

Black Perspectives in Writing Program Administration

FROM THE MARGINS TO THE CENTER



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SWR
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Introduction: Black Matters: Writing Program Administration in Twenty-First-Century Higher Education

Staci M. Perryman-Clark and Collin Lamont Craig

Nearly a century later we confine discussions about race in America to the “problems” black people pose for whites rather than consider what this way of viewing people reveals about us as a Nation.

—Cornel West, *Race Matters*

THE STUDY OF RACE, INCLUDING ITS INTELLECTUAL, theoretical, and methodological aspects, continues to be a hot topic of scholastic inquiry; and the field of rhetoric and composition is no exception. More recently, conversations concerning race have been discussed in writing program administration (WPA) scholarship. These conversations have highlighted how making race visible in our intersecting administrative and curricular practices creates opportunities to both explore and problematize writing program administration as a framework for institutional and disciplinary critique. In 2011, we published “Troubling the Boundaries: (De)Constructing WPA Identities at the Intersections of Race and Gender,” where we called into question the limited representation of faculties and scholars of color in the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA) conferences. Upon the publication of “Troubling the Boundaries,” CWPA as an organization requested feedback from us on how CWPA could be more inclusive. From that conversation, CWPA established a mentoring project to support new WPAs and WPAs of color. As part of the mentoring project, various scholars con-

tributed blog posts responding to some of the issues we addressed in “Troubling the Boundaries.” While we found these early conversations to be quite productive, we knew that CWPA and larger organizations like CCCC would need to embark on calls to action that moved beyond dialogue. We knew that there needed to be a breadth of practical takeaway strategies that could address the complexities of structural racism and enact real change that mattered.

As scholars who engage race in WPA work, we are pleased to see calls to action that engage race and WPA research in scholarship. We are pleased to see the “Symposium: Challenging Whiteness and/in Writing Program Administration and Writing Programs” published in the Spring 2016 *WPA: Writing Program Administration*. In this special issue, the editors frame conversations about race in relation to the “[v]iolence in Ferguson and DC; the creation of #blacklivesmatter; the killings of Trayvon Martin, Tamir Rice, Ramarley Graham, Freddie Gray, Sean Bell, Jonathan Ferrell, Darius Simmons, Ernest Hoskins and Oscar Grant; the deaths of Sandra Bland, Kindra Chapman, Joyce Curnell, Ralkina Jones and Raynette Turner . . .” (1). We also acknowledge the timeliness of this publication. Not long after its appearance in print, two more Black men, Alton Sterling and Philando Castile, were gunned down by police. In fact, the news of Castile’s killing appeared in the media at the very moment when we were drafting this book chapter! Given these current events, there couldn’t be a more kairotic moment to consider how they inform the rhetorical situation of blackness in twenty-first-century higher education.

For us, the work published in “Troubling the Boundaries” and WPA’s “Fall 2016 Symposium” very much shape how we understand the racial macro- and microaggressions we experienced as WPAs and faculty of color. While we’ve shared snippets of our experiences in both our first collaborative article, “Troubling the Boundaries,” and our follow-up article in the “Fall 2016 Symposium,” “Troubling the Boundaries Revisited,” we quickly recognized that we did not have enough space to thoroughly tease out the implications for both allies and WPAs of color who administer writing programs. It was during the revision stages of “Troubling the Boundaries Re-

visited” that we discovered that this work needed a more extensive book project, and so we began brainstorming what such a project might look like.

For us, such a project needs to include additional experiences with racism, navigating institutional constraints, and the challenges to cultivating and sustaining administrative agency that WPAs of color face. We’ve shared a few experiences in our previous publications, but there is much more to tell. For instance, when reflecting on previous publications, Staci needed to omit an experience about being denied summer compensation for WPA work, while a white male colleague in her department self-reported guaranteed summer teaching and a summer stipend for advising undergraduate students over the summer. When Staci confronted administrative leadership, she was told that no one received summer compensation, despite her colleague’s self-reporting, only to later be told by another administrator that the colleague was indeed compensated. For her, race and gender equity intersect, and the implications for exploring that inequity alone warranted another article or chapter. While race and gender intersect in much of Staci’s experiences, the racial implications associated with WPAs of color cannot simply be ignored. Staci needed more than another “model of anti-oppressive and anti-racist . . . work [that] question[s] power relationships in society in producing and reproducing racial and gendered sources of oppression” (Graham 424). While it is useful to consider antioppressive and antiracist work in relation to racial and gender hegemony, such work often subscribes to “a Eurocentric[ity] that fails to understand, recognise or respond to black autonomy” (424). For Staci, this meant considering the precise role of blackness as its own cultural epistemological framework that informs the work she does as WPA in her writing program.

With other experiences, Staci, as the only black woman on specific committees, found herself having to argue continuously for diversity and access for students when embarking on curricular reform efforts including graduate curriculum reform and general education. In both cases, resistance to these efforts did not come from white men alone, but also, and more often, from white wom-

en who could readily champion gender equity, but remained obstinate—or, at best, silent—when Staci raised concerns that applied to students of color. When working on general education curricular reform, while Staci made the case for diversity and inclusion learning outcomes to be embedded in every distribution area, members of the committee, all white and cis-gendered, quickly dismissed her pleas because they found them to be too prescriptive and not feasible for programmatic assessment. As a compromise, because there were no additional allies in the room to support her proposals, Staci had to accept that diversity and inclusion learning outcomes would be those addressed in skills-based courses across disciplines. In other instances on this committee, Staci's credentials would be questioned by white male colleagues when making the case for first-year writing courses to be taught by trained faculty instructors. Referring to CCCC's "Principles for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing," a "go-to" document for WPAs, did her no good. The irony of this experience was that no other colleagues' disciplinary knowledge or credentials were questioned. While one might concede that the mythic notion that anyone could teach writing (Kahn) poses a challenge for any WPA, regardless of subjectivity, the same colleague questioning Staci's credentials further stated that Staci needed checks and balances, a charge that was not made toward any other colleagues on the committee. Such an assumption suggests a conformity to whiteness's status of power, authority, and generation of knowledge when blackness is positioned as a threat to white supremacy as an institutional construct.

During another meeting, on graduate curriculum reform in her English department, debate occurred when colleagues in literary studies argued against a curricular reform that would remove distribution requirements for studying knowledge by literary time period. One particular colleague, white and female, questioned how a student could complete a PhD in English without studying literary periods before the 1600s, periods that have historically and traditionally omitted the experiences of people of color. As a result of this discussion, Staci boldly proclaimed that the current curriculum in use was one of the whitest curricula she had seen: She re-

mind colleagues that those trained in many rhetoric and writing programs often do not take coursework in literary periods, yet are qualified to teach rhetoric and writing courses offered in English departments. She also reminded her colleagues that not all knowledge, especially knowledge generated from Afrocentric study, is investigated chronologically. After a few colleagues were unwilling to abandon literary study by historical periods, Staci boldly asked, “If we really want to think about chronology, why don’t we go all the way back to Africa, the cradle of civilization?” Gasps emerged from colleagues, especially white women. #micdrop!

For Staci, these experiences illustrate racial microaggressions and resistance both from those who shared her gender identity and from those who did not. In our previous two articles, “Troubling the Boundaries,” and “Troubling the Boundaries Revisited,” we address the intersecting identities between race and gender; however, as we have continued reflecting and doing intellectual work, we have also continued to understand specific racial microaggressions associated with our being black that challenge our roles as WPAs and colleagues doing curricular work. Staci has since written about her experiences as a WPA responding to resistance not only from GTAs to her authority, but also from colleagues to the GTAs’ commitment and desire to work on behalf of students of color (“Who We Are[n’t] Assessing”; “Creating a United Front”; “Race, Teaching Assistants, and Student Bullying”). While implications of gender are explored, each of these works examines more critically the implications of those teaching, assessing, and making judgments about what students of color can and cannot do; she has also written about experiences that specifically affect black students who have been referred for intensive first-year writing remediation. Thus we felt a critical need for scholarship that addresses microaggressions for both faculty and WPAs of color and students of color, and furthermore establishes a firm commitment to examine the relationships between our being African American, African American students in higher education, and the current sociopolitical landscape for African Americans in a twenty-first-century context.

After Collin’s first year as a writing professor on the tenure track,

his WPA left to take a job elsewhere. The rumor mill of unchecked racial microaggressions from colleagues and volatile working conditions echoed in the whispers of faculty-lounge gossip regarding the cause of her swift exit. While any new junior faculty member of color might find this troubling, Collin knew that program politics in WPA work were an inevitable part of the job. And so his pretense mantra was: Be collegial, find allies, teach your classes well, and write. In the following year, the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education and Director of Core Studies was assigned as the interim WPA, and the full-time writing faculty divided much of the administrative duties of the program. Collin and his colleagues visited one another's classes, led summer teaching retreats, approved program syllabi for graduate students, and sat on committees that hired contingent faculty. He collaborated with other junior faculty to revise the program learning objectives, volunteered to mentor TAs and part-time writing faculty, and partnered with colleagues to coordinate their annual end-of-year student writing conference. The work of the WPA organically took on a collective identity of faculty in the program. By the spring semester, Collin was also co-coordinating a high school bridge program, a structured mentoring project that partnered high school students with writing professors. He had also recently published in a prominent journal in writing studies and was finally getting his research off the ground. In spite of the recent department drama, he wanted to demonstrate his work ethic and commitment to excelling in his first tenure-track job.

Midsemester, the interim WPA sent an email stating that he wanted to speak with Collin about his progress. Given everything Collin was doing, he welcomed the opportunity. The following day the WPA visited Collin's office. The exchange went something like this: "So how are things?" the WPA asked. Collin thought to invite him to sit. But this was looking to be a quick chat. He spoke about some of the administrative work he was doing for the program. Feeling inspired that he had found a sense of belonging in his new position and was actively contributing, he mentioned his work to revise the program learning objectives, and remarked on the success and high student participation of the recent annual student writing

conference, an event that he volunteered to help organize in coming years. “That’s good,” the WPA responded, still standing in the doorway, arms folded and with a tone that seemed to contradict what was meant to be an affirmation, “but you should give other faculty a chance to coordinate the event.” His nonchalant dismissal was quick and indicative that this was not going to be a congratulatory visit.

In a strange line of questioning that followed, the WPA would go on to ask why Collin was missing faculty meetings. Collin reminded him of the research project he was launching. He reminded the WPA of their previous discussions about how it would conflict with the monthly faculty meeting schedule. Before taking on this project, he sought department and university approval because of this time conflict. He reminded the interim WPA of this granted approval to miss meetings, an approval that he had secured from the dean, and clarified his commitment to service responsibilities, just for good measure. But none of this seemed to pacify his director or sway what now seemed like an intent to put Collin in his place. His WPA then suggested that there were some “inconsistencies” on Collin’s curriculum vitae that he recently included as a supporting document with the annual faculty report to the university, an accusation that turned out to be false, and a document the WPA could only have accessed using unethical measures. “You should be careful when getting those documents together,” he said in warning. “You should let me help you next time.” These interrogations were rapid and infantilizing. But more critically, they implied that not only was Collin not fulfilling his responsibilities as a faculty member but that his academic integrity was also in question.

As this WPA stood halfway in Collin’s office, dealing out one criticism after another, his whiteness had eventually become apparent. It was a moment where Collin’s simmering racial paranoia had faced a prophetic truth that one day he would no longer be safe in spite of all of his efforts and mantras to maintain safety. You see, Collin had crafted a manicured version of his black self for these kinds of situations. This curated self: careful and readymade to diffuse any existential dangers when interacting with white folks in

positions of power. It is the portable identity that one takes to conferences and to campus-wide teaching workshops and university-wide committees where we are leveraged by the university for our *de facto* diversity perspective. It is your psychic armor when you know that showing out or “keepin’ it real” won’t keep yo’ black self a job at a predominately white institution. Collin had mentally rehearsed these kinds of interactions over and over when he prepared for campus job talks. He knew the unbreakable smile he would give to the racially insensitive question. He knew the defusing words he would offer in response to the microaggression hurled at him that masqueraded as intellectual curiosity about his research during Q&A sessions. These are African American vernacular strategies of survival that are grounded in black epistemologies; they are “ways that African Americans come to know and act in response to their environments” (Richardson 34–35). They are taxonomies of verbal and nonverbal practices by which black folk achieve agency, or, put another way, how we make a way outta no way; or, put another way, strategic interjections into the ivory tower so that we can survive and do our work.

Collin recollected the stories he had read of black folk who had come to realize when subject position meant everything as they navigated their departments and disciplines. Jacqueline Jones Royster calls these the moments “when we are compelled to respond to a rendering of our potential that demands, not that we account for attitudes, actions, and conditions, but that we defend ourselves as human beings” (31). But even more, they are moments when subject position teaches those living in vulnerable bodies about abjection and surveillance. These moments are the complementary folklore to the clichéd narrative of black suffering. Collin despised this narrative for the prophetic truth that it always told. And now, while sharing his office with what he had realized to be a bullying white male writing program director, he had become the cliché (Als 137). Were there other black faculty whom he had spoken to this way? Other pretenured arrogant Negroes who had gotten out of line and needed a quick serving of managerial correction? There

usually are. These interactions are rhetorical in how they produce a kind of tragic black existential reality. It is a reality that illuminates how white male administrative subjectivity as a regulative project of institutional whiteness reifies the status of the black subject as subalterned. More broadly, it is a reality that illuminates how institutional whiteness legislates the conditions of legibility and positionality for black bodies, black labor, and black intellectual work in a university writing program.

Understood through an African American rhetorical framework, this WPA's line of interrogation of Collin's work progress and academic credentials meant that on any given day his job and, by extension, his world could be drastically altered by how this WPA chose to see him. And this man's subject position as white male administrator at a predominately white institution made it so. The audacity and prevailing norm of white men as administrators that served as the backdrop at our Catholic institution made it so. When whiteness exists as the institutional and administrative norm it also functions as a floating signifier that regulates disciplinary and department discourses and permits these kinds of bullying to go unchecked. And as a consequence of this norm, gendered administrative whiteness is always and already centered as precursory to any racial paranoia black faculty may experience: the paranoia of being watched, losing one's job, having one's credentials scrutinized, or being subjugated to a range of interrogations and unchecked microaggressions. Collin imagined the swift exit of that black sista WPA after his first year on the tenure track. He wondered if she had performed a readymade version of her black self before she decided to pack up and leave.

There are some meaningful conclusions one might draw from this interaction. At best, it demonstrated an occasion for how we might use African American centered frameworks to interpret and theorize ways that race matters in our relations with institutional administrators. It reveals that WPA discourse, as an amalgamation of experiences, bodies, labor, policies, rules, departments, and documents, is always and already race work. And for black faculty

engaging with WPA work, there are a myriad of categories that we must factor into this labor. As editors of this collection, we have realized a few: Comporting blackness to minimize white anxiety is race work. Deciding how one chooses to be visible on campus is race work. Deciding whether or not to apply for positions after combing department websites looking for black faculty is race work. What we decide to teach is race work. How we dress is race work. Achieving legibility in front of panoptic white administrative gazes is race work. Coddling white fragility is race work. Our decision to smile or not in weekly faculty meetings is race work. How we respond to microaggressions is race work. How we empathize with white liberal guilt is race work. How we succeed and fail as administrators is race work. And born out of our efforts to perform this labor are the dissonances that come with the daily struggles of having to choose: Between leaving and staying at our jobs to support the faculty and graduate students of color that lean on us for support, mentoring, and the courses that we teach. Between the lie of diversity initiatives and the truth of gatekeeping hiring and curricular practices. Between black silence and white faculty murmurings as to why we never come to department parties or retreats. Between talking too little and talking too much.

These realities have greater consequences as we experience an unprecedented historical moment in our public discourse where political campaigns are won on xenophobic rhetoric, draconian measures to regulate our Muslim communities, and presidential talking points that equate the agendas of white supremacists and those of social justice activists—all practices that demonstrate a commitment to reaffirming racist power asymmetries that work to regulate vulnerable bodies of color. We are in a moment in which racism and racist logics are no longer sanitized in coded language or veiled by political rhetoric. And we must ask how these rhetorical projects bleed into our institutional practices, are coded into our administrative agendas, and are reflected in our programmatic objectives and interpersonal relations. When white heterosexual men misuse their administrative power while living in bodies that are always already raced and gendered citations of historically and po-

litically maintained power asymmetries endemic of the ivory tower, we must ask how race and racism are circulating in our writing programs. We must consider how the policing of black bodies, black labor, and black intellectual work in our writing programs functions as citations of larger political projects to disenfranchise historically vulnerable and marginalized groups. Centering WPA discourse as intersectional critical race work is an opportunity for exploring these subjects of inquiry as critical interventions. It positions us to cultivate antiracist responses from the perspective of those of color (not simply as Eurocentric appropriations), and enact socially responsible approaches to program building. It positions us to build allies and create rhetorical situations for students and faculty to imagine rhetorics that speak truth to oppressive and divisive ideologies within and beyond the ivory tower, and more specifically within our writing programs.

Thus, we begin our call by responding to Staci's call to her colleagues that we "go all the way back to Africa." For us, Africa is a metaphor for locating the root of black thought in US writing programs, one that enables us to thoroughly explore an evolution of racism, microaggressions, and success in twenty-first-century higher education. In response to the additional microaggressive experiences we share here, we approach this book with the hope that we might move from sharing of microaggressions toward sharing of successes by black WPAs and WPAs whose work represents a strong commitment to students of color, and, in our case, black students; and toward fostering stronger alliance building among white allies in our field. It is through this progression of rhetorical moves that we not only seek to better understand our own work and its implications for black WPAs and WPAs of color, but also and more important that we have concrete and specific models for taking action to confront and resist racist microaggressions. For us, the shift from racialized experiences toward alliance building and allyship comes at a critical, historical moment, where the lives and embodiments of black perspectives in higher education must be carefully examined.

WHY BLACKNESS MATTERS: WHY NOW

As editors of this collection, we also wish to emphasize the timeliness of moving from broader studies of whiteness and race to the study of blackness in relation to WPA work in higher education. One of the reasons we advocate this shift to blackness as part of the narrative and research we do with race in higher education is the shifting population of students who enroll in our postsecondary institutions, and, in effect, in our campus writing programs. Given the current landscape in the United States, black women are one of the fastest-growing groups enrolling in postsecondary programs. A 2014 study confirmed that black women currently lead all racial and gender groups when it comes to higher education enrollment (Danielle par. 2). Another study confirmed: “For the first time in the history of data collection by the National Center of Education Statistics as reported by the US Census, Black women have surpassed every other group in this country based upon race and gender” (“Black Women” par. 1). In addition, Howard Professor Ivory Toldson has found a “sharp spike in college enrollment among Black men” (“Nine Biggest Lies about Black Males”). In contrast, a more recent *Forbes* study revealed that college enrollment among white males has been on a consistent decline (CCAP). In short, given the fact that racial demographics are changing in higher education, the shape of such conversations on race must also shift. We see a focus on blackness in WPA work as one of many opportunities to address these shifting demographics.

In the wake of xenophobic rhetoric in politics, trends of police brutality, and the reawakening of public discourse on race, current and historical events surrounding the state of blackness in the United States also require us to pay close attention to the relationship between these events and the work we do within our institutions. In this chapter, we previously cited the *WPA: Writing Program Administration* editors’ references to current events related to the violence in Ferguson and Washington, DC. The editors write:

The violence in Ferguson and DC; the creation of #blacklives-matter; the killings of Trayvon Martin, Tamir Rice, Ramarley Graham, Freddie Gray, Sean Bell, Jonathan Ferrell, Darius

Simmons, Ernest Hoskins and Oscar Grant; the deaths of Sandra Bland, Kindra Chapman, Joyce Curnell, Ralkina Jones and Raynette Turner while in police custody brought national attention to the realities of majority minority citizens in this country. We call out these names to remind us that many of us are able to turn our heads and close the doors, as our privilege allows, to these injustices. All too often we forget the names of these individuals because our communities, our cultures, our families, and our homes are not subject to the violence of racial intolerance. (1)

Current events surrounding violence in relation to black citizens in the United States have hit even closer to home. In 2014, both NCTE and CCCC condemned the violence and police brutality inflicted on one of our own CCCC members and long-time members of the NCTE/CCCC Black Caucus, Ersula Ore, an assistant professor at Arizona State University. Their letter to Arizona State University Provost Page and President Crow, signed by past NCTE President Ernest Morrell and CCCC chair Adam Banks states:

If there is any institution we should be able to count on to advance the ideal that all people are equal, that all people should feel safe in the pursuit of learning, it is the university. However, the treatment of Dr. Ore by university police, vociferously supported by President Crow's statement of support, undermines our confidence in Arizona State University's commitment to basic equality and leaves us questioning whether ASU is in any way serious about its often expressed commitments to diversity. (par. 1)

While the letter does not directly mention blackness or black bodies, it is important to emphasize this racial profiling and police brutality inflicted on Dr. Ore, a black female body, which functions as a system of police brutality and state sanctioned violence inflicted upon black male and female bodies. It also goes without notice that this letter was signed by past NCTE and CCCC leaders, both of whom represent the presence of black bodies in higher education and disciplinary organizations.

In addition to NCTE and CCCC's statement in support of Dr. Ore, the NCTE/CCCC Black Caucus also published a statement affirming #blacklivesmatter in 2015. In the first paragraphs of this statement, leaders of the Black Caucus acknowledge the timeliness and necessity for literacy and writing educators to affirm #blacklivesmatter in their call to action: "At this pivotal moment, between a space of hopeful resistance and fragile defiance, the dilemmas of race and racism in the United States have become so copious that to ignore them would be to render NCTE voiceless and bequeath it to those great chasms of silence through which racial injustices endure" (par. 1). What is also important to note is that this statement specifically signals blackness and schooling in relation to the criminal justice system in the United States:

The picture of US racism begins with our children (though it does not end with them). While they comprise 18 percent of the preschool population, Black children represent over 50 percent of all out-of-preschool suspensions. A recent analysis by researchers at Villanova University concluded that in addition to racial bias, Black girls face colorism: darker skin tone significantly raised Black girls' odds of being put out of school. To this point, we now know that Black girls are six times more likely to be suspended than White girls, just as Black boys are imprisoned at six times the rate of their White counterparts. Moreover, Black children are 18 times more likely to be sentenced as adults than White children, and make up nearly 60 percent of children in prison. While we could cite hundreds of comparable statistics, the evidence is unambiguous—racial inequities in the US prevail from the cradle to the grave. (par. 3)

For us, the final paragraph of the NCTE statement affirming #blacklivesmatter sums up the reason we choose to emphasize the relationship between blackness and the work we do in higher education: Because black lives do matter and the time is now for organizations including NCTE, CCCC, and CWPA to work together

to affirm black lives as they promote racial equality and eliminate injustice within and beyond our organizations and institutions of higher education:

Recognition of structures of racial hatred sits at the center of our conviction as an organization. This statement seeks to affirm what should be obvious: Black lives matter. As an educational organization committed to equity and educational justice, promoting literacy and human life, we take seriously our obligation to ensure racial justice. Therefore, we remain resolute in our mission to use and produce knowledge that is essential to eliminating racism in the US and beyond. (par. 8)

As one example of this affirmation, we offer the CCCC 2016 revised Statement on Ebonics, where the relationships among black identity, language, and lives are firmly established and recognized. In their revised version of this statement, authors from the CCCC Language Policy Committee write: “Ebonics reflects the Black experience and conveys Black traditions and socially real truths. Black Languages are crucial to Black identity. Black Language sayings, such as ‘What goes around comes around,’ are crucial to Black ways of being in the world. Black Languages, like Black lives, matter” (par. 13). We couldn’t agree more; engaging blackness and its implications for the work we do in campus writing programs occurs at a precise kairotic moment that counters the assault on black lives and black intellectualism in the United States.

Additionally, we acknowledge and affirm larger-scale projects in relation to how we see and understand the importance of black lives in our discipline. However, we also recognize that more work needs to be done at specific, yet varying, locations and institutional sites. What is also missing from much of this previous disciplinary work is the ways in which individual and racialized narratives affect issues in writing program administration differently. In essence, we believe that the discipline must now direct its attention beyond macrodisciplinary experiences, as we venture into the weeds in search for experiences and narratives that are less familiar to readers, nar-

ratives that position black experiences more directly in relation to WPA work. Thus, we seek to share those experiences that are less commonly familiar.

In relation to the role of black lives in higher education, we further assert that the time is now to signal attention directly to higher education, with organizations such as NCTE, CCCC, and CWPA serving as guides, for what we want literacy and writing education to look like in twenty-first-century higher education. Organizations such as these can provide leading voices on the value of black lives, black language, and African-centered practices in campus writing programs. However, it is also critical to acknowledge the limited scope of attention to African-centered practices in WPA scholarship. While Collin and I have previously argued that “within the field of composition and rhetoric, identity politics as a trope has been central when charting the terrain of discourse power relations between dominant and minority representations” (“Troubling” 40), African Americans have made specific—yet often untapped—contributions to WPA work. In addition to the works offered in both “Troubling the Boundaries” and “Troubling the Boundaries Revisited,” Barbara L’Eplattenier and Lisa Mastrangelo’s collection, *Historical Studies of Writing Program Administration Individuals, Communities, and the Formation of a Discipline*, does highlight a couple of contributions from African Americans. Of the HBCU writing program experience, while Deany Cheramie writes that HBCUs were committed to educating African American students during the early twentieth century, she also contends that an HBCU like Xavier University in Louisiana, which she profiles, was “not capable of supporting a writing program administrator during the first five decades of its existence” (146). Moreover, while Cheramie describes the complicated history of this support as grounded within a historical and geopolitical climate designed around racism, narratives such as these position HBCU writing programs from the perspective of deficit in their ability to offer support and therefore contribute significantly to WPA narratives and histories of the field. In fact, as Sherri Craig has also observed of Cheramie’s account, “An historical examination of the HBCU Xavier University

of Louisiana by Deany Cheramie reveals no evidence of a person of color administering the program in the first fifty years of the university's existence" (17). Therefore, the black perspective as it relates to WPA leadership is excluded from this account.

Collie Fulford's discussion of HBCUs in her essay "Hit the Ground Listening: An Ethnographic Approach to New WPA Learning" similarly identifies challenges and assumptions about HBCU support for writing programs. In that essay, she describes her experiences of trying to make too-abrupt changes while directing an HBCU writing program as a new WPA, explaining that she had not read previous studies of white WPAs at HBCUs who had also tried to make changes too abruptly (161). While Fulford attributes her understandings of ethnographic research to her ability to learn from HBCU faculty when contributing to and revising a writing program, her discussion centers more on what she learned from ethnographic methods than it does on her position as a white body navigating and making decisions about how her policies and practices represent black perspectives and bodies.

Craig has called attention to the absence of both African American and HBCU experiences in WPA narratives not only with her critique of Cheramie's recollection of WPA work at Xavier University, but also of the exclusion of WPA narratives more broadly. She writes:

To address this false assumption of ownership, writing program administration scholarship and the CWPA organization must collect more narratives that link the individual experience of WPAs of color to the social collective and internal conversations that help validate the long-established use of storytelling in defining and decoding WPA work. Overall, the absence of people of color in the field's common histories, whether intentional or not, silently and systematically reaffirms the marginality of non-white, unprivileged narratives. (17)

Of black perspectives, Craig further expresses the need for the field to understand the ways in which young black professionals

like her share their own stories in relation to WPA work. With reference to Jacqueline Jones Royster and Jean C. Williams's essay, "History in the Spaces Left," she demands that the field "resist dominant narratives by offering a fully developed discussion of Blacks in composition studies," while also "counter[ing] mythologies" about the experiences of blackness shared in WPA scholarship. In order to counter mythologies, Craig asserts a need for (1) acknowledging the fact that the presence of blackness in WPA scholarship is "typically disregarded," and that (2) including the black experience changes the history of rhetoric and composition (18). In short, providing an accurate account and history of WPA work and rhetoric and composition requires that the field include the histories and perspectives of people of African descent in its account of WPA work.

As for us, we seek to find those experiences that focus primarily on black people as racialized bodies in relation to writing program administration scholarship, scholarship that is less frequently explored in comparison to other narratives and perspectives on blackness in writing studies. As a result, we propose to position blackness and black bodies as a focus in the work that teachers and scholars do in writing program administration at specific sites and campus locations. We aim to frame the black body as both a political and a theoretical project. In doing so, we move from the obscuring of such narratives toward more visible opportunities for inclusion in composition. Additionally, we seek to situate the black perspective as intersectional and as providing a nuanced exploration of writing program administration that brings the unique experiences of black faculty, students, scholarship, and administrative work from margin to center. While it is distinct from conversations on race more broadly, we situate our focus on blackness as part of the tradition of research and scholarship surrounding race in higher education. In other words, we offer a focus on blackness as one part of the racial narrative of scholarship in WPA work. Blackness offers an illuminating part of the racial narrative that seeks to unblur confluences of race, whiteness, and privilege by affirming and acknowledging the intricacies that surround the work of black bodies and students who work within our postsecondary writing programs.

SHIFTING TO SPECIFIC LOCATIONS FOR
BLACKNESS IN WRITING PROGRAM

ADMINISTRATION: AN AFROCENTRIC APPROACH

We believe that an Afrocentric approach to understanding the shift from macro-approaches to black contributions and intellectual work in disciplinary statements toward more concrete experiences at specific institutional sites is necessary. Therefore, we position an Afrocentric theoretical framework as a focus for understanding the work of black WPAs, the impacts of WPA work on black lives, and the fostering of alliances across institutional and disciplinary contexts. When defining Afrocentric theories of education, Jacqueline Jordan Irvine writes that most scholars “agree that an Afrocentric curriculum [includes] a systematic study of the multidimensional aspects of black thought and practice centered around the contributions and heritage of people of African descent” (“Afrocentric Education” 201). In *Afrocentric Teacher-Research: Rethinking Appropriateness and Inclusion*, Staci M. Perryman-Clark further argues that Afrocentric education is “grounded in worldviews employing educational practices that are culturally situated within the interests of the people of the African Diaspora, regardless of institutional or organizational infrastructures” (9). With reference to the ways in which the African worldview has been taken up in rhetoric and composition scholarship, Elaine Richardson clarifies that such a worldview refers to “the knowledge that Black folks have about how to negotiate Blackness in everyday situations” (*African American Literacies* 27).

It is from this perspective and worldview that we consider Afrocentricity as the foundation for understanding black perspectives and contributions to WPA work. We intentionally apply “multidimensional understandings of black thought and practice” with the contributions we feature in this collection. By multidimensional, we mean the inclusion of experiences of black WPAs working at both Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) to show that while WPAs at both sites are committed to inclusive practices that support students of the African Diaspora, the institutional contexts for

taking up that work have very different consequences and implications. Other contributions in this book speak more concretely to pedagogical practices and programmatic policies that are sensitive to the specific interests of black student writers who enroll in our writing courses and programs. For example, such practices include how we assess black students' writing and how we design programmatic outcomes that seek to overcome implicit and explicit biases for black students. Other practices include the types of assignments we design so that black students are permitted to apply their shared collective worldviews to how they see the world and how they communicate within the world. It is an Afrocentric framework, then, that enables us to see existing WPA narratives through a different lens that positions the African worldview as a direct focus, more specifically than previous narratives that view race more broadly.

In laying this foundation, we moreover and explicitly assert that Afrocentric theory does not suggest a separatist discourse that is irrelevant to the lives of those who are not black. In fact, quite the contrary: Countless sources of rhetoric and composition research and scholarship consistently show that Afrocentric theory and pedagogy benefit all students (Richardson; Perryman-Clark, *Afrocentric*; Holmes; Ampadu), and there is certainly no reason that it might not also benefit all of those charged with doing WPA work. More recently, scholars including Arnetha Ball and Ted Lardner and Perryman-Clark have called for specific professional development opportunities concerning Afrocentric teaching and African-centered language pedagogy, and have targeted this call directly at WPAs. Perryman-Clark directly argues that "(1) Afrocentric and language rights pedagogies serve as appropriate occasions for scholarly exploration and teacher training in a writing program and that (2) Afrocentric and language rights pedagogies be included in the general mission and design of writing program curricula" (*Afrocentric* 118–19).

It is from these perspectives, then, that contributors to this collection seek to respond to these calls. Contributors in our collection examine the relationship between issues that focus directly on community members of African descent and the administration of

college and university writing programs. This collection centers on conversations surrounding the work of black scholars, teachers, and students because (1) black scholars are significantly underrepresented as writing program administrators (Craig and Perryman-Clark, “Troubling the Boundaries”), (2) the assessment of black students’ work in relation to programmatic placement and outcomes is rarely included as a focus of writing assessment work (Inoue and Poe; Inoue; Perryman-Clark, “Who We Are(n)’t Assessing”), and (3) limited attention has been paid to the relationship between writing program policies and their direct effects on black students.

Previous work in rhetoric and composition has uncovered the benefits for all students when including Afrocentric, African American-centered, and black-designated pedagogies in our programs (Richardson and Gilyard; Richardson; Perryman-Clark, *Afrocentric*). Additional works call for the need to consider Afrocentric pedagogy in relation to speakers of African American Vernacular English (AAVE)/African American Language (AAL) more directly in writing program administration (Ball and Lardner; Perryman-Clark, *Afrocentric*). Ball and Lardner state:

A message to those at the writing program administration level . . . calls for the policies and program development that support these activities. We believe writing program administrators will improve educational opportunities of AAVE-speaking students (and all students) by seeking to improve teacher efficacy by initiating and supporting collaborations within and across writing program and institutional boundaries, and by situating efforts aimed at broadening teachers’ knowledge of AAVE-related pedagogical issues within collaborative staff-development activities. (177)

Despite this call, limited work has taken up the benefits of Afrocentric pedagogy and African American language in writing program administration. Furthermore, as with Afrocentricity, limited attention has been paid exclusively to blackness at all in WPA scholarship. This collection, then, seeks to shift the focus from race more broadly toward perspectives on blackness in writing program administration.

BOOK ORGANIZATION

The remaining chapters of this book apply Afrocentric approaches to various aspects of WPA work. In Chapter 2, “Administering while Black: Black Women’s Labor in the Academy and the ‘Position of the Unthought,’” Carmen Kynard recounts experiences with racial microaggressions in relation to antiblack institutional practices. Previously, Perryman-Clark has argued that WPA work by blacks is especially complicated for those who advocate for racial equality, linguistic diversity, and antiracist assessment practices “because doing social justice work on behalf of students poses great risks for the WPA of color’s career” (“Who We Are(n’t) Assessing” 209). Given the complexities associated with social justice work and the subject positions of those doing this work, we appreciate the insights that Kynard contributes to this collection.

Because positioning black perspectives is a central focus for how we understand writing program administration, we include a direct emphasis on HBCU writing programs. We believe these programs are optimal sites for understanding the contributions of both black WPAs and black students in campus writing programs. In Chapter 3, “A Seat at the Table: Reflections on Writing Studies and HBCU Writing Programs,” David F. Green Jr. discusses implications for black WPAs who work at HBCUs. Given the significant role that HBCUs play in shaping how black students succeed, we would be remiss as a field if we did not move their narratives from the margins to the center. In an era when we as public intellectuals are charged with making the case that black lives matter, we must affirm and acknowledge that HBCU pedagogical narratives matter too! In addition to the HBCU experience. In order to emphasize the benefits of Afrocentric work for all students—and, in essence, all WPAs regardless of subject position—we also call on allies to help foster alliances with WPAs of color, especially black WPAs, who administer postsecondary writing programs. In Chapter 4, “Forfeiting Privilege for the Cause of Social Justice: Listening to Black WPAs and WPAs of Color Define the Work of White Allyship,” Scott Wible extends the conversation to WPA allies who speak to the necessity of moving black WPA perspectives from the margins to the center.

We also offer a theoretical framework for success with black students. In Chapter 5, “Black Student Success Models: Institutional Profiles of Writing Programs,” we use the CWPA Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing as a lens for providing a few principles for the success of African American students in first-year writing programs, something that we argue that CWPA has overlooked. In addition to offering theoretical principles, we use examples of programmatic models from both HBCU and PWI institutions that have employed successful pedagogies with respect to black students. These programmatic models, then, offer tools for WPAs who want to model success at their own program sites.

Speaking of tools, as editors, we conclude this collection by sharing reflections and insights on what WPA looks like when we frame it from an Afrocentric perspective. In Chapter 6, “Reflective Moments: Showcasing University Writing Program Models for Black Student Success,” Alexandria Lockett, Shawanda Stewart, Brian Stone, Adrienne Redding, Jonathan Bush, Jeanne LaHaie, Staci, and Collin reflect on the curricular work we have done at both HBCUs and PWIs in support of black student success, building from the framework offered in Chapter 5. By reflecting on the work with student success at our institutional sites, we identify key takeaways for WPA work that pertain to black labor, curriculum development, and power and authority. While reflecting on this work, we also want to provide key tools and pedagogical examples of how our work may benefit black students. As a result, we include electronic profiles from these programmatic profiles at black-perspectives-in-WPA-resources.ncte.org, where we offer curricular materials from these program profiles that affirm black contributions. These curricula include narrative descriptions of writing programs, sample syllabi, sample assignments, and assessment tools aimed to promote student success. Two specific HBCU programs, those at Spelman College and at Huston-Tillotson University, design Afrocentric cultural and linguistic materials to enhance student learning in their writing programs. These materials were also prepared by Alexandria Lockett, of Spelman College, and Shawanda J. Stewart and Brian Stone, of Huston-Tillotson University.

With regard to PWI institutions, we showcase Western Michigan University's ENGL 1050 Intensive (ENGL 1050I) Program. ENGL 1050I is a first-year writing initiative designed to provide students in danger of failing their first-year writing course with a second opportunity to succeed. Two-thirds of the students enrolled in ENGL 1050I are racial minority students, many of whom come from the Detroit Public Schools, a predominantly black school district. In sum, taken together—considering both the work within our print-based collection and the contributions from our electronic resources—we hope that you will come to appreciate these contributions as much as we do, as we aim for the discipline to engage black perspectives on writing program administration with direct emphasis.

In sum, we invite readers to position blackness at the center of the fight against oppressive and racist institutional practices. And we specifically call on allies to assist in this fight. It is our sincerest hope that readers will be equipped with a few tools to resist oppression in university writing programs in the twenty-first century.

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This volume then on fleek cuz it straight presentin what ahm calling this blended wokeness—protest and humanity, racialized pedagogical experiences, . . . and the possibilities for racial empathy.

– Vershawn Ashanti Young, *University of Waterloo, from the Introduction*

Black Perspectives in Writing Program Administration is a powerful and moving argument for genuinely recognizing how black bodies are racialized—rendered invisible, disrespected, and marginalized in their labor—in postsecondary writing programs. What's more, Perryman-Clark and Craig, with their contributing authors, critically explore and reflect on what it means to practice WPA curricular, assessment, and other educational work informed by an Afrocentric perspective. A theoretical as well as a pragmatic work, this book is essential reading for those who wish to challenge the racial underpinnings of writing program administration.

– Haivan V. Hoang, *University of Massachusetts-Amherst*

This collection centers writing program administration (WPA) discourse as intersectional race work. In this historical moment in public discourse when race and racist logics are no longer sanitized in coded language or veiled political rhetoric, contributors provide examples of how WPA scholars can push back against the ways in which larger, cultural rhetorical projects inform our institutional practices, are coded into administrative agendas, and are reflected in programmatic objectives and interpersonal relations. Editors Staci M. Perryman-Clark and Collin Lamont Craig have made a space for WPAs of color to cultivate antiracist responses within an Afrocentric framework and to enact socially responsible approaches to program building. This framework also positions WPAs of color to build relationships with allies and create contexts for students and faculty to imagine rhetorics that speak truth to oppressive and divisive ideologies within and beyond the academy, but especially within writing programs. Contributors share not just experiences of racist microaggressions, but also the successes of black WPAs and WPAs whose work represents a strong commitment to students of color. Together they work to foster stronger alliance building among white allies in the discipline, and, most importantly, to develop concrete, specific models for taking action to confront and resist racist microaggressions. As a whole, this collection works to shift the focus from race more broadly toward perspectives on blackness in writing program administration.

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