

Independent Black Institutions and Rhetorical Literacy Education: A Unique Voice of Color

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“There is a cultural price-tag to literacy.”

—Carl F. Kaestle, *The History of Literacy and the History of Readers*

The tales of my people’s literacy education history have been gentrified. The truth about the valiant fore-teachers and students wading against the political, economic, physical, and rhetorical barricades to their learning objectives is removed from the collective consciousness of American history. Historians assessed the agency earned by Black-built practices and traditions developed by Black communities, Black-owned rhetorics, discourses, and literacies and determined that agency worthy of being traded out for literacy histories owned and operated by sanctioned middle-class White patriarchal sociocultural constructions. And so, our true literacy history is relegated to the margins of cultural knowledge about the needs and goals of education for Black Americans, historically and contemporarily. Save for the work of a small collective of composition and literacy scholars, the history of rhetorical literacy education in and for American Black communities has been reduced to “romantic adaptations” (Lathan xxvi) that appease “majoritarian stories” (Solórzano and Yosso) about the place of Black people and blackness in American culture. Rhetorical literacy education constitutes instruction in social and civic-based literacy practices for the purposes of rhetorical participation in society and culture. I employ this term rather than rhetorical education because I intend to emphasize the rhetoricity—the rhetorical force and influence—of literacy practices taught in these divergent education sites rather than to emphasize the persuasive purposes of formal education.

For Black folks, like me and my kin, descendants of American slavery, literacy education has always been rhetorical (Royster, *Traces*; Logan, *Liberating*; Kynard, “Writing”; Lathan; Karega; Richardson). Both the pursuit of literacy and its uses have been wielded to

strengthen our social and political stations and resist assimilationist practices. In this essay, I apply the critical race theory “voice-of-color” tenet (Delgado and Stefancic) to establish a counter-story about the rhetoric of literacy education for Black Americans by analyzing the literacy instruction of independent Black institutions, a style of education developed outside of majoritarian Eurocentric voice. Our literacy education has often occurred in community sites outside of formal schooling. By adopting central features of these Afrocentric literacy education programs, college composition programs and faculty can create race- and community-conscious writing curriculum, pedagogy, and instructional practices.

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I detail critical race theory’s unique voice of color principle and how, as a lens for framing cultural narratives, it reshapes historical and perpetual narrative constructs of American literacy education. The unique voice of color suggests that individuals outside of racial-cultural norms can best speak to experiences of those outside of racial-cultural norms. This principle focuses on narratives that counter accepted social myths, as “because of their different histories and experiences with oppression, black, American Indian, Asian, and Latino/a writers and thinkers may be able to communicate to their white counterparts” better than Whites can to each other (Delgado and Stefancic 4). Eurocentric literacy instruction persists as a central tactic for the dominant culture to rob students of color of the opportunity to use academic discourses as one of many ways to respond to their social, cultural, and political positions (Delpit). This pattern, however, results in part from the divide between the public community and the college or university that has historically prevailed within Eurocentric educational models, models that have been challenged and reimagined by composition-literacies (Kynard, *Vernacular*) recently. In venerating school literacies for the singular purpose of being academic, “such efforts mistake the official purposes assigned to academic knowledge and academic discursive and institutional forms for the full range of uses to which these can and have been put” (Horner 169). The unique voice of color will aid me in presenting a counter-story to the dominant academy tale about the rhetorical of literacy education for Black Americans. This unique voice of color reveals the objectives of rhetorical literacy education for Black Americans as *instruction in the social actions, civic practices, and language performances for the purposes of rhetorical participation in society and culture in advancement of Black communities, locally and globally*. The following pages first outline attributes of the predominant Euro-American voice about literacy education for Blacks in America and then outline the implications of a unique voice of color for speaking against that dominant voice. In discussing some critical practices of independent Black institutions, I exemplify a unique voice of color counter-story to the prevailing perspective about rhetorical literacy education for Black Americans. This Afrocentric education model is grounded in truthfully representing and advancing Black American and African-centered cultures. I end with a discussion of implications for composition-literacy approaches that support the education of Black American students.

Black Rhetorical Literacy Education from the Majoritarian White Voice

Majoritarian historical and contemporary accounts of Black Americans' place in American higher education literacy instruction are those that dismiss the legacy of educational endeavors initiated out of Black American communities. These endeavors often privilege Afrocentric ways of knowing, and because majoritarian stories often "generate from a legacy of racial privilege" (Solórzano and Yosso 28), those about literacy education "distor[t] and silenc[e] the experiences of people of color" (29). The majoritarian White voice speaking to the subject of Blacks in American higher education literacy generally imposes the narrative of the White savior. Yes, these tales say, Blacks had their own community-developed education outlets, but none were sufficient as systemic forms of academic learning. It was only when the mainstream White education system *allowed* Black Americans into predominantly White colleges that our rhetorical literacy education became adequate and relevant to American society.

This majoritarian historical and contemporary account of Black Americans' place in literacy education is constructed from a whiteness-valued Eurocentric epistemological perspective. I draw this term from Black feminist intellectual activist Patricia Hill Collins, who defines the Eurocentric epistemological perspective as knowledge validation practices that honor or privilege Eurocentric cultural ways of being (253). Jacqueline Jones Royster and Jean C. Williams describe the consequences of excluding selected perspectives from the history of a discipline like composition studies. The Eurocentric narrative about Black Americans' literacy instruction in higher education proclaims that, except for in a few anomalous cases, our curricular options were subpar until we were allowed to enter White-majority education sites in the 1960s (Brereton; Brubacher and Rudy; Miller; Thelin). Even though select Blacks accessed and succeeded in mainstream White American colleges and universities, most of the rhetorical purposes of literacy education were aimed at assimilating into mainstream, White-dominated society and culture.

John Seiler Brubacher and Willis Rudy imply that Black Americans, indigenous Americans, and Latinxs received vast changes to their higher educational opportunities with the implementation of affirmative action admissions policies in 1964 and open admissions in 1970 (78-79, 401). The authors deduce that the "threats to withhold federal funds ... [to] institutions which were held to be too slow in implementing" affirmative action guidelines resulted in findings by the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education that "many colleges and universities were being forced to lower their academic standards and to undermine the quality of their faculties because of the demands flowing from Affirmative Action programs" (79). In noting that Black Americans and other racial formation groups underrepresented in colleges and universities fell behind those of Asian descent in accessing higher education (401), the historical account fails to note that this gap existed within predominantly White institutions. John R. Thelin, by contrast, does include a partial history of historically Black American institutions of higher education. Although, in the discussion of predominantly White institutions, the inclusion of experiences of color remains in step with the majority of historical texts on the

subject. Thelin's approach of considering "key historical episodes that have enduring implications for colleges and universities" (Introduction) ignores, for instance, the inaugural graduation of Black American Richard Henry Green from Yale College in 1857 (JBHE Research Department). Nor does the historical record chronicle the impact of approximately forty Black students graduating from universities and colleges in the North or Lucy Ann Stanton's certificate in literature from Oberlin College, the first Black American woman to receive such an honor (JBHE Research Department). These events are but a few that create a racial perspectives gap in how researchers historicize American higher education. I share them to show that the majoritarian White voice in historicizing rhetorical literacy education is but a product of a larger cultural phenomenon in college-level education.

Turning to literacy and composition histories in higher education institutions, the discipline has not fared much better in eliminating an absent presence of race (Prendergast) from how it historicizes the discipline in higher education. In the introduction of *The Origins of Composition Studies in the American College, 1875-1925*, John Brereton notes that "the 1865 founding of Cornell University, a school which promised that anyone could learn anything there, was a sign that a determined philanthropist with enough money could influence the course of education" (8). This change led to the 1869 ascension of Charles W. Eliot as Harvard's president and to the rise of modern English composition literacy instruction and practices. The year 1869 also marks the year that Massachusetts's first Black American judge, George Lewis Ruffin, graduated from Harvard Law School. Brereton does not examine the role that admitting and educating Black Americans had in executing the new installation of composition.

Brereton's goal for this collection is to "supply ... all those interested in the history of English composition with some of the most significant documents in readily accessible form" (xii) by connecting theory to practice (xiv) through the central documents that compositionists of the time sourced (xv). Brereton acknowledges the limitations of focusing on the public record, because "a great deal of what we would now regard as postsecondary writing was done by ... men and women . . . at historically black institutions," and even as these marginalized institutions may have borrowed pedagogical and curricular methods and outcomes from majority White schools, "some students and some teachers asserted themselves in new and important ways" (xv-xvi). Although, the Introduction does remark that "[Black American] writers were forging a distinctive voice (or series of voices) in nineteenth-century America," it additionally notes that Black students and faculty were still expected to perform discourses of whiteness (Inoue) in their writing practices (Brereton 21). In *The Evolution of College English: Literacy Studies from the Puritans to the Postmoderns*, Thomas P. Miller narrates a history of college English studies, broader than composition studies but including composition and literacy studies. This historical record does make a few strides in acknowledging the presence of Black Americans in literacy instruction and its development in the American education system through the centuries. Similarly to the accounts reviewed thus far, Miller includes the cases of Black Americans in the development of English and literacy studies within the purview of Euro-American histories. These acknowledgements are significant, but their limitations represent yet another erasure of lived experiences from Black American students with literacy in the education system.

These tales about the arrival of Black Americans at historically White sites of higher education ignores the history of Black American-centric education in Black communities, constructing Eurocentric education as the ultimate key to social mobility for Black Americans. The result of these perspectives is that they construct histories that have “social, political, and cultural *consequences*” (Royster and Williams 563). The account of the Black American presence in composition studies that Royster and Williams present counters or revises the conventional Eurocentric epistemological perspectives of this presence. Drawing inspiration from the ways that Royster and Williams “counter mythologies about African American presence” in the history of composition studies (579), I aim to wield a unique voice of color to counter perspectives that emulate the “majoritarian racial privilege” within American rhetorical literacy education.

Counter-story of the Unique Voice of Color

Critical race theory can help explicate this racialized construction of literacy education. Critical race theory hypothesizes that people of color have a unique voice that can provide vital counter-stories to accepted knowledge about racialized experiences. In other words, in a society ordered in part by racial identifications, racialized experiences may allow writers and intellectuals of marginalized races to communicate issues to the dominant White racial culture that Whites do not have the language to communicate to each other (Delgado and Stefancic 4). According to this tenet, racial counter-narratives are essential to providing a complete historical perspective of American social institutions. Aja Y. Martinez proposes that critical race theory, and particularly counter-story, can act as a testimonial method of narrative methodology to bring to light persistent racism in the field of composition studies and the academy itself (34). Martinez notes that such narrative forms are necessary as the field faces a “demographic shift” in the students it serves (34).

Counter-story has been used as a research methodology that allows researchers to challenge the de-humanizing expectations of “empirical data” (Martinez 37) that propagate deficit narratives about people of color (Solórzano and Yosso 4) and the privilege of the dominant cultural ways of knowing (Solórzano and Yosso 33). Literacy research in composition studies has alluded to the need for such ways of knowing (Kynard, *Vernacular*; Lathan;). In *Freedom Writing: African American Civil Rights Literacy Activism*, Rhea Estelle Lathan pushes back against the notion that “literacy *belongs* to white

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people” (28) by performing cognitive mapping of Jim Crow and composition studies (30) as they relate to the teaching and learning practices of Citizenship Schools. This mapping, or “spatial diagram or distribution of both” (Lathan 30) cultural productions, distorts cultural ideologies about literacy education and literacy activism, therefore providing a space to interject theoretical counter-stories. In another look at the possible ways of knowing in contrast to

those advocated by dominant racial epistemologies, Carmen Kynard explores the ways that the Black Arts Movement, Black Studies, and the Black Power Movement could craft an “alternative social world” when connected to language arts and composition pedagogy (*Vernacular* 111). Cognitive mapping of historical and disciplinary narratives and imaginings of unconventional social worlds can help create a unique voice of color that acts as a critical race counter-story to prevailing narratives and imaginings.

Critical race researchers see “counter-story [as] also a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege” (Solórzano and Yosso 32). The voice of color is essential to this process as it calls for inquiries into the impaired judgement of the singular Eurocentric epistemological voice. The voice-of-color thesis has its complications, including that it risks essentializing racialized experiences. In theorizing that a unique voice of color exists for speaking to systemic racist practices, critical race theory complicates the principle that races are constructed through thought and social relation (Delgado and Stefancic 8). I apply the voice-of-color thesis here as a theoretical frame to analyze one case of rhetorical literacy education for Black American students through non-Eurocentric perspectives. Instead of essentializing the Black American literacy education experience through the unique voice of color, I hold it as protection against epistemological gentrification around this education.

Counter-stories to American Rhetorical Literacy Education

Two critical works in composition-literacies studies have detailed the rhetorical purposes of postsecondary education for Black Americans. *Traces of a Stream: Literacy and Social Change Among African American Women* by Jacqueline Jones Royster and *Liberating Language: Sites of Rhetorical Education in Nineteenth-Century Black America* by Shirley Wilson Logan provide counter-stories, revisionist narratives, or an alternative social world to dominant conceptions of what rhetorical literacy education has looked like for Black Americans, one of several groups typically marginalized in education histories. For a long time, White America crafted the official accounts of Black Americans’ acquisition of literacy and rhetorical education through formal higher education. Yet as far back as 1903, *The Souls of Black Folk* by W.E.B. Du Bois offered a counter-story about the formal education of Black Americans. In “On the Wings of Atalanta,” Du Bois distinguishes Atlanta University’s exceptionality from other distinguished universities:

Not at Oxford or at Leipsic, not at Yale or Columbia, is there an air of higher resolve or more unfettered striving; the determination to realize for men, both black and white, the broadest possibilities of life, to seek the better and the best, to spread with their own hands the Gospel of Sacrifice, — all this is the burden of their talk and dream.

Du Bois sees Atlanta University as “the organ of that fine adjustment between real life and the growing knowledge of life.” Contradicting the principal narrative of Black Americans and higher education, this period-based description of an HBCU conveys an opportunistic perspective.

If one central goal of higher education is liberation through assimilation into culturally dominant ways of knowing and being, then writing in literacy education, as it is most generally

accepted, is central to this goal. Revisionist narratives through counter-stories have been central to Black communities owning their identities and creating meaning. The Literacy Narratives of Black Columbus Project, developed out of The Ohio State University with community partners, presents a unique voice of color from stories that complicate the dominant narratives about Columbus, Ohio, and its history.¹ Studying the rhetorical literacy education practices of Black Americans prior to inclusion in Eurocentric sites of education may have proven complicated, since much of the education happened in non-academic settings (Kates; Logan “Liberating”; Royster). This exclusionary rationale might be just a poor excuse to omit Black Americans from the narrative, however, because plenty of our instruction in literacy education happened in what would be considered formal institutions today. Yet because of the second-class status during particular historical moments, it takes the efforts of dedicated researchers to locate the records of these institutions. Along with accounts of informal instruction in literacy education, details of rhetorical literacy education through formal Afrocentric curricular applications crafts counter-stories to the dominant narrative about the history of rhetorical literacy education in America.

Rhetorical Education in America (Glenn, Lyday, and Sharer) provides a broad scope of approaches to defining and applying rhetorical education in American classrooms. The contributors inquire into the institutional policies around rhetorical education meant to uphold the status quo but also propose rhetorical education practices that empower traditionally subjugated groups wishing to overturn the status quo (Glenn, Lyday, and Sharer). My research into the unique voice of color of IBI literacy education speaks to the latter of these approaches. Kynard’s *Vernacular Insurrections: Race, Black Protest, and the New Century in Composition-Literacies Studies* expounds on the ways that Black American students have brandished composition-literacies for rhetorical, political, and social action across twentieth century decades. While many composition studies and literacy studies scholars have examined various aspects of literacy education for Black Americans, most have not considered what this unique voice of color productively adds to examine the role of literacy education histories in their influence on contemporary rhetorical literacy education practices. Further, no scholar has addressed explicitly the literacy education in the instance of Afrocentric education outlined here, independent Black institutions (IBIs). Overall, writing studies focuses little on the rhetorical literacy education of Black Americans during these eras and within these sites; the majority of information stems from interdisciplinary literature. Two key texts, *Teach Freedom: Education for Liberation in the African-American Tradition* and *Education as Freedom: African American Educational Thought and Activism*, provide grounding for this exploration.

The collection *Teach Freedom* provides essays and primary texts related to the educational institutions discussed in this article. From historical analysis of Afrocentric education just around the Civil Rights Movement to proposals and firsthand accounts from those who were there, this book supplies crucial perspectives on the dissemination of education to Black Americans. *Education as Freedom* complements *Teach Freedom* by illustrating how oppression and liberation have constituted two sides of the same coin for Black American education throughout history. The collection brings together authors who exemplify the objectives around social progression of Civil-Rights-era rhetorical education for Black Americans as well as perspectives on alternatives to the

mainstream instruction provided by Afrocentric education. These works are vital to situating the revisionist, counter-story, and alternative social world narratives that create a unique voice of color from Afrocentric frames for rhetorical literacy education at the college level. In the next section, I will closely consider the curricular and extracurricular approaches of these types of education and their potential for adoption in composition-literacies curriculum.

Adding a Unique Voice of Color to American Rhetorical Literacy Education

Several embodiments of formal education for Black Americans have sprung from community education models. These formal education forays succeeded in granting Black students access to pre-college and higher education for transformative purposes. Afrocentric models from the 1960s and 1970s succeeded in transforming the ways of thinking about social status for Black community members and that rhetorically educated a wide range of Black community members. Contemporary education programs for Black American students have a number of predecessors.

Particularly for Black American students, rhetorical literacy education often occurred in community sites outside of formal schooling (Enoch). Black communities have a history of utilizing rhetorical education as a tool of civic engagement and civic responsibility. After all, “[l]ooking to the past for models and uses of rhetorical education ... [g]iven that rhetorical action is initiated in response to mediated exigencies, few Americans have had a greater need to respond than have African Americans nor a greater desire to respond effectively” (Logan “To Get an Education,” 37). For many Black Americans, even today, our introduction to the practices of language and power as a tool of social action is through the church or community centers. Mainstream school forms of literacy education often undermine rhetorical literacies conferred by our communities.

Readers will be familiar with Black-built institutions of higher education such as Fisk University, Tuskegee Institute, and Atlanta University, all of which serve as forerunners to the programs of education highlighted in this unique voice of color. Among the schools produced by goals of community-building literacy education was Mary McLeod Bethune’s Daytona Educational and Industrial School for Negro Girls—transformed currently into Bethune-Cookman University, established in 1904 with a mission to promote racial uplift for young Black girls through education, in order to help them “earn a living” (Bowie qtd in McCluskey 67). The curriculum put students in a position where they could use education to transform their lives by applying their learned knowledge and skills to gainful employment in service to themselves and their local communities. Normal schools for teacher training are a significant example of the rhetoricity of literacy education, because they carried out the specific purpose of serving the Black American community through educating future teachers as a resource for social change. Any of the remaining normal schools started by and for formerly enslaved Blacks during Reconstruction and post-Reconstruction are now historically Black colleges or universities (HBCUs).

Teacher education held a significant role in growing Black communities, as long-established debates questioned whether students were better taught by Black teachers or White teachers,

southern teachers or northern teachers (Du Bois; Morris). This educational progress aimed to produce politically and socially conscious teachers. In *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, Carter G. Woodson argues that vocational training, like teacher training, should help teach Black students how to make a living (38-40)—not just a living for the students themselves, but to make a living for the community. Independent Black institutions embody these goals and outcomes. In the US, these homeschooling institutions for Black students came out of the spirit of Civil-Rights-era Citizenship Schools, Freedom Schools, and Black Panther Party liberation schools, as outlined in the next section. Just as “the ‘legal storytelling’ movement urges black and brown writers to ... apply their own unique perspectives to assess law’s master narratives” (Delgado and Stefancic 11), the voice-of-color perspectives presented about these instructional sites provide an assessment of narratives about mainstream rhetorical literacy education.

The Unique Voice of Color from Independent Black Institutions

Independent Black institutions arose as a way for parents and community members to counter the hidden curriculum of White supremacy offered in traditional schools. Unlike these homeschool collectives and online sites of community learning, Citizenship Schools, Freedom Schools, and Black Panther Liberation Schools constituted more official sites of general education and literacy education for Black communities. Each offered its own counter-story to dominant narratives of literacy education histories. Lathan proclaims Citizenship Schools as “a chapter in the continuing struggle against the overwhelming justification for relegating black people to subhuman positions: the belief that they were, by and large, illiterate” (xiii). The literacy and political education of older community members became central to Civil-Rights-era Black American communities in the South and prompted the creation of Citizenship Schools in 1957 Tennessee. These counter-stories also provide a Black American perspective of the range of uses for rhetorical literacy education in community affairs. Along with Freedom Schools, Citizenship Schools developed within the Black communities and taught formal writing education to enhance citizenship practices as well as service to the community. Citizenship Schools created a unique voice of color to the White American education perspective “that Black students were capable of little learning” and in doing so developed a participatory student body where such an opportunity did not exist for these students before (Levine 37). A key goal of both Citizenship Schools and Freedom Schools was to create more Black voters, particularly in the South in order to bring Black American interests and concerns to government representation.

Freedom Schools developed as a derivative of the civil rights goals established during Freedom Summer, 1964. The schools aligned with the overall Freedom Summer objective “[t]o create a truly representative political party [from] the vast majority of disempowered African Americans” by “develop[ing] the self confidence [sic] and organizational skills required of active citizens” (Emery, Braselmann, and Gold 5). Freedom Summer activists aimed to change the perception that registering to vote was something only White people did, believing their “main challenge was getting Black people to challenge themselves” (Cobb 70). The Freedom School model of education produced formal literacy education as a resource for preparing students for social action of multiple kinds, for

example, to teach others and organize boycotts. The everyday reality of Black students that Freedom Schools aimed to upset included “[n]ew brick school buildings built to give the illusion of ‘separate but equal’ [but] contained virtually bookless libraries and science labs with no equipment” (Cobb 71) and teachers removing Black students from class for questioning about voting and organized freedom rides (67). Thus, one concern of Freedom Schools was to inspire students to brave their public-school classrooms to ask critical questions of their teachers (Cobb 67). Carmen Kynard suggests that this inspiration derived from the very racial oppression in the education system that created critically conscious and educated citizens to challenge that system (*Vernacular* 25). Part of the rhetorical literacy education of Freedom Schools included preparing students for participation within the mainstream education programs.

The Black Panther Party’s Liberation Schools built upon and enhanced the previously discussed models with a resolute political approach to the education of young Black Americans. Liberation Schools reflected a distinct connection between politics and pedagogy, an approach that counters the formative, universalist Eurocentric epistemological perspectives to keep politics out of the classroom. Like the Black Panther Party that developed the education program, these schools aimed to “chang[e] the way Black people were viewed in the public sphere, and in the process [they] changed the way Black people looked at themselves” (Pough 71). Its vision for creating young revolutionaries addresses Shirley Wilson Logan’s central question in “‘To Get an Education and Teach My People’: Rhetoric for Social Change,” which is “Rhetorical education for what?” (36) The rhetorical literacy education at Liberation Schools taught students the history of socio-political conventions including “racism, capitalism, fascism, cultural nationalism, and socialism” (Perlstein 262). Rather than teaching reading, writing, and other literacies as disconnected from social contexts, teachers urged students to confront and question the entire gamut of school-related practices (Perlstein 264), including the “Pledge of Allegiance.” Not unlike Freedom Schools, the educational system itself became a topic of study within Liberation Schools.

Citizenship, Freedom, and Liberation Schools’ educational models stem from critical moments in American history, where the literacy education of Black Americans was a source of either oppression or progression. Independent Black institutions are modern-day constructions of Afrocentric rhetorical literacy education representing a unique voice of color. With modern versions first established in the early 1970s, IBIs have gained increasing popularity over the last thirty years. These schools use an Afrocentric program of education to teach relevant curriculum and values to preschool through high school-aged students (Lomotey 455). They come in the form of “homeschool collectives” and “African-centered schools” (Changa)—or *Afrikan*-centered, as many practitioners prefer to spell the term, where they hold a more encompassing view of success than do mainstream schools (Lomotey 456). IBIs’ unique voice of color about the most effective curriculum to help Black Americans prepare for active community life can inform approaches for theorizing and teaching literacy in composition studies.

This counter-narrative to traditional rhetorical education practices responds to Kynard’s argument that “when we have talked about understanding the social contexts of literacy, language, and discourse, ... we have not done so from the perspectives of interrogating deep political and

ideological shifts that have left structured inequalities and violence firmly in place, especially in reference to, but not solely based on, race” (“Literacy/Literacies,” 64) and Logan’s question “[r]hetorical education for what?” (“To Get an Education,” 36). It takes on Jacqueline Jones Royster and Jean C. Williams’s call for “*a systematic commitment to resist the primacy of ‘officialized’ narratives*” (582) about literacy education. They are able to uphold these approaches in part because “money to support IBIs comes directly from African American communities” (Bush 392). Such a financial model permits these institutions to “refrain from depending on outside financial support to prevent unwanted control and influence” (Bush 392).

Lawson Bush, Edward C. Bush, and Tonia Causey-Bush trace IBIs through a 10,000-year historical evolution through ancient African systematic apprenticeship education. These roots can be detected in modern iterations of IBIs, which include as part of student success “attitudes toward school and the nature of the relationships between school personnel, students, and families” (Lomotey 456). Community relations is a central aspect of IBIs. This community connection is embedded within the Afrocentric institutional philosophies. These philosophies originate from various principles based in African diasporic epistemological perspectives. IBIs privilege Afrocentric narratives of history and culture, which may be one of the reasons that their institutional histories, like those of their HBCU cousins, are absent from mainstream narratives about literacy education in America. These collectives of homeschool, virtual, and community-based education teach through an African-centered worldview, a perspective that conflicts with the perpetuation of Eurocentric ways of being of dominant rhetorical literacy education. Similar to indigenous American tribal community schools (Lee and McCarty), this unique voice of color rejects the notion that students are best rhetorically prepared for society when they learn and adopt Euro-Western rhetorical traditions and literacy practices.

For example, some IBIs are based in the concept of “nommo,” the notion that “all magic is word magic, and that the generation and transformation of sounds contribute to a [rhetor’s] power” (Asante 60). Some are based in “Ma’at” or “ancient African principles of ethical character development” (Lee 166).² Others share values with the seven Kwanzaa traditions of Umoja (unity), Kujichagulia (self-determination), Ujima (collective work and responsibility), Ujamaa (cooperative economics), Kuumba (creativity), Nia (purpose), and Imani (faith) (Lee; Lomotey). According to a Facebook post citing Kalonji Jama Changa on the page for the Council of Independent Black Institutions, these institutions are “growing everyday [sic], not as an alternative to public school, but as our own paradigm for academic excellence, cultural awareness, and the quintessential foundation for Black self-sufficiency and sovereignty for African people” (Council of Independent Black Institutions). Their community-based approaches to curriculum, pedagogy, and administration exhibit an emphasis on rhetorical action. By grounding their curricular and pedagogical approaches in Nguzo Saba, or “Seven Principles of Blackness,” IBIs deliver literacy education that “develops in students a communal and civic identity” (Enoch 7) relevant to who they are and their social positions by teaching Black American students “to look at the world through an African-centered set of lenses that ... has a wider periphery and more depth” (Lomotey 456). Further, as Kynard suggests, it helps Black American literacies mobilize beyond systemic stifling that never positions these literacies or

their participants as equal (*Vernacular* 26).

Taking the definition of rhetorical education for Black American students proposed earlier, these schools aim to develop communicative and behavioral practices based on the students' cultural and community histories. The pedagogy underscores *social action* and *civic practices* relevant to Black people. Among the eight goals for Afrocentric pedagogy within these schools, four center on the progress of community life (Lomotey 465-66). These include a goal for teachers to amplify support for serving students' multiple local, cultural, and world communities as well as to champion the belief that individuals and communities are producers instead of simply consumers of knowledge (Lomotey 466). The other goals for pedagogy build on an Afrocentric consciousness, including consciousness of language performance which "[e]xtend[s] and build[s] upon the indigenous language" (Lomotey 465). Kofi Lomotey does not elaborate on what "the indigenous language" is, but I take it to mean the student's "mother tongue." The intention is for teachers to expose students to both the progress of community life and Afrocentric critical consciousness as early as possible. In doing so, IBI educators help ensure that these values and ways of knowing influence students' overall engagement with education.

In terms of literacy instruction at IBIs, let's consult two examples of IBIs for middle and high school students. The Fawohodie Sua Pan-Afrikan Educational Online Co-op and Maroon Life Learning online course collection provide examples of teaching and learning practices that challenge the majoritarian White voice about the rhetoricity of Black-centric literacy education. Eurocentric epistemological perspectives of literacy education promote the literacy practices of Euro-Western cultures as the race-less, decontextualized norm (Barnett; Kincheloe). However, these two IBIs, along with others, interrupt this majoritarian voice that suppresses or outright denies literacy practices meant to create and sustain sovereignty of African diasporic cultures, including those in the US. Fawohodie's Word Power course offered the 2020 winter quarter teaches students "scholarly analysis and critique of the values, virtues and culture transmitted through Afrikan folktales and lore, and their evolution and propagation in the diaspora" ("Fawohodie Sua"). Instead of speaking against Eurocentric epistemological perspectives, this outcome of literacy instruction sustains Afrocentric literacy practices and literacies. Django Paris and H. Samy Alim explain that sustaining cultural practices in education requires not only honoring them but also critiquing and problematizing their context and use, in the same ways that this approach has become reflexive in our treatment of traditional reading, writing, speech and research practices.

Through its outcomes, this course also inspires students to "explore Afrikan traditional folkways and culture that 'appear' in Afrikan life in America, via the spoken words, lore and literature that was and continues to be a part of black life in America" ("Fawohodie Sua"). This approach to literary analysis reflects some of the concepts of African American rhetorics (Richardson and Jackson), such as "a view of culture, as influenced by African ancestral traditions, as an appropriate factor in analyzing performance" (Royster, "Foreword" x). If one aim of Eurocentric epistemological perspectives is to sustain absent-present, acontextual knowledge-making conventions of White supremacy through institutionalized literacy curriculum (Ladson-Billings; Ladson-Billings and Tate; Collins; Richardson; Barnett; Keating; Leonardo; Villanueva, "Maybe"; Villanueva "On"), this

learning objective collides with such an aim. To maintain a majoritarian voice and dominance in culture, instruction based in Eurocentric epistemologies cannot truly “explore, honor, extend ... [or] problematize” (Paris and Alim 3) the lore and literature representing *Afrikan* folkways and culture. Furthering the cultural sustenance goals of IBI literacy education, the Word Power course expects students to “discover the Afrikan retentions in their own family traditions and evaluate their benefits” as well (“Fawohodie Sua”). This aim of the course also opposes the goal of propagating Eurocentric worldview, which detaches knowledge development from social and cultural contexts (Kincheloe).

Even in their application of an Afrocentric worldview, not all IBIs are the same, as not all mainstream education institutions are the same. Take the Maroon Life Learning (MLL) online course collection. Their website states, “The main objective of our programs is to show youth and all people of African descent their own personal potential by introducing them to their history and to the achievements of Africans through the Ages [sic].” The courses are similar to most IBIs in that they strive to “connect the student to [the] awareness that Africans have had a long history, perhaps the longest of any other people on [E]arth” (MaroonLifeLearning). In contrast to Fawohodie aims, MLL’s pedagogical methods for literacy include “decipher[ing] the world in which they live and to continue to find ways to not just survive but to thrive spiritually, mentally and materially” and “us[ing] primary sources of information ... to connect to the past through the lives and views of people from the past ... [and] then move from concrete observations and facts to questioning and making inferences about the materials” (MaroonLifeLearning “Pedagogy”). While we teachers in traditional college literacy education can connect with some of the goals identified here, the recognition of the history and to the achievements of Africans through the ages, as well as the link to lives and views of ancestors, exhibits the unique voice of color missing from our literacy education practices.

Faculty in mainstream sites of education who want to sustain all students’ racial cultural language practices as a teaching tool can turn to this objective and the previously discussed IBI objectives for inclusive literacy instruction. For example, the commonplace practice of conducting scholarly analysis of texts and textual practices of writers and intellectuals of color still approaches these materials from dominant cultural theoretical perspectives about literacy. Taking direction from the Fawohodie and MLL course objectives, composition teachers would invite students to study these texts under the lens of Afrocentric values, virtues, culture, traditional folkways, and other ways of being or knowing, in conjunction with Eurocentric traditions of literacy, language, and discourse. Studies by several composition and literacy studies scholars examine an array of pedagogical approaches that loosely apply Afrocentric cultural perspectives to composition curriculum (see: Gilyard and Richardson; Kynard “Writing”; Perryman-Clark). Where the White supremacist cultural script of mainstream education literacy curriculum (Ladson-Billings; Richardson) teachers discourses of whiteness as the universal truth, IBIs teach these discourses as one of many ways of being and thinking. Because their contemporary methods are influenced by literacy histories detached from the Eurocentric narratives, IBIs illustrate a true unique voice of color in literacy education.

IBIs continue to steadily prosper today, even with limited financial support. However, they are built on the tradition of Citizenship Schools, Freedom Schools, and Liberation Schools, and they use rhetorical education as a means for community engagement. Each of the schools detailed here

operates on the premise that all children deserve to receive a curriculum relevant to their worldview and therefore the lives they face. Rather than inculcating Eurocentric ways of knowing and acting through rhetorical education, these educational models demonstrate how academic knowledge can serve purposes outside the academic setting. This kind of knowledge allowed the students of these schools to take accountability for the advancement of their communities, or it gave them the tools for civic responsibility. To conclude, I reinforce the need for the unique voice of color that IBIs offer to college-level literacy education and histories in America so that we, as composition-literacies teacher-scholars, may shape rhetorical literacy education experiences that consciously sustain raciolinguistically marginalized students' literacy cultural traditions.

The Need for Unique Voice of Color Counter-Narratives in Rhetorical Literacy Education Inclusive Curriculum Design

The counter-story to Black students' engagement with literacy education in America that I have provided shows a missing link in the ways education histories frame the social-rhetorical purposes of this education, as well as the rhetoricity of its outcomes for a portion of socially subjugated students. While traditional approaches to literacy education have centered on acquisition of literacy practices to serve the dominant culture, my definition of rhetorical literacy education for Black Americans expands on the approach recommended by Logan, "a rhetoric of social change" ("To Get an Education," 39). The counter-story provided by the unique voice of color represented in IBIs postulates that educators must consider, in addition to rhetorical literacy education for what, literacy education in service of whom.

Long before present-day IBIs, educational psychologist Inez B. Prosser studied the effects of non-academic social and psychological factors on Black American schoolchildren. The study compared the experiences of these children at segregated and integrated schools. Prosser concluded that that "the teacher-pupil relationships in the mixed schools are not as satisfactory as those in the segregated schools" (178). Still, even among teachers in segregated schools, Prosser suggests that they "strive to rid pupils of definite personal inferiority feelings unless such feelings are warranted"

“[C]ountering White savior narratives about Black students in literacy education can help reduce systemic ignorance about the purposes of this education, particularly within composition theory.”

and recommends "teacher re-education in newer aspects of mental hygiene" (186). Using Prosser's research into "certain attitudes and interests, the emotional stability, and the personality adjustment of two groups of Negro pupils ... in the two types of schools commonly called mixed and segregated" (1), pedagogues of literacy education might better serve their Black student populations by understanding the non-academic variables that influence them inside

the classroom. One of these nonacademic factors might be the psychological undertow that Black students feel that they "live and work in a world built up largely by and for someone else" (Prosser

30), because typical Eurocentric-privileged literacy education experiences reinforce this perception.

Since “counterstory [sic] functions as a method for marginalized people to intervene in research methods that would form master narratives based on ignorance and on assumptions about minoritized peoples” (Martinez 33), countering White savior narratives about Black students in literacy education can help reduce systemic ignorance about the purposes of this education, particularly within composition theory. The counter-story of IBIs, supported by Citizenship Schools, Freedom Schools, and Black Panther Liberation Schools, gives authority to marginalized perspectives in the history of literacy education. The rhetorical action promoted by the targeted literacy instruction of the Afrocentric educational approach demonstrates how the ways that we frame our teaching of literacy practices, such as writing, can impact the rhetoricity of those practices in social and civic contexts. Rather than focusing on using rhetorical behaviors for sole engagement with dominant society, this unique voice of color emphasizes how Black Americans applied the literacy education they gained from school to respond to the needs of their subordinated racial community.

For example, *reciprocity* is an African principle expected of IBI teachers and one that they instill in students. This African principle long precedes mainstream, predominantly White universities’ community-based work and writing studies community literacy research. It puts forth the idea that the teachers are symbolically connected to the success of the students, and the students are symbolically connected to the success of their communities, and therefore, communities are symbolically connected to the success of both the teachers and students (Lee 165, 168); however, such a postulation is foreign to Eurocentric epistemological perspectives of mainstream college-level education. As Carmen Kynard notes, the tradition of “action/activism-based class alliances” is embedded within the tradition of Afrocentric American education, even at mainstream institutions where students often ally across class and across racially subjugated communities on and off campus (*Vernacular* 58).

This goal of serving Black communities stands in contrast to what many see as the central goal of institutional literacy education for this demographic. That goal has been to assimilate Black American students out of the “black ghetto” (Smitherman 202) by “inculcating the values of the dominant society and eliminating the cultural distinctiveness of Black America” (203). That rhetorical impetus of literacy education for Black Americans is the accepted gentrified narrative. It is happily accepted by mainstream higher education. By presenting these unique voices of color, I hope to join the tradition of literacy in composition studies scholars who have begun to reject these whitewashed assimilationist stories and reclaim historical and contemporary truths about the racialized ideologies of rhetorical literacy education. Privileging this narrative for Black Americans reframes the purposes of institutionalized literacy education in order to better serve the lives of more of our students.

NOTES

¹For further details about The Literacy Narratives of Black Columbus Project, please see <http://blackcolumbus.osu.edu/theProject/default>.

²Ma'at is a concept described in what most Westerners know as *The Egyptian Book of the Dead* but which title actually translates as *The Book of Coming Forth by Day*.

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