

The Rhetorics of Race and Racism: Teaching Writing in an Age of Colorblindness

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KEYWORDS

rhetoric, race, racism, critical literacy, New Jim Crow

True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar. It comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring (158).

—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

From looming environmental catastrophe and relentless privatization of public space to extreme economic inequality, a multitude of contemporary issues underscores the need for a “new activist” movement and a corresponding political literacy. While there have been signs of a global political awakening in uprisings like the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street,¹ the current conjuncture of disarray on the left² and pervasive neoliberal policies of austerity and privatization tend to breed hopelessness, discouraging young people in particular from exploring radical ideas and possibilities that inspired previous generations, notably in the 1930s and 1960s. The mainly working class and first generation students I teach tend to be saddled with debt, anxious about the future, and driven by pervasive and uncertain market forces. For most, a college degree is a step toward a successful career and learning has rarely, if ever, been liberatory. In this essay, I show how analyzing the rhetorics of race and racism in the dominant narrative of American democracy alongside counternarratives of struggles for social and economic justice can engage students in “education as the practice of freedom.”³

I describe two classes—Pathways to Freedom and Writing in the Community (WiC)—in which students acquire rhetorical, writing, research, and analytical skills central to composition instruction. While themes in writing classes are typically viewed as incidental to these universal goals, I suggest that the study of history, together with an emphasis on critical discursive and rhetorical analysis, is also central to the development of the skills associated with composition. To pose a research question, evaluate a problem, develop an argument, or propose a solution, the writer must grasp the historical forces that shape a particular rhetorical discourse. At the same time, it is the rhetorical analysis of those discourses—actors, agency, motive, purpose, scene, and audience—that situates and complicates them. As Lloyd Bitzer theorizes, rhetorical discourse can be traced to the rhetorical

situation that gives rise to it, characterized by an exigency, “an imperfection marked by urgency . . . something waiting to be done . . . which is other than it should be” (6). To make sense of the text’s provenance and meanings, the reader must glean its contexts, locating them in time and space from multiple perspectives and sources, and engaging in historically specific, intertextual, critical analysis, akin to Freirean *conscientização*.

African American history is a particularly apt theme because it shines a bright light on the discrepancy between the nation’s democratic claims and its undemocratic practices. Even though, arguably, racial exploitation can only fully be understood in the context of class conflict, its inextricable entwinement in the process of capitalist expansion warrants emphasis on how colonial conquest and racism continue to haunt us. The exigencies of capitalist growth and black resistance pushed the nation to civil war in 1861 and then to rebellions in more than 160 cities in 1967 as civil rights laws proved incapable of remedying hundreds of years of racial oppression. By engaging in close reading of the discourses of American slavery and freedom, struggle and resistance, capitalism and democracy, students can begin to discern a key piece of the bigger puzzle of U.S. history in political and personal terms. Applying Bitzer’s theory of situated rhetorical discourse to an activist agenda, we might thus define “political literacy” as a critical response to exigent situations leading to actions aimed at changing reality.

THEORY AND METHOD: BEHIND THE VEIL OF COLORBLIND IDEOLOGIES

Since 2011, I have been teaching in a first-year learning community called Pathways to Freedom that focuses on rhetorical analysis of African American history in Brooklyn, New York. The Pathways theme stems from my participation in Students and Faculty in the Archives (SAFA)—a project sponsored by the Brooklyn Historical Society (BHS)⁴ to introduce first-year college students to archival research—as well as from my own lifelong commitment to fighting racism. My experience developing the Pathways curriculum, in turn, informed my design in fall 2013 of Writing in the Community, an upper division course in which students tutored teenagers in an alternative high school for youth offenders in conjunction with reading public sphere theory, essays on community literacy⁵ and Michelle Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*.⁶ Both classes use historical inquiry, rhetorical analysis, and metacognitive reflection—the ability to reflect on one’s own thought processes—to foster students’ ability to read “the word and the world” closely and critically, often revealing a gap, in this case, between their increasing knowledge of the history of racial oppression in the U.S. and their understanding of contemporary, racist social structures and practices.

Understanding the idea of the “veil” can help close that gap. The “veil” is a central concept in Marx’s theory of commodity fetishism in which the production of things conceals the exploitative process (e.g., cheap labor, inhumane working conditions) by which they are produced. W.E.B. Du Bois also uses the idea of the veil in writing about the problem of the color line to denote the lens of racial prejudice that keeps whites from recognizing black people’s humanity and creates a sense

of “twoness” or “double consciousness” (2) in African Americans. While most people today find racism morally repugnant, they also maintain that, despite some setbacks, we have made substantial progress in achieving racial equality. Though true in some respects, this uncritical faith in U.S. democracy serves to mask deeply unequal, oppressive conditions for masses of people. Gerald Horne lays out the historical basis for these persistent inequalities in his new, groundbreaking book about 1776, in which he argues that the colonists’ war against England was counterrevolutionary—not revolutionary—aimed at preserving the institution of slavery at a point of mounting black resistance and growing momentum in the British abolitionist movement. According to this analysis, rather than aberrations of democracy, U.S. slavery and racism constitute the very foundation of U.S. capitalism—brutal, racially coded, social relations of production behind the veil of “mirage democracy” (Zeese and Flowers).

Since the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the rise of post-racial ideologies, increasingly large numbers of people of color have been impoverished, incarcerated, and socially isolated in resegregated communities, schools, and prisons in what Alexander calls the “New Jim Crow.” Starting in the early 1970s with President Nixon’s State of the Union Address, a nascent post-racial ideology helped reframe racist practices and policies as wars on crime and drugs, orchestrated by a “New Federalism,” a return of power “back to the States and to the people of the United States” (21). This mystification of racism hinged on the idea that slavery and Jim Crow were anomalies in an otherwise admirable national history of expanding rights and freedoms. Thus in keeping with the national mythology that the death of the old Jim Crow was a triumph of American democracy, it became taboo to engage in publicly racist speech or behavior, leading to the concealment of racist policies in code words like “crime” and “safety.”

These discursive sleights of hand make white and black students alike susceptible to the ideology of colorblindness. I find that many students are shocked by gaining more detailed knowledge about slavery and Jim Crow yet disassociate themselves from contemporary forms of racism, expressing gratitude toward those who fought for civil rights and relief that they live in a period of relatively more equality and opportunity. Complicating such attitudes is the fact that in many respects the situations of individual African Americans, including those of many of my students, *are* better. Such complexities are difficult for anyone, much less college freshmen, to grasp. To do so entails analysis of the contradictory forces that dismantled Jim Crow and produced radical social change, on the one hand, yet gave rise to colorblind politics and *de facto* segregation, on the other. They need to exercise what James Paul Gee calls “powerful literacy,” a “meta-discourse to critique the primary discourse or other secondary discourses, including dominant discourses” (26). In other words, they need to learn to stand outside the discourses of post-racial America in order to explain the persistence of such inequities and recognize the exploitative political-economic structures that post-racial ideology conceals. Further, they need to support their analysis with evidence that accounts for the evolution of these discourses.

ENACTING CRITICAL RHETORICAL ANALYSIS IN PATHWAYS TO FREEDOM

Pathways to Freedom links two or three sections of composition and history with a total of 40-60 students each year in a two-semester sequence roughly spanning the periods from the Revolutionary War to Reconstruction in the fall and the rise of Jim Crow to the 1960s in the spring. Students visit BHS to examine slave bills of sale in what was then called Breuckelen, analyzing eighteenth and nineteenth century transactions for a person whose name probably exists nowhere else in the annals of history in relation to the 1799 New York State Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery. Complementing these materials, among other texts, are Jefferson's draft of the Declaration of Independence, parts of his *Notes on Virginia*, and a paper by historian David Gellman about the tension between the New York State founding fathers' abolitionist sentiments and their stronger commitment to nation-building. We ask the students to analyze the rhetoric of the Declaration of Independence and the 1799 Act in relation to slave bills of sale. To guide them, we assign parts of Bitzer's essay concentrating on his idea that exigent rhetorical situations give rise to rhetorical discourses that "function ultimately to produce action or change in the world" (4). Thus students begin to understand, for example, how the response of historical figures like John Jay to the exigencies of the 1790s gave rise to a specific discourse of "gradual abolition" in New York State that subordinated their moral condemnation of slavery to their reliance on slaveholders' support and their commitment to nation-building.

As students examine the divergence between the rhetoric of the Declaration of Independence and the realities of U.S. history, they not only learn that slavery was fundamental to nation building but also begin to question the dominant narrative of American democracy and reflect on their own subject positions. For example, a student discovered George Washington's evolving view of slavery by researching his letter to financier Robert Morris. In the letter, Washington complains about a lawsuit filed by Philadelphia Quakers who sought to free a slave owned by a Mr. Dalby. Washington expresses sympathy for the plight of slaves—"there is not a man living who wishes more sincerely than I do, to see a plan adopted for the abolition of [slavery]"—but insists that the only proper authority for enacting change is the legislature and worries slaveholders would shun the city so as not to "hazard their property." Starting with this primary document, the student traces Washington's development from his early disparagement of blacks as "inferior and needless of rest" to his growing but mostly private sympathy for abolition. Through rhetorical analysis of the letter, she gains a critical perspective on who did what and why in history and deepens her understanding of complex personal and collective responses—including perhaps her own—to rhetorical situations.

In the second semester of Pathways, students study the rise of Jim Crow, the Great Migration, and the civil rights movement, examining Brooklyn Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) papers at BHS and conducting oral history interviews with local civil rights activists for the Brooklyn Civil Rights Oral History Collection.⁶ They read Richard Wright's *12 Million Black Voices*, which bridges the yearlong course of study with a short history of the African American diaspora, along with other texts, including Ann Petry's gripping story "In Darkness and Confusion" and an article by Brian

Purnell about Brooklyn CORE protests in the early 1960s. In *12 Million Black Voices*, Wright recalls the trauma of the Middle Passage and hundreds of years of captivity, and goes on to chronicle the everyday realities of black Southern sharecroppers under Jim Crow, their mass exodus to the urban North between 1890 and 1920, and the broken promises of northern city life that gave birth to the modern civil rights movement. Through his poetic chronicle of the African American experience, Wright underscores the contradiction between early white America's "rebellion against tyranny" and its utterly dehumanizing extraction of wealth from slave labor (12).

This conundrum of "democracy," properly understood, demands a dialectical explanation rooted in historical research of the sort the author of the paper on George Washington begins to pursue. By investigating Washington's perspective on slavery, both through her analysis of his writing and through secondary sources that contextualize the primary document, the student complicates popular myths about the "father of our country" and arrives at a portrait of him that is neither heroic nor contemptible but human, shaped by his times, worthy of legendary status and disappointing in his failure to oppose slavery, which he increasingly understood was morally wrong and lacked scientific or religious justification. It is the same move in a more sophisticated vein that Wright makes when he contrasts the "devastation and despair" (12) experienced by African Americans to the transatlantic rise of "a passionate, humanitarian belief in the rights of man" in the early eighteenth century, underscoring their capacity for hope and struggle and the complexity of their response to the brutal history of enslavement and exploitation despite which "*we* black tools responded as fervently as did the rest of mankind to the call of Liberty" (17).

Engaging in dialectical thinking remains a challenge for Pathways students as they are asked to draw connections between U.S. history and their own experiences in a period of unprecedented success for some African Americans and misery for masses of others trapped in cyclical poverty and the prison industrial system. Another challenge is the weakness—in some cases, absence—of the sort of public dialogue on these issues that a strong political left, capable of pushing back against neoliberal policies, might engender. In an effort to offset such challenges, we introduce students to new knowledge such as the iconic Woolworth's sit-ins that began in 1960 in Greensboro, North Carolina. While most of them already know something about the protest, learning how it spread to Brooklyn among other places helps them understand the scope and mass character of the movement. Next we might ask them to compare and contrast the overt racism of the Jim Crow era to current practices like restrictive voting bills and to reflect on how people in two different eras stand up and resist oppression. A third step, which I increasingly see as vital, is to guide students in a process of integrating their emotional responses to racism with their deepening political and historical knowledge. Last, we are finding that expanding the focus from African American to Native American and women's eighteenth and nineteenth century history enables students to link these narratives horizontally and vertically, across and beyond that period, and alleviates the stress of zeroing in unremittingly on black history.⁸

ENACTING CRITICAL RHETORICAL ANALYSIS IN THE FIELD: THE TRANSITIONS PROJECT

In Writing in the Community (WiC), the advanced writing class I taught in fall 2013, students participated in the Transitions Project, for which they tutored teenagers remanded to a special high school for youth offenders. I assigned Alexander's book to help the students situate their experience working with youth offenders in the historical context of the New Jim Crow. Alexander directly addresses the problem of post-racial ideology of colorblindness in her searing indictment of the prison industrial system. She punctures the myth of a post-racial society with chilling data about the dramatic increase of America's prison population since 1980 from 300,000 to two million, observing that more black men are incarcerated today "than were enslaved in 1850, a decade before the Civil War began" (180).

She goes on to reinterpret American history as comprised of three periods of racial oppression and racialized control: slavery, Jim Crow, and mass incarceration. The students found Alexander's critique of the criminal justice system profoundly disturbing, relating her analysis of the impact of the War on Drugs on poor, black communities to their experience working with youth who were responsive neither to their own program nor to our encouragement to reflect on their experience and learn to "talk back" productively to the school and wider communities. The teenagers' fierce resistance to authority, including us, involved verbal abuse, tantrums, physical scuffles with each other, and refusal to learn or cooperate, ultimately resulting in their administration asking us to discontinue our visits.⁹ My students and I could see first hand the impact of incarceration, poverty, and racism on teenagers with multiple arrests, criminal records, and dreary future prospects.

In an essay titled "Catch 22: Literacy Education and the Public in Jefferson High School,"¹⁰ one WiC student, Samantha, begins with an epigram by Tupac Shakur: "As real as it seems / the American dream ain't nothing but another calculated scheme / To get us locked up, shot up, back in chains / To deny us of the future / Rob our names / Kept my history, of mystery, but now I see / The American Dream wasn't meant for me." She describes the dramatic entrance of the most disruptive student to the classroom: "My gaydar flared immediately, followed by my sympathy: this girl must have it rough, a teenaged black lesbian already caught up in the justice system. The girl slammed her backpack onto a chair; it fell to the floor." With perfect pitch, Samantha captures the girl's gift for parody, her power, and her fragility: "You know what kind of school this is, right? You know we're..." She didn't break her fierce eye contact ... 'juvenile delinquents?' The other girls laughed. Nadia had asserted authority over me, challenged me, turned me into someone completely out of place."

Samantha recalls that the English teacher answered another student's question about relevance: "I'm sorry you don't like the essays but maybe you can see it as a life skill. Sometimes life gives us something we don't necessarily like, right? And we work with it as best we can." Interpreting these scenes "through the lens of education as a political act, incarceration as a political concept and the written word as a site for radical subversion," Samantha challenges the teacher's response to the student, concluding: "True revolutionary pedagogy, then, is more than teaching the right books or giving the right tests . . . [or] providing a public forum . . . for airing students' contributions to

national discussions. Revolutionary pedagogy requires a massive, multilateral shift in the social and political environment in which teachers work, day by day, to educate against all odds.” In an early draft of the paper, Samantha imagines what might have happened if the girls had shared each other’s writing, mostly autobiographical stories written in response to a prescribed nonfiction curricular unit. “One girl wrote about moving from Brooklyn to Senegal when she was five. Another wrote what was technically fiction but was obviously about her and her boyfriend navigating the shifting alliances of family members and school friends . . .” Samantha goes on to suggest that “discussing [the stories] in a forum designed as a rhetorical public . . . could have revealed an element of a community in crisis.”

Although Samantha came into the course with a commitment to social justice and prior exposure to critical education (she cites Freire, for example, whose writing I did not assign), her response to Alexander’s book and the Transitions Project resonated with that of her WiC classmates. More advanced than the Pathways students, WiC students were better able to link slavery and Jim Crow to the current era of “colorblind” ideology that obscures racist practices and policies and has led in many respects to far worse conditions for vast numbers of African Americans than existed in the 1960s. Although they appreciated Alexander’s analysis of mass incarceration, they did not always agree with her. Pointing to the complex, deracinating effects of poverty and racism that complicate such situations, students of color, in particular, questioned her critique of police surveillance of poor black neighborhoods, reminding us that many residents who feel under siege by local dealers and gangs welcome a police presence, and emphasizing the interplay between the rhetoric of race and crime and the reality of high crime rates in predominantly poor, nonwhite communities. As a whole WiC students were disappointed that Alexander’s call for a “radical restructuring of our approach to racial justice advocacy” (260) lacked discussion of alternatives to capitalism or explicit linkage of the prison industrial system to neoliberal policies such as privatization and public and corporate austerity programs that contribute to high unemployment rates, particularly among black men.

LEARNING FROM SOCIAL MOVEMENTS: POLITICAL LITERACY, RESILIENCE AND THE "NEW ACTIVISM"

The belief that ghetto conditions were caused not by racial discrimination but by black pathology helped preserve the illusion of the North as a liberal sanctuary and spin the “classical narrative” of a triumphant civil rights movement. Through the study of Brooklyn history, including slave bills of sale and CORE flyers, pamphlets, and news clippings, Pathways students come to understand the civil rights movement as a “long” movement instead of a single victorious decade between *Brown v. Board of Education* and the 1965 Voting Rights Act. If we succeed in getting them to think critically about history, they also grasp what Jacquelyn Dowd Hall describes as the “conservative interregnum that, for good or ill, depending on one’s ideological persuasion, marks the beginning of another story, the story that surrounds us now” (1234). That narrative unfolded with the ascent of Black Nationalism, the reification of a black culture of poverty, and a rising black middle class—a post-racial story

purveyed by liberals in support of civil rights but afraid of radical black politics and by conservatives seeking reconsolidation ever since the turbulent New Deal politics of the 1930s.

One Pathways student who researched Operation Clean Sweep started her essay by noting that despite having been born and raised in Brooklyn, she knew little about the borough until her first year of college when she had “the chance to learn its history.” She learns that conditions in the 1960s were “horrific” and that Brooklyn CORE “decided to take on the task of improving living conditions because it highlighted the different ways racism was expressed in the North than it was in the South, which is what made this group so significant.” She proceeds to recount the main events of the anti-garbage campaign and to emphasize the politics of discrimination that led black residents to view unequal sanitation service as indicative of pervasive racism, while “Whites believed that the causes for the living conditions in Bedford Stuyvesant were due to the black population that lived there.” But for her classmates and her, the racism of the 1960s still belonged mainly to the past. She concludes, “The streets are much cleaner, discrimination is now over, and everyone has an equal opportunity.” I understand this response complexly both as a sign of hope—that young people now have indeed experienced a different reality than that of their counterparts in the 1960s—and an indication of the extent to which post-racial ideology permeates American society, underscoring the need to foster students’ capacity for social and political critique.

We try to foreground the relevance of the past to the present by focusing toward the end of the semester on policies like “stop and frisk” and the Supreme Court’s ruling in the summer of 2013 that struck down the key elements of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. We ask students to research the resegregation of neighborhoods and schools, the persistence of hunger and homelessness, the extreme inequality in global wealth—according to a staggering 2014 Oxfam report, 85 people own as much wealth as the entire bottom half of humanity (Fuentes-Nieva and Galasso 2)—and the disproportionate number of impoverished black and Latino families. At the same time, we understand the appeal of a post-racial society and the complex realities of our students’ lives. The students’ sense of how much society has changed since the 1960s is both accurate and false. At urban campuses like mine in which white students constitute only 28 percent of the student population, diversity is the rule, not the exception; nor does a black/white binary apply to today’s global and interfamilial mix of ethnic, national, and cultural identities. Post-racial ideology is confirmed on the one hand by highly visible “black exceptions”—President Obama, Colin Powell, Oprah Winfrey, Jay-Z—and unsettled, on the other, by countless examples of racism, including the students’ own encounters with racial injustice.

Activism—old and new—takes place outside the classroom. By historicizing the production of race and engaging in rhetorical analysis of history in class and in the field, students lift the veil of neoliberal, post-racial ideology to reveal widening racial and class inequalities and begin to explain them as a result of human actions, past and present—a prerequisite for political activism if, to paraphrase Marx, the point is not only to interpret the world but to change it. However, as my colleagues and I have discovered by testing this thesis with successive cohorts of students, more than intellectual engagement is needed to forge a new historical and political consciousness. Learning about some of the most heinous, murderous chapters of human history—especially when such

knowledge dispels firm beliefs in American democracy, freedom, and equality—can sap the energy right out of a classroom of eighteen-year-olds.

Perhaps the most crucial lesson for me in teaching these two classes is to link critical analysis to explorations of resilience. Despite many examples of resistance, from slave rebellions to civil disobedience, neither class emphasizes resilience adequately. I recently heard a panel of students attest to a life-changing course they took called *Against All Odds: The Black Experience*, co-taught at Evergreen State College by professors Joye Hardiman and Kabby Mitchell and aimed at: “Enhanced appreciation and comprehension of those elements that result in resiliency and indigestibility while in the belly of the beast.” Teaching political literacy in an age of colorblindness requires lifting a powerful ideological veil. Students may feel despair, frustration, and anger in response to what they learn. In *Against the Odds*, students explore how black men and women found the “insurmountable courage to deconstruct and reconstruct their lives.” Such courage sparks activism and lets us disentangle ourselves from the guilt and pain of a collective history that implicates all of us. Understanding our very personal stake in global justice, we might shift from identification *as* a racialized, gendered body to identification *with* others in a move that can free us from the constraints of disabling subject positions like white liberal guilt or that sense of “twoness” Du Bois understood as alienation.¹¹ This shift might in turn enable a critique of oppressive systems as we embrace the just causes of all people whether or not they are different from us.

Thus, in addition to learning how U.S. history contradicts the rhetoric of the founding fathers, we want our students to respond—personally and politically—to how this historical pattern continues to unfold in all our lives, and to understand what Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. meant when he declared in 1968 that, “True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar. It comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring” (158). Previously, we concluded each semester with a story circle in which everyone told about a time they witnessed, experienced, and/or stood up against injustice. Almost always among the students’ stories are personal accounts of racial profiling, “stop and frisk,” use of the “n” word by police; it is in the course of sharing these visceral experiences that the post-racial dream collides with realities they have personally experienced, ushering in a new synthesis of what they know and what they think. Going forward, we plan to make the story circle a more regular feature of the class, a collective practice aimed at deeper, more integrated learning. A new activist movement will require “resilience and indigestibility,” a lesson one Pathways student hints she has taken away from the class when she describes her self as having been “injected ... with a little activist blood.”

NOTES

¹ As this special issue goes to press, additional signs of resistance can be seen in #BlackLivesMatter at home and abroad with Syriza's victory this past January in Greece and the growing popularity of Podemos in Spain.

² For example, in May 2013, invoking "the politics of exhaustion," Jeffrey St. Clair called the American left "an immobilized and politically impotent force."

³ See bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*.

⁴ See www.teach.archives.org for a full account of SAFA, including information about the project, articles by participating faculty and staff, in-archives exercises across several disciplines designed for first-year college students, and student artifacts.

⁵ See *Writing and Community Engagement: A Critical Sourcebook* (Deans, et al.)

⁶ The project grew out of an already existing partnership between the alternative high school and LIU's Student Life Office. In search of a community partner but concerned about issues of sustainability, I was delighted to discover that LIU already had a connection with the high school, which was in close proximity to the campus and fit remarkably well with my goals of engaging my students in community writing and critically examining a site of literacy at the intersection of schooling, the prison industrial system, and systemic racism.

⁷ Funded by a 2012 NEH Digital Humanities Startup Grant, a team of faculty and students created a mobile application, accessible at <http://beta.brooklynfreedom.org>, mapping the oral histories in time and space.

⁸ While space will not permit me to discuss this very recent change (fall 2014) in the Pathways curriculum in detail, so far my colleagues and I have found that expanding the scope of subject matter fosters interdisciplinary and intersectional thinking.

⁹ English 173 students and I gained some insight into the high school students' fierce resistance to our offers of mentorship and tutoring by reading Herb Kohl's "I Won't Learn from You: Thoughts on the Role of Assent in Learning." In particular, his concept of "not-learning" as a way to subvert remediation and as a healthy response to a "hostile society" has helped me rethink how to partner with the alternative high school.

¹⁰ The student used pseudonyms for the high school and all the people involved in it.

¹¹ Du Bois also means "second sight" here, a "more positively-laden notion" (56), as Ernest Allen Jr. points out. I do not mean to suggest that people who have been historically oppressed should surrender their identities but rather that bringing about structural and social change is a collective struggle.

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