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Symposium: Diversity is not Enough: Mentorship and Community-Building as Antiracist Praxis

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This *Rhetoric Review* Symposium extends long overdue conversations about racism in the discipline begun in a NCTE/CCCC cross-caucus *College Composition and Communication* symposium titled "Diversity is not Justice: Working toward Radical Transformation and Racial Equity in the Discipline." That symposium brought together graduate students and faculty to initiate a set of dialogs highlighting the need for BIPOC scholars to share knowledge regarding their graduate experiences, mentorship, community, and academic survival. Our aim in publishing that first collection of essays was to share something of ongoing discussions about racism that already occur in BIPOC safe spaces, hush harbors, and home communities with a hope that these discussions would be taken up more widely—in other words, that the issues examined there would go beyond backchanneled whispers, isolated published essays, and special issues to form a more consistent thread within *all* rhetoric, composition, and communication scholarship.

But hope is never enough. Hence, with many thanks to editor Elise Verzosa Hurley, we continue that conversation here as well as in forthcoming issues of *Composition Studies, Present Tense*, and *CCC*. While we recognize the work of scholarly marginalization that special issues can enact, allowing venues to dedicate the majority of their space to whitestream and settler perspectives, we avail ourselves of these nevertheless crucial publishing opportunities to fight against the erasure of and neglect for BIPOC concerns. Simply put, we refuse to let the discipline ignore us and the needs of our communities any longer. Furthermore, we argue that for actual sustainable change to occur, we must all take up these concerns. This constant struggle for equity cannot be BIPOC's fight alone; white and settler scholars must join us in combating racism and the harms it wreaks on our minds, bodies, and spirits. For these reasons, we share the following counternarratives which the authors featured in this symposium have so generously—and bravely—chosen to share.

A survey of the literature shows how BIPOC use story as a critical technology. We use narratives to contend with the complexities of minoritized identity (Hsu; Ore; V. Young); maintain our cultures and communities (Guajardo and Guajardo; Nunley; Smith; Wieser) contest flattening stereotypes created by white supremacy (García; Pittman; M. Young); and decenter universalizing whitestream notions of thinking, knowing, and being (Baker-Bell; Burrows; CRTL; Rodriguez and Cuevas). Within academia, BIPOC stories also provide invaluable counternarratives that draw attention to the academy's complicity—indeed, centrality—in promoting the oppressive structures and dominant culture's imaginary that continue to harm us. So long as mainstream education continues to be *whitestream* education, the academy will continue to demean and exclude our culturally-situated knowledge-making processes, our uses of language, our bodymindspirits, and the stories we tell, including our research (Lara). Therefore, BIPOC use narratives to compose counterstories regarding our place in higher education and in the world (Delgado; Martinez, *Counterstory*; Solórzano and Yosso).

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Academic counterstories explain how we craft culturally sustaining research methodologies (King, Gubele, and Anderson; Reyes García and Martínez; Riley Mukavetz; Wan) articulate our navigation of academia (Cedillo; Powell; Villanueva) and lay claim to our own identities and experiences (Hull et al.; Kinloch, Penn, and Burkhard; Martinez, "A Plea").

We add to this vast corpus of scholarship by BIPOC about BIPOC by highlighting stories that illustrate the vital significance of mentorship and community to our academic survival. The authors featured in this symposium narrate their experiences to show the myriad sacrifices that the academy expects us to make, as well as the different ways that we work around and challenge these expectations. That is, this symposium is a collection of counternarratives that tell how these particular BIPOC scholars size up and subvert an oppressive system to find the nurturance and community they need to succeed in often hostile spaces. While the stories shared below may resonate with many readers, we want to note that what we endure and the tactics we deploy in response vary according to context, positionality, and our lived identities. Institutional racism affects different communities, and even individuals within the same community, in distinct ways. That does not mean we cannot find common ground and learn from one another's experiences.

As we engaged with the narratives featured here, we noticed that they all referenced a few prominent challenges faced by BIPOC in the academy, including commodification, competition, disbelonging, and fear of repercussions. Commodification refers to how institutions use BIPOC bodies to sell their antiracist "brands," framing themselves as friendly to marginalized people while doing nothing to actually keep us. This symposium offers at least a few examples of antiracist interventions in the academy that people have attempted since the murder of George Floyd, the protests that followed, and the profusion of Black Lives Matter statements issued by departments and scholarly organizations around the country. However, in order for us all to engage in antiracist work on our own campuses and in our organizations, both as this pandemic persists and afterward, they will have to actually make room for us in those spaces. Otherwise, as D'Angelo Bridges states in his contribution: "[T]hey realize they was just playing when they got us." Even at minority-serving institutions, programs can be run by people outside the community the school claims to serve, bolstering the whiteness of the discipline and forcing us to question what we are willing to do to have a seat at the table (see Mckoy's contribution). Also, because universities were not created for BIPOC and we were never intended to succeed in those spaces, vital support systems are often missing. The unrecognized, unpaid labor of offering support falls on exhausted, already marginalized faculty, staff, and students who, with no support of their own, might easily be forced out. Mentorship happens laterally as graduate students teach one another what they had to learn themselves, and even between faculty and students much needed counsel must be shared via whispers and closed-door conversations for fear of repercussions (see Waszak, Masséus, McCalla, Kumar, Corona, and Ahmad in this Symposium). In this way, institutions disavow their need to provide adequate support, and they accommodate only a select few BIPOC who can supposedly "hack it," preventing us from establishing more equitable numbers, and with that, more systems of support.

Because so few of us are granted even this version of supposed access, institutions can use the discourse of meritocracy to explain away the lack of BIPOC presence on campuses, in scholarly organizations, and in our disciplinary journals. The narrative is that only the "chosen few" are truly worthy of academic inclusion. Yet counter-narratives prove just the opposite. Research reveals that white men are more likely to receive institutional support, allowing them to focus on career advancement. In contrast, BIPOC and many white women are forced to prove their worthiness constantly, forcing everyone who is not a white cis man to compete for what little space is

designated for diversity (see Felber, Williams, and Chung in this Symposium). This ruse leaves Black women and other women of color to spend valuable time and energy reflecting on negative experiences, questioning their self-worth, and struggling to command respect (Robinson).

Academia was never designed around our needs and experiences. Stated plainly: "No matter how many shifts the academy makes, the center still pivots around this reality" (see Whitebear's contribution). Addressing these issues practically and materially is still something that largely has yet to happen. BIPOC scholars continue to contend with the politics of dis-belonging, that is, how we are kept from ever feeling at home in our social locations, from identifying with more privileged colleagues, and from ever seeing ourselves as authors of the ethical codes that determine how belonging occurs (Yuval-Davis). Thus, after the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and too many others in 2020, expressions of shock and empathy from white liberal academics rang hollow. For state violence and death are the ultimate outcomes of disbelonging, a condition necessitated by whitestream dominance and imposed on Black people and other communities of color in large part through our education systems.

As an antidote to these problems, BIPOC scholars must create spaces where we *do* belong (McKee and Delgado; Tuck). Mentorship and community-building are central to this work—and to keeping BIPOC in the academy. One thread tying these narratives together is the agency required to fashion professional networks that counter the sense of isolation we often experience, but also the need to independently establish a network that future generations can benefit from, build upon, and extend. As these stories show, BIPOC must learn to give themselves permission to choose their mentors and their communities. Not every senior scholar will be a mentor. Your dissertation director may not be your mentor; your faculty program directors may not be your mentors. This point holds especially if they emphasize bootstraps and meritocratic models that promote violence against the self and marginalized people. Your mentor may not come from your department or your university. Some of us have received mentoring via conferences, listservs, e-mail, and even through reading about other people's experiences. We cannot underestimate the importance of such "surrogate mentorship," which helps many BIPOC students through coursework and dissertation writing and inspires BIPOC faculty to mentor others so that they, too, can make it (see Felber, Williams, and Chung). Mentors don't have to be close by. Mentors may not even be members of one's home community, but they must go beyond talk of diversity and inclusion to demonstrate actual commitment (see Mckoy). A good mentor must discuss the importance of giving oneself permission to seek significant connections that give us a sense of what is possible for us.

Nevertheless, as much as we may wish to be generous BIPOC scholar-mentors—which we hope we all aspire to be—we do need to do so without burning out. How can we be the mentors we want to be, we need to be, in a sustainable fashion? This is just one reason why community and community-building is so important. Sometimes mentorship comes from cultivated networks of "sibling-scholars," scholars from across the country and across career levels who advise us, cheer for us, and offer stability amidst hostile environments (see Bridges's contribution). Communal ties can move us beyond mere survival to being able to thrive (see Sales). But kinship and care as practiced in communities of color take effort; they are actions, not static phenomena. In BIPOC spaces, elders, cousins, and colleagues teach us how to navigate the world, including academia. This form of instruction is rarely credited within whitestream structures though such teaching is foundational to our lives and our work. And so, kinship and care are actions that underwrite what we are doing here in this symposium and in our multi-journal cross-caucus initiative. We are growing relationships across the caucuses by enacting them, by doing the work,

by embodying cross-cultural scholarly kinship and being part of a chosen community of care where we maintain our own spaces and identities while being in authentic relation to each other.

Scholars throughout the academy can learn from culturally-situated BIPOC models of mentorship, relation, and support while building something new. One size does not fit all, and unfortunately, this approach is all too common when it comes to the kind of diversity, equity, and inclusion work enacted by institutions. Diversity in terms of bodies is not enough, not while the makeup of academic spaces continues to constrain our very being and our people are forced to pick up the slack. Neither is trying to fix the same stale academic models that were built around BIPOC's exclusion from the classroom even as we were forced to surrender the land, build the buildings, and maintain the grounds where those classrooms are still standing. Moving forward, institutions and allies need to center antiracist and decolonial change over their own agendas, and that requires truly listening when we articulate our particular needs and experiences. Thus, besides valuing each other's stories and testimonies, we are making space here for the counternarratives that follow to be heard by others. Sharing our accounts is never a small matter for BIPOC; we are used to having our hi/stories overwritten and ignored even by well-intentioned comrades. But, as Indigenous scholars explain, sharing stories allow us to build and sustain the relationships that make up our cultures and communities, but with relationship comes accountability (Jennings).

Accountability entails knowing that we are responsible to all our relations, including our home communities, our ancestors, those peoples whose lands we inhabit, those whose labor built and maintain your schools, and each other. As a colonial institution, the academy cannot be decolonized, but since we avail ourselves of its capital to teach against the forces that harm our peoples, we can make room for ourselves where we can thrive—and our allies can help. What might this look like? It means offering mentorship to your BIPOC students and colleagues with the understanding that many of us navigate the academy all by ourselves, minus the structural support that we are assumed to have had and that many of our privileged colleagues did. It means trusting your students and colleagues and refusing to silence or ignore their grievances because they are not part of your experience or could potentially "cause trouble." But it also means admitting that "many pockets of bigotry, intolerance and repugnant elitism" exist, and fighting to keep them out of our classrooms, organizations, and institutions (see Brooks). It means being upfront with mentees about what they should expect from whom—who is safe and who is not—and speaking up and taking action when abusers strike. It means centering the needs of the most vulnerable in our academic communities, including students, adjuncts, and staff.

In the end, racism is a problem created by whiteness to bolster whiteness, though we BIPOC are the ones who must live its effects. Therefore, BIPOC cannot and should not have to do all the work. As these stories show, we are busy offering each other the support we should be receiving from our institutions and organizations. Hence, we render ourselves open and share these stories with you so that BIPOC know they are not alone and potential privileged allies can begin the work of listening and doing. In doing so, here is what we hope you will take away from these stories: When we put these ideas in conversation with each other, a model for forming intercultural, antiracist, decolonial communities started to emerge, communities that allow us to maintain our distinctions and differences while putting us into more productive and healthy relationships to each other and the world around us. This model does not begin and end with an academy where people must conform to a monolithic whitestream pattern or be rejected. Instead, this model emphasizes the creation of better spaces for everyone, BIPOC and not, academic and not. Because ultimately, that's the kind of world we want to live in—a world where we are all supported and accountable to each other, a world where we can all thrive.

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Teaching Rhetoric and Composition After January 6, 2021

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When mainstream media outlets announced Joe Biden as the winner of the 2020 presidential election, millions of Americans cheered and tens of thousands rejoiced in public celebrations. However, no amount of dancing in the streets would disguise the creeping malaise that seemed to be gently falling from the sky like confetti on the heads and shoulders of those electoral-decision revelers. What was the cause of this sense of unease that blunted the size and depth of the democratic party's expected jubilee? More than seventy-four million citizens had voted for Donald Trump, and this number signified that—despite the horrors and social upheaval of a global pandemic, extreme income inequality, the destabilization of climate change, a renewed reckoning with racial oppression, and an administration mired in chaos, corruption, and cruelty—there would be no wholesale repudiation of either President Trump nor the ideals and dispositions he has come to embody (that is, Trumpism). Although Trump's rejection of the election's results surprised few, the willingness of a large portion of the Republican party to support Trump's efforts to overturn the election only further confirmed that this sense of unease would be here to stay amongst the liberal body politic. Only days later, a violent mob would go on

to attack the U.S. Capitol and obliterate any sense of incoming normality with a new administration.

Some of the most important voices within the American public sphere have concluded that this feeling is a product of a collective recognition of what President Barack Obama has described as an epistemological crisis fueled by the public's diminishing capacity to distinguish between truth and fiction (Goldberg). Following a plethora of commentators and pundits, Obama lamented the ways in which Big Tech and social media companies have helped to create an environment that facilitates conspiracy theories, fascism, and white supremacy:

> I don't hold the tech companies entirely responsible because this predates social media. It was already there. But social media has turbocharged it. I know most of these folks. I've talked to them about it. The degree to which these companies are insisting that they are more like a phone company than they are like *The Atlantic*, I do not think is tenable. They are making editorial choices, whether they've buried them in algorithms or not. (Goldberg)

Obama's notion of epistemological crisis should be viewed through BIPOC histories, particularly African American history. This epistemological crisis is a byproduct of experiencing America's history of systemic racial oppression, for the greatest power within America's institution of slavery was not located in the means of physical subjugation, but in the twisted lie of white supremacy, one of the most successful disinformation and propaganda regimes in all of human history. Therefore, this unease is quite familiar to America's Black and Brown communities because it has extensive historical roots. Academic institutions will play an important role within America's collective response to this crisis. In order to meet the challenges of our current moment, they must be willing to reimagine their community relationships and institutional priorities. Moreover, they must also be willing to acknowledge the gravity and implications of such feelings despite the forces of dismissal and erasure ("just get over it") so often used to stifle public discourse and halt productive and equitable policy changes. This moment also requires teachers of rhetoric and composition to consider what demands these recent events place on our collective pedagogical commitments.

For abolitionists like Frederick Douglass, this sensation was the profound anguish that accompanied witnessing America survive a civil war only to then turn away from its commitment to justice and equality in spite of great human sacrifice. For scholars like W.E.B. Du Bois, it was the travesty of Reconstruction and the heartbreak that occurred from realizing that no amount of data and rational analysis would persuade America to abandon racial oppression. Moreover, for civil rights leaders such as Ella Baker and Martin Luther King Jr., it was reckoning with the price America was willing to pay for its commitment to the fiction of white supremacy.

More than just the dashed hopes of prominent figures who dedicated their lives to the freedom struggle, this phenomenon marks a particular component of the Black experience most recently described by Eddie Glaude in *Begin Again* as living in the "after times." Living in the after times involves the experience of witnessing the declension of America's progress toward an equitable and multi-racial democracy after a period of supposed progress. According to Glaude, the key to survival involves following the teachings and lived experiences of figures like James Baldwin, those who grappled with what it meant to recommit (begin again) to telling the truth about America. I argue that teaching rhetoric and composition in the after times involves a similar process that impacts pedagogical goals and strategies, collegial relationships, and disciplinary commitments. I will briefly discuss one way of transferring these ideas into classroom activities in addition to commenting on the treatment of BIPOC adjunct and nontenured faculty in regards to issues of

equity and inclusivity among colleagues. I posit these claims as part of reconnecting to a blues ethos, a reminder of the blues resources that are necessary in this political and pedagogical moment, as one of many strategies embedded in the Black experience that are battle-tested practices for combatting the uncertainty we currently face as well as the very kinds of disinformation and anti-democratic propaganda plaguing democracies around the world.

Pedagogical Goals and Strategies

In many ways, Glaude's argument traces Eric Pritchard's notion of "restorative literacies" in his book *Fashioning Lives*. Pritchard explains this idea as the literacy practices employed by Black queers as a "means of self-definition, self-care, and self-determination," through reading and meaning-making processes that occur both on and off the page. Restorative literacies, a set of tactical responses to the oppression and homophobia of "literacy normativity," hold much potential for wider application (24). As a form of cultural labor, restorative literacies codify strategies of resistance in order to engender myriad ways of "making a life on one's own terms" (33). Such literacy practices are rooted in the Black American experience and buttress his theorization of the ways Black queers deal with the problems of marginalization and historical erasure. Pritchard argues that Black queers find historical rootedness through "ancestors," those bereft of life, but very much alive through their powerful influence and legacy (106). Glaude essentially positions Baldwin as an ancestor whose example can help us forge a restorative literacy for our current times.

Living in the after times features a double bind: one must resist the forces inherent in America's social justice declension, while also not succumbing to the depression, exhaustion, and cynicism that may arise from encountering the daily incursion of decontextualization, dehistoricization, and disinformation present in our current media landscape concerning seemingly everything that really matters. Such balancing requires a place of refuge, an "elsewhere" that affords one the critical distance necessary to imagine their life and the country differently (Glaude 130). For Baldwin, locating his elsewhere meant leaving the U.S. to think and work abroad, but Glaude concludes that the power of an elsewhere is most often located in the small moments of agency one exercises when the status quo, the norms and expectations that reify racism and white supremacy, is rejected. The classroom also presents an elsewhere suitable for establishing restorative literacies for students and instructors alike.

This can mean reframing rhetoric and composition curriculum in response to our current epistemological crisis as a grounding threshold concept in conjunction with introducing students to the discipline. This reframing requires approaching American history and the institution of slavery in ways that illuminate some of the same disinformation and anti-Black propaganda strategies that have remained active up to our current moment. For example, in my introductory course in rhetoric and composition, I ask students to read *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845) and Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) against texts such as Peter Pomerantsev's *This Is Not Propaganda* (2019) in relation to key concepts such as narrativity, conceptual metaphor, image schema, and metonymy. After covering the historical substance of the texts, students are then prepared to begin tracking the rhetorical moves of Douglass and Jacobs in ways that disrupt the comforts afforded to those who may believe that the moral compass of the nation was somehow predestined to point toward liberty and justice for all. As the course continues, Douglass and Jacobs become ancestors that anchor us to both the historical roots of American racism and its constitutive discursive matrix. Students are tasked

with making connections between these historical examples and more recent topics, such as the impact of conspiracy theories such as QAnon, the #MeToo movement, and Black Lives Matter.

But I contend that Glaude's framework leaves out one important element for living in the after times that concerns how African Americans have historically negotiated their relationship to space and time—music, specifically the blues. Langston Hughes put it this way:

> The music goes way back to Blind Lemon and Leadbelly—Georgia Tom merging into the Gospel Songs—Ma Rainey, and the most primitive of the Blues. It borrows their gut-bucket heartache. It goes back to the jubilees and stepped-up Spirituals—Sister Tharpe—and borrows their I'm-gonna-be-happy-anyhow-in-spite-of-this-world kind of hope. It goes back further and borrows the steady beat of the drums of Congo Square—that going-on beat—and the Marching Bands' loud and blatant *yes!!* (Hughes)

Baldwin channels this exact idea in his short story "Sonny's Blues." Upon finally hearing his brother's band perform, the protagonist realizes that the blues were " . . . not about anything new. He and his boys up there were keeping it new, at the risk of ruin, destruction, madness, and death, in order to find new ways to make us listen. For while the tale of how we suffer, and how we are delighted, and how we may triumph is never new, it always must be heard" (Baldwin). Baldwin communicates that the blues is about the joy and anguish in living through and surviving catastrophe, and it is what connects living in the after times to the ability to conceive of a better future. It is a sentiment brilliantly captured by Professor Griff from the iconic hip hop ensemble Public Enemy in the song "Countdown to Armageddon" when he says "Armageddon, it been in effect, go get a late pass!" Public Enemy was relating to a tradition within the Black experience that conceptualizes The Middle Passage and enslavement as equal to the complete degradation and cultural destruction most commonly associated with the apocalypse. From this perspective, living in the after times and the biblical "end times" form an important relationship as African Americans have already survived the worst imaginable circumstances. This conception of time and history fuels a sense of strength and agency that resists the kinds of negative fatalism woven into narratives of white supremacy and racial oppression (van Veen 65).

This alternative interpretation of the past and the present, an embrace of a post-eschatological timeline, is an important element of the blues and its emphasis on "keeping on" amidst great obstacles. Even in current interpretations of the blues, such as hip hop artist Kendrick Lamar's "Sing About Me I'm Dying of Thirst," Hughes's and Baldwin's contention remains intact. Lamar's lyrics reflect this same meditation on tragedy, mortality, and what it means to, following Bradford T. Stull's theory of emancipatory composition, compose a life worth living from the ironies of the human condition and racial oppression in America (Stull 3). Therefore, teaching in the after times involves incorporating this blues ethos of "Armageddon been in effect" by finding ways to include the Freirean gesture to "dangerous memory," or the history of the oppressed, within composition pedagogy. This means providing students with the opportunity to examine the foundational political and theological language of the American experience while including disinformation and historical erasure as important components of that foundation. Such is my goal when I create assignments for students that allow them to learn rhetorical analysis by juxtaposing dueling narratives surrounding historical events.

In addition to considering concepts such as identity, ethos, and consubstantiality, we focus on the ways in which those narratives seek to shape the reality of their intended audiences while highlighting a series of critical questions: How do we find hope and resiliency when our political, social, and educational institutions fall short? What should be our collective anchor when

confronting a sea of disinformation and untruth? Responding to such questions is an important element of African American rhetorical traditions, and it is precisely these qualities that demand its positioning as central to our disciplinary identity.

Collegial Relationships and Disciplinary Commitments: We Cannot Give Our Students What We Do Not Have

After the sweeping protests for racial justice across America following the murder of George Floyd, organizations and corporations of all kinds began issuing press releases declaring their stance against discrimination and their support for the protests. Beyond these statements, the majority of these entities went on with business as usual, including many parts of the academy. Concurrently, millions of Americans were refusing to believe that the COVID-19 virus was real, even when hospitals began to be overwhelmed with patients. What was most unfortunate about the role of experts in public discourse on the virus was not the surge of anti-intellectualism and individualism bordering on social Darwinism that stifled information dissemination, nor the skepticism leveled at nationally-known figures such as Anthony Fauci, but the scores of local scientists and experts who were rejected by their own communities. While President Trump's lies and disinformation had much to do with their rejection, the academy itself does not remain blameless. Trump's rhetoric only ignited what was already a growing disconnect between the academy and "the community" it supposedly serves, so readily apparent in its response to protests for racial justice.

Teaching in the after times will require institutions of higher education to perform the same kinds of soul searching and self-exegesis in order to meet the challenges ahead. Decrying injustice and inequality in America rings hollow when it remains unaddressed on campus. Although numerous administrators and faculty across the academy have performed herculean efforts to forge truly equitable and inclusive communities, there are far more pockets of bigotry, intolerance, and repugnant elitism than many of us are comfortable with acknowledging, and this reality inevitably finds its way into our classrooms. The commentary around #BlackInTheIvory is but one example. One important manifestation of this issue is the precarity facing BIPOC adjuncts and lecturers. Because most first-year composition courses are taught by adjunct faculty, the discipline of rhetoric and composition must deepen its political commitment to their interests and well-being. Our students—and the communities they represent—recognize the inequitable hierarchy confronting many adjuncts and lecturing faculty, especially those from BIPOC communities. The challenges BIPOC adjuncts encounter are related to the growing tension between the public and institutions of higher education. How BIPOC adjuncts are treated communicates a message about what academia is and what its values are. The scale of this issue now reflects an academic gig economy which damages the academy's credibility. This state of affairs also endangers the recruitment of BIPOC students to the professoriate. How do we expect students to not register (at least subconsciously) the hierarchy at work here and what the lower end of that hierarchy entails?

Lani Guinier's and Michael Sandel's critiques of meritocracy in higher education help to explain how this state of affairs blunts a more forceful political identification between varying classes of employment within higher education. The ideology of meritocracy suggests that those on the lower end of the hierarchy are deserving of their lot in life, while those toward the top view their status predominately through their own sense of personal achievement. What is particularly

dangerous about the discourse of merit, according to Sandel, is the sense of moral justification it engenders that functions as a bulwark against criticism (13). Guinier's corrective theory, democratic merit, presents an attempt to balance personal achievement with the needs and concerns of a thriving democracy in ways that should guide examinations of inequity in higher education (28). Additionally, I would add that grappling with how the field of rhetoric and composition can respond to these matters in the after times means rejecting easy "we shall overcome" narratives. I agree with Glaude that "we fail to linger in the dark moments at our peril" (25). I am reminded of a gospel song by the Five Blind Boys of Mississippi called "It Could've Been Me." Aside from its religious context, it suggests that we must resist the temptation to overlook or elide the lived experiences of our students and colleagues when their concerns challenge the status quo.

Searching for Higher Ground

In this essay, I have endeavored to stress how Glaude's discussion of living in the after times contains important strategies for teaching rhetoric and composition in this time of national crisis. The attempted coup inspired by President Trump demands a reckoning with the forces of white supremacy, authoritarianism, and disinformation in conjunction with the ways in which institutions of higher education will respond. It is incumbent upon all of us to recognize the sense of urgency this moment demands and the powerful role that educators will serve as truth-tellers. This moment will require radically different conceptions of how academic institutions interact with communities and a reassessment of institutional priorities. However unnerving these challenges appear, equipping our students with critical literacy remains a paramount objective. As educators, we need not bear the weight of choosing our students' ancestors/anchors, following Glaude's choice of Baldwin, but we can commit to establishing their necessity and relevance to the importance of the work they do in our classrooms. A pedagogy for the after times can equip students with the tools they need to engage their role as citizens and future leaders in our society who will quite literally hold the future of our democracy in their hands.

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Interlocking Communities of Care: A BIPOC Map through Academia

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Have you ever floated across a college campus feeling both highly visible and invisible at the same time? For many Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) students and faculty, this can be a familiar feeling at a predominately white institution (PWI), floating in a bubble of uncertainty while surrounded by a sea of unknown faces and experiences. Finding a way through frequently requires a support system of peers and a group of mentors. I remember being that student floating around until I found a sense of place and mentors who could see me as more than a random face on campus. It was not until I returned to academia and began to mentor students that I recognized the structural designs in place that exploit mentorship. It is not a surprise for many that the academy expects a tremendous amount of unrecognized, often unpaid, labor to provide mentorship and care for students. This labor that regularly stems from a place of love and compassion becomes raced and gendered. BIPOC faculty and staff, especially BIPOC women and queer folk, carry the weight in order to keep the academy from crushing the students it serves. The academy was not designed with our belonging in mind. Rather, it was designed to keep us out, and no matter how many shifts the academy makes, the center still pivots around this reality.

One way we are excluded in the academy is by the impact of our identities being minimized or ignored. Emerging BIPOC scholars need mentorship in ways that honor and respect their identities and lived experiences as well as the communities from which they come. Mentors step in to help share tactics for surviving the academy as well as for staying connected to the many things that make BIPOC scholars who they are. Having mentors to whom students can relate based on their identities can determine whether or not students survive or thrive. This is especially true for those students at PWIs, which is where I am situated in sharing this story. PWIs are not known for having large numbers of BIPOC faculty who might serve as mentors. For example, at the time this essay is being written, there are fewer than five tenure track Indigenous faculty members at our institution. The number of support staff in retention work is even smaller; by smaller, I mean one full time employee allocation, and half of another employee's allocation. This speaks to the lack of institutional priority and support of Indigenous students, despite being a land grant institution. The labor of supporting students fall hard on a handful of folk, but somehow we still are able to do it by creating communities of care, or as I would like to describe them, circles of care. Despite the work being done in the best ways possible by a small few, the responsibility should actually fall on the institution. The amount of unpaid and unrecognized labor does not absolve the institution of this responsibility.

These circles overlap with other areas of our lives—home communities, families, friends, colleagues across campuses—creating interlocking networks. As I think of the communities

of care I have been fortunate to have, I think of my mentor, Qwo-Li Driskill and the academic kinship model used within our program to create such a community for graduate students. This model follows Daniel Heath Justice's description of kinship as "something that's *done* more than something that simply *is*" (352). This act of doing is how our academic kin learn to be in relation with each other—an act especially important in academia where competition is often centralized. Modeling how kinship is practiced, Dr. Driskill has always shown students a great deal of compassion and encouragement, which is partly how I was able to learn to navigate graduate school and be on the market. I feel that the transition between being in a graduate program and becoming a professional can be abrupt, but because of the academic kin we have, it feels more like a transition into larger communities of care when we finish our programs.

Communities of care are also made up of colleagues and of community circles off campus. As I have shared my research and begun publishing, people from my home communities and folk I have met through professional networking have been such supporters of my work. To know my work impacts their lives positively drives me to continue to write, which is a central part of gaining tenure and promotion. While I am not currently in a tenure track position, I know all of the things I am working on now have potential to help me in that process in the future. If I did not have communities of care, I would have felt like I were writing into a void. Instead, I feel like I am writing and teaching with a purpose. For BIPOC people that community connection helps us move into what Andrew Jolivette describes as "thrivance," the transformation "to turn our traumas and vulnerabilities into moments and possibilities to change our lives" (sfaf.org). The longer I am part of academia, the more I want to fight to continue to build these networks of communities of care for future students to feel like they truly belong and know that their knowledge systems can come with them. Those transformational moments of possibilities are ones I witness on a regular basis with the students with whom I work.

Through my role at the Native American Longhouse (NAL) Eena Haws at Oregon State University (OSU), I am tasked with both maintaining the physical space of a cultural resource center and supervising/mentoring students. Born out of collective student activism during the late 1960s, the NAL Eena Haws is one of seven Cultural Resource Centers designed as culturally-based student support spaces, and serves as both a student center and a physical reminder that OSU occupies Kalapuya land. Coupled with my understandings of community spaces like the NAL Eena Haws in the context of Indigenous communities, circles of care based on a kinship model have helped students connect to not only each other, but to the space/place of campus—something Justice reiterates as part of the responsibilities of kinship beyond persons into all of creation (352). Connection to self, each other, and place on a PWI is a powerful way for students to move beyond surviving the academy. Asserting Indigeneity in the act of doing is reflected in actions such as cooking salmon over an open-pit fire in the middle of campus using salmon provided from tribal fishers asserting their treaty rights. It is also reflected in stories shared across the community table over food and/or beads as well as in the photos shared across time on social media that serve as a visual record of what it took to thrive as a community.

Before having a word for it, students, faculty, and staff practiced thrivance. Jolivette provided a framework to describe what was happening and the power it holds. This thrivance helps prepare the next cohort of students to begin to heal each other, passing down what was learned, what was resisted, and what was sacrificed along the way. These interlocking circles of care create a legacy of resistance built in community love. Students were and are foundational in these types of circles of care. As mentioned, the Cultural Resource Centers at OSU were born from collective

resistance to white supremacy and oppression on campus. Black and Indigenous (including Chicano) students learned from legacies of solidarity that coalitions create a strong voice. It is from this place of needing to survive a PWI that the NAL Eena Haws came from not only for Indigenous students, but for Black and other students of color as well. These spaces of community have now expanded to the seven Cultural Resource Centers, each operating in ways informed from what the students bring to them by their respective communities. They are a physical manifestation of thrivance on our campus. Each circle of care created by cohorts of students is linked to each other across generations of students and is extended into the cohorts of students to come.

I attended OSU for all of my degrees, and as an undergraduate student learned to navigate the institution through the NAL Eena Haws (back then it was just the NAL). My mentors during that time (Dr. Kurt Peters and Dr. Allison Davis-WhiteEyes) helped me see myself in the academy as well as helped keep me culturally grounded in a space that easily devours the spirits of Indigenous students. My peers at the center taught me how powerful our collective voice could be on campus, especially across community spaces. As students, our circles not only overlapped generations, they overlapped spaces as well. Having each other's backs as some spaces faced literal erasure from campus created bonds that last to this day.

These lessons are ones I pass down as a mentor to students at my alma mater, and they pass lessons to me as well—a process of reciprocity. In the Indigenous communities that I am a part of, cross generational work is common and something I carry with me to the academy. This does not only apply to students, but to colleagues as well. Often left out of the conversation about mentorship in the academy is the necessity of colleagues as mentors. One of the most powerful moments in my personal growth was transitioning from a student to a colleague of Dr. Davis-WhiteEyes about a decade after my time as an undergrad. Returning to campus from working in a tribal community was a huge shift and required a great deal of adaptability. Allison continued to mentor me in new ways. I learned how Indigenous women are treated in the academy and ways to navigate the multitude of challenges faced as an Indigenous person not only at a PWI, but on a land grant institution. Without her mentorship as a colleague, I would have been stuck in the mode of survival and limited in my ability to thrive.

My first term back was also when I met Dr. Driskill. It was their second year on campus and meeting them changed everything for me. They quickly became a mentor to me as a colleague and later directly through my graduate studies. Qwo-Li taught me the power of the academic kinship model—something I will always be grateful for. As a scholar-mother, my children have gone to graduate seminars with me, stayed with grandparents so I could attend professional conferences, listened to me tell stories about my research, watched films for my class prep, and were by my side as I defended my dissertation. As an extension of me, they are part of my academic kin's story as well. After my defense, they wrapped me in an honor blanket from my committee as an honor song was offered to me. My children were part of my bridge across this moment, hearing me called Dr. Whitebear for the first time.

As mentioned above, the transition out of a graduate program can be hard, but knowing you hold your academic kin with you into the future helps tremendously. I think of my academic siblings and how excited we were to meet other academic kin at conferences for the first time. Those connections beyond readings and knowing we are part of each other creates a transition between being a student and a colleague reminds me of ceremonies that mark different stages of life—not just in coming of age, but the different ways in which life moments are honored through

ceremony. Being a colleague and student with Qwo-Li taught me how to mentor graduate students as well as how to help build this same type of beauty with them.

These communities of care we create never leave us. Even if they seem to have faded, those connections remain. In the act of doing as kin, we pass these teachings across generations and spaces as we scatter across institutions. It's like a blanket of stars connecting us through what The Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab describes as constellating—a non-linear way of making meaning and connections (Powell et al.). Each view and shift allows for different views and meanings of the constellations created. These constellations serve as a network to guide us back to each other across time and space. These types of kinship networks transcend the divides created to isolate us on our respective campuses.

What then does BIPOC mentorship mean in the academy? It means everything. It holds space for the stories we tell ourselves about those who foresaw what it would take for us to survive the academy well before we envisioned ourselves there. These stories, or sets of instructions, are passed down from mentors to build upon the strength of those before us. They are part of the ever-changing mosaic of constellations we create, that network of kin built with the power of our ancestors. Whether or not we stay in academia, those stories and connections remain part of us—always ready for us to return to when needed.

Notes on contributor

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We Told Stories, We Laughed, and We Learned from One Another: Relationality, Community, and the Role of Story

Catheryn Jennings

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I come to you with a story. This is a story about home and about community. This is a story about the ways in which we build and foster communities, even when we are seemingly without. This is a story about how the mentorship and friendships that I formed during my doctoral work at Michigan State helped to fill the gap in community support and understanding that I was feeling

in my larger college experience. It is also a story of how my joining a collective of Indigenous graduate students saved me from giving up and going home in a time in which I was feeling hopeless, and how the off-campus connections made through the organization further helped me find a sense of community a thousand miles from home. In this piece, in order to uplift and celebrate the importance of the communities I built, I have intentionally woven together the words and knowledges of (some) of my friends and mentors, both in and outside of the classroom with those I only have read and cited to build the foundations of the knowledges, ways of doing, and research that I still turn to today.

My understanding of the ways that research and academia can be fostered through community are directly informed by Kathleen Absolon's book *Kaandossiwin* and her understanding of how Indigenous folks' collective worldview influences research. She states " … that [research] process, when community driven, owned, and directed, requires the searcher to relinquish some power and control" and an "[o]rganic methodology emerges as we listen to our inner knowing" (87). The idea of a community-driven research practice was something that made sense to me; it resonated with not only the way that I view my research—something that has long focused on how communities work together and function—but also the ways that I was raised to see and understand the world and my place in it as part of a whole, rather than seeing myself as an island alone. However, this kind of open sharing of knowledges and ways of knowing was not one that I had seen in action in academic spaces before; instead, I had seen academic knowledge as something near proprietary, something at risk of being stolen away. (I think of the horror stories I heard about research being misappropriated or outright stolen.) But as Qwo-Li Driskill tells us: "*Learning happens through our bodies, through embodied practice, through doing*" (57). The relinquishing of control mentioned by Absolon above was scary. There is/was to me always the chance that something like the things that had happened in the "scary" stories I had heard would happen, always keeping in mind the warnings I was given about maintaining a tight grip over my research and my knowledges and stories, but I had to, have to, commit to the *doing*, the lesson, the teaching that there are things about my own research that I cannot control.

But first, a little about me because, as Thomas King reminds us, "[t]he truth about stories is that that's all we are" (2).

I was born and bred in the foothills of the Ozark Mountains in the Northeast corner of Oklahoma, and Oklahoma is deep in my veins. I was raised often covered in the red dirt of the hills and plains of Cherokee County. And while I have a long-standing love/hate relationship with my home and the endlessly frustrating politics of the state, it is my home. When I moved from Oklahoma—where I had spent all but two of my 33 years to Michigan to pursue my doctoral degree at Michigan State, I quickly found myself deeply aching with an unexpected sense of loss. I had left behind not only my friends and chosen family that had nurtured and supported me throughout my adulthood and my blood family who brought me up, but also the built-in community of my tribe whose hands and lands had helped to raise me from my birth, and I found the ache of this loss most unexpected of all. My whole life I had (somewhat embarrassingly) taken my place in and the comfort of being surrounded by my people for granted, and when I left my tribal lands in Northeastern Oklahoma, I found myself lonely in a way for which I could not find the words. This was an aching kind of loss that I felt was not one that I could articulate to the majority of people in my department or even to myself, at first. The connection that Indigenous peoples share, not only with their tribal community, but also to their lands is suggested by V.F. Cordova when she says that, for Indigenous peoples, "[t]he story of each group postulates a creation not only in time or space but in a specific place. Each group

views itself as being created for one specific place" (104). Even though my tribal community is a diasporic one, forcefully and violently removed and marched from our homelands on the East Coast on the Trail of Tears, we have spent the last four generations or so settling into the rolling hills and grassy plains of Oklahoma, and I felt myself removed from my "specific place." Michigan was not my home; it was cold and unfamiliar, and it hurt to be away from the people and the red dirt that had nurtured me for so long before. And I was lonely in a way that I had never felt before.

This loneliness left me struggling deeply on the inside and in a way that was probably not obvious to others around me in my department. I performed well on paper as a student; I did my homework and came to class having read what I was supposed to read, and I met deadlines and participated in departmental functions. Since I am not one to easily ask for help or show that I am struggling, as far as anyone in my department could see, I was rocking it, but in reality, I was hurting and desperately wanting to just give up and go home to lick my wounds. The need and longing for community is not one that is unknown to any graduate student far from home, but for Indigenous peoples, it seems to go deeper. In *Research is Ceremony*, Shawn Wilson describes this need: "If we step outside the community of Indigenous scholars, we can see the importance of relationship building in the everyday lives of most Indigenous people" (84). Community and relationships are the building blocks of the Indigenous worldview, and without them, I was hurting.

However, there was a light at the end of the tunnel for me, and it was through a building of community with other Indigenous and POC students and faculty, where I found the help and support I needed to navigate the situation I found myself in. My gateway to these relationships and communities was my joining the Indigenous Graduate Student Collective (IGSC). Referred to the group by my lifelong best friend and fellow Cherokee and Michigan State graduate, I came into the space unsure of how I would be received. Here I was, just some Native kid from rural Oklahoma that had only briefly been to Michigan twice before, who knew essentially nothing about the Indigenous peoples of the Great Lakes region, and who often makes jokes about being the "world's worst Indian." But it was there that I found not only people from the area to help show me the ropes, but other Indigenous folks who were also far from home.

In this space, I was welcomed with open arms into the group and eventually into the surrounding community. During our meetings, we talked about the struggles and successes that we were having; we shared meals and stories; we talked about how we made frybread differently in different parts of the country (and argued about which made for better tacos); and in all of these times, we shared much needed laughter. We had a working group where we used our hands to bead or make moccasins while we discussed topics I had never considered, like finding a balance between our academic and Indigenous knowledges in spaces and for audiences that often do not know how to respond to them, along with more "standard" scholarly practices like syllabus and CV workshops. It was through these connections that I not only found a semblance of that lost feeling of home, but I also found the community of scholars and learners that helped to shape the ways in which I understood/understand the making of knowledges and, further, the kind of research I was drawn to do that eventually became my dissertation project about the role that stories can play and their impact on history. Most importantly, even more than the books I read and the lessons I was learning in the classroom, I was able to see the ways and the actual methods in which I could use story to enact the shift in my own research by the conversations that I was having with the people that I met through the IGSC and the ideas that we shared when we chatted.

The ways of knowing and coming to knowledge and research that began to and still shape how I engage with my own research and learning methodologies were formed largely through the seemingly casual conversations I was having with members of the community, both academic and not. In Dylan Miner's "*Mawadisidiwag miinawaa Wiidanokiindiwag*//They Visit and Work Together," he says that "[w]e must be cautious to not focus on what is being made, but rather on the actual process of making and with whom we are doing this work" (31). With this idea, he is suggesting that the ways in which we make and the people with whom we make must be at the forefront and that making will not always take place in the classroom. Along these lines, J. Estrella Torrez states: "It has always fascinated me that, as sites of knowledge production, universities have historically failed to recognize the immense knowledge base produced by those within a few short miles of its campus" (145). For me, this understanding of learning taking place in the community as well as in the classroom is woven in with the idea of relationality suggested by Shawn Wilson in that "an [I]ndigenous research methodology means talking about relational accountability. As a researcher you are answering to *all your relations* when you are doing research. You are not answering questions of validity or reliability or making judgments of better or worse. Instead, you should be fulfilling your relationships with the world around you" ("What Is" 177). And this is elaborated further by Andrea Riley Mukavetz when she discusses the role of positionality/relationality and an embodied research practice built through community and an understanding of "there-ness," saying we must "value the efforts and practices used to make and sustain something and use that understanding to build a theoretical and methodological framework that reflects the cultural community a researcher works with" (110). So that is what I did (and I continue to do); I spent time talking with people, not only about our work, but about our lives and our histories and began to weave the practices of story and community into my own research in ways that reflect my community. In my case, this meant seeing the value of the stories I was being told and sharing.

Of all of the places that the conversations took place, perhaps the most formative was an unexpected one, a sticky, smelly shack out in the woods that we spent countless hours in while making maple syrup every late winter/early spring. We shared stories in the sugarbush, and while we learned about and made maple syrup, we learned from one another and embodied the work and knowledges that we shared. Stories guided my learning in the sugarbush, and it was in that space that I began to see how stories can be tools for academic learning as well. Christina Cedillo and Phil Bratta discuss this when they state that "[w]e find the practice of story to be not only conducive to epistemological and ontological concerns, but necessary for bringing to the forefront embodiments and power dynamics for a number of cultural positions and situations" (218). These voices, these stories of my friends, mentors, and peers helped me to understand the relationships I had with the land I was inhabiting, the histories of that land, and how they impacted the work that I was trying to do while residing on them. Everardo J. Cuevas and Eric Rodriguez talk about how we learn the stories and histories of place in regards to the understanding of the kinds of knowledges about the lands we learn on and the legacies of theft and violence that exists on the lands of all universities in the Americas when they state: "We suggest that self-educating about local Indigenous histories and supporting local struggles for Indigenous sovereignty on the lands we currently call home and the universities where we work is another necessary way to begin to work through the fog of colonial erasure" (230). Even though we were not in a classroom or even on campus, we were and are on stolen land, and yet we were still there, enacting and embodying traditional knowledges while we talked about our contemporary scholarship and drank maple sap tea.

It was through stories, community, and relationships that I grew during my doctoral work, and the changes I saw in myself and in my research were significant and important. When I first came to graduate school to finally get my doctorate, I had intended to focus my work on the ways that people form and perform community on social media platforms, a space where I had and have long found some sense of home. However, I found that this was not the home nor the spaces that were nurturing me in Michigan. As I started to form deeper connections to the people I met through the IGSC and to the land that I was inhabiting, albeit temporarily, I found that my research desires, were instead inspired by the conversations I was having and a desire to tell the stories of finding myself, my place, and my voice as an Indigenous scholar, even so far from home, And once I came to understand that, I set about weaving together the guidance I had received, both on campus and off, to best tell my story and the words that I needed to tell it because, like Malea Powell explains: "We need a language that allows us to imagine respectful and reciprocal relationships that acknowledge the degree to which we need one another (have needed one another) in order to survive and flourish" (41). This language and power are what I found in the relationships and stories that I shared, and like maple sap tea on a cold March morning, they continue to warm and sustain me.

Notes on contributor

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Creating Space: Cultivating Identities "Outside" Academia

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Tip-Off

I was nervous moving somewhere new to complete my PhD. I was in a new town with only a few friends–mostly from the English Department whom I had met on my campus visit and at orientation. I was told several times–especially by the graduate students of color–that the small college town experience was going to be different than what I was accustomed to in Long Beach, California.

So, I gravitated toward what felt familiar: basketball. The second night I arrived, I went straight to the university recreation center and scoped out the pick-up game runs. I analyzed each court, the styles of play each had, and the nuanced rules the players abided by that might have been different than what I was used to in California. I was on the court not too long after, playing 5-on-5 with people I had never met. And although I was in a new state, a different gym, and playing with random people, I did feel at home in a way. And this continued like clockwork for the remainder of my graduate work. Perhaps it's cliché to say, but basketball really has a way of making the unfamiliar familiar. After all, no matter where you go, it's a ball and hoop.

I felt torn on what to focus on for this symposium. On one hand, I wanted to highlight the guidance scholars of color within our field have given me in my academic journey. Their support comes with a legacy that tells me my work is valid—that I should continue. Some guidance, though, is simply the reading of scholars of color whose work resonates with me as I see their experiences as similar to mine. Others who I may identify with pan-ethnically frequently encourage and influence me with their writing as I'm realizing that I can write and research about aspects of my Asian American and Pacific Islander experience. For the longest time, I felt as if I couldn't, and in some cases, was even encouraged not to. Then, of course, there is my own close-knit mentorship crew consisting of educators who believe in my work (or at least the intent behind it) and who continually reach out to me regarding a project or a committee, knowing full well that I may be too timid or intimidated to join. Some of these mentorships are more structured, such as my involvement with the Asian/Asian American Caucus or my dissertation committee, while others have developed more informally. In all, I truthfully doubt I would have made it this far if I hadn't read or engaged with these scholars. I owe them all so much.

And yet, on the other hand, I want to talk about basketball and its impact in my success as a scholar. Sometimes, I feel silly when explaining to people, especially in academia, that I'm very much into basketball. Playing it, watching it, analyzing it. Anything related to the game interests me and that has been the case for many years of my life even before I dedicated much of my time to academia. I'm a Southern California-bred Filipino American, so not only was I raised playing basketball, but I also grew up within a community that worships it. Basketball and "The World-Famous Los Angeles Lakers" are staples at every Filipino party, and for every Tito who claimed he had a hook shot like Kareem, there was a Lola rockin' a Kobe Bryant jersey. Growing up,

I became accustomed to the sounds of *Inside the NBA*, Chick Hearn's voice, and Ralph Lawler's iconic catchphrases. I knew that four or five times a week at 7:30 pm, there would be basketball on.

Imagine everyone's disappointment when they found out I was a Clippers fan.

That's beside the point though. What I want to say is this: basketball is a big part of my life, and I can't help but include it into other aspects that are equally important to me. Basketball and its communities continue to be one of the most meaningful support systems I've had in academia; it has helped to keep me going. The participation of the sport itself, however, is only part of that support system. The attendant communities associated with recreational basketball—those you play with and against—are equally significant, and these communities can act as crucial support structures. Yet in the same vein, simply having these communities doesn't automatically mean individuals will be able to navigate through every challenging circumstance they encounter. What it does offer, however, is the opportunity to be seen, heard, and recognized as more than one identity. And for me and other BIPOC inhabiting an academic space—one that often requires us to perform—having these adjacent communities allows a more fluid and comprehensive perception of who we are.

It's good you have a hobby other than your research. I've had many people say to me, but like I mentioned, I'm reluctant when it comes to showcasing my love for the game inside academic circles. I often feel embarrassed. I feel as though my hobbies have to coincide or somehow be connected with my research. As if the mere notion of being interested in anything else would show how undedicated I am to my work. And that's why I felt a bit uncertain about writing this piece. I had to think quite a bit about my relationships with basketball, academia, and community. Because as much as I wanted to write about my mentors within academia, I also wanted to be straight-up about who and what gets me through academia on the day-to-day level.

I wanted to write about something that means more than just me being in academia.

I wanted to write about other parts of myself that contribute to my survival through the academy.

It isn't enough for me to simply say: "Yes, fellow scholars of color, go find yourself a hobby to distract yourselves from the potentially dysfunctional and overwhelming force that is academia." As if all someone has to do is pick up a basketball, toss it toward a hoop, and then be totally fine with the struggles of being marginalized in their line of work. How can something so far removed from my scholarly work be beneficial for me?

At the same time though, that same hobby could be the exact type of community one needs. Having multiple and different communities is important as this allows individuals to escape from the often exhausting emotions that are attached to a particular community—a community that perhaps has taken up much of their life—academia. So, while I find it extremely valuable to have mentors that I can seek out within my own field, I also consider my experience within the basketball community crucial in creating a supportive system of relationships that extend beyond conventional academia. Yes, it's true—I can never truly be totally separated from my work, so while I never go onto the court thinking I'm going to talk about my research, it may inevitably happen. Still, I know that my attempt to distract myself from academia isn't shameful, but rather an effort to be seen in another way because sometimes this assimilation game for me and my fellow scholars of color can be exhausting. Nonetheless, it can still be invigorating to consider my work reimagined in other spaces, and I see the basketball community as an opportunity to engage with publics inside and outside academia, with clashing identities and different positionalities. This meshing of identities on the basketball court makes me realize that the people around me

make the game more than just a hobby; rather, they form a community that helps me weather those low valleys I may find myself at the end of a challenging teaching day. It centers me, too, on those days where things are going *right*—the acceptance of a publication or simply a good writing day. This is the kind of community I deliberately cultivated for myself so that I could survive the academy.

I met Dr. Stephen Bischoff on my campus visit. I was an incoming Filipino American-Hawaiian PhD student, and you know how it goes. I was brought to the Asian American and Pacific Islander Student Center (AAPISC) where I met Stephen, the director of Multicultural Student Services. We talked about our interests in Filipino American Studies, hip-hop, and of course, basketball. I commented on my disappointment in leaving my recreational basketball team as several of the players are my closest friends. I know how challenging it is to get a group together (who like not just playing, but also being with one another), and I was doubtful in my ability to develop camaraderie with others so quickly. He mentioned a city league team he played for and asked, "Do you play point guard?" to which I answered, "Yes, of course! I'm 5'9 with shoes on—I'm not going to be banging around with power forwards on the block." We laughed, and he said he'd let me know if the team needed one more player. Turns out they did, and I joined the team several months later after I had moved.

As a fellow Filipino American scholar, situated in a predominantly white institution, I felt comfortable with going to Stephen for advice though I don't think we spoke much of my insecurities of being brown in a mostly white department. As a matter of fact, at times the more nuanced types of support work with me much better. I think he knew I felt that way sometimes, but my insecurities went implicit for most of our conversations—almost like the connection a point guard has with the rest of their team. They don't always have to say, "Roll with me after that pick." Sometimes, it's just a feeling, and I'm sure he sensed it. The more we played together, the more I stopped by his office in the AAPISC to discuss our next game, the good pho places around town, and how my transition to an unfamiliar town was going. I quickly grew to trust Stephen outside the confines of the basketball court, and perhaps because he wasn't in my department, I didn't feel compelled to go in-depth about certain aspects of my research, but I know his work, and I know we could have those conversations. We just don't have them as much. And I appreciate that because it seems less like a hierarchical relationship and more like a collaborative endeavor.

I wonder sometimes if mentorship can be misdirected to promote material successes rather than the cultivation of one's character. I think of the academic introductions we always have saved in the back of our minds. You know the kind. The ones where your research interests might as well come before announcing who you are because everyone listening is more concerned with your work than remembering your name or how to pronounce it. Don't get me wrong though, knowing people's research is important, but how about your favorite food from your childhood? For some, I imagine that can be more related to their work than they think. I like to think that Stephen remembers my name, how to spell it, and how to correctly pronounce it. And truthfully, I've had several mentors who fall into that category, and I'm thankful for their investment in the aspects of my identities that may not always clearly align with academia.

Cultivating ourselves within other communities is important in our survival of the academy because we can get stuck thinking that we are simply an academic while overlooking that all parts of our identity are constantly intertwined with each other. It's basketball for me in this piece, but it could as well have been the importance of authentic delicious Filipino food during the

dissertation process (the salt helps with the revision process, I swear), or the influence of boba tea shops in one's article writing (the sugar allows the creative juices to flow). Or, if I grew up in Hawaii with my cousins, would it have been studying hula? We don't forget our community or parts of ourselves when it comes to assimilating into the academy, but golly, we give so goddamn much to this thing, y'know? We shed intimate parts of ourselves to be accepted into this place. Sometimes sacrificing or investigating parts of ourselves that mean much to us, but seem inconsequential on the surface to others. Romeo García writes on his "gringodemia" experience by saying that he "could not write, communicate or be white," and as he says, we shouldn't have to remake ourselves as white (31). Yet a good portion of surviving "gringodemia" is finding ways for people to listen to you.

Of course, I get that no one is telling me, "Hey, we're not saying you can't write about basketball!" Well maybe not, but my experience in academia has taught me that to be listened to or be seen as legitimate or "scholarly," you have to write about particular things that pique dominant audiences' interest while also articulating yourself a particular way. So that means writing about certain things and omitting others. I have split myself up into factions (as we all do), but I'm much too concerned with what academia wants. Despite this, however, I cling onto different aspects of my identity and come to find that those communities associated with my identity remind me that people inside and outside academia can see me as more than an academic than I sometimes see myself—as a whole person.

Game-Point

For 3 hours almost every day, I get to leave my unread articles and half-written documents behind. E-Mails can be read and composed later if need be. I will return to them all later, and yes, they don't leave my mind completely, but for that moment—those wondrous 3 hours—I can consider myself more than a PhD student, teacher, researcher, or consultant. On the basketball court, some folks frankly don't care. They don't care how many articles I've published or what conference I'm presenting at. They do care that I can shoot the lights out of the gym. They care if I can pass the rock. But they could care less about my work, and to me, that is so refreshing. I don't have to explain myself to anyone on the basketball court unless I want to—and rarely do I feel judged for my other authentic selves.

The work we do every day is exhausting, and I know I'm not alone in thinking this as we are often coerced into believing we must always be working. Breaks don't quite feel like breaks as there is often guilt attached to doing something that doesn't *seem* productive. Fueling that guilt is the demand to produce—publish or perish as the saying goes—and that can be a reason as to why some prioritize their academic selves. When I reflect on what has been supportive thus far in my academic career, I think that there can be some productivity in the seemingly unproductive. The ability to move freely between multiple communities—inside and outside the academy—can contribute to one's sustainability in their field. Imagining myself as more than just one entity grounds me into not thinking my whole being relies on my successes or failures in academia. I'm allowed to focus on the other facets of myself without any takeaway from my work, and if given the chance, I can even start to envision how communities that conventionally may not be included in my work can be reimagined into what I do. Therefore, instead of thinking about these communities as a way of surviving, I now acknowledge them as communities that allow me to thrive.

Notes on contributor

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Sibling-Scholar Network as a Means of Survival

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For Black and other marginalized peoples, communities of care make graduate school education survivable. Our communities comprise our families and partners, friends, mentors, colleagues, professors, and even pets. They are our first line of defense against the academy and its practitioners when we experience the psychic injuries it is so apt to inflict. They help us navigate academic, social, and political institutions in ways that do not leave us bereft of hope or in despair. Because many Black graduate students toe the line between desired object and repulsed subject, constituting communities of care early and reconstituting them when necessary is vital to our progression through our respective programs.

We are desired when academic institutions can point to our Black bodies as evidence of their functioning diversity and inclusion initiatives. However, we are repulsed almost in the same breath as our welcome if our cultural or linguistic practices do not align with, or conform to, standardized English or if our comportment is in contradistinction to white normative practices. In a word, academia wants us, but they realize they was just playing when they got us. My community helps me manage the heavy load, helps me make a way outta no way, and helps see me through the peculiarities of being Black in white institutional spaces. In this brief essay, I discuss the importance of building community as a survival tactic. Specifically, I describe a few pivotal moments in my graduate school education that demonstrate the significance of community and its impact on my academic journey through a network of scholars that I call my sibling-scholars.

My graduate school experience began rough. I entered my first seminar confident and self-assured that my undergraduate training equipped me to manage the pressures of earning a Ph.D. in English. But it did not. When professors and white graduate students employed, for example, what sounded like highfalutin language that I could not parse, they abandoned me at the classroom door. When I gathered the courage to speak, my comments often earned blank stares. My language, or my Black body, or maybe my discussions of Black culture, language, and rhetoric, marked me as an outsider in this new world. In a word, that first day fractured me. What I mean is it sent me spinning. I wondered, and often still do, if I would ever speak the language of

the academy, if I would ever be able to string a neatly packaged argument together like my white colleagues couched in the vocabulary and calculus of academe. While in coursework with my graduate colleagues, I often heard a little voice pressure, bully, and keep me up at night, saying, you won't ever be as good as the white students in your program. I was haunted by the rhetorical and literary theorists they quoted in seminars and office spaces that I did not know, the lack of engagement with my ideas in seminars, and the way professors expected white instantiations of "excellence."

Like many Black graduate students, the struggle to belong, to feel heard, to feel seen haunted me, especially in courses with non-Black instructors, but tussles for inclusion also happened in hallways, classrooms, administrative offices, campus buildings, faculty office hours and were ad nauseam. That our fight is multidirectional and multidimensional is a problem in many liberal arts programs. That is, they convince themselves that their humanistic studies preclude them from espousing racist ideologies, but it can be a mere gossamer that minoritized students face daily—invisible to those who choose ignorance.

My community taught me that my struggles were not singular, and that many people before me felt the sting of racism and the strain of isolation in their doctoral studies. They advised that the hauntings would stop when I voiced my concerns, advocated for myself, and chose self-care when necessary. Arduous and tattered was the road to confidence in a white academic world, and my community—the GPS.

There were semesters I chose silence in seminars rather than to speak because at least when I was silent, I knew I would be heard. I have chosen silence in my office cubicle, on the bus, in meetings, and in a multitude of places because in those moments, I chose me and my happiness and not the barrage of foolishness people of color face in graduate school programs that are seemingly invisible to white colleagues and "allies." Like many marginalized students who came before and who will come after me, we must navigate a complex matrix of determinants crafted to exclude us. We play the game, and we choose to get through it because we might be able to help someone else one day. Building a community early on helped me figure out I was not going crazy or that I was not imagining what I saw so clearly. It is challenging living in a predominantly white city where my presence is both hyper-visible and invisible. That is, when I smile and say hello to people on the street, I often am ignored, but when I am walking in offices people clench their book bags and purses. Or I get the students who insist I have no clue what I am doing because their high school teachers told them they were "A" students, and their student evaluations demonstrate that race colored their assessment of my class.

My people have kept me and are keeping me from going insane when I observe strained smiles when I enter classrooms I have taught in, classrooms where I was a student, or in faculty offices. They are the ones I turn to when I peep racism rearing its head. I ask: Am I tripping, or did X person say/do that? We ask these questions as barometers to check ourselves. We want to ensure we are not misperceiving what happens. I have gone back and forth in my mind about seminar experiences, I have called my family, talked to my friends, and I have talked to mentors to ensure I am not overreacting. This is a particular form of violence that people of color deal with: the constant dread of having experiences that frustrate our sensibilities. This is labor that is invisible to those who are not observant. I have spent many days and nights talking to my community about classroom experiences that shook me to the core. My community has been there to talk me down from the ledge, to keep me strong and encouraged—even though I know the race is neither given to the swift nor the strong. My race has been peopled by an amazing

group of scholars, friends, mentors, and a host of allies who can sympathize with my plight. But the making of this community did not happen by my efforts alone.

Throughout his prolific career, my advisor has cultivated a network of former and current graduate students he has mentored. I call them my sibling-scholars. I call them my sibling-scholars because when we get together, rest assured laughter, sometimes to tears, shade-throwing, and building each other up will transpire. I have called, texted, messaged on social media, and emailed them for help or advice, and my sibling-scholars network has helped me deal with the seemingly psychological warfare we undertake when we pursue Ph.Ds. This group of scholars span many institutions across the U.S.; all of them are at various stages in their careers. This network of family is not accidental by any means. My advisor knows the necessity of community and what it means to have a village of people behind his students rooting them on. One of the most powerful stories I heard before beginning my doctoral studies was the fantastic network of scholars I would join when I started my program. My advisor is deliberate in cultivating these relationships to facilitate strong bonds and kinship amongst us.

For example, my soon-to-be advisor asked me to call his office to discuss my interests before I began my doctorate. I wanted to hear more about whether he had the capacity for new graduate students. We talked for fifteen minutes—a conversation he may not remember, though he seemingly remembers everything—about graduate school and my research interests at the time. During that conversation, he mentioned one of his former students that I should reach out to and two others who were his current students. Before starting, my advisor was keen about setting the stage for this network to continue and grow because community is fundamental. I even met one of them at a conference the following year when my advisor invited me to lunch. His students, my future sibling-scholars, exhibited the kind of generosity that I could only hope to display one day.

Their generosity likely stems from the model my advisor exhibits. His office is a haven, a place for his graduate students to unburden themselves with the weight of the world. His office has been the place I have turned when I am overwhelmed and tired, when I needed pragmatic advice, and when I needed a break. In that office, we have talked about family, religion, poetry, language, rhetoric, music, movies, sports, food, memory, trauma, writing projects and ideas, scholarship, and a host of other topics. I have sat in his office for hours talking about an idea that I could not quite formulate or a seminar paper or article I could not quite work my way through. My mentor commits himself to developing and bringing knowledge into the world.

His office has been a place of refuge, of frustration, though I try to hide it, and intellectual stimulation for me throughout the years. His office has been the spot that cultivated the sibling-scholar network because of the time he pours into mentoring his students. One can imagine that this has always been his mentoring style—heavily involved in his students' intellectual and at times personal growth. It would be easy to believe, then, that his former advisees would create a bond with him that outlasts their experiences in their doctoral programs. My sibling-scholar network exhibited this sense of care for me immediately when I arrived to my graduate program.

From my first day in PA, I emailed one of them because I arrived in the Midwest with no family or friends in a predominantly white city, and I felt isolated. Starting my graduate program was the first time I had ever lived away from family. Without hesitation, my sibling scholar sprang into action and invited a group of my soon-to-be sibling-scholars and me to dinner at a local restaurant. I had not realized hosting dinner was a tradition she picked up from my advisor, one I have looked forward to throughout the years. At dinner, I met the current "crew," and we laughed so hard I almost cried. We were family immediately. That moment solidified in

my mind that the relationships that my advisor cultivated with his advisees are strong. My sibling-scholars network advises me about courses, professors, how to navigate academia—and we have arguments about music and performances, movies, sports, and more.

I have met sibling-scholars who finished before me at field conferences, and we were immediate family. For example, I ran into one at a conference. When she peeped my nametag and where I was from, she said, “Oh, it’s you.” We both laughed at some comment she made, and we talked at the conference before parting ways. The next morning, she invited me to breakfast, and we talked for about an hour about graduate school and how to navigate the pressures of being in the Midwest at a PWI. Since that encounter, I have called her on several occasions for advice, and with generosity, she always answers. I do not doubt that anyone who is a part of my sibling-scholars network would respond similarly. We have had large dinners where eight of us, including my advisor, have gathered to break bread. My advisor encourages these kinds of bonds. He understands that knowledge construction happens in community through conversation.

With patience, he indulges my ideas and queries and so too have his former and current students. The sibling-scholar network is a community of care. They have been a beacon and offered me channels to reach out to for help when the pressures of my courses, comprehensive exams, prospectus, and dissertation debilitated me. They are a rock to which I continually turn.

This network has been instrumental to my surviving academe, and without them in concert with my family, friends, advisor, and mentors, I could not have made it to the end. We have gathered together on Zoom to fellowship, laugh, celebrate, shade each other, be in community in, through, and after graduate school. We talk about our current projects, our future endeavors, our expanding families, and have even discussed a collective trip.

I am not one who is sentimental. I, like many other graduate students, silence myself to appease those around me. I suffer in that silence, haunted by my thoughts. What I mentioned above are my experiences and my inheritance. This network of scholars inherited me and I them. Along with many of my colleagues in my graduate program, my family, and friends, I would not be making it through graduate school. I am an introvert who loves to read and who wanted to pursue a Ph.D. because of my passion for Black people, culture, and language. My people, my community, have inspired me to run my own race and be diligent in my pursuits.

My community has challenged me not to measure my success against that of others. I have so often admired others’ publications, awards, and accolades along my route to completing the Ph.D. I have been haunted by perfectionism and by chasing others’ dreams and not my own. My siblings-scholar network and my community more generally have encouraged me to run my own race, allow myself to set the pace of my course, and imagine the infinite possibilities of my graduate school experience. It ain’t what others got. Graduate school ain’t about bean-counting publications or awards. It is about measured steps toward completing my degree. I learn this daily in my interactions with my community.

The importance of community cannot be overstated. Community makes the struggle for place and space in graduate school for people of color manageable and was instrumental in my continuing. When I began my Ph.D. program, I imagined graduate school would be taxing, so I sought to establish my Midwest people, my community. I knew they would help me figure out ways to survive the voices in my head telling me I was not good enough and the professor who actually had told me as much. When I was weak, they proved to be strong. I leaned on them while going through depression, while writing seminar papers, studying for exams, writing my prospectus—much of which occurred during a global pandemic. This essay is as much a story about the significance of communities of care for Black graduate students as it is an open letter to

us to remind us that the crucible under which we emerged ain't got to always be this way. We can demand linguistic justice for graduate students, higher stipends, hold our colleagues accountable for their white supremacist ideologies, and be the advisor we had or the one we so wish we had. We can be our students' community.

Notes on contributor

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Counter Narratives of Mentorship and Community

Sarah Felber, Jeanine Williams, and Tracy Chung

University of Maryland Global Campus

Introduction

Sarah Felber

Academic work is often perceived as an individual pursuit, with academia presented as the ultimate meritocracy: if you're smart enough and you work hard enough, you succeed; if not, you don't. This is certainly the perception I had as I progressed through graduate school and started a career. It's no wonder that stress and self-doubt seem to be part and parcel of graduate training and academic employment. Every struggle, every stumbling block, is seen as an individual failure. The myth of academia as an arena of pure individual merit encourages scholars to question themselves when they should be questioning the structures that surround them (Gvozdanović and Bailey; Zivony).

As we reflected on our experiences in the structures of academia in preparation for this piece, we saw a system in which supportive resources propped up the most over-represented individuals (white, male, cisgender), while individual merit was given outsized credit for their success. We also observed in our own experiences various ways of finding support through ad hoc mentoring relationships and self-created community groups. Seeking out relational support and offering it to others has created value for us, not only in the sense of reaching professional goals, but also for the intrinsic value of interconnectedness and community. The personal narratives in the following sections illustrate some examples of these experiences. As a backdrop, we first introduce some of the literature on professional relationships and identity in academia.

That professional relationships have both transactional and intrinsic value has been discussed by Gersick et al., who interviewed junior and senior faculty, men and women, about their professional relationships. They found that supportive professional relationships not only could help faculty achieve professional success, but also could themselves provide substantial professional satisfaction, concluding that "relationships are both means and ends" (1039). They observed that some participants "conveyed a sense of others as compatible partners with whom they jointly create value" (1031). Given the competitive nature of the academic job space, the pressure to create value, and the accompanying stress (see Woolston for some personal accounts), the combination of camaraderie and cooperative value creation could be key for keeping people in academia.

Despite the positive potential of professional relationships, there is no doubt that they can also do harm. In particular, members of underrepresented groups in academia—BIPOC, women, LGBTQIA+—are more likely to experience interactions and relationships that are outwardly hostile or that reinforce harmful stereotypes even when they are intended to help. Comparing men's and women's faculty experiences with professional relationships, Gersick et al. found that men were more likely to tell stories of others helping them strategize or "play the game" of professional advancement, while women were more likely to tell stories of exclusion and having to prove their worth to be in the game at all. They described examples of women, well into their careers, continually struggling to prove themselves, while men were more able to focus on "strategizing for reputational gain" (1040). These inequities also can pit individuals from minoritized groups against one another, forcing them to compete for the one piece of the pie allocated to any/all nonwhite-male-cisgender peoples.

Considering race (not to mention gender identity and sexual orientation) further problematizes the role of relationships for academic professionals. We know that BIPOC scholars experience exclusion and marginalization, both in graduate school (Arday; Durand) and as working academics (Settles et al., "Epistemic Exclusion"; Settles et al., "Scrutinized"). This knowledge should prompt us to greater recognition not only of the need for supportive relationships, but also the ways in which anti-BIPOC bias influences these relationships. As Gersick et al. found for male versus female faculty, we have found that anti-BIPOC bias leads to mentoring that focuses on proving worth versus strategizing for advancement. These inequities affect the stories we tell others about our place in academia as well as the stories we tell ourselves.

The research discussed here hints at a master narrative in which supportive professional relationships in academia are at once underestimated in importance and at the same time offered only with limited or exclusive access. As we consider these issues and reflect on our own experiences, we are led to wonder: How different might a career in academia look and feel if we all recognized, nurtured, and celebrated the importance of relationships to our professional production, belonging, and success? To explore this question, I invited my colleagues Jeanine Williams and Tracy Chung to highlight some of the professional relationships and communities that have sustained and lifted them up—what led to those relationships and communities, how they operate, and the value they provide.

BIPOC Graduate Students and Surrogate Mentorship

Jeanine Williams

As a Black woman, I have always been disappointed by the lack of mentoring I received as a graduate student. There was a stark contrast between the opportunities afforded to my white female counterparts and what was afforded to me. While my white female counterparts were invited by faculty to be mentees, to serve as teaching assistants, and to coauthor manuscripts, I was left to fend for myself and forge my own scholarly inroads. In talking with other Black female graduate students, I realized that a lack of mentoring was something we all had in common. Instead of faculty members taking us under their wings, we formed our own support system, sharing ideas and opportunities for deeper scholarly engagement. We talked each other through our challenges and cheered each other on as we submitted conference proposals and manuscripts for publication. Yet still, the support we provided to one another could only go so far. As graduate students and emerging scholars, we did not have the experience, credibility, or

inroads that a seasoned professional in our field could provide. In the absence of mentoring and support from our graduate programs, we had to seek out surrogate mentors in other scholarly spaces.

There are several avenues through which BIPOC students pursue surrogate mentors. One way is through close study of the works of other scholars of color who provide a safe haven for their own thinking about their research ideas and interests. This can often happen serendipitously, where these students simply stumble upon scholarly sources that validate their instincts about their own work. Two examples of this in my experience are the work of Dr. Richard Milner and the work of Dr. Arlette Willis. Dr. Milner's work mentored me in understanding positionality and personalizing my research—challenging the stifling requirement of researcher objectivity. Through this surrogate mentorship, I was able to be up front and explicit about my position and the role it plays in my research, which allowed me to connect to my research and writing in an authentic and full manner. It gave me permission not only to write in first person, but to *center fully* my identity as a Black woman. It gave me permission to own my work. Dr. Willis's work on critically conscious research methods helped me squarely situate my research within a critical paradigm. I was able to move beyond criticality as theory, to criticality as methodology. Where my dissertation committee was unable to guide me, Dr. Willis's scholarship bridged the gap. Dr. Willis's work gave me permission to infuse my identity and perspective as a Black woman into my research methodology and data analysis. Whereas Dr. Milner helped me to connect with my work conceptually and metacognitively, Dr. Willis allowed me to connect with my work practically and operationally. While I have never formally met Dr. Milner and I have only recently met Dr. Willis, their work was hugely influential on my own. Even more than that, finding their work helped me to persevere through major challenges in my dissertation writing. This example of surrogate mentorship disrupts traditional notions of mentoring relationships as having to be between individuals who are well-acquainted or within close proximity of one another. This is particularly important considering that BIPOC graduate students often do not have the luxury of renowned BIPOC scholars or other suitable mentors within their graduate programs. If it were not for the non-traditional and seemingly impersonal mentorship that I gained through their work, I cannot say that I would have even finished my dissertation.

BIPOC students must also seek surrogate mentors through professional organizations. They lean on caucuses and special interest groups and, when they are lucky, they connect with senior scholars at conferences. In my own experience, the best surrogate mentorship usually came in the form of another Black woman who had made her way through the academy, who overcame her own challenges with a lack of mentoring, who made a name for herself, and who was committed to using her acquired social capital and clout to make the road less painful and isolated for other Black women desperately striving to navigate the same treacherous path. Such surrogate mentors were willing to linger after their conference presentations to answer my questions and to simply connect. They would ask me about my background, my research interests, and my career and life aspirations. They would sit with me over lunch, providing a much-needed haven and a space to simply belong. They would give me their contact information and offer to assist me in any way they could. Most importantly, long after the conference they would respond to my e-mails—sending me resources, giving me feedback, and reassuring me that I could do it. It was this sense of community and caring and mentorship that helped me persevere to the end.

One such surrogate mentor for me was the late Dr. Elizabeth Peavy, an adult literacy scholar and activist. We met in 2005 after her presentation at a regional conference. I was so inspired by

her ability to connect literacy theory and pedagogy with her fervor for civil rights and social justice. It was Dr. Peavy who introduced me to critical literacy, and more importantly, the work of Septima Clark, Rev. Dr. James Cone, and other Black Liberationists. As my surrogate mentor, Dr. Peavy cultivated my identity as a scholar-practitioner-activist. She freed me to fully and unapologetically pursue social justice in my work as a postsecondary literacy professional. While Dr. Peavy has passed on and is now an ancestor, there is no place in my professional life where the impact of her mentorship is not present. If she had not taken the time to invest in me as her mentee, I would not be who I am today.

Here I am ten years post doctorate, doing my part to continue this sense of community, caring, and mentorship. This is why I stay, why I continue as a fully engaged member of academia. I want to be to others what I so desperately needed. I want to bridge the gap for emerging scholars. I want to be a presence and a representation of what is possible. I want to leverage my social capital and clout. I want to be the surrogate to that emerging scholar who is searching for sources to support them in their research. I want to be the surrogate to that emerging scholar who is sitting in my presentation hoping that I will linger. I want to provide the mentorship that will help BIPOC graduate students make it to the end. Most importantly, I want my presence and the mentorship that I provide, surrogate or otherwise, to inspire new BIPOC scholars to reach back and mentor others and to keep this important network alive.

Community Formation

Tracy Chung

My experiences in graduate school were similar to Sarah's and Jeanine's, in that I had to seek out mentorship and community outside of my academic department. While just beginning my research in Ethnic Studies, I attended the Association for Asian American Studies' (AAAS) annual conference in Washington, D.C. The field itself had its roots in social and community activism, so folks who fought their way to become established scholar-practitioners found both informal and formal ways to help address what they had experienced and knew persisted as marginalization. For example, Professor Elaine H. Kim, a pioneer in Asian American literary, cultural, and feminist studies, sat in that D.C. hotel coffee shop each morning so that students could meet and chat with her. Through that conference, I also connected with another leading scholar who became an outside reader for my master's thesis.

After finishing my dissertation, I again faced a lack of guidance and a dearth of ethnic studies career opportunities in my region. I had gained some academic administration experience along the way, which I enjoyed, particularly for the interactions with students and colleagues. So I ended up on a career path in academic affairs, which is where I am now, directing an English undergraduate program.

During the spring of 2020, my coworkers and I were adjusting to full-time telework and stay-at-home orders in our state of Maryland. We are a group of academic affairs staff and faculty who do a combination of teaching, curriculum development, and academic services for the University of Maryland Global Campus. The percentage of effort we put toward each of those three areas varies, depending on our roles. But what we share equally is a commitment to social justice, and what we have in common is our scope of serving adult undergraduate learners. We also have among us a range of personal connections, professional synergies, and collegial care. While the extent or complexity of those relationships vary between and among us, I can comfortably say

that we all get along, with trust, humor, and respect informing much of our interactions. We have a loose formation of community.

What Motivated Us

At that time, we were all disheartened, disturbed, and disrupted by the state of our society. As educators, we have background knowledge of systemic racism, historical injustices, and straight up atrocities that have harmed people of color for generations, including our own. The deaths of Ahmaud Arbury, George Floyd, and Breonna Taylor loomed painfully large in the media; at the same time, the spiraling political circus felt overwhelming. Quarantined in our homes, we felt lost or powerless, or both. We also did not feel particularly engaged or supported by our institution beyond its mass messaging, which was in line with what most colleges and universities were putting out to their constituents, and thus not inappropriate, but it was not enough. We bring our personal beliefs, experiences, and compassion into our work, so the communication from our organization felt a bit like lip service.

How We Formed

When there is an obvious gap, as Jeanine narrates above, educators of color often take the charge upon themselves to try and fill that gap, or at least underscore the fact that the gap persists. In this spirit, one of my colleagues shared a link to a recorded conversation with scholar-practitioners Bettina Love, Gholdy Muhammad, Dena Simmons and the Schomburg Center's Brian Jones about abolitionist teaching and antiracist education (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v = uJZ3RPJ2rNc). Another colleague followed up by sharing their participation in a conference organized by Academics for Black Survival and Wellness (https://www.academics4blacklives.com/). I viewed these resources fully and found that I wanted to talk about how to do discrete work in our online classrooms to advance antiracist teaching. I researched a bit more, talked with another colleague, and then it was clear to me that we could cohere ourselves into a more established community. I invited my colleagues for a one-hour virtual meeting, and I called it "Justice Group Dialogue." Everyone accepted, and we began meeting every other week.

How It Disrupts

As has been introduced here and discussed in the literature, people of color in higher education are pressured to conform to the culture of white/male/power, and even further, expected to become clones of their mentors—whether or not those mentors are BIPOC scholars themselves—if they are to be deemed successful scholar-practitioners. To disrupt this imperative of elitist academia, we need to develop and adapt a practice of what bell hooks calls "engaged pedagogy" in *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. Drawing on the work of Paulo Friere, hooks advances a radical change in how we approach teaching and learning. As a student herself who experienced the stifling world of prestigious, predominantly white institutions, hooks argues that pedagogy should be a dynamic culture of engagement and community.

In practice, for example, hooks describes her collaboration with others who are focused on change-making:

> Understanding and appreciating our different locations has been a necessary framework for the building of professional and political solidarity between us, as well as for creating a space of emotional trust where intimacy and regard for one another can be nourished. (132)

Space, locations, and framework seem to me to be key nodes for building community that can disrupt existing power structures. Having a peer community and material resources are basic needs for practitioners who have experienced marginalization in the academy. As Sarah discusses above, academia's systemic structure of individual (supposed) meritocracy for both graduate students and junior faculty of color is harmful and exclusionary. In order to find ways to combat the negative impacts, people need to find strength in numbers—we need to form community so that we can find mentoring and ways to thrive and effect change. As Jeanine discusses above, she found and formed her own community of support as a graduate student, and now as a scholar-practitioner-activist, she makes herself accessible to others who are either new to the field or have been in isolation. Having gone through the experience herself, Williams understands how to create space for intimacy from different locations, which helps bring about solidarity.

What You Can Take Away

Some of the practical teaching methods that members of our Justice Group have implemented started from our dialogs. In approaching "engaged pedagogy," we talked, for example, about rubrics (and the constraints and biases of "standard English"), research and argument (and cases where the opinions of the professor and student do not align), and how to address these elements in ways that help build community rather than enhance divisions. For instance, we were talking about day one in an online classroom and virtual introductions. Since our classes are asynchronous, the discussion forum is the space where students and the professor post their introductions of themselves. While an adequate template is available, which asks students where they are from, what their major is, and the like, we wanted to try out prompts that immediately created space for more emotional investment and thus the possibility for greater trust and intimacy. With more open-ended prompts, students would not only share more but also think more critically and make deeper connections. For example, one professor asks their students to introduce themselves and then respond to the prompt: "How do you prepare rice in your home or culture?" Imagine the range of responses, both similar and contrasting, and the conversations that can stem from this simple prompt. The exchange of cultural, historical, and social contexts starts the class off from a place of belonging and looks ahead toward community-building. And in turn, if the classroom is by design more inclusive, then the structural exclusionary elements are disrupted.

Conclusion

As we reflected on the role of mentorship and community in our academic training and careers, we began by observing what was missing. We saw places where academia as a system failed to support us, made things more difficult for us, or perhaps even deceived us about what success looks like and how to get there. However, as we went on to ask what mentoring and community in academia *should* look like, we refocused on the informal support structures that we sought out or built ourselves.

By highlighting the counterexamples to harmful structures and patterns in academia, we help ourselves—and, we hope, others—combat those harmful structures and patterns. In "Considering Counter Narratives," Bamberg describes the role of the master narrative in relation to that of the counter narrative. Master narratives set up "sequences of actions and events as routines" that guide daily life. "As such," Bamberg writes, they "have a tendency to 'normalize' and 'naturalize'—with the consequence that the more we as subjects become engaged in these routines, the more we become subjected to them" (360). In deciding how to tell our stories, we use counter narrative to position ourselves in relation to the master narrative, finding ways in which we have refused to be constrained by its routines. We identify stories of dialogue, trust, nurture, and solidarity. We identify counterexamples that show "individuals who actually occupy different locations within structures, sharing ideas with one another, mapping out terrains of commonality, connection, and shared concern with teaching practices" (hooks 130). We foster the creation of common space, often virtual, where physical and material connection are not readily apparent. By telling these stories, we honor their importance in our lives and identities and invite our colleagues to consider where their own counter narratives of mentorship and community in academia serve them and may serve as a model for others.

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Shadow Networks: BIPOC Women Talk Back to an English Doctoral Program

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In the wake of George Floyd's murder in May 2020, our emotions as BIPOC PhD students and recent graduates in the St. John's University English Department were running high. In the weeks that followed, some of us received a particularly tone-deaf e-mail masquerading as a statement-of-solidarity from an older white member of our larger community. The e-mail left us feeling something all too familiar: incredulous pain. In Fall 2020, the contributors to this essay took part in a BIPOC in Academia panel led by Dr. Laura McCalla, one of the recipients of this e-mail. The panel was an opportunity for us to reflect on our experiences as BIPOC graduate students; on what we were still grappling with in the wake of these experiences; on the event that motivated this panel; and on our mixed emotions before, during, and after the panel itself. The following essay attempts to capture the spirit of the panel; we hope that allowing ourselves to be vulnerable—to let our guards down, as we do below—will lead to positive change.

Golden Hour

Oh, you have GOT to be kidding me.

I (Laura) had been on edge for days that felt like an eternity when I opened the "replied all" message a fellow adjunct professor wrote in response to the English Department's rote denouncement of white supremacy and support of the Black Lives Matter movement. It was still the immediate aftermath of George Floyd's murder and I, like most other Black people I had spoken to, had been bombarded for days on end with well-meaning, but utterly tone-deaf sentiments of solidarity from white colleagues and friends:

I hadn't realized.
I hadn't known what was truly happening.
I hadn't understood.

I didn't know, and frankly still don't know, why this death served as a flash point. Why didn't the countless brutal and unnecessary Black deaths that came before—some of which were also caught on tape—cause a great awakening? Maybe quarantine had given people a lot of time to be introspective? Maybe quarantine madness had started to set in and people were looking for something to do, and Mr. Floyd's death just happened to be that *thing*? Regardless, this death and this moment had people, particularly white liberals, seeking to make amends for their behavior in ways that I found shallow and ultimately burdensome to me. I was expected to forgive ignorance,

suggest ways to get involved, and recommend resources to further their educations. It seemed a new social contract had been drawn up, wherein white liberals tried in earnest to educate themselves as to "The Plight of BIPOC Folks in America," and BIPOCs were to forgive centuries of brutality, of having been ignored, and good naturedly suggest how to do better.

By the time the diurnal course had all but completed and the shadows of summer, a day's promise, and death still danced but grew lethargic and were certain to soon follow the thin glimmers of remaining daylight over the horizon, I had come to a crucial realization about this new contract: I simply wasn't with it.

I opened the e-mail and there it was—a suggestion that in addition to the Department's stance that Black lives do indeed matter, that we also promote an understanding that all lives matter. In that moment, every racist incident that I had been subject to or had been forced to bear witness to during my time in academia came roaring back in a wave so colossal and visceral that it felt like I had water in my lungs where air had been but a moment before. How was this a response from a New York City academic in 2020? Why did this person feel the need to hit reply all and terrorize faculty of color with these incendiary words?

Over the course of the next hour, I forwarded the e-mail to two trusted full-time faculty members and let loose years of outrage and disappointment. I demanded immediate action. I hit back at the notion that because the offender was old, she was simply oblivious to the true weight and meaning of the all lives rhetoric she had spewed into my inbox.

> *"I know who she is, and I know she's an older person,"* I wrote.
> *"However . . . that's not the point and it doesn't excuse her. People of color don't get to be oblivious (about anything, ever), lest we lose our livelihoods or lives. And I'm simply through extending a grace that I'm not allowed in this society to other people."*
> *"Once, years ago, I dealt with a semester's worth of racist microaggressions from a member of the full-time faculty . . . "*
> *" . . . I refuse to let that history repeat itself."*

I didn't know, and frankly still don't know, why this e-mail served as a flash point. Why didn't the countless indignities that had come before—some small and petty, others large enough that I still feel the reverberation of their shockwaves years later—cause a great awakening? Maybe quarantine had given me a lot of time to be introspective and figure out my own failings in promoting social justice. Maybe quarantine madness had started to set in and I was looking for something to do, a fight to fight, and this e-mail just happened to be that *thing*. Regardless, I knew I had to do something.

I decided that perhaps that thing was giving a voice to all of these feelings, the slights BIPOC students suffer through, by putting together a panel in which we could not only discuss our experiences, but have faculty listen without giving input or further burdening already beleaguered young academics with defensive posturing about our own experiences. I conceived of it as a public continuation of the conversations that BIPOC academics have in private with one another—no-holds barred accounts of our proverbial war stories and the microaggressions that we dealt with on a sometimes daily basis. Throughout my time in academia, I had always sought out the Shadow Network, the places filled with BIPOC folks who would be able to warn me off certain professors and administrators. It was the kind of mentoring that went on behind closed office doors, in hushed whispers in student lounge areas, or passed off as meta-ironic comments over cocktails. While useful, I knew that the current system had a lot of holes and cracks through which people could easily fall. Sometimes word didn't get around very quickly or missed

someone entirely and they were forced to endure a hellish semester with someone at the helm of a class who was adept at pointedly making you feel invisible, or uncomfortable, or offended. As I grew older and progressed further in my graduate studies, I began to mentor younger students in the same ways that I had been mentored.

I spoke behind closed office and apartment doors.
I whispered in student lounges.
I made meta-ironic jokes over cocktails.

It was the way things had always been done in these Shadow Networks, but even so, I knew that this wasn't sustainable, nor was it how I wanted to serve as a mentor for the rest of my career. I knew that in order to expand the Network, it had to come out of the shadows. And so, I conceived of the BIPOC in Academia panel: a frank and unflinching discussion between BIPOC PhD candidates and recent graduates about the invisible and highly racialized tolls of attempting to learn, collaborate, and create in the mise en scène of a Predominantly White Institution. I thought of it as a way to drag the Network out into the unflinching daylight, to invite others to bear witness—and only to bear witness—to the conversations that we were already having and had been having for years

Naively, I assumed that others would be excited by the opportunity and welcome the chance to speak freely and publicly, but my invitations to participate were met mostly with deafening silence. While frustrated, I began to realize that while I was offering to serve as a moderator and speak to my own experiences, I wasn't really putting much on the line. I completed my PhD two years ago. I'd never intended to stay in academia and within weeks of graduation, I had successfully traded hallowed halls in for a lovely alt-ac career. I occasionally served as an adjunct assistant professor at my most recent alma mater, but I did so for fun. I had spent years as a member of the Shadow Network, yet somehow missed the entire point. It wasn't about fear, but rather *safety*. Safety of income, of career advancement.

I didn't know, and frankly still don't know, why this had always escaped me before. Why didn't the countless conversations and concerns that had been conveyed to me before—some small and petty, others large enough that I still feel the reverberation of their shockwaves years later—cause a great awakening? Maybe quarantine had given me time to be introspective, but it wasn't until that moment that that it had given me the insight to understand that, just as others had with buildings during that summer's protests following the deaths of George Floyd and, an eye blink later, Breonna Taylor, I was preparing to burn it all down. I wasn't about to bring the shadows into the light, but rather, I was going to set it all aflame. But, unlike me, the people I had asked to participate didn't have the invulnerability provided by a lovely alt-ac career.

I hadn't realized.
I hadn't known what I was truly asking.
I hadn't understood.

I had asked these people—my friends and colleagues—to immolate themselves with the flame that I had lit. I had lit a flame and once a flame burns hot—as the flames of racial injustice always do—there's no containing it. There was no turning back. It was all going to burn down, and I knew that the only recourse left was to use the embers to light a new path . . . and hope that my friends somehow made it out unscathed.

Morningtide

Being asked to be on the panel caused me (Tejan) to reflect on the tough time I had at the start of the program and during my early years of coursework. The years during coursework where I felt I had little institutional support and guidance held memories I did not want to share with an audience for fear of the emotions they conjured. I was unsure of my ability to keep my composure while sharing difficult personal stories. I was hesitant to take part in the panel in part because I'd tried to put that difficult chapter behind me. I'd taken part in a few groups in grad school to find likeminds, but it wasn't always easy for me to find resources or comfortable spaces within the program where I could voice concerns. As a working parent, my time on campus was also limited and building community within the program oftentimes felt like a struggle, especially during coursework. I remember feeling like I had to be intentional about building community within the program—and at one point deciding that if I was going to continue in the program, I needed to actively seek out professors who would be mentors and peers who I could relate to.

2020 also brought about what felt like a sudden eruption of awareness for many. As a Black woman, having been a part of many of these conversations on anti-racism in work settings, it had become overwhelming. Though conversations centering around anti-racism in academia are absolutely important to have, it can be especially difficult for BIPOC. It felt as if many had been complacent and now they were angry, but some of us had been angry for so long and had to push through regardless of that fact. Taking part in the panel was emotional labor that felt exhausting to me as I thought about what I might share through examining my experience in the program. Though I was comforted by the familiar friendly faces of the BIPOC panel, the idea of discussing racial matters in front of an audience primarily made up of white professors, many of whom I'd taken classes with, brought about an uneasy feeling. During my time within the program, there had been multiple experiences that led to feelings of disbelonging, but I'd discussed many of the issues I'd been having in grad school with my close group of friends. Some issues felt resolved, but not because anything had improved—I'd vented and forced myself to move on because I couldn't allow roadblocks to stop my progress.

As I thought about what I might share, I was surprised at how easy it was to return to the painful moments I thought I'd transcended. After thinking it over for a few days, it became clear to me that there could be some benefit in taking part and sharing some of those hard experiences. There are so many instances of silencing Black voices within academia and this opportunity suddenly felt like a chance to at least bring attention to some overt and covert instances of racism that I'd mostly pushed to the side for the sake of sanity. The emotional labor did have the potential to help other BIPOC students who would take part in the program, and that felt worthy of the effort.

When Laura first approached me (Vickie) about participating in a panel on BIPOC experiences in academia, I resisted for all the familiar reasons: fear of retaliation, academia's unwillingness to change, and my suspicion of what academia does with Black stories like mine. I said yes because I strongly supported the idea and value the necessity of such panels, of our stories, of "talking back," but still, I resisted. I admit I grew frustrated with myself: *How can experiences that are so commonplace in academia for women of color feel so particular and private, so intimate?* I resisted.

What did it feel like to even get Laura's invitation to be on the BIPOC panel? I (Raquel) felt my heart sink a little. I was astonished that (1) I was even being considered, (2) I was unsure what I could share and if I had anything to share of great significance, and (3) I felt guilty for never really doing this work as a graduate student. I was surprised to get the invitation because although

I had been privy to other students' experiences, I did not remember sharing or experiencing nearly as much as they did. But, I think that's something I've noticed as a problem with my memory: sometimes it's simply unreliable because it's taxing to hold on to and then process the range of microaggressions and other harms caused by others. Finally, I felt guilty because as a member of a graduate organization in the department, I rarely created opportunities to talk about these concerns. I just didn't imagine there would be space for these conversations. I had assumed I had to do what I did for all four years of my undergraduate degree: keep my mouth shut and just suffer at the hands of white professors who did not actually teach. The English departments at the institutions I attended for both my master's and doctorate degree though were not nearly as hostile and unkind as my undergraduate experience, so I just felt lucky to have found much more supportive professors and departments than I had encountered in my first experience in college.

Would I say too much? Would I overplay something? Would I underplay something? Did I really need to mention that detail? Did I share the "right" things in the right way? What if my feelings after instances of microaggression were "just hypersensitivity"? What if they were not? And, what of my South-Asianness? While I (Gowri) identify as BIPOC, I know our institutions are anti-Black in historically specific ways. I didn't want to speak from a place of privilege—not ever, and especially not at this panel. *But then, what if I was exercising my privilege by saying "no" for this reason?* I knew these questions would plague me before and after the panel. I had to make space for my fear of these questions—for which there would be no verifiable answers—before making any commitment. And that—that was hard.

High Noon

A couple of days before the panel, I (Vickie) devised a plan to make use of the challenges I faced as a Black woman in my graduate program using the following questions: What do I feel when I remember those experiences? What can academia learn from my experiences? The plan did not work as I anticipated because I could not get past my feelings as I listened to my friends on the panel: fatigue, anger, shock, frustration, alienation, disappointment, and so forth. Getting stuck in them reminded me of one experience in my graduate program where an openly liberal white professor—while leading a discussion to expand our conception of texts beyond the conventional "written" text—*read* the room and concluded that mine and another woman of color's "choice" to not sit around the seminar table was not a choice at all, but a demonstration of how academia, whiteness, the world treats "diverse bodies." *My body? Good Lord. My diverse body*? I had felt stuck in my feelings then, too, and only ever shared that experience with BIPOC friends and acquaintances. This time, however, I decided to share it.

I (Raquel) had a friend who attended the program in an effort to support me, and she was crucial to my getting through the allotted time because I was able to text with her. During our text conversation, she mentioned that I was quieter than usual. From her experience with me in the classroom and with others outside of the classroom, she was surprised I wasn't speaking as much or being nearly as passionate as I usually am. I did not know how to tell her that it was hard to come to grips with what I felt I had to share and what I felt comfortable sharing. I felt overwhelmed by speaking out into existence what I knew to be true but had never conjured the courage to tell people outside my community (faculty and students who were BIPOC). My fear and nervousness sometimes got the best of me, but I remember it getting easier for me to share toward the end when the questions were a bit broader or focused on pedagogy. It was then

that I was able to share what it meant for me to be wronged by my fellow graduate students also, how I was often upset with faculty because of what they allowed to happen in their classrooms, and how my peers were left to run amuck. I also remember being really intentional about when to contribute because I was on a panel with Black women whose graduate experiences were much more traumatic and important to voice. As a lighter-skinned Latina, I knew it was important for me to take up the right (or less) amount of space in order for my fellow panelists to process these events. I also knew that I held a certain privilege being a "favored" graduate student of sorts—someone to whom the department gave countless opportunities for development and growth.

As I (Gowri) heard my friends on the panel, I realized the importance of our unspoken solidarity. Processing our experiences together had validated the inarticulable emotions we felt after instances of microaggression. Due to work commitments, I could not be on the panel, but I attended the event. When Laura opened it up to the audience, I felt my need to speak outrun my fear. I heard myself sharing something that felt personal: as an international student, I had felt the disadvantage of not knowing the system intimately; I realized so much was just "understood." People I approached were baffled that I didn't already know or didn't "just ask." It made me feel stupid and berate myself, and that's how I gravitated toward students and faculty of color for mentorship and community. No sooner had I shared this perspective than the voices in my head came alive, as always, to dismiss the validity of everything I had felt and shared: *Was my experience relevant? Was it even real? Was it just me? Am I the problem?*

The Ungodly Hour

After the panel, I (Tejan) still had to process what happened. I remember finding a bit of comfort in the e-mail thread of the panelists voices and what felt like a collective sigh. It was empowering to be in the company of these amazing women. It also felt as if the emotional labor hadn't been in vain as there were signs the department would be working toward some necessary changes that could help BIPOC students to follow.

I (Raquel) could not really foresee how "shook" I would feel afterward. Usually when I have a large sense of emotion, fear, or anxiety taking over me, I describe it as this feeling in my chest, sort of like a rope being tied tight across my shoulders. Sometimes, I long for that tightness to take over and keep me from fully indulging in any sense of emotion. Luckily, Vickie texted me right afterward, and we were able to commune over the idea that we had not expected to feel the emotional labor so viscerally. I remember feeling so grateful that I had Vickie to debrief this sentiment with. I have been left thinking deeply about the visceral sense of fear I felt after the panel. I wasn't really scared that there would be consequences in the department per say, but just a fear that I had said what I should not have, that I did what must not be done: discuss racism. As a person who does research within Black and Latinx feminisms, it hurts to know that despite my years of "talking back," it still feels wrong to bring the truth to light. This is just a reminder of how strong and powerful the institution is.

Should I fix myself and stop blaming the "system"? Should I grow thicker skin? Is it just me or is the "system" preying on me, on "us"? Time and distance usually pacify the inner demons that come alive when I (Gowri) speak, especially when speaking is in the service of "talking back." I wondered now if these demons are the very embodiment of implicit bias, of structural racism. I have learned how to tame these demons and focus on what's more important—*being* at these events, ("diverse") body, mind and soul; being there for the faculty who want to listen, for the BIPOC students who will, like me, call this university their home. I felt a moral obligation to say

"yes" to participating; I knew also that this sense of moral obligation was something my white counterparts (especially if they are cis, straight and male) may never have to experience. Yet, I knew I had to be there—for the very reasons I felt conflicted.

My (Vickie) experience on the panel is particularly interesting because of the ways I failed to translate my challenges into some kind of pedagogical use/utility. I started with the following questions: What do I feel when I remember those experiences? What can academia learn from my experiences? Yet my feelings resisted that approach that would allow me some distance and insisted on the emotions. Those emotions led me to different questions: What is it that I resist through those feelings? What are the uses of that hesitation/resistance? Black women are often read and consumed for how our stories critically gesture toward possibilities for radical change. The opposite is also true: academia consistently uses our stories to further perpetuate critical limitations on Black womanhood and Black Thought more generally. That particular memory, which refused my plan, and insisted on the sticky feelings, shifted my attention away from arriving at an anticipated resolution to a knowing outside what one learns. It forced me to ask different questions, to engage in another way through a critical logic of care beyond myself and the audience. That insistence resisted the impulse in academia to consume BIPOC stories as acts of learning and redirected the focus to the importance of understanding the failure that learning about "BIPOC experiences" always entails. I realized then why I only ever shared this experience with other Black and Brown peers: our knowledge projects begin and end in radical and critical practices of care. It is *this* that women of color recognize, develop, and value in our community building and critical practices. I experience this always with the community I've found amongst my peers of color and the mentorship I receive from the few faculty of color in my graduate program, but I did not come to *know* it until after I reflected on how Laura structured the panel and why I reached out to my Black and Brown friends, including fellow panelists, after the panel presentation. We develop new kinds of questions and meditative methodologies through radical practices of care that attend to the failures that learning always entails for Black stories and experiences.

As the faculty liaison, I (Dohra) had a lot of conflicting emotions and reactions in relation to the process. First and foremost, I felt pride and gratitude for the recent Ph.D.s and current students who organized and participated in the panel, both for their courage in sharing their experiences, and also for their years of work in building the strong and supportive community that backed them up in doing so. However, it was also frustrating that they were in the situation of needing to do that work. Similarly, I both appreciate the incremental changes made in our graduate program over the past few years, and also feel frustrated that the rate of change hasn't been fast enough.

In conceiving of the event, Laura had astutely noted the possibility that faculty could become defensive and want to explain themselves in response to student/recent grad testimonies. Therefore, she wisely requested that we also schedule a separate "faculty debrief" to follow the initial event, where faculty could process and respond without burdening the panelists with their immediate reactions. This was a brilliant division of labor that forced faculty to sit with the discomfort of what they heard, and then regroup to brainstorm on concrete measures that would address some of the programmatic problems that the panelists had observed.

Accordingly, with the support of my department chair, we followed the brave and illuminating panel with a faculty response and brainstorming session a week later. As well as acknowledging their part in the negative experiences that panelists presented, faculty proposed instituting immediate and concrete measures to prevent those negative experiences in the future. These will include publicizing the university's microaggression reporting system among graduate students; training graduate faculty

on how best to handle microaggressions that take place in class; more consistently supporting events organized by our excellent, proactive graduate student organization; instituting a "cluster mentoring" system to create community and alleviate the disproportionate advising load that can otherwise fall on faculty of color; surveying current students to look specifically for equity gaps; making space in graduate classes to talk about impostor syndrome (while also recognizing that it affects different groups and individuals differently); and holding fairness, access, and transparency as primary goals whenever revisiting graduate program plans and policies.

It was an honor to support the panel, and I hope that its concrete results will ultimately make the risk and exhaustion that the participants experienced worthwhile for them and for the students who are still coming through the program.

Daybreak

We have learned to dwell, thrive, strive, and revel in our "Shadow Networks;" yet, we care deeply for the very institutions that relegate us to these liminal spaces. It is this care, this radical love, that infuses us with a sense of purpose. Before, during, and after the panel, this very love gave us the courage to let go of our safety net(work) and speak our truth to those willing to listen. We wanted you to be privy not only to how we experience microaggressions, but also how we process them and learn to live with their after-effects within the Network. Vulnerable as this made us feel, we hoped this would mean taking concrete steps to ensure that our pain—which has so far remained private because attempts at speaking out fell on deaf ears—would be heard. We are always going to be here, alert and determined to speak out if we find our allies slipping back into their pre-Summer 2020 complacency. We are here to ensure that our access to resources, support and accountability continue, whether or not there are shocking events in the news to force people to sit up and take notice.

Notes on contributors

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Vickie Masséus is currently a Ph.D. candidate in the English department at St. John's University in Queens, NY. Her dissertation project explores how Black Caribbean women's fiction offers radical possibilities for theorizing subjectivity outside of the power relations inherent in the discourse of empowerment. Her research and teaching interests focus on representations of self and subjectivity in women's fiction.

Laura Lyn McCalla graduated with her PhD in English from St. John's University in 2018. Upon graduation, Laura successfully pursued an alt-ac career in the governmental sector, though she occasionally serves as an adjunct faculty member at various universities in the New York City metro area. Laura's research and teaching interests include film and television as literature; film theory; the use of media in andragogy; portrayals of Blackness in media; critical race theory; social justice; and various topics in popular culture.

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Raquel Corona is a doctoral candidate in the English department at St. John's University and a full-time Lecturer at Queensborough Community College (CUNY). Her dissertation is a rhetorical exploration of how transnationalism affects the circulation of stories about the Latinx woman's body and sex. It examines various texts and the digital realm to consider the ways Latinx women are resisting against the dominant and oppressive forces in their lives to cull an alternative way of expressing and exploring their sexuality and sexual desire.

Dohra Ahmad is Professor of English at St. John's University, where she teaches classes on 20th and 21st century postcolonial, U.S., and global literature; works with instructors of the Core course Literature in a Global Context; and had the honor of serving on the dissertation committees of Gowri Kumar and Tejan Waszak. She is the author of *Landscapes of Hope: Anti-Colonial Utopianism in America*, coauthor (with Shondel Nero) of *Vernaculars in the Classroom: Paradoxes, Pedagogy, Possibilities*, and editor of *Rotten English: A Literary Anthology* and *The Penguin Book of Migration Literature*.

Using Your Black Experience to Impact Higher Education and Why You Should Let Your Students Do the Damn Thing: A Conversation with Students and Faculty

Temptaous Mckoy

Bowie State University

"Why do we not call the drug dealer a scientist?" A question that I've asked a many scholar.[1] I mean we all can have several reasons for why this happens, but let's just cut to it, cause racism that's why. Point blank period. Y'all notice folks didn't start really referring to Jay-Z as an entrepreneur until he got a lil' pop, married Beyonce. But before then—and even when he pisses off the people at Fox News, he is/was just a drug-dealing rapper. Notice the modifier in that sentence too . . . Jay-Z *was* a drug-dealing rapper, not a rapper that *just so happened to have dealt drugs*. Referring to him as primarily a rapper suggests that he is mainly an artist of some sort. But you see, centering and referring to him as a drug-dealer first has a boatload of implications on its own. Even more so, we see this sudden rise of marijuana dispensaries poppin' up being owned by folks that ain't Black. These folks are considered Entrepreneurs, Scientists, Holistic Doctors, all dat. You see we always talk about how words have meanings, but I like to take this one step further and say those words put into sentences have meaning. We all know it, but there is something about taking that time to acknowledge how the careful placement of words in a certain order, meticulously placed with other keywords produces a different meaning. Black Lives Matter vs. All Lives Matter vs. Blue Lives Matter . . . see my point. Language, Literacy, Composition, all that are carefully placed to enact different meanings. Cause let we not forget that it was a technical writing document that kept folks in slavery, this includes the Emancipation Proclamation. Deadass, take the time to unpack that document for real—intent vs impact, my friends. But I ain't done, let's go one more step, consider who or what is placing these sets of words together. Could a white dude give the "I Have A Dream" speech and still have the same legacy and same meaning? I'm going to say nah fam. In all, words strategically placed and delivered (written or oral) by certain bodies have different meanings.

So the question now becomes: "Aye Temp, what this got to do with utilizing your Black experience?" Well your answer my friend, my black experience, much like words, can be used to define new meanings of what it means to be successful in higher education. In undergrad at

Elizabeth City State University (an HBCU), I took a class titled "The History of The English Language." In that class, I learned the origins of so many words and how they came to be understood as their current meanings. What changed over time? Context and the users of the language. We should look at higher education in the same way. The people that now have access to higher education and are willing to attack this joint are starting to look more and more like myself … they Black and Brown. The context for why Black people are enrolling in higher education is changing, which means the pedagogical practices should change, too … right?

Well, as some of us (Black scholars) have learned, some pedagogical practices are very well outdated and really do not address the epistemological needs of the Black students enrolled in graduate programs. But that's not the only problem. Black students are sometimes left to fend for themselves and figure out how to navigate a space that for the most part, is predominantly white and was not made for them to start. Black students must go into graduate programs and really grapple with how do they make this program one that can work in their best interest, regardless of where they may fall on the researcher spectrum. I can see this as the case for Technical and Professional Writing programs. They are all housed at PWIs, with the exception of North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University's Technical Writing Concentration, which is run by Dr. Kimberly Harper—a Black woman. So if they are all housed at PWIs, then guess who those institutions were built for? And also guess the demographics for a majority of these Technical Writing Programs? And guess who is deep at the conferences for Technical and Professional Writing? So yea, it's not a good space to be in.

In order to change the outlook of any field, it starts with graduate students. That's why I suggest students learn how to utilize their Black experience to in fact shape their programs and the overall future of higher education. When I say Black experience, I speak from upbringings all the way to educational experiences, to general ideas of what it means to be Black. And even as a Black woman, I try to not overgeneralize my people. Because I know for a fact that my Black experience is not that of all of my people. However, I have learned that there are certain Black experiences that can be taken into the realm of high education that could potentially make the experience of being embedded in the world of higher education better. For example, the use and know how to be active on Black Twitter … we will talk about this more. But just know, it's like dat. My Blackness, along with other great qualities, is what makes me the damn good scholar I am today. But here is the thing, I ain't a grad student anymore. I am a faculty member, and my focuses have changed a bit. My priorities don't look exactly the same, they def ain't that of a grad student struggling to complete her diss. Overall, I still have a drive and flame to advocate for the redesign of higher education, more specifically in composition studies, to allow for a more inclusive and socially just learning space for Black and Brown students.

For that reason, I've decided to deliver this piece in a new way. Well, at least new to me. The first half of my article will be exclusively for Black graduate students—even undergrads. The second half will be for faculty. Now I think it can be helpful for all parties involved to read all of this, but lemme tell you what I learned my first year in the job. Some stuff don't make a lick of sense till you are actually on the job (wait till that first department meeting … sheesh!). So I mean, yea, I can obviously offer pedagogical practices for graduate students that are GTAs (which I will), but I want to be clear that I've designed this piece to be much more condensed and to speak to two different audiences in two different professional spaces. Not to mention, if I give you all the goods now, what would you look for in the future or how can you grow for yourself? This piece is not necessarily a manual on how to use your Black experience, but instead, I offer this piece as a means to suggest reflection for all parties involved. In all, I want to make clear that

giving a manual on how to enact change, the way that I've done so step-by-step, can lead to the very thing I tend to argue against—the cloning of myself. I want readers to identify themselves in the sections I've presented and think of the ways their Black experience or role as a mentor is tied to their identity, embodiment, and individualized sense of self.

How to Use Your Black Experience as a Graduate Student to Impact Higher Education

Assess and Reflect

First, my dear graduate student, know that you can't change a thing "till you figure out who you are for yourself. Using your Black experience comes with a sense of awareness of oneself. YOU gots to define what it means to be Black for you and only you first. As a Black woman, I've come to learn my Black experience don't define you, and your Black experience doesn't define me. Now granted, there are some intersections in terms of those experiences, such as folks questioning you about your natural tresses; you still have agency in speaking to just what it means to be Black. This is where it is also critical and important to understand the various cultural nuances that are associated with being Black. Yet, as I've stated ASSESS and REFLECT on YOUR understanding of what it means to be Black. I can't play spades. Yes, I, Temptaous can't play spades. Now I know talkin" about spades may seem as though I am employing a negative stereotype associated with Black people by stating I cannot play spades, but know that anytime I've mentioned this fact about myself, I've caught hell from my brothers and sisters. But does this make me any less Black? Of course not. I just understand that playing spades is actually a part of Black culture that I do not partake in. Meeting or fighting to meet the expectations of others regarding your Blackness will only leave you disappointed, mad as hell, and faking the funk. And I'm here to tell you, when it comes to impacting higher education, and any other facet of life, faking the funk ain't gon last but so damn long. Even worse, people are gonna call you out for faking the funk. So ya ass better stick to what you know and be as unapologetically Black as you define yourself to be. Which would lead me to my final point, legit be reflective if this journey of using your experience to impact higher education is one you are prepared to embark on. It ain't easy being at the forefront of change, but the benefits are well deserved. You have to assess if the benefits of "shaking the table" outweigh the risk of remaining at the table to eat Karen's potato salad. Your choice. We all done had to sit at a table and eat a bland meal or two. Think of higher education as the table and the experience itself as the plate. You tryin' to control what's on that plate?

Identify and Select

Now that you've decided that this is what you fixin to do, you actually committed, you need to identify and select who gonna ride with you on this thing. Changing any type of design by default requires allies. Or as some of my great mentors Drs. Michelle Eble and Angela Haas call them, accomplices. While you are attempting to identify your allies in this thing, this is the time to really perform an additional self-assessment of the skills you have and what you bring to the conversation. I know this may seem counterproductive to think of your skills in the second step rather than the first, but there is a reason for this. I've prioritized the centering and understanding the complexities of one's Blackness over the skillset because Blackness cannot be taught. However, you can adapt your skillset. You can learn from mentors. And as I've learned if you only focus on what you cannot

do, you will overlook what you can do, AKA, imposter syndrome. Once you've established better understandings of your skills, you are able to assess your needs in a mentor. Now, this is important. I know oftentimes our first reaction, even mine, is to go to the first Black faculty member in the department. While this is not wrong, because sometimes you need ya people to talk to, pay attention to other faculty/potential mentors that are not Black, but committed to supporting Black students—not claims for diversity and inclusion. This is crucial because when something pops off (because it will anytime you try to enact change), you need to know they will stand with you while you come up against issues that face Black communities and students very differently than students from other historically marginalized communities. Also, mentorship does not end just on campus. Make sure you identify and select people who will support you as you navigate simply being Black. Finally, make sure you get yourself a team of bomb people (students, industry members, outside community members, and others) that will help you while you are in the trenches. When I completed my dissertation, I knew I could not be in front of the camera and behind it at the same time. So, I hired Director of Photography D'Andre Drewitt—a fellow Elizabeth City State University alum—to help get the video chapter of my dissertation completed. You cannot impact higher education alone, and you shouldn't have to. But it is up to you to do the work of putting together a team of individuals that you know will stand with you.

Execute and Revise

Finally, just do the damn thing. I mean of course, there are some steps for planning and things of that nature, but overall, you should simply push for that change. One lesson I learned while advocating for change in my field is that you cannot always wait for permission. I've reflected on the many opportunities to share my work I stepped over because I did not FIRST get the approval of my mentors. You don't need to get their approval to do everything. Yes, they are there to guide you and help you along the way. But permission … nah. I think we oftentimes mix up our intentions to gain approval with getting permission. You didn't need permission to be born Black, and you damn sure don't need permission to flip the table. Yet also understand that even with or without the permission of others, things may not always go the way you expect the first time. Keep trying. Never take a no the first time. My personal rule is to go for about three no's before I start to back down—I'm going to come back to this. I'm not going to say keep trying until it happens because only you can really decide when you've met your match or are tired of the fighting the battle. But even when you've reached that point, you better make sure they heard you while you were in the room. Again, make sure they heard YOU specifically. Far too many times have I seen people call themselves going to bat for Black students as "allies," only to silence that student. To hell with that. Now to be clear, I do acknowledge your position of vulnerability as a graduate student. That is a very real issue. But even if you do have mentors who speak up, ensure the narrative they share is one that centers YOUR work and experience instead of their allyship. Using your Black experience is about your narrative. And once you start to back down following taking your first no, you need to revise your approach. I wish I had a clear-cut answer on the best way to revise your approach on things. But from my experience, I believe you will see the needed changes as you go along. You know the saying, "You catch more ants with sugar than salt?" I'm sure you do. Most people use this to indicate having a "softer" approach or attitude with people. I use it just to remind people you trying to catch the damn ant, so act accordingly. But this revision can also mean your motivation to enact change has indeed evolved, hence meaning your approaches will as well. Then once you've revised, execute that joint all over again.

How to Support Graduate Students Choosing to Use Their Black Experience to Impact Higher Education

Assess and Reflect

As a faculty member/mentor, your very first step needs to be an assessment of just how committed you are to supporting Black graduate students. While I suggest graduate students reflect on their Blackness, you need to focus on your own implicit and explicit bias against Blackness. I ain't saying go down this rabbit hole of all things you've done wrong toward Black students, scholars, and people in general, no. Instead, I am asking you to check yourself now before you call yo self bout to roll up and support a student who plans to impact the future of higher education. It ain't going to be easy. It will require additional labor (mental, physical, financial, emotional, and others) that you can not necessarily plan for. Key emphasis on emotional. You see, students that take on the duty to change any field also take on a great deal of emotional labor. As mentors, some of that emotional labor will become yours just as well. So do a self-check on your own emotional awareness—or lack thereof. Having a mentor that lacks emotional awareness can surely send a graduate student to a dark place; trust me I know—been there, done that, got the t shirt. While I understand many, myself included, take pride in creating boundaries around the way they mentor students, I want to be proactive and let you know those boundaries will constantly change. Yet, you very well have every right to establish those expectations with your students in the beginning. Finally, if you are not Black, assess and reflect on just how much you know about Black culture, community, and epistemologies. This can make a world of difference in how you move forward with the boundaries you've set, cause here is the thing. It is not the job of the graduate student to teach you any and everything about Blackness. You have to be willing to do that work yourself, FIRST, then check in with your graduate student. My dissertation chair, Dr. Michelle Eble was absolutely phenomenal at this. While there were parts of my project she may not have understood, she always vocalized her efforts to learn on her own before asking me. This meant so much to me as a graduate student and overall. Black people, in general, spend their entire lives moving about in a world that was not created for them or with them in mind. Their ways of knowing and understanding are not privileged, as a result, Black people spend a lot of time (if they choose) explaining cultural references and key pieces of Black culture—let's not make your graduate student do it with you as well.

Identify and Select

Now, this is where you really gotta step up as a mentor, it is game time. At this stage for graduate students, you would have been identified as an ally and someone the student feels can help see them through this process. You are, and sometimes you are also THE subject matter expert. Identify where your expertise fits into your student's scholarship and apply pressure accordingly. Let me share my own brief experience with this. In my first year at Bowie State University, I've stepped up to assist a graduate student in completing her thesis. Her project makes awesome claims regarding Black authors in the lit world. Here is the thing . . . I ain't took a damn lit class since Fall 2011 (junior year of undergrad). And to be honest, that was only because it was a course requirement. I am very far removed from the lit world. Also, I didn't write a thesis in my master's program. Instead, I did an independent study. So the question may be, "Sooooo, why did you volunteer to help this student?" Well, she also made the choice to

produce a podcast as a major part of her thesis. See where I am going with this? She had the lit knowledge, and I had the digital humanities knowledge. So we were able to work together to produce a pretty dope thesis project that very much so centered her Black lived experience in interacting with American Literature and suggested we make digital humanities more a part of the literature community. But I also think it is worth noting the additional steps I made to support her. As I mentioned, I don't have a lit background, but I got people around me that do. So when it came time for me to find an outside reader for her project, I put out a call to my networks. Luckily I got some awesome people, Michelle McMullin and Keith Gilyard, to join and help my student. Why does this extra tidbit matter? 'Cause you better identify what you don't know when it comes to helping your student as a mentor and finds folks that do know how to help your student. And this ain't just limited at committee work. Consider the people with the resources to help your students: Department Chairs, Financial Aid, Conference Organizers, Outside Subject Matter Experts, and so on. Learn the protocols, policies, and guidelines that your students are going to be up against. Identify the specific PEOPLE your student will be up against—cause there is going to be some people! Learn the people in and out of your field you can pull in. Remember, you and your student do not have to fight the battle with only you two—but I'm sure that has been the case for some people in their experience. My point is, you as a mentor must be willing and ready to identify and select key players who are needed on the home team, even when your student is unable to do so for themselves.

Execute and Revise

You see this part is the easiest part as a mentor, stand the hell back and let your student do their thing. Like fam, you as a mentor can't really execute no plan for the student. You can do both of the steps as mentioned above, but you can't actually be the one to put the actual plan into action. Amplify your student and *let them do their thing*. Be there to catch them and support them when things may not work out and help them understand how to revise their plan. I have plenty of stories on how Dr. Eble helped me revise my approaches to research and advocacy as a grad student, and I've noticed I've taken on the same approach as a mentor to my graduate student. For some, fallin' back ain't gon be so easy 'cause you want your student and their efforts to be successful. But sometimes, you simply gotta let the student take the wheel—you just put on your seatbelt and be ready to give directions. Think of this as a road trip; your student is the driver, you are the front seat passenger, and all the people the both of you have identified as pivotal to the game plan are the folks in the back of the van. You all are going to the same place. You may have some detours, you may even have to leave someone on the side of the road, but you will get to your destination. As the front seat passenger, it is your duty to make sure the driver is at their best. You are to advocate for breaks as needed. You are to ensure that if the student is pulled over, you talk a good game to get everyone out of the ticket—or at least a reduction. Point is, you are an important passenger, but you not the driver. Once you all have accomplished your task, make it your duty to continue to help the student go to the next level in their efforts. Reflect on what you both learned in your initial approaches and consider how your revised approach can help all of your students to come.

So What I Need from Bof of Y'all

Now, either you only read just your part and came here, or you did a complete read of this joint. Either way, I feel you. I would however challenge graduate students to have a read, then revisit this once they are in the role of mentor. You may be surprised just how much you've evolved in your role from student to faculty member/mentor. Ain't but so much training you gone catch to help ease the transition. Yet, your experience as a grad student will set you up to mentor students in ways you may not have imagined. Now if you are a faculty member/mentor and did not read the graduate student portion first or at all, I wish to ask one question, "Why didn't you?" Yea, I know I told you that I broke this into separate pieces for two audiences, but how do you suggest you can mentor a student without first understanding what they may have to face? Oftentimes, we can be so far removed from our role as a student that we do not understand them (graduate students). Or, we have difficulty in understanding the experiences of our students because it has been so long since we have been in their shoes. Trust, I go through this with my undergrads ALL THE TIME—and I'm still in my 20s with them! Positionality is a big thing here people. I promise this is not me shaming you, reader. I am asking you to be more reflective. If someone is saying they will offer steps to my student on how to do something impactful, I need to know the game plan myself so I am able to support it. So go back and read the graduate student section if you haven't already done so.

As I mentioned earlier, if I were to provide you all specific steps on how to do the very thing I am suggesting here, then I feel you run the risk of not presenting your most authentic self. I am a loud person, literally. So my first step is to make noise in various ways. However, what if you are not loud? You are not going to be as effective as I in implementing your Blackess to enact change through your loudness. I am also a Black woman. This provides me insight into the Black experience and an experientially grounded understanding of what my student(s) may face. What if you aren't Black or a woman? You are going to have to do a bit more work and spend more time in that Assess and Reflect Stage as a faculty member/mentor attempting to help your student. The stages I've offered here are only starting points for us to continue conversations about using our Blackness to impact and change the future of higher education. How you choose to implement these stages is up to you as a graduate student or mentor.

Notes

1. This article was composed from an invited talk given at Bowie State University.

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#ForTheCulture" as well. Also, she served as chair of the CCCCs Black Technical and Professional Communication Task Force and is the Associate Editor of the *Peitho* Journal.

Suggested Readings

While I offer this list of suggested readings, I want to also acknowledge the need for additional scholarship composed by graduate students that reflect their lived experiences. The suggested readings I've listed here are geared more to mentors and other individuals in positions of power.

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