and constantly reinvests learning and teaching in the language arts.

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## Interview

Emeritus Professor of English at Rutgers University, Louie Crew has a long history of research and activism surrounding queer concerns. In the early 1970s he had already initiated a lesbian and gay themed-edition of *College English* and, since then, he has had a continuous and prolific assembly of articles, books, and websites. Some of his earliest work, *The Gay Academic*, compiles the views of gay and lesbian scholars in academia, while his later work examines the subject of sexuality within the Episcopal Church. You can find his website at <http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~lcrew/>.

September 9th, 2010: Mark McBeth interviewing Louie Crew about the initial days of lesbian and gays in the NCTE/CCCC.

**Mark McBeth (MM):** Can you describe how you initiated this group and what your participation was in this initial group of gays and lesbians at NCTE and CCCC?

**Louie Crew (LC):** Well, first I was a newly minted Ph.D. in '71, at the University of Alabama, and as for so many other newly minted Ph.D.s, I taught a fairly large amount of composition. I happened to like doing that as well. But I realized that I needed specialized training that had not been available at that time in Birmingham and other places. I realized too that homosexuality had not received any mainline attention among English professors. So, in '73 or '74, I wrote off to Richard Ohmann, the editor of *College English*, who was at Wesleyan, saying, "You've done a special issue on Native Americans; you've done at least one, maybe two, special issues on women's issues. What about a special issue on gay and lesbian studies?" I think I was using the word homosexuality as most people were in academic discourse at the time. He wrote back and said, "This is a great idea. Would you expand on it and some details to say what

you think that issue should contain, and who would be the one to edit it?" I wrote back a fairly long note suggesting things, and I was really up against my own ignorance right away because, who knew? But I suggested bibliography studies, biography, special authors, and reclaiming the greats. For example, bringing Whitman indeed to be the gay poet, and not just "happy poet."

For editing it, I suggested Rictor Norton at the University of Florida because I had just read his dissertation. In his English doctorate thesis, he talked about sexuality in the Greek language and in British literature as well. And low and behold I got a letter back from Ohmann saying, "Well why don't you and Rictor get together and edit this." We were given complete freedom to do this project. I was virtually an unknown academic—I had not done much beside my dissertation. At that point I only had about 18-20 periodical publications. I was very committed, obviously, to doing that, but it was real risk-taking on Ohmann's part to choose me as guest editor. I graduated from a non-descript doctorate program at the University of Alabama, (where Forrest Gump went to university) and where the football team was the major emphasis. I was teaching in a small African-American Methodist college in Orangeburg, South Carolina so it was really quite daring of Ohmann to trust me with this project. This project led me to find out everything I could about what was going on with the topic. About that same time some people in New York started the gay academic union, and they had their first meeting—I believe the first national meeting was in '73.

**MM:** And I think that was at John Jay College where I work.

**LC:** It was at John Jay, yeah. And some of the same people who were there, Bob Cheryll in the political science department, Cheryll I think is still there, he's only recently retired. Martin Duberman of course was one of the guiding persons in that group. I went to that conference with a call for papers for contributions to this special issue. Some publisher shortly thereafter had read an article I wrote for the back page of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, first one they ever published on coming out and gay issues. So anyway a publisher got in touch with me and I did come out in '78 with a book called *The Gay Academic*, it was a collection. Like a lot of things uneven, there were some absolutely stunning pieces as part of it. Anyway that sort of took me out of my...while I still lived there and flourished there—I loved where I was when I was doing and teaching in grad school and college, as a white southerner finding out the world was so

wonderfully rich just by crossing the street and participating in it in a just way.

I obviously was no major literary scholar and that had very little credentials for me at that point, but I had the dedication, and hopefully a mind for the task, and that's how I got involved in it. Also, I cared a lot about composition and found out how little I knew and how little anyone knew; we didn't know it was going to become a whole discipline, but it almost did overnight. I was teaching in small places where you taught everything. I mean I taught the Shakespeare course, I taught the Victorian course, I taught composition, and so on, and I taught black literature. I introduced the first course in black literature at that black college. But that's how I got involved in it. I continued going to MLA for several years before then, but I felt that it spoke less to kinds of professional needs I had, and I didn't have the budget to be going to all of the academic meetings. So I focused more on the National Council for Teachers of English and on the CCCC when the CCCC really got underway.

Also I was very influenced by the grammarian James Sledd at the University of Texas who had the misfortune of coming out with an absolutely brilliant new grammar the year or two before Chomsky published his. So you had this wonderful book, and some people would read it, but you know who is going get all of the attention and you don't even resent the guy getting all the attention. [Laughs] nut Sledd had a National Endowment for the Humanities scholarship for a seminar, and that was the second one I went to. The first one I went to was Stanley Fish's, when he was still at the University of California, Berkeley in '74, when the special Gay issue of *College English* was in the press but had not come out yet. Stanley Fish was one of the most interesting personalities in academia who had spent most of the last few years at Duke. It was extraordinarily nurturing to meet both those figures. Later I had a third NEH fellowship and I guess in 1981 at the University of Chicago with Joe William who was the biggest influence of mine through *Style: [Ten Lessons]* in Clarity and Grace and prose style. But that's the background and how I got started in composition. Obviously I met many people who had been at it much longer than I had been. All of us were in some stages of coming out, and of course many people were also supportive who were not themselves gay or lesbian. Many of them were not.

One of my favorite stories about that was going to a job interview at the MLA—I guess in 1974—and it was the year that Christopher

Isherwood and James Baldwin both were special presenters to the big MLA that was at the Chicago Palmer House. And, but of course the Caucus had all of it then, and I was not instrumental in founding that caucus, then Luke Cromton and a woman named Knowle... I'm blanking out on the first name, but it was a person who was at Kent who had started the Caucus and they had a whole range of programs. Anyway I went to a job interview at that occasion, that was the University of Colorado, and it turned out that the night before that, somebody had gotten up in one of the sessions and complained—I didn't know this man—had complained that he thought that it was a dreadful thing that gays and lesbians were coming out of the closet, and one of the great contributions gays and lesbians had given to British and American literature was the sense of irony and so on they got from being in the closet, and he felt that literature would be impoverished by this loss of irony. And I stood up and I said I think this is just a marvelous suggestion, and I think based on that we really ought to form a resolution to the NCTE that we persecute heterosexual professors so that they will enrich our rights and force them into the closet and *[laughs]*... and of course the room just hooted! I went to the job interview and he was chair of the interviewing committees. Needless to say I did not get that job—I was spared them, and they were spared me *[laughs]*.

**MM:** I suspect it's not the job you wanted anyway. It's an interesting take on homosexuality, because it's actually not putting down homosexuality, but in a very bizarre way celebrating it and saying, "my god, if everybody's out in the open we're going lose something."

**LC:** One of the great things about Stanley Fish is that he's not only rich in his own approach to the excitement about ideas, but he's also great about bringing people in. He doesn't have to recruit them; all the scholars at Berkeley were just looking forward to coming to our seminars as often as they could. One person he brought in, Stephen Booth—a Brit—was a world expert on Shakespeare's sonnets. I remember being just so exasperated with him, and said so at a cocktail party when you can say things more directly, especially if you don't work in the same institution. I said, "Well you don't say anything specifically about the homosexuality of the sonnets," and I started reciting several lines from the sonnets. I said, "I just don't see how you can ignore this." He said, "Well, almost all of literature is written for someone who was 58 years old, male, and who only lives 30 miles outside of London... this is the audience that you write



things for, if you're writing scholarship. But I have a whole trunk load of material on homosexuality and sonnets, which sits in my attic and will remain there." I remember another person who was a major scholar and himself gay who came to the meetings and said, "I'm just embarrassed by your tone," and at another cocktail session later, says, "I don't understand why you're bringing up things that just shouldn't be brought up. I'm not about to give the people the power over me by letting them know for sure, from my lips that I'm queer. Of course they know I'm queer, but they won't hear it from me! I'm not going to give up that sense of power." Well, I would like to say that's all a thing of the past too, but I keep hearing that institutions still exist where some of that still is the sentiment.

As you may know about another huge portion of my life about the same time, I started the Integrity League, the gay Episcopal groups so a lot of my discourses were informed by ecclesiastical and biblical stuff. And for that I said let the dead bury the dead [laughs]. If you're gonna wait till your mother dies or you've gotten your doctorate or you've gotten your tenure or whatever... Believe me, you know, go on—life is right now. And, but my, uh, whole understanding of why we have brains and why we educate ourselves and why we have institutions for that is to take our talents and re-invest them in institutions that will also do the same nurturing. But they're not meant to be hoarded up like some sort of prize.

**MM:** So, it sounds to me as if you've initiated quite a few leadership roles and been involved at a variety of places—like MLA, NCTE, CCCC. When did your leadership begin at the NCTE specifically?

**LC:** Julia Stanley and I got together because we had realized that we needed to have gender parity in this caucus group. She had decided to adopt the name Julia Penelope. I don't think she was yet at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln where Louis Crompton was throughout his career, but she moved there at some point during this time. And so we decided to approach the NCTE and set up a—it was fairly easy to do, and to a number, I'm not sure what number, I'm sure the process was not impossible because we did it. I don't remember it as being difficult when we initiated a caucus and had meeting time when people came.

I remember at the meeting of NCTE in New York City at one point, I had gone to a great deal of trouble trying to find out all of the restaurants and theaters and things, catering to gay and lesbian folks. I even persuaded NCTE to put that in the brochure that everybody

got. It was not unusual: they had brochures of welcome from various other caucuses of things you might want to do. I remember Ernest—my partner—arrived from Georgia, and we were going to go out to one of these places. He had on this gorgeous fur coat and was looking very fine. We showed up, and we waited at the bar; we waited and we waited at the bar to be taken into the restaurant. We couldn't get anybody even to serve us any alcohol much less ... because it was a very upscale, very proper white-only bar in New York City. And I remember being absolutely shocked, and I remember writing to the people—I was also on the board of the Nation Gay and Lesbian Task Force where I had gotten some of this contact information for some of my brochures. They said, "Well, its enough that we can give you some names, but we cannot take on the mafia for right at this point; it's unrealistic to expect that of us." We were dealing with other complications in New York besides the things we dealt with in our small southern town in Georgia [laughs].

**MM:** There are a couple committees of that time because you just talked about the Caucus, and that was a caucus for the concerns for gay and lesbian instructors. Prior to that there was a committee formed for concerns for gay and lesbian instructors.

**LC:** Well, I'm not saying that they didn't happen or I didn't know, I have, frankly just—my memory bank's gone dead on that part.

**MM:** There's a very blurry line between these two groups because sometimes they're talked about as if they're the same group, and sometimes they're talked about as if they're separate groups doing different things.

**LC:** Let me answer one that I spotted here: What risks did people face joining these groups? And on the other hand, what benefits did people gain? Although certainly there were risks, because you never knew who was going to show up in the meeting and you didn't know whether it was somebody scouting it out to report on people back home—whether or not that person was gay. You know, there were all sorts of internal politics of gays betraying gays, especially with playing into all of the other academic rank politics—it's a nasty profession in some ways.

So the shift came very rapidly. Let me give an example again from the NCTE of 1976 because it's so vivid in my mind. I believe I'm right in saying that that's the one where I also was on a panel to speak about the writing of Isherwood. And Isherwood was present. I was very fond of his book *The Single Man* and I wanted to talk

about that specifically from the point of view of a gay activist living in Georgia, and what that book said to me and the problems I had with things I wished it had gone on to say. And it was a very presumptuous way of doing it, but I was an authority on that, so I thought I was trying to stay within my realm of authority. And, lo and behold, I look out and he's there with Don Bacardi, his lover, sitting in the audience. And to celebrate getting out of Georgia I wore my latest creation which was a lavender pant suit that I had made and just about the longest earring I could find.

**MM:** Do you still have that lavender pant suit?

**LC:** No, I couldn't dare fit into it. Someone kept it as a relic but he's gone and I'm sure so is the pant suit.

**MM:** I was going to ask if we could add it to the NCTE archive.

**LC:** [*Laughs*]. But anyway, I got up and I arrived and there were I guess four or five of us, and the others were all well known scholars and had written about issues themselves and were quite distinguished people. And incidentally my gaydar went off and I was correct, all of them were gay. I couldn't believe at the end of the discussion when Isherwood got up and in a raspy voice said, "Well I've enjoyed all the things that the rest of you fellas have been saying" but, uh, he said, "I just have to go with that gay guy up there." He said, "Well he's the one that's interested me the most because we need that kind of challenge, to be honest, that's he's asking us to do, and I want to talk to you more." And he came up and said, "You talk to me after this is over." And I went over to talk to him and he invited Ernest and me to go over and visit the two of them in California, which unfortunately we never made off. But wasn't that a—I mean I, you had some questions here about risks, but in probably 24 hours or certainly within the next year or two everybody in that panel was out.

And I don't know if you know a book by Nigel Dennis, I think was the guys name, in the '60s had a book called *Cards of Identity*, which treated those people who finally came out as contest, and all the wars they had with each other, who finally did it first, and it was a real take-off on trying to make something out of something that really wasn't important. There is, I think, in any coming out process, a ... such a marvelous unleashing of energy. You can see that with any adolescent today. And the marvelous...for me, I remember experiencing, because I had heard so many of the negative things I did not want to be queer, and I had grown up where queer was one of the ugliest words that you said, in growing up in Alabama. I was so

afraid that I... and I accepted contrary stereotypes. One was that you were so rapacious that you could knock down every tough and subdue him and rape him, and the other one was that you were a powder puff, and completely of no consequences or danger at all.

**MM:** And those two things aren't necessarily mutually exclusive.

**LC:** No! [*Laughs*] I was probably having some trouble with not wanting to be either one of those! But certainly enjoying, maybe seducing men, but not knocking down and um... At any rate, it was such a delight to realize that one of the...and especially because I was writing a lot, and I had been writing since I was four or five years old. I had been very aware, and also I had developed a, despite some of its negative things, a southern Baptist really put a lot on the word: the power as the Greeks say *hol logos*, and then the beginning was the word. The power of the word, and I was aware, that part of that power was that you couldn't tell me what queer is, I'm queer, I can tell you what queer is for me. I can't tell you what queer is for you or you or you. I can tell you cause I'm an authority. And I understood and it was so liberating!

**MM:** Well it would make it un-queer if you could tell me what my queer was.

**LC:** [*Laughs*] That's right.

**MM:** That's defeating the purpose of queer.

**LC:** Yes.

**MM:** I want to go back to something you said earlier because you said that when you began this caucus with some other people, and presented it to NCTE, that it was fairly easy to get it started. And it sounds like it was a place and at a time when I imagine that the GLBTQ community came up against some kind of disavowing and often hostile environments. It sounded like NCTE and some other groups within English studies such as Richard Ohmann and MLA were places where actually you could make some pretty easy ground.

**LC:** Absolutely. Well, remember we were just starting out in the '60s which had liberated the whole academic world, and not everybody came along with it, but everyone was familiar with seizing of office buildings, and I was arrested and jailed at the University of Alabama for being for peace when everybody else was for war. Before Stonewall, I taught a course at the University of Alabama in the experimental college non-credit course, but experimental colleges were going up as sort of adjunct things in college campuses all over the country: got one on the sexual revolution because, was it Cory

who wrote the book about the homosexual revolution? Which was one of the few books that you could buy in an Alabama paperback bookstore at the time that would deal with the subject at all. That and Giovanni's Room and a few other staples that were there. So the mood was already set, maybe almost even waning, because it does, and once you do something that's revolutionary for four times, it's no longer quite so revolutionary. But there was an openness on the part of academics, not giving credit to, but giving attention to, which may be more important actually, a lot of diversity in ideas. So you could take courses in Marxist revolution and anything else. My gosh, we had never been allowed in my education... nobody had ever asked me to read the Communist Manifesto. How in world I could get a Ph.D. without ever having read—everyone has to read that, I don't understand it? That's the American education system. How in the world I could go to teach in China in 1983 and not know the names of more than two of the rivers in the country and maybe three of the cities in the country! I mean, that's nuts, and never have that even as an option to learn Chinese. And to go there and get to teach through a year in Beijing and three in Hong-King is just a transforming experience. But I mean, our education system really is not very good on a whole lot of things... it's good one some others but...

**MM:** In starting the Caucus apparently there was some talk where people were talking to each other saying, "We need to start this group." Can you talk a little about who those characters were and what kinds of things were initiating this sense of getting together? We need to make this group more formal.

**LC:** Well one of the things that we realized very early we needed to give a high priority to, it was a high motivation for a lot of people, was that the NCTE and CCCC have a huge influence on what is published in the teaching market and textbooks. We needed to lobby ... I mean one of the things we would have sessions and talk about and sometimes some of the very people who we would be lobbying were sitting in too because they were gay and working for the publishers at the display areas. But we'd go out and start asking for, well where is your book? What books do you have that would help my students deal with queer issues or homosexual issues? That was enormously influential—and we even passed resolutions towards textbook inclusion and so on. That was one of the priorities. Then another priority that was reflected by an article by Karen Keener—who was teaching and I think she's retired now to a school in Illinois,

an out lesbian—and I wrote an article for College English in the early '80s called, I don't know what the title was, I'll send you a comment when I think of it, but anyway it was to try to deal with the whole business of how important it was to have job security for people. We also tried very hard to get people to raise these issues on their own campuses. The big way that people had dealt with homosexuality for hundreds of years was the same as a crime not mentionable among Christian gentleman [laughs]. Change a few words there, put the unmentionable, remained the longest of that doctrine, and of course someone later said it the crime that won't shut up. But, there was a real need to declare honesty about the discourse. I mean if you, if you—you don't want to think, as much as we revere him, that Oscar Wilde was the only gay writer in British literature. If he was outed by some foolish statements in he did himself in dealing with before Douglas.

We also increasingly had people, I mean Kinsey, for whatever else, I don't know what his stature is at this point, but he had opened up to the whole world that far more people had experienced homosexuality, far more males, than had grown up to be homosexual. Roughly 33% of his population had had a homosexual experience, and the people who became a part of the 10%. Well the difference between 33 and 10, I often have written about, the 23%, are the ones who knew but weren't telling. Now some of those were allies, became strong allies, they just had recognized that this was not their predominant choice or sexual orientation or whatever. But many were running in fear or maybe were part of the 10%... you know, whatever. And that dynamic, I think, still continues today, particularly in institutions like the church which tends to be 30 to 50 years behind everybody else.

**MM:** Well it's those that "doth protest too much." I've always been intrigued by people saying, "You people do such gross things in the bedroom." And my question always back to that is, "Why are you spending so much time fantasizing about what I do in the bedroom? You're spending an awful lot of time fantasizing about what I'm doing in the bedroom. Why are you doing that?"

**LC:** Yeah. Well it's so hard sometimes. Jesus uses the metaphor of teaching as planting seeds, and I really think, while I like to be very precise in my lessons plans and the designs I have for my syllabus, and the ways I work, the evidence suggests to me that over a long look-back over it all, that the seed planting was the predominant metaphor. And I didn't control who was right for that seed...you might have

gotten the student when they were on a hard ground, I might have gotten the student on hard ground, that's not my choice—I don't have responsibility for that beyond doing my best to get that seed there.

**MM:** I think there's a way that you can make fallow ground fertile.

**LC:** Absolutely. You know, but that's all just a way you can...

**MM:** And then give the seed.

**LC:** ...kill the flower that wants so hard to bloom; there's a lot for that.

But I really think that planting the seeds is extremely important. For example, when I came to Rutgers I taught first, before joining the English Department, I taught for I guess four years in something called the Academic Foundations Department. It's no longer a part of Newark, but it was a very significant part of our program. It really did not want to be a remedial program, though that's what other would have called it, and it really wanted to be a course in developing academic foundations for people that we respected as very bright, or else we wouldn't have chosen them. They were, for the large measure, the survivors of the toughest neighborhoods of Newark and Irvington and East Orange, where I now live, and other places. Many of them were going home to incredibly difficult home environments with guns and drugs and whatever. In fact one of the things that Rutgers, Newark did was have very limited, and wanted very limited, dormitory space, for undergraduates almost none. But we opened, I think right as I got here, the first and only undergraduate dormitory space, unless they've built one since I left, though I think they may have. And it was occupied primarily...the graduates by foreign students, and the undergraduates primarily by Newark people because this was one place you could give them the kind of nurture and support and safety to pursue studies.

**MM:** Well it seems to me also, from what you just said, its safety for people who had the intelligence to survive the lack of safety elsewhere. And now they could focus their intelligence on what they came to do instead of just survival.

**LC:** We really worked to honor that and, the big problem I think as a teacher more often, is not so much to honor some students' intelligence as it is, but get the students to honor it. I mean, many of these students at Newark had survived by not letting anybody know they were intelligent, by hiding all the evidence they could... to play it down. But anyway, there was this one student as often happens, that was having difficulty. I insisted that he come by for counseling and he came by voluntarily even more than I asked him to, and I knew



he was going to have a hard time getting through the course with a grade. And he was an absolutely gorgeous young man, and he paid his way partially through school, his student job was as a campus cop. So usually he arrived in the uniform of a campus policeman. So he got through with his C-, and I knew that he could, with similar efforts, you know, go into freshman English classes and pass, which in fact he did. I didn't see him for a couple of years, and then he spotted me several times on campus and he started this thing which I really found very disconcerting. He would spot me, see that I hadn't seen him, and he usually had three or four girls in tow; he was so good looking. He would come up from behind, reach around, and kiss me on my cheek, and I duck. Well I would be so frustrated: one, he was so attractive, and I as a gay male, I operate that way. But I also, I never had been about any interest in seducing this guy's body, it was his mind I was interested in, and his friendship. So I stood it for about three times, and the third time . . . my first reaction would be that I don't want you to share my stigma, but there was no danger of that. No one was going to think he was gay.

So I called him I said, "we need to talk." "Yes" [he replies]. Said no we need to move away form your entourage, go talk over there. And I said, "I just want to make it real clear to you that this has got to stop, that this is a boundary that is not appropriate for us to cross: it doesn't speak well of you, it communicates the wrong message about me and what I care about as a teacher." I mean I'm an Episcopalian and an English teacher, you know, I could give that talk [*laughs*]. I've never been cool, which frustrates me about straight men—so many of them can be, especially the good looking ones—and he always was just so cool and patient, and smiling through all this, but not an unhappy or unkind smile, and loving, kind smile. And when I finally had run out of huff and puff, he said, "Well Doc, I won't do it anymore, but can I tell you why I do it?" Well, you know, knocked me on the head [*gestures*] . . . why I do it; and he said, "Well my brother was a much better athlete than I—I was the captain of the high school football team in my senior year, but he was the captain in his senior, junior, and sophomore years in our high school. And unlike me he was very academically talented, and I always envied that, and he had gone to NYU."

He said, "And then he [the guy's brother] came home his freshman year and said to the family at the dinner table, 'I have to tell you some news. I wanted to be real certain about it myself first,



but I'm gay.” And the father plopped his fist down on the table and the mother said, “No child of mine is gonna be any faggot!” “And my brother and I said to him, ‘Well no brother of ours is gonna be any queer.’ And, he said, ‘Well that’s the way it is.’” And, he said, “Well, we didn’t relent. He went away and came back the next time with his boyfriend, and wanted to introduce him and they wouldn’t let him in the house. They said, ‘Sorry. You just have to give that up if you’re going to be a member of this family.’” Then he said, “My brother fell in love with Jack Daniels, and he died last year, of AIDS, and Doc I’d just like for you...”—*[starts to weep]* sorry it’s hard for me to tell this, I must have told it about 50 times—he said, “I just like to think that my brother sees me when I kiss you. And it’s because I miss him so much, and that if he, if we had encouraged him to live with his partner the way you and your husband live together, I might still have a brother.”

Well, I mean, talking about seeds, that’s sort of what I—I mean, I don’t love my lover to plant a seed in someone else’s mind, I love him because I love him and he loves me and this is a wonderful miracle.

**MM:** And you just never know when a student like that is going to sideswipe you with such compassion and such smart thinking.

**LC:** Yeah, and I said to him, you know you can kiss me anytime you want! *[Laughs]*.

**MM:** Well, that actually brings—you may have just answered my next question. But how do you think that, particularly English studies both in it’s teaching of composition and rhetoric as well as teaching of literature plays a role in kind of queer cultural heritage and people’s knowledge and awareness of GLBTQ issues?

**LC:** Probably a lot more than was healthy for me, since I was spending so much time writing about these issues than would have been healthy for me to bring them into my classroom. Now mind you I have one of the most visible and earliest queer websites. It’s not as academic in focus now as it was when I was still a teacher, but there’s still a heck of a lot there, and certainly church-oriented. So I mean, I had no sense of that as wanting to go back into a closet, but my understanding as a teacher is that my students’ liberation is at the heart of my teaching—not my own. And that it would be an abuse of my role in the classroom to make myself the center of my attention. I do not think for a moment that means I should not breathe. Obviously, the longer you have been out, the less imperative, I at least experienced in having been sort of underscored in that

remark, and also the more I could just assume everybody had already heard or seen in a website, you know, or wherever. So much so that after several, after a decade or two of this, I went off to find myself at near the end of the semester to realize that I've never said anything very specifically gay, only to find out, particularly from some of my Chinese students, that one of the reasons I had such good attendance in class was they all wanted to be there the day I made my Alfred Hitchcock appearance [*laughs*]. And one day I made it all the way to the end, and they knew that would be the day I had to do it, and here I was about to forget it, and somebody acted in a way to let me know that I better say "oh, well my husband and I experienced the same thing when we were in Egypt last summer." And then that was all the little appearance, and then I had gone in a flash, flash in the pan.

**MM:** What a great way to create a perfect attendance policy!

**LC:** It was done quite by accident, but it worked. But I'm sure there were students who spent quite a bit of their time monitoring my pitch and my pinky, and not hearing a thing I had to say, and for that I still grieve. I'm sure they were not all stupid; they had just been badly educated, and you know, my seed didn't drop at the right time. You can't win them all, as it were. Winning them over to me, however, was never my goal, I mean one of my great pleasures as a teacher of freshman English was to be able to give to a Puerto Rican or somebody who was into the macho, anti-gay stance, a paperback where he had dared to take on a teacher—no one was taking on a teacher, and to write a paper that was actually well written and to be able to say "A (or A-). Welcome to the university from your very own fairy." [*Laughs*]. I think that in the essence was really the gift I was giving to them: I was honoring their minds and giving them a challenge, and they knew that no high school ever allow them to take on [a teacher] with that type of resistant essay. Well I always, or almost always, in my last half or more of my career, I've found it was best in any such exercises, any sort of major paper, meaning once a week even, I wanted a prospectus on what you were going to do, because I found it so futile to be remarking about things on students' papers in a final way, that I could have helped them to avoid the problem if they had asked me to start with. Also, it wasn't my primary reason, but it was a major secondary value to it, was a big way of dealing with plagiarism because if they have to revise—I always recommended changing some things that would have been easy if you hadn't already found a paper you were going to use for

your plagiarism version; it was much more difficult to rewrite your own paper than to plagiarize it. So that was a secondary benefit of this procedure. When somebody would propose a paper to me that would take on a gay issue, and you know, there was always this sort of slight thing, hahaha [*mocking laugh*], you can feel it all going though that, but why hate this? Why not go with it? This is a chance to teach something! And I would say, that you better make it good, because I know a little more about this than other things, so I'm going to hold you to a higher standard on this one.

**MM:** Right. I'm often, when put in those situations, I'm often more insulted by the student who is writing the gay—the paper about gay issues to be sycophantic toward me than the student who wants to write a paper which is kind of anti-gay or is homophobic...

**LC:** Oh, absolutely.

**MM:** ...but decides they're going write it well and do the research. And I'm happier about the latter because the former is just like you're trying to do that to get on my side, and it's so kind of insulting to think that I'm not going to treat you like an intellectual.

**LC:** And if you had the prospectus again, you could anticipate—now I'm not going to take sycophancy here, or I wouldn't take that direction. Look, I don't want flattery here. I'm going to hold you to higher standards, and you're free to change your subject at this point, even if I've already set a deadline, you're free to change your subject.

**MM:** Well, I think, it sounds like you and I would agree that I don't need the tolerance or acceptance from either of you, whether you're on my side or not. I just need a good paper.

**LC:** Yeah. A parallel situation for me that is very painful so I wrote about it for College English once in response to something Carol Madeleine had written about education pedagogy—pedagogical issues of composition in China. And she had argued that we didn't have enough respect for their tropes and things that we tended to which is, in some measure there's a lot to be said there, just as you were talking earlier about Cicero, and there's a lot to be learned from what couldn't be badly taught, it's just something... it's to grid, and you meet the grid. But, I remember one of the exercises I used a lot in Wisconsin, where I was teaching before I went to China, that I decided to use in China, which is absolutely exhausting as a teacher, but I was going to debate each student privately in my office. And the way they had it set up, I had over 200 students. It was going to be a 15-minute debate. So I mean this went over several weeks if you work

it out, and I was up until all hours doing this. And you had to give me a prospectus, no, you had to give me a subject. You did not tell me your side. I told you your side when you came into the office, so you had to be prepared for either side. And I always told them I was going to win every debate. Of course there was enough bluster that they realized it was muster, but that I was going to give you a very hard time. And remember, these are English majors in their fourth year of Foreign Language Institute in Beijing. They're very bright. They have not ever spent much personal time around anybody who is a native speaker of English, and they have used to perfection several models of memorization. I thought this was even a more important exercise for them there because it was so intimidating, and of course, you think "we'll do well." So many of them did well, they really, you know they just [*gestures with fist*].

**MM:** Well it's not an exercise in recitation, but it's an exercise in analysis ...

**LC:** ... and thinking on your feet, yeah. I would always present them with a towel when they arrived, and of course they'd all heard after you've done it once: this is going to be your crying towel, so if you really need this, I'll be patient with you—lots of teasing and stuff like this, and I'm a tease anyway so it wasn't completely ... I wasn't Simon La'Gree. But then this one student came the very last night of the deadline to tell me what her topic was going to be, and she was going to debate communism as a form of government. She didn't know whether I was going to ask her to debate for it or against it. Well my tutor had heard in the hall of teachers, and seeing how immature I am, he was a first year teacher and he was my interpreter, and he spent a lot of time with me, and he said, "We've all been told that you're giving this debate and people wonder what you're going to do if somebody proposes to debate communism?" And I said, "Well, I won't choose to debate either for it or against it. I will warn them." "You cannot, they will not ever debate against it," he said. "And you cannot afford to debate against it. You'll lose your job. They'll fire you on the spot if you're teaching propaganda from the west. Kerrigan wants your voucher on that." And it was clear that he was also being pressured by the other—his employer—head of the department to do this.

Well, I'm not going to eat shit in my life; it doesn't taste very good in my opinion. But after he had left, I decided to go over and deliver a note, I remember how awful it was to write this note

saying that—and there were like only four days before the deadline for turning them in. Most of them had turned them in not a-one I checked off. Well, actually I hadn't checked all of them, but I was going over to give this thing that this is one subject that'll have to be off limits. Of course this gives the whole communist party a great victory, an improper victory 'cause that's not something to celebrate. But, we're so insecure we have to be off limits. So I decided halfway over I would go back to my apartment and look over all of the proposals to see who had proposed to debate communism. Not a single one! On the last possible time to turn in the thing, the weakest student in all the sections of my classes, turned in the request, and she had a great big smile on her face, to debate communism.

**MM:** As... so she's the weakest student in the course, but she certainly is the slyest!

**LC:** She sounded very, very clear; I mean she's a bright girl, she's just...  
*[laughs]*.

**MM:** She was sly!

**LC:** Yeah. And I had to say that she needed to be prepared. I said that's fine with me, but be aware that you might have to debate against it. You are welcome to change your topic if you want to, you still have time, but that is a very real possibility. I can argue for it very strongly, but can you argue against it? And she: "I will change my topic, sir." And I think of that you know, as a victory and as a defeat. I mean, I never found a better way to do it, because she's the loser no matter how that comes out. But it, I think hits to the heart of the kind of pedagogical, the intensity I want as a human being. This is a discipline for me at 73 that's maybe even harder than it was at 53! That is, to be able to hold myself, to be able to take the view . . . of like this crazy nut, preacher from Florida, who won't even listen to the president! Apparently, he was asking today. You know, I haven't heard the latest, but the president did ask him today not to burn the books. I think the best thing is that they not give... the fire department has not given permission so the moment the match is lit, the fire department can be there and put out the fire before the books burn!  
*[Laughs]*.

**MM:** I just think we'd all be better off if we just ignored him.

**LC:** That's right.

**MM:** 'Cause it's such a small, tiny fringe group. It's like saying that, you know, Al Qaeda is all of Muslims. This nutcase is not all of the opinions of Americans, or even religious Americans.

**LC:** But hasn't he done us a wonderful service of talking about, I mean, for example, one response is, "Don't burn the book, read it!" It's a great teaching moment for the whole world [*laughs*]. We are in a country that values your freedom of speech so much that we'll let you say things we think are stupid, and our best response to that is not censorship, but better speech.

**MM:** Right, right. Talk back to it.

**LC:** That's right: Not shut up by it.

### About the Interviewers

Martha Marinara is an Associate Professor at the University of Central Florida where she teaches undergraduate writing and graduate courses in Rhetoric. She is director of the Information Fluency initiative on campus and teaches Writing in Digital Environments and Digital Rhetoric, among other classes. Dr. Marinara coordinates the Central Florida GLBT History Projects as part of the RICHES Grant in UCF's History department. She earned an MA in Creative Writing (SCSU 1989) and a Ph.D. in Rhetoric (Lehigh University 1993) and her academic publications have appeared in *College Composition and Communication* and *The Journal of Basic Writing*. She writes poetry and fiction, publishing recently in *Massachusetts Review*, *Xavier Review*, *FEMSPEC*, *Pelican Review*, and *Broken Bridge Review*. She won the 2000 Central Florida United Arts Award for Poetry. Dr. Marinara's first novel, *Street Angel*, nominated for a Lambda Literary Award, was published in October 2006 and she is hard at work on a new one tentatively titled *Breakfast in Memphis*.

Mark McBeth currently teaches as an Associate Professor at John Jay College of Criminal Justice/CUNY. During his tenure there, he has been Deputy Chair for Writing Programs and Writing across the Curriculum Coordinator. His scholarship explores the relationships between language and sexuality as reflected through issues such as theories of writing, gay urban vernacular, curricular design, and the educational history.

# Working-Class Culture and Pedagogy Special Interest Group

## The Conflict with Class

An Interview with William Thelin of the Working-Class Culture and Pedagogy SIG

*Pamela F. Roeper, The University of Akron*

## Introduction

Bill Thelin was the chair of the Working-Class Culture and Pedagogy special interest group of the CCCC from 2004-2009. As one of the original members, Bill led or co-led several initiatives, such as the tutoring outreach to local communities, the Bring-A-Book project, and resolutions and sense of the house motions concerning labor and academic freedom. He worked closely with Ira Shor, the founder of the SIG, on activities ranging from attempts at forming coalitions with other SIGs to sustaining continued dialogue on the group's listserv. Bill has authored and presented several papers on working-class culture especially about the awareness instructors must have in adapting pedagogies to working-class students.

## Interview

**Pamela Roeper (PR):** When and how did the Working-Class Culture and Pedagogy SIG (WCCP) start?

**William Thelin (WT):** We held the first meeting in Phoenix in 1997, but I trace its roots to the previous CCCC that was held in Milwaukee. Ira Shor chaired a panel of his students, Caroline Pari and Eileen Ferretti among others, concerning the working class in academia. Ira was very concerned about the “invisibility” of the working class in our discipline. By this, I think he meant that academia embraced middle-class values and culture, thereby erasing the upbringing of many academics, himself included. Academics from the working class were almost afraid—or perhaps “ashamed” is a better word—to discuss their origins. They would hide, presenting publicly and in the classroom what you might call the expected refinement or tastes of the middle class. The picture our working-class students would get from the facades we present could easily alienate them from education. The tacit message was that you had to leave your upbringing behind in order to enter these hallowed doors. In order to better serve our students, we had to stop hiding and let them see the connection.

I met Ira for the first time in Milwaukee through my close friend, John Tassoni. Whoever Ira ran into or met, he would say words to the effect of, “If you think the working class has disappeared from English studies, come see my panel. I’ll show you the working class.” I remember asking him a brief question at this time, something like, “Do you mean the adjuncts?” as I saw them as the working class of our profession. So we talked about the overlaps among the labor conditions for most practitioners of composition, capitalism, and working-class culture. I went to the panel, and the room was packed. The panelists presented themselves unabashedly as having working-class backgrounds and discussed the feelings of alienation they experienced in their ascent through English studies. I remember particularly some of their more humorous moments, when they would recount feeling lost in a conversation or a classroom, sensing their working-class side coming out, and wanting to say something like, “What the f—— are you talking about?” Naturally, at the time, they had to suppress such urges, an experience we had all had. In the Q&A session, audience members rose from their seats to say they had never, ever seen these issues explored before or to exclaim that they finally felt comfortable in the academy. It was a helluva moment.

**PR:** I think I understand what you’re saying, but I can’t help but think that such a dialogue reproduces stereotypes of working-class people. It seems to reinforce that idea that all working-class people are these scrappy, foul-mouthed, tough guys, and less than intelligent. I am not sure that I am entirely comfortable with that. But then I also have to question whether it is my own discomfort with my identity as working class, or is it the stereotypes that portray the working class?

**WT:** We all wrestled with what it actually means to be working class. During this session, Ira distributed a pad where everyone wrote down their names and emails, and we started a listserv. I remember posting the first question, which was, “What does it mean to be working class?” To this day, I don’t think the question has been definitively answered (laughs). And trust me, we tried. The stereotypes can, indeed, distract us from more productive discussions and can actually sully us in the eyes of others. But at the same time, elements of those stereotypes ring true to me. Perhaps there’s a masculinist element in the caricature you mentioned that is disturbing.

**PR:** That’s definitely true. Part of a productive discussion has to look at the unique role a working-class woman faces. We have to juggle several identities in an English department.



**WT:** I don't doubt this. In fact, the SIG broached this subject in our annual meetings by making our focus the intersections between gender, class, and ethnicity. Maybe I'll talk about that later, though. What you're asking now speaks to the elusiveness of a solid definition of working class. I'm convinced that the more broad we are in understanding class in general, the more we can bring class front and center into the discussions of what ails us in the academy. Clearly, adjuncts represent the working class in English departments, and...

**PR:** Not necessarily. Not necessarily at all. We have adjuncts who do live privileged lives, who have spouses who earn good livings, who teach composition for non-monetary reasons. They impede progress in many ways in the fight for adjunct rights. I know that sounds so divisive, but I think it's true. They're the ones who look well rested in the department.

**WT:** [*Smiles*]. Perhaps the more visible adjuncts—the ones who aren't freeway flying and can sit in their offices and meet students—reproduce the myth of a middle class existence for adjuncts. But just as we need to broaden our understanding of the working class, we need to broaden our understanding of adjuncts. Not one depiction fits all. But my point here is that many adjuncts live working-class lives, meaning they live from paycheck to paycheck, have no guarantees of work from semester to semester, and have to commodify their intelligence. In the same way, typical blue-collar laborers have to commodify their strength, their skills, and their time in order to make a living. Their savings are often meager and they cannot afford to go a prolonged period of time without working. They can be fired or laid off and have little recourse. While the WCCP never settled on a definition—official or otherwise—we did feel the impulse toward inclusiveness and leaned toward Michael Zweig's beliefs that the working class—not the middle class—constitutes the majority in America. When your relationship to the means of production becomes more distant, even with seemingly middle-class jobs such as those teachers occupy, you become part of the working class.

We talked on the WCCP listserv initially about the differing backgrounds that comprised our group. We also discussed about the downward spirals that some families have taken that led formerly more affluent families into livings more akin to working-class existence. But class is more complicated than a person's occupation or breeding. It involves the areas where we find comfort. It involves the

relationship to the means of production. It involves a worldview—our sensibilities, so to speak. It does involve our backgrounds, of course, and our incomes certainly factor in. But the feeling of being part of the working class springs from multiple experiences in life. The definition cannot be contained. Some people try to dismiss this understanding, wanting to embrace a more rigid, blue-collar definition of class—complete with the stereotypes you discussed earlier—and claim that we in English studies do not have true working-class credentials. Claiming to be working class, from this perspective, somehow diminishes those in more dire circumstances who get their hands dirty while working. Then there are some people who feel a person's background matters—what the old man did, your neighborhood—but that class is something that income can transcend. Nothing lingers in this view. Then, of course, there's the view that the academy should be teaching middle-class values and be a middle-class institution. Think Sharon O'Dair and Lynn Bloom. Education transforms the working class into [the] middle class, as class is limited to a person's enculturation—or a person's acceptance of that enculturation. I have strong feelings toward these views, and perhaps I won't get into it now, but so many variables have to be accounted for when discussing class that I just cannot imagine anyone thoughtfully reflecting on class and coming to such conclusions.

My compromise—is that a good word?—is to talk about multi-class backgrounds and affiliations. Using myself as an example, I actually come from what would appear to be a pretty solid middle-class existence. My maternal grandfather was an art director in the early days of the motion picture industry. He was actually nominated for an academy award.

**PT:** Really?

**WT:** Yes, for Beau Geste. He lost to *Gone with the Wind*. But on my father's side, there was poverty and a working-class existence. His parents toiled at a lot of different jobs to try to make a living. And my father became successful, but he retained many of his working-class habits. And really, when I think about it, there was a frugality on my mother's side—maybe Depression-era stuff—that always made me think that we were not well off. I wore hand-me-downs as a child which were often ill-fitting. My jeans and shoes had holes in them, as did my brothers'. I remember overhearing more than once my dad complaining to my mother about the bills, especially her deferring the bills from local businesses that did not charge interest to next month

so that she could pay off the bills that did accrue interest. But I had more than a lot of kids—I know that. Still, after I left home and definitely after my divorce from my first wife, I lived in the working-class part of town in a one-room apartment for years and supported myself on a bi-weekly paycheck I got from working at Kaiser Hospital as a chart clerk in the outpatient records department. I went to college at night and had no savings to speak of. So when people talk about my background, class plays a role. I feel more working class than anything. Even part of my lifestyle now reflects the discomfort I feel around wealth and privilege. But the more proper term would be “multi-class” or “mixed-class.”

**PT:** I can't help but wonder if it is only the position of power you have now that allows you the luxury of having this perspective. As an adjunct, I have to worry about being too open regarding my working-class background and how this could be perceived by students and administrators. At two of the places where I teach, we have a dress code. It is the distance that you have obtained from that working-class history through a tenured position that allows you to mold your working-class background into a badge of honor.

**WT:** I don't think anyone in the SIG thinks of this as a “badge of honor.” I certainly don't. The fact in academia is that way too many people tried to hide class affiliation before we brought it to the surface.

**PR:** But don't you see that this has the danger of becoming a bootstraps narrative? Our country feeds off the myth of meritocracy—the impoverished who rise up. How can we in academia learn to talk about class without embracing the myth?

**WT:** I think the point of the SIG is to learn this. Class is a slippery concept and is difficult to talk about. Part of what I want to discuss here is the problem with claiming class as an identity. But before the WCCP could talk about that, we had to get class back into the discussion. America has tried to eliminate discussions of class. We were supposed to be a classless society. Republican politicians would complain about the rabble-rousers who were stirring up “class warfare.” But we were already in class warfare. What do you call it when privatizing and deregulating lead to enormous profits for the 1% of the wealthiest in this country and widen the gap between the richest and the poorest? Class has always been there, even with the attempts at erasure or labeling it communist. It's part of our identity whether we want to acknowledge it or not. We in the WCCP choose

to acknowledge it. I also think that it's important to point out that advocating for the working class, especially for our students, is not the same as claiming oppression because of class background. I align myself with the working class not to gain some identity from it or to make people think that I have succeeded against the odds. Rather, I align myself with it because I'm already a part of it.

**PR:** So what did the WCCP do, then? It sounds like you felt you had a different charge than other SIGs, one maybe a bit more complex.

**WT:** Visibility was the key. The listserv attracted much attention, and we dialogued, even argued, about much of what you were talking about. What was the purpose to bringing class up in the academy? Were we trying to disrupt the status quo by staking out territory? But activism—or attempts at it—was our initial goal, along with bolstering our ranks. At the first meeting in 1997, several people had joined us. While I don't remember presentations necessarily, Eileen Schell, Sherry Linkon, Janet Zandy, Linda Brodkey, and others were listed as presenters on the program, announcing in a way their affiliation with us. We just needed to work toward something. I believe one of our goals was to make the CCCC more affordable to adjuncts. That might have been one of our sense of the house motions if I'm remembering correctly. But we bought a booth, put together some literature, and had petitions to be signed. Several of us took turns working the booth and talking to people passing by.

**PT:** So it generated some buzz, I gather?

**WT:** Yes, the response was amazing. Yet, this success at recognition—I guess that's the right term—wasn't all together successful. This first meeting of the WCCP had to be tempered by the political reality around us. While working-class academics felt free, perhaps for the first time, to talk of their discomfort in academia and the challenges they had faced, what I will call the "identity issue" emerged. And it emerged decidedly in that first meeting.

In an auditorium with over a hundred people present in Phoenix, Leo Parascandola brought his sense of the house bill to the floor of the WCCP, hoping to encourage enough people to support CCCC taking a stance against abusive work conditions. Leo likened them to slave conditions. While much support ensued, a voice from the front objected to his language. "We cannot steal other people's history to make a statement for working-class people," she said. "We have a big problem here. I don't see any people of color present tonight. We cannot borrow their history of oppression so neatly." While Leo

valiantly argued that slavery preceded the colonization of Africa and that the use of the term was appropriate, it felt to me like all the air had gone out of our balloon. The comment was not just a critique of the bill. The “big problem” was the impression that the WCCP was a refuge of sorts for white people in the field. They—we—couldn’t have a special interest group based on ethnicity or skin color. Or at least not anything that would be taken seriously. So we had made class our identity, our special interest.

It’s hard when you point your finger at class, calling it the enemy. Some people will think you’re excusing men for their complicitness with the patriarchy. Others will believe you’re removing race as a factor in oppression. I know that’s not what we were trying to do. But it is true that people studying class tend to talk about capitalism rather than racism or mention economic background before gender constraints. Perhaps that’s just an impression I have. Yet, I also think it’s true that class can be the structure against which people of all genders, races, ethnicities, religions, and sexualities can unite. We will experience that structure differently, but it exists for all of us. But at the CCCC with so many different special interest groups forming around ethnicity, sexuality, and gender, class was rarely discussed. In fact, my guess is that others SIGs siphoned away some of the people of color who might otherwise be attracted to working-class studies. Yet, class started to function as another form of identity instead of a sustained critique against systemic exploitation that hurt everyone. The term “working class”—even with our avoidance of the term “studies” in our SIG name and our inclusion of “pedagogy,” which was supposed to call attention to our mission as teachers—seemed to connote “white.” Or at least some saw it that way.

**PR:** So what did you do in response to the identity issue?

**WT:** I’m not sure I can trace one particular path we took. Certainly we looked toward activism, especially in response to the labor crisis in academia, to show other SIGs we wanted to work with them. I remember sending out a lot of emails to the chairs of SIGs, trying to get them to sign onto the motion that Ira and Eileen championed for the CCCC to take a firm stand against adjunct exploitation. This led to the creation of the Academic Quality Committee. We always represented ourselves well at the Progressive SIGs Coalition, as well. I think our plan to get involved in the local communities while in the convention cities, which eventually became the Bring-A-Book project, was another way to show that we were about more than

celebrating working-class culture. Yet, maybe the main response we had came from Ira, who wanted to start studying the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, and class. We invited Victor Villanueva to speak at our SIG event, which was always two hours in those days, to give us his perspective on class and Latino/a culture, and we sought ways to dialogue about these intersections. One year, we even had the unofficial theme of whiteness studies for our SIG to look at the intersections between that and working-class culture. But I'm not sure we ever totally rid ourselves of the stigma, despite some important discussions taking place in and out of our sig meetings.

**PR:** When you talk of class as a “sustained critique against systemic exploitation,” are you speaking for yourself or for the ethos that helped create the WCCP?

**WT:** Well, I cannot, of course, speak for everyone, and I do think there was a need for working-class academics to tell their stories and be counted, which maybe partly created the identity issue, but overall, we see class as more than a group of cultural or behavioral markers. Over the years, the different theories of class have played themselves out amongst our members, especially in heated debates on our listserv. I don't think we could classify ourselves collectively as students of Bourdieu or Weber or Marx. But to borrow a phrase from bell hooks, we all believe that class matters.

Of most interest to me is the manner in which our varied relationships to class theory show up in our pedagogies. From the first time at the CCCC in Milwaukee when Ira convinced me to go to his panel about the working class in composition, I always connected working-class pedagogy to critical pedagogy. But “critical pedagogy” is just as contested of a term as “working class,” so there is no easy fit. We have many members who do what I consider to be critical pedagogy—generating themes with students, defamiliarizing the familiar, and co-creating curriculum and class materials. Such a pedagogy aligns with Marxist theory, as it challenges the status quo and demands change in the business-as-usual model of education. But Marx's presence would not be felt in some other pedagogies that, nonetheless, are impacted by our members' understanding of working-class culture. Many of our members feel that our goal should be to work with our working-class students so that they can experience upward mobility, that we should not be teaching them to challenge the status quo or to recognize existing hierarchies as manufactured and unnatural.

**PR:** I find this comment very interesting in light of Patrick Finn's work. He has suggested that we do teach working-class students to challenge the status quo, but that we teach them to do it in a socially acceptable manner. So I guess I am confused over this conflict. I sense that truly challenging the system requires us to not do it in a socially acceptable manner. How do I teach my students to challenge the status quo if coming from a working-class background I might not know how to do that myself?

**WT:** That, perhaps, is what this group [within the WCCP] believes, although I think the methods of critical pedagogy that are much discussed on the listserv—based as they are on Freire's work with peasants—speak to this. But when we ourselves are part of the status quo, working within and for the system, the students might perceive a conflict between that and our challenging them to go fight the status quo. Maybe they want to join the system, too. I guess this anti-radical theory aligns with a sense of meritocracy, but I would not criticize it as not understanding class just because of that. Sometimes college instructors just face a daunting task and know that they cannot bring all their students along. Some rise and some fall within the ranks of the working class. These pedagogies would be more pragmatic in nature.

Some our members feel that any politicization of the classroom is an injustice to working-class students and works against their best interests. They would embrace Maxine Hairston's infamous critiques of the early '90s, criticize critical pedagogy, and see our job with students already feeling oppression as teaching them writing, not politics. Such a pedagogy would be more current-traditional in nature, I think, but does not necessarily have to be. It just does not seem to account for the transactionality of rhetoric. Some feel getting students to tell their stories is enough to empower them, and would probably be closer to the expressivist camp than anything else. Still others see education for working-class students in itself as an empowering process. I think David Seitz classified this type of instruction as a form of critical pedagogy in his book. For myself, I do not see such a pedagogy as critical, but I'm not as interested in that as wondering about the class theory that drives it. Is it influenced by Bourdieu? It's interesting to speculate.

Anyway, the point is that the different class theories we embrace manifest themselves in our discussions of pedagogy. My guess is that many members would not see the WCCP as existing to critique



sustained exploitation. But our activism sure points in that direction.

**PR:** So did you see the Bring-A-Book project as challenging the status quo? Or maybe you could explain further what you mean by “activism,” as some people might see Bring-A-Book as functioning as charity?

**WT:** Bring-A-Book was actually the culmination of other efforts. And I’m wondering as we talk whether “activism” is the right word. We have certainly agitated as a group. If I can go back to the Academic Quality Committee for a second before talking about Bring-A-Book, the discussions that led to AQC’s formation started in the WCCP in 2000 at the CCCC in Minneapolis. We were all concerned about the ongoing exploitation of labor in academia, and we decided to try to do something about it. We thought that NCTE might have enough clout to make policies that in some way would stigmatize universities and colleges that did not create more full-time positions for current adjuncts to fill. We spent some time in online discussions, trying to build a coalition with other SIGs, as I mentioned. It took several years—the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq kept us busy, as many of us held dual membership in Rhetoricians for Peace—but in 2003, we had something together for the meeting in New York. While we went through the proper channels, bringing our resolution to the board and meeting all deadlines, we planned on doing more if our proposal was rejected. Ours was a radical plan that would have required the CCCC to take action, perhaps risking funding as a non-profit as a result. We showed up in force at the annual CCCC business meeting. Some in the audience wanted us to slow down and revise the resolution to something more accommodating, but we stood firm. The resolution passed. However, the CCCC is not run by the radical fringe of composition. To enact the resolution, then, they had Ira form a committee—the Academic Quality Committee—to further study the issue and to make recommendations. Jennifer Beech was one of the main players on this committee, and I remember her running a booth, talking about the results on her campus of bringing the issue of adjunct exploitation to the forefront. But our goal of forcing the CCCC to be responsive was not met when the AQC presented its findings at the next business meeting in San Antonio. It felt like the AQC would just be another committee that met, discussed, and presented, but never really did anything.

I think that what I am talking about concerning activism is just that—doing rather than talking. Academics are great at critiquing



and complaining. But they don't do a lot. The WCCP wanted to be different, but many of our plans were thwarted. For example, we developed a plan that would have been what Ira called an "exchange of capital" between the hotel workers at the convention sites and us. We would have been giving our expertise in daylong tutoring sessions with the workers and their children and developing a pen-pal program with those interested—a quaint notion now given the advances in technology but one that seemed real at the time. We were recognizing what they gave us with their service—something that tips could not adequately compensate—and wanted to make their presence more visible. Ed Whitelock and I worked on this project.

**PR:** Forgive me for saying so, but that sounds like a form of colonialism. I mean you did not know these people, you were not familiar with their backgrounds or culture, and yet you felt free to step in and bestow your knowledge upon them. Couldn't this suggest the same power dynamics that are in play within the universities and adjunct instructors? How did you think this was activism?

**WT:** You're echoing some of the accusations thrown at us at the time. But let me ask you, how does one make a move, given our position? We wanted to initiate a dialogue and sustain it. We wanted to change the dynamic of the CCCC so that maybe, just a little bit, conventioners would ponder their relationship to the workers who made their conferences possible but went unrewarded. The workers weren't going to come to us. You mention the adjunct situation. Tell me how I—a former program administrator—could do anything to change your working conditions without in some way enacting a colonial relationship?

**PR:** I don't deny that it is a very tenuous relationship. There will always be that question of power. Who has it, and who does not? As far as changing, or improving the working conditions of the adjunct I think the suggestions and solutions have to come from the adjuncts themselves. I believe it is the same with the workers that you encountered at the conventions as well. I know that activists do not like to hear that. And I understand the desire to jump in and do something rather than "critiquing and complaining," but I believe it is more important to recognize and respect that imbalance of power that is in play.

**WT:** Which, in other words, means for us to maintain the status quo and do nothing to try to change things? I can't do that. I'd rather

be accused of being top-down than just going along with the system. But you know, as the WPA for eight years at The University of Akron, very vocal adjuncts would always accuse me of “not doing enough” to create more full-time positions. The problem was laid at my feet, so I responded with ways to agitate from their ranks to help create more positions—to work together, in other words, so that I would be making the case at my level and they would be making the case at theirs. But they were always unwilling to do it. So all I could do was continue on with the same ineffective processes I started with, talking about the need for full-time positions at every opening, requesting for more positions from my dean, and being told there was no money. Perhaps this is why academics only complain and critique. I still don’t see the problem with acknowledging the value that any given hotel worker extends to a conference-goer, acknowledging that it extends beyond what our paltry tips and their salary would show, and offering to give something back in exchange, something they might find a use for. It wasn’t like we were determining what their tutoring needs might be. Rather, it was saying if you and/or your child would like some help, whether writing a paper for school, putting together an application letter, reviewing a document concerning healthcare or whatever, we would be available.

**PR:** I do understand what you are saying, and on the surface it all sounds very charitable. But perhaps that is where the issue lies – with the concept of charity. For the stigma of charity to be removed there has to be more of reciprocal process going on. It must be more symbiotic; more give and take on both sides. There has to be the acknowledgment that both sides have something to offer.

**WT:** Well, the tutoring project died before it ever began anyway. Ed approached the hotel management about the idea, but apparently it was corporate policy not to allow such things for the workers. We ended up conducting a workshop for the Boys Club of Atlanta in 1999 about college opportunities, instead. But would your idea about charity extend to the Bring-A-Book Project? Ed, Bill Macauley, and I conceived of this idea in 2002. We asked conventioners to donate a book, whether used or new, at the registration desk, and we would give them to a local literacy center in the city in the name of the CCCC. We very successfully collected a lot of books and gave them to worthy recipients. In so doing, we made the conference, in just a little way, responsive to the underprivileged in the city in which we met, talked, and socialized. We ran this every year until 2009, when

I resigned as chair of the WCCP. While I liked the donation, I felt the project didn't do enough to change the conditions of literacy education. We only enabled what was currently happening to continue. Given your perspective, what do you think?

**PR:** Well, I do agree that the Bring-A-Book idea seemed like a valuable idea; I can also see your frustration in it just not doing enough.

The donation concept is one that many people are comfortable with because of how it distances the giver from the receiver. But it seems that it is that distance as an activist that frustrates you. I can respect that. There is a need for people to be willing to get into the dirty trenches and fight for what is right for any workers that are marginalized and exploited. Where do you see this fight going next for the adjuncts? Is there really a fight left?

**WT:** I imagine that is for the Labor SIG to decide [smiles]. I wouldn't want to impose my ideas upon them, after all, given your thoughts on colonialism and charity [winks].

**PR:** Non-action could be construed as passive acceptance of the system, though.

**WT:** Then you see my dilemma. I want to do something, and I do think the WCCP should have a role. I'm just uncertain as to exactly what. It seems to me that the WCCP has reached out to others on a consistent basis. But as I look back on the WCCP, I feel very mixed as to what we have done. We failed more than we succeeded. Maybe part of the problem is that no one came to us. Maybe on this issue, we should wait. The WCCP succeeded in getting class to be talked about now in composition circles, but it's just talk, really. The WCCP was different in its goal to try to mold the CCCC into a more responsive organization and to connect English studies with the outside world, but too much failure sours a group on making more attempts. Our model of agitation or coming under our umbrella just would not work for the adjunct movement. There is definitely a fight left, that's for sure. But I almost hesitate to speak further on what I think is needed. It just seems to me that adjuncts have to embrace their position as the working class of academia and do what members of the working class have done—fight collectively for better working conditions.

**PR:** What about the future of the WCCP, then? What do you see as its future mission?

**WT:** I imagine we will continue letting people new to the academy know that we are here and that we understand the difficulties in

teaching working-class populations. I can see us working more on developing pedagogies designed with working-class students in mind. There is so much we have learned from our online reading groups about social class. I'd like to see us apply it concretely. The labor situation will always factor into our thinking about this. How could it not? I don't see the sense in developing pedagogies that the actual practitioners could not enact due to the time constraints that teaching multiple sections of composition in different settings imposes upon them. But maybe if we develop regionally responsive pedagogies that adjuncts play a part in developing, we can make a difference in little pockets of the nation. It's worth a try.

## **The Working-Class Culture and Pedagogy SIG and Bring-A-Book**

*Bill Macauley*

In the fall of 2001, Ed Whitelock suggested to Ira Shor that we collect books from CCCC conference goers, books that had been significant in their literacy development, and donate those books to literacy programs within CCCC-host cities that served working-class and poor communities. It was in Chicago that next spring that Bring-A-Book was begun. From 2002 through the 2008, Bill Macauley, Pat Glazik, Bill Thelin, local conference hosts, and literacy workers from New York to San Francisco, San Antonio to Chicago worked to make quality books available to those who might not otherwise have access to them. However, this project did not simply appear; it began with a desire to connect thought and action.

The Working-Class Culture and Pedagogy SIG had been meeting at CCCC for three years when, in 1998, we began to develop our focus on literacy education and working-class culture. We were increasingly troubled that we seemed dedicated to the value and importance of working-class culture but seemingly only from afar. We found ourselves wanting a way to connect working-class culture and higher education, specifically literacy education, in more tangible, more immediate ways. Because several of us had come from working-class backgrounds and had been successful in higher education, we felt as though we were uniquely positioned to explore this connection with others. We wanted to make higher education seem less remote for working-class students and their families, and to share some of our own experiences as working-class students and academics.

As a result, we decided to focus our first efforts on CCCC hotel workers. We planned to provide writing workshops at CCCC Chicago in 1998. We

spent most of 1997 writing back and forth with the managers of the hotel, negotiating a space and an opportunity for their workers—particularly the maintenance, food service, and housekeeping staff—to work with us on developing their writing skills. After much discussion and correspondence, we were told that the hotel would not allow these workshops to take place. We thought about insisting or providing a pirate workshop that no one would actually clear with the hotel, but it made no sense to put at risk those for whom we were trying to provide the workshops.

In 1999/Atlanta, we took a different tack. We anticipated that, because we were dealing with the same hotel chain and the same hierarchies within it, the workshops for employees would not fly. Instead, we focused our attention on high school students, and we worked through the Atlanta Boys and Girls Club. We provided a workshop on the Saturday of the conference, focused on two things: we worked to help these young people with college applications and application essays, but we also talked with them and their parents about being working-class college students. We provided a small number of prospective working-class college students not only with access to college-level faculty but a bit more understanding of how they could succeed in college.

We planned to continue and further develop this program at CCCC in 2000, through the Boys and Girls Club of Minneapolis, and there were two hurdles in our path to that work. Background checks had been required and paid for by the Atlanta Boys and Girls Club. We understood their necessity, to be sure, and assumed that Minneapolis would pay for them, as well. However, Minneapolis did not have the resources to do so. A second hurdle was the distinctly lower level of engagement we were experiencing with the Minneapolis Boys and Girls Club. It never seemed as though they were opposed to our work, but it became clear that they had a number of priorities and few resources to see them through. We understood, later, that the kind of one-off project we were offering was less appealing when other, locally sustainable projects could do so much more for the children they served. By the time we understood these circumstances fully, it was too late to make anything of substance happen at our annual conference. So, in 2000, we were not able to work with communities within the CCCC host city. In retrospect, it is easy to see that the Boys and Girls Club officials were simply working to make their resources go as far as they could for the kids they were serving; at the time, it seemed like bureaucracy run amok.

In Denver (2001), Bill Thelin made a presentation on our CCCC conferences being more locally responsive, which provoked interest and activity from one audience member, Jon Lovas (2001 Program Chair). Though a

core of active SIG participants remained energized, Jon provided motivation and access to CCCC leadership that provoked an increased level of clarity in our work. Our missteps helped us to open our thinking to a wider range of options while Jon's influence helped us to focus our efforts more effectively. Some important realizations came of these competing forces.

Whatever we would do from then on had to be something we could readily start and continue given the resources available. It also had to be portable. We didn't want a one-off charity project; rather, we wanted an ongoing effort that would make a difference, in which SIG members and CCCC attendees could continue to participate. We thought we would probably encounter similar levels of tepid responses from organizations if we did so. More importantly, it had to make a difference in the lives of the working-class families we hoped to encourage in their literacy and educational development.

As Bring-A-Book was slowly coming into view, we were thinking again about our intentions. If we were interested in a simple charity project, we could collect funds or canned goods, and make donations somewhere, which would be a whole lot easier on everyone. Though that option was viable and could have been somewhat satisfying, we all agreed that charity was not our purpose. However, we had to stumble through a few learning opportunities before we could appreciate the complexity of what we sought. In retrospect, we could see the folly of asking hotel management to let us do workshops for their employees; we never really asked hotel employees what they wanted and the workshops did not serve the hotels' bottom lines. The Atlanta workshop was not a failure, and its effect was limited because many of those we wanted to meet simply did not come to that posh, high-rise hotel to receive their lessons. When potential collaborators' limited resources were required, they had to think very carefully about what would be best, in the long run, for their participants. They could not risk being perceived as turning help away, but neither could they afford to make expenditures that did not promise to have lasting effects. Finally, our larger vision was not simply doing something for the poor and working class; we wanted to also make CCCC participants aware that there were literacy disparities and that small individual efforts from large groups could make a significant difference. To that point, we had not even thought about how to engage CCCC participants.

As we scrutinized our goals and efforts, Ed spoke up. Each year after 2001, CCCC conference attendees were invited to bring to the conference a book that had been influential in their literacy development. Each year, the WCCP SIG selected a community literacy resource in the CCCC host

city or surrounding area as the recipient of those donated books. The books were collected primarily through the CCCC Registration Desk, and Pat Glazik was nothing short of amazing in making that part of the process so easy. As programs were handed out, those boxes were refilled with Bring-A-Book donations. Books were also gleaned from the exhibitors' booths at the close of the Exhibits Hall on Saturday afternoon. Members of the WCCP SIG "swept" the exhibits, collected the donated books, took the boxed books from the Registration Desk, counted and sealed them in their boxes, carted them to a designated pick-up point, and handed them off to the recipients' representatives.

In terms of selecting recipients, we always focused attention on community literacy resources that served poor and working-class communities. Nonprofits were preferred. Centers that served both adults and children became more frequent recipients, especially those dealing with non-native speakers of English. It was not unusual to include two recipients in a given year; however, the dual recipients always served distinctly different constituencies. In the end, all that really mattered was that a community with less access to high-quality literacy materials was served by this project. CCCC presence in a city was marked not only by dollars spent but by some small, positive change in literacy as well.

Continuing at each CCCC meeting since 2002, conference goers made annual and generous Bring-A-Book donations, primarily in the form of influential books from their own literacy development. Concurrent Bring-A-Book projects have appeared outside of the conference cities, too, inspired by WCCP SIG members' discussions of Bring-A-Book's impact and importance. From 2002-2007, the WCCP SIG is proud to report that Bring-A-Book and these associated efforts distributed more than 3650 books to eight community literacy resources. That's an average of more than 450 books each.

One thing that Bring-A-Book did not do is follow-up with the recipients. It would have been interesting to revisit past recipients to see if the donated books had made an impact on their clients. This might not only have invigorated the project and attracted attention and resources, but it could also have sustained the project beyond 2008, which was the last year donations were collected.

### Recipients

2008: Lindy Boggs National Center of Literacy  
at Loyola University  
YES (YMCA Educations Services) New Orleans, LA



## Working-Class Culture and Pedagogy Special Interest Group

- 2007: District Eight Public Schools, Brooklyn, NY  
St. Bartholomew's Lutheran Church Community Literacy Project, Manhattan, NY
- 2006: Pierre A. Capdau School (K-8), New Orleans, LA
- 2005: Mission Learning Center, San Francisco, CA
- 2004: Joven, San Antonio, TX  
Benetia Family Center, San Antonio, TX
- 2003: District Ten Public Schools, Bronx, NY
- 2002: Albany Park Community Center, Chicago, IL

Though I was never directly involved in the negotiations between the SIG and CCCC conference planners, it has been my impression that they were consistently supportive of our work with host-city communities. The SIG had a lot of work to do to make Bring-A-Book work; we had some missteps and our thinking had to develop over time. In a lot of ways, we were operating independently because we asked no more of CCCC than a space. However, when we asked, we received. CCCC was always a partner in our efforts.

Early on, we were provided with workshop spaces in Chicago, Atlanta, and Minneapolis. Once we made the transition to Bring-A-Book, the material commitment from CCCC was minimal, but we still relied on CCCC people to help us operate the project. Pat Glazik was the real logistician; she came up with the idea of simply counting the donated books as they replaced conference programs in the program boxes at the registration desk. In a lot of ways, Bring-A-Book became her and her staff members' project, too; as often as SIG members would stop at the desk and ask what we could do to help, the answer was, "There really isn't anything for you to do right now." All we had to do was pick up the filled boxes on Saturday.

It has been clear from the success of Bring-A-Book that this kind of project can work very well for the conference and conference goers. It also seems clear that, when conference participants, conference staff, and community members can find ways to engage with one another in meaningful ways, good things can happen. Given our field's continuing interest in community literacy, growing interest in the expanding understanding of composition studies, and traditions of practice informed by deep theorizing from empirical data, it seems likely that CCCC can and might want to continue these kinds of projects. It will take careful consideration of the balance our field seeks between the abstract and the concrete, between the theoretical and practical, between the classroom and the world outside.



### **About the Interviewer**

Bill Macauley is an Associate Professor and Director of Writing at the College of Wooster. Born in New York and raised in Michigan, Bill completed his B.S. (Creative Writing & World Literature) at Grand Valley State University ('86), M. A. (American and British Literature) at Pittsburg State University ('88), and Ph.D. in English (Rhetoric and Composition) at IUP ('99), where his dissertation examined studio pedagogies for teaching writing. Bill has been teaching since 1987, working in and with writing centers since 1989, and directing a writing program since 2005. He's had educational opportunities that his working-class parents never even imagined.

## Editor Profiles

**Samantha Blackmon** is an Associate Professor at Purdue University. She focuses on minority rhetorics, digital humanities, and their intersections. She began her career teaching elementary school and figuring out how to make learning a game. She has published on race and gaming, race and technology, and technology and pedagogy. Her publications “Racing Toward Representation: An Understanding of Racial Representation in Video Games: in *Gaming Lives in the Twenty-First Century: Literate Connections* (2007) and “Cruising Composition Texts: Negotiating Sexual Difference in First-Year Readers” (co-authored with Jonathan Alexander, Will Banks, and Martha Marinara) in *CCC* (2009). She also writes about games and education online [atnymgamer.com](http://atnymgamer.com).

**Cristina Kirklighter** is a professor of rhetoric and composition at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, where she teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in composition theory, the personal essay, autobiography, technical writing, and ethnic literature. She has published *Voices and Visions: Refiguring Ethnography in Composition* (Boynton-Cook 1997), coedited with Cloe Vincent and Joe Moxley, authored *Traversing the Democratic Borders of the Essay* (State University of New York Press, 2002), and *Teaching Writing with Latino/a Students: Lessons Learned at Hispanic-Serving Institutions* coedited with Diana Cardenas and Susan Wolff Murphy (State University of New York Press, 2007). She has served as a member on the CCCC’s Executive Committee, Resolution Committee, Book Award Committee, NCTE Rainbow Strand, chaired the CCCC’s Nomination Committee, and she is currently the CCCC/NCTE Latino/a Caucus Co-Chair.

**Steve Parks** is an Associate Professor of Writing and Rhetoric at Syracuse University, where he teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in composition history, community literacy, and community publishing. He has published *Class Politics: The Movement for a Students’ Right to Their Own Language* (NCTE 2000) and *Gravyland: Writing Beyond the Curriculum in the City of Brotherly Love* (Syracuse University Press, 2010). For the past three years, he has served as Editor of *Reflections: A Journal of Writing, Service-Learning, and Community Literacy*. He is also Executive Director of New City Community Press ([newcitypress.org](http://newcitypress.org)). He has been active in CCCC, helping to found the Progressive SIG and Caucus Coalition as well as serving as Chair of the CCCC Resolutions Committee.

In 2011, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) turned one hundred years old. But our profession is endlessly beginning, constantly transforming itself and its purpose as new voices and identities claim their rights in our classrooms and in our country. The recognition of such claims, however, does not occur without a struggle, without collective work.

*Listening to our Elders* attempts to capture the history of those collective moments when teachers across grade levels and institutions of higher education organized to insure that the voices, heritages, and traditions of their students and colleagues were recognized within our professional organizations as a vital part of our classrooms and our discipline. In doing so, *Listening to Our Elders* demonstrates this recognition was not always easily given. Instead, whether the issue was race, sexuality, class, or disability, committed activist organizations have often had to push against the existing limits of our field and its organizations to insure a broader sense of common responsibility and humanity was recognized.

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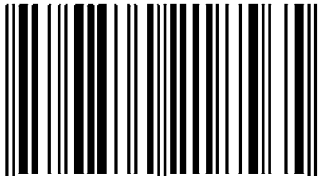
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**UtahStateUniversity**

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