



DIALOGUE

*The Interdisciplinary Journal of
Popular Culture and Pedagogy*



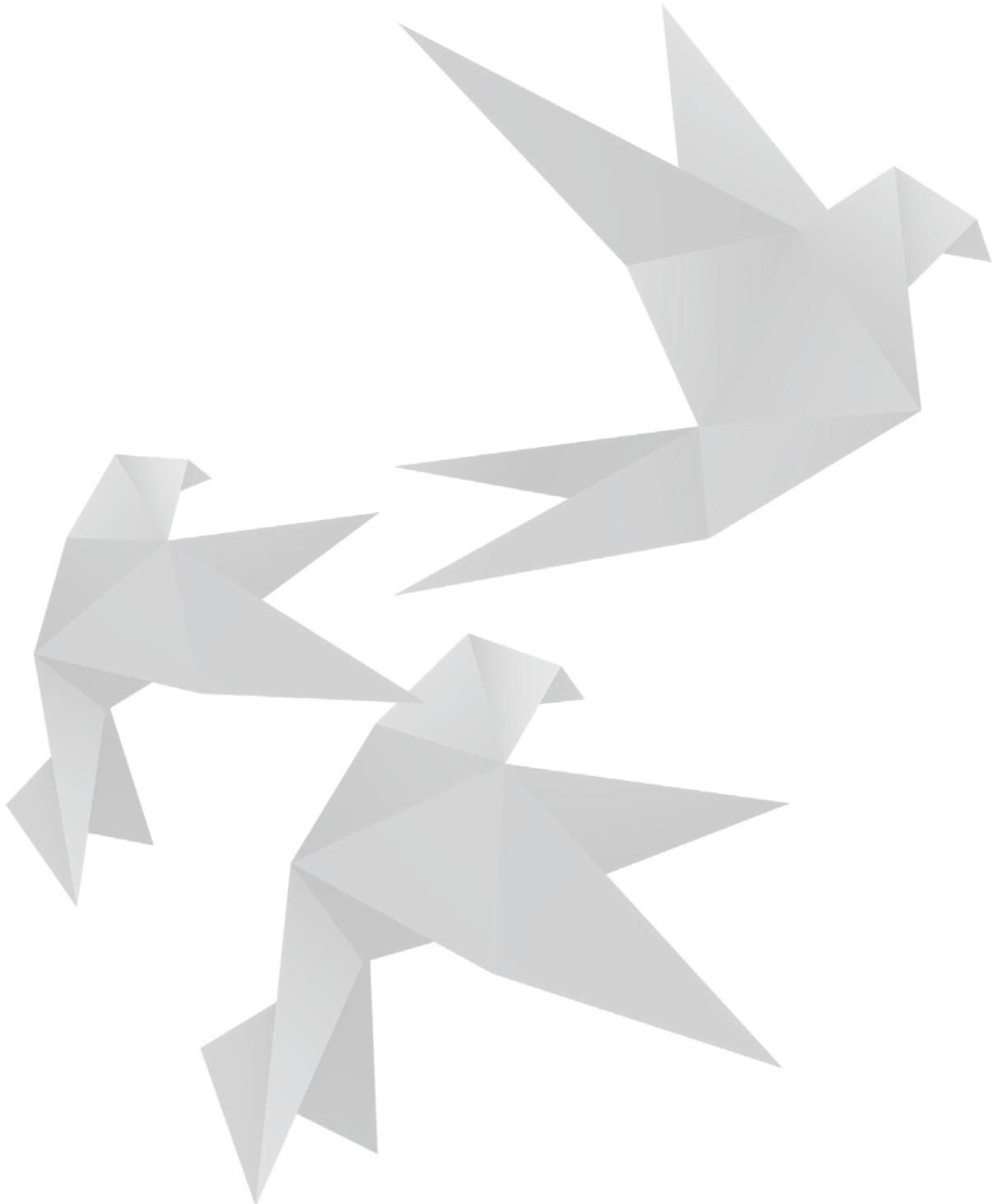
Engaged Popular Culture and Pedagogy: Awareness, Understanding and Social Justice

Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy
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INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE

Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy is an open-access, peer-reviewed journal focused on the intersection of popular culture and pedagogy. *Dialogue* is committed to creating and maintaining a scholarly journal accessible to all—meaning that there is no charge for either the author or the reader.

The Journal is interested in contributions offering theoretical, practical, pedagogical, and historical examinations of popular culture, including interdisciplinary discussions and those which examine the connections between American and international cultures. In addition to analyses provided by contributed articles, the Journal also encourages submissions for guest editions, interviews, and reviews of books, films, conferences, music, and technology.

For more information, please visit www.journaldialogue.org or email Dr. Anna CohenMiller, Editor in Chief, at editors@journaldialogue.org.



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Can popular culture speak to issues of equity in educational spaces?

We realize the importance of our voices only when we are silenced.

– Malala Yousafzai

#MeToo	<i>Undulating in murky waters. Treading. Looking for footing, for guidance, for air.</i>
#inclusion	<i>Holding space for inspiration.</i>
#frontlineworkers	
#fear	It's July 2020. Globally, we're facing a pandemic, and systemic racial and gender-based violence. <i>Holding space for action.</i>
#COVID	
#hope	
#BlackLivesMatter	The <i>privilege</i> of skin tone.
#change	Of language.
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#together	Unsubstantiated differences separating and <i>allowing</i> some to succeed easily while others suffer. <i>Holding space for hope.</i>
#onlinelearning	
#representation	
#equity	<i>Undulating in murky waters. Treading. Looking for footing, for guidance, for air.</i>
#together	<i>Holding space for change.</i>

holding space (CohenMiller, 2020)

We've started this editorial with a quote by Malala Yousafzai, the Nobel Peace prize winner, who was shot by the Taliban in Pakistan for encouraging girls to get an education. She was 15 years old at the time. Her educational work, like that of others working as activists, can be seen through the lenses of popular culture and social media (Berents, 2016). While geographically distant for many of our readers, her quote loudly echoes injustices faced worldwide.

These are touched upon in the poem above, as well as by the hashtags reverberating internationally of #MeToo, of #BlackLivesMatter, of #SayHerName, all amidst #COVID and #onlinelearning. The work speaks to the privilege experienced daily that affects all aspects of our lives, allowing some to thrive while others fight against inequality and violence that must be faced. In the classroom, educators seek to find inclusive ways to engage the diversity of students enrolled, striving to adopt new methods, tools, and pedagogies in the rapid transition to online environments.

Soon after the pandemic started, the US became immersed in a highly profound set of racial violence that set off protests and the advocacy to change the nature of law enforcement and the ways our communities work. Black communities and individuals were suddenly facing not only COVID-19 but also heightened violence, pressure, and valid fears. In “holding space” (CohenMiller, 2020), we can be reminded of bell hooks’ (2003) work and a focus on hope:

It is my deep belief that in talking about the past, in understanding the things that have happened to us we can heal and go forward. Some people believe that it is best to put the past behind you, to never speak about the events that have happened that have hurt or wounded us, and this is their way of coping — but coping is not healing. By confronting the past without shame we are free of its hold on us. (p. 119)

Thus, in moving towards hope, our vision for this special issue of *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy* is reflected in the cover image of multicolored origami birds extending their wings and flying piecemeal higher into the sky. The birds are a metaphor for the variegated nature of the important issues of our time externally, and internally—a way to view the multifaceted nature of our pedagogical practices and our efforts to expand and move our awareness and abilities while working towards a more socially-just society.

So, what does this mean for this issue of *Dialogue*? Can popular culture speak to issues of equity in educational spaces? Over the years, *Dialogue* has highlighted work that critically examines popular culture and education with a focus on social justice (see Antuna et al., 2018; Church, 2019; Cragin, 2018; Harmon & Henkin, 2016; Propper, 2017; Rank, 2019; Spencer, 2018; Tinajero, 2020). In this special issue, *Engaged Popular Culture and Pedagogy: Awareness, Understanding and Social Justice*, 12 authors have taken the call and shared their insights, providing practical steps through the use of popular culture to improve teaching and learning in informal and formal spaces.

These articles address how popular culture can be used to understand and to teach about the contemporary world as well as highlight practical, innovative, and theoretical ways to reinterpret and create a better conceptualization of political, environmental and social climates. So, we say yes. Popular culture can indeed address issues of equity in educational spaces. Working hand-in-hand with SWPACA, we are committed to advancing social and racial justice taking active steps to foreground the voices of those historically marginalized, in particular Black, Indigenous, and people of color.

As such, we have invited Travis Boyce, the African American / Black Studies area chair for the Southwest Popular / American Culture Association Society, to write a Guest Editorial for this issue. In it, he discusses how popular culture provides a medium to critique and understand our past as well as our present realities. Boyce likens the 1921 Tulsa Race riot (as seen in HBO’s *Watchmen*) to the present socio-political moment where the public death of George Floyd has sparked a worldwide movement that seeks to dismantle anti-Black racism and White supremacy. We are grateful for his keen insights which lay the foundation for the articles in this issue. Moreover, the authors in this issue demonstrate how they have sought new ways to speak to issues of gender bias, of racial stereotyping, and to broaden our ways of knowing and thinking. While they initially wrote their texts prior to the massive events erupting in the last few months, we have extended an invitation to incorporate these pressing issues.

In the first of the full-length articles, *Triple Threat or Triple Opportunity: When a Pop Culture Course Goes Online at a Community College*, Lance Eaton and Alex Rockey critically position their experiences developing a face-to-face course for online-only delivery to illustrate how digital learning presents unique possibilities for inclusive student engagement and learning. By embracing asynchronous workflow, multimodal communication, and different interactivities inherent in online pedagogy, the authors focus on constructivist approaches to “create opportunities for students to interact with content to create their own

knowledge.” This kind of flexibility, challenging to manage in face-to-face classroom ecologies, “can empower students who may have felt marginalized or out-of-place in more traditional learning environments as it emphasizes the importance of their experiences to their learning.” Pertinent to current pedagogical necessities, Eaton and Rockey ground theory with practical advice for embracing a constructivist approach to online course development.

The next article similarly addresses urgent pedagogical concerns that are relevant at this time of radical change. Laurie Fuller’s *Cultivating Anti-Racist Feminist Pedagogy Queerly* is a call to transform the college classroom community. The author utilizes principles put forth by black feminist activist and science fiction scholar adrienne maree brown in her book, *Emergent Strategy*, to lay a critical framework for restructuring learning environments in ways that position social justice in the foreground. As Fuller explains, “emergent strategy principles can be integrated into classroom teaching and educational practices to create more meaningful learning, engagement, and measurable success: Trust the people, what you pay attention to grows, less prep more presence, never a failure always a lesson, and change is constant.” Change is an important keyword in Fuller’s work, in which “queer is an action.” In *queering*, uncritically accepted norms are challenged and remade. By embracing the energies of intentional change, educators and students can “imagine liberation” in tandem, connect more meaningfully in the classroom, and thus better advocate for a just future.

The third article examines how productions of racial embodiment in visual narrative media can reveal cultural tensions and upend notions of a post-racial American ideal. In *Afrosurrealism, Aristotle, and Racial Presence in Netflix’s Luke Cage*, Angela D. Mack uses the lens of Afrosurrealism to situate her rhetorical analysis of the Marvel series and identify “a diasporic reading of race with Harlem as its bridge to the ‘realms’ of New York City and beyond.” The author asserts that Luke Cage and his world vitally communicate the role race plays in the construction of place in America. *Netflix’s Luke Cage* shows audiences “the significance of representation and how working through issues of race for African Americans and people of color impacts everyone.”

The two final articles offer insights into pedagogical methods that leverage technology and popular culture to help students engage with critical issues including representation, power, and environmental justice. In *Sexual Harassment Effects on Bodies of Work: Engaging Students Through the Application of Historical Context and Communication Theory to Pop Culture and Social Media*, Bryan Vizzini and Kristina Drumheller provide a case study in the development and execution of a course that combines student analyses of current events with historical readings. The authors discover that asking students to consider contemporary cultural movements as they unfold facilitates their practical understanding of advanced concepts like Foucault’s challenges of power and Burke’s terministic screens. Vizzini and Drumheller argue that “variations on the theme of this course allow historical and modern popular culture to collide, demonstrating the significance of both in a fractured society.” The experiences outlined in this essay can help educators empower their students to recognize how theory pertains to lived experience as paradigms continue to shift.

Finally, Elspeth Iralu and Caitlin Grann discuss the use of mixtape-inspired assignments in an online course focused on environmental and social justice. In *Hell You Talmabout: Mixtapes as method for online environmental justice pedagogy*, the authors connect the radical activist movements essential to the foundation of environmental justice to the anti-racist and anti-capitalist origins of the mixtape. In the social science classroom, “mixtapes serve as an analogy for the dialectic process of generating knowledge from within and outside of disciplinary traditions and norms.” Students identified how issues of race, class, and social and environmental justice intersect by creating multimedia compilations informed by the rhetoric represented in their mixtapes. The authors note that online course delivery can better reveal the connections between critical theory and popular culture as “students move between tabs on the computer screen” from scholarly text to music video upload.

In addition to the full-length articles, this issue also includes a special series of four short articles and a book review. The special series highlights the work of Bridget Goodman, who explores the pandemic through the lens of pedagogy in times of crisis, its effect on students, and the relationship it has to popular culture. Lastly, Holly Chung reviews Anna Tso's *Hong Kong Stories* exploration of the connection to one's mother, culture, and identity.

Overall, the power of popular culture is clear. According to Pew Research (Pew Research, 2018), those who live in the US spend the vast majority of their waking hours looking at screens, averaging 11 hours per day consuming media of some form (Nielsen, 2018). And while some may be passive recipients, the authors of this issue push their readers to actively engage with ideas to change discourse. These articles come together at the intersection between popular cultural texts, broadly conceptualized, and providing an understanding and solutions to issues in contemporary society.

The set of authors for this issue have engaged with challenging topics and broad concepts to harness the power of popular culture. They have attempted to identify what is missing in the conversation—in the *dialogue* about popular culture and pedagogy and invited us to make a difference.

As a whole, this issue came together through great efforts and work of a full team who found the time and space to work despite a global health crisis and major unrest. We would like to thank the following people: Book Review Editor, Karina Vado; Educational Editor, Kelli Bippert; Copy Editors, Miriam Sciala and Robert Gordyn; Creative Designer, Douglas CohenMiller; and our authors and peer reviewers. A special thank you goes to Miriam for her insights and feedback on this editorial.

We are pleased to share these texts that speak to our inherent ability to grow as individuals, as educators, and as communities. We look forward to hearing your thoughts and to moving forward together toward a more just and equitable society through *Engaged Popular Culture and Pedagogy* to bring about *Awareness, Understanding and Social Justice*.

Anna S. CohenMiller
Editor in Chief

Kirk Peterson
Managing Editor

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MLA

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Cruel Summer¹

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Popular culture is an excellent medium to critique and understand our past as well as our present realities. For example, in 2019, the Home Box Office (HBO) critically acclaimed television series the *Watchmen* (based on an American comic book maxiseries) was reimagined and set to present-day Tulsa, Oklahoma. Significantly, *Watchmen* reenacted the 1921 Tulsa Race Riot in the series' opening scene, thus resulting in a public discourse surrounding anti-Black racial violence in U.S. history (Sidner, 2019). Prior to the 1921 race riot, 15,000 Black Tulsans lived, worked, and played in a segregated, yet economically prosperous area of the city, the Greenwood District. Dubbed *The Black Wallstreet*, the Greenwood District had close to 200 businesses. These included a major hotel and a movie theater (Ogletree, 2009). Despite the economic success of the Greenwood District, the era that Black Tulsans lived in was one of the lowest and *cruelest* points of race relations the U.S. history. Two years prior to the tragedy, the nation was engulfed in widespread anti-Black race riots known as "The Red Summer" of 1919 (Krugler, 2009).

But clearly even before The Red Summer, the United States was rife with racial conflict. In 1915, D.W. Griffith had released the controversial *Birth of a Nation*. This popular film portrayed the Ku Klux Klan as the heroes and African Americans as the villains - lazy, corrupt, and rapists, and the inability to self-govern (Berquist & Greenwood, 1974). Between 1882–1968, approximately 3,445 African Americans were lynched; to put things in perspective, 2,522 were lynched between 1889–1918 (Perloff, 2000). Anti-Black violence and other forms of institutionalized racism in the early twentieth century were carried out with the clear aim to maintain White supremacy.

In Tulsa, the false sexual assault allegation lodged against Tulsa Black resident Dick Rowland on May 31, 1921, created the opportunity for its White residents to assault /kill its Black residents and ultimately destroy the Greenwood District with impunity. By June 2, the White mob completely leveled the District, leaving approximately 300 Black residents dead, and thousands of its survivors in financial ruin. Additionally, the White establishment overwhelmingly condoned this destruction and cruelty (Ogletree, 2009).

Now (2020) ninety-nine years later, the city of Tulsa, Oklahoma, the United States of America, as well as the global community are living in an existential crisis, where anti-Black violence and institutionalized racism remain constant. At the same time, the novel corona virus (COVID-19) has ravaged the globe. There's been divisive national leadership in the United States, supported by a following from the fringe far-right. Many U.S.

1 In an attempt to draw historical parallels to the Red Summer of 1919, I define the *Cruel Summer* as an ongoing period beginning in late February 2020 (with the murder of Ahmaud Aubery) that was marred by racial violence, a climate of White Supremacy and right-wing authoritarianism, mass unemployment, and the intensification of COVID-19 in the United States.

citizens have embraced the idea that the virus is a hoax. But COVID-19 is no hoax, and it has vastly impacted poor and vulnerable communities. To date, the United States leads the world in total confirmed cases and deaths; and consequently, African Americans have disproportionately died of COVID-19 at alarming rates in comparison to other racial groups. Just as the political climate in the early twentieth century resulted in the Red Summer and the Tulsa Race Riot, today's institutionalized anti-Black violence and normalization of White supremacy have overlapped the COVID-19 discourse.

Leading up to the ninety-ninth anniversary of the Tulsa Race massacre, we have witnessed cruelty and horrific anti-Black violent incidents at the hands of police or White citizens. Those heartbreaking events are reflective of our current turbulent times. On May 7, 2020, Gregory and Travis McMichael, two White Georgia residents, were arrested/charged on felony murder charges for the February 23 killing of Ahmaud Arbery (a Black man). As cell phone video footage revealed, Arbery was hunted down (while jogging) by the McMichaels in their pickup truck and subsequently shot to death. A few weeks later, over Memorial Day weekend in Central Park, New York City, Amy Cooper (a White woman) called the police on Christian Cooper (a birder and Black man), who had asked her to keep her dog on a leash (per park rules). His phone video showed her claim of being threatened by him was a lie. On May 25, in Minneapolis, George Floyd, a Black resident, was murdered during an arrest by police officer Derek Chauvin. In an 8-minute video, Chauvin is seen kneeling on Floyd's neck, literally choking him to death. The juxtaposition of Floyd pleading for his life and stating, "I can't breathe," while Chauvin appears nonchalant, is a stark reminder of the nation's long, troubled history, cruelty and racial violence against Blacks.

The horrific murder of Floyd by officer Chauvin resulted in a pivotal political, social, and popular cultural moment in the United States and on the global stage. Floyd's televised death legitimized a once-polarized #BlackLivesMatter movement and sparked a worldwide movement committed to dismantling anti-Black racism and White supremacy. From a popular cultural perspective, murals dedicated to Floyd and other forms of iconography can be found internationally, in places such as Syria. #BlackLivesMatter signs can be seen in White, gentrified neighborhoods of San Francisco. The protests and pressures applied to institutions and corporations, with the aim to support the Black Lives Matter movement, resulted in small and symbolic victories. Confederate monuments as well as monuments dedicated to racists and other problematic individuals have been removed or are coming down. For example, in Denver Colorado, the residents of the (Benjamin F.) *Stapleton* neighborhood voted to rebrand its name to Central Park (Tabachnik, 2020). Stapleton was the former mayor (1923-31 & 1935-47) of Denver and a member of the Ku Klux Klan (Goldberg, 1982). In Springfield, Virginia confederate general Robert E. Lee High has been appropriately renamed to honor the late congressman and civil rights icon John R. Lewis (Martin, 2020). Furthermore, the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR) has banned the flying of the Confederate battle flag at racing events (Macur, 2020). Finally, companies such as Quaker Oats retired the racist mammy archetype image from the Aunt Jemima brand and the National Football League's Washington Redskins retired its controversial "Redskins" name (Kesslen, 2020; Sanchez, 2020).

Most significantly, the death of Floyd has shifted the discourse surrounding anti-Black violence to Black women as well. Like Floyd, Breonna Taylor (who was shot and killed by Louisville, KY police on a no-knock warrant on March 13) has emerged as an important cultural symbol during these perilous times. Thanks to robust activism on social media platforms supported by popular hashtags such as #SayHerName & #JusticeForBreonnaTaylor, the WNBA (Women's National Basketball Association) has dedicated its 2020 season to Breonna Taylor (West, 2020). Additionally, Taylor will be featured in the September issue of the Oprah Winfrey's *O Magazine* (O The Oprah Magazine, 2020). To date none of the officers who were involved in the shooting death of Taylor have yet to be charged or arrested. Nevertheless, the discourse surrounding her death as well as Taylor's iconography serves as a daily reminder to both the Louisville Police to arrest these officers.

It also serves as a reminder of the invisibility of Black women who fall victim to police and anti-Black violence.

However, the commitment to White supremacy, cruelty, and anti-Black violence persist in the wake of Floyd's death. U.S. President Donald Trump, who has refused to unequivocally condemn White supremacist rhetoric (this includes his policies) throughout his term, hosted a political rally on the weekend of Juneteenth (an African American holiday commemorating the end of slavery in the United States) in Tulsa, thus reopening old racial wounds of years past and perpetuating a *Cruel Summer*. Days later at a political rally in Phoenix, AZ; Trump referred to the corona virus as the "Kung Flu" with the insistence of a majority college-aged audience (Blum, 2020). It was at the same rally where Turning Point USA ambassador Reagan Escudé shared a gross misrepresentation of Nancy Green's legacy (the original Aunt Jemima) in an attempt to defend the use of the racist Aunt Jemima /mammy archetype. The subtext of her speech in essence, was rooted in the defense of White supremacy offering a rebuke to the Black Lives Matter movement. She concluded her speech thanking Trump for "never apologizing to the [liberal/cancel culture] mob" (President Trump Delivers Remarks At Student Convention – Aunt Jemima (2020).

Yet, the outright rejection of and resistance to White supremacy has intensified despite the racial violence from Trump, his supporters and other White supremacists. *Blackish* actress Jennifer Lewis eloquently noted in a July 6 podcast interview that the current political climate has permitted White supremacy and cruelty to flourish resulting in the televised murder of George Floyd at the hands of the police (Hill, 2020). She further noted that people from all walks of life are waking up to this reality, "taking to the streets," and are saying "No more!" (Hill, 2020).

2020 has been one of the most eventful and consequential years in the United States as well as around the world. Along with COVID-19, the sociopolitical climate that has allowed White supremacy and cruelty to thrive consequently resulted in a *Cruel Summer*. As we reflect on this *Cruel Summer*, popular culture can serve as a powerful lens to understand history as well as our contemporary world. We must remain vigilant and use our scholarship to push back against anti-Black racism and White supremacy. I look forward to your thoughts on this issue and hope you enjoy, *Engaged Popular Culture and Pedagogy: Awareness, Understanding and Social Justice*

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AUTHOR'S NOTES

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Triple Threat or Triple Opportunity: When a Pop Culture Course Goes Online at a Community College

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ABSTRACT

Teaching popular culture comes with many opportunities and challenges in a traditional classroom, but equally interesting and valuable are the possibilities that teaching such a course online can provide. This article explores how “Popular Culture in the US,” an online course at a community college, embraces some key attributes of the digital world such as multimodal communication and Web 2.0 interactivity. Evolved from a face-to-face community college course, the online version has increasingly developed to move from an instructor-centered to a student-centered approach that relies upon various engagement strategies. By using student choice, OER-enabled pedagogy, and constructivist approaches, the instructor engages students by leveraging the Internet to educate students, empower them as creators of content, and support critical participation in popular culture. The article illustrates how teaching within the online space can enhance teaching and learning, particularly for courses that have a disciplinary focus on popular culture and media.

Keywords: pop culture, online course, constructivism, community college, universal design for learning, open pedagogy, open educational resources, interaction, multimodal

INTRODUCTION

In the US, community colleges operate as the popular culture antithesis to elite higher education. Community colleges are presented as functional, open-to-anyone, and indicative of low value, while Ivy leagues are presented, like high culture, through a lens of sophistication, exclusivity, and importance. Thus, community colleges experience a perceived absence of quality, both regarding those learning, and those teaching; indeed, they are for the masses (Barrinton, 2019).

While online courses are increasingly offered in higher education, they too suffer from a negative perception (Columbaro, & Monaghan, 2009; Saad, et al, 2013; Taylor III, 2018). Additionally, non-traditional courses, such as those focusing on aspects of popular culture, are routinely taken to task for not being “real” courses (Allen, 2019; Bathroom Readers Institute, n.d., Crow, 2018).

Therefore, an online course on popular culture at a community college experiences a triple-threat of deficit thinking. Yet, such a situated course offers a meaningful learning experience through constructivist approaches including universal design for learning (UDL), open pedagogy, and multi-channel interaction.

This article explores one such course and how the instructor moved from a traditional face-to-face (F2F) environment into an online course environment. The purpose will be to illustrate the numerous ways that teaching popular culture in an online environment at a community college can enhance learning and critical thinking through practices that can be understood as and connected to constructivism. In doing so, the article will provide examples and approaches to effective online teaching, particularly for a course on or featuring popular culture as well as for diverse student audiences, such as those found at community colleges (National Center of Education Statistics, 2019).

WHY ONLINE

While F2F teaching has been an important part of education, asynchronous learning has also been essential. Written language represents the first asynchronous learning tool that made learning flexible to the reader’s time rather than the teacher’s schedule. Today, digital technologies (images, audio, video, etc.) transform communications by removing time constraints. These technologies offer opportunities in education for a more dynamic, flexibly-paced learning experience for the student who can take as much or as little time to process information rather than be confined to the traditional F2F learning experience. The F2F environment still remains a robust learning space but this course’s online evolution illustrated how complex and dynamic online learning can be when leveraging constructivism and different pedagogical practices, particularly for popular culture-related courses.

Some benefits of online learning are more established than others. For instance, discussion forums can enable a more democratic experience, wherein everyone has a more equal opportunity to share their thoughts (Sorensen & Murchú, 2004; Swan 2018). Students are not racing to collect their thoughts while the instructor and peers wait, nor are they worrying about having to be as fast as some of their class peers (Chen, 2018). In this course, students are not only sharing their personal connections to different areas of pop culture but are also talking about complex and challenging topics such as race, class, gender, and sexuality. Discussion forums allow for students to let their guard down and speak more frankly. This opens up more complex conversations around the content and the students’ considerations about challenging topics.

Regularly gathering together in one space takes coordination, energy, and resources. F2F courses can be limiting for some depending upon physical ability, transportation options, and particularly here in New England, weather. At times, students may prioritize course availability online as opposed to prioritizing a format for the best learning experience for themselves (Jaggars, 2014). The construct of class time in one, two, or three hour chunks is equally nebulous for learning in terms of what is most effective for students and

for instructors. For classes that meet two or three times a week, it means chipping away from actual time on learning with some portion of that time going to getting set up, getting started, and winding down. Once-a-week classes that meet for three hours offer challenges in terms of how much attention can be maintained over that period. Each class may also lose time repeating things or further clarifying ideas. Thus, time and energy is used to get to the classroom and the time in the classroom is often limited in how much is actually spent on learning. It is no wonder why instructors find it a challenge to stay on schedule with their syllabi.

Another challenge for F2F courses is navigating the vastness of the course subject. Instructors regularly lament the concepts they cannot get to in a course. With popular culture, this challenge seems even greater given its vastness. Students come into the conversation from different points of reference and often, in order for people to follow the conversation, some time is dedicated to explaining, even briefly, the context of some piece of pop culture. If the instructor introduces Spider-Man, which version of Spider-Man is being discussed? Each clarification (usefully) swallows up class time for people who do not understand the reference but may limit opportunities for deeper discussion. In the online environment, hyperlinking to specific examples contextualizes the pop culture being discussed and creates learning opportunities for those who do not know without sacrificing the time of those who do.

Along those lines, the F2F environment requires the course to be more linear in its approach. If torn over which film to show during class, an instructor can only settle on one. Yet in an online course, the instructor can encourage students to choose among several films. For instance, when discussing the racist portrayal of African Americans in films, the first author would have the students in the F2F class watch *Bamboozled* (2000), but in the online environment, students choose from several satirical films on African American representation including *Bamboozled* (2000), *Don't Be a Menace to South Central While Drinking Your Juice in the Hood* (1996), *Hollywood Shuffle* (1987), and *I'm Gonna Git You Sucka* (1988). The discussion became more dynamic by covering thirty years of satirical films on African American representation and allowed for students to learn about (and possibly, eventually watch) other films in that vein. In the online course, Eaton increasingly leveraged this possibility by allowing students to select from different learning materials in many weeks, allowing them to focus on learning materials that might speak more to their interests than might be possible in a F2F course.

Instructors can be challenged to explore things that happen midstream in a F2F course. They are torn when course-related news items occur that are ripe for discussion. They wish to include them, but need to sacrifice part of the day's agenda. In the online space, such events can be integrated into announcements (with relevant links) and redirected to a discussion forum for conversations relevant, but not central to the course. These opportunities allow for deeper exploration while not detracting from the learning.

In addition to shifting time, gaining more learning time, providing more democratic engagement, and creating multiple learning paths, online learning can provide the instructor with more effective means of understanding students and their engagement in the course. LMSs account for all time and actions performed within them. Instructors can access this information often in the form of reports that can be class-wide or focused on individuals. While Orwellian and open to potential abuse, this type of knowledge can significantly help the instructor understand where students are spending time, what activities are useful, and what resources may not be accessed (Dixson, 2015). This type of information on how students interact in a course can provide some details that are harder to discern in a F2F course.

ONLINE LEARNING AS A CONSTRUCTIVIST ENVIRONMENT

Online course enrollments continue to grow while enrollments in F2F courses decline (Seaman, et al, 2018). Given the continued growth of online course enrollments, leveraging the affordances of this particular

environment are essential in ensuring that the next-generation of college-going students receive quality educational opportunities. Moving F2F courses into online formats supports a re-envisioning of pedagogy (Neff & Whithaus, 2008) that aligns with constructivist approaches. Simply put, constructivism posits that “knowledge is a function of how the individual creates meaning from his or her experiences” (Jonassen, et al, 1995, p.11). In this way, constructivist educators create opportunities for students to interact with content to create their own knowledge (Jonassen et al., 1995). As the focus of a constructivist pedagogy does not centralize a lecturing professor, online courses and their associated technologies are particularly well-suited for supporting and fostering constructivist pedagogies (Jonassen et al., 1995).

We posit that universal design for learning (UDL), open pedagogy, and online interaction are approaches to constructivism. This paper details these approaches to constructivism as well as particular examples of these approaches. In this particular course, UDL was manifested in this course through multimodality. Open pedagogy was supported with attention to content curation representing breadth and depth. Finally, online interaction allowed for multiple means of engagement through different communication channels and learning activities which supported students in interacting with the instructor, students, and content.

COURSE HISTORY

The course moved online in 2012 after being taught as an Interdisciplinary Studies special topics course on the community college’s urban campus. In the first few years, the course relied on textbooks--a survey and a primary source reader. However, just as conversations about Open Educational Resources (OER) in higher education were increasingly taking place, Eaton shifted away from textbooks (Jelley & Scanlon, 2013; Lee, 2013; Owens, 2013). Inspired by what OER offered in terms of flexibility, Eaton adopted a mix of OER materials and library-sourced materials in Spring 2015. This approach allowed Eaton to rethink the types of learning materials to include more multimedia content.

Changing format and content led to considering new features, including in 2016 using blogs where students would discuss and apply theories and themes of popular culture. That year, Eaton also introduced extra credit options and opportunities to engage in writing/creating outside of the classroom that connected to pop culture. An example of this is writing relevant pieces for the school newspaper.

In 2017, Eaton added Web-based annotation to the course, such that students could annotate the course learning guides with commentary, ideas, and research that would then be integrated into future learning guides; they could do this in lieu of the blog each week. Weekly reflections were added to help students better connect the different activities and their learning.

Finally, in 2018, Eaton introduced an approach called the “Do-It-Yourself (DIY) Option”. The DIY option lets students choose to craft their own course on pop culture. The course students created would be based on areas of the subject they wanted to learn. Students produced tangible things such as podcasts, video series, and blog posts that demonstrated their learning.

While many such changes can be embraced in a F2F environment, especially with abundant online tools, their integration in an online course can help overcome limitations inherent in F2F classes. These integrated practices help students leverage the Internet to empower themselves as creators of content and critical participants in popular culture. Effective strategies for integrating these practices will be covered in the final section of the article. Next, this paper will dig into how these changes imbue constructivist practices to improve student learning.

UDL AS CONSTRUCTIVIST PRACTICE

Universal design for learning (UDL) is significantly informed by constructivism (Izzo, et al, 2011).

UDL focuses on learning through the students' lens to consider how they engage, make sense of, and demonstrate their learning, given their context, choices, and abilities. UDL aims for multiple means of engagement (motivation-focused), representation (content-focused), action, and expression (communication of learning-focused). These veins come from UDL's guiding framework for curriculum to meet the needs of a diverse student body. Hitchcock, Meyer, Rose, and Jackson (2002) identify four goals of a UDL curriculum: be challenging for all students, provide materials in a variety of modalities, include a range of learning experiences, and incorporate flexible and diverse assessments.

The central tenant among those goals is a desire to be responsive to the individual student. This emphasis aims to connect the student with course learning by having choices or modes of learning that meet students where they are; that is, the structural support from UDL empowers students to find useful ways of integrating knowledge and skills with how they understand their world already. A UDL-inspired course, then becomes a welcoming environment where unnecessary hurdles are reduced and learning is configured to be more relevant and contextualized to the students' needs which empowers them to engage actively in their learning (Scott, et al, 2015; Smith, 2012; Tobin, 2014).

Multiple Modalities to Support UDL

Multiple modalities is typically defined as including multiple modes of representation such as text, video, audio, and images (Anstey & Bull, 2008). In today's society, a large percentage of content relies on different modes of communication (Kohut, et al, 2011). Even when one looks at an app like Instagram which is categorized under photo-image (and video) apps, other modalities, such as text through chat features, are present. Using multiple modalities for learning is both a tenant of UDL and an important practice for preparing students for the future. Providing opportunities for students to engage with, analyze and create artifacts in multiple modalities will better prepare students for their careers and as 21st century digital citizens.

A major affordance of an online course is the potential to integrate multiple modalities in a variety of ways. While F2F courses can support multiple-modalities, in an online course, the LMS is the central space for gathering for students and instructors. Therefore, rather than being supplemental as is in F2F courses, instructors can use and support multiple modalities simultaneously as a natural part of the learning environment.

In this course, Eaton embraced multiple modalities for learning content. First, he focused on locating learning material in various modalities and then, created new learning multimedia. Finally, he structured the course so students could select learning materials.

Eaton felt obligated to fully use the textbook since students had bought it. Moving to OER created the opportunity to collect different resources for each module. Therefore, Eaton included a mix of materials that captured that week's content. For instance, in the module exploring the mythology of the cowboy, students choose among different sources including dime novels, old-time radio episodes, TV western episodes, and Western films.

Eaton created two types of learning materials: learning guides and big-concepts videos. The learning guides were introductory material that provided context and framed the big ideas and questions. The guides were textual with occasional images that Eaton later turned into MP3 recordings so as to expand media options. The big-concept videos were usually several short videos each week (to the total of 20-30 minutes) that explored a major framework, theory, or ideology relevant to the present or future week's content. These videos include topics such as feminist theory, hegemony, critical theory, and semiology.

To allow for a variety of thought and interest, students could often choose the primary analytical reading or many of the additional materials. Other times, they were encouraged to find a relevant resource that could enhance their learning on the subject and explain how it did so, either in the discussions or on the course blog. To encourage students to make thoughtful decisions about what they would explore in a given

week, they were given a survey the week prior and asked to identify what materials they would use for the following week. This helped Eaton to think about what questions to ask and to whom but also to get a sense of what the students had covered.

Engaging in multiple modalities goes beyond just what the instructor does in the course. It also has been important to consider and encourage students to use multiple modalities in demonstrating their learning. Giving students the option to create multimodal texts that integrate audio, video, and/or text can provide students the opportunity to challenge themselves. Additionally, integrating multimodality into a course provides the opportunity to discuss accessibility concerns, as one challenge of creating multimodal texts is ensuring that these texts are accessible.

OPEN PEDAGOGY AS CONSTRUCTIVIST PRACTICE

Definitions of open pedagogy vary (DeRosa, & Jhangiana, n.d.; Sinkinson, 2018). But at the time, Eaton worked primarily from David Wiley's definition which focuses on the idea that the activities and assignments in a course should have a life beyond the course. While many educators hope for such an outcome, they often miss the opportunity to do so (Wiley, 2013).

The course materials and the student artifacts created can be used beyond the given course and in doing so, become more relevant and meaningful to students. After all, no one likes to hear that they will spend time and effort on something that will then be largely forgotten. However, explaining to students that what they are doing in that course has implications not just for themselves but for others can motivate and engage learners more because it makes their work meaningful.

Open pedagogy overlaps with both UDL and the constructivist approach. Open pedagogy can operate as the driving force of an ongoing shared-power engagement strategy. It can also be more focused as an applied approach to create meaningful demonstrations of learning (DeRosa, R. & Jhangiana, R., n.d.). In this course, the practice focused on the latter form of open pedagogy. Not only was their choice around assignments, but many assignments had a higher purpose than just meeting course objectives. Assignments are crafted to be learning objects from which others can benefit. Assignments gave room for students to connect the course content and learning to things that were meaningful to their world while also creating a situation where others would learn from that student.

Open pedagogy in this context represents a constructivist approach, particularly in how it is executed. By having students create knowledge by blending their areas of interest with learning activities that capture their explorations, it helps students blend what they know with what they are learning. However, many of those learning objects then become future potential artifacts for other students and people beyond the class. In this way, the open pedagogical approach creates an interesting constructivist method of paying it forward, wherein students learn from previous students' works and to which those students will contribute to future students' work.

Breadth and Depth Supported by Open Pedagogy

Many instructors grapple with how to tease out the tension between doing a systematic survey and diving deeply into focused areas. For a course that covers something as vast as pop culture, striking a balance is quite challenging. Students come into the course with strong filters about what they want the course to cover or assume the course is about.

There are several ways to strike this balance of capturing students' interests and providing structural knowledge around the study of this multi-faceted and ceaselessly expanding realm. For the first two-thirds of the course, several themes, areas, and technologies over the last three centuries provide a strong foundation across popular culture. Students are encouraged to focus their assignments on things that interest them. This

constructivist approach allows students to dive more deeply into their interests but through the learning they have been exposed to in a given module. This strategy leans on students' interests, where students are better off incorporating their interests into their learning while also exposing them to new ideas, theories, and relational knowledge connected to their interests.

Each week students are tasked with a choice between two constructivist activities. For one activity, they apply a particular theme or theory to a realm of popular culture (e.g. explore examples of mass-culture critiques at work in modern culture, identify modern examples of cultural cowboys). The other activity entails annotating the week's learning guide to add salient points they have found and that are relevant to the learning guide from the readings and additional research. In either case, students are more capable of blending their knowledge and interests with the big ideas of the course.

While the course mainly focuses on the instructor providing a breadth of pop culture and students finding their own depths within pop culture, the final third of the course shifts toward depth. Four modules offer the opportunity for a deep dive through a series of case studies. Therefore, instead of a wider exploration such as the impact of radio on pop culture, it focuses more specifically on topics like horror comics, youth culture and censorship in the 1950s. Case studies in popular culture like these draw upon rich materials such as old comics found on the Digital Comic Museum, dime novels on the Internet Archive, and old horror films found on YouTube.

For a course-project, students can create these case studies, which later students can elect to take in future sections. Through the structure of these final modules, this open pedagogical approach utilizes the constructivist idea of choosing more relevant material while also having the ability and option to forge new lessons in areas of interest for the betterment of current and future students.

INTERACTION ONLINE AS CONSTRUCTIVIST PRACTICE

All online interactions are mediated by technology. Students cannot walk up to the instructor after class to ask a question. Instructors cannot gauge a student's understanding instantaneously by reading their face. Instead, interactions occur via email, chat, course announcements, or video conferencing tools. Online courses have historically been criticized for a lack of instructor-student interactions (Dennen, et al, 2007; Swan et al., 2000; Picciano, 2002), but recent studies suggest a potential of online courses to improve the quality and quantity of instructor-student interactions (Larreamendy-Joerns & Leinhardt, 2006).

Online courses can provide students with a variety of ways to assert their voice. In F2F courses, the standard method of raising a hand and speaking to the whole class may intimidate students, including those coming from diverse linguistic and sociocultural backgrounds. Research suggests some students who struggle with finding a voice in the traditional classroom can utilize mediating technologies to create more space for their voice (Sauro, 2009). As Swan (2001) notes, "all students have a voice and no students can dominate the conversation" in asynchronous online discussions (p. 310). The asynchronous nature of online discussions can support a more democratic, equitable, and reflective discussion (Swan, 2001) in which all students in a course are empowered to participate.

Asynchronous interactions provide students and instructors alike the opportunity to interact according to their schedule and as often as needed. Therefore, online courses can support interactions that extend beyond the time of a typical F2F course across an entire week. A well-structured course might have numerous interactions across different channels (email, feedback, discussions, announcements, weekly reflections, video conferences, and online office hours) during a week. Though online asynchronous instructor-student interactions have been questioned as to their effectiveness, scholars have suggested that continuous online asynchronous interactions can be highly interpersonal (Walther, 1994). In fact, Swan's (2001) study on asynchronous online courses found that students enjoyed the continuous nature of the asynchronous

instructor-student interactions in their courses and that perceptions of high instructor-student interactions correlated with student satisfaction with the course overall. Students seeking flexibility due to work and family demands can schedule interactions around their schedules. This flexibility can support students who may have historically struggled with interacting in courses due to work and family demands.

Types of Interactions Supported in the Online Course

Meaningful interaction occurs in several distinct ways within the course, with some approaches using multiple forms of media to maximize impact. These interactions include one-directional communications, reflection and dialogue, feedback, and encouragement to students to use multimedia in their work.

While one-way communications do not necessarily foster direct engagement, they can help to humanize the instructor. For text-based announcements, Eaton uses an enthusiastic and warm tone. For video announcements, Eaton maintains eye contact with the camera and maintains a lively delivery while following along to but not reading a script. The script keeps Eaton on track while also providing a text for accessibility. The instructor-created content is dynamic, offering up a series of videos on pop culture, turning the learning guides into audio recordings, and including relevant images throughout. The learning guide is created to be more dialogic, with students being able to ask questions through the Google Doc comment feature or add to what is already there. For the introductory discussion forums, Eaton replied to each student introduction with a personalized video that asks questions and welcomes the student to the class. Finally, throughout the course he may create additional videos where relevant (e.g. how to access grades, the blog, or other quick-walkthroughs).

Interactions happen beyond the learning content. Each week, students complete a reflection about their learning that week using three questions. The first question focuses on what they did or did not complete that week and why. This question helps identify what is too much or too little for future iterations as well as helps students in their accountability. The second question asks students what is the most salient thing they have learned. This question supports learning reinforcement and also highlights student takeaways, thus guiding the editing of the module in the future. The final question asks for their questions and concerns regarding the week. The students have an opportunity to voice feedback and challenges they have.

That in itself makes the reflection a great tool for enhancing learning. However, these reflections act as a dialogue as Eaton often replied to each directly, acknowledging the challenges they faced that week, encouraging their learning, and responding to their questions. Even if the student has reported not doing any work, he avoids negative or critical feedback in this space. Rather, this is a place to talk and figure out what is working and where there are obstacles while creating a community online.

Another means of creating interaction is through an early course survey. Usually by week three or four, the students have figured out the rhythm and the challenges of online courses (especially if it's one of their first online experiences). At this point, the students fill out a survey about their experience in the course. The survey is anonymous to solicit genuine answers and the results are shared and discussed in an announcement where questions and comments are addressed. Like the reflection, this practice reinforces the point that students are heard and are part of the online community.

One more extension of student feedback and dialogue comes in the form of the syllabus where students are encouraged to discuss and add what they believe the course expectations for students and the instructor should be. By using Google Docs and allowing students direct access to edit and add to the Syllabus, it not only bestows a level of trust in them but also creates a more collaborative space that encourages them to think of it as more as their space than in other courses.

Assignment feedback also opens up the possibility for more engagement and dialogue. Assignment feedback usually entails annotations and solicitations to respond to comments that Eaton left as well as a rubric and often, the opportunity to revise. At times, Eaton provided video feedback that screen-records the

student's paper to focus in on certain areas and provide holistic feedback. Students regularly respond to the power of hearing the tone and emphasis and how it helps them understand and ultimately feel less combative about the feedback. Halfway through the course, each student receives a video review from Eaton about where they have done well and where they should focus their efforts moving forward. This video is usually of the student's grades thus far in the course. Students receive this video via email. Here again, this sparks an opportunity for a dialogue with the student that reinforces the connection between instructor and student.

The final means of using and encouraging online interaction is nudging the students to use multimedia throughout the semester. They may at first be encouraged to find multimedia such as videos, podcasts, and websites to bring into the discussion, blog, or learning guides. However, as the course progresses, they are encouraged to use video and audio as their replies in the discussion or on the blog so as to get them more comfortable with the medium but also encouraging them to work on other communication skills. Additionally, for those who work on the case study as a final project, they are encouraged to create some video lessons to help students understand the concepts they are exploring.

Though instructor-student interactions are inherently different in online courses, leveraging integrated technologies to provide dialogic feedback can improve instructor-student interactions beyond even what they would receive in a F2F course.

STRATEGIES FOR INTEGRATING CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACHES IN ONLINE COURSES

Course design is an iterative process. This particular course represents a decade of iteration. The result of this effort has been a recognition of Eaton's work with receiving the Massachusetts Colleges Online Course of Distinction award.

Given this decade of work, there are five strategies for instructors or instructional designers as they work to develop an online course that aligns with constructivist practices. The strategies described are informed by reflection on one online popular culture course, however, the strategies and instructional practices are broadly applicable to online courses which seek to align with constructivist theory.

Incremental Changes

For good course design, incremental change is probably the best pursuit unless one has been given substantial time to design a course. Even when substantial time is allotted, the various moving parts of the course and adapting to new practices in different areas of a course, may still be too much to handle. For instance, introducing a blog, student-created case studies, and annotations all at once might have led to more challenges for the instructor to think through the different problems that each could create. Each change will require some time to adjust and see how it fits with the other parts of a course. Taking on all the tools and practices at once, instructors or students may find themselves burnt out or running into numerous technical or process challenges.

Contextualize the What and Why

Part of gradually launching different facets of the course will allow the instructor to better scaffold the rationale for including each new element and connecting it to other parts and practices within the course. Many courses lack a clear and stated rationale about what is being done and why along with how it connects to the course outcomes. Assignments and activities in these courses are offered but not clearly understood in relation to the course or the instructor's pedagogical approaches. By slowly introducing each element, it provides time and opportunity to communicate with students the what and the why of the instructor's approach.

Explaining pedagogical choices can be particularly useful for students at a community college who are returning to education after a prolonged absence. Since many have likely been exposed to the banking

model of teaching and learning, providing some insight as to the benefits of a more open and interactive approach can help them understand how this learning approach is different and important for their learning (Freire, 1996). Furthermore, providing context and using constructivist models for teaching such a course can empower students who may have felt marginalized or out-of-place in more traditional learning environments as it emphasizes the importance of their experiences to their learning.

Assemble the Team

The course discussed in this article happened because Eaton looked to colleagues for input, support, and guidance, repeatedly over the years. From input from other instructional designers to discussions with librarians about library resources to adapting ideas from other instructors to guidance from accessibility services, the course improved because others were willing to help. Teaching is often portrayed as a solitary act but to improve a course it often takes inviting others to help and provide feedback in the process. Inevitably, instructors need to do a lot of work to improve a course but that does not mean they have to do it alone. Most institutions have a variety of staff that can aid in the process and even if they do not, there are many communities online to find help.

Get Uncomfortable

Letting go of the reins of the course can be challenging for many instructors. Often, this is a reflection of our own educational past. The first few times one allows students full editing powers of the syllabus, they are going to feel anxious and may constantly check to make sure it is still there. (Don't worry, if using Google Docs, there is a version history.) Finished products, be they blog posts, annotations or case studies, may not look like how the instructor envisioned them and it may seem that the student has not met the barest expectations. However, that does not mean failure, but an opportunity to revisit, revise, and retry. Even our most traditional approaches fail to engage or effectively evaluate students so it should be no surprise that the first time something new is tried, it stumbles a bit.

Own Mistakes

Instructors can go a long way with their students by owning mistakes. It happened recently in this course when Eaton added an element to the course that failed--in large part because he did not heed the advice in this section. He rushed to introduce the DIY Project, did not give sufficient context, and did not have others provide feedback.

Inspired by open pedagogy, he pitched an offer to students. They could create their own course by researching content, creating learning materials, and crafting something that others could learn from. Created on short notice, it left Eaton scrambling to develop the resources and right level of interaction for those involved. Students could self-select into this project or go with the way the course was traditionally set up. What started with a group of eight people, eventually dwindled down to none. Because Eaton took a risk with their education, he worked with them to merge back into the traditional course.

Mistakes will happen, implementations may falter; regardless of how much one prepares. Sometimes, one might look to blame it on the students but if the instructor is trying something new and students are not responding or following through, then it might reflect missing things or not properly setting up the situation.

CONCLUSION

Moving this popular culture course to an online format supported constructivist approaches as exemplified by the use of:

- multimodal approaches to support universal design for learning,
- greater breadth and depth of topics covered enabled by open pedagogy, and
- meaningful and varied interactions.

The online environment created a course that uniquely afforded these constructivist approaches, however they were not all adopted in the first iteration of this course. Transforming the F2F version of this course into an online format supported a reflective, iterative process that allowed this course to be progressively revised in order to increasingly leverage constructivist approaches. With constructivist approaches, this course better aligned with the learning outcomes of the popular culture course as well as the students attending an online community college course.

While this course is by no means perfect or even in its final state, understanding the first-hand experience of an educator as he continually adapted a course to be more deeply aligned with constructivist approaches will hopefully inspire other educators to reflect on their own courses to decide whether a move to the online environment could similarly leverage constructivism.

The course as it has been developed provides strong considerations for others who teach online and in particular, popular culture online. As a discipline, pop culture is often interested in exploring power, engagement, and democratic experiences across areas of culture that have largely been dismissed by the elites. It is looking at the ways mass culture produces meaning in complex ways to the every-person. Therefore, a course on pop culture (physical or digital) should also reconsider this discourse as it plays out in students' education at a community college; a place also created for the masses and often seen and portrayed as adequate or insufficient by elite culture.

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Queerly Cultivating Anti-Racist Feminist Pedagogy

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ABSTRACT

Queerly Cultivating Anti-Racist Feminist Pedagogy raises questions and analyzes classroom practices based on adrienne maree brown's (2017) *Emergent Strategy*, a radical self-help manual for our current political climate that calls for a paradigm shift in organizing work. Black, mixed, queer, pansexual, feminist writer, pleasure activist, facilitator and sci-fi scholar, brown builds on a continuous tradition of women of color feminists resisting oppression to bring together science fiction and permaculture, biomimicry and organizing, pleasure and activism. She offers fresh perspectives on how to imagine liberation and provides dynamic ways to think about teaching and learning. *Emergent Strategy* provides principles to help us change and grow, essential for all pedagogical work, and asks us to imagine liberation. In fact, emergent strategies can be integrated into classroom teaching and educational practices to create more meaningful learning, engagement, and measurable success using the principles: trust the people, what you pay attention to grows, less prep more presence, never a failure always a lesson, and change is constant (brown, 2017, pp. 41-42). This article addresses present moment classroom concerns using these five principles to explore why and how to cultivate anti-racist feminist pedagogy and to do it queerly. In this case, queer is an action, a verb, something to do, and something to do to counter normative approaches: queer them. Thus, queerly cultivating anti-racist feminist pedagogy questions the status quo, and can be used to challenge taken for granted, problematic and oppressive classroom practices.

Keywords: Feminist, Anti-Racist, Queer, Pedagogy, Privilege, Oppression, Organizing, Emergent Strategy, Teaching

QUEERLY CULTIVATING ANTI-RACIST FEMINIST PEDAGOGY¹

All that you touch
You Change.

All that you Change
Changes you.

The only lasting truth
Is Change

God
Is Change. (Butler, 1993, p. 3)

Octavia Butler begins her speculative apocalyptic novel, *Parable of the Sower*, with this pronouncement, setting the stage for her African American young woman protagonist, Lauren, to lead a radical cultural movement for societal transformation. Butler published 13 books and won many prestigious awards including being the first science fiction writer to be named a MacArthur Fellow. She saw herself as an outsider—a working-class Black woman raised by a single mother—and her fictional worlds challenged her readers' understandings of gender, race, sexuality and humanness.

Butler's recurring theme of change as a constant also inspires and frames the work of New York Times best-selling author, Adrienne maree brown, in her social justice organizing and self-help text, *Emergent Strategy* (2017). Black, mixed, queer, pansexual, feminist writer, pleasure activist, facilitator and sci-fi scholar, brown builds on a continuous tradition of women of color feminists resisting oppression to bring together science fiction and permaculture, biomimicry and organizing, pleasure and activism. *Emergent Strategy*, brown (2017) explains, "Is how we intentionally change in ways that grow our capacity to embody the just and liberated worlds we long for" (p. 3).

I draw on this radical genealogy in my pedagogy to ask how our current oppressive systems and carceral logics—including policing and punishment—shape our lives and constrain how we imagine our responses to injustice, harm and violence. How can we imagine a just society, and how can we raise questions about injustice and harm in the classroom? *Emergent Strategy*, a radical self-help manual for our current political climate calling for a paradigm shift in organizing work, has, to this point, not permeated discussions and analysis about classroom practices; yet it offers profound insights, building from Octavia Butler's radical tradition, to utilize in classrooms. brown offers fresh perspectives on how to imagine liberation and offers new and dynamic ways to think about teaching and learning. *Emergent Strategy* provides principles to help us change and grow—essential for all pedagogical work and asks us to imagine liberation.² In fact, emergent strategies can be integrated into classroom teaching and educational practices to create more meaningful learning, engagement, and measurable success using the principles: trust the people, what you pay attention to grows, less prep more presence, never a failure always a lesson, and change is constant (brown, 2017, pp. 41-42). Working from the school of feminist science fiction, particularly the insights in *Emergent Strategy*,

1 I acknowledge and pay respect to the traditional custodians of the land on which I live. Recognizing our role in colonialism and that we are on stolen land acknowledges that the present United States is a collection of chopped up territories and land purchases accumulated by genocide. I am conscious of my place on the ancestral homelands of the People of the Council of Three Fires: The Ojibwe, the Potawatomi and the Odawa. Chicago was also a site of trade and healing for the Miami, Ho-Chunk, Winnebago and Sauk and many others. Today there are more than 65,000 Native people, representing hundreds of tribal nations who call the Chicago-area home. Remembering the history and honoring the contributions and traditions of indigenous people is one step towards fighting their erasure.

this article engages present moment classroom concerns using these five principles to explore why and how to cultivate anti-racist feminist pedagogy and do it queerly.

Queer can be a noun, an adjective, and a verb, with various meanings in different contexts, similar to the ways in which *education*, *art* and *media* take on significance in different times and spaces. Non-binary white sex educator and scholar Meg-John Barker and white transgender illustrator Jules Scheele in *Queer: A Graphic History* (2016) note that in queer theory there is a particular emphasis on the idea of queer as an action, a verb, something to do, rather than something that folks are (or are not). Queer is at odds with ‘regimes of the normal’: those ‘normative’ ideals of aspiring to be normal in identity, behavior, appearance, relationships, etc. (Warner, 1999). Thus, queering questions taken for granted, status quo relations we, especially those of us with power and privilege, may have come to accept as part of white supremacy or sexism. In queer theory nothing is inherently straight and queering can be used to challenge harmful and oppressive classroom practices.

WHY PEDAGOGY?

Pedagogy, the study of theories of education, is about the practice of teaching. As a Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies faculty member at an urban, working-class, majority students of color public university, teaching is a central component of my academic position. The people who enroll in my classes often struggle to pay for their education and negotiate multiple hurdles on their way to the university: childcare responsibilities, underemployment or low wage full-time plus work, and long commutes. Their time in the classroom is valuable and I take seriously my work to create meaningful teaching and learning environments. I draw on popular culture, particularly speculative fiction, to make feminist theories and ideas relevant, visionary and accessible to my students, motivated by the questions: How can we imagine justice and liberation, and how can we work for life free from harm and violence, free from racism and white supremacy? These questions seem extremely timely given the political climate of ongoing racially motivated police murders and pandemic death. I am interested in research and dialogue surrounding pedagogy as I am committed to using this platform for radical social transformation. My pedagogical practice is characterized by feminism, anti-racism/anti-oppression, and queerness.

My framework for feminism is intersectional, anti-sexist, and gender curious. The term intersectionality was first used by Black legal scholar and civil rights advocate Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) to describe the specific oppression Black women experience based both on race and gender. Crenshaw’s work is part of a long history of feminists, especially Black, Indigenous and other women of color, conceptualizing the interrelated nature of oppression. In 1977 the Combahee River Collective, a group of Radical Black Lesbian Socialist Feminists, explained how oppressions are interlocking, simultaneously experienced, structural and omnipresent. For me, as Barbara Smith, one of the Combahee River Collective organizers, wrote in 1979: “Feminism is the political theory and practice that struggles to free *all* women: women of color, working-class women, poor women, disabled women, lesbians, old women, as well as white, economically privileged heterosexual women. Anything less than this vision of total freedom is not feminism” (emphasis in original, p. 49). This freedom for all women, including Indigenous women, transwomen, and femmes everywhere, would change our whole world in ways that would make us all free.

I use the term “cultivating” to modify anti-racist feminist pedagogy, inspired by queer white anti-racist feminist, activist and scholar Ann Russo’s (2019) *Feminist Accountability*, an intersectional analysis of anti-racist, accountability and transformative justice work. Cultivating, then, is a way to recognize this work as “a practice, not an end, and it is a continuous process, rather than a single act.” Pedagogy and teaching are “often embedded in the logics and structures of power and oppression” (p. 11). Thus, cultivating an awareness of power and oppression has the potential to alter our own pedagogy in ways which lead to more justice and transformation.

As I cultivate my anti-oppression pedagogy, I recognize ways my work—indeed my life— has been

radically shaped by lesbian feminism (not the trans exclusionary kind) and the love of women. I use queerly here because I am. Queer thinking and queer pedagogy is about resisting norms and normal. Additionally, queer is about people, activism, history and theory. Queer theory examines power relations and questions dominant and normalized binaries such as teacher/student and gay/straight.

My pedagogical lens amplifies anti-racism because white supremacy, capitalism and settler colonialism shape the U.S., continue to harm, and form the context of my lived experience as a white, cis-gendered, non-disabled, monolingual, U.S. citizen. The work for people with privilege is to acknowledge the benefits we receive, to take accountability for the harm we commit, both intentional and unintentional, and to struggle for justice. Using *Emergent Strategy*, we can learn to teach and “change in ways that grow our capacity to embody the just and liberated worlds we long for” (brown, 2017, p. 3).

BUILDING EMERGENT STRATEGIES IN THE CLASSROOM

Learning can be a transformational act and brown’s *Emergent Strategy* offers a clear description of liberatory philosophy with principles to help us change and grow. Using elements of *Emergent Strategy* as pedagogical interventions enable those of us in classrooms to imagine a liberated future: trust the people, what you pay attention to grows, less prep more presence, never a failure always a lesson, and change is constant (p. 41-42).

Trust the People (If You Trust the People They Become Trustworthy)

One of the primary principles of emergent strategy for brown (2017), is: “if you trust the people, they become trustworthy. Trust is a seed that grows with attention and space. The facilitator can be a gardener or the sun, the water” (p. 214). This principle can be applied to all forms of facilitation, especially pedagogy and teaching.

Trusting the people, or for educators, trusting the students, can be challenging because the longer we work in the field, the further we are from our own student days. We start to see the students through the lens of the hierarchical institution: on the other team, grade grubbing, scamming or trying to get away with doing less. We communicate this to them by not believing them when they offer the reason they were not in class or did not finish their work; when we ask for documentation for their illness or doctor visit or suspect they do not do the readings assigned because they are blowing us off or their crosstalk in class is because they are not paying attention, are bored or The list of ways professors and teachers suspect our students of being untrustworthy goes on and on.

I create a paradigm shift by offering another way to inhabit the classroom: *Trust the students. If you trust the students they become trustworthy.* If teachers change the way we view students as our opponents, harboring suspicions of them and their motives at the outset of the semester what might that look like? How can we use our pedagogy, our syllabi, our classroom interactions to build trust? Faculty must recognize our power: we are the ones who construct the curriculum, assign the reading, control the conversation, assess the work. What do we actually have to lose if we trust the students? More importantly, what do we gain if we plant the seeds of trust; what can grow in our classrooms with students? No matter our disciplines or fields, we can foster a collective classroom culture centering a willingness to learn, to engage the materials, and to create community.

I approach building trust in the classroom the first day by learning the names students want to be called (reading out names from the roster can alienate students if you mispronounce their names or use a name they don’t want to be called). I spend time before class starts talking about how things are going in the world, in our lives. I share about my life when it relates to the texts or to topics which arise in class. I talk about the importance of their thoughts and them coming to their own ideas about the world. Sometimes we get into a

circle for our class conversations and start class with a check-in where students share how they are doing, in addition to building trust, this creates a context where their whole selves are welcome into the room and can create opportunities for them to recognize how they are feeling and embrace learning alongside. This respect, and classroom empathy more broadly, is linked to student success and participation (Okonofua et al., 2016). How might we practice this more regularly in our classrooms? How do we build our syllabi in ways that trust our students? And if we have a random student here or there trying to “get around” on us, what have we lost? Who really loses if they lie about a doctor visit or why they need an extension on their paper? Across disciplines we can read syllabi for their emphasis: Are the due dates or the attendance policy more centrally located than what the learning will be? Can we create syllabi and classroom interactions to build trust?

Queering this first principle questions taken for granted, status quo relations of power many have come to accept as part of capitalism, white supremacy and heteropatriarchy. Those of us with power, white people, men, heterosexuals, citizens, teachers and professors in the classroom, especially need to trust the people deemed untrustworthy: outsiders, queers, trans folks, people of color, undocumented, people with disabilities. Simply because those that experience the world without structural power and in different ways might just be the folks to lead us to liberation, like Lauren in Butler’s (1993) text *Parable of the Sower*. Simultaneously the role of the professor as having the power is queered by faculty of color or teachers with disabilities who are themselves deemed untrustworthy. Drawing on Smith’s (1979) definition of feminism, everyone must be free in order to imagine just and liberated feminist futures. Additionally, brown is not setting up the binary of either trustworthy or untrustworthy with this principle, she is reminding us: many things can be true at once.

What You Pay Attention to Grows

This principle rings true when we hear it and has been stated by many (Chopra, 1995, p.111; GeneenRoth, 2012) and used in fields of life coaching and self-help. How can it be applied to queer anti-racist feminist pedagogy? Just as trust can grow with people when we pay attention to trust, so can the power of feminist love, a central tenet of my pedagogical practice. I believe, as Black woman scholar, author and public intellectual bell hooks (2001) emphasizes that when love is nurtured in us it enhances our capacity to be self-actualized and to engage in communion with the world around us (p. 4). **This is not romantic love but the love of resistance and collectivity.** Teaching this form of love asks students to resist the self-hatred promoted by oppression and to take themselves—their minds and bodies—and each other seriously. Recognizing systems of oppression, through theory and analysis, allows students to examine society and culture, to think in more liberatory ways, and to build collective and individual forms of resistance to ableism, patriarchy, white supremacy, heterosexism, transphobia, nationalism, capitalism, anti-Semitism, etc. The first step to resist patriarchy is to resist self-hatred. When we get the oppressors out of our heads we can imagine freedom. As Audre Lorde (1984), a self-described Black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet reminds us, “The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” (p. 110).

To focus on love may appear a tall order to practice in classrooms. I start each semester off with structured opportunities to connect across differences and build community—for students to get to know each other and me. Because *what you pay attention to grows*, I often assign bell hook’s (2001) book *All About Love: New Visions* to center our exploration of feminist love. I pay attention to assignments which prepare students to talk to each other about the readings and to encourage participation in class. For example, I create assignments giving them chances to write their thoughts about the readings on their own and then to share those ideas in smaller groups, to learn about each other through the meanings they made from the texts. This also gives every student the opportunity to think through some of their ideas in advance, not only to those that feel comfortable answering questions from a lecture or speaking up in class discussion.

In addition to traditional theory and research texts, I incorporate film, video, poetry and fiction into the curriculum to create opportunities to engage ideas from multiple genres, forms, and points of view. The

interdisciplinary course content challenges students to imagine different ways to think, to practice love, to resist domination and to relate to each other with justice.

I use this range of media to welcome different teachers into the classroom, an aspect of the concept of *ethical referencing*. Regina Yung Lee (2018), offers this framework to center, research and actively reference Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, other people of color and LGBTQ folks in work, in syllabi, and course lectures.³ The *Cite Black Women* and #CiteASista™ movements also motivate people to practice incorporating and centering Black women's scholarship and writing. When syllabi include assigned readings by people of color and the students are required to properly reference those texts, it highlights the work people of color have done and continue to do. It also makes sure students, especially students of color, know they belong. They belong in higher education, as professors, researchers, poets, filmmakers, writers, and everywhere. Ethical referencing, *Cite Black Women*, and #CiteASista™ pay attention to creating and supporting multiracial communities in academia and can be practiced across all fields. Whose work do you teach? Who is featured in the textbooks and examples you use? Make a point to investigate and diversify syllabi (use the Center for Urban Education's, 2018, *Equity-minded inquiry series: Syllabus Review*) and texts because research confirms: diversity and inclusion contribute to college success and retention (U.S. Department of Education Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, 2016). When you imagine what you want to grow in your classrooms with students, such as their ability to learn and understand the ideas, what can you change in your teaching or materials to pay more attention to the acts and practices that contribute to those abilities and to students' academic success?

How to queer this principle of what you pay attention to grows? First, recognize some of what folks are conditioned to value in our culture: money, influence, and ourselves as individuals, not feminist love or ethical referencing. In fact, what most teachers have been taught to pay attention to, for example, assignment due dates and the canon in academic fields, is steeped in white supremacy, heteronormativity, patriarchy, and capitalism. If the focus of our attention remains normative, love and connecting across differences cannot happen. Queering this principle is resisting the pull of cultural norms to buy ourselves happy or distrust difference. It is to go one step beyond and become aware of the interconnected nature of social identities, such as gender identity, sexuality, race, class, ability, nationality, and religion, among others. It is to accept "the relational nature of those differences," as Elsa Barkley Brown (1992) has evocatively noted: The privileges afforded to white people are literally at the direct detriment of those not white; white people lead the lives we do because women and men of color live the lives they do (p. 298). Paying attention to how power circulates creates opportunities for all of us to learn, listen, dialogue and act across differences.

Less Prep More Presence

In becoming too attached to the preparation for class and covering all the material, we might miss the actual practice of being present with each other and learning. Practicing community building in classrooms, meetings, and organizing work gives us the opportunity to listen to each other across differences, learn across differences, and grow our capacity to embody the worlds we long for. This is not just a practice in women's, gender and sexuality studies, the humanities or social sciences; *less is more* is a common principle in business and leadership studies.

In the sciences, Elizabeth Kitchen and her colleagues (2003) researched the idea of "attempt less and accomplish more" (p. 188) in their large lecture Cell Biology courses. They covered less material but used interactive teaching techniques which required students to explain about the science they were learning in more depth than the traditional lecture course control group. At the end of the semester the students in both settings did equally well on the same exams, even the students in the sections which did not cover all

3 I practice ethical referencing in this article and cite the race or queer identity of authors when possible or known.

the material that was on the test. The real change was the students in the interactive sections gained more confidence in dealing with biological concepts and scientific reasoning (p. 190-191). For Kitchen and her colleagues, more presence meant learning to talk about science and explain scientific concepts, which led not only to accomplishing more than just content coverage, but also to community building and critical thinking.

How can we cultivate more presence in our pedagogy and classrooms? There are days when many students come to class without having read the assigned texts (the students did the less prep part of this principle) and we can still practice presence and engage the texts in the classroom. Ask students to read out loud specific quotes or paragraphs and together as a class analyze their meaning. Or have the students turn to their neighbors to think about what the textual passage might mean together. Additionally, reading out loud encourages a different valuing of the texts, centers students' voices, increases their public speaking skills and confidence. It is also important to explain the value of reading out loud in class. Often students have negative or fearful responses to this request, so to frame it as an opportunity to hear different voices and to think differently about the texts can transform some of those responses.

Valuing student voices brings back the first tenet of trusting students when it comes to less prep, more presence. When we are present in a class and a conversation takes an unexpected turn, when a great question stumps the instructor, can we be present enough to change our lesson plan, our curriculum to add new ideas, questions or themes into future classes? Can we be generous enough to encompass more?

In these pandemic times how might this principle work in online learning? In my teaching, less preparation means my online learning environments are confusing to students (many emailed to tell me my course was disorganized and hard to follow). I know organization and what makes sense is socially constructed; what is disorganized for some might be clear to others. Simultaneously taking a course which seems disorganized is frustrating. My response is to be present with generosity and respect. I empathize with the confusion (this is all confusing to me too!), validate the students' experiences of alienation and inability to find assignments and due dates. I email and check in on them when I do not hear from them. I appreciate their work, support their ideas and them showing up. I encourage them, which research shows improves their participation and engagement (Okonofua et al., 2016). This is not a social science or humanities response: generosity and compassion can be practiced in all online teaching. Teacher empathy can change student interactions and improve their success (Okonofua et al., 2016). In my evaluations during the pandemic, students reported: they learned a lot, felt heard, and found this online class less alienating than others.

Is all presence the same and equal? Queering the idea of presence is to question anything constructed as value-neutral and to ask ourselves and others for a deeper listening, listening with more intent, and more vulnerability. This is a multidirectional listening where we are willing to see our interrelatedness as humans and our desire to connect across the power lines, oppressions and harms separate us. AnaLouise Keating (2009), feminist woman of colors, defines, "This deep listening as listening with raw openness to underscore its difficult, potentially painful dimensions. ... Peeling back our defensive barriers, we expose ourselves (our identities, our beliefs, and our worldviews) to change" (p. 92). Listening with raw openness challenges us to queerly resist the binaries of either/or thinking and judgments, and the normative ways we have been taught to fear difference, instead using it as a resource for transformation as Lorde (1984, p. 115) challenges us to do. Listening with raw openness means teachers are present with their students, learning with their students and learning from their students. This form of listening also asks, especially of people with privilege, to listen in ways that open us up to uncertainty and recognize we don't always know. This offers us so many opportunities to learn. And sometimes not knowing can lead to mistakes.

Never a Failure Always a Lesson

Failure or mistakes happen in interactions with students and colleagues and this principle reminds us: mistakes and failures are chances to learn. In anti-racist pedagogy, particularly for white educators, often the

mistakes are about racism or other oppressions.

Feminist accountability recognizes, as Russo (2019) explains, we are often overwhelmed, hurt, angry when we are in a classroom or a meeting where racism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, sexism manifest. Sometimes these occurrences get pointed out, other times ignored or silenced. It can be difficult to know how to address these inevitable harms which cannot be avoided in systems of oppression. Our work is then to cultivate the ability to respond to the commonplace instances of oppression and harm (Russo, 2019, p. 28-29). Also, the logics normalizing systemic oppression are always present, as Black psychologist and educator Beverly Tatum (1996) explains, “like smog in the air. . . . [A]lways, day in and day out we are breathing it in” (P. 6).

Thus, we are all involved in the everyday occurrences of racism, sexism, heterosexism because we are all breathing the smog of systemic oppression. Often these harms stem from unconscious bias. “The human brain can take in 11 million pieces of information in any one moment. We’re only consciously aware of maybe 40 of these—at best” (powell, 2014, slide 3). We will not be rid of this bias and thus need to address it. We need to become more cognitively aware of our own biases and slow down. We must take more time so our minds can make conscious choices and recognize the logics of sexism or racism, for example.

Even when I take time, I am still racist and commit microaggressions. (I use this term for its current parlance despite my agreement with theorists’ critiques, like Ibram X. Kendi’s (2019), about how it minimizes racist abuse.) Derald Wing Sue (2010), Asian American multicultural scholar, explains that microaggressions are, “brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to certain individuals because of their group membership. The term was first coined by Pierce in 1970 in his work with Black Americans” (p. xvi).

African American psychiatrist and professor Chester M. Pierce, defined microaggressions as “subtle, stunning, often automatic, and nonverbal exchanges which are ‘put downs’” (Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, & Willis, 1978, p. 66). I have done this by calling students the wrong names, mispronouncing their names, passing papers back incorrectly and more. These mistakes are compounded by systemic racism. It means something different for me, the white teacher, to mix up the white students’ names than those of the Latinx or African American students, or to mispronounce Asian and Asian American student names. How we respond in these moments can be the lesson. When I call an African American student by the wrong name: Do I recognize it? Can I apologize and name it as racialized? Sometimes.

Sometimes I can stop and apologize in front of the whole class and discuss how as a white person not remembering or not pronouncing the name correctly is a white way of being. In other words, I can use my own failure as an example of the way white people don’t have to be good at that work because of white supremacy. I recognize white people have the privilege to: not always be able to tell the difference between people of color and not always remember people of color’s names, nor even be able to pronounce them. And those acts are microaggressions. Sometimes I explain and take accountability for my failure, try to learn and change, and not do it again. Because I have been taught, like white people and other people with power are: my feelings matter, I am tempted to apologize and explain too much; ask for assurances, especially from those I harm. This centers me and my feelings, how I feel bad because I committed a microaggression, and also how I really am a good white person.

Sometimes I can recognize this behavior as white fragility. For Robin Diangelo (2018), white educator and consultant, white fragility “may be conceptualized as the *sociology of dominance*: an outcome of white people’s socialization into white supremacy and a means to protect, maintain and reproduce white supremacy” (italics in original, p.113). After I realize that I commit a microaggression, in the classroom or a meeting, sometimes I can also recognize the mindset that continues the harm: I must then be validated by those I have harmed. Thus, another layer of utilizing the principle of failure as a lesson is to move to repair (Diangelo, 2018, p.145), apologize, take accountability, and not spend time on *my* feelings, *my* fragility, with the folks I hurt.

The lesson is: I will, sadly, commit microaggressions and harm others, in meetings, classrooms and

beyond. We will all be in spaces where sexism, racism, homophobia, settler colonialism, anti-Semitism manifest. We all experience privilege and will commit microaggressions and oppressive acts against others. There is not one of us who is free of the “smog” of systemic oppression. These failures and mistakes happen in all disciplines and classrooms. We can be racist or sexist, ableist or anti-Semitic, Heterosexist or anti-Muslim because of the “day in and day out” nature of oppression (Tatum, 1996, p. 6). The lesson is: we need to cultivate our ability to recognize our harmful actions, respond to our mistakes, take accountability, move to repair, realize our failure as a lesson, and become resilient in our work to imagine justice and liberation.

Where is the queer in this principle, in recognizing our mistakes and asking for ourselves and other people to be accountable? The queer is in the resiliency, in the face of failure we continue to build community. The queer is also in recognizing a good/bad behavior binary. We are not bad people but people living within systems of oppression shaping how we engage in the world. Committing microaggressions does not make us bad people; apologizing and taking accountability to learn and change does not make us good people. The queer work then is to recognize how these systemic power relations manifest and impact us, so in coming together we will have more power to resist and, as brown (2017) says, “work for the just and liberated worlds we long for” (p. 3). The queer is also in the connections created in repair and community building. In the feminist love of justice and valuing the humanity of those different from us. In the students who were encouraged to succeed with our respect. The queer is the joy in our ability to change. To return to the opening quote from Octavia Butler (1993), the work of queer anti-racist feminist pedagogy is to recognize: “All that you touch you change. All that you change, changes you. The only lasting truth is change” (p. 3).

Change is Constant

One thing we can count on in this world is how things change. Can we embrace it? One strategy I practice is what Mari Matsuda (1991), Asian American activist and lawyer calls, “Ask the other question” (p. 1189). Matsuda invites us to recognize interlocking forms of oppression by not just focusing on the most glaring form. For instance, Matsuda writes, “When I see something that looks racist, I ask ‘Where is the patriarchy in this?’ When I see something that looks sexist, I ask ‘Where is the heterosexism in this?’” (p. 1189). Asking the other question reminds us how oppression is interconnected and changing.

How does this analysis emerge in my teaching and community? I used to call out and try to isolate people who caused harm, or people who were racist or people who were homophobic. I thought isolating the person would somehow create a space free from harm and oppression; through asking the other questions I now realize we all commit harm and microaggressions. The work, as Russo (2019) reminds us is to focus “more on how we will respond *when* it manifests” (italics in original, p. 29) and to see ourselves as continually implicated in the “smog” of white supremacy which requires a collective to sustain meaningful political change.

Why not use the organizing strategy of “Calling In,” instead? It has been called “A Less Disposable Way of Holding Each Other Accountable” (Trần, 2013). Calling in, supporting and educating people to recognize the “smog,” gives those of us who make mistakes an opportunity to change and be accountable, to recognize how all are shaped by sexism, racism, classism, islamophobia, heterosexism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, ableism, and colonialism. Thus, we all commit harm and microaggressions and all need to take accountability, repair and change, the practice of calling in can help.⁴ By working together, we can overcome the overarching systems of oppression which keep us separate and unequal, whether in the classroom, in autonomous spaces for people of color, in white anti-racist groups, in people with disabilities organizing spaces and beyond. It is first in our imaginations where we are unconstrained in our responses but in queerly cultivating anti-racist feminist pedagogy we intentionally change in ways to grow our capacity to embody the just and liberated worlds we long for. This involves trusting each other, recognizing failure as a lesson, working to be present

⁴ As Ngọc Loan Trần (2013) notes, this is not in opposition to calling out but another tool to be used in community and with people we with whom we have common ground, say in the classroom or in faculty meetings.

and pay attention to what we want to grow. Let us resist white supremacy, settler colonialism, capitalism, Anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, Xenophobia, ableism, and heteropatriarchy together!

Gloria Anzaldúa charted a path for us. As one of the first openly queer Chicana Indigenous writers, her theory and activism helped redefine and develop inclusionary movements for social justice. She reminds us, “Nothing happens in the “real” world unless it first happens in the images in our heads” (1987, p. 87). She challenges us to change our minds, our hearts and our behavior:

We are ready for change.
Let us link hands and hearts
together find a path through the dark woods
step through the doorways between worlds
leaving huellas for others to follow,
build bridges, cross them with grace, and claim these puentes our “home”
si se puede, que asi sea, so be it, estamos listas, vámonos.
Now let us shift. (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 576)

Let’s cultivate our capacity to embody the just and liberated worlds we long for.

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Afrosurrealism, Aristotle, and Racial Presence in Netflix's *Luke Cage*

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ABSTRACT

This essay examines *Netflix's Luke Cage* as a rhetorical reading of racial embodiment and productions of the cultural identity of Blackness and People of Color, and the tensions they produce to help audiences understand the current climatic flux between racial hostility and American idealism. With only two seasons in the small-screen version of the *Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU)*, Cheo Hodari Coker's adaptation of the 1970s Blaxploitation *Power Man* comic foregrounded the recent wave of superhero narratives that expanded minority/gender representation from both major comic houses (*MCU* and *DC Extended Universe [DCEU]*). This examination employs the lens of Afrosurrealism, a conceptual framework of understanding Blackness through its many complex manifestations of cultural and aesthetic representations in art across time. It is through this Afrosurrealist concept where references to race such as "Black," "Brown," "White," and "People of Color" are applied to describe specific people groups/collectives throughout this essay. Using Afrosurrealism, I argue that *Luke Cage* can be analyzed through Aristotle's three species of rhetoric: the judicial rhetoric of the past, the epideictic rhetoric of the present, and the deliberative rhetoric of the future. By using these three rhetorical branches, this analysis demonstrates a diasporic reading of race with Harlem as its bridge to the "realms" of New York City and beyond. This reading of a Black superhero's world, *Luke Cage's* "Harlem World," thus brings about an awareness of a necessary racial presence, resulting in a grounding of racial realities, that subverts an ideal post-racial afterlife in the post-Obama "American" universe. By understanding the show's characters and the setting of Harlem as another type of Americana manifestation, an America that from its origin to its current iteration is constructed through race, we can continue to learn the significance of representation and how working through issues of race for African Americans and People of Color impacts everyone. If we continue to resist the racial tensions and realities in our social climate, then we run the risk of contributing to the racial issues we say we would like to help heal.

Keywords: *Luke Cage*, race, rhetoric, Afrosurrealism, Aristotle, Marvel, MCU

INTRODUCTION

Representation matters, especially for People of Color, on both the big and the small screen. The *Netflix* version of *Marvel's Luke Cage*¹ can thus serve as an example and as a rhetorical text of why such visibility is critical for individuals of color and how, through the medium of popular culture, audiences can think through issues connected to race and awareness. As a show, *Luke Cage* does not shy away from portraying the social tensions and hostilities of a desired post-racial America, and it does so through the backdrop of the *Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU)*. In the two seasons of the show— as the third “Marvel Knight” to have his own *Netflix* show—*Luke Cage* stirred a flurry of interest among viewers as it confronted ongoing themes of trauma, violence, identity, community, and survival as an *MCU* tie-in to the events in New York City after the “Incident.”² Given the meteoric successes of big-screen films like *Wonder Woman* (2017), *Black Panther* (2018), *Aquaman* (2018), and even television series such as *Black Lightning* (2018), *Batwoman* (2019), and the *HBO* adaptation of *Watchmen* (2019), the small screen version of *Luke Cage* (2016-2018) time-stamps the latest wave of superhero adaptations that take on a more cultural and gendered expansion of characterizations in their respective comic universes.³ With such an expansion comes the opportunity to analyze the various ways viewers come to comprehend what an American is and who qualifies to conform to that ideal depiction. This essay examines *Netflix's Luke Cage* as a rhetorical reading of racial embodiment and its productions of the cultural identity of Blackness and People of Color, and the tensions these produce to help audiences understand the current climatic flux between racial hostility and American idealism. Specific references to race such as “Black,” “Brown,” and “White” will be used throughout this essay, along with a distinction of “People of Color” as markers toward the historical tensions of such cultural identities.⁴

The show was compelling for several reasons, but the most provocative centerpiece came in the form of the show's namesake, Luke Cage (Mike Colter). As a bullet-proof Black man, Cage is impervious to one of the most common weapons used against Black bodies. Not only is his superpower a nod to racial trauma, but his trademark hoodie riddled with bullet holes also harkens to the images of such real-life victims of gun violence like Trayvon Martin, Botham Jean, and Atatiana Jefferson.⁵ Though many of the show's critics focused on concerns about respectability politics and hypermasculinity connected to violence, the larger discourse to consider is that of racial awareness as understood from the show's Black and Brown perspectives and how such awareness is reflected in a post-Obama America. I argue that examining *Luke Cage* from this perspective of race, conceptually and rhetorically through Afrosurrealism and Aristotle's three species of rhetoric, better serves the purpose of understanding the show's conversations about racial embodiment and identity across the diaspora and the cautionary tales that arise from the desire to live in a colorblind society.

Before describing the narrative arcs of *Luke Cage* and delving into the conceptual and rhetorical underpinnings of the show, I believe it is important to define some key terms used in this essay to help us navigate the analysis and the functioning of the framework. Afrosurrealism was first coined by Amiri Baraka when he described the work of slain artist Henry Dumas back in 1974.⁶ Afrosurrealism, like the Surrealism movement of the early 20th Century, is understood as a collective sensibility, a way of recognizing art that focuses on aesthetics, composition, sensation, and display.⁷ Afrosurrealism approaches artistic expression from a grounding of the here and now through critical insight on what is termed “a future past:” an intentional observation of history and an action-oriented future, from the seen and unseen (unconscious) perspective through the unique lens of the African-descended/African American experience (Miller). Like Surrealism, it is not a theory as much as a collective concept of perception and interpretation. While Surrealism historically links itself to the Dada movement and the Eurocentric propensities of the avant-garde, Afrosurrealism secures its roots in the Harlem Renaissance, the Negritude movement, in African and African-Caribbean modernism, and is, at its core, Black.⁸ This Blackness, however, veers from defining the African American as its own exclusive type and expands Blackness into a more hemispheric and global inclusiveness. In this

sense, Black... is. Notable early and contemporary commentators, artists, and scholars include Aimé Césaire, Suzanne Césaire, Léopold Sédar Senghor, and D. Scott Miller who penned the 2009 “Afrosurreal Manifesto.” Other examples of artists of such renown who helped popularize the term include Robin D.G. Kelley, Krista Franklin, Terence Nance, and a growing number of poets, visual artists, filmmakers, and practitioners. Miller, in his manifesto, puts forth 10 coalescing principles to describe Afrosurrealism in the sense of how, through it, the unknown world is perceived and how it is believed to strive to manifest itself in the visible; the value of the past is restored with fresh insight; excess subversion and hybridization are used as forms of disobedience; reality is distorted for emotional impact; an effort towards whimsy is made; and meaning and fluidity in iconography is sought. Afrosurrealism does not merely concern itself with the interplay between dreaming and awaked-ness, between the mystic and the material, it also concerns itself with honoring the past as the primary work to recover a knowing present. Miller goes on to describe the key concept of Afrosurrealism by stating:

There is no need for tomorrow’s-tongue speculation about the future... What is the future? The future has been around so long it is now the past. Afro-Surrealists expose this from a “future-past” called RIGHT NOW... Afro-Surreal is the best description to the reactions, the genu-flections, the twists, and the unexpected turns this “browning” of White-Straight-Male-Western-Civilization has produced (20).

In terms of embodiment, Afrosurrealism provides a space for Africans, African Americans, Afro Caribbeans, and Afro-Latinas/os/x to claim and reclaim a complicated past without apology and allow its “manifestation” to be manifest in the present through the sumptuousness of heritage as both speculation and reality. It allows Black and Brown bodies (and variations in-between, in proximity, and throughout) to occupy space without regret or shame. It also pushes against the lie that these bodies and the spaces they occupy are essentially threatening. Embodiment, through this lens, is thriving and is no more or less a concern than any other body allowed to occupy a space to live in. In terms of cultural productions of identity, Afrosurrealism expands upon Stuart Hall’s premise that cultural identity is a matter of “becoming” and “being,” taking it further than history and the future and flowing it back to the present (70). People of Color have multiple beginnings, interwoven contexts of origin in both language and place, and self-expression.

Afrosurrealism pushes against an objective view of Blackness, thus dismantling the pretenses of othering.⁹ There is no one way to be Black or to live the Black experience. In this sense, there is no one way to arrive at the conclusion of Blackness - Black is and Black becomes. Though some would argue for Afrofuturism or even Afropessimism as more suitable concepts to frame an analysis of *Luke Cage*, I instead argue for Afrosurrealism as the more comprehensive lens for this reading because it allows room for more than just scientific, technological, hauntological, and decolonial possibilities. *Luke Cage*, as a superhero show in the *MCU*, does feature sci-fi and technology such as the Judas bullet by Hammer Industries, Cage’s own enhanced powers, Diamondback’s suit of armor, Misty Knight’s bionic arm from Rand Industries, and the aftermath of the Incident itself. The show also deals with the struggles of racial subjugation originating from systemic injustice and the sense of nothingness that Afropessimism puts forth.¹⁰ A closer look, however, will allow us to see that dealing with sci-fi and technology, the enhanced powers imbued to a Black body, and the othering of Black and racialized bodies, gives us the metaphorical exercise of manifestation, and this is more than simply a snapshot of a possible techno-future or a non-future for People of Color. Afrofuturism, the speculative engagements of afro-tech-culture, is not inappropriate by any stretch of the imagination, but Afrosurrealism is simply more inclusive and malleable. Afropessimism, in its provocation of Blackness as nothingness, is doable as well, yet Afrosurrealism provides collective materiality that is more readily pliable towards a sense of embodiment. Thus, Afrosurrealism provides us a racially-oriented perspective into the future-past concepts presently at work in *Luke Cage*.

While Afrosurrealism informs the way to engage this analysis, Aristotle provides the structure. Understood as the classical means of appeal, Aristotle's three branches of oratory employ the temporal construct of Afrosurrealism with its focus on past (judicial), present (epideictic), and future (deliberative) forms of rhetoric. As a show, *Luke Cage* works as a dialectic, a conversation between itself and its audience, about Harlem as an Afrosurreal triumphant setting of past-future-present through its restoration of the Harlem Renaissance and its characters' racial presence. The show recovers cultural symbols of pride and success from Harlem's past, it reveals current imperfections in examples of whimsy, and it explores Harlem's future possibilities from a grounded state in the present. From this standpoint, Aristotle's judicial, epideictic, and deliberative genres of rhetoric permit viewers to witness the manifestations of characters becoming themselves in their Afrosurrealist materiality of being and how those characters occupy their space with fluid ambiguity. Judicial rhetoric allows audiences to observe character ambiguity developed from their past. Epideictic rhetoric encourages viewers to interpret behavior and identity by scaling it against the notions of morality. Deliberative rhetoric tasks observers to imagine the possibilities of what characters could do given what they are already doing. From this perspective, racial presence is defined as the ways in which People of Color choose to occupy space, not the ways in which those spaces are assumed to be occupied or how those spaces are interpreted. Such presence disrupts the Western-White-male gaze by complicating a need for an in-roads into the culture without an accompanying lexicon to explain cultural experiences. This mode of racial presence thus obstructs the gaze by pushing against the tendency, unintentional or otherwise, to default into dominant cultural expectations of what a superhero show with a predominately non-White cast should look like and how it functions as part of the greater cinematic universe arc. Thus, by applying concepts of Afrosurrealism to Aristotle's three types of rhetoric to the show, we can learn that the lived experiences of Black and Brown people are broad, fluid, and complex.

A SNAPSHOT OF SEASONS 1 AND 2

Luke Cage is the third *Defenders* installment after Cage endures an explosive departure from the *Jessica Jones*'s series upon learning how his wife was murdered. Cage discovers his wife was murdered by Jones (Krysten Ritter) while under Killgrave's (David Tennant) spell.¹¹ He takes refuge in Harlem, and Season 1 of the show views it as a two-act play. The first act establishes Luke Cage as a fugitive seeking safety, and the murder of his father figure, Pop (Frankie Faison), propels him to seek justice and disclose his superhero powers. This exposure leads to his involvement with Claire Temple (Rosario Dawson), the "Night Nurse," and they begin to traverse New York City for answers about his unlawful imprisonment at Seagate.¹² The second act moves players into position after the unexpected murder of acclaimed crime boss Cornell "Cottonmouth" Stokes (Mahershala Ali) by his cousin councilwoman Mariah Dillard (Alfre Woodard), and then it follows the arc of Cage facing the consequences of a past he can no longer run away from. Throughout Season 1, the show captures the present situations of characters based on former circumstances, setting up the metaphorical game of chess that guides the story arc of each episode. Along with the rest of the characters including Hernon "Shades" Alvarez (Theo Rossi), Willis "Diamondback" Stryker (Erik LaRay Harvey), and Misty Knight (Simone Missick), Season 1 depicts an entangled web of violence, deception, sibling rivalry, and retribution, leaving surprise game players at the top of Harlem's world and Luke Cage facing penalties for breaking out of prison, with room for opening the storyline for Season 2. Each episode is named after a song by the hip-hop group Gang Starr.

Season 2 transitions to where Luke Cage encounters a new villain, John "Bushmaster" McIver (Mustafa Shakir) while also reuniting with his father James Lucas (Reg E. Cathey). The season highlights Cage's struggle with the power dynamics of a broken father-son relationship and facing an opponent that possesses the same

level of enhanced strength and healing abilities as he does. At first, Cage pays homage to his *Power Man, Hero for Hire* comic roots by publicizing his skill set as available for contract employment. Season 2 also plays out in two acts. The first act follows Luke Cage's conflict in his moral disposition towards justice because to him, it does not come swiftly enough and is unsatisfactory in its conclusion. Mariah Dillard continues her descent/ascent into her family's criminal legacy while also seeking penance through a public reconciliation attempt with her daughter Tilda Johnson (Gabrielle Dennis), a holistic doctor and herbalist. Cage not only struggles with mending the relationship with his father but a violent outburst from him tears his relationship with Claire apart. The first act closes with a fight between Bushmaster and Cage, and Bushmaster wins by paralyzing Cage and throwing him into the river. The second act of Season 2 sets forth the course of Mariah Dillard's demise by highlighting the history and the warring factions between her and her Stokes family and between Bushmaster and his family, along with the Jamaican residents of Harlem. Their shared history and their present violence uncovers an inner racial hostility between them as a subset of a larger discourse on Black identity and intra-racial discrimination. Through a series of encounters with Bushmaster, the show concludes with Mariah's imprisonment and her death by a poisoned kiss from her daughter. Cage is bequeathed Mariah's club, "Harlem's Paradise," through her will, and viewers witness Cage becoming Harlem's new henchman in charge, cobbling together a shaky alliance with New York's criminal syndicates and Cage's identity as a Defender left in flux. Each episode of Season 2 is named after a Pete Rock and CL Smooth song. Both seasons feature contemporary R&B and hip-hop artists at the Harlem's Paradise nightclub.¹³

ARISTOTLE'S RHETORIC AND AN AFROSURREALIST SENSE OF TIME

Luke Cage is the typical superhero, Herculean, story in its features of a protagonist with enhanced powers who fights for humanity, while it also engages discourses of race, power, and the struggle for the soul of a neighborhood. The moral ambiguity of the characters complicates any wholesale account of their being good or evil based on their histories, choices, and circumstances. From this perspective, Aristotle provides us an entry into the dialectic the show constructs for its viewers. Aristotle sees dialectic as useful, "because after enumerating the opinions of the many we shall engage in discussion with others on the basis of their own beliefs rather than that of others, restating whatever they seem to be saying to us when it is not well said." He also states that dialectic is useful, "because if we are able to raise difficulties on both sides of the issue, we shall more easily see in each case what is true and what is false" (265). In this mode, *Luke Cage* engages in a conversation with us through its structure, location, language, and characters. Mitch Murray argues, a "dialectical understanding enables us to see in certain superhero series both a 'realist experimentation [that] helps establish a set of cultural practices' and a modernist impulse that 'experiments on the institution of a practice itself'" (19). The show allows us to bear witness to struggles with power and perspective, from a distance. Murray continues by saying, "The plot-driven narratives of certain superhero series are not at odds with, but central to, its particular modernism" (43). In this way, we, the viewers, participate in the act of observation - of witnessing the experiment of reality. Once the show concludes, we are left with the issues and experiences presented to us and are challenged to see whether our views should alter based on the impressions we felt from the performances in the show.

Luke Cage speaks to the past, present, and future iterations of its characters, leading them back into a fully realized racial presence. Eugene Garver explains that "The three kinds of rhetoric are three ways in which argument leads to judgment. That is, deliberative, judicial and epideictic rhetoric lead to judgments in different ways" (5). Viewers are placed in a position to not only observe, but also to reach their own conclusions regarding the characters and their actions. Garver continues, "In the three kinds of rhetoric there is a confluence of the end of a kinesis—once a judgment is made, further argument is pointless—and the

end of an *energeia*—fulfilling the function of rhetoric by being persuaded” (5). With judicial, epideictic, and deliberative rhetoric, we engage with the show through a performative/observer dialogue where we question ourselves and our assumptions, understanding the significance of acknowledging the types of experiences the characters undergo in real life as they represent their presence in spaces that may not be readily defined for us.

Judicial rhetoric helps us bear witness to a character’s past to decipher their present ambiguity. For example, Cottonmouth seeks empathy as a character because although he is a gun-running gangster, he only functions as a product of his environment and the duty he feels to maintain his family’s influence in the community. When speaking with his cousin Mariah Dillard, he says, “You know what people remember besides Black martyrdom? Black money.” He also tells her, “Money outlasts respect. Respect will put your name on the side of a building, but the money that put your name up there, comes from some place” (Season 1, Ep. 2). This provides a glimpse into Cottonmouth’s understanding of influence as currency. As the season progresses, the show reveals his entryway into the criminal underworld via his Aunt, “Mama Mabel” Mabelline Stokes (LaTanya Richardson Jackson). He had a love for piano playing and wanted to pursue his music scholastically. However, Mama Mabel forced him into the “family business” and by age 14, he began his trek as a criminal under-lord in Harlem (Season 1, Ep. 7). Cottonmouth’s clever dialogue points to his ambiguous tension between the need to stay in a position of power but also the need to express his discontent with his constraints. Cottonmouth operates within an ultimate paradox because he occupies both innocence and guilt; the man who speaks at Pop’s memorial is the same one who murders one of his henchmen when he mentions the path of benign neglect to deal with the Luke Cage problem (Season 1, Ep. 5). The man that says, “Money is still green,” is the same one that says, “Believe it or not there’s supposed to be rules to this sh—t.” Cottonmouth reminds us that his embodiment comes from decisions formerly made that bestow him with what he deems as success. The implication is that not all criminals are hardened by nature; actions, though violent and illegal, are simply a means to a conclusion. Cottonmouth takes what was given him and builds a name for himself, without cloaking himself in victimhood. Viewers are forced to choose whether he is simply a product of his circumstances or complicit in the choices leading to his “downfall.”

Another example of judicial rhetoric comes through the ways one can interpret the character Diamondback’s excesses. Willis Stryker comes to Harlem to seek revenge on Luke Cage for what he perceives is needed retribution for his father’s bastardization. As cynical and extremist as he is, Diamondback wants us to understand that his father, who is also Luke Cage’s married preacher father, discarded him in favor of Cage, and that his vengeance, then, is justified as an act of Cain needing to kill Abel (Season 1, Ep. 6). Cottonmouth and Diamondback are similar in that they are both paradoxically products of choice: Cottonmouth is chosen for entry into the criminal world while Mariah is protected and esteemed. Diamondback is rejected while Luke Cage is protected and esteemed. Diamondback mirrors his half-brother in that he uses the Bible as his discursive performance in an even more extreme “moral” application than Cage does. Diamondback engages in unmitigated acts of violence and even mimics Cage by creating a suit to shield him from Cage’s superpower. He challenges us to see him as unapologetically excessive and complicated by the failures of an unnurtured past. Diamondback’s fractures and his ambiguity between the sacred and the profane causes us to either dismiss him or sympathize with him once he suffers paralysis at the hands of his brother. Viewers are left to determine their own response to Diamondback’s fate as we wrestle with how he acted upon an unfulfilled need for the love of his and Cage’s father.

Epideictic rhetoric helps us choose how to view a character’s current racial embodiment and how it contextualizes their virtue in a superhero world. Aristotle argues that “Since virtue is defined as an ability for doing good, the greatest virtues are necessarily those most useful to others. For that reason, people most honor the just and the courageous; for the latter is useful to others in war, and the former in peace as well” (76). Rhetorically speaking, both Shades and Luke Cage engage in questionable acts of violence, but in their

character perspectives, they feel justified. As referenced throughout, we are called to participate in the act of witnessing. Bradford J. Vivian says, “Acts of witnessing are generically epideictic in nature (....) A witness is not simply a unique individual but a uniquely authoritative persona in contemporary public culture” (190). For instance, in Season 1, Ep. 3, Luke Cage marches into the Crispus Attucks complex to the backdrop of Wu Tang’s “Bring the M--f-ing Ruckus.” This is the scene where Cage storms in and fights against all of Cottonmouth’s henchmen. What is critical about this scene is that not only does the audience see Luke Cage being shot repeatedly while donning his hoodie, but we see him, in Robin Hood-like fashion, taking Cottonmouth’s money as an owed debt. Cage also shields himself with a vehicle door as bullets rip into the metal but are repelled from him. This visualization appears as a statement of extreme violence against Black and Brown bodies in a building complex signifying a new Harlem Renaissance. He uses the money to pay the debt of Pop’s barbershop. He tells Pop’s friend and former taxman, “You got change that can make change.” Cage engages in an unlawful act for a just cause. Should audiences praise or blame him, especially since Cage has already suffered so much loss as a tragic hero?

In another instance, when Cage beats a released parolee suspected of domestic violence against his partner, should viewers see him heroically, as a vigilante, or as a stereotypical angry Black man (Season 2, Ep.3)? Cage transitions from justice to vengeance between Season 1 and 2, and he seemingly flows in the contradiction of recklessness and respectability. He embodies the expectations of admiration and justice but also collides against it with his own need to reach his desired conclusions. He exemplifies the collapsed icon of Black masculinity, and epideictically, we, as viewers, are challenged to see his embodiment, his bullet-proof yet vulnerable masculine Blackness, as ambiguous but fully autonomous as his own.¹⁴

Another example of epideictic rhetoric is Shades, who we, as viewers, are challenged to struggle with the ambiguity he demonstrates as one of the ultimate power players on the show. In Season 1, he manages to appear in most episodes and works as a master manipulator using whatever available means of persuasion afforded him to move up in the criminal underworld. Shades engages in a one-sided conversation with the audience, urging them to see him as a non-disposable character with every move he makes. In his confrontation with Mariah, Shades says, “I think, that... when you get the nerve, you’re going to be surprised at just what you’re capable of” (Season 1, Ep. 6). Shades seemingly operates on a variation of virtue, the type of virtue that eliminates potential threats and possible weaknesses but also empowers those who need it most. When Shades finally provides proof that sends Mariah to prison, it signals their inability to reconcile the vision he thought they shared (Season 2, Ep. 12). When Shades gives his final recommendation to Cage to move in the space once occupied by Cottonmouth and Mariah, he does so to ensure another player does not assume power (Season 2, Ep. 13). Shades manipulates to bring about what he believes is the most optimal outcome, and viewers can only suspect that his intentions are selfish, but they cannot be sure because the motives are never truly revealed. In this understanding of embodiment and identity, his occupancy is his own; he does not “become” an “other;” he is a brother. Shades is part of the Harlem collective where Black and Brown converge and flow from each other in their “being.” He mirrors Cage in that they both seek their own outcomes, but we as viewers are left to determine his real definitions of virtue and their implications in the present.

Deliberative rhetoric causes viewers to judge the characters’ potential actions as they are and as they could become. One of the repeated themes referred to by Pop before he dies is “Always forward.” This sentiment, this onward progression, propels the story arc for both seasons. Projecting the future of Harlem allows us to explore its presence and its people. Aristotle says, “Let a good be [defined as] whatever is chosen for itself and that for the sake of which we choose something else and what everything having perception or intelligence aims at or what everything would aim at if it could acquire intelligence” (61). For instance, when reporting on the recent shootings in Harlem, one of the newscasters says:

The shooting comes just days after rising tension between Black and Latino street gangs after a multiple shooting at a local junk yard. The recent uptick in gunfire may mar the new Harlem Renaissance. The shooting at Pop's Barbershop is becoming something that's all too familiar in Harlem; a crime scene. (Season 1, Ep. 4)

The presence of violence speaks to a potential race war, but through characters like Shades and Bushmaster, viewers are given a racial presence that twists and turns through these players. Violence speaks to the ongoing tensions between systems of power and access, from mass shootings to police brutality. But the shooting of Pop's barbershop, the neutral ground of the neighborhood, gives a greater insight into an ambiguous racial presence that collides against the American ideal of minority racial tensions. In the show, these Black and Brown gangs (even the Asian one referenced from *Iron Fist*), concern themselves more with money than simply racial separation. One could argue how such an observation falls into pessimism because of the oppressive structures of capitalism, but I take it further to show it is not as separate as one assumes. Black and Brown bodies work on both sides of violence, not to justify it, but to recognize its double standard. Where one is read as organized crime, the other is read as gang activity. Where one is a boss, the other is a thug. In this concept of rhetoric, we must remain cautious as to how we read violence and its future implications on racial presence because violence occupies a dense space where People of Color often are either diminished or express a sympathy of victimhood that excludes the ambiguity where some instances are not so separated along racial lines.

Another example of deliberative rhetoric comes through Mariah and Bushmaster. Mariah begins Season 1 as a councilwoman on a mission to restore Harlem. At first, she believes, "The only way to save Harlem is to do it legally. To fortify it against the real invaders" (Season 1, Ep. 3). Even though Mariah is already in a position of power with the city, her embodiment as a leader is complicated by the constraints of her trauma, her family history, and her present occupancy. By Season 2, Mariah turns, and her changing ambitions lead to her descending/ascending into her family's legacy as she obsesses over a vision of herself and Harlem that leads to her ruin. This change highlights a greater presence when the show turns to Bushmaster and his history. Bushmaster mimics Diamondback in the sense of coming to Harlem to seek revenge. His plight comes from a troubled history between African-Americans and Afro-Caribbean/Jamaican Americans, specifically his family and hers. The Stokes family is responsible for his family's betrayal and death. The Jamaicans in Harlem stay relatively isolated, but the resurgence of violence upon Bushmaster's return gives us a glimpse into another racial paradox; this time, a Black-on-Black one. Whereas the violence of Black and Brown revolves around drugs, power, and street currency, the Black-on-Black violence intrinsically deals with the culture of otherness. Viewers must wrestle with the seeming segmentation of Black bodies along diasporic lines and question how arbitrary they are. Why does it seem that there are issues between Mariah's people and the Jamaicans beyond the feud (Season 2, Ep. 4)? Why, when hearing the Jamaican accent and vernacular, do we see an othering by characters with the same skin tones? In the case of the feud, there is no one type of Blackness, so who gets the final say on who possesses power in the show? Seemingly, Bushmaster does because he escapes and Mariah dies. Their feud, in terms of occupancy and racial presence, reminds us that a post-racial existence does not exist, especially among Black people. Blackness is diasporic, but the challenge is recognizing it as such.

HARLEM'S WORLD: REPRESENTATION, PEDAGOGY, AND AWARENESS

In *Luke Cage*, Harlem is the world.¹⁵ It functions not only as a setting, but also as the Afrosurrealist aesthetic that guides the show. Hahn Nguyen emphasizes the fact that the series showrunner, Cheo Hodari Coker, music journalist turned TV producer, influences the specific musical nuances throughout. Hip-hop

references are not a coincidence because its appearance hearkens to the past (like jazz) originating in the Black experience and thriving in the present. From Biggie Smalls's photo featured during Cottonmouth's reign, to a direct Tupac reference of "roses from concrete" at Pop's memorial, music speaks to how culture is produced (*IndieWire*, Ep.5). With Afrosurrealism being rooted in an always present, the Harlem Renaissance never stopped; it is an ongoing musically-imbued movement. Coker borrows directly from the comic book's origin but also brings forth Harlem as its own locational subset of social and cultural collisions beyond the Incident. Rhetorically, the setting implies that this historically significant area of New York is a slice of Americana as much as any city in the Midwest. Hip-hop rises to the same premise as rock and roll and Black life is American life. Harlem represents an unfiltered look at a racialized America inside a superhero story. Such awareness resists an American idealism that seeks to bask in a post-racial afterglow of the post-Obama era. Harlem resists the utopian erasure of racial reality.

With such an analysis comes the opportunity to use *Luke Cage* as a popular culture text to engage relevant and urgent discourses on social justice and representation. In a teaching application, *Luke Cage* lends itself to expanding the uses of frameworks such as Critical Race Theory (CRT) and even public pedagogy to help us interrogate ways of seeing, addressing, and eradicating racial inequities while encouraging racial autonomy and agency.¹⁶ As a CRT application, scholars could use the show as a primer to interrogate depictions of violence, systemic oppression, the prison industrial complex, and surveillance while also encouraging the development of counternarratives from viewers of color that situate economic development, love and recovery, community power, cultural heritage, struggle, and history as the loci of lived experience. As a public pedagogy text, the show allows us to critique how the racialized body is performed, is politicized, and is a site of life, trauma, and death while also providing examples of resistance against social constructs of hopelessness.¹⁷ Representation comes when Luke Cage becomes as much of a heroic default as Iron Man is in the MCU, and is allowed to stand as he is without defending himself as a character or without justifying his actions as a feature of the show. *Luke Cage* provides us a cinematic story where some People of Color can survive the fray of a racialized world as superheroes while crushing the arbitrary binaries of good and evil without racial subjugation or reduction of any of their choices or actions.

In conclusion, *Luke Cage* demonstrates how racial presence is a manifestation of the Black experience that does not ask for the permission to be fully realized. Though this analysis highlights some of the characters and parts of Harlem, it has by no means covered the breath of *Luke Cage's* rhetoricity in the Afrosurrealist lens of the present or the full capacity of the pedagogy that can be applied from it. While reeling from the deaths of Black and Brown people from the over-aggression of law enforcement (and now targeted mass shootings), we still deal with issues of abuse and violence against women, with identity, citizenship, and belonging, and we still grapple with instability in housing, education, and healthcare. *Luke Cage* sheds light on these experiences as a bullet-proof, hoodie-wearing Black superhero situated in Harlem, not just in Captain America's New York City. Some may still argue that even with the strides it made as a show, it still clings too tightly to its old dating, is perhaps too Black, or maybe not Black, Brown, or racially inclusive enough. However, I conclude that the show speaks through its racial presence by demonstrating fully realized characters occupying their spaces without apologies or lexicons; they simply... are. *Luke Cage* is Afrosurreal: wholly Black, American, universal, complex, and present. America still needs work; we have yet to heal. A show like this helps us to understand why continued conversations and actions toward race relations are currently needed and still unresolved. It helps us understand how representation paves the way for more films with a greater prominence of women and characters of color, especially its theatrical kinsman *Black Panther*. Though I had hoped for more seasons of the show, I believe there is enough of it with which to continue its liberating work.

END NOTES

1. This article references the cinematic adaptation of the original *Marvel* comic, first appearing in *Luke Cage, Hero for Hire # 1* (June 1972), created by Archie Goodwin, George Tuska, Roy Thomas, and John Romita Sr. Cage was the first Black superhero to be featured in his own comic.
2. The “Marvel Knights” is the internal reference to the shows of the *Marvel* characters, including the season of *Defenders*, on *Netflix*. The “Incident” refers to the alien invasion widely known as the “Battle of New York” featured in *Marvel's* film *The Avengers*, 2012.
3. From 2016-2019, *DC Extended Universe* and *Marvel* expanded their television and theatrical releases to include more gender and racially-inclusive characters and storylines receiving mixed reviews from its respective fanbases.
4. In this article, there is a deliberate and distinct use of capitalization in reference to race. I use the terms “Black” and “Brown” with capital “B” and “White” with capital “W” in an Afrosurrealist application with a historical understanding of the complications and tensions attached while exercising a rhetorical act of recovery. I also express “People of Color” in capitalization as a reference to distinct collective groups marked by race, but I by no means intend erasure of the varying minorities that can comprise them.
5. Trayvon Martin (17) was gunned down by George Zimmerman in Sanford, FL in 2012. Botham Jean (26) was murdered by Amber Guyger in Dallas, TX in 2018. Atatiana Jefferson (28) was murdered by Aaron Dean in Fort Worth, TX in October 2019. The show pays homage to the multiple Black and Brown victims of racially ignited/police-involved violence and shooting deaths. Unfortunately, these names are but a mere fraction of the growing list of victims the show’s themes touched upon, especially the new ones recently added in 2020.
6. Amiri Baraka coined “Afro Surrealist Expressionism” in 1974, in tribute to Henry Dumas, who was killed in 1968 by NYC Transit Police.
7. For an overview and resources on Surrealism, see tate.org.uk.
8. For a “lensed” look into Afrosurrealism, see Terri Francis, “The No-Theory Chant of Afrosurrealism.” *Black Camera*, vol. 5, no. 1 (Fall 2013), pp. 95-111, Indiana UP.
9. “Othering” is often written and referred to in its capitalized form. It is a term and concept that centers on rendering a people group foreign/alien/outsider. For a closer reading of othering as it relates to stereotyping and racialization, see Homi K. Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, 1994. Additional notable scholars include Edward Said and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who critique classic and contemporary notions of racial characterizations made from Eurocentric and colonial perspectives.
10. Afrofuturism was first coined by Mark Dery in *Flame Wars*, 1994. See Kodwo Eshun, “Future Considerations on Afrofuturism.” *CR: The New Centennial Review*, vol. 3, no. 2, globalcities: possibilities of the globe (Summer 2003), pp. 287-302, Michigan State UP. In addition, Afropessimism was first coined in 1990 by Sony Lab’ou Tansi. See Annie Olaloku-Teriba. “Afro-Pessimism and the (Un) Logic of Anti-Blackness.” <http://www.historicalmaterialism.org/articles/afro-pessimism-and-unlogic-anti-blackness>
11. *Jessica Jones* is the second show in the *Defenders’* series on *Netflix*, produced by *Marvel* for *ABC Studios*, 2015-2019. Killgrave in the show is also known as “The Purple Man” in *Marvel Comics*.
12. The character of Claire Temple appears as the main crossover character in the *Defenders’* series, first appearing in *Netflix's Daredevil* (Season 1, Ep.2), 2015. Seagate was the private prison where Cage and Shades were imprisoned together.
13. Harlem’s Paradise is reminiscent of another nightclub named “Natalie’s” that was featured in the television police drama *New York Undercover*, (1994-1999).
14. Referring to “Collapsed Icons” in Point 10 of the Miller’s Manifesto.

15. "Harlem is the world" references the album, *Harlem World*, released by hip-hop artist Mase in 1997.
16. CRT is an overarching framework assessing the relationships between race, power, and the law, and it stems from work in critical legal studies and the social sciences. It would be offensive to not credit champions such as Kimberlé Crenshaw, Patricia Williams, Derrick Bell Jr. and others who pioneered the ways racial injustice and White supremacy are fought in scholarly and civil discourse.
17. Public pedagogy, in its complex history, refers to the frameworks of learning from the public and how they develop and are interpreted in education. For specific pedagogical references as it relates to applying *Luke Cage*, see Norman Denzin's "A Critical Performance Pedagogy That Matters," and M. Francyne Huckaby's "Public Pedagogies: Everyday Politics on and of the Body," in the *Handbook of Public Pedagogy: Education and Learning Beyond Schooling*, Routledge, 2010.

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Sexual Harassment Effects on Bodies of Work: Engaging Students Through the Application of Historical Context and Communication Theory to Pop Culture and Social Media

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ABSTRACT

Rarely do professors have the opportunity to branch out and create a course that is literally shaped by the day's news. The mediated unveiling of sexual predators in the summer of 2018 provided an opportunity to teach an honors seminar that wrote itself over the course of five weeks. Professors from the communication and history disciplines drew on theory commonly used in the communication discipline and used historical readings to frame a discussion of popular culture and its relation to current events. Each week, a film was incorporated for discussion and student projects were drawn from examples of popular culture, creating a course that allowed a historical and modern popular culture to collide. Students articulated the significance of both the historical context and rhetorical relevance in a fractured society. The course and its content continued to be discussed well after it ended.

Keywords: sexual harassment, Orwellian, LGBTQ+, #MeToo, framing, terministic screens

BABY, IT'S COLD OUTSIDE

The #MeToo movement went viral in October 2017 after Harvey Weinstein was accused of numerous accounts of sexual abuse. Alyssa Milano encouraged individuals to tweet #MeToo, the phrase coined by Tarana Burke in 2006, to demonstrate the prevalence of sexual harassment and abuse in the workplace (Garcia, 2017). The movement generated conversation about the treatment women endure, particularly in Hollywood, leading to allegations about other prominent celebrities, including Matt Lauer, Louis C.K., Charlie Rose, and Kevin Spacey. Bill Cosby was arrested in 2015 with an ongoing criminal lawsuit as the #MeToo movement gained traction (Ember & Bowley, 2015). What became clear from the allegations was that women, and men to a lesser extent, regularly endured abuse in Hollywood to avoid career-ending consequences in the form of blackballing. Consequently, two professors from two different disciplines, talked and texted each other about the latest news daily and a course idea was born.

As a professor of history and a professor of communication respectively, we both study and use popular culture in our classrooms, and so we started critically assessing our media choices. Should we exclude Bill Cosby despite his clear importance to television sitcoms and black actors in general? Should our movie collections shun the likes of Alfred Hitchcock, Roman Polanski, and Woody Allen with their known predatory offenses? Conversations with friends and family members revealed that while some were culling their collections, others viewed this as a non-issue. As we mulled over our responsibilities as educators, we realized that the tools for critical engagement present in uncertain times were exactly the type of application we wanted to provide students. Given the media's potential for shaping attitudes, it makes sense to have students engage in critical assessments of not only the media but the people behind its creation including the actors and actresses, directors, producers, and everyone in between. As prominent entertainers fell one-by-one to the #MeToo voices that would no longer be silenced, it brought up several pedagogical questions that became the focus of a five-week honors summer course, *A Wrinkle in Time: Sexual Harassment Effects on Bodies of Work*. The course wrote itself as the movement grew and articles questioning bodies of work appeared. Suddenly, an entire generation of John Hughes fans was disillusioned by the sexism and harassment normalized in popular films. Although this was our starting point, other media issues organically entered our course discussions.

WELCOME TO THE SHOW

The course began by introducing students to various theories commonly used in communication to frame the course and materials. Any number of theories could be chosen for this type of course, depending on the discipline, but we chose the overarching challenges of power (Foucault, 1982) filtered through media framing (Scheufele, 1999), and terministic screens (Burke, 1966). We also included cultural and queer studies.

Each week was designed for consistency in content. Mondays were theoretical foundation days, mainly in a lecture/discussion format. On Tuesdays, we would discuss the readings for the week, including chapters from Ursula K. LeGuin's novel *The Left Hand of Darkness* and bring in current events. Wednesdays were reserved for media think pieces, which were probably our favorite parts of the entire course. Thursdays were for film viewing, which was debriefed the following Monday.

The assignments were meant to incorporate the similar types of media we were assessing while asking students to reflect on the cultural implications of the #MeToo movement, #BlackLivesMatter, and similar social justice issues arising after the contentious election of 2016. Students created a weekly journal of current events, presented weekly media think pieces in class, developed a podcast and wrote a final paper over LeGuin's novel. There are many great writers, films, and scholars from which to choose, so this discussion reflects our biases but acknowledges other directions that could be taken for a similar course.

THE HEAT IS ON

The first week encompassed a brief overview of the theories and readings to be discussed in the course. Media framing explicates how media socially construct topics, shaping how the audience interprets and discusses public events (Scheufele, 1999). Essentially, by discerning what is highlighted in news stories, the media creates a lens through which a particular event is to be viewed. Importantly, the acceptance of these frames is dependent on individual frames of events. The course embodied this distinction as students were asked to examine media frames, and through critical discourse, analyze those frames via their own schema. The students also explored factors leading to particular media and individual frames.

Individual frames fit nicely with a discussion of terministic screens acting as filters for our perceptions of reality. Burke (1966) argues, “Even if any terminology is a *reflection* of reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must be a *selection* of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a *deflection* of reality” (p. 45, emphasis in original). Through this lesson, we helped students situate themselves within their terministic screens as determined by their own identities, attitudes, beliefs, social circumstances, and other variables that affected their perceptions of reality. They began to realize matters that seemed of little consequence to their daily lives took shape in what they chose to attend and to ignore. The reflection, selection, and deflection of reality through the use of terministic screens not only resonated with the students, but also affected their discussions throughout the course as they took note of what impacted them and questioned why some things remained off their radar.

It seemed fitting that a course shaped by women finding their voice against patriarchal power would start with Cixous’ (1976) admonition to write, to tell their stories, defying those who would silence women. In a metaphor that defines the current straits, Cixous (1976) writes, “We the precocious, we the repressed of culture, our lovely mouths gagged with pollen, our wind knocked out of us, we the labyrinths, we the ladders, the trampled spaces, the bebies – we are black and we are beautiful” (p. 878). *The Laugh of the Medusa* provided the forum for immediately delving into the depths where power silences, harasses, and assaults women, even denying them the rights to their own bodies (and bodies of work). In discussing power over the body, we also focused on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) representations in the media acknowledging the spectrum of gender and sexual identities.

Given the context of Hollywood, students were shown a segment from *The Celluloid Closet* (1995), a documentary based on the book of the same title providing a history of LGBTQ+ representations in film, including a discussion of the Hays production code that shaped and stifled Hollywood films. Students read Armond White’s (2016) piece on *The Maltese Falcon* as an example of early queer cinema, and Daniel J. Leab’s (1984) *How Red Was My Valley*, a history of gendered Cold War political repression. These enabled the discussion of *The Celluloid Closet* to segue into a broader focus of how media, power, and gender have intersected historically. Notable examples included Alfred Hitchcock’s *Rope* (1948), Nicholas Ray’s *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), and John Huston’s *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), where queer life is cleverly depicted flirting with the Hays code (White, 2016, 2017). The week culminated with the Billy Wilder film, *Some Like it Hot* (1959), about two men who dress as women to join a ladies’ band while hiding from mafia hitmen.

While the pretext allowed Wilder to circumvent the code with respect to cross-dressing, the situations and dialog must have upset the censors. Joe E. Brown’s character, Osgood Fielding III, for example, falls in love with Jack Lemmon’s character, Joe. When Tony Curtis’s character, Gerry, points out that this development could jeopardize them both and asks, besides, what a man could possibly offer him, Lemmon responds, “Security!” (Wilder, 1959). After Lemmon finally reveals to Brown that they cannot marry because he is a man, Brown responds, “Nobody’s perfect” (Wilder, 1959). This still edgy, always entertaining, comedy allowed time to unpack a great deal of deep discourse while relaxing slightly as the first week came to an end.

As students began their own searches for media representations, the breadth of their research highlighted their pursuit of meaning in very difficult times. Student selections ranged from a satirical take on Harambe the gorilla's death to sexual imagery in advertising. With respect to the latter, we saw the first evidence of how gender can affect perception—men in the class were almost desensitized to the provocative imagery of advertising whereas several women pointed out that this was the burden they lived with every day of their lives and it affected not only how others saw them but, just as importantly, how they saw themselves.

The impact of the course was probably made the most clear through Childish Gambino's video *This is America* and the collaboration of Christina Aguilera and Demi Lovato for *Fall in Line*. Students saw that time and again the struggles of the past had been reimagined for the present.

FALL IN LINE

In the second week, which focused on the *Use and Abuse of Power*, Edward Said's (1978) *Orientalism* and Michel Foucault's (1982) *The Subject and Power* provided the foundation for discussing both power "with" and power "over" as seen in the kinds of social movements that have dominated headlines over the past few years. Foucault (1982) argues:

there are three types of struggles: either against forms of domination (ethnic, social, and religious); against forms of exploitation which separate individuals from what they produce; or against that which ties the individual to himself and submits him to others in this way (struggles against subjection, against forms of subjectivity and submission). (p. 781)

These struggles are not without a form of resistance to sustaining current power structures. The ultimate creepy attempt to sustain white patriarchy, as presented in Bryan Forbes' *The Stepford Wives* (1975), demonstrated the use and abuse of power in a fashion that left students shocked and horrified. Based on Ira Levin's bestseller of the same name, the film presents a male utopia in which a community of businessmen conspires to murder their noncompliant wives and replace them with animatronic counterparts.

The literal destruction of women in the film brought to mind the previous week's discussions, in particular those involving the Lavender and Red Scares, which begged the question of how and why, in the 1950s and 1960s, both the U.S. government and the film industry sought to "destroy" through the persecution of alleged gay men, lesbians, and communists. (The class did not miss the "irony" of Roy Cohn, a closeted gay man who led the proverbial charge!) What role did power, for its own sake, play in this persecution? Reading Foucault established, at a minimum, the dualistic notion that those most subject to the whims and caprices of power typically exist in societies that rationalize its imbalance in terms of socially constructed "others." The influence of Foucault was seen in the example of Tzvetan Todorov's (1984) *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*, which persuasively explained the mechanisms of abuse, enslavement, and genocide in precisely such terms. Inga Clendinnen's (1987) *Ambivalent Conquests* explained key episodes of church-sanctioned violence against the Mayan Indians in late 1500s Mexico as a horrifying example of social constructs, expectations, and power.

To what extent, then, did America, or any other nation for that matter, differ from 1930s Italy or Germany inasmuch as it willfully created and perpetuated negative stereotypes to justify abuses of power? As discussed in class, not content to stop at the vilification of Jews and communists, Nazis vilified gay individuals and women who pursued careers outside of their marriages and homes. The Lavender Scare becomes particularly troubling in that light. A discussion of power, fear, and the other was in order, along with a healthy dose of political skepticism courtesy of H.L. Mencken and Mark Twain, neither of whom had any use for fools, scoundrels, and politicians.

The assigned Mencken (1949) and Twain (1875) essays might best be described as a cynic's guide to

politics. Both men dismiss the empty platitudes of public service and focus instead on the naked ambition and absence of ethics that leads to corruption. Power, they suggest, is an end in itself, and any amount of lying, chicanery, and/or intimidation is justified in the attempt to acquire, maintain, and increase one's power. In short order, Twain's humor gave way to the deeply troubling implications of Foucault's work, itself hardly inconsistent with Twain's more facetious ramblings, especially with respect to politics, power, and gender.

Iowa State University's (1951) ill-conceived 1950s recruitment film for Home Economics majors is a case in point. The film's sins are many, from its saccharine narration to its assumptions regarding these future graduates' roles in society—teacher, cook, seamstress, and interior decorator would appear to be the limit to which Iowa State administrators believed young women should or could aspire. Worse, the narration not so subtly suggests that both college in general, and such career choices in particular, could help young women to find husbands—in short, their B.A. in Home Economics would naturally lead to the proverbial “Mrs.” degree.

Student reactions ran the spectrum from feeling insulted to incensed. Especially troubling, in the estimation of several women in the class, were the film's assumptions regarding gender norms. Worse, as one student noted, the film was composed around very clear, and very black and white (perhaps literally given the complete absence of minoritized students in the film) beliefs about women and their place in the world. She went on to explain that it made one feel as though they were not welcome if they failed to conform to the expectations of the fabled Home Economics degree. Other students agreed. The ensuing discussion revealed that although the students believed universities have come a long way in their diversification and recruitment efforts since 1950, they shared the sense that American society as a whole still objectifies and imposes gender (and racial) expectations upon women.

Student presentations once again drew upon events playing out simultaneously in the news and around the world at the time. Family separations at the U.S.-Mexico border arguably garnered the most attention as multiple media clips served up instantaneous reminders of the week's lessons. In the summer of 2018, students seemed to conclude, the “other” had both a face and a socially-constructed identity as “criminals,” “rapists,” and “bad *hombres*.” Such a suggestion that many asylum seekers might be “terrorists” virtually ensured the abuses that a significant portion of the U.S. tolerated might now be openly condoned.

SOMEBODY'S WATCHING ME

The *Language, Power, and Authoritarianism* unit of the third week built upon the previous unit drawing again on Burke's (1966) terministic screens through Rockler's (2002) critical analysis of the comic strips *Jump Start* and *The Boondocks*. Rockler (2002) argued that African American and European American participants interpreted the comic strips through different terministic screens: the former through race cognizance, thus highlighting racial oppression, and the latter through Whiteness deflecting the relevance of racial oppression. An in-class viewing of *The Boondocks* elicited considerable student interest and led to a discussion on the terministic screens of the opposing narratives of current social movements.

Edward Said's (1978) classic work *Orientalism*, when paired with Rockler (2002), allowed students to delve more deeply into the mechanisms by which groups socially construct the other. That week, student journals reflected upon their terrifying consequences. Two students wrote about how the demonization of immigrants was enabling the separation and detention of families at the border; another wondered whether this “us” versus “them” mentality was contributing to a perceived increase in incidents of police brutality; yet another asked what it signified that post 9/11, the government itself had adopted such a mindset towards its own citizens, whom it now spied upon with regularity and, apparent impunity.

Although the George Orwell connection is obvious in the form of Big Brother, the very apotheosis of the surveillance state, it was his seminal essay *Politics and the English Language* (1946), along with excerpts from *1984* (1949), that provoked the most discussion. “Fake news” and “alternate facts”, for instance, sound

precisely like the kinds of things with which Orwell's protagonist Winston might have dealt with in his struggle against Big Brother. Likewise, the notion of computer screens watching us or listening in on our conversations produced a clear feeling of discomfort in a classroom full of students who live in the world of smart-phones equipped with cameras, social media, and Alexa.

Orwell's emphasis on language juxtaposed well with the aforementioned Said and Rockler pieces. One student provided an item-by-item comparison of how two rival news networks framed very different narratives with respect to the family separations taking place daily at the U.S.-Mexican border. Video clips of Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler established the historical backdrop against which Orwell wrote *1984* and led to two student media presentations that sought to define fascism and to determine whether, or to what extent, various television characters (and even the Trump administration) met the threshold for those definitions.

In *1984*, the government possesses a monopoly on information, with Big Brother essentially being one large, state-controlled echo chamber. Big Brother's resulting ability to construct "reality" by controlling the press and rewriting history struck a note in class. With daily attacks on the press and claims of "fake news" from all parts of the globe and all parts of the political spectrum, the whole notion of a constructed "reality" led to a rapid and widely shared conclusion that sometimes the inexplicable behavior of entire groups of people was a result of their "living in a different reality." *Where* people got their information was now the first question posed by the students. It is also worth noting that questions about language, power, and authoritarianism extended beyond the more recent and prominent political events.

The Pennsylvania Attorney General's release of a damning report on decades of sexual abuse within the Catholic Church triggered a discussion on how the same questions of language, power, and authoritarianism applied to non-state entities. The television adaptation of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, a favorite of several students in the class and the focus of a student media presentation, led to some revealing conversation. Three young women pointed out that the story's setting in a society dominated by Christianity and the Church left them with a feeling of discomfort. As Christian women, they noted, they were seeing what might come of unchecked (in this case religious) zealotry in a setting of absolute power—the very essence of authoritarianism. If Orwell's cautionary tale was too emotionally and/or culturally remote, *The Handmaid's Tale* was a chilling reminder that, as Upton Sinclair once suggested, it could indeed happen here.

Drawing on the themes of language, power, and authoritarianism, the film *Brazil* (1985) is director Terry Gilliam's interpretation of *1984*. As one might expect, given Gilliam's past as a member of *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, *Brazil's* take on the unit themes took on a more surreal dimension than the original source material in *1984*. During a particularly graphic torture scene, for instance, a guard advises, "Don't fight it son. Confess quickly! If you hold out too long you could jeopardize your credit rating" (Milchan & Gilliam, 1985).

Students found the film difficult to follow. Their comments, though, were sobering. Conversations revealed that *Brazil* still has the capacity to shock, horrify, and confuse, but if filmgoers in 1985 saw only a nightmare worthy of Lewis Carroll, our class saw reflections of the present day. Thus, the differences were ones of extent. To wit, the film's premise that a single bureaucratic error, a typo in this case, could turn lives upside down (evictions, accusations, arrest, torture, and death) has become a living reality for many people in the twenty-first century. At the time we viewed the film, Wells Fargo was in the process of trying to explain how such errors led to thousands of homes being wrongly foreclosed. The plight of wrongly convicted innocent people trying to clear their names in cases that lasted years, if not decades, is no longer a mere work of fiction. If Gilliam's actors inhabited a Kafka-esque world, so too did real people. Students' reactions to the content of this unit, as well as previous ones, added a generational variable to the mix—whereas we, as members of Generation X, expressed a cynicism born of feeling betrayed by institutions, the students in our class represent the youngest of the Millennials and already possessed a very strong and healthy sense of skepticism when they came to the material.

YOU DON'T OWN ME

By the time the class entered the fourth week, the unit's focus on *Media Control* was a well-recognized theme. Born around the time that unscripted television was on the rise with *Survivor* and *Big Brother* debuting in 2000 (Sanneh, 2011), today's students see reality television as normative. What was shocking, then, about *Network* (1976) was not that it is about a network scripting the news, but that the film predicted what was to come. Directed by Sidney Lumet, *Network*, a shocking concept in 1976, is normalized today with the rise of programming that defies scripts and maximizes conflict. Reality television created the celebrity of Donald Trump, elevated a platform for the presidential candidate, and arguably got him elected as his candidacy was an extension of his reality television persona. As Howard Beale, played by Peter Finch, screams "I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take it anymore," so were millions of Americans in search of rhetoric outside of political norms. Perhaps not coincidentally, one of the student media think pieces for the week was from *The Newsroom*, where the character played by Jeff Daniels declares America is "not the greatest country in the world" ("America," 2012). Students noted the irony that reality seemed scripted after all.

The unrest following the election of Trump led to the Women's March on Washington on January 21, 2017, where more than half a million women gathered to fight for the protection of women's rights following his inauguration. Students read Nicolini and Hansen (2018), who analyzed the strategic communication choices of the Women's March and concluded that media outlets were largely influenced by communication from the leaders, but framed the narratives according to audience bias. The Women's March continues to be fragmented and plagued by criticism while still maintaining solidarity for some. The key takeaway for students was the strategic choices available when communicating important messages and the ability of a message to transcend typical outlets. These choices ultimately affect the long-term effectiveness of the message.

In the #MeToo environment, it would be an oversimplification to solely analyze the women of the movement's rhetoric. The critiques of these alone have demonstrated the problems arising from a homogenous view given the discontent of those leaders with disparate views. The fourth week's readings acknowledged that men and the media challenge the discursive nature of the women's movement.

The messages that were geared towards men as the movement gained traction centered on consent and a movement away from a society dominated by a rape culture. The students were introduced to the work of Jackson Katz whose books on masculinity and violence argue that men need to go beyond being good men who help women to being men who see their privilege and use it to eradicate violence against women. Katz had been a speaker on campus the previous spring so one student immediately loaded a TEDx talk given by Katz. In the example, the sentence "John beat Mary" is transformed to "Mary was beaten by John," which after a few additional adjustments becomes "Mary is a battered woman," removing all focus from the aggressor (Katz, 2013). Removing men from the equation removes them from accountability, but it also ignores the fact that men can also be victims of sexual harassment and assault. Another media example from students was Terry Crews testifying before Congress about his own Hollywood assault ("Actor," 2017).

Identifying a place for men at the table became a focal point as students considered how men could empower women to make positive changes. One student brought in the image of the cast in *Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle*, written and directed by men. The transformed gamers become avatars appropriately dressed for the jungle; except the female character dressed in a tight crop top and shorts (additionally, one female is given a male avatar, thus reducing the number of women by half). The students noted that the gaming world is replete with such obvious gendered differences that often sexualize women; yet, the actress went as far as to defend the costume choice (Cipriani, 2017), demonstrating hegemonic femininity. Another brought in a clip from *Grey's Anatomy* mirroring current events as a foundation leader is guilty of sexually harassing women resulting in a renaming of the foundation. The student asked, "But the real question is, does this act, in addition to giving the women their medical careers back, right the wrong?" Students concluded that men and women need to work together to change the ways that women are viewed and treated.

LAND OF CONFUSION

The last unit of the course had students diving into questions of identity and exclusion as they applied what they had learned. Issues of power and media control were juxtaposed against those of individual identity. Throughout the course, our students had identified as racial, sexual, and gender minoritized individuals so this discussion had become highly personal. Anzaldúa's *La Frontera* resonated with several:

As a *mestiza* I have no country, my homeland cast me out, yet all countries are mine because I am every woman's sister or potential lover. (As a lesbian I have no race, my own people disclaim me; but I am all races because there is the queer of me in all races.) I am cultureless because, as a feminist, I challenge the collective cultural/religious male-driven beliefs of Indo-Hispanics and Anglos; yet I am cultured because I am participating in the creation of yet another culture, a new story to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other and to the planet. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 103)

Students brought in videos such as *Being Latino in America Today* (2016) and Michelle Navarro's *Moving Beyond the Chicano Borderlands* (2018), both demonstrating the continued challenge of identity expression and belonging.

While the previous week's readings introduced Katz's insistence that men be included in the conversation about violence against women, this final week's readings looked at male identity more holistically. As with women, men have similarly been let down by societal expectations; expectations that, as the #MeToo movement has uncovered, have resulted in a violent culture. Rebecca Walker's (2004) *What Makes a Man* addresses the creation of male identity, patriarchy, and hegemonic masculinity through a series of essays from various authors. In Walker's (2004) essay, *Putting Down the Gun*, she explains the idea for the book, which was to recognize the expectations placed on her son to morph from a creative, empathic soul to a metaphoric and actual soldier ready for battle: "don't feel, take control, be physically strong, find your identity in money and work, do not be afraid to kill, distrust everything that you cannot see. Don't cry" (p. 4). The students were challenged to think about the social construction of identity; and specifically, how their own identities had been, and continue to be, socially constructed.

Challenges to identity expression are not just in relation to gender and racial markers, but also emerge from within the political environment. An assigned excerpt from Slavenka Drakulić's autobiography involved a chat with her censor, "I don't look like what I am," said the man's voice on the telephone, a little nasal but pleasant" (Drakulić, 1991, p. 76). It is curiosity that draws Croatian born Yugoslavian writer Drakulić to meet with Inspector M of the state security police (SDB) in charge of the press. Imagining something like the KGB as represented in film, Drakulić is eager to separate reality from myth. The SDB made sure media representatives fell in line with party expectations, but also created an auto-censorship whereby journalists questioned their every move, making the censor's job easier. As a class, we could not escape the parallels to a world where freedom had more to do with positions of privilege than an equitable right.

Representing government control and censorship, Francois Truffaut's *Fahrenheit 451* (1966) had students imagining a world of government control and censorship. Oskar Werner plays Guy Montag, one of the totalitarian regime's firemen charged with destroying all literature. As his supervisor reminds him, "You see, it's . . . it's no good, Montag. We've all got to be alike. The only way to be happy is for everyone to be made equal" (Truffaut, 1966). Montag is simultaneously the oppressor and the oppressed as the viewer discovers Montag's own obsession with books, an obsession that eventually has him switching allegiance. Returning to Foucault (1982), the class discussion turned to the destruction of books as, ultimately, the destruction of knowledge, and thus power, leading to complete subservience to the regime. Montag's subjugation ends with

a shift in his identity from fireman to one of the book people dedicated to keeping literature alive. Especially disconcerting to our students was the realization that they themselves, with their smart hand-held devices, had unwittingly given up the privacy Montag (and practically the whole cast of *Brazil*) so desperately desires.

As the students critically evaluated the readings and media representations presented in class, we challenged them to create a podcast consistent with the expression of their identity. They paired up to create a conversation via a 30-minute podcast that reflected their interests and style. Requiring students to share themselves creatively can unnerve the strongest of students. One dyad even labeled theirs, “Dr. Viz, you can’t make us listen to this so we’re leaving the room when you play it,” (they didn’t). Due to time constraints, we played approximately 5 minutes of each podcast and allowed for a discussion about their formats and topics. At the heart of our questions was how each student’s identity was represented in their performance, which is very personal, yet important for considering how to move forward with the complex matters tackled in the course.

BLINDED BY THE LIGHT

A reflective paper based upon LeGuin’s 1969 science-fiction masterpiece *The Left Hand of Darkness* served as the final assignment of the course, which allowed students to draw tentative connections and conclusions with respect to the various issues discussed over the previous month. We felt that this novel’s use of fluid gender categories presaged current discussions of the extent to which gender is itself a social construct. In addition, LeGuin covered similar ground to that of previous readings. Despite, or perhaps because of, its roots in the Cold War, Vietnam, and the counterculture, *Left Hand’s* central themes of gender, identity, fear, and power resonated surprisingly well nearly half a century later.

The story follows Genly Ai, a diplomat from earth who travels to the planet of Gethen, the inhabitants of which live in monarchies, possess virtually no knowledge of other civilizations, and, most importantly, have no fixed sex. Rather, Gethens follow a monthly cycle called *kemmer* whereby they become increasingly male or female until such point that they may reproduce. Having borne children, Gethen “females” then become “male.” Either partner can switch reproductive and gender roles during *kemmer*, such that there is no fixed gender identity. The Gethens, for their parts, view the cisgender Genly as a sexual deviant. To say that *Left Hand of Darkness* is a work about culture-shock would be an understatement.

Students quickly noted that LeGuin, like her protagonist, struggled due to the limitations of vocabulary. LeGuin, for example, used the terms “bisexual” and “ambisexual” almost interchangeably. Both suggest an underlying sexual dualism that fails to fully reflect the Gethens’ sexual fluidity. The class pointed out that even a term like today’s “pansexual” would have offered LeGuin much greater linguistic clarity and that today’s understanding of gender as a spectrum (rather than binary) would have been a boon to Genly and LeGuin alike. One of the students, who identified as pansexual, led the way in showing that LeGuin’s efforts notwithstanding, the author really struggled to successfully present a non-dualistic world.

The Gethens’ suspicion and demonization of the other, in this case, Genly, was another theme that facilitated considerable discussion. The Gethens took great pride in the virtual absence of violence, sexual assault, and rape in their society, but when Genly subsequently becomes the target of palace intrigue and finds himself enslaved, he learns that such empathy applies only to members of their own community. Those who fail to conform to the sexual mores of Gethen may be enslaved and/or killed simply due to perceived differences. Gethenians face even worse prospects than Genly. While all deviants will be enslaved and worked to death in short order, Gethenians are forced to take drugs that suppress their sexual cycles. Given the centrality of *kemmer* to Gethenians’ lives and identities, its sublimation or suppression effectively rendered them non-people.

In short, Gethen is no utopia and, sexual differences aside, the same kinds of divisions that led earth people to murder and wage war with one another existed on Gethen. Three students wrote specifically about such weaponization of fear (of the other) and how it corresponds to the current demonization of immigrants at the Southern border, to the rise of the so-called alt-right, and to attacks on the LGBTQ+ communities. Discussing *Left Hand of Darkness* against the panoply of real-life issues involving transgender individuals, same-sex marriages, race-baiting, and the seemingly ubiquitous daily refusal of some businesses to serve customers based upon their race or sexual orientation made it very easy for our students to forget that they were reading and reacting to something written half a century earlier.

The themes of power and authoritarianism served as similar reminders. Genly's travels take him to two separate nations on Gethen, Karhide, and Orgoreyn. These two kingdoms share a monopoly on information, and both, in varying degrees, view Genly's arrival and otherness as an existential threat to their continued rule. Of the two, Orgoreyn proves to be the more Orwellian as it is complete with a secret police organization to enforce conformity and to make undesirable information go down what Orwell referred to as the memory hole. If Genly's abduction and subsequent death sentence in a slave labor camp are the mechanisms of forgetting, his escape and contact with the earth is the act that undermines the entire political structure.

An excellent example of how *Left Hand of Darkness* served to pull together disparate threads of class discussion, one particular student paper noted that with the exception of its unique sexual politics, Gethenian society was almost certainly modeled upon the fascist regimes of the 1920s and 30s. As such, the aforementioned weaponization of fear, the demonization of the other, and manipulation of language were merely par for the course. The fears of Menckel and Orwell, both of whom wrote against the backdrop of the rise of fascism, had simply been realized. To paraphrase Twain, history does not repeat itself, but it does rhyme, even on the distant, imaginary planet of Gethen.

WOULDN'T IT BE NICE

Swept along by events and logistics, we actually changed the syllabus on the first day of classes as we began to consider the practicality of some of our ideas. Because we felt the students should shape the course, we sought their input and adjusted accordingly. That said, the current event journal and media think piece assignments could have used stronger differentiation and perhaps even some gentle prodding to stay more closely in tune with course themes.

We went into the course determined to make sure various voices were heard; we were, after all, discussing silenced voices. We believe we were only moderately successful as there were powerful yet long marginalized voices eager to be heard in the class, which created a slight groupthink. We slowly got wind of a mild dissenter in the group that we wish we had encouraged more for her to understand that her perspective was equally valued in the course. Early reflection assignments might have made us more aware of various positions to help us better moderate and support all the voices in the room. More discussion on individual frames could also have helped bring dissension to the forefront by generalizing various attitudes rather than attaching them to a personal view. Reflection assignments would have given us a better sense of the class "pulse", complete with all of its idiosyncrasies.

Finally, it would have been useful to spend more time with the readings. The downside to packing so much material into a single course was that not everything ultimately received equal billing. Detailed analysis and discussion of the readings is likely more possible in a full semester. To manage the reading expectations, providing some type of summary or outline of the readings to help students focus on the main ideas might have been more fruitful.

Well after it had ended, the course continued to evoke discussion among the professors and the students alike, as we would see each other on campus and note recent news and points we wish we could have discussed.

This is a fantastic issue to have because the lesson has been given the opportunity to outlive the class, which could solidify the importance of critical assessment in a news-weary world. Potential variations on the theme of this course allow historical and modern popular culture to collide, demonstrating the significance of both in a fractured society.

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Hell You Talmbout: Mixtapes as method for online environmental justice pedagogy

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ABSTRACT

This paper takes on the mixtape as a pedagogical method for approaching urgent and critical topics within the undergraduate online classroom. Drawing on two case studies from different sections of an introductory course on environmental and social justice taught in an American studies department, we demonstrate how mixtape-inspired assignments offer a method for theorizing and enacting the connections between popular culture and critical scholarship around injustice in the humanities and social sciences while also altering the space of the classroom to promote deeper student engagement, comprehension, and reflection. We argue that introducing popular culture as both content and method within an undergraduate course not only strengthens student understanding of key concepts and the relevance of these outside the classroom, but also acknowledges the importance of time and context within the space of the online course. Popular culture, a component of this context, enriches the online learning experience and responds to contemporary issues and events that students encounter in the material world. Mixtapes serve as a conceptual tool for understanding the contents of a syllabus and as a pedagogical tool for assessment. The practice of making mixtapes within a course on environmental and social justice opens the possibility for radical expression.

Keywords: mixtape, environmental justice, online classroom, online teaching and learning, popular culture, pedagogy

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INTRODUCTION

Beginning in Fall 2016 and continuing to the current academic year (Fall 2019-Spring 2020), we taught sections of a new 100-level online course titled *Introduction to Environmental and Social Justice* for the Department of American Studies at the University of New Mexico. Based on a previous iteration of a course titled *Introduction to Environment, Science, and Technology*, the structure of the course was part of a larger institutional effort to standardize online classes so that content and assignments would remain the same from semester to semester, regardless of the instructor teaching the course. In the original structure of the course, students wrote three-sentence précis for assigned readings, summarizing each reading's argument, method, and purpose. Over the duration of the semester, students also took three open-book exams made up of definitions for key terms, short answer questions, and five-paragraph essays. In consequence, this paper examines two different approaches to remixing this online syllabus to further engage popular culture as a mode of student learning and engagement.

Given that the subject of *Environmental and Social Justice* combines academic discourse with the embodied and felt realities of the students who take the class, we felt it important to draw on the flexibility and immediacy of the online classroom in order to enhance student learning. Integrating popular culture and current events into the course would help both instructors and students to synthesize topics presented in the assigned academic literature, as facilitated by the online classroom setting. The current global pandemic highlights the necessity for dynamic, high quality online instruction that is not merely a stop-gap substitute for classroom learning, but that adapts and adopts creative approaches to virtual instruction in response to the urgent need for accessible learning for students. Further, the vulnerable populations at the core of discourse in *Environmental and Social Justice* experience the brunt of the impacts of COVID-19 (Newton, 2020; Jackson, 2020; Ahmed, 2020). Adaptive and relevant online learning environments could be one response to the environmental and social injustices associated with the pandemic (Kim, 2020; Gardner, 2020).

This essay includes two case studies that demonstrate how assignments inspired by the mixtape offer a method for theorizing and enacting the connections between popular culture and critical scholarship that revolve around injustice in the humanities and social sciences. We look at two pedagogical approaches to using mixtapes in the online classroom and consider how the mixtape can function as a practice for altering the space of the classroom. Not only does introducing popular culture as both content and method within an undergraduate course deepen student understanding of key concepts and their relevance outside the classroom, but it also highlights the importance of time and context within the space of the online course. Finally, we argue that effective online teaching is attentive to the context in which it is taught, and that popular culture provides an opportunity for students to navigate the current social climate in relation to the course.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Environmental justice as an academic discipline owes its origin and development to peoples' movements for economic, environmental, reproductive, and civil rights. Here in Albuquerque, we are fortunate to be in the company of radical figures such as Sofia Martinez and Richard Moore, who are responsible, with many other leaders from around the United States, for the development of principles and documents that are foundational to environmental justice work. These include the "Principles of Environmental Justice" adopted at the First People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in 1991, and the "Jemez Principles for Democratic Organizing," generated at a meeting in Jemez, New Mexico in 1996 hosted by the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice (SNEEJ). Our understanding of environmental justice is also shaped by Indigenous movements and organizations such as New Mexico-based Tewa Women United and the Red Water Pond Road Community Association. These organizations take a braided approach to

addressing environmental, economic, and reproductive justice - not as discrete units, but as integrated parts of a whole vision of Indigenous liberation and decolonization (Sanchez, 2019; RWPRCA, 2016).

Introduction to Environmental and Social Justice draws on the radical activist roots of environmental justice to illuminate the links between environmental and social injustices. We assemble the work of key thinkers in environmental justice scholarship, such as Robert Bullard (2018), Laura Pulido (2000), and David Pellow (2007), introduce essential themes such as pollution, garbage, and climate change, and bring these key thinkers and themes together with scholarship, movements, and mediums that push boundaries and definitions of environmental justice as a disciplinary category. For example, we draw on critical theoretical developments by movements such as Black Lives Matter, scholarship from critical prison studies and critical Indigenous studies, and mediums such as podcasts and music videos (Dillon and Sze, 2016; Gilmore, 2007; Whyte, 2017). In this way, we create a mix and remix of environmental and social justice issues that pushes student understanding of the boundaries of environmental justice without losing sight of the genealogy of environmental justice as a discipline.

Our theory and practice of environmental justice pedagogy is inspired by scholarship that initiates conversations about what constitutes environmental justice and how we can shift what students perceive and understand as being “environmental.” In Spring 2017, when we taught sections of this course for the second time, we assigned Lindsey Dillon and Julie Sze’s 2016 essay “Police Power and Particulate Matters: Environmental Justice and Spatialities of In/Securities in U.S. Cities.” Students read it shortly before the semester midterm, in tandem with a 2006 essay by Rose Braz and Craig Gilmore on prisons, policing, and pollution titled: “Joining Forces: Prisons and Environmental Justice in Recent California Organizing.” We hoped that this pairing would help students perceive movements such as Black Lives Matter as key actors for environmental justice, while also honoring the long history and significance of Black studies and critical prison studies to environmental justice activism and scholarship. In the first half of the semester, students struggled to move beyond conceptions of environmental activism as movements for an awareness of individual efforts such as recycling, riding bicycles, and “ethical consumption.” Many struggled with the articulation of the term *racism* in environmental racism. But upon reading the essays by Dillon, Sze, Braz, and Gilmore, students began to grasp the relationship between environmental and social justice and between environmental injustice and systemic racism. What clicked for the students, as evidenced in the short essays they wrote on the midterm exam, was Dillon and Sze’s analysis of the conditions of Eric Garner’s death and the ways in which Garner’s words “I can’t breathe” articulated not only his choking at the hands of a police officer, but also the racialized exposure to environmental conditions that caused and exacerbated Garner’s asthma. Through their own engagement with everyday popular culture and current events, students were already familiar with the story of Garner’s death and with the use of “I can’t breathe” by the Black Lives Matter movement. Situating course concepts within this moment of public consciousness gave students a place from which to approach other readings, videos, and podcasts assigned in the course.

Moved by students’ immediate connection to and grasp of Dillon and Sze’s analysis, we decided to explore further methods of using popular culture to teach environmental justice. In addition to the scholarship of Dillon and Sze, we found particular inspiration in Min Hyoung Song’s paper presentation at the 2016 annual meeting of the American Studies Association on the visibility of climate change. While playing the first episode of the first season of *True Detective*, Song challenged common assertions that it is difficult for people to believe and grasp the concept of climate change because it is not visible. Song pointed out that images of the over-industrialized landscape, poverty, and racialized and gendered violence permeate the opening credits of *True Detective*. He argued that climate change, its effects, and the affected are constantly visible, both in our everyday experiences and in popular culture.

While *True Detective* might not resonate as a tale of environmental injustice, Song’s analysis remixes

the series for viewers interested in environmental justice, finding a relevant story that undergirds the narrative arc. Storytelling is an essential practice of environmental justice scholarship in the humanities and social sciences. In their chapter in *The Routledge Handbook of Environmental Justice*, Donna Houston and Pavithra Vasudevan write: “Environmental justice storytelling is a particular form of political intervention that envisions socio-ecological transformation and produces more hopeful futures by narrating the environment as intimately connected to human well-being” (Houston and Vasudevan, 6). For Houston and Vasudevan, environmental justice storytelling enacts connection, recognizes emergent realities that may not yet have been measured through scientific data collection, and makes sense of narratives, data, and experiences that have been obscured.

MIXTAPE AS METHOD IN THE SPACE OF THE ONLINE CLASSROOM

Many academic fields commend the possibilities created through the introduction of the mixtape to the classroom. For Black studies, the mixtape serves as a radical response to the capital-driven world of popular music culture. Jared Ball, in “FreeMix Radio: The Original Mixtape Radio Show: A Case Study in Mixtape ‘Radio’ and Emancipatory Journalism,” identifies the mixtape as “source of emancipatory journalism” (Ball, 617), one that disrupts the powerful and predominantly white corporate-owned media. It calls out and replaces a colonial voice. The process of sampling, excerpting, rearranging, and perhaps adding commentary within the mixtape medium can create radical creative forms from familiar content, challenging media forms that see present music as settled, fixed, and mastered. George Ciccariello Maher argues that “mixtapes represent an often overlooked source of hope for escape from what has been characterized as a zero-sum dilemma of dissemination” in “Brechtian Hip-Hop: Didactics and Self-Production in Post-Gangsta Political Mixtapes” (Maher, 139).

Within the social sciences, mixtapes serve as an analogy for the dialectic process of generating knowledge from within and outside of disciplinary traditions and norms. Sociologist Paul V. Stock looks at how the practice of sociology resembles the creation of a mixtape in “Sociology and the Mixtape: A Metaphor of Creativity.” He argues, “Sociology and the mix tape are products of their historical context and to that end exist in a dialectical push and pull of conventions, cutting edge, newness, traditional classics and personal experience” (Stock, 287). This notion, that a discipline and a mixtape share similar productive approaches, is also important for fields within cultural studies. Before the 2016 meeting of the American Studies Association (ASA), the ASA program committee encouraged meeting attendees to participate in the creation of a mixtape around the annual meeting’s theme “Pedagogies of Dissent.” Attendees were encouraged to submit songs for the mixtape that were “associated with, or inspired by, dissent (in the widest possible sense of the term)” (Program Committee of the ASA, 2017). The mixtape was distributed to attendees before the meeting and was the subject of a presidential plenary session at the annual meeting. At the session, participants focused on the role that music plays in activating, expressing, and affirming dissent, and highlighted music as a pedagogy that produces a sense of intimacy through its compilation and sharing.

This interest in the mixtape extends into theoretical discourse on method, genealogy, and historiography in American studies. In 2017, former ASA president Philip J. Deloria and Alexander Olson published a book on methods in American studies titled *American Studies: A User’s Guide*. Deloria and Olson use the concept of the mixtape as an heuristic to narrate the history and historiography of American studies. They create lists, which they call mixtapes, of essays and books focused on particular strands of American studies, with nods to texts that readers might consider canonical within American studies, and then follow these mixtapes with remixes. In the remixes the content, theme, and method overlap with the original mixtapes, by incorporating more recently published writing – scholarship that might be written outside of American studies yet has

weight in the field, or twenty-first century turns to old-school American studies themes. For example, “Original #4: The American Spaces Mixtape” features Jacob Riis’s 1890 monograph *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York*, Henry Nash Smith’s 1950 *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth*, and Gloria Anzaldúa’s 1987 *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (Deloria and Olson, 77). The ten selections on this mixtape highlight a variety of primarily North American geographies and ways of thinking about these spaces through the lenses of race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and Indigeneity. This mixtape is followed by the “American Spaces Remix: Transnational Spaces.” In this remix, the category of American spaces spans oceans via Paul Gilroy’s 1993 *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*; continents via Melani McAlister’s 2002 monograph *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945* and Lisa Lowe’s 2015 *The Intimacy of Four Continents*; and analytics via Brent Edwards’ 2003 *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*. (Deloria and Olson, 78). The remix does not negate the original mixtape, but is instead a new take on it with an informal citational practice to mark inspiration, relationship, and perhaps diversion from the original.

Following the success of teaching Dillon and Sze’s essay on Eric Garner within the *Introduction to Environmental and Social Justice* course, we decided to expand upon this opening to further engage students through popular culture. We both incorporated a version of a mixtape into the syllabus of our respective course sections; Caitlin created a mix of her own and Elspeth assigned her students the task of making a mix. Each assignment provided an opportunity for the students to become spatial architects with the assigned materials. As instructors and course designers, we traditionally perform this role while the students navigate the constructed space in an effort to reproduce the nodal concepts introduced throughout the course. In “The Space Between: Mix Taping as a Ritual,” Rob Drew cites the mixtape as an “affectively charged medium of communication” (Drew, 145), and the exchange of a mix functions as “a kind of back channel to face-to-face interaction” (Drew, 151). The act of creating and gifting a mix is a remote exercise. It feels intimate, but as Drew argues, “the practice of making and exchanging mixes can easily be understood as a ritual of distance” (Drew, 147). This is particularly useful in an online classroom setting because we do lack the face-to-face interaction that the traditional classroom has to offer. Distance is an inherent quality of online teaching. Beyond grading students’ work, in an online classroom, the instructor is not always privy to how students receive the literature or how the material engages with their affective, ordinary lives. Conventional assignments that assess student engagement with readings and other sources assigned in a course do not necessarily reveal how a student relates, engages, and applies new learnings to their life beyond the boundaries of the course. Assigning a mixtape works “within the constraints and boundaries, while at the same time challenging those same conventions that create great intellectual breakthroughs, artistic genius and opportunities for students to make connections” (Stock, 280). The mixtape provides an opportunity for students and teachers to revel in the ambiguities that can surround online learning with regards to the boundaries of the classroom and it produces deep answers to questions proposed throughout the course.

EXAMPLES AND ANALYSIS

Caitlin’s Mixtape Assignment: Navigating the mix of the syllabus

For extra credit at the end of the Fall 2018 Semester, Caitlin provided a mix of five songs, via *YouTube* links, to the students: “Gentrification” by Ry Cooder, “Water Fountain” by Tune Yards, “Hell you Talmbout” by Janelle Monáe featuring Wondaland Records, “Trouble in the Water” by Common featuring Malik Yusef, Kumasi, Aaron Fresh, Choklate & Laci Kay, and “Idle No More” by Pura Fé. She asked the students to choose two tunes and write a 700-1000 word paper using these songs as guides to reflect on the material and ideas they had engaged with throughout the semester. Caitlin encouraged the students to research the songs and seek out

videos of live performances to gain a better understanding of how the music is used in critical movements. Though the nature of the reflection allows the students to take the paper in any direction they like, Caitlin did provide the following guiding questions in an effort to motivate and inspire the students in their writing : Who wrote the song and why? How does the song demonstrate and/or push the content of articles/podcasts/chapters that you read/listened to this semester? How does the song incorporate multiple components of the course and what does that say about the relationship between environmental justice and social justice? Some of these songs are performed in specific locations or at specific events. Why is this important and what does that say about music as a tool for those who experience environmental and social injustices? Is the song a cover song? Has it been covered by others? If so, why? What does that say about the relationship between injustice, time, and space/place?

Each student reflected in a unique way and their approach spoke to how they processed the entire course. Though their work did vary to a large degree, two overarching themes ran through the papers. First, the songs provided an opportunity to bring literature from different modules together to better understand how different places are affected by environmental racism. Second, music videos and live performances shed light on the role of music in the historicized present of current critical environmental and social movements.

The water crisis in Flint, Michigan, represented by the song titled “Trouble in the Water,” resonated with many students and they felt that the song/performance emotively embodied the emplaced reality of Laura Pulido’s 2016 article titled, “*Flint, Environmental Racism, and Racial Capitalism.*” However, the song led to explorations in the relationality of how these concepts exist in multiple places. The environmental racism that fuels the Flint water crisis was analyzed alongside notions of white privilege in Aspen, Colorado (Park and Pellow, 2011), the advantages of capitalism in Malibu, California (Davis, 1995) and the gendered environmental injustice of uranium mining on the Navajo reservation (Voyles, 2015).

The students also paid attention to where the songs were performed. “Hell you Talmbout” resounded on the streets of Washington D.C. during the Women’s March in 2017, in 2015 during a Black Lives Matter protest in Chicago, and in concert venues throughout the country. One student related that the song is also covered by other performers, notably David Byrne, in large concert venues internationally. All of the performances analyzed by the students centered around a call for awareness. For them, this awareness was reinforced by the literature we read in our online class. While the students were able to experience the emotional weight of a live performance, they could do so while being just one click away from scholarly articles and media that detailed each artist’s motivation to create. This type of engagement is unique to the online setting and would not be possible in a traditional face-to-face course.

There are a couple areas for improvement with this assignment. Because it was offered as extra credit, few students completed the task with enough time to ask questions and clear up any confusion about the relationship between music and environmental and social justice movements. One way this limitation could have been curbed to help develop more robust analyses would have been through the introduction of the songs throughout the semester while encouraging the students to engage with their peers and the instructor about the content throughout the course. Also, if the instructor had presented the assignment towards the beginning of the semester, the students would have been encouraged to consider and analyze the songs they listened to and experienced during the course instead of only adhering to the assigned five; they could thus have created their own unique mixtape.

Elspeth’s mixtape assignment: Remixing the environmental justice canon

As a final, cumulative project, Elspeth asks students to create an “Environmental and Social Justice Mixtape.” Elspeth first assigned this mixtape project in Spring 2019 and continues to use it as the final project in her teaching of this course each semester. The assignment has three parts: a mixtape, liner notes, and an album cover. The mixtape is a conceptual multimedia list, which could be made up of songs, essays, book

chapters, visual art, podcasts, videos, or any other medium. The students are required to include at least four sources assigned within the course, as well as four to eight additional sources selected by the creator of the mixtape. Accompanying the mixtape are 600-800 word narrative liner notes to explain what the creator intended to invoke, inspire, and incite through the mixtape. Finally, a piece of cover art represents the creator's mixtape and narrative. It could either be designed by the student or borrowed and cited with documented permission from the original artist.

If, drawing on Deloria and Olson, the course syllabus can function as a mixtape, the final projects created by students are remixes on the original mixtape. This assignment functions as a reflection on and synthesis of the key concepts in the course. The students are asked to consider what they would like an imagined audience to experience, feel, or learn as a result of exploring the mixtape. In addition, they are asked to consider the narrative arc of the mixtape, considering whether the audience's experience should be smooth and gradual or a reaction to contrast created between the pieces.

Students retitle and reimagine scholarly monographs as tracks on a hip hop remix, and analyze the theoretical contributions of the lyrics to the field of environmental justice. In these final mixtapes, students juxtapose Dillon and Sze's "Police Power and Particulate Matter" with Kanye West's "New Slaves," Rob Nixon's work on slow violence with Kendrick Lamar's album DAMN. One student created a new title for each item on her mixtape, starting with a chapter from Julie Sze's monograph *Noxious New York*, and re-named it "Clogged Lungs". Another student described the process of staging a photo for her mixtape's album art. She described how, after choosing the theme of environmental racism with a particular focus on how communities of color are disproportionately exposed to the harmful effects of pollution, she struggled to find publicly available images that fit her criteria for an evocative image that both fit the theme and spurred particular emotions in the listener/viewer. Instead, she staged a photo with her niece as a model. In the liner notes accompanying the mixtape, she described the process of obtaining consent from her niece and the niece's parents, collating the materials she used, manipulating the materials to create the image, and listening to the responses from other family members when they saw the final photo. In the image, a child wears a dust mask that is smudged with dirt. The lighting is harsh and the child looks directly into the camera's lens, gaze steady but guarded. The student described how her mother, the photo subject's grandmother, was upset with the photo because she felt it made her granddaughter look abused and sad. The student then described the conversation that ensued between herself and her mother about environmental injustice and her purpose in creating the mixtape and the accompanying image. This student's narrative captures the tension present in many student mixtapes between anger and sadness and a sense of encouragement and aspiration for radical change.

Students initially express hesitation upon encountering a new assignment format they have not yet experienced, particularly with regards to what "counts" as a track on the mixtape. To address this, Elspeth creates a discussion board thread as a space where students can post their questions, emphasize the questions of others which they share, and where both other students and Elspeth can answer questions. Through this board, students quickly learn that almost any type of media "counts" as a track on the mixtape. As they create the mixtape, liner notes, and album cover, they create knowledge and imbue each track with meaning.

CONCLUSION

In 2016, when we began teaching *Introduction to Environmental and Social Justice* online, we were concerned about the possible constrictions imposed by teaching online. However, through collaboration and a shared love for incorporating popular culture into our teaching, we came to realize that introducing a mixtape assignment into the syllabus allowed us to take a creative approach to pedagogy in an online space.

We each had a different strategy: Caitlin created a mix of songs that she felt expressed the affective spaces of the course and asked her students to use two of them as guides in reflection papers where they highlighted

the interconnectedness of the material and concepts. In contrast, Elspeth asked her students to remix the themes and concepts from the course to create a multimedia mixtape spotlighting cultural production outside of the scope of the course syllabus to create an affective listening, reading, and viewing experience through the mixtape, album art, and long-form, reflective liner notes.

We found both approaches to be effective and well received by our students. The mixtape facilitates the experience of students as spatial architects; the students hold the power as they confront the structural limitations imposed by the syllabus. Students can incorporate imagery and music from the shows and albums that they may watch or listen to while they complete their classwork, thereby bringing their individual experience of the online course into the shared experience of the online classroom. Therefore, what is usually considered a distraction in the traditional face-to-face classroom turns into an opportunity to make connections between course topics, cultural production, and current events. While these sorts of connections can also be made in a traditional face-to-face classroom environment, we suggest that integrating popular culture as assigned course material and as student-generated creation gives the online classroom a unique advantage. As students move between tabs on the computer screen, implicit relationships form between current music videos and traditional scholarly texts. Through the mixtape assignments presented here, those implicit relationships become an activated note of student learning.

Finally, both creating and analyzing the mixtape recalls the radical roots of environmental and social justice, creating theory from community movements and practices. In this course, environmental justice theory becomes the method of instruction. As online instructors, we rarely have the opportunity to understand if and how the students are engaged with revolutionary work in their communities. Disruptive and productive, this assignment turns the students into critical creators and provides them with a toolset that was originally fashioned by activists and radical figures.

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A special issue of *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy*

Submission deadline for full articles: October 1, 2020

The phenomenon of the Grateful Dead has been written about (and studied) for more than 50 years, starting first with rock 'n' roll journalists and, over the past 30-plus years, both by rock journalists and by academic scholars in a variety of fields and disciplines. Indeed, in terms of scholarly activity, the Grateful Dead area of the Southwest American/Popular Culture Association (also known as the Grateful Dead Scholars Caucus) has been in existence for 20-plus years and has attracted scholars from more than 30 separate disciplines. While the Grateful Dead phenomenon has proved worthy from a scholarly standpoint, anything that merits academic inquiry from scholars also warrants inquiry from students. One of the issues that comes to the fore in making the Grateful Dead phenomenon accessible to students is figuring out how to teach about the Grateful Dead, particularly when considering the ongoing scholarly activity in so many fields and the various settings in which teaching can and does occur. Also worthy of note are the many ways that the Grateful Dead frequently have been incorporated into the curriculum in various otherwise apparently unrelated academic disciplines, such as business management or the sciences.

This call for papers seeks to draw upon these different perspectives and approaches to teaching and learning in Grateful Dead studies and/or using the Grateful Dead as a vehicle for studying in various disparate disciplines for a special issue on “Teaching (with) the Grateful Dead.”

Of particular interest are articles that address a variety of pedagogical approaches to teaching about the Grateful Dead or using the Grateful Dead as a teaching tool, especially in terms of considering the notion of pedagogy broadly defined to include classrooms, films, movies, television, radio shows, popular publications, exhibitions, conferences, academic publications, musical events, and those one-on-one moments in which many Deadheads first heard about and became educated about the band and wanted to build their knowledge and awareness of the various aspects of the Grateful Dead phenomenon.

Types of Submissions:

- Articles/Essays – theoretical or practical discussions of popular culture and/or pedagogy.
 - MLA or APA format.
 - 5,000-7,000 words (inclusive of abstract, endnotes, and works cited).
- Musings and Reviews – essays relating to popular culture and/or pedagogy; reviews of books, films, games, conferences, etc., as relevant.
 - MLA or APA format.
 - 1,200-1,800 words (inclusive of endnotes and citations).

Submission Guidelines:

For all submissions, please submit the following documents:

- A title page with the author’s name, affiliation, city, state, country, and email address.
- A full version of the submission as intended for publication.
- A blinded version of the submission for review purposes.

The guest editors, in consultation with the *Dialogue* editorial board, will review submissions in the initial selection phase and will identify qualified reviewers, with oversight from the *Dialogue* editorial board, to provide constructive feedback and recommendations for publication (accept, reject, accept with revisions) on full article manuscripts in a double anonymous review process. Final approval of articles for publication in this special issue will require the consensus of the guest editors and the *Dialogue* editorial board. Special efforts will be made to solicit proposals from a diverse group of scholars, and special encouragement is being extended to scholars outside of the SWPACA’s Grateful Dead studies area.

Please send submissions to special issue editors Julie H. DeLong (Julie.h.delong@gmail.com) and Timothy Ray (tray@wcupa.edu).





DIALOGUE

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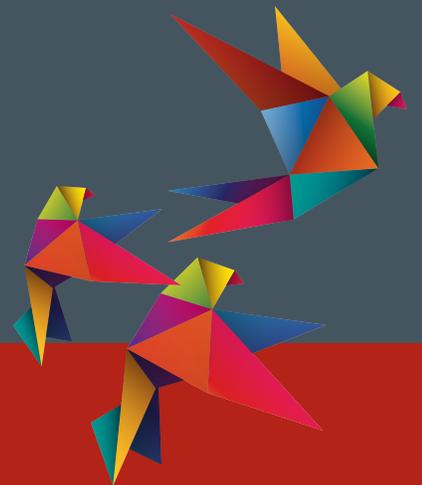


Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy is the official journal of the **Southwest Popular/American Culture Association (SWPACA)**.

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The mission of the **SWPACA** is to promote an innovative and nontraditional academic movement in Humanities and Social Sciences celebrating America's cultural heritages. To provide an outlet for scholars, writers, and others interested in popular/American culture, to share ideas in a professional atmosphere, and to increase awareness and improve public perceptions of America's cultural traditions and diverse populations.

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