

THE PROGRESS AND PROSPERITY PRESENT IN AFRICAN AMERICAN RHETORIC  
AND COMPOSITION SCHOLARSHIP

By

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## ABSTRACT

In my dissertation, I combine autoethnographic work and my analysis of Carmen Kynard's *Vernacular Insurrections*, Tamika Carey's *Rhetorical Healing*, and Eric Darnell Pritchard's *Fashioning Lives*. I share my story about being a Black girl whose childhood interests in African American history evolved into sharing my own stories and my analysis of scholarship that spotlights lessons about the African American community's use of their literacy practices to achieve progress and prosperity. My dissertation is about the essential role my parents, family, African American histories, legends, legacies, histories, texts and music have played in my life and development of the literacies that have personally and professionally shaped me. I answer Pritchard's (10) call for more scholarship focused on "...Black LGBTQ literacy practices..." by merging scholarship by Black women rhetoric and composition scholars (e.g., Kynard, Carey) who share my identity as a Black woman and scholarship (e.g., Pritchard) that considers my identity as a member of the Black LGBTQ community. I use April Baker-Bell's Black Feminist Womanist Storytelling approach to combine my analysis with stories about my identities.

I aim to inspire and motivate people to achieve their goals and to support other people in their efforts to do the same in my discussions of the scholarship which evidences the African American community's use of their literacy practices to progress, prosper and experience what Bettina Love refers to as "Black Joy." My dissertation sheds light on African American people progressing and prospering despite enduring the racism and oppression that Love, Carey, Kynard, Pritchard, and other scholars discuss, and illuminates the power in Pritchard's (24) discussions of Black LGBTQ people using "restorative literacies" to combat "literacy normativity." I call writing teachers, writing center professionals, rhetoric and composition

scholars and others to engage with Kynard, Carey, and Pritchard, and other Black scholars' definitions of literacies and discussions of African American people's use of their literacy practices to progress and prosper even when they were the only ones invested in their progress and prosperity.

I discuss the personal and pedagogical purposes served by the scholarship and how I have used the scholarship as an educator and scholar and future uses for myself and other scholars and educators. I draw on scholarship about injustices, oppression, and racism that resulted in African American people having to risk their lives to educate themselves without institutional support and call rhetoric and composition scholars and educators and institutions to ensure they do not repeat these histories. I urge readers to think about the progress and prosperity that is possible if oppression, racism, and what Pritchard refers to as "literacy normativity" are not present in educational, professional, or religious spaces.

I reflect on how Kynard, Carey, Pritchard, and other scholars shed light on the significant role African American peoples' literacy practices have played in the creation of essential spaces that positively impact them and other people. Through discussing my own experiences and engaging with African American scholarship (e.g., Kynard, Carey, Pritchard, Logan, Love, Banks, Richardson, etc.) I present histories and propose futures that consider the role African American people's literacy practices play in progress and prosperity. I encourage people to be invested in Black people having equitable and uplifting experiences in spaces and experiences that are essential for their progress and prosperity and to envision how that work positively impacts society.

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I dedicate my dissertation, *The Progress and Prosperity in African American Rhetoric and Composition Scholarship*, to everyone who has positively impacted me and contributed to the progress and prosperity I have achieved in my life. While many people have contributed to my progress and prosperity, I dedicate my dissertation to my mom, Cynthia McCray, who is my hero and an extraordinarily courageous and brilliant, Black woman and human being, who I am blessed to learn from. I dedicate my dissertation to my dad, Gary McCray, who taught me to apply the Three Ds, dedication, discipline and determination to everything I do and who throughout my life has given me an example of what it means to be dedicated, disciplined and determined. I dedicate my dissertation to my wife, Stacy Botex, whose love knows no limits and who has helped me remove the limitations I had on love.

I dedicate this dissertation to my family, including those who have passed on like my Grandma Helen Donald, Grandpa Henry Donald, Grandpa George McCray, Grandpa Preston Breeden, and Grandma Rosetta (Rosette) Breeden, and all of my aunts, uncle, cousins and loved ones who are no longer here. I dedicate my dissertation to my brothers, living aunts, uncles, cousins, goddaughter and loved ones. I dedicate my dissertation to the different communities and people within those communities, who have affirmed and uplifted me and embraced my contributions, while contributing greatly to my life. I dedicate my dissertation to everyone invested in ensuring that people can experience progress and prosperity.

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me and being excited about the work I do. Thank you for all you do and all you are, and all you inspire me to be. I would like to thank my family and loved ones, teachers, fellow graduate students, students I've taught, the communities I am a part of and mentors, who have all played a vital role in inspiring and motivating me. I would like to acknowledge my dissertation committee chair, Dr. Trixie Smith, for providing feedback on drafts of my dissertation and consistently meeting with me to engage in thoughtful and thought-provoking dialogue about my work, while affirming me and the work I am doing. I would like to thank Trixie for always believing in what my work could be, especially on days when I was figuring that out. I would like to thank Trixie for not only being interested in the progress I was making with my work, but also caring about my well-being and how I was doing as a person.

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## INTRODUCTION

How did a person born in Jasper, Alabama, who was raised in Danbury, Connecticut, and who spent some of her adult life living in a small town named Conetoe, North Carolina, before moving to Greenville, North Carolina, end up in Michigan? While my dissertation is not the place where you will learn about my entire life story, every aspect of my journey, every person I've interacted with and learned from, all the experiences I've had in places I lived in and traveled through or about what and who brought me to those places, you will learn some of those things. You will also learn more about me and how some of my childhood interests lived on to be explored by me in my professional and academic work and how that influenced my belief that African American Rhetoric and Composition is an essential and valuable field of scholarship that can help people progress and prosper in their experiences and endeavors.

My name is Sharielka Shontae Botex. I am the oldest of my extraordinary parents, Cynthia and Gary McCray's three children, which includes my brothers Gary, Garrick, and I. I was born on February 27, 1987, in Jasper, Alabama. As a Black family, with parents who migrated from Alabama to Connecticut, we grew up hearing about some of the differences and similarities between the place we were being raised in and the place where my mom was born and raised and that my dad moved to during his childhood. We grew up hearing about my dad's glory days playing football at Walker High School in Jasper Alabama, and about some of both of my parents' fond and enjoyable experiences in Jasper, the lifelong friendships they made, and some of the things that made it clear that racial injustices, struggle and the tough moments that are a part of the human experience, and specifically Black people's experiences were as they had been for our ancestors, a part of their experiences.

Unlike my mom, my dad was not born in Alabama. He was born in Tarboro, North Carolina, and lived in New York and North Carolina prior to moving to Jasper, Alabama, which eventually became his home. Jasper is the place where my parents met and it is the origin of their love story, which includes being married since June 10, 1989. It is the place where my dad became a legendary football player at Walker High School, where my mom also spent some time as a member of the track team. It is the place they attended their high school prom together, and where they made lifetime friendships. It is also the school where both my mom, dad and Aunt Shawn, my mom's sister earned their high school diplomas. The north was appealing to my parents who wanted to have access to opportunities and a good quality of life. Even in identifying some of the positives about the north, my parents were aware that moving to the north did not mean we were not going to have to be aware of racism, and the challenges, struggles, successes, joys, and possibilities associated with being Black in America. My parents were and still are dedicated to teaching my brothers and I, that regardless of where we live, love, maintaining a positive attitude, contributing to community, doing our best, encouragement and embracing and enjoying life should always be permanent practices, ways of being, and doing.

Growing up, we learned about Black history and the value of taking pride in our Blackness so that we would never succumb to perspectives that suggested that being Black meant that we were less than anyone or less capable than anyone. We also learned to take pride in Blackness so that regardless of what society said about what Blackness meant for what we could do or who we were, that the truth was that we could do everything that anyone else could do and be extraordinary when doing it. Looking back, I feel like there were times when I was more aware of race than my peers in the north, which likely had something to do with my family's roots in the south.

As a kid who had a picture of Harriet Tubman in my room, I knew that her escape from slavery and commitment to securing her freedom and leading other Black people to freedom factored into her greatness and made her a hero. Growing up, I was aware that my ancestors escaping slavery and obtaining freedom was a part of my history as an African-American person. I knew that being Black meant that while I could accomplish amazing feats that it also meant that I would have to overcome challenges, inequalities and obstacles that only existed because I was Black. My parents ensured that my brothers and I knew that being African-American people in America meant that our history included our ancestors being forced into enslavement and doing labor that they were not paid for, while also knowing that such a history should never prevent us from seeing our value, self-worth and the valuable and essential ways the Black community contributed to shaping and building America. My parents taught us how to honor and celebrate our history and culture, while also teaching us the importance of valuing and honoring other peoples' histories and cultures.

When it came to my parents' insights about life and humanity, they shared and still share a wealth of knowledge with my brothers and I while also setting the expectation that we do the same with them and other people. Whether it was my mom, talking about fulfilling your destiny and the power people have to fulfill their destiny and talking about the importance of helping people and giving back to your community or my dad sharing his beliefs, including his perspectives "That there is only one race– the human race" and "Whether you're the President of the United States or a garbage man, take pride in everything you do," my parents always shared knowledge that I viewed as profoundly important to apply to every aspect of my life.

Their support, love, knowledge and guidance have all played an essential role in my life and greatly influences me and helps me to, regardless of life's circumstances and what's

happening in society, be able to know and believe that progress and prosperity are possible. In my dissertation, when I use progress and prosperity, I have in mind my parents' lessons about working to achieve your goals even when it seems impossible and the ways they both live by those words and have worked to achieve their goals and work towards the lives they aspire for. I have in mind the resources and support that should be consistently made available for people to achieve educational, financial, spiritual, political, societal and communal, physical and mental and personal success and the ways that limited access to those things negatively impacts people. I have in mind the essential role our literacy practices play in accessing the resources we need to achieve success and creating circumstances that allow us to sustain ourselves and well-being even when what we or society define as success is out of reach. I have in mind the ways African-American people have historically, and currently use, their literacy practices to progress and prosper, and the ways my focus on Tamika Carey's *Rhetorical Healing: The Contemporary Reeducation of Black Womanhood*, Carmen Kynard's *Vernacular Insurrections: Race, Black Protest, and the New Century in Composition-Literacies Studies*, Eric Darnell Pritchard's *Fashioning Lives: Black Queers and the Politics of Literacy* evidences this.

When I use the terms progress and prosperity, I am speaking of how the Black community progressed and prospered and has remained relentless in pursuing and obtaining what is essential for their lives and ensuring they can experience the lives they envisioned for themselves despite opposition and oppression. This is exhibited in the African American Rhetoric and Composition scholarship I am focused on. As a rhetoric and composition scholar, I am interested in how the African-American community historically used and currently uses their writing, communication and literacy practices to make progress and prosper and how this is evidenced within African-American rhetoric and composition scholarship. I use the terms

progress and prosperity while keeping in mind Bettina Love's adamance<sup>1</sup> about surviving not being enough and her advocating for educators to expose Black students' to uplifting and supportive educational experiences where their identities can be embraced and affirmed. Like Love and other scholars, whose work I will discuss in my dissertation, I recognize the importance of doing this work. My dissertation is a project that better prepares rhetoric and composition scholars and educators working with students in writing classrooms to recognize students' identities and what they must do to support students in honing and acquiring literacy practices and skills that are essential for their lives. It is a project that encourages rhetoric and composition scholars to realize that even in the current climate, we can still teach students to use their literacy practices to positively impact society and to do equitable and inclusive work that helps them, and other people, pursue personal, professional and academic goals that bring them a sense of fulfillment and purpose.

In these discussions, it is essential to place a focus on progress and prosperity and the ways that the Black community has progressed and prospered, regardless of obstacles and oppression that existed to prevent them from doing so, because doing that, energizes us and lets us know that even when we endure, we can excel. Rhetoric and composition scholars looking to make a worthy investment will be invested in themselves expanding their knowledge of how the African-American community used their literacy practices to progress and prosper despite what they endured and inspiring students to use their literacy practices to do the same. In the next section, I will offer insights and reflections that add to my earlier definitions and insights about progress and prosperity. In addition to considering my perspective on progress and prosperity and the insights I offer about other scholar's perspectives on these terms, I hope you will

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<sup>1</sup> *We Want to Do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and The Pursuit of Educational Freedom* by Bettina Love. Beacon Press. 2019

consider your own definitions of progress and prosperity and invite students to consider what progress and prosperity mean to them. I encourage you to invite students to inform you about the support, instruction, feedback and guidance they need from a teacher in a writing classroom to make the progress they want to make in their professional and academic endeavors.

## **Progress and Prosperity**

I view progress and prosperity as what is achieved by people in their daily lives and the way their contributions motivate and inspire future achievements for themselves and others. Progress and prosperity is going from being a child who wanted to write, speak and help people when I grew up to being a grown-up who is doing those things. When considering progress and prosperity, insights in African-American rhetoric and composition scholarship, I find it productive to consider Jacqueline Jones Royster and Jean C. Williams' insights. Royster and Williams state:

In other words, what has constituted progress and achievement in the past and what might be meaningfully used to nurture progress and achievement in the present and future seems better tied to knowledge making processes that are recursive, ones that allow us to re-see and re-think. (583)

## ***Definitions***

### **Progress**

Progress is continual and it involves everything and everyone involved in the process of trying to get people where they are trying to go. On the *Merriam- Webster Dictionary* website, progress is defined both as a verb and noun. As a verb, progress is defined as: “to move forward; to develop a higher, better or more advanced stage” (“Progress”-*Merriam-Webster*). The

definitions of progress as a noun that are relevant to my work are: “a forward or onward movement (as to an objective or to a goal)” and “gradual betterment: “especially: the development of humankind.” (“Progress”-*Merriam-Webster*)

## **Prosperity**

Prosperity is fixed and it is what you are working towards when you are trying to progress. Prosperity is what you eventually experience once you successfully make the progress you wanted to make. Along with the reflections and definitions of prosperity I shared, the following definition of the term presented in Merriam-Webster is also an accurate point of reference. According to the *Merriam- Webster Dictionary* website, prosperity is defined as “the condition of being successful or thriving.” (“Prosperity” -Merriam-Webster)

## **A Return to the Reasons and Purposes of My Work**

I return to my question: How did a person born in Jasper, Alabama, who was raised in Danbury, Connecticut, and who spent some of her adult life living in a small town named Conetoe, North Carolina, before moving to Greenville, North Carolina, end up in Michigan? In short, it is a part of a journey focused on progressing and trying to find ways to help myself, my family and anyone I encounter prosper. Although I visited Illinois for a vacation and came to Michigan for a conference and for a recruitment event for people interested in my graduate program, I had never lived in the Midwest prior to my time in my PhD program at Michigan State University. Prior to moving to Michigan, I had knowledge of some of the legends who had built careers and their legacy in Detroit and the successful auto industry.

In terms of making a decision to move to the Midwest, I was balancing a myriad of reflections, feelings, thoughts and perspectives. I was considering people’s comments and perspectives about how “There are no Black people there,” “The sun rarely comes out,” the

national news coverage about the devastating Flint Water crisis, concerns about violence and crime and fears of racism in the Midwest. I was considering the aforementioned matters and perspectives, along with my own thinking about the ways Black people had been excellent and excelled in the Midwest, the excellent reputation of the PhD program I was interested in and my excitement for working with brilliant scholars at a resource-rich university with its' own prominent history and legacy, and what that meant for it being possible for me to progress, prosper and positively impact people on my academic and professional journey as a scholar and educator.

I knew Michael Jordan had an extraordinarily exceptional career with the Chicago Bulls and that Magic Johnson played and dominated at Michigan State University. I knew that Jim Brown had a historic and legendary career playing with the Chicago Bears. As an Oprah Winfrey fan, I knew about Oprah Winfrey's extraordinary, ground-breaking and transcending show in Chicago and her legendary career as an inspiring talk show host, philanthropist and person who shed light on matters that impacted people and society while generating dialogue about a variety of topics. I knew that Kanye West, who was at the time one of my favorite rappers and now is a figure whose consistent controversial statements, which include remarks that have been classified as anti-Black and anti-semitic, and have resulted in me self-reflecting on what I need to do to work to avoid causing the hurt, harm and pain he causes, was from Chicago. I knew Chicago was also the hometown to legends like Lupe Fiasco and Common. I knew about Motown being in Detroit and all of the iconic and talented legends that were associated with Motown.

I knew that all of these legends, who had made essential and extraordinary contributions that profoundly transformed their professions and greatly impacted society were Black. For me,



their presence evidenced that I could be present and progress and prosper. In my dissertation, I will expand on the importance of recognizing the power in people being present and what that makes possible for others who need evidence and affirmation to believe they can exist and excel in a space. Knowing that Black people had excelled and prospered in the Midwest and became icons certainly made me feel more confident about seeing it as a place where I could live, learn and work, even amid expressed concerns about there not being many Black people and not knowing about what the experiences of Black people were.

When you move to a place, there are many things you want to know and be sure of. You want to know that your family is safe, that you will be able to find a sense of community, that you can travel to see family and friends and that you will be able to experience culture and potentially contribute to creating culture. Being a Black queer person in America impacts your ability to be sure of some of these things. Through the years I have heard people reflect on there being a lack of diversity where they lived, and certainly can attest to that being the case in some of my experiences in Michigan and Michigan State University, while also being able to attest to a powerful, rich and amazingly incredible presence of Black people, Black communities, Black organizations, legacies and histories within the university setting, communities that surround the university and in Detroit.

According to the Michigan State University page on *Data USA*, the student body is 66.5% white, which accounts for 33,051 students who are enrolled. There are a reported 3,572 students who are Black or African-American, accounting for 7.19 % of the student population, and 3,244 Asian students who account for 6.53 % of the population. *Data USA* reports that 3.34 % of the student population is Hispanic or Latino, with a reported 0.252 % of students reporting that they are two or more races. At MSU, American Indian or Alaska Native students account for

0.0563 % of the student population (“Michigan State University Data USA”). Within doctoral programs at MSU, 50 % of students are White, with 15 % of the doctoral student population reportedly being Hispanic or Latino and African American students accounting for 9.69 % of the doctoral student population.

As a graduate student at Michigan State University, I was blessed and fortunate to have the experiences I had within my department and in university level programming and for opportunities that I had and roles I served in, but earning such opportunities and experiences did not absolve me of the realities that comes with being an African-American woman and lesbian. African-American people and other marginalized communities are too often the ones who are left to lead and initiate dialogue about racism and race, consider voices and experiences of people from the LBGTQ community or respond to the ways that racism has negatively impacted them or infiltrated their experiences. At a university where signs like “Hate Has No Home Here” are in the hallways and on the website, I still had to advocate for the message being a reality and address issues where hate seemed to still live rent-free.

My dissertation like other scholarship, like Love’s *We Want to Do More Than Survive*, takes into account my own realities and experiences and other peoples’ experiences, which communicates the importance of telling the stories of Black brilliance, excellence and achievements like those of Sarah Douglas Morgan becoming the first African American woman<sup>2</sup> to become the president of an NFL Team and Supreme Court Justice Ketanji Jackson Brown being sworn in as this country’s first African American woman to serve as a supreme court justice and the pervasiveness of oppression, violence and tragedy linked to White Supremacy aimed at keeping such accomplishments from being possible. Within 2022, the hatred and White

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<sup>2</sup> “Sandra Douglas Morgan Talks Las Vegas, Work Ethic and Joining Raider Nation on Good Morning America.” *Raider Nation*, <https://www.raiders.com/news/sandra-douglass-morgan-las-vegas-work-ethic-joining-raiders-good-morning-america>

Supremacy of some people resulted in the Buffalo shooting massacre, where a gunman killed Black people and the Uvalde massacre where school children were brutally killed<sup>3</sup> as a result of the gunmen and law-enforcement's lack of effort and humanity resulting in them failing to save their lives.

My pursuit of my graduate degree has resulted in me having both beautiful and incredibly enriching experiences and interactions, while also still having to address the racism that exists to communicate that African-American people do not deserve to engage in educational and professional pursuits linked to progress and prosperity. I have continued on despite symbols of hatred and racism either holding people and headlines hostage or infiltrating my personal spaces and experiences. My continuing on has involved combatting that racism and spotlighting Black excellence<sup>4</sup> and continuing to be excellent, because that is a part of the legacy

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<sup>3</sup> "Systematic failures" in Uvalde shooting went far beyond local police Texas House Report Details." *Texas Tribune*, <https://www.texastribune.org/2022/07/17/law-enforcement-failure-uvalde-shooting-investigation/>

<sup>4</sup> When using the term Black excellence in my dissertation, I am not using it in ways that are associated with elitist perspectives. Throughout my dissertation I offer various discussions that are representative of how I view Black excellence. I hope that people will think of Black excellence in relation to progress and prosperity and define it for themselves. In my use of Black excellence, I ask that readers do not narrowly view it as a set of achievements, level of education and or a type of employment that Black people must achieve and or possess to be excellent. My use of Black excellence should call readers to think differently than they have about the term, to understand it differently than it has been traditionally understood and to think about how they themselves have defined and will define the term and contribute to Black excellence. Black excellence is achieved in the lives of Black people every day. Black excellence is achieved through Black people existing and the various ways they exist and the essential contributions they make throughout their existence. Black excellence is in the body of every Black person, and it inspires and motivates Black people and what Black people do when we are inspired and motivated. Black excellence is what Black people collectively achieve as a people and what they have inspired and motivated other people to achieve and how they have contributed to the improvement of society and inspired and motivated humanity to be more humane. Black excellence is what has been reported about Black people and their contributions in both written and unwritten records and documentation. Black excellence is what Black people have done and desire to do. Black excellence is the labor Black people have been credited for and the labor we still have not been properly recognized and acknowledged for doing. Black excellence is ensuring that narratives, stereotypes and misrepresentations of Black people do not define and or represent who Black people are and who they have the potential to be. Black excellence is alive in the everyday work and everyday existence of Black people, their experiences, legacies and histories. Black excellence should be viewed as the ways Black people achieve and help make other people's achievement possible regardless of their socioeconomic status, class, gender, sex, sexual orientation, education level, religious beliefs, political perspective and ideologies or what they do for a living. Black excellence is what Black people achieve and what they do when something stands in the way of achieving. For more, see my discussions of Fannie Lou Hamer's quote (20). I am also sharing the following texts as texts that I view as offering valuable discussions on this topic: Audre Lorde's "Learning from the 60s"; bell hooks' "Postmodern Blackness; Vershawn Ashanti Young's *Your Average Nigga: Performing Race, Literacy and Masculinity*, 2007.

I want to create and history I want to contribute to and that I am invested in. Along with this, I am invested in maintaining a hope that racism and the stain that racist people put on American history and people will eventually be washed away. In doing the work I do and will do, I must be committed to acknowledging and celebrating Black Brilliance while not overlooking the need to address things aimed at compromising future generations' abilities to experience and create Black Brilliance, which all Black people are capable of, and all of humanity can contribute to and experience.

I am fortunate that I have been supported in celebrating and acknowledging Black Brilliance and Black excellence from an individual and institutional level and that I am learning to avoid entertaining people who don't find Black Brilliance and excellence worthy of their time. If my brilliance and excellence is not worth someone's time, my labor and the contributions that I make to improve all of humanity are also not worth their time. Still, I have learned to contribute, regardless of who does not value my contributions because it will lead to ensuring that more people have access to equitable and enjoyable experiences where they can progress and prosper. While I remain optimistic that Black people's efforts and investments in progress and prosperity will not also require them achieving these things while enduring oppression and racism, the pervasiveness of these issues and the ways they impact peoples' personal and professional lives make the following points from James Baldwin resonate with me. Baldwin stated:

What is it you want me to reconcile myself to? I was born here, almost 60 years ago. I'm not gonna live another 60 years. You always told me it takes time. It's taken my father's

time, my mother's time, my uncle's time, my brothers and my sister's time, my nieces and my nephews' time. How much time do you want for your progress? (Baldwin<sup>5</sup>)

Like Baldwin, I find myself wondering how much time does it take for progress and a genuine investment in being committed to humanely engaging with Black people and eliminating thinking, activities, activities and practices that communicate that Black people are not human beings? How much more time is it going to take to acknowledge how the Black community has achieved success in various sectors and positions in society and greatly contributed to culture and humanity – while waiting for their community to be similarly invested in. I dream of a day where Black scholars, writers, educators, students and people will be able to focus on making essential and valuable contributions, without any isms or ills threatening their existence or their ability to enhance the existence of all people. I dream of a day where our literacy practices which have aided in the development and enhancement of our experiences, community, lives and society, will be widely valued and accepted as practices that should inspire and motivate others to improve society and ensure that society improves their investment in supporting and affirming peoples' access to opportunities and experiences that lead to extraordinary lives.

I have not done more than Fannie Lou Hamer, Ella Baker, my grandparents, parents, siblings, relatives and loved ones or any of my ancestors. I have not done more than the scholar-activist committed to calling out injustices in their scholarship and who have decided that their life's work will be combatting the injustices and inequalities that plague people. I have not done more than Louis Maraj, author of *Black or Right: Anti/racist Campus Rhetorics*, a text that should be read by everyone to deepen their understanding of racism and oppression that occurs on college campuses, which Maraj sheds light on, along with informing readers about how Black

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<sup>5</sup>“How Much Time Do You Want for Your Progress? James Baldwin From the Documentary *James Baldwin: The Price of the Ticket*.” Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=10154092802816623>

people combat racism, hatred and oppression in pursuit of their degrees at institutions that in some instances, are unwelcoming to them and their community and histories.

As Maraj's work and April Baker-Bell, et. al in "This Ain't Another Statement! This is a Demand for Black Linguistic Justice!" and others advise, the issues, isms and ills within university settings mirror the systemic injustices, inequalities and racism that are experienced by Black people in society. I have not done more than the local community organizations in cities like Lansing, Detroit and other cities, where advocates and activists make it possible for people, including myself to learn and to teach while knowing that I can do so with a peace of mind, and knowing that if someone interrupts my peace of mind, threatens me or my well-being, that there are organizations willing to advocate for people to be able to safely receive the education that my ancestors were invested in me and others receiving.

I am grateful for the people within organizations who commit their lives to protesting, attending town hall meetings and organization meetings, and providing programming and resources that will enhance the lives of people. I am grateful for people who continually enhance society, without society being as equally invested in enhancing their lives. I am grateful for the people who are speaking out against injustices not only when it is convenient to do so, but because they realize the ways that everyone's lives will be inconvenienced by them not doing so. I am grateful for the people who get up day in and day out to provide essential services, resources, support and experiences that help us all enjoy life.

I dream of the people invested in making positive communal and societal change being in state senate seats, police departments and food and drug administration roles, financial institutions and other places where they can use and apply their fervor, commitment to making positive change, commitment to people experiencing equality and commitment to safety, and

their literacy practices to help people prosper and progress in all aspects of their lives. I dream of more people realizing that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream is worthy of being a reality. I dream of a day where people aren't working so many jobs that they get so little rest that they can't even dream. While I have worked to engage in efforts that hopefully show people that these dreams should be ones that they too have and work towards making possible, in my dissertation I am presenting discussions that will show how the African-American community's use of their literacy practices has always allowed them to dream the realities a person like me is now living and to do the things they need to do to pursue education and opportunities to improve their experiences and society. I view such discussions as a contribution to helping the dreams I shared become a reality.

In my dissertation, my discussion and analysis of Tamika Carey's *Rhetorical Healing: The Reeducation of Contemporary Black Womanhood*, Eric Darnell Pritchard's *Fashioning Lives: Black Queers and the Politics of Literacy* and Carmen Kynard's *Vernacular Insurrections: Race, Black Protest, and The New Century in Composition- Literacies Studies* will exhibit how the scholars' discussions of African American people's use of their writing and literacy practices for their own and community's progress and prosperity can be used by writing teachers, scholars, educators and people working to achieve their goals and reach their aspirations. In Kynard's work, she sheds light on how Black people's commitment to ensuring they had the educational opportunities and experiences made public education available for everyone. Kynard writes:

It was the demands made by African Americans for free, public education that became the impetus for the system of public education that was established in the United States after the Civil War. Up until that point, public education as we know it today, did not exist. Kelly argues that it was the newly emancipated African Americans who had the

clearest agenda and sense of importance of education and thus, cleared the path for everyone else to have access to public education.” (Kynard 34-35)

It is imperative that Black people and other people from communities that have historically been oppressed and marginalized, and writing teachers working with these students in classrooms, have an awareness of the history Kynard sheds light on. Such an awareness, and an awareness of other insights I will discuss in my dissertation, educate us about the essential contributions Black people have made to creating and shaping education, and the vital role education has made in the community progressing and prospering. An awareness of African American peoples’ undeniable contributions to building the American education system should result in ensuring that African-American people always have access to education, educational institutions and opportunities to be employed as educators. That awareness will result in increasing everyone’s access to the spaces. I value education as an essential tool and as a rhetoric and composition scholar turning to histories and realities discussed by scholars, such as, Kynard, Carey, Pritchard, Elaine Richardson, and Shirley Wilson Logan, I contribute to discussions focused on how the African-American community used their literacy practices to ensure they could acquire and use the literacy practices that they knew were essential to access what was essential for their lives.

At Michigan State University, my education did not just involve the course work I was fortunate to do, but it involved learning in various spaces and experiences and from people, educators, graduate students, undergraduate students, department chairs, staff, leaders, community members, mentors and educators, community members within my own department and outside of the department and reading and listening to scholars whose work evidenced what can be achieved within academic institutions. Lamar Johnson at his First Year Writing Workshop



hosted by the Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures Department First Year Writing Program talked about how, “We can’t count on external liberators, you have to liberate yourself.”

In my dissertation, my analysis of Kynard, Carey and Pritchard’s texts and other African American rhetoric and composition scholarship will evidence how the Black community’s use of their literacy practices, commitment, intellect, ambition, visions and investment in making positive and everlasting change in their own lives and communities has historically made possible the success, realities, access to opportunities and achievements that opposition and oppression aim to make impossible.

While I earlier listed some iconic legends who helped me to see that my presence in the Midwest would be possible, and briefly reflected on how that helped me counter ideas about there not being a lot of Black people in the Midwest, while in the Midwest, the incredibly influential and inspiring Black people I encountered in person and in text expanded my mind and inspired me to continue to exist within the field of rhetoric and composition and in academia. At this phase of my life, I am as I have been since I was a kid interested in the ways that the presence, histories, stories, achievements and contributions of people communicate what is possible for me.

This interest does not trump realities and challenges that threaten the existence of those people and my existence. Still, I call people to be invested in ensuring that nothing threatens those people, their work and their existence and that we instead, commit ourselves to doing work that ensures that students and educators, and people within any personal, public and professional space can exist and contribute without their contributions being compromised and their lives being threatened. Historically, marginalized communities have had to confront and combat the aspects and attitudes that America must do away with if anybody is going to truly be able to take

pride in this nation and if this nation is ever going to be able to fulfill the promise of being the land of the free and home of the brave. Is America the land of the free right now? Is it the home of the brave, when we are watching people cowardly cause catastrophes that aim to consume our lives and imagination and that leave a lasting impact on student's writing and other literacy practices and what they hope to achieve in their academic and professional careers?

Nikole Hannah-Jones during her 2021 National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Conference presentation talked about how the *1619* project was American history. It is. First Lady Michelle Obama, who was a keynote speaker at the conference, talked about the importance and productivity of learning about people's stories, Nelson Mandela's wisdom and impact on her and reflected on how we may not see the impact of our efforts, but that doesn't mean our efforts are any less significant and that we should stop being invested in making change. At the same conference, George M. Johnson, writer of *All Boys Aren't Blue* talked about his book being banned and linked his book's banning to the history of Phillis Wheatley's writing being banned. Johnson also advocated for people to put an end to Black writers, including Black queer writers having their work banned.

The NCTE's support of the speakers and Valerie Kinloch's vision as conference chair is an example of the kind of institutional and organizational support that must be consistent because that work aligns organizations with the effort of a community of people who have continually and consistently been involved in working to improve not just their own conditions, but conditions for everyone. These discussions are relevant to my dissertation for many reasons, including how they evidence how the powerful, visionary and extraordinary work that Kynard (75) reflects on Ernece Kelly doing as a scholar and writer when she addressed the NCTE about issues impacting Black people and global issues has manifested into the work that is the focus of

some organizations' conferences. That is the kind of progress I am interested in evidencing because it shows what can be achieved during a time when people may become weary about the ways current day circumstances resembled times that other people have already struggled and lived through. I will never let myself become so jaded by current day atrocities, that present-day successes and the history of my people are insignificant. I will never become so downtrodden by obstacles and issues within institutions that I fail to recognize the essential role institutions play in greatly contributing to peoples' progress and prosperity.

I hope my dissertation and my engagement with African American Rhetoric and Composition scholarship will revitalize people at a time when the only thing we can afford to do is focus on what we can create and contribute to enhance human being's existence and quality of life and their access to the resources, experiences and opportunities that they need to do the same. As writing teachers, doing this work involves considering how we keep these matters in mind when we work with students in writing classrooms. As scholars, it involves the work I am doing in this dissertation. Shirley Wilson Logan's *Liberating Language: Sites of Rhetorical Education in Nineteenth-Century Black America* and her discussions about Black peoples' roles and work in the "...lyceum movement in early-nineteenth-century America..." (59), the various purposes the lyceums served in Black progress and Logan's (49) discussions of Charles Chesnutt's experiences at The Howard School evidence Black people's investment in education and the ways their pursuits of education built, impacted and transformed educational spaces.

My own experiences and the histories presented in the scholarship I will discuss affirm my beliefs about the ways educational institutions and the writing classrooms within them can positively impact people and help them develop and hone skills, practices and ways of engaging with others, so that they can, within the spaces they are in, positively contribute and consider

other people, their identities, histories and experiences. Logan in “When and Where I Enter,” similarly acknowledges the ways that the writing classroom can be this kind of space when she writes, “We need to devise ways to speak the unspeakable, to talk about and have students write about issues surrounding race and gender, in composition classrooms and in all classrooms” (433).

Considering these things, I cannot get to this phase of my life and decide that I will tap out and view any space as unnecessary, so terrible and so tainted that I do not belong in them, because doing so would be a lie that negates all of the excellent and extraordinary experiences I have had in educational spaces. Doing so would overlook what I love about education and my own experiences within academic settings and the history of success achieved by Black people within academic institutions. I am inspired by the history and legacy of many Black rhetoric and composition scholars and the ways they shed light on how essential Black people’s literacy practices were in their efforts to achieve their goals and to live the lives they aspired to live.

In writing about how Nat Turner used his writing and reading for a revolution focused on Black people’s liberation, Logan (11), sheds light on how Turner’s actions “resulted in more rigid laws against slave literacy” (11). Adding additional insights about the backlash Black people have faced when trying to learn, and the ways that did not stop them from pursuing their education, Logan (11) writes:

For example, in Norfolk, Virginia, the early education of William G. Allen, who would later become the first African American professor of rhetoric, was disrupted when his all-black school was closed in the wake of the rebellion, and he subsequently devised other means of acquiring it. (11)

Logan's (11) reflections about "the other means" used by Allen are important for people to be aware of and consider because our work should be focused on institutions being spaces of support for all people and preventing the kinds of histories that resulted in many Black people historically and currently having to use "other means" to achieve their goals. It is imperative that Black people can deploy their literacy practices in every sector of America and live lives and do work without being threatened by the legacy of anti-literacy laws, which in current day is alive in book bans, reading lists that do not include Black authors and or spaces where there are rarely Black readers present to speak for the ways they are presented in texts.

During my time at Michigan State University, I have been fortunate to learn at an institution where Malcolm X delivered a speech<sup>6</sup> in Erickson Kiva Hall and a plaque that commemorates his speech is present. I have lived in a city where some of his childhood homes are located, which I learned about from exploring "Malcolm's Lansing," a project that there is a description for on the *Curatescape* website. According to the description:

Malcolm's Lansing is the creation of Michigan State University's Residential College in the Arts and Humanities (RCAH) Fall 2015 class RCAH 192: Proseminar: Malcolm X in Lansing. The 13 students worked to learn and apply research methodologies, and this is their creation... ("Malcom X in Lansing" Curatescape).

I was blessed and fortunate to listen to *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* while on some of my runs in Lansing, where my first home as a graduate student was in South Lansing. I never imagined myself having an experience of being in a city that was the home of one of most extraordinary gifted, intellectual, thought-provoking, fearless and transcendent leaders of all

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<sup>6</sup> Beard, Jaden. "60 years after Malcolm X's speech at MSU, 2nd annual Malcolm X community forum hosted." *The State News*, [https://statenews.com/article/2023/01/60-years-after-malcom-xs-speech-at-msu-2nd-annual-malcom-x-community-forum-hosted?ct=content\\_open&cv=cbox\\_latest](https://statenews.com/article/2023/01/60-years-after-malcom-xs-speech-at-msu-2nd-annual-malcom-x-community-forum-hosted?ct=content_open&cv=cbox_latest)

time. I also never imagined that I would have the chance to hear Dr. Tamura Lomax discuss how Malcolm X supported Black women and was an activist whose ideologies supported and served Black women during her participation in the Michigan State University *Slavery to Freedom* Series lecture. During the *Slavery to Freedom* event, Lomax, Patrisse Cullors and Dr. Marita Gilbert engaged in dialogue that showed how they are modern day versions of Malcolm, Ella Baker and Fannie Lou Hamer's vision for change and the ways that vision looks in academic settings.

Living is better than dreaming. Living without terrors that interrupt our ancestors' dreams of us achieving prosperity is something I hope my dissertation will contribute to. I also hope my dissertation and analysis of African-American rhetoric and composition scholars' discussions about Black people's use of their literacy practices to improve their lives and circumstances with or without institutional support will inspire and motivate readers to remember their ability to contribute and create and inspire others to do the same. As Fannie Lou Hamer says:

Whether you have a Ph.D., or no D, we're in this bag together. And whether you're from Morehouse or Nohouse, we're still in this bag together. Not to fight to try to liberate ourselves from the men – this is another trick to get us fighting among ourselves – but to work together with the black man, then we will have a better chance to just act as human beings, and to be treated as human beings in our sick society. (Hamer qtd. in Lewis)

## CHAPTER 1: METHODOLOGIES: AN ADVOCACY PROJECT BUILT ON TEXTUAL ANALYSIS AND AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

– “[P]erhaps then we may convince them [the students] that the pen is mightier than the Molotov cocktail” – Geneva Smitherman, qtd. in by Carmen Kynard (83).

As a scholar, it is important for me to refer to the scholarship of Black rhetoric and composition scholars as a resource for rhetoric and composition scholars working to improve their teaching in writing classrooms. Along with this, it is important to refer to the scholarship for audiences who are interested in learning more about Black history, Black literacy practices, what Black people have historically endured in their efforts to hone and develop their literacy practices and the writing, speaking and other literacy practices that they used to progress. While my analysis of the scholarship is an important aspect of my work, my own stories and experiences provide useful and relevant insights in these discussions and offer more stories about Black people’s use of their literacy practices in personal and professional spaces, and for societal matters.

Considering my presentation of my own stories in my dissertation, I use an autoethnographic approach. In doing so, I am participating in a tradition that Louis Maraj (29; 31) refers to as “Black autoethnography” in his autoethnographic work *Black or Right: Anti/Racist Campus Rhetorics* where he sheds light on other Black scholars (e.g., Young, Royster and hooks, etc.), who have participated in the tradition. Like Maraj, Kynard in *Vernacular Insurrections*, Pritchard in *Fashioning Lives*, Vershawn Young in *Your Average Nigga: Performing Race, Literacy and Masculinity*, and other scholars I am using an autoethnographic approach to discuss my own experiences and provide my analysis and commentary on scholarship, societal matters, and my work as a scholar and educator in academic spaces.

In this chapter, I will draw on Heewon Chang's definitions and discussions of autoethnography in *Autoethnography as Method*, Maraj's (31) discussions of "Black Autoethnography" and other scholarship which I view as relevant and central to my use of autoethnography and my understanding of the approach. In *Autoethnography as Method*, Chang offers valuable discussions of autoethnography, examples of the approach and insightfully reflects on what the approach positions scholars to offer through their work. Chang (46) defines autoethnography when she writes:

The autoethnography that I promote in this book combines cultural analysis and interpretation with narrative details. It follows the anthropological and social scientific inquiry approach rather than descriptive or performative storytelling.

That is, I expect the stories of autoethnographers to be reflected upon, analyzed and interpreted within their broader sociocultural context.

In my dissertation, my use of the autoethnographic approach will show how my work can be classified as the kind of autoethnographic work that Chang (46) defines in her aforementioned points and how it is a part of the tradition and lineage that Maraj (31) identifies as "Black Autoethnography," which I will later discuss. My stories about my experiences importantly present insights about my identities, perspectives on societal matters, experiences as a teacher and scholar and are accompanied by my discussions of spotlighted scholarship.

When thinking about the pedagogical purposes the types of sharing of stories I do in my dissertation can serve for both readers and students, who I engage with in classrooms where acknowledging my identities and experiences positions me to invite students to do the same, Chang (38) offers useful insights about the role that "self-reflection" can play in teachers work with students. Chang writes, "As teachers face increasing cultural diversity in the classroom,



their interest in using self-narratives as cultural texts to analyze themselves and others will only grow” (38). My acknowledgement of my own identities and sharing of reflections and stories about my own experiences, positions me to encourage students to feel comfortable writing about and discussing these matters in the classroom.

When explaining his own use of autoethnography in *Black or Right* and discussing (23) his own identities and experiences as an educator in the classroom, Maraj provides a powerful example of how autoethnography can be used to shed light on our experiences and to provide insights about what can be gleaned from our experiences as people and educators. Maraj’s discussions about his experiences as an educator, as his insights (Maraj 31) on Young’s teaching experiences reveal, add to what we know about the work and experiences of Black men teaching composition. Along with powerfully contributing through his autoethnographic work, Maraj powerfully contributes to what the field of rhetoric and composition and readers of his text know about Black autoethnography. Maraj (29) writes:

To dig deeply into these differences to which Lorde alludes in the epigraph to this chapter— and to use them creatively as Lorde implores as critical of Black feminist imaginaries (1984, 110-113) – I position my forthcoming stories in a tradition of Black autoethnographic work within rhetoric, writing, and literacy studies.

Like Maraj, I view my work as a part of the existing body of work that he refers (29) to as a “tradition of Black autoethnographic work within rhetoric, writing, and literacy studies.”

Throughout my dissertation, both the texts I spotlight and other scholarship I discuss has an autoethnographic approach and is also a part of the tradition that Maraj sheds light on. Along with Maraj’s reflections about how he is a part of the tradition, he (26) draws on the work of

Adam Banks to explain the powerful work that is done through storytelling and Black autoethnographic work. Maraj writes:

I highlight this long-standing, though unrecognized, foundation utilized by Black academics in our fields through the figure of the *griot-as-scholar*. Such a move follows on Banks's call to 'build theories, pedagogies, and practices of multimedia writing that honor *the traditions and thus the people* who are still too often not present in our classrooms, our faculties, and in our scholarship (2010, 13-14; emphasis mine).

Autoethnographic orientations align with African indigenous relational paradigms that emphasize self-awareness, belonging, and ecological accountability, which should permeate community and thus research engagement. (Chilisa, Major, and Khudu-Peterson 2017 qtd. in Maraj 26)

In Maraj's (26) points about Banks' perspective about what can be achieved through the work of a person who he refers to a "*griot-as-scholar*," it is clear that Banks, like Royster and Williams, Royster, and Ronald Jackson II, Pritchard, Kynard, Carey, Perryman-Clark, Baker-Bell, Logan and others is interested in ensuring that people who have historically not always had access to the academic spaces and opportunities and or equitable experiences while in those spaces can be made present by people within the spaces.

In my dissertation, I hope my acknowledgement of my own stories and experiences as a Black queer woman, scholar and educator, will, as the texts I spotlight and scholarship I discuss help someone else see that it is possible for them, their communities, cultures, identities, histories and legacies to be present. Along with considering Maraj's (46) discussions of Banks' insights about the powerful contributions a "*griot -as- scholar*" can make to their community and history, it is also productive to consider Maraj's (31) discussions of Black women's roles in

autoethnographic scholarship because it provides readers with a chance to acknowledge and honor the essential contributions Black women have made through autoethnographic work and how they have shaped the autoethnographic approach. Through discussing autoethnographic scholarship by bell hooks and Jacqueline Jones Royster, Maraj (30-31) explains both the pedagogical purposes that can be served and the ways that scholarship can uniquely serve as a tool for enhancing and transforming spaces. Writing about Royster's "When the First Voice You Hear is Not Your Own" and hooks' *Teaching to Transgress*, Maraj (31) writes:

hooks's call for instructors to 'practice being vulnerable in the classroom, being wholly present in mind, body, and spirit' (14) parallels Royster's (1996) emphasis on the varied, intersecting ways voices can be embodied (or move beyond biocentric notions of bodies) for Black feminist griots-as-scholars. In utilizing multiple angles of Black storytelling, both thinkers press Black autoethnography forward demonstrating how subjectivity might be complicated through layers of analysis to resist institutional oppression.

Something that I also appreciate and value about Maraj's (31-32) discussions of Black autoethnography are his discussions of Young's *Your Average Nigga* and the autoethnographic scholarship he credits (32) Kynard for doing. I view myself as doing the kind of autoethnographic work that Maraj reflects on Kynard and Young doing when he writes:

Following on Young's conspicuous and metalevel use of storytelling as a means to analysis, Carmen Kynard's (2013, 2015) scholarship exhibits Black autoethnographic methodologies in its prioritization of personal narrative in reflexive relation to academic conversation. It embodies critical self-awareness of her positionality as a Black feminist-race-radical-griot-as-scholar and how that awareness shapes and furthers research. (33)

Young's sharing of personal stories and experiences in *Your Average Nigga* where he talks about his personal life and experiences as a Black man, reflects on his teaching experiences as a Black man teaching writing and discusses how identity and perceptions about Blackness factor into his interactions with students, and Maraj's (31) discussions of his experiences with T, which he reflects (31) on in relation to Young's experiences with Cam provide a historical record of Black peoples' teaching experiences in the same way that Shirley Wilson Logan does in "When and Where I Enter: Race, Gender, and Composition Studies." Along with this, like Logan's work, the discussions of one's own experiences, as Maraj (31) notes when talking about Banks' "griot-as-scholar" concept, call readers to recognize their experiences and the experiences of people who are a part of her community, history and legacy.

As a writer, following his discussions of Young's text, Maraj (31) offers important insights that shed light on differences between him and Young's experiences with how Black men receiving an education was perceived. Maraj writes:

Growing up, my situation differed from Young's in that school and bookishness were not necessarily socialized as feminine. In postcolonial Trinidad and Tobago, parents, teachers, and even culture beat learning into us as a clear alternative to drugs, poverty, and violence. (31)

In Maraj's (31) reflections on what he learned about Young's experiences and his own experiences, he is able to consider his life, educational experiences, cultural identities and community in relation to Young's. In doing this, Maraj (31) offers another perspective about the educational expectations that are placed on Black men and reflect on the role his cultural identity played in the way education was perceived.

Considering Maraj's (31) acknowledgement of the difference between the expectations that were placed on him to pursue an education and Young's experiences, it is important to consider how autoethnographic work should not be treated as work that is a representation of the experiences of everyone who shares the cultural identity of the writer, which Logan (430) recognizes and explains. Drawing on bell hooks, Logan writes, "Further, I hope that for my telling of my episodes I will not be given the essential label of the anthropological 'native informant' who is presumed to speak for an entire group (hooks *Teaching* 43 qtd. in Logan 430).

Like Logan (430), and as Maraj's (31) discussions of differences between he and Young's experiences reveal, my account of my stories and experiences do not represent and or speak for everyone from the communities I am a part of. By being in conversation with other scholarship and perspectives presented in texts I present multiple perspectives alongside my own and engage in a dialogue that exhibits how the scholarship I engaged with considered my histories, experiences and identities. In my discussions of autoethnographic work, I have drawn on scholarship to discuss the positive histories, lineages and possibilities associated with it. In returning back to my discussions of Chang's work, I am able to offer some of her reflections on what she refers (Chang 46) to as "Pitfalls to Avoid in Doing Autoethnography." While I will not detail every pitfall that Chang discusses, I will reflect on an area of improvement in my work that Chang would classify as an autoethnographic pitfall. Chang writes:

Third, autoethnographers can fall into the pitfall of over-relying on their personal memory as the source of data. Personal memory is a marvelous and unique source of information for autoethnographers. It taps into the reservoir of data to which ethnographers have no access. Yet, Muncey (2005) reminds us 'Memory is selective and shaped, and is retold in the continuum of one's experience, [although] this does not

necessarily constitute lying' (2 qtd. in Chang 55). Memory can sensor past experiences.

When data are collected from a single tool without other measures for checks and balances, the validity of data can be questioned. (55-56)

In addition to Chang offering these valuable insights about the role that peoples' personal memory and recollection play in autoethnography, she also offers important insights about the connections and differences between autoethnography and ethnography. Chang explains that:

Autoethnography values your personal memory, whereas ethnography relies on informants' personal memory and ethnographers' recent memory of what they observed and heard in the field. Another major difference between you and other ethnographers is that you openly acknowledge your personal memory as a primary source of information in your research. (71)

While I asked my parents questions about some of their recollections of some experiences, including an educational experience that I did not go into detail about and forwent discussions of because of our different memories about the matter, checked in with them about certain memories and discussions, shared and discussed some of my work with them, and reviewed sources to confirm some memories, I believe that in the future if I do autoethnographic work, I will consider Chang's (55-56) points about how "...autoethnographers can fall into the pitfall of over-relying on their personal memory as the source of data."

An excellent example of work where interviews provide valuable and insightful discussions about peoples' experiences is *Sista, Speak!: Black Women: Kinfolk Talk About Language and Literacy*. In *Sista, Speak!*, Sonja L. Lanehart interviews her Black women family members about their literacy practices and experiences with literacy throughout their lives. When considering how people rely on each other as sources of information and knowledge, I believe

that it is important to be confident about relying on ourselves in the same way. It is also important to be open and receptive to the lessons about how we can improve in the future, which are lessons that can come from sharing and presenting ourselves and experiences. It is important to keep in mind how Chang (10) sheds light on how “...autoethnography is affirmed as an ethnographic research method that focuses on cultural analysis and interpretation.”

In addition to keeping Chang’s (10) points about autoethnography being an ethnographic approach in mind, it is important to do so in conversation with some of Chang’s other insights about the connection between autoethnography and ethnography and Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s (61) powerful insights about the traumatizing and troubling histories associated with ethnography which she sheds light on in her reflective response to James Clifford’s insights about ethnography. Smith writes, “The idea that collectors were actually rescuing artefacts from decay and destruction, and from indigenous peoples themselves, legitimated practices which also included commercial trade and plain and simple theft” (61).

Although, I expressed some of my concerns about some of the issues with autoethnography being affiliated with such a troubling history in my core exam paper, where I engaged with scholarship (e.g., Chang, Maraj, Smith, Van Maanen, Logan) to answer my question “What does autoethnography position me to do as a researcher interested in discussing my own experiences as a scholar, person and educator and shedding light on matters that impact society and community along with offering solutions?” (Botex), if I use autoethnography in future work, I plan to expand my discussions of how Smith’s (61) discussions of ethnography should make all researchers concerned about using an approach affiliated with ethnography. Along with using the autoethnographic approach, within my dissertation, my delivery of my

stories can also be classified as what Baker-Bell refers to as a Black feminist-womanist storytelling approach. Baker-Bell writes:

Black feminist-womanist storytelling is a methodology that weaves together autoethnography, the African-American female language and literacy tradition, Black feminist/womanist theories, and storytelling to create an approach that provides Black women with a method for *collecting* our stories, *writing* our stories, *analyzing* our stories, and *theorizing* our stories at the same time as *healing* from them. (Baker-Bell 531)

Considering Baker-Bell's (531) reflections about the healing and the storytelling that is a part of Black feminist- womanist storytelling, a saying my dad commonly uses, which is that "You can't have sunshine without rain," comes to mind. In acknowledging this adage, as my discussions in this chapter evidence, I call attention to some of the outcomes of what Love (22) refers to as "white rage," while also recognizing how extremely important it is to call attention to what she (Love 120) and many others refer to as "Black Joy."

I intentionally focus on Black joy to ensure that my work does not become entrenched with the oppression that African-American people have faced, while also not overlooking that oppression. A major goal is showing how extraordinary the African-American community has been despite what they have faced and endured and to celebrate the community's brilliance. This is essential work because negative experiences and oppression that African-American people have endured in America are not the whole of the community's experience. In order for Black people to continue to achieve the progress and prosperity that Black rhetoric and composition scholarship and my own experiences reveal that Black people have achieved with their writing, speaking and other literacy practices, I believe that creating what Love (120) refers to as "Black



joy” has to be something that both Black and non-Black scholars and educators collectively focus on. Explaining “Black Joy,” Love writes:

Black joy is to embrace your full humanity, as the world tells you that you are disposable and that you do not matter. Black joy is a celebration of taking back your identity as a person of color and signaling to the world that your darkness is what makes you strong and beautiful. Black joy is finding your homeplace and creating homeplaces for others. Black joy is understanding and recognizing that as a dark person you come with grit and zest because you come from survivors who pushed their bodies and minds to the limits for you to one day thrive. (120)

Love’s (120) insights about Black Joy educates readers about how Black people and their ancestors have committed themselves to fighting, to enduring, overcoming, excelling, being excellent even in the midst of struggling and wanting to ensure that future generations can experience excellence without the struggle that has historically been a part of those endeavors. My discussions in my dissertation of Black rhetoric and composition scholarship evidence the vital role that Black people’s literacy practices have historically played in creating “Black Joy” and how acknowledging and engaging with the texts can lead to progress for Black writers and communities, and non-Black writers who are invested in gleaning from the history of people who have excelled despite what they have endured.

Drawing on Love’s (120) discussions about “Black Joy” which are central to my work allows me to discuss instances of excellence and resourcefulness that are associated with the African American community using their literacy practices for their progress and prosperity. Now more than ever, examples of achieving and excelling in the face of adversity are essential and I am turning to Carey’s *Rhetorical Healing*, Pritchard’s *Fashioning Lives* and Kynard’s

*Vernacular Insurrections* to advocate for using Black rhetoric and composition scholarship as a resource that can help writing teachers, students and members of society recognize and envision that progress and prosperity can still be achieved even when enduring.

In doing this work, it is important to recognize the ways Black rhetoric and composition scholars before me, like Carey (6) and Banks (104) shed light on how Black and African American rhetoric and composition scholarship is focused on community and how Black rhetoricians within and outside of the field write and communicate to improve conditions for their community. Banks (104) writes:

The project of synchronizing African American rhetoric as an area of study to address the debates, tensions, differences, and commonalities across generations is one of connecting the crucial works of figures like Smitherman, Jacqueline Jones Royster, Keith Gilyard, Vivian Davis, Bill Cook, and many others with major questions related to technologies and writing and also technologies, community building, and communal goals.

Similarly, Carey's discussions of the legacy and history of Black rhetoric and composition scholarship provide me with a list of scholarship that I am building on. Carey writes:

There is an existing body of rhetorical, linguistic, and literacy scholarship on the shared epistemologies, language and speech acts, literacy practices and technologies African American men and women use to assert, preserve, and transform themselves, their communities, and their sociopolitical conditions (Asante, 1970; Smitherman, 1977; Gilyard, 1991; Logan, 1999; Royster, 2000; Moss, 2002; Richardson, 2003; Pough, 2004; Nunley, 2004 and 2011; Banks, 2005 and 2011; Holmes (,) 2006; Kynard 2007 and 2013; Lathan (,) 2007; Perryman-Clark 2012; Pritchard, 2014, Browne, 2013). Yet, as observed in the forward to Elaine Richardson and Ronald Jackson's 2004 edited collection, *African*

*American Rhetorics: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, there remains a call to ‘pull forth for contemporary critical inquiry’ the practices and performances that constitute the contours of a rhetorical landscape that remains relatively unknown in mainstream scholarly discourses. (10)

In my dissertation where my work combines my analysis of African-American rhetoric and composition scholarship, I discuss my own literacy practices and experiences, while drawing on my journalistic experience to present observations about current circumstances and matters. In my dissertation, some of the discussions within the scholars’ texts that I am focused on are their discussions of Black literacy practices (Kynard; Carey; Pritchard) Black queer literacies (Pritchard), societal commentary and issues and matters that have historically impacted Black people and are currently impacting them (Kynard; Carey; Pritchard) and insights about both the challenges that Black people used their literacy practices to overcome, the successes they achieved with their literacy practices and the ways they used writing, literacy practices and communication to contribute to their personal, professional and political lives (Kynard; Carey; Pritchard).

My work is an advocacy project, where I advocate for turning to Carey, Kynard and Pritchard’s work for the lessons they can teach rhetoric and composition scholars and others interested in potentially pursuing a career in the field. I bring these scholars’ voices together to shed light on some of the ways their texts can be considered when they are in conversation with one another. I call the field of rhetoric and composition to be actively engaged in the work these scholars call us to do. I am also focused on showing how these texts place a focus on the positive changes that they and members of their community have made in their professional work and the

ways that Black writing, literacy and communication practices have been used to greatly contribute to the Black community and society.

Like other texts I have read, podcasts I have listened to, shows I've watched or conversations I've had, reading Kynard, Carey and Pritchard's text affirmed different aspects of my identity and served as encouragement for me to continue to work towards reaching my aspirations in academia while still placing a focus on the issues and ills that result in other people not having the opportunity to do the same. Through my analysis of African American rhetoric and composition scholarship, and the ways I consider how it can be used in societal and academic spaces, I achieve the work of making my own work and Black rhetoric and composition scholarship a part of the 'mainstream scholarly discourses' where Carey (10) said Richardson and Jackson viewed it as being "unknown."

## **CHAPTER 2: A LITERATURE REVIEW OF LESSONS ABOUT LITERACY I’VE LEARNED FROM AFRICAN AMERICAN RHETORIC AND COMPOSITION SCHOLARSHIP**

In this chapter, I am deeply invested in discussing how Black people achieved what Richardson refers to as “Makin a way outta no way” (96). When explaining the concept of “makin’ a way outta no way,” Richardson (96) writes:

The freedom through literacy theme in Black experiences is a major example of Signifying in African American literacy traditions. I see it as the heart of African American culture, because this trope can be used to describe the African American experience of ‘makin’ a way outta no way,’ the quest for freedoms and literacies, from enslavement to the present day.

I build on the scholarship of Richardson, Gwendolyn Pough, Shirley Wilson Logan, Carey, Pritchard, Kynard and other scholars to discuss what Black people’s efforts to acquire education and use their literacy practices have historically involved and how there have been and are different influences, supporters and informers of Black peoples’ writing, communication and literacies. In this chapter, I aim to deepen readers’ understanding of how Black rhetoric and composition scholars’ scholarship focused on Black writing, communication and literacies can be used to help writing teachers and others work to exhibit an awareness of the struggles and successes associated with Black literacy practices and encourage them to push themselves and fellow educators and scholars to envision the way they can contribute to the success of students, while understanding how this is achieved by focusing on people’s histories, experiences and current circumstances, including the Black queer experiences that Pritchard (10) informs us have

been under engaged with and the Black histories that Royster and Williams advise us have been overlooked.

Through drawing on scholarship (e.g., Carey; Logan; Richardson, Pough, Banks, Pritchard, Kynard, Lockett) that discusses the history and legacy of African-American people's use of their literacy practices, I shed light on how Black people, regardless of what space they are in or what invitations and opportunities they do or do not have access to, use their literacy practices to make significant positive change in the personal, communal and professional spaces we are in and to combat issues and oppression aimed at stopping them from progressing and experiencing prosperity.

As a rhetoric and composition scholar, I am placing my voice, perspectives and experiences alongside the work of African American rhetoric and composition scholars, who, like me, are a part of the Black community. That community includes scholars like Shirley Wilson Logan, who informs us about how people honed their writing and literacy skills through engaging in "self-education" (29), relying on manuals (53), educational instruction such as reading rooms (70) and literary societies (84;94), and Black soldiers developing their already-existing literacy practices and acquiring new literacy practices during their time serving the country (19;23). In discussing the Black press, Logan explains (99):

The black press was active across the century and especially during the antebellum period. Also often overlooked is that a surprising number of antebellum journalists were formerly enslaved. These were individuals motivated by a desire to reach a wider audience than they had been able to before.

In spotlighting African-American rhetoric and composition in scholarship, I illustrate the way a field focused on writing, communication, rhetoric and literacy consists of scholars, who emerged

from a community that despite being denied the right to read and write have written prolific texts about the histories, legacies, and contributions made by their community.

In doing the work of showing what can be gleaned from African-American people's educational endeavors, and our use of our writing, communication and literacy practices, as Bettina Love (161-62) expresses in her discussions of "Survival vs. Freedom," I believe it is important for an all-hands on deck approach to doing work that contributes to Black people's progress and prosperity. Such an approach is necessary because in life and in their work, Black people have always considered their progress and prosperity and everyone else's. *The Combahee River Collective Statement* illustrates how Black lesbian and women's efforts to create collective progress for people within their communities and their desire to improve the lives of those who have historically endured oppression is work that is consistently done by people within the Black community. Pritchard (43) in drawing on Pough's insights and acknowledgements about Black feminists sheds light on this legacy. The CRC statement writers state that:

We realize that the only people who care enough about us to work consistently for our liberation are us. Our politics evolve from a healthy love of ourselves, our sisters and our community, which allows us to continue our struggle and work (CRC).

*The Combahee River Collective Statement* writer's reflections about their own concern being the only concern that is consistently expressed is still too often an unfortunate reality for Black women and Black queer people, navigating through conversations about diversity, equity, and inclusion, without actually experiencing those concepts. My part in this work is calling for writing teachers and institutions to be as equally invested in the future educational endeavors, progress and prosperity of every member of Black community as the Black community has historically been in their own community and to ensure that there are academic and institutional

opportunities and invitations for Black people to progress and prosper within writing classrooms and society.

In this chapter, as I do throughout my dissertation, where I discuss the myriad ways Black rhetoric and composition scholars have discussed Black people's acquisitions of literacy practices and the spaces and activities where their literacy pursuits and endeavors transpired, I present an eclectic archive of the diverse range of learning, existing, living, educating and education-receiving endeavors that Black people have engaged in and the ways these things are intertwined. In this chapter, through sharing my own perspectives and experiences, reflections about current and historic moments, and discussions of Black women rhetoric and composition scholarship and Black queer rhetoric and composition scholarship, I provide insights about the texts that *Vernacular Insurrections*, *Rhetorical Healing* and *Fashioning Lives* exist alongside.

Along with this, I work to exist alongside this scholarship and illustrate the ways that these texts like the aforementioned texts that I am providing an analysis and discussion of in my dissertation powerfully illustrate the ways Black people have even in challenging circumstances and limited access to opportunities and resources, have created and used spaces and technologies to improve their conditions, push for progress and never stop viewing prosperity as possible. Whether considering how, Valerie Kinloch, Beverly J. Moss, and Elaine Richardson in "Claiming Our Place on the Flo(or): Black Women and Collaborative Literacy Narratives," in their interview with Cynthia Selfie reflect on the role their families and different experiences played in the development of their literacy practices and how technologies impacted what they had to learn to continue to produce scholarship, or taking into consideration Lanehart's discussions of the varied literacy and language practices that can exist in one family, which she sheds light on in *Sista, Speak!: Black Women Kinfolk Talk About Language and Literacy*, there is



no shortage of discussions on Black literacy practices and the places, people and experiences that shape Black people's literacy practices. Considering the aforementioned scholarship and other people's scholarship, there is also no shortage of discussions about how Black people have used their writing and communication for themselves, their communities and societies.

Like Kinloch, Moss and Richardson, my discussions of my own personal experiences as a learner, writer and communicator will reveal some of the who, what, when, where and why that was involved in shaping my literacy practices. In "School Daze: Family Ways and The Importance of Bringing Up My Upbringing," I will share stories of some of my experiences, literacy practices, who and what affirmed me as a learner and the role that my upbringing plays in the work I am doing.

### **School Daze: Family Ways and The Importance of Bringing Up My Upbringing**

I remember writing things as a kid and my family members saying things like "That's good, Sharieka" or me just feeling like my writing was good, unless I encountered some critique of it that suggested otherwise. I remember thinking my writing was important and not even needing anyone to tell me it was important or good. I came up with something, liked the sound of it and I was proud of it. My mom has a piece of artwork, which she says has my goals to become a lawyer and a writer. As a kid, I knew I wanted to write, speak and help people. Growing up and seeing television shows where people were writers and communicators for a living was inspiring and affirming. The ways the characters in shows like *Moesha*, *Martin*, *Ghostwriter*, *Reading Rainbow* and *Living Single* used their writing, speaking and other literacy practices appealed to me and exhibited the various personal and professional ways writing could be used. Khadijah on *Living Single* was a writer at a magazine and that was a big-time thing to me. Moesha, who was a writer, who shared her work at open mic nights at Andell's<sup>7</sup> later pursued a professional career as

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<sup>7</sup> I performed a Google Search to confirm Andell's name.

a writer. On *Martin*, Martin hosted a radio show and interviewed guests, including celebrity guests, who he engaged in interesting and entertaining conversations with.

The *Reading Rainbow* theme song advised viewers to “Take a look, it’s in a book, with Reading Rainbow” so I had various examples of programming that placed a value on reading and writing, which helped me understand the various purposes reading, writing and communication could serve. As a kid, my dad wrote me letters, which helped me develop an early understanding of the ways that writing could be used to present emotions and thoughts on a page and directly connect with someone to communicate with them. His letters exhibited how he could use the written word to share his stories, communicate his love and reflect on what me being his daughter meant to him. Both of my parents spent a lot of time talking to my brothers and I about a wide-range of personal and public topics, including their own lives, jobs, public figures and our experiences in school.

My parents stressed the importance of education and helped us to see the ways we can learn through our participation in sports, volunteering, experiences like me going to work with my mom, or from what was going on in politics, music we listened to and television shows and movies we watched. Even now, they stay aware of the latest news and current events. Looking back, I believe having parents, who valued the news as a source of information and referred to print, television and radio news for details about current events and events was the earliest shaper of my journalistic roots. Along with my mom’s love for reading, which included her reading books by authors like Eric Jerome Dickey, Terry McMillan, Bebe Moore Campbell and other authors, and routine family experiences like watching films and engaging in dialogue about the films that at times lasted for hours, my parents also shared stories about their own experiences

and their perspectives on sports, music and entertainment, society and a wide-range of topics and matters in society.

My parents always expressed a genuine interest in what was going on in my life and supported my exploration of my interests. In turn, I have them to be grateful for the way I engage in these practices. My mom and dad are strong, effective and thoughtful communicators who taught us how to communicate and to communicate with other people with care. As a family, we were comfortable carrying on a conversation and engaging in dialogue where we provided examples or evidence of what we were talking about. We all listened to other peoples' contributions, and acknowledged the points other people contributed to conversation, even when those perspectives differed from our own. Through listening to my parents and engaging in conversations that in our home sometimes turned into debates, we learned how to articulate our perspectives, express our perspectives and to state how our perspectives aligned with or differed from other people's perspectives.

My mom and dad encouraged us to reflect on our day in school, what we did and how we contributed. Our parents ensured that we were not only aware of our own perspectives and experiences, but that we knew and valued other peoples' perspectives. They taught us how to care for and support family, contribute to the community and the world, see the best in situations and circumstances and be committed to always trying to improve situations and circumstances for ourselves and other people. After learning about the tragic and horrific September 11 attack when I was at school, where there were televisions with news coverage about the tragedy, I remember going home and seeing coverage of the traumatizing terrorist attacks. The coverage played on our big screen television that sat on our marble floor.

I remember seeing colors that symbolized the threat and danger levels and what at the time felt like ongoing news coverage related to the tragedy. I remember feeling like the tragedy was never going to end and being in shock about having to deal with the reality that such a deadly catastrophe had occurred. On that same television, I recall watching iconic and historic sports moments. I immersed myself in watching *NBA Hardwood Classics*, which was basketball programming that showed legendary basketball players and games and I learned about players like George Gervin, Bill Russell, Larry Bird and Clyde Drexler.

While television shows and sports that I watched in my house played an essential role in my life, I also was very fortunate to have parents who invested in ensuring that we were exposed to art, sports and entertainment outside of our home. I was very fortunate to have parents, who, during the early stages of the WNBA took me to a New York Liberty Game where they were playing against my then favorite team, the Houston Comets, which one of my favorite players Sheryl Swoopes played on. In elementary school, my mom chaperoned school field trips, including one we took to New York where we went to see *Les Misérables*.

Years later, as an adult, when I sat masked up, in the Indianapolis Symphony performance, and listened to the symphony play music from *Les Misérables*, I cried. I cried because the experience made me think about how my mom chaperoned a school trip where she used her time to guide my classmates and I through different parts of New York, where we were exposed to theater and historical sites. My educational experiences as an elementary school student included knowing the value of theater and exploring new places. These experiences were possible because of people like my mom and dad being invested in us having them. They were possible because my mom dedicated her time to chaperoning school field trips, which communicated to me that the events and activities were significant and valuable experiences

worth participating in. Those experiences kept me engaged in learning from different spaces, people, events and helped me associate education with adventure, joy and explorations that inspired me.

As a kid, it was exciting to see stories about people's lives and experiences on stage and to have experiences that we could excitedly talk to other people about. The stories I watched on stages impacted me in various ways. Going to see plays, and other forms of art made me a life-long supporter of the arts and someone who greatly values the major role theater, entertainment, music, playwriting and production and other artforms play in our lives and our ability to learn about, reflect on and deepen our understanding of other people's experiences. The trips out to see shows, movies and sporting events was a way to learn how to watch, appreciate and enjoy those things as a part of a crowd and public audience and a chance to learn about the important role audience and reception played in performance. I learned as much from attending those kinds of public events as I did by appreciating art in the comfort of my home. The year Eve's album *Let There Be Eve...Ruff Ryder's First Year Lady* came out, my parents purchased me a copy of the album for Christmas and that same Christmas our family got our first computer, a *Compaq Presario*.

My neighbor and friend, who was also a friend to my brothers and a kid who we all competed against in backyard basketball, got a computer before us. I remember going in his room and seeing his computer which in the 90s and early 2000s was rare to see in someone's home. It was not like current times in America, where everyone likely owns multiple electronic devices and computers and where within most households, there is more than one computer, television, phone, and or some other type of electronic device in them, even though some homes and communities can't even access the internet. When our family got our computer at home, it

was another reminder of how invested my parents were in us having access to technologies, and of us moving with the times and not being left behind.

Prior to getting a computer at home, I remember we used to have Apple computers at our elementary school and before we got the colored Apple models, which were vibrant orange, candy apple green and pink, we had the old school Macintosh computers that were a kind of grayish beige color with spaces for floppy disks. The older Macintosh computers had *Number Munchers* and *Word Munchers*. The newer models had *Where in the World is Carmen San Diego?* While games like *Number Munchers*, *Word Munchers* and *Where in the World is Carmen San Diego* were a part of the earlier phases of my youth, in my later youth, I played *Sims* on my computer at home.

My brothers had the Playstation, the Sega Genesis and the Nintendo 64 and while I did play those games and they went on the computer, when we were growing up, I viewed the game console as theirs and the computer as mine. My brothers had their way of monopolizing the game console and I had my way of monopolizing the computer. Based on what I can recall, I treated that computer like it was mine. I was annoyed if a landline phone call interrupted my internet connection. Whether I was doing homework, in chat rooms on AOL or talking with friends on AIM, I didn't think anything should interrupt my time on the computer. Back then, there were so many free AOL discs everywhere you went, whether it was your neighborhood, a store or a store parking lot. You could literally find an AOL disc on the ground and that's how you accessed the internet back then. I will never stop wondering who paid for what seemed to be unlimited AOL internet service.

Along with ensuring my brothers and I had access to educational and recreational experiences that enriched our lives, and technological tools that kept us up with the times, there

were times where life taught lessons about how our literacy practices and learning needed to be as present in tough times as they were in the times we looked forward to. On several occasions, including during my childhood, I wrote obituaries for family members, which in some ways was a part of my mourning process and a way to remember and honor the legacy of a loved one. Writing obituaries involved being there for family, seeing my writing as a tool and gift that could say something about someone's life and contributing something necessary to a cause or event. Writing obituaries also required being familiar with family history, getting input from people about what information should be included, and working to ensure that the information was accurate. I also shared poetry at my Grandma Rosette's funeral service.

One of my cousins, who was also a youth, sang at the funeral, which evidenced the ways that whether an adult or still a youth, people in my family used their literacy practices to contribute, even when it was time to celebrate the life of a loved one for their homegoing. I was not paid to write obituaries for my family members. Even if a family member did offer money, I wouldn't have accepted it, because I did not write the obituaries to get paid. I wrote obituaries because my parents and family invited me to write them, and I was honored to write them. Being invited to share my writing provided me with a chance to see how I could help my family in their time of need and to create something beautiful in the midst of challenging times. Such opportunities, and all the other ways my parents invested time, energy, money and love in supporting my brothers and I and the ways they let us explore our interests helped me learn about the power of writing, and to hone and deepen my skills, talents and abilities.

Years later, when I worked as an intern for the *Danbury News Times*, I was assigned to write obituaries and news stories about local events. Although I had to learn AP style, my experience writing obituaries on a few occasions for my family helped me gain some of the

experience and style I needed to write the obituaries for the newspaper. I never thought to put writing obituaries for my family down on any professional job applications or resumes because I wasn't doing it for a job or profession, money, a prize or praise. Even if I never continued on to become a professional writer, my family's invitation and what honestly also felt like an obligation for me to write when family members passed away helped me understand how the writing I was doing provided a record of someone's life and their achievements. That writing also served as a chance to contribute something to their family and friends and to speak about the span of time they existed and what they did during their existence.

Having a chance to write before professionally working as a writer gave me a chance to demonstrate what I learned in school and to use it outside of school. Sharing what I wrote, even for a sad occasion like a funeral, positioned me to get used to sharing, used to presenting and that is something that people pay to learn, get paid to do and are paid to teach. My family did not charge me. Instead, they provided me with an abundance of opportunities to contribute and to make use of my gifts, skills and abilities whether for everyday occasions, celebrations, or tragic times. That helped to prepare me to not be reluctant to use my words to respond in different moments and occasions, including sad or tragic times and to recognize that no payment or fame was needed to do so, and that the only thing needed was the need to do so. While I was always aware of tragedy and circumstances that needed to be addressed, growing up I also learned to turn to experiences, histories, lives and legacies to remain inspired about what was possible.

### **Lessons in African-American Rhetoric and Composition Scholarship That Speaks to My Experiences**

In *Sista Speak!*, Lanehart's discussions of her own and her Black women family member's, including her mom's literacy practices and the women's insights about their



experiences in school, at home and in employment settings and other aspects of their lives reveals how language and literacy influence the opportunities people have in life. Such scholarship is important because it provides real-world examples of the ways our literacy practices inform and influence our circumstances. In Lanehart's presentation of her family member Deidra's experiences, Deidra states:

Most of all what I wanted to major in at college required a great deal of reading and writing skills which I knew I wasn't good in. I wasn't getting anywhere in college because of my literacy so i stop going to college. I have Two good jobs that I thank God for. (Deidra qtd. in Lanehart 25)

Deidra's (qtd. in Lanehart 25) reflections about how reading was a roadblock that prevented her from pursuing the major she wanted to pursue illustrates a powerful story about how eventually people who do not possess or acquire the literacy skills that are valued in certain areas of study and professions can potentially be subjected to being in situations where they cannot pursue their professional goals and aspirations. In Deidra's experiences, she still optimistically reflects (25) on being employed, which is something that Lamar Johnson's (488-490) discussions of his great-grandfather illustrate he was also able to do despite having a limited education and limited literacy practices. Johnson (488-490) reflected on his great-grandfather's successful career working on trains where he educated others on what their work would entail and informed them about how to do different aspects of their job.

My Grandma Helen's experiences of having a long and successful career working at Barden Corporation illustrate how despite not having a college degree, not being able to complete her K-12 education, and earning her G.E.D. later in life, my grandma prospered in her professional career, which included her traveling to Germany for professional purposes. Even in

acknowledging Laneheart's sharing of (25) of Deidra's reflections of her ability to get two jobs she was satisfied with, Johnson's great-grandfather successful career working on trains, and my paternal grandma excelling and achieving in her professional career and time as a reverend, we should still wonder what each of these people could achieve if they, or my maternal grandparents, who provided for and took care of their family had unlimited access to education and opportunities to acquire literacy practices and skills? What would happen if they had opportunities to exhibit their knowledges, literacy practices and skills in ways where those things were celebrated and embraced. When thinking about approaches and practices that are productive to consider how to honor and acknowledge people and their contributions, there is an abundance of guidance in the scholarship discussion and other scholarship. In Pritchard drawing on Toni Morrison's discussions about what she refers to as "discredited knowledges," they offer important insights that can be used as guidance, writing that:

Again, as Toni Morrison reminds us, we must resist impulses to classify the cultural centrality of the ancestors as 'discredited knowledge,' for such impulses are bound up in and amplify dismissive attitudes toward a particular community's culturally situated knowledge. Morrison states that these instances of so-called superstition and magic must be seen as yet 'another way of knowing things' that is 'enhancing, not limiting.'

(Morrison qtd. in Pritchard 151).

We should always be asking, what people can achieve if they have access to the kinds of educational and employment opportunities that we view as essential for our progress? We should always be working to answer that question, which I do in my dissertation. As a person, who has greatly benefited from my educational experiences in academic settings, and like Kinloch, Moss and Richardson acknowledge how my literacy practices were developed in school and at home

by family, dialogue and texts I was exposed to, and other experiences, I greatly value the support and opportunities I've had to hone and develop my writing and communication skills and the various ways my writing and communication have been influenced by family and school. Since I value my own experiences, I also recognize that the educational and professional opportunities I have had and the family, personal and communal support I have received would be of value to other people too.

I am aware of the valuable role people's support and opportunities play in people pursuing their professional and academic goals and aspirations. I believe writing teachers and educators play a vital role in the progress and prosperity people experience and achieve. Considering this, I call writing teachers and educators to learn from and engage with the work of scholars like Baker-Bell, Baker-Bell et. al, Young, Smitherman, Lanehart, Kynard, Samy Alim and Smitherman, and Asao Inoue who acknowledge the need for Anti-racist teaching practices that ensure that students receive the kind of Black Linguistic Justice, Baker-Bell calls for. Like these scholars, I recognize that people and their literacy practices are devalued for what some readers and listeners perceive to be less than adequate, proficient and or proper use of Standard English. Because of my own personal and professional experiences, and those I have witnessed other people have, I recognize both the reality of the demands readers and jobs will place on writers and speakers and the importance of a work like, *This Ain't Another Statement! This is a Demand for Black Linguistic Justice*. A reflection like Deidra's (Lanehart 25) should help readers understand the inferiority complex some people may develop about their own literacy practices and how that impacts what they do and don't pursue.

No one's writing, communication practices, and literacy practices should be ignored or treated as lacking value. The reality is, that some people's literacy practices and ways of being

and doing are devalued and treated as insufficient for opportunities and experiences that are essential and required for educational and professional opportunities or positions where they can voice their perspectives about the kind of change they want to see. As many other people have acknowledged, ignoring people and their literacy practices has resulted in people being told where they can be or can't be, and what they can and cannot become. As a dissertation writer, working to professionally enter rhetoric and composition, it is imperative for me to acknowledge these realities and the scholars, who within their work exhibit an awareness of them and present solutions for improving them.

In spotlighting and discussing *Vernacular Insurrections*, *Fashioning Lives*, and *Rhetorical Healing*, I am engaging with texts that do not overlook Black writers, their communication and literacy practices, their histories and experiences, the value of Black writers and their literacy practices or what they have created and can create for themselves and their communities. Kynard, Pritchard and Carey's discussions of Black people's use of their literacy practices provide proof that no matter how Black people's language, writing, reading, communication and other literacy practices are classified, that as Shirley Wilson Logan teaches us in *Libertating Language*, Black people created and maintained various practices and processes for improving their writing and oratory skills to develop the kinds of educational spaces, organizations and circumstances that they wanted and needed for themselves and their communities.

My discussions of Kynard, Carey and Pritchard's work offer insights about how Black people's history of using their literacy practices to enhance their circumstances is something that writing teachers, students and others can glean from. While I will share multiple definitions of literacy in my dissertation, it is important that I explain how I understand literacy and that I am

transparent about expressing that I am still working to understand how to define and discuss literacy.

I believe that literacy is both the non-verbal and verbal ways we write, read, communicate and engage with people. I believe that literacy is the way we listen, respond and how we express ourselves. I believe that literacy is the decisions we make about what and who we use our writing, speaking and reading for. I believe that literacy is how we engage with people, how we respond to them and circumstances we are faced with and our awareness of who and what should be considered in our delivery of language and our response to language. I believe that our use of our literacy practices is what leads to our progress and prosperity and how we contribute to improving society, and what other people experience and will not have to endure in their endeavors.

In drawing on J. Elspeth Stuckey's definition of literacy, Lanehart (8) suggests that "Literacy neither imprisons nor frees people; it merely embodies the enormous complexities of how and why some people live comfortably and others do not." I agree with Lanehart's (8) point about how literacy dictates whether or not people live comfortable lives or not. Along with acknowledging Lanehart's (10) perspective, I believe it is important to share my perspective that writing, reading and communication factor into people being imprisoned because the ways people are read and perceived dictates the ways they are impacted by laws that have been written to subject them to imprisonment.

Along with this people's access to opportunities to hone their literacy practices and skills is connected to the educational and professional opportunities they do or don't have, which certainly factors into whether people will be able to within a legalized system afford the quality of life they desire, or if they will have to subject themselves to decision-making and a lifestyle

that is criminalized and may result in them being incarcerated. People need opportunities to use their literacy practices to write and rewrite laws and to write themselves out of the criminalization that is associated with their Blackness. Oftentimes, Black people are criminalized without committing any crime and subjected to chains and confinement similar to what their ancestors experienced when enduring the dehumanizing and destabilizing forced enslavement imposed on them after their minds, bodies and lives were transported to America.

When thinking about the power of literacy and how it can be abused and used to oppress, or how it has been used by the African-American community to overcome oppression, it is important to, as Pritchard does, acknowledge the ways Black people created spaces and places in America to educate themselves and learn to read and write when it was illegal to do so. Pritchard explains that:

...creating ‘pit schools,’ spaces dug into the ground in the woods that were covered by bushes and trees to protect slaves from view while they learned to read and write or exchange lessons with one another using tree bark, dirt, and other natural elements to create writing utensils such as pencils, slates, and ink; and eavesdropping on White people’s conversations in which slaves used ‘perception and memory’ to record and practice the literacy and numeracy they observed. (64)

Like Pritchard, Logan sheds light on the different techniques and practices Black people used to acquire education and engage in educational experiences, regardless of the limitations placed on them or the threat to their lives. Logan shed light on (26;70) the role of “readers” who read to people and practices like “insurgent eavesdropping, which she said (Conquergood, qtd. in Logan 127) Sojourner Truth did. Logan (127) writes:

Many of those who were denied literacy acquired access to written material as a result of the practice of reading aloud in domestic spaces as well. Conquergood points out, for example, that Sojourner Truth engaged in ‘insurgent eavesdropping’ when slaveholders read confidential material aloud around her.

Logan (4;127) and Pritchard (20) refer to Truth as someone who should be considered when defining literacy. In doing so, Logan (4;127) and Pritchard like Kynard (29) in her discussions of “out- of-school literacies” offer a more expansive and humane view of literacy, and the ways people acquire and use their literacy practices. Literacy rhetoric and composition scholars and educators can benefit from applying Kynard, Logan and Pritchard’s more inclusive view of literacy to their work and teaching. When explaining literacy, Logan (3) writes:

Literacy is the broader term, the ground upon which rhetorical education develops. Some manifestation of literacy, then, is implicated in one’s rhetorical abilities. With this definition of literacy and rhetorical education, we can admit the experiences of rhetors such as Sojourner Truth into consideration, though conventional definitions would classify her as illiterate.

As Logan (2008), Kynard (2013) and Pritchard (2016) communicate in their texts, there are no limits on Black peoples’ literacy practices or the lengths they have gone to learn and engage in educational experiences. Considering this, writing teachers must remove the limits they place on Black students and all students, and review assignments, classroom activities and pedagogical approaches that may not acknowledge different ways of doing, being and contributing.

While I have had some experiences in educational settings, where I did not feel I or my writing and work were valued, as a person who has greatly benefited from being able to learn in

various places and from many people and experiences, I always have valued the educational opportunities that I have earned and had afforded to me.

This has been motivated by recognizing how I can use my education to positively impact people and society, and how being invested in learning and education positions me to share what I learn with other people, while also learning from other people in the process. I find myself disappointed when there is a lack of effort to ensure that educational opportunities are equally afforded to, and or available to anyone interested in pursuing an education. It is also disappointing that within some peoples' educational endeavors, they learn that their literacy practices, identities, ways of being and doing are things that people will use to make them feel displaced and disenchanting with their educational pursuits.

The frustrations associated with that are ones I combat with the beautiful and powerful history and present-day examples of African-American people's acquiring of their literacy practices, education, and the kinds of practices they engage in to learn, as detailed in Logan and Pritchard's work. In Logan's discussions of Black writers and orators, she reflects (Logan 80) on Charles Chesnutt and his work, including how he contributed to our understanding of how "institutional and community-based literary societies" differ. Logan also reflects on (51) how Chesnutt honed his writing and communication skills by referring to the "George B. Quankabo's *Advanced Course of Composition and Rhetoric*." Discussing Chesnutt's perspective on orators, Logan writes:

He notes that orators 'are not born equipped for effective service,' usually being motivated by some cause. Such comments indicate the extent to which the mature Chesnutt recognized the value of training in rhetoric – particularly for a disenfranchised people – training that his journals reveal he worked so diligently to acquire. (Logan 53)



Logan's (53) insights about Chesnutt's acknowledgement of the important role education and "training in rhetoric" play in people acquiring essential literacy practices evidence how people from historically marginalized communities desire the opportunity to gain and use the same skills that they have witnessed be beneficial for other people, who have historically reaped the benefits of writing the rules, the laws, and other content that informs and influences our lives and quality of life. For me, turning to Logan, Carey, Kynard and Pritchard's scholarship evidences what the Black community has done without institutional support, which increases my goal to motivate and inspire people to imagine what could become possible for communities who have been historically oppressed if they have institutional support. I present myself and my own work and the scholarship I am spotlighting as an example of the possibilities that can exist for other people, who have access to equitable educational opportunities and support, and to hold myself accountable for not letting my access to opportunities reduce my commitment to other people accessing them.

As teachers of writing, it is important to take seriously Logan's (53) insights about how Chesnutt "recognized the value of training in rhetoric" because it evidences the same value that many students will place on learning how to hone and develop their writing skills and literacy practices. It also evidences the ways that Black perspectives about language and learning to be effective writers and orators, include views like Chesnutt, who believed writing and speaking need to be honed and developed in order to be used in ways that produce the kinds of outcomes and results that people want and need.

The kind of honing and development of skills that Logan (53) credits Chesnutt for engaging in and valuing is connected to a history and tradition of Black people teaching themselves literacy and language practices they needed for their lives. While Logan's (53)

discussions of Chesnutt evidence his reliance on material resources and educational training, the following insights from Smitherman illustrates how enslaved Black people, who lacked resources and educational opportunities still taught themselves what they needed to know to communicate.

Smitherman (5) writes:

What this image suggests is as follows. African slaves in America initially developed a pidgin, a language of transaction that was used in communication between themselves and whites. Over the years, the pidgin gradually became widespread among slaves and evolved into a creole. Developed without benefit of any formal instruction (not even a language lab!), this lingo involved the substitution of English for West African words, but within the same basic structure and idiom that characterized West African Language patterns.

Smitherman (5) sheds light on Black people's brilliance and ability to learn language to communicate with one another and the language they needed to learn to communicate with White people, and how that learning, as she explains, transpired without a language lab.

Smitherman's (5) insights should motivate people to envision what those same Black people would've achieved if they were not enduring the harsh, oppressive, inhumane, racist and hateful conditions of slavery and instead had the institutional support and resources they were denied. Smitherman's (5) insights also call us to recognize the various language and literacy practices Black people possess and the history of learning and educational endeavors that played an essential role in their existence and the existence they created for themselves despite their lives being consistently devalued and threatened.

Learning that transpires and teaching that occurs with no institutional support and resources, which often times is the case for people from historically marginalized communities and communities who do not have access to resources classifies as what Richardson (96) refers to as “makin’ a way outta no way.” People should have access to educational spaces that help them learn and acquire skills they need for their lives. They should be able to pursue careers and futures they want. Knowing that access to some of the educational opportunities and career paths that I have been passionate about pursuing have been possible for me to pursue, and recognizing the barriers that, at times made the paths, and other paths feel impossible, I dedicate myself to working to ensure that other people can access professional and academic paths and opportunities. Considering the way that some of the paths I wanted to pursue seemed out of reach or unattainable, and considering other peoples’ experiences, I am well aware of the reality that such a truth is the case for other people, who may then have to settle into lives that they did not envision for themselves, because of the way that the lives they envisioned for themselves required access to education, employment and or other opportunities that they were viewed as unqualified for.

In a society, where some people can pursue their goals and some people can not, it is important to work towards more people being able to attain the lives they aspire for and ensuring that they are supported in those pursuits. When writing teachers and institutions consider how Black people’s educational opportunities have historically been limited, and they recognize how the community still engaged in essential educational experiences, they are better prepared to honor and value Chetnustt’s (qtd. in Logan 53) acknowledgement of the importance of “training in rhetoric” and what drives and inspires people to use their rhetorical skills and literacy practices. Such work can result in educators being better equipped to support Black students and

teach in ways that recognize the essential role that writing and communication plays in supporting themselves. The recognition of the historical denial of educational opportunities and resources should call people to recognize current deficits and shortages of educational opportunities and how they impact both Black students within classrooms and people who despite pursuing education in educational spaces do not have access to equitable learning experiences.

### **Language, Literacy and Living: Black People's Use of Writing and Communication to Define the Lives They Want**

When considering literacy practices, it is important to recognize when people's language and literacy practices are valued and when they are devalued, and who is more likely to be told that their presentation of their ideas and perspectives are correct and acceptable vs. wrong and not accepted. In Smitherman's discussions about Black people's use of "story," (161) she writes about the practice and the usefulness and effectiveness of story. Smitherman also discusses how the practice of storying is an undervalued and misunderstood practice. Providing an example of this, Smitherman (161) presents reflections about dialogue in a courtroom, where Black people are already disenfranchised and will likely not receive fair and equitable treatment.

Smitherman (161) writes:

A fascinating look at this type of interference comes from the courtrooms in which young black males are tried for criminal offenses. In many urban areas, the overload of trial cases is overwhelming, and the judges anxiously try to move cases as quickly and judiciously as possible. Naturally they don't reckon on the narrative style of the young bloods before them.

In Smitherman (161-162) shedding light on some Black people's experiences with trying to tell a story in a courtroom, she shows how a judge, or another responder and listener can dictate when one's presentation of their experiences is insufficient, inappropriate and inadequate. Smitherman reveals how Black people's attempt to use story in an institutional setting where they are communicating with a white audience resulted in counterproductive outcomes. Smitherman's discussions (161-163) also show how people not being allowed, and or empowered to use their language and literacy practices in ways that they are comfortable with and best prepared to do limits and constrains them and dictates outcomes they have no control over, and instead results in outcomes controlled by people who determine what language practices and literacy practices are accepted and approved.

Baker-Bell's (5) points about "standard English syntax" not saving Eric Garner's life illustrate that when Black people are faced with systematic oppression, injustice, inequality and anti-Blackness and they speak to protect themselves against those things and verbally fight for their lives, regardless of whether they do these things in Standard English or not, if it comes out of a Black body, their life is still devalued and treated as worthless. The value of their life is not determined by them. It is determined by the audience, the listener and reader, not the speaker and writer.

Baker-Bell delivered *Linguistic Justice: Black Language, Literacy, Identity, and Pedagogy* 18 years after Lanehart released *Sista, Speak!*, a text focused on language and literacy and the ways her, and family's literacy practices factored into their personal and professional lives. Although Baker-Bell's text is not focused on family literacy practices, but instead the ways that Black high school students she taught used Black English and Standard English, she like Lanehart is still deeply invested in ensuring that Black people's language practices are

acknowledged and engaged with and that readers understand that peoples' societal, political and personal lives are connected to their language. Like Lanehart, Baker-Bell uplifts Black English and identifies the value and the power in Black Language.

Paying attention to Baker-Bell's discussions of Black Linguistic Justice is important because of the ways she connects current day Black student's experiences, and the linguistic injustice they experience in the classroom with the inhumane, unjust and oppressive practices and systems, like "language planning" (67) Black people endured and and sheds light (Baker-Bell 68-71) on how they responded to the ways they and their language were oppressed. Although focused on Black people, their history and language, Baker-Bell (100) makes it clear that her work is useful for everyone. In my dissertation, Baker-Bell's discussions about Black language and Black linguistic justice are relevant because they evidence the contributions scholars are making to shed light on some Black people's current experiences with using their language and literacy practices and spotlight a set of tools and resources that can be valuable for educators interested in intertwining the histories I reflect on and the futures that I believe Kynard, Carey and Pritchard's text can help us envision.

My discussions of texts focused on Black language and literacy practices also shed light on the language and linguistic-focused scholarship that these texts exist alongside and some of the empowering and liberating philosophies and perspectives about Black language that exist. In presenting the following points from Baker-Bell about the broad applicability of her text which is focused on Black Linguistic Justice, I am affirming my perspective on the applicability of my own focus on African-American rhetoric and composition scholarship, histories and legacies and similarly asserting that it is useful and valuable for all writing teachers and students. Baker-Bell writes:

*Linguistic Justice: Black Language, Literacy, Identity, and Pedagogy* is designed to give Black students the tools to liberate themselves from oppression. However, let me also point out that the Antiracist Black Language Pedagogy that I outline in this book offers ALL students and their teachers a critical linguistic awareness of Black Language and windows into broader conversations about anti-Blackness, language and identity, language and power, language and history, linguistic racism, and white linguistic and cultural hegemony. (100)

Baker-Bell's (100) acknowledgement of outlining an Antiracist Black Language Pedagogy is useful for my work, because it illustrates the pedagogical approaches and tools that exist for educators, who may be looking for a way to apply my discussions and analysis to their writing, teaching of writing, responding to writing and the different ways they engage as content creators and audiences. Baker-Bell's acknowledgement of how her work focused on Black people, their language and identity benefits everyone is a sentiment that is also expressed in other Black-authored content, like The *Combahee River Collective Statement* and the work of other scholars like Perryman Clark and Craig (112), Carey (150), Baldwin (4), Pritchard<sup>8</sup> (9) Green (58) Smitherman (237) and others. In "A Talk to Teachers," James Baldwin (4) writes:

It is not really a 'Negro revolution,' that is upsetting the country. What is upsetting the country is a sense of its own identity. If for example, one managed to change the curriculum in all the schools so that Negroes learned more about themselves and their real contributions to this culture, you would be liberating not only Negroes, you'd be liberating white people who know nothing about their own history.

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<sup>8</sup> "Something resonated with me about this alliance, this continuum of Black Queer family, working together, for not just the causes of their race or sexuality or gender justice but also for social justice writ large" (Pritchard 9).

My focus on African American and Black scholarship is as Baldwin (4) suggests, when discussing the power of Black curriculum, work that liberates everyone, because it calls people to learn more about Black literacy practices and Black history. It is also work that finds commonalities between non-Black scholarship, media and texts that are focused on what it means to improve the conditions and circumstances of Black people and histories, and how to value Black people and their contributions. In growing up and valuing Black history, even though I was never able to overlook America's theft of Black people, who were subjected to inhumane conditions and forced labor, I was able to take pride in the reality of how much Black people created, contributed and how they built lives for themselves that improved the entire country and their own and other people's quality of life despite being equated to property.

Black writing is an exhibition of Black life. Black writing is proof that we are alive, even when we witness and observe the ways that we are being killed, the ways that we are dying, the ways that we have brilliantly existed and survived. Black writing, literacy practices and communication show how despite society positioning Black people in graves or prisons, they do not stay confined to those spaces. Instead, no matter what space Black people are in, they define how they are going to exist in those spaces and inspire others to do the same. As Kynard (99) credits Smitherman for communicating, "Black power is Black language." In Baker-Bell's discussions and defining of Black Language she provides a variety of examples that speak to the variety of Black language. Baker-Bell writes:

Black Language is the rhetoric of resistance embedded in the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter, which led to the birth of what some call the 21st century civil rights movement. It is the phonology and grammatical structure former president Barack Obama used when declining to accept change from a Black cashier by saying, '*Nah, we straight.*' Black



Language is the controversial words of wisdom that Michelle Obama shared at the 2016 Democratic National Convention, ‘*When they go low, we go high.*’ (13)

In *Articulate While Black: Barack Obama, Language and Race in the U.S.*, Samy Alim and Geneva Smitherman inform readers that Black people’s writing and speaking, including when from the mouth and mind of President Barack Obama is over-analyzed and is the subject of scrutiny, curiosity, denigration, targeted attacks, and the deliverer and recipient of promise and possibility, tradition and triumph. For me, Black language is everything and anything that comes out of a Black body. As a writer and communicator, who is a Black woman, anything that comes out of my body is Black. My discussions of Black language and how scholarship focused on African-American people, their experiences, language and literacy should be engaged with by every teacher and student. I offer these discussions to shed light on scholarship that, if engaged with, will increase educators’ ability to value the work and contributions of Black people, and hopefully motivate them to think through and about how they can apply the lessons they learn from that work.

While my focus is on African American literacy practices and what can be gleaned from the three texts I am focusing on, I recognize Black language is a part of Black literacy practices. In my dissertation, I pair my advocacy for using Kynard’s *Vernacular Insurrections*, Pritchard’s *Fashioning Lives* and Carey’s *Rhetorical Healing* with my support of the movement to support and uplift Black people and their language. Along with acknowledging the ways that I spotlight and celebrate scholarship that is focused on Black people, Black language, histories and literacy practices, like the scholars who are responsible for the scholarship, I am invested in using my writing to improve the conditions and experiences of Black people.

As a writer, teacher and rhetorician, my expectation is that we speak out and call people to never normalize death, violence or any action or way of thinking that prevents people from living or taints their quality of life. No human being should ever be producing or creating content that inspires the kind of chaos that has resulted in people being murdered in their homes, schools, churches, synagogues or while at grocery stores and nightclubs. I respect when Joe Biden has stepped up to the podium to disavow White supremacy because while not coming out of a Black body, it is an illustration of the kind of co-conspirator work that Bettina Love identifies as essential work, and that work cannot just come from Black people. In order to eliminate oppression, racism and violence, that work has to come from all people, and leaders of nations should be obligated to ensure that it comes from them and that they work to inspire people to be invested in a safer, more racially just, equitable and humane society.

Along with honoring and celebrating Black language and literacy, in order to create and present equitable and just educational experiences for Black people, we must actively combat the racism and oppression that has historically been committed to prevent Black people from progressing and prospering. Love's (22) discussions of "white rage" show the pervasiveness of hateful and racist attitudes and perspectives of people committed to preventing Black people from excelling in society and in institutional settings. While Kynard and Love both shed light on the ways White people have committed inequitable and or violent acts dedicated to denying Black peoples' access to education, Louis Maraj in *Black or Right: Anti-Racist Campus Rhetorics* sheds light on how Black people within university settings are perceived to be a perceived threat and the ways this impacts their experiences in universities, public spaces and public streets. Maraj writes:

I push here, then, to re/iterate the question(s); if given the history/of Blackness ‘is a strain that pressures the assumption of the equivalence of personhood and subjectivity” (Moten 2003, 1, qtd. in Miraj 143), and, if in the United States and elsewhere, ‘Black people ejected from the state become the national symbols for the less-than-human being condemned to death” (Sharpe 2016, 79), have Black beings ever really *been* human? Was Mike Brown *being* in the Ferguson Street and (not on the sidewalk) an ‘object’ out of place for Darren Wilson to put in place? (Maraj 143-144)

In reading Maraj’s (143-144) insights, everyone should be actively involved in ensuring Black people’s safety and working towards efforts to ensure that Black people stop prematurely dying because of people being killed and being victims of violence. Like Maraj, Perryman-Clark and Craig call our attention to injustices faced by Black people. Like Baker-Bell and her co-authors of *This Ain’t Another Statement!*, through Perryman-Clark and Craig’s (13) discussions of Adam Banks and Ernest Morrell’s letter writing condemning the injustices and violence Ersula Ore experienced, they show the role writing plays in Black people’s efforts to combat oppression and violence.

Perryman Clark and Craig (13) also call us to recognize the kinds of flaws that Maraj and Baker-Bell et. al reflect on as being issues that are as present and prevalent in academic institutions as they are on the streets. When Black people and students are traveling to learn and teach, they are facing the kinds of “white rage” Love (22) identified and the anti-Blackness Maraj (143-144) reflected on. Even when Black people are headed to their jobs to provide for themselves and their family and make essential contributions in the world, history illustrates that they are faced with oppression, hatred and racism that can make those travels deadly. Recognizing this, Black people need institutions that they are traveling to, to be as invested in

them as they are in them and invested in ensuring that our educational endeavors or attempts to access opportunities and resources are not as burdened with obstacles and barriers as they have historically been.

Along with acknowledging the need for increased institutional efforts to protect and support Black people, it is equally important to shed light on how Black people, including Black women, are already doing the work of supporting and protecting themselves. In this section, I shed some light on how African-American and Black scholars use their scholarship to call attention to societal matters and experiences that Black people endure, and how they hold universities and educational spaces accountable for leading the charge to make changes that will address those issues. In the next section of my dissertation, I will continue these discussions, by drawing on the work of Elaine Richardson, Alexandria Lockett and other scholars and discussing an example to shed light on the role Black women's writing and literacy practices have played in their efforts to improve spaces, experiences and circumstances.

### **An Up-Close Look at Black Women's Use of Writing and Communication: The Impact and Inspiration**

In "What is Black Twitter: A Rhetorical Criticism of Race Dis/information and Social Media," Alexandria Lockett discusses Black Twitter, and how Black people use Black Twitter to advocate for themselves, to call attention to issues and inequalities both on the social media platform and in real life. In discussing how Black people use Twitter, Lockett connects Black people's Twitter use to their legacy and history of using their literacy practices and technologies to make societal change. Lockett acknowledges (171) Black rhetoric and composition scholars like Keith Gilyard and Banks, who she is joining in discussions focused on Black people's experiences in digital and online spaces. Providing an example of Black women's use of their

literacy practices on social media, Lockett (189) discusses Hudson and Crockett's "YourSlipisShowingCampaign." While focused on digital spaces, I liken Lockett's discussions of the "YourSlipisShowingCampaign," to Kynard, Logan, Pough and Carey's discussion of Black women using their writing, communication and content to improve their own and their community's conditions and circumstances. Lockett significantly contributes to discussions and scholarship about Black people's literacy practices. Lockett writes:

The scaled documentation of Black people's lived experience with oppression is an affordance offered by Twitter that is part of a long tradition of Black media participation. In addition to slave narratives, Black people across the diaspora have been publishing about aspects of our experience since at least the founding of *Freedom's Journal* in 1827. (199)

While much can be gleaned from Lockett's scholarship, for my dissertation, I am interested in the light she sheds (199) on how Black women's writing, communication and literacy practices online are a part of the legacy and tradition of African-American literacy and rhetorical practices that existed before the internet was even created. Lockett's work shows the importance of acknowledging Black women's use of technologies and digital spaces and platforms to engage in the kinds of digital activism that other Black rhetoric and composition scholars credit Black women for. I believe it is important to, as Lockett does, pay attention to how Black women use digital spaces, like social media accounts to advocate for themselves and their community and to see how a technology like e-mail can be used within professional settings to do similar work.

Following the murder of Patrick Lyoya, an unarmed Black man,<sup>9</sup> who was reportedly killed by Grand Rapid Police Officer Christopher Schurr, Denise Troutman and Natasha Jones,

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<sup>9</sup>According to NPR Staff's story, "A Michigan Police Officer is Charged with Murder in Patrick Lyoya Shooting," <https://www.npr.org/2022/06/09/1103989565/a-michigan-police-officer-is-charged-with-murder-in-patrick-lyoya-shooting>

two Black women faculty members, used e-mail and online technologies to address educators and scholars within their department and call them to action. In addressing, their department about the murder of Lyoya and the devaluing, dehumanizing murdering of Black people by police officers who are paid to protect and serve, Troutman and Jones stated:

We write this note with a heavy heart. Again, we see in the news the unnecessary and heartbreaking state-sanctioned murder of a Black man at the hands of the police. As many of us learn of and mourn the murder of Patrick Lyoya, a first-generation international student, we are faced again with conversations and debates about the usefulness of police versus the harm and terror experienced by marginalized communities at the hands of law enforcement. This calls into question a number of concerns that seem to be debated endlessly, including the role of police presence on our campus and in our communities, the role of surveillance of Black and Brown communities, and the way we talk about and engage in liberatory pedagogies in our classrooms. (Troutman and Jones)

Calls like Jones and Troutman's exhibit how Black women use their writing, communication and literacy practices in digital spaces to do the kind of work Lockett spotlights and to as Elaine Richardson (89) states "To Protect and Serve." Richardson (89) explains "To Protect and Serve" as a practice commonly engaged in by Black women who have historically taken care of themselves and their communities. Richardson (89) writes:

I find the mantra of law enforcement, "To Protect and Serve," to be a useful metaphor to illustrate these issues. The general mission of the police is to protect American citizens and make sure that law and order are maintained. However, "To Protect and Serve" represents a unique set of ideas and experiences for African Americans' especially females. As mentioned earlier, Black females have been socialized to protect and serve.

This survival strategy comprises helping those inside and outside of the Black community to feel less threatened. Black females use this strategy at school and at work. (Richardson 89)

What Richardson (89) refers to as protecting and serving, is the skill that Troutman and Jones exhibited in the midst of a workday, where they exhibited knowledge and understanding and presented calls to action that need to be present in the reflections of local and national leaders when they take the podium to address ills and injustices. Jones and Troutman's work is an example of the work that Black women rhetoric and composition scholars, like Richardson, Pough, Kynard, Carey, Logan and Royster and Black queer scholar Pritchard have credited Black women for when acknowledging Black women's role in improving their own and their community's circumstances and conditions.

Jones and Troutman's e-mail is a part of the African American rhetorical tradition of recognizing that focusing on progressing in our own professional and personal endeavors should never be the only priority. Turning to the work of Logan provides insights (133) about how Black orators and writers have historically used their literacy, speaking, and composing practices to improve circumstances and conditions for their community. Logan (132-133) writes:

Whether considering early forms of rhetorical education in slave hush harbor spaces or more structured formalized manifestations in late-century college literary societies, I recognized a common urgency – their need to communicate with one another in a shared language and to respond to society's attempts to deny their humanness.

Logan's (132-133) points about Black people's response to "society's attempt to deny their humanness" is in itself a form of progress because if Black people relied on society's perspectives of what they are capable of, Supreme Court Justice, Ketanji Jackson Brown would

not have been sworn in as the first Black woman on the supreme court in its 232-year history<sup>10</sup>.

Black people have crafted, written, produced and spoken words in a way that exhibits that we are alive and will ensure that we will improve our own quality of life and everyone else's quality of life in the process. We are alive despite constant reminders that some people within society are not investing in keeping us alive. We are alive despite constant reminders that our quality of life is compromised by violence, lack of access to resources and lack of access to support and opportunities. We are alive regardless of the denial of services and goods we pay for, or lackluster versions of what we pay for, which suggest our money is no good.

We want to live in a society without violence and have worked toward making that a reality not just for our own communities, but for everyone in society who should be tired of having to prematurely bury people. We want to live in a society where everyone has access to the food, water, and shelter they need. We want to live in a society where we don't have to convince people that we are human beings, especially after a history that has shown us how inhumane other human beings have been towards us. We want to live in a society where our creativity, ability to write, communicate, create content, innovate, think, read, and contribute don't have to be used to convince people whose history includes inhumane treatment of others that we are human beings.

Whether through the technological means that Lockett reflects on Black people using, or the kinds of "slave hush harbors," that Logan (133) speaks of as being a part of Black people's continual commitment to improve our circumstances and certifying our humanity, African American people are invested in living prosperous lives. In the chapters that come, I place my focus on spotlighting essential aspects of Kynard's *Vernacular Insurrections*, Pritchard's

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<sup>10</sup> Bustillo, Ximena. "Ketanji Brown Jackson sworn in as the first Black Woman on the Supreme Court." *NPR*, <https://www.npr.org/2022/06/30/1108714345/ketanji-brown-jackson-supreme-court-oath-swearing-in>



*Fashioning Lives* and Carey's *Rhetorical Healing*. I will continue to share my own literacy narrative and encourage educators to think about how they can incorporate the shared lessons about African-American people's literacy practices to prosper and create circumstances they desire and need in their teaching.

Within the chapters that follow, I will present insights from within these texts and from my own perspectives to offer solutions, shed light on possibilities and better equip writing teachers and academic institutions to do work that ensures that Black people are engaged in learning experiences where they and their experiences and literacy practices are embraced. I want to inspire people to envision a world where there is an abundance of opportunities for African-American people to acquire the educational endeavors that positively contribute to their lives, learning and afford them an opportunity to use their literacy practices for everything they want and need. My dissertation is a guide that will help readers recognize how Kynard, Pritchard's and Carey's texts can be referred to as resources for doing this work.

### **CHAPTER 3: ECHOES OF THE ANCESTORS: AN AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMAN RHETORIC AND COMPOSITION SCHOLAR'S ENGAGEMENT WITH THOSE BEFORE HER**

In this chapter, I spotlight aspects of Carmen Kynard's *Vernacular Insurrections* and Tamika Carey's *Rhetorical Healing* that resonate with me. This chapter will evidence how and why I view *Rhetorical Healing* and *Vernacular Insurrections* as resources for thinking through and about how I can exist as a Black woman in academia and how writing teachers can productively and effectively use Carey's *Rhetorical Healing* and Kynard's *Vernacular Insurrections* in their writing classrooms. The content that I am discussing is content that affirms me personally and affirms me in my teacherly and scholarly endeavors. Within this chapter, I will discuss aspects of the texts that I connected with as a reader and writer and discussions within the scholarship that helped me see the ways I can exist as scholar and teacher in academia.

Some of the insights and discussions I engage with are ones that show me how women like my mother and grandmothers, who are not in the field of rhetoric and composition, are considered by these scholars who consider the plight, progress and prosperity of Black women. The aspects of the texts I am highlighting, and the scholarship I discuss mindfully acknowledges people who have not had the opportunity to pursue academic paths and encourage us to learn from those people. My focus on certain content is a focus that comes out of those insights generating reflection within me or because of the ways it surfaced in my mind as I was reflecting on my own experiences and perspectives about what rhetoric and composition educators and scholars can glean from these texts.

I am highlighting aspects of the texts that illustrate how Black people and Black communities, histories and legacies that, as scholars like Jacqueline Jones Royster and Jean C.

Williams tell us, have not always been acknowledged and or credited for the brilliant ways they did exist in the academy and the essential contributions they made. I also engage with African-American rhetoric and composition scholarship to advocate for recognizing the contributions of Black women rhetoric and composition scholars, who should inform and influence the work writing teachers do with their students.

In my dissertation, I am doing the work that Royster and Williams (583) reflect on as work that is essential for “progress and achievement.” Royster and Williams (583) explain:

In other words, what has constituted progress and achievement in the past and what might be meaningfully used to nurture progress and achievement in the present and future seems better tied to knowledge making processes that are recursive, ones that allow us to re-see and re-think.

Although readers of my dissertation may be familiar with the texts I am focused on, and some have considered how it is productive to use Black scholarship as a resource and learning tool, I am inviting readers to reengage with the scholarship I spotlight and offering discussions focused on what I believe can be gleaned from the work. I encourage you to follow Royster and Williams (583) direction to do work that “...allow us to resee and rethink.” My dissertation is for both people who I hope to inspire to read the texts I spotlight for the first time and for people, I hope will return to them and use my dissertation for directions about some of the ways they can engage with them. My hope is that people will revisit them and put them in conversation with scholarship and experiences I reflected on in chapter two.

I believe that it is necessary to consider Royster and William’s (583) focus on progress and achievement in my discussions of Carey, Kynard and Pritchard’s discussions of Black peoples’ use of their literacy practices. I also believe it is necessary to consider insights within

Carey, Kynard and Pritchard's scholarship and other scholarship that I highlight to illustrate how African American people used their literacy practices for progress and prosperity. In my discussions of Kynard and Carey's work in this chapter, and my later discussions of Pritchard's work, I aim to offer the kinds of histories that Jacqueline Jones Royster and Jean C. Williams in "History in the Spaces Left: African American Presence and Narratives of Composition Studies" call us to provide. In doing this, I offer a pedagogical tool that serves the purposes of positioning people to be able to respond with African-American literacy practices and traditions, when responding to Ronald Jackson II's question, "Whose rhetorical legacies and traditions get to be centered in the curriculum such that students cannot leave without learning them" (118).

My hope is that my dissertation will increase peoples' awareness of African-American people's use of their literacy practices to prevail and progress and prosper and that such an awareness will serve as inspiration for people in this current moment where understanding and recognizing what African American people have used their literacy practices to achieve in their personal, spiritual professional and political lives can help other people realize what they can achieve regardless of their circumstances and conditions.

### **Joining the Lineage of Scholars Who Recognize the Pedagogical Power in Black Scholarship**

While I recognize the value in African American rhetoric and composition scholarship and advocate for writing teachers to use it in writing classrooms because of the pedagogical purposes it serves, it is important to acknowledge some of the other scholars who also recognize the benefits of assigning African-American rhetoric and composition scholarship in writing classrooms. David Green, in "A Seat at the Table: Reflections on Writing Studies and HBCU Writing Programs" advocates for including Black rhetoric and composition scholarship in a

cypher in writing classrooms, where students can read the text and use it as a resource to enhance their own writing skills. Perryman-Clark in “Black Intellectuals in the Academy: Inventing the Rhetoric and Composition Special Topics Course,” talks about the usefulness of assigning Black women’s research, including Black women rhetoric and composition scholars to graduate students.

While Richardson in “Dukin’ it Out With the ‘The Powers That Be’: Centering African American-centered Studies in the Traditional Curriculum” is not solely focused on the benefits that can come from exposing students to Black rhetoric and composition scholarship or Black women intellectuals, she like Perryman-Clark and Craig and their co-authors in *Black Perspectives in Writing Program Administration* are focused on the usefulness of an “Afrocentric approach” in writing classrooms. Richardson (96) advocates for using “African American centered approaches” and other aspects of Black culture for teaching students in the writing classroom.

As a writing teacher, it is important for me and the students I teach to be aware of and informed about our communities, histories, cultures, identities and how that informs and influences our work. Along with this, it is important to acknowledge how texts like Carey’s *Rhetorical Healing* and Kynard’s *Vernacular Insurrections* are among the texts that can be used as resources to help students and teachers in writing classrooms better understand the history, experiences and culture associated with Black people’s writing, communication, and literacy practices and how they were used for the community’s progress and prosperity.

In presenting these discussions, I draw on Kynard and Love’s work to talk about disparities and inequalities that can jeopardize and or eliminate Black people’s educational experiences and opportunities, their lives and discuss visionary perspectives and realities (Love;

Kynard and Carey) that show how Black people have managed to propel themselves and others forward despite sometimes lacking institutional support and investment and the ways that legacy can be used for future progress. Along with this, I present discussions of some of my own personal experiences to draw parallels between content within the texts that I relate to and to shed light on the significance of the content in either my personal or professional life. Prior to presenting my analysis of Carey and Kynard's work, I will share a snapshot of both texts to offer a summary and provide my perspective on the texts and some insights about the key discussions I am spotlighting within my analysis.

### **A Snapshot of Carey's *Rhetorical Healing***

In *Rhetorical Healing*, Carey provides an analysis of the work of T.D. Jakes, Iyanla Vanzant and Tyler Perry and links their work to the tradition and legacy of Black healing and curing practices, as well as different spaces and people who have served Black audiences and presented content that can impact Black peoples' lifestyles or serve as inspiration, entertainment, or guidance and knowledge-giving resources. Carey (164) explains that:

My aim in this book is not to provide definitive answers about the kinds of wellness strategies Black women need. Instead, my goal is to argue that we must pay attention to projects such as healing, empowerment, and wellness that show us the systematic ways African Americans go about solving social problems, and we need to generate critical models that recognize the agency of individuals who seek them out for themselves and may need them most.

Carey (118) discusses the history of Black urban theater, sheds light on the contributions of Black women writers and reflects (153-164) on her own experiences with assigning Elaine Richardson's *Po H# on Dope to PhD: How Education Saved My Life*. In Carey's reflections of

assigning Richardson's text, she discusses the writing and learning (158-161) that the text resulted in for her students and advocates for texts like Richardson's to be used in writing classrooms, while explaining both the productive learning outcomes, and some of the potential challenges and drawbacks of assigning such a text. Carey's reflections on her teaching of Richardson's text are among the many valuable lessons she offers to educators. Carey (160) states:

Sometimes, a performance of respectability is the result as students resort to drawing attention to how different they are from the events that they encounter in a text. On other occasions, it is an apathy that I imagine may come from seeing on the page the realities of people they may know or illustrations of events they may have experienced. In either case, the practice of distance is a result that requires us to reassess our approach to these kinds of painful and uncomfortable scenarios. If we, as teachers, let these types of silences fester under the assumption that we are avoiding triggers or keeping our students comfortable, we are complicit in keeping certain experiences, voices and people out of our learning spaces even when we've made gestures to include this content on our syllabi.

I believe it is productive for writing teachers to consider Carey's illuminating discussions of her teaching experiences with assigning Richardson's text, and her advice for educators to recognize how the presentation of text can result in people and experiences who historically have not been invited into educational spaces being present. It is productive to consider Carey's (158-161) insights about her and her students' experiences reading, writing and talking about Richardson's text with Eric Darnell Pritchard's (243) discussions of the text. Pritchard (243) reflects on the value of presenting texts like Richardson's as examples of Black queer experiences, which they

classified as such due to Richardson's story, like Black queer peoples' experiences, being too often unheard, unread and unacknowledged. Pritchard (243-244) explains:

Thus Richardson's literacy narrative, though not about Black LGBTQ people is a story that clearly lives at the intersections of race and queerness and is thus an example of the wide array of scholarly works that could fit under the rubric of Black Queer Literacies – as could research on literacies and single parents, historical and contemporary literacy studies and the discourses of racialized gender and sexuality about people on public assistance, sexuality, and prison literacies, to name only a few. (243-244)

I believe that Carey (160) and Pritchard's (243-244) perspectives about the value and power in Black women's stories like Richardson's create progress, because by making room for those stories in the classroom, students and educators are better prepared and equipped to make room for them in society. As a writer, Carey is able to show readers both what she appreciates and celebrates about the work of spiritual and religious leader T.D. Jakes while also critically examining his messages and the impact he has on his women followers. Carey pushes readers to think about how Tyler Perry's portrayal of Black men and Black women and the issues within some of Perry's messages about Black women. Along with this, Carey examines and critiques (72-73) practices and techniques that Vanzant uses when working with Black women to enhance their well-being. In Carey's discussions of Jakes, Perry and Vanzant, she is engaged in an illuminating and thought-provoking rhetorical analysis that calls attention to the writing, communicating and delivery of messages that is associated with the Black public figures whose work she is examining.

Carey (18) discusses the history of Black healers and curers and identifies (17) practices like Black women's writing as life-saving, healing and powerful practices that exist in a world,



where oftentimes the Black church is treated as the Black community's only saving grace. In providing her discussions of Black healing practices and traditions, Carey sheds light on how Black people's history as healers provides evidence of the way the community took care of themselves and improved their health and well-being even when they did not have access to institutional means, support and resources. Such insights within Carey's work are important to pay attention to because they illustrate how the Black community always has and always will create what they need for their lives. Knowing this should inspire readers to consider what can be achieved with support and resources and without struggle being present.

Such insights evidence how Carey (9-10), as she does when discussing Black people's educational experiences, which she draws on Shirley Wilson Logan and Nan Johnson's work to discuss, sheds light on Black people's ability to create and produce for themselves. As a reader of Carey's text, there are many insights within her work that I associate with progress and prosperity, including how Carey (18-20) discusses how Black people historically healed themselves and the evolution of the healing, spiritual and wellness community, and what people like Tyler Perry, T.D. Jakes and Iyanla Vanzant's work in the modern day communicate about the evolution of the now profitable industry, in which they have used their Black literacy practices to create products and content designed to guide other Black people to better lives and circumstances. Carey understands the essential role individuals play in shaping institutions and how their participation in institutions, and reliance on them determines whether or not institutions are determined to be valuable or useful. Carey (5) states:

When individuals or groups engage an institution, they often embrace the institution's values, or they adopt particular communication practices, styles, and modes of social

engagement. That engagement, in turn, constitutes the need for that institution as a vital component of everyday life.

Carey powerfully articulates Black peoples' ability to create what they desire and need for themselves, regardless of whether or not they have had access to the support, resources and opportunities to do so. In my work, I call readers to think about such a history of prevailing, progressing and prospering and what that would look like with institutional support and what we are currently doing to provide that support, and or may need to start doing to ensure we are providing it. In spotlighting the work of Carey, Kynard and Pritchard, I offer examples of what is produced when African American writers and scholars have the support to do their work and produce it.

Carey's text evidences what she created and contributed with access to educational opportunities and chances to create. In reading Carey's discussions about how Jakes, Perry and Vanzant have succeeded in the spiritual and wellness industry, or what Carey (4) said Kathryn Lofton refers to as the "industry of 'spiritual capitalism,' readers learn about the progress the individuals have made in their careers and how some Black women and audiences rely on their work for progress and prosperity<sup>11</sup>. Carey's work connects Jakes, Perry and Vanzant to the longstanding tradition of helping people get better, be better, and be their best selves. Carey pushes us to be aware of the tools and resources Perry, Vanzant and Jakes have created, while also recognizing that everyone who creates content can improve the messages they share with their audiences, while rhetorically thinking about the impact of the messages they are conveying.

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<sup>11</sup>"In his provocatively titled 2010 essay, "The Black Church is Dead," religion scholar Eddie Glaude attributes this crisis to an abandoning of the historical social-justice mission that made the church a place of refuge and voice of the disenfranchised, and he cites the prevalence of contemporary African American ministers preaching prosperity gospels as evidence of this shift. While Glaude considers this death an opportunity to reimagine the church's function, Jakes is one of a number of Black ministers including Creflo Dollar, Noel Jones, and Eddie Long who boast congregations in the thousands despite criticisms of their perceived focus on prosperity" (Carey 81).

## A Snapshot of Kynard's *Vernacular Insurrections*

In *Vernacular Insurrections*, Kynard focuses (153) on how Black and Brown students have used their literacy practices to change academic institutions, and how their “out-of-school literacies” (29) inform the institutional and societal change they make. Along with this, Kynard (163) advocates for educators to acknowledge and value student authorship by highlighting what students have historically achieved with their literacy practices. Kynard (163) writes:

My main purpose for spending this much time describing student involvement in creating open admissions at CUNY has been to stress student authorship of such programs, an important site of *literacy and writing*. Student authorship of this moment was certainly recognized by researchers and academics; however, constructing this student authorship as representative of literacy and writing remains the work of our contemporary times, thereby removing error analysis and grammar instruction as a central or relevant pedagogy and praxis.

As Kynard does throughout her text, she importantly prioritizes her work as an educator and teacher of writing and reflects on how that work should involve the students’ being invited to contribute and honored and credited for contributions they have historically made. Kynard directs educators to encourage students to recognize and envision how they want to use their literacy practices to make the contributions they want and need to make. Kynard also draws on her own experiences and presents a deep knowledge of the field of rhetoric and composition, and Black history including the Black Arts Movement (120) and significant moments in history like the oppression and racism James Meredith endured in his educational endeavors and journey to University of Mississippi (166), Black educators engaging in efforts to financially support their students and communities (183), and the role historically Black colleges, universities, and

communities played in making education available for Black people when the government would not provide the funds and resources for Black people to receive an education or access equitable educational experiences (177).

Kynard spotlights the contributions of Black women rhetoric and composition scholars Geneva Smitherman (112;123-125) and Ernece Kelly (Kynard 74). In doing so, Kynard makes clear how the women and their work focused on Black people, their experiences, circumstances and other people who endured struggle and created positive change in their professional fields and society. Kynard calls readers to recognize the variety of ways Black people have excelled with their literacy practices, and the hurdles and challenges that remain despite their acceleration.

*Vernacular Insurrections* should be used by scholars within the field of rhetoric and composition to assist in eliminating challenges and disparities in writing programs and society. Rhetoric and Composition graduate students reading the text will learn more about the work that is possible for them as teachers and how to within writing classrooms acknowledge the power of students' literacy practices and interests while providing writing instruction that invites them to think about how they will use their literacy practices.

Kynard sheds light on Black people's literacy practices, social movements and the Black community's commitment to education. Kynard informs readers about how no one person is solely responsible for the systematic struggles and failures they face within academic institutions or in society. Along with this, she expands readers' minds about how race, racism, societal issues and traditional approaches to education that do not consider students, limit them and hinder their ability to contribute. Like Logan, Kynard broadens readers' knowledge of how Black people have acquired and used their literacy practices and used them to achieve their goals and to improve their community's circumstances. One of the most powerful aspects of Kynard's

*Vernacular Insurrections* is her acknowledgement of the experiences and issues she had as a Black woman during her time as a graduate student and in her work as a Black woman scholar and administrator navigating through institutional practices, perspectives and expectations amid teaching students in writing classes. For Kynard, the label of basic is not something she would place on any writer, which she makes clear in her text where she shows her commitment to acknowledging that every student has valuable and essential change-making contributions to make.

*Vernacular Insurrections* evidences how Kynard sees beyond the label of basic and basically provides a different kind of possibility and experience for her students while calling others to do the same. Like Carey's *Rhetorical Healing* and Pritchard's *Fashioning Lives*, *Vernacular Insurrections* is a tool that educates audiences on Black people's literacy practices and how Black people have transformed universities and educational spaces and the role their literacy practices played in the transformative work they did. Throughout *Vernacular Insurrections*, it is evident that Kynard is committed to acknowledging the already existing brilliance in students, and she is committed to teaching writing in ways that help students share their already-existing brilliance. For scholars who are invested in paying attention to societal matters and doing community-engaged work, Kynard's text is a text to turn to as an educational source that provides illuminating insights about the progress Black and Brown students have historically achieved in their scholarly-activist work focused on ensuring that more people from historically marginalized communities can access academic spaces and educational opportunities.

## **History in The Making: A Story about An Academic Exploring Interests that Existed Before My Academic Life**

As a PhD student, I designed an independent study, and Carey's *Rhetorical Healing* is one of the texts I included on my modified reading list. During my concentration exams, I read Kynard and Pritchard's texts, which like reading Carey's text were learning experiences, where I immersed myself in reading scholarship that spoke to me and my spirit at a time where it was important to be reminded that being in academia didn't require me to overlook the conditions of Black people. Reading Pritchard, Carey and Kynard's texts helped to affirm my perspective about embracing my interests in Black literacy practices, legacies, experiences and my desire to do work within academia to improve conditions and circumstances for my community. Instead of skimming the texts, which is a reading practice that graduate students are often advised to engage in, I read the texts, which involved me reading both day and night.

At times, while reading the texts, I wondered what more I could say, when Kynard, Carey, Pritchard, had said all that they said. I wondered if I had anything else to offer after reading the work of people who valued Black history and literacy practices in ways that I valued them and had done an excellent job discussing the histories and experiences in ways that should make them valuable to other people too. I wondered what I could contribute to a field with scholars who had already worked to teach people about how African-American and Black people powerfully and productively used their literacy practices to create progress and prosperity, yet there was still so much more progress that was necessary.

I wondered what I could offer since these scholars and others had already let people know our work in academia should involve our commitment to improving societal matters. Fortunately, for me, I received uplifting and affirming advice from a mentor of mine, Bill Hart-Davidson,

who advised me that, there “...was nothing wrong with having work, like that, that’s a beacon for you.” I want the work that is a beacon for me to be a beacon for others and that is a part of the work I am doing by focusing on these texts in my dissertation. As a person, who is finding my way in rhetoric and composition, I recognized the commonality in the scholar’s commitment to celebrating the work of Black rhetoric and composition scholars who came before them and existed alongside them and their focus on the societal matters that impacted Black people. I realize now that it is a shared focus that I am grateful to contribute to and dedicate myself to maintaining, because it is a focus that many see the purpose and value in, and that we have to help others recognize the importance of, in order for people to have access to the opportunities within academic institutions that will address inequalities, pay disparities, less than humane living conditions and stop people from being denied the opportunity to pursue professional and academic paths that they desire.

Prior to encountering these texts, I had goals to address the aforementioned matters, but encountering these texts provided me with more examples of support and peoples’ investment in also addressing them. These texts validated and affirmed me for many reasons, including how they helped me eschew and ignore ideas that working to improve things for my community was too idealistic or somehow self-motivated. When I read *Vernacular Insurrections*, *Rhetorical Healing and Fashioning Lives*, I was able to explore and learn more about my interests in Black history, experiences and culture, which for me was an opportunity to do work that appealed to both my professional interests and personal interests I had since my childhood. Through reading these texts, I was exposed to history, language, and insights about topics I discussed with my family, and I could see how topics that were of interest to me, and societal, cultural and historical

matters that impacted me were also being considered by people in the professional field I was trying to become a part of.

Growing up, my brothers and I experienced a lot of different things, ranging from engaging in family conversations, being active participants in sports, and watching films, shows and classic and historic programming like Alex Haley's *Roots*, which I watched when I was in elementary school. *Roots* informed me and my experiences because it served as an educational resource for the discussions my parents were having with us in our home and it educated me on topics such as race, Black history, Black legacies, Black experiences, Black excellence, Black joy, Black love, slavery, family, racism, identity, opportunity, what people envisioned for their lives, culture, tradition and the oppression, violence and abuse endured by Black women, Black men and Black children.

*Roots* further opened my eyes to both the harsh, inhumane and racist realities that were unfortunately a part African-American and Black peoples' experiences and the progress and prosperity, which existed because of the ways African-American people immersed themselves in spiritual, educational and professional endeavors to improve their circumstances. *Roots* clearly illustrated the important role education played in Black people being able to change their own, their family and their community's circumstances and legacy. The miniseries also illustrates the risks Black people took for their freedom and to create the lives they desired.

Watching *Roots* gave me another example of Black peoples' efforts to improve their circumstances and the challenges and devastation they experienced in the process. In watching the series, I could see how their experiences and lifestyles were a combination of their own ambitions, aspirations, and their harsh realities they were dealt and experienced as a result of racism, slavery and the ways it impacted them and their family's legacies even as they strived for



and created better economic, educational and religious futures. I related to *Roots*. I still relate to *Roots*. I wanted to do the work Alex Haley was portrayed as doing in the miniseries to trace my own roots. It took more than my childhood viewing of *Roots* to articulate the things I articulated about Alex Haley's miniseries. Still, my childhood viewing of *Roots*, exposure to *Ebony Pictorial History of Black America* encyclopedias and discussions my family had about various topics wisened me up, and all contributed to where I am now. Those discussions within my home helped me to acquire and develop what Carmen Kynard (29) refers to as "out-of-school literacies."

Kynard defines "out-of-school literacies" in the following points where she explains, "By out-of-school literacies, I mean something beyond classroom instruction, effective pedagogy or learning outcomes and instead, I want to focus on students' everyday practices as endemic to literacy" (29). In "Claiming Our Space on the Flo(or)," Kinloch, Moss and Richardson's discussions reveal the ways that they developed what Kynard (29) refers to as "out-of-school literacies" by learning from different people, places, texts and experiences that helped them develop their literacy practices. In Baker-Bell's "For Loretta: A Black Woman Literacy Scholars Journey to Prioritizing Self-Preservation and Black Feminist Woman Storytelling," she discusses (534-536) learning literacy practices from her mother, grandmother and sister.

Watching *Roots*, conversing and debating with family, experiencing my Grandma Helen deliver sermons in the pulpit, playing sports, going to work with my mom and so many other people, places and experiences impacted me and informed the way I see the world and myself in the world. In addition to developing what Kynard (29) refers to as "out of school literacies," from things I was learning at home, in school, at church, from playing sports and in various other settings and through the people I was interacting with, my parents really placed a high level of

importance on taking school and education seriously. My parents' commitment to seeing me succeed in school and interest in some subjects in school and my love for learning really also made it possible for me to take education seriously.

My parents were actively involved in my educational experiences and reflected on their own educational experiences including their experiences at Walker High School, the high school they attended together, and both graduated from. Even though my brothers and I played sports, my parents always reminded us that we were student-athletes and that the word student came first in that word, so how we performed academically would determine whether we would be able to keep competing in sports. Taking pride in myself was a part of my vocabulary and an expectation. Black history was a part of my vocabulary and the Harriet Tubman picture that hung in my bedroom evidenced that.

When I read Carey's *Rhetorical Healing* and Kynard's *Vernacular Insurrections*, I was inspired by their discussion of aspects of Black history I was familiar with and aspects of Black history that I learned about from reading their work. Listening to and reading Kinloch, Moss and Richardson's interviewed-styled literacy narrative where they responded to questions Cynthia Selfie asked about their literacy practices and experiences evidenced the ways I could share my own literacy narrative. When I picked up our family collection of our *Ebony Pictorial History of Black America* encyclopedias, I was enamored by the texts and images that powerfully exhibited Black history. I was similarly enamored and inspired when I read insights in Kynard's text like her points that:

The white radical intelligentsia has often overlooked or outrightly dismissed the Black Radical Tradition in education because these ideas are continually seen as the provincial domain for the liberations of blacks only. Yet the Black Radical Tradition in, for, and of

education has been deep-rooted from Du Bois to the African American communists who were active in teacher unions and curriculum change in 1950s Harlem (Kynard 86-87). Kynard's knowledge of Black history and her dedication to acknowledging Black people and the community's legacy of making significant changes that positively enhanced the educational system and educational experiences of Black students added to my archive of examples of the African-American community achieving progress and prosperity. While I would've appreciated and valued learning about such a history even if I was not in the field of rhetoric and composition, learning about it as someone who is a part of the field of rhetoric and composition evidenced how histories and experiences that have been important to me throughout my lifetime, could be ones that I advocated for people in my profession to see the importance of.

Along with celebrating the Black community for making positive societal and communal change, Kynard (92) also sheds light on the value in engaging with Black people's history and experiences for educational purposes. Kynard's attention to Black histories and experiences is accompanied by her guidance and rationale about why it is important to pay attention to those histories. Kynard (92) writes:

It might seem strange and overdone to some folk that people such as Parks and myself spend so much time relocating these historiographies, but those who think this way miss an important point: how you situate yourself and your understandings of Black Power/Black Freedom struggles also situates how you understand race in the presence of color-conscious students in the classrooms. Those who ignore Black freedom struggles may unwittingly promote white privilege, especially when using the usual argument that their colleges have mostly white students, as if that is accidental, as if that has not always been an active, protracted campaign in higher education.

In reading and spotlighting these remarks in Kynard's text, it is clear to me that I am not alone in desiring to do teacherly and scholarly work that considers my community and my interests and identities while considering how Black people and other people, who have historically not been able to access educational spaces and opportunities or have equitable experiences in those spaces can access those spaces. Kynard's (92) insights show her unwavering commitment to ensuring that Black history and experiences are a part of the educational experiences in writing classrooms and pushback against the idea that there is no place for histories in spaces where those communities are present and instead urges people to think about the fact that the absence of Black people within educational spaces is an intentional history and inequality that needs to be addressed.

### **Rhetoric and Composition's Place in The History and Legacy of Black Academics Focusing on Society and Community**

As a Black academic focused on how the work I do within academic institutions can help to improve societal matters and people's experiences, it is important to acknowledge the Black community's history and legacy of doing this work. Kynard (86-87) acknowledges the legacy and history when talking about the work of Du Bois and others doing the work. Carey acknowledges the legacy and tradition of African American rhetoric and composition scholars doing socially focused community-engaged work. Along with joining Kynard, Carey and other scholars' in acknowledging this tradition, I am showing how their work, Pritchard's work and the other scholarship I discuss in my dissertation is a part of the tradition of caring about one's community enough to consider the community's well-being and progress in scholarship and to view your progress as something that is only truly achieved if your community is also progressing.

Du Bois' *The Souls of Black Folk*, which was published in 1909 provides evidence of the longstanding tradition of Black scholars dedicating themselves to doing work that is focused on their community's progress and prosperity. Du Bois' work evidences that it is not new for Black scholars, who work as educators within academic institutions to be dedicated to their own professional endeavors, and how they can within those professional endeavors improve circumstances for their community and society. Like Du Bois (73-75; 128), Kynard, Carey and Pritchard focus on Black people's lives, educational experiences and the essential role that access to equitable educational and learning experiences, and other institutions of benefit plays in peoples' lives. Along with doing this, Kynard, Carey and Pritchard call the field of rhetoric and composition to focus on Black experiences, histories and literacies and the ways these matters are intricately linked to the messages people create for their own progress and prosperity and the improvement of societal circumstances.

There are various connections between Du Bois' work and Kynard's *Vernacular Insurrections*, where she also acknowledges Du Bois' work and contributions. Both Du Bois and Kynard discuss their work within academic settings, the experiences and plight of Black people and what they believe should happen to improve Black people's lives. Kynard calls us to consider and pay attention to the circumstances of Black people and other communities who have historically endured oppression. Kynard writes:

Our current moment is equally alarming. Poverty has increased across all groups since 2008, but blacks and Latino/as experienced higher levels of poverty, such that in 2009 one in four black people and one in three Latino/as lived below the poverty line as compared with one in eleven whites. (Kynard 237-238)

The aforementioned insights illustrate how Kynard, as a scholar, uses her literacy practices to shed light on the impact disparities have on Black and Latino people, and how they are impacted by lower pay, educational inequalities and health disparities (238). Along with Kynard calling attention to the ways Black and Hispanic people experience oppression and inequality in employment, education and healthcare, she sheds light on the power of people using their abilities and resources to combat these issues and to inform and support one another.

Like Kynard, Love sheds light on the disparities and inequalities Black and Brown people face. Love explains that “Black students are six times more likely than White students to attend a high-poverty school. Latinx students face triple segregation: by race, poverty and language. Overall, only 9 percent of low-income students graduate from college” (29). Like Love, the light that Kynard sheds on such disparities is a continuation of the light that Du Bois shed on the ways disparities impacted Black and Brown communities. When thinking about the work that rhetoric and composition scholars do when working with students in writing classrooms, it is important to be aware of the disparities that exist within Black and Brown communities.

Doing so, makes educators more aware of all the Black and Brown students that likely did not even make it to their classrooms and what they should be doing to try to ensure that students from those communities who are present do not become absent. Along with this, we should be invested in asking what Black scholars like Du Bois, Kynard and Love could focus on addressing if they did not all have to continue to fight the oppression, racism and inequalities that have been so deeply woven into the experience of people who have been historically marginalized and oppressed?

I believe turning to Kynard's (31) insights about the support Du Bois provided for Black college students who were working to change their university could serve as a source of inspiration for educators working with students in the writing classrooms. Kynard (31) writes:

Du Bois responded to the student protests (his daughter had graduated from Fisk the year before) by arguing that these students were 'hit[ting] power in high places, white power, power backed by unlimited wealth' and that one should never forget that 'the arch enemy of the Negro race is the false philanthropist who kicks us in the mouth when we cry out in honest and justifiable protest.'

Kynard's (31) discussions of Du Bois provide insights about how in 1925, he used his power, literacy practices and his pen to support the student protests that led to the ousting of a university leader who did not support the students and their efforts to oppose what they viewed as "racist" and "restrictive" policies and regulations and instead endorsed what Kynard identifies as the "New Negro" mindset. My question for educators is, how can these histories be used in a composition classroom? How should they be engaged with? What can referring to these histories in the teaching of writing mean for what teachers and students learn about what they can achieve with their literacy practices?<sup>12</sup>

Along with offering those discussions, Kynard (162) sheds light on Black and Puerto Rican students' protests and other contributions and efforts of students who used their literacy practices to create equitable educational experiences for themselves and people from their community. It is important for rhetoric and composition teachers to pay attention to Kynard's (163) focus on "student authorship," her acknowledgement of the positive and impactful results

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<sup>12</sup>The following is a reference to a scholar who reflected on work that I think is akin to these discussions, and an example of doing this type of work in the classroom. During Earl Brooks 2021 CCCC presentation, he reflected on how in his introductory rhetoric and composition courses, he "asked (students) to read Harriet Jacobs and Frederick Douglas' work... to track the rhetorical moves of Douglas and Jacobs work" (Brooks).

yielded from students' using their literacy practices to change the university, and her own investment in acknowledging students' literacy practices.

Kynard's (163) discussions make it undeniable that students possess the ability to not only do the work they are assigned in writing classrooms but to also transform the universities and educational spaces they are learning in. As Kynard (163) informs us, Black and Brown students made essential contributions to the development of writing programs' courses and curriculum. These insights from Kynard and her discussions in "The Revolution Will Not Be [Code-Switched] (Or Power-Coded): The Classroom," (92-105) section of *Vernacular Insurrections* are among the essential discussions writing teachers and educators need to pay attention to when thinking about students' understanding of the writing, language and literacy that is essential for their lives and what is possible when they use their literacy practices for means and reasons that they value and care about. It is important for teachers to recognize students' interests, needs and goals as writers, so they can consider those things and incorporate them into class assignments, activities, content, assigned reading, writing projects and curriculum. Turning to work like Kynard's can provide teachers with ways to introduce discussions about the role writing and literacy practices play in social change projects.

A concept Miraj (22;74) refers to as #Hashtag composition is one potential way writing teachers can take up Kynard's guidance to acknowledge students' out of school's literacies and assign work that provides students with a chance to share their perspectives for activist-related matters. Along with it being necessary for rhetoric and composition scholars to pay attention to Kynard's (163) calls to acknowledge and value "student authorship" (163), it is important to consider engaging students in activities and work like Maraj's hashtag composition (74). Explaining how hashtags can be used, Maraj (49) writes:



If students understand hashtags for their *encultured* potentials as these kinds of commonplaces (or commonplace ‘headings’) in a reconceptualization of particular social media spaces as ‘remediated’ commonplace books in the writing/composition classroom, these tags can afford such writers means to resist dominant ideologies through communal/collective, deep rhetorically ecological frameworks.

Considering Maraj’s (49) insights about “hashtag composition” alongside Kynard’s (163) discussions about “student authorship” will result in educators inviting students to use their writing and social media content to call attention to societal matters. I call rhetoric and composition educators to consider how their work as writing teachers positions them to facilitate discussions with students that help them see themselves in more than just a reactionary cycle on social media and society. Along with teaching students to advocate for being treated in more equitable ways, teachers must encourage students to be creators of content that creates the experiences and circumstances they want and need to have in their personal and professional lives and for their communities. Insights within Kynard’s and Miraj’s work that I have spotlighted and discussed provide educators with resources and guides for doing this work.

As educators, some of the questions we must be invested in answering are: How can we get students to engage in the work of actively condemning chaos and making statements about how they will not cause or continue on the kind of oppression, violence and injustices that have historically plagued and troubled the lives of Black people, Brown people, differently-abled people, women, members of the LGBTQ community, and people who don’t have access to the financial means to be able to afford to combat the oppression?

How can we use Kynard’s and Carey’s text to encourage students to create a society without oppression, racism and violence, misinformation and the ways those ills and issues

negatively impact and further marginalize people? How can we turn to Kynard and Carey's text to help develop and strengthen students' perspectives about what it means for them to use their literacy practices in their professional, personal and political lives to make the kind of change and impact they want and need to make?

Considering these questions, I will share one of my teaching activities and content I use that I believe provides some insights about how I have done this work in the class with students. In my first- year writing class, the students and I listened to some of the "Rich Roll" podcast episode with Rainn Wilson and Reza Aslan where Roll, who is the host of the show. In the episode, Wilson and Aslan discuss purpose, mission and life calling, and what it means to fulfill our purpose in life. After we listen to some of the podcast as a class, students engage in a discussion about their purpose in relation to their professional and academic ambitions and they talk about the ways their purpose and professional endeavors are intertwined. When the students are done with this small group discussion, we within our classroom where students also engage in writing and reading focused on identity, race, language ideologies and literacy practices and Standard English are within the same semester engaged in dialogue about their purpose and their future professional careers and academic endeavors in relation to themselves, their writing and feedback. This work connects to the work I did as a writing teacher at MSU where there was a shared curriculum and sequence of assignments in the writing program that focused on various topics including culture and professional literacies.

The activity provides students with an opportunity to think about purpose in relation to their professional endeavors. It also provides them with a chance to see if and how their purpose considers or does not consider other people. Such an activity helps me learn more about the students, helps them learn more about themselves and about others, and helps them hear and be

exposed to the connections between the purpose they identify for themselves, and the purpose other people identify for themselves. While I have not done so in the past, I believe that in the future, pairing this work with Kynard's (163) discussions about the work Black and Puerto Rican students did to make significant change in their universities can inspire students to think about both the current and future impact they want to have and how they can use their writing to make that impact. I believe it can broaden students' perspectives about their purpose, especially considering the occasional, and rare response I receive about their youthfulness limiting their ability to determine their purpose.

My knowledge of Kynard's work and reading about work she did with students inspires me. In Kynard's work, she reflects on the careers that some of her students ultimately end up having, and through reading her work, it is evident that affirmation of the students and her work with the students (Kynard 242) was impactful in their journey and helped to determine what their "future selves" would be. Discussing the professional and academic paths Rayshawn and Rakim were on, Kynard (242) explained that they both earned careers in academia where they were prospering as professors. Kynard writes:

That these men's rhetorics, their out-of-school literacies connected to their political activism, and their resistance to white liberal ideas of educational success are the source of a sophisticated scholarly disposition and writing identity is not mere fantasy or overstatement in this book. It is a quantifiable fact. (242)

Like Kynard (31) acknowledged Du Bois' use of his writing to acknowledge and support the work of the student protesters, and the ways she acknowledges Smitherman's essential contributions to rhetoric and composition, I am acknowledging the value of Kynard's contributions. Kynard calls us to value and affirm students' identities, experiences, literacy

practices and what she refers to as their “out-of-school literacies.” It is important to acknowledge how Kynard recognizes the important role students' writing, perspectives and literacy practices play in enhancing their own and other people's experiences and broadening our perspectives on transforming universities. In the next section, “Language. Life. Literacies. Are you Still With Me? Considering How Audience Shapes Our Writing, Literacy Practices and Use of Language?,” I discuss Christopher Lewis' discussions of Alice Walker's intentional decision to use language that would make *The Color Purple* readable for her mom, while making connections to my own desires to have my mom and family understand the scholarship I produce. Within the next section, I join scholars' discussions about Black Language, Black histories and advocate for rhetoric and composition scholars to recognize the value in considering Pritchard, Carey and Kynard's texts and other scholarship in the work of honoring and learning from people's literacy practices and the histories associated with them. Along with this, I discuss the ways I have found connections to texts and educational experiences even when my racial or gendered identities are not represented and how this impacts my expectations for other people to connect to my work in the same way.

### **Language. Life. Literacies. Are you Still with Me? Considering How Audience Shapes Our Writing, Literacy Practices and Use of Language**

In Christopher Lewis' “Cultivating Black Lesbian Shameless: Alice Walker's “The Color Purple,” he discusses some of the linguistic decisions that Alice Walker made in *The Color Purple* and his perspective about Walker's linguistic choices. Lewis writes:

Describing her mother's interaction with *The Color Purple*, Walker writes ‘She had not read *The Color Purple* before her stroke, beyond the first few pages, though it was deliberately written in a way that would not intimidate her and other readers like her, with

only a grade school education and a lifetime of reading the Bible, newspaper and magazine articles.' (*Same* 24, qtd. in Lewis 167)

Lewis also presents Henry Louis Gates' (1996) perspective on Walker's use of African American Vernacular English in *The Color Purple*. As Lewis' (1997) insights indicate was the case for Walker, like the prolific and legendary Black writer, I want my mother to be able to read my work and am confident that she can. I am confident that my dad can read and understand my work. I am confident my brothers can read and understand my work. I am confident my uncles, aunts and cousins can also read and understand my work. If my grandmothers and grandfathers were here, I would want them to read my work and find themselves, their accomplishments, and both their fulfilled and unfulfilled dreams and ambitions in it.

Even though my work is a resource for rhetoric and composition scholars and teachers, I want any reader who picks up my work and reads it to learn from it. It is not for a select few people. It is for anyone willing to read it and engage with it. I had a conversation with my mom, and I shared some of my autoethnographic writing from my dissertation draft with her. My dad happened to be listening to me read and both of my parents seemed to enjoy what I was reading. As I moved into reading some of a chapter where I engage more with scholarship, I wondered if my mom was following me like I assumed she was following me when I was reading the autoethnographic content that contained stories that I knew she was familiar with.

As I read, I checked in to see if she was still with me. What does it mean to try to guarantee that our audiences are with us? During the experience where I was sharing some of my dissertation draft, I stopped and asked a question that showed my interest in ensuring that my mom was still with me and to ensure that my parents were still following along. When I am teaching students, I ask questions to ensure that they are still with me. I do the same thing when I

facilitate workshops. Even if people communicate they are with you, that doesn't really confirm or guarantee that they are. If I receive an education, learn words, learn language, learn concepts and do not share it with other people whose lives are still going to be impacted by the concepts and language that I have learned, then I am furthering issues of institutional injustice such as limiting access to education and linguistic inequity. The truth is, I can not only talk about what is familiar to my audience and or even just use language that my audience is familiar with. If I did, I would be doing them and myself a disservice. The service is sharing what I do know and what I have experienced.

I must familiarize my audience with what they may not have an invitation to be familiarized with, and with what and who they have historically not been expected to be familiar with. I must expose my audience to experiences that they can learn from while explaining my purposes and reasons for sharing what I have learned. I know that there are people who would thrive in the academic and professional experiences that I have had, but there are various reasons that people do not receive the opportunity to do so. Considering this, I always keep in mind that when I learn, experience and am exposed to something useful, productive and exposed to something that enhances my existence and can play a significant role in the ways I positively contribute to society, I should share that with people. I should also share experiences, realities and circumstances that need to be addressed and raise peoples' awareness about the work that Black people have historically done.

My focus on Blackness does not mean, it is only for Black readers. When my educational experiences were not representative of me, my history, communities, and identities, I did not decide that I should disengage and not learn what was being taught. When I learned American history that did not include African-American history or my African-American self, but was

instead narrowly focused on White history, I did not disengage and decide that it was history that I did not need to learn. I still received an education and expressed an interest in learning. That had a lot to do with my upbringing of respecting and valuing people, their histories and experiences even when they differed from me. Such teachings are too often lacking in educational spaces. When I was reading *The Canterbury Tales* and *A Separate Peace*, doing Mr. Kiley's assignment, which required analyzing "Hotel California," or learning about the branches of government and presidents, who were all White until President Barack Obama, who was elected president while I was in college, I never dismissed the texts, assignment or histories as ones that were irrelevant to me just because my racial identities and histories differed from the creators and producers of the text or the people whose lives and histories were focused on.

Even when Barack became the first Black president, his presidency was not the topic of my educational discussions, in ways that previous presidents' presidency had been. J.L. Dillard in his 1972 text, *Black English: Its History and Usage in the United States* offers an enlightening critique of the ways presidents are inaccurately portrayed in educational settings and proposes more productive ways for teachers to engage students in work that acknowledges them, their history and identities. Dillard writes, "Why, instead of eternally reading about Benjamin Franklin walking down the streets of Philadelphia with a loaf of bread under each arm, don't, our schoolboys learn how he and other early American leaders reacted to the slave trade?" (290)

Dillard (290) rightfully reflects on how too-often the history of oppression and inhumanity that was rendered at the hands of some of America's leaders is overlooked for insignificant stories that do not shed light on the past that is still impacting Black people's current circumstances and that is forever intertwined with their future. Even considering Dillard's (290) accurate acknowledgment of the under-engagement with histories and facts about

leaders association with the “slave trade,” being the case in my own educational experiences, I never let those shortcomings result in me packing up my bag and deciding that the school system could not teach me.

I instead understood that I was receiving an education at school and an education at home and viewed both educations as valuable. I also had experiences and curiosities about why I was not learning some of the things I was learning at home at school. This is something that raises questions, then and now, especially looking back and realizing the ways that my parents reinforced the education I was receiving at school. Just because I and many other Black people were not being exposed to enough curriculum and texts focused on our histories, it did not mean that we could dismiss our educational experiences and or devalue them.

Instead, I value the teachers and educators who thought it was valuable and essential to make Black history and Black experiences present in the classroom. Along with this, I take great pride in the work that I am doing to ensure that Black people and their experiences, their literacy practices and histories are valued. I have kept an open mind about content and curriculum being for me, even when I wasn’t in it. I hope other people will do the same when reading my dissertation and other scholarship focused on Black people, their experiences, histories, culture and community.

I hope non-Black readers, people who do not have a degree and readers from all backgrounds will know that my work is as much for them as it is for me. I want people to read my dissertation and be inspired to be their best selves and to push themselves to learn more about the ways that literacy, writing and communication have been productively and positively used within their communities to uplift and elevate humankind and fight oppression. I want people to think about how their writing, literacy practices and communication can be used in their lives, in



their homes, communities, education and employment and society. In my analysis of Kynard's *Vernacular Insurrections*, Carey's *Rhetorical Healing* and Pritchard's *Fashioning Lives*, I am exposing readers to Black rhetoric and composition scholarship that will expand and deepen their understanding of how Black people's literacy practices, writing and communication have historically shaped their lives and been used to improve circumstances for all of humanity. I hope other people will be inspired to place a similar focus on their own communities, while also confronting abuse and misuse of writing, literacy and communication practices and proposing what can be done to preserve the best use of language while eliminating the abusive and oppressive use of language.

There is nothing like creating scholarship and a space that can benefit everyone entering the space, and then having someone enter the space and express that they are unsure about whether or not they were supposed to be there because the people in the space are from communities that have not historically been the predominant group in the space. Those are the kinds of norms and attitudes that we must change, especially if we are truly invested in improving society. If we truly care about any community or cause, we must make sure the people from the community are present. We must also make sure that the curriculum, texts and learning experiences that consider them are present and that we present solutions and support that will aid in addressing the causes. Logan provides us with guidance for doing this work in her discussions about the lack of Black women working as English and composition professors in "When and Where I Enter: Race, Gender, and Composition Studies" which was published in 2003. Logan (429) writes:

What is also clear is that few English faculty members are black and female, and few of those, if they are tenured or on a tenure track, are likely to teach composition, especially

at predominately white institutions where black women are seen as commodities too precious to use in this manner. (Departmental assumptions about what subject areas are valuable do not support such use.) But since writing takes place – or should take place – outside the traditional composition classroom, we can imagine this scenario: a black female teacher, white students, and students of color having conversations about writing. Based on my experiences, despite Logan's piece being written in 2003, her points about the lack of Black women who are faculty members, and their positions and status are still relevant and accurate. For Black women educators and faculty members in universities, and non-Black colleagues looking to support Black people and affirm their work, Logan's (429) insights about the experiences of Black women compositionists and the history of Black women compositionist cannot just be read, but must prompt people to think about how to appropriately respond to what they have learned from what they read.

Along with there being a lack of Black women educators working in the field of rhetoric and composition, based on my experiences, there is a shortage of Black men and Black LGBTQ teaching writing. There is no excuse for there not being more Black educators, including Black teachers of writing. There should be no doubt that Black teachers of writing possess the skills to teach writing, or any reluctance to recognize how their community's literacy history is an excellent resource for evidencing what people can use their writing, speaking and other literacy practices to achieve. Carey (163) offers guidance that should eliminate any uncertainty or doubt about whether or not Black women or their work can serve communities other than their own. When discussing one of her student's responses to Elaine Richardson's *PHD to Ph.D.*, Carey writes:

Ultimately, the passage suggests that we can centralize the experiences of Black women and other non-dominant groups and still teach members of dominant groups how to stay in the conversation when silence may seem easier and teach them how to engage these matters and narratives with sensitivity and respect. (163)

Carey's discussions (157-164) of her teaching experiences illustrate how students regardless of their race or gender had their mind broadened by being exposed to, reading and discussing a text by a Black woman and learning about her experiences. The insights that Carey offers should help to address and eliminate concerns about the productiveness and usefulness of content from Black people and eliminate any doubt about the myriad of educational and learning purposes served by the texts, the writers and their experiences and their community's histories. Hopefully, students' minds being broadened through exposure to texts and dialogue will result in them sharing what they learned within an educational space with other people and result in them considering different peoples' experiences and histories in their professional, personal and academic endeavors.

### **Our Lives Bring Text Alive and Texts Bring Us to Life**

When I was living in Greenville, N.C., I had the pleasure and honor of taking my Grandma Helen and my brother Garrick to see Bishop T.D. Jakes preach in East Carolina University's basketball arena. At times when reading Carey's *Rhetorical Healing*, I thought about my Grandma Helen, who was a big supporter and appreciator of TD Jakes and the reason I knew who the mega star religious leader was. As a result of my grandma's embrace of Jakes, who she considered to be an anointed preacher, I was familiar with the spiritual leader, his sermons, audio tapes and how his messages appealed to a wide-ranging audience. My grandma's appreciation of Jakes' ability to deliver a gospel sermon and preach and my awareness of his

religious leadership impacted the ways I deeply related to Carey's discussions of the impact Jakes had on her and her experience seeing Jakes. Carey (167) writes:

At that time, I was a first-generation college junior who went home once a month to play the piano for my church's youth choir but was still intensely private about the religious traditions I had grown up practicing. Somehow my college girlfriends managed to chip away at that reserve by that Friday night in April, and I agreed to go with them to hear T.D. Jakes preach to thousands in attendance about the importance of discovering the "destiny" of one's life. The message stirred me in a powerful way, and later that night I read over the packet of literature he gave those of us who wanted to know more about how to set our lives on course. To this day, I can still hear his voice.

Considering my earlier discussions about the work I do with students to encourage them to think about their purpose and my encouragement for teachers to view writing classrooms as a space for that kind of work, Carey's (167) insights about how Jakes' sermon inspired her thinking about "destiny," during her days in college evidence the appropriateness and timeliness of those conversations in a college writing classroom, where students may be able to draw on their own experiences in class discussions about topics that are relevant to their personal and professional lives and the lives they envision for themselves.

Along with this, Carey (167) highlights the significance of Jake's impact on her and the way he delivered messages that people could apply to their lives. In doing so, Carey evidenced the power of the Black faith tradition and how religious leaders powerfully influence and impact their lives and what they envision for their lives. I know that like Carey, my Grandma Helen valued being able to listen to Jakes preach in-person. My brother valued it. I valued it. For me, it

was evidence of the outcomes of praising God and an opportunity to do so with someone who was among the people in my life who instilled the importance of praising God in me.

Taking my Grandma Helen to see a preacher, who I believed was one of her favorite preachers of all time, was the least I could do after she had taught me about God, taught me about praising God, taught me about serving God and taught me about how I could serve people as a result of serving God. I am grateful to have the memory of my grandma, my brother and I standing on our feet, engaged, enthralled and excited, as we listened to Jake's message. Words can't explain what it felt like standing next to my favorite preacher, who was my grandma, as she, my brother, I and everyone else present watched, listened to and learned from the messages that were being delivered by Jakes, who some view as one of the greatest preaches of all time.

While I want to think the night meant the world to her, the truth is, I can't confirm that with her now that she is gone. What I have are the memories of the experience as proof and evidence that it did mean the world to her. What I have is Carey's (167) reflections about what her experience listening to Jakes preach meant to her. What I have is my brother, who I can call and ask about his memory of the occasion. What I can confirm is the joy and happiness that emanated from my Grandma Helen as she praised God while listening to Jakes deliver the word of God. I can confirm that no matter what highs and lows my grandma or our family was experiencing, praising God meant the world to her. What also meant the world to her was knowing that her family knew God, and that we were living our lives for God and not for the world. I suppose that the truth is, the night meant the world to me then and it most definitely means the world to me now that my grandma is not here.

My memories of us being able to see T.D. Jakes in person, like other memories and lessons she taught me and love and wisdom she shared with me are among the wonderful

memories and gifts that I have from my Grandma Helen. Seeing my grandma Helen dressed in her Sunday's finest and knowing her testimony. Seeing my grandma dressed in her Sunday's finest even though it wasn't Sunday. Seeing my grandma dressed up in her Sunday's finest and knowing what it means to be dressed up in your Sunday's finest. Seeing my grandma dressed up in her Sunday finest to see T.D Jakes, who she spoke of as preaching like he had a calling and anointing on his life. Knowing my grandma's testimony and seeing her sway from side to side and do her signature church clap that anyone who knows her knows the sound of.

Seeing Jakes move my grandma like she had moved so many people when she preached. Seeing my baby brother who doesn't go to church often in awe while we had church as we watched our grandma dressed in her Sunday's finest on a weeknight and all shared the experience of watching one of the greatest religious leaders in modern day history preach in a packed arena. It meant the world to me to see my grandma sway, clap, praise and worship and sing like I had watched her do so many times before. Anybody who has ever encountered my Grandma Helen knows what she says and does when she's praising God and that night, T.D. Jakes delivered a sermon worthy of praise and my grandma got to praise God in a way that made God's existence undeniable. She got to praise God at a time where her praise and worship as it had done on so many occasions before gave my brother and I a chance to witness how alive God was in her. I feel like my brother, Grandma and I listened to Jake's preach the word of God, and us all being present for the praise and worship that was delivered through music and preaching was an exhibition of a blessing that maybe she prayed for.

I still see my Grandma Helen now, dressed in her Sunday's finest. I still hear her praising God. Amen. Amen. Amen. Sing that song. Preach. You better preach. While Carey (82) when referring to her work on T.D. Jakes acknowledges that one of the aspects of her work is to

“...interrogate the implications of his modes of instruction for healing” (82), she also reflects on a part of her work being to “...provide a discussion of Black women’s experiences as what Jacqueline Grant describes as ‘the backbones of the church’ (Grant qtd. by Carey 82). My story of taking my Grandma Helen and brother to see Jakes, my stories of my Grandma, a Black woman preacher getting in the pulpit and delivering sermons, her journey to become a preacher, and her experiences in the pulpit all defy the traditional norms and restrictions established for women preachers and exhibits how my Grandma was among the women who Grant refers to as “the backbones of the church” according to Carey.

At the time we went to see T.D. Jakes preach in Williams Arena at Minges Coliseum at East Carolina University, I was not in graduate school yet, but East Carolina University, would later become the school where I earned my Master of Arts in English, with a concentration in rhetoric and composition. After graduating from my master’s program and while in the second year of my PhD program during an independent study I designed, which was a few years after my brother, Grandma Helen and I went to see Jakes, I read Carey’s *Rhetorical Healing*. In doing so, I had an example of text in my professional field that discussed faith, religion, church and a religious figure that greatly impacted my Grandma Helen, who had greatly influenced me. Carey placed significant focus on the Black faith tradition and religion and for me that was an exhibition of the ways a tradition and faith that I was raised to value, and that I had learned to come to value in my own ways had value in a field where I was working to make valuable contributions.

Carey’s (86) critique of the Black church is a critique that sometimes comes up when my mom reflects on how despite my Grandma Helen being an ordained minister, she could not preach at my Grandma Rosette’s homegoing services at the church in Alabama, where the

services were held. In Carey's discussion (86) of Juanita Bynum, she sheds light on the issue of Black women not being properly acknowledged and valued by the church and the equity issues Black women church leaders face. Carey (86) writes:

Yet, even though Bynum had the benefit of an actual testimony she could draw upon when addressing the thousands of African American women who would attend her speaking engagements around the country, she did not have the same institutional authority and ethos as did Jakes. Despite what appeared to be her best efforts to franchise that message, she could not acquire the same mainstream status with her call for healing as sexual purity as Jakes did.

Carey's (86) insights illustrate how Black women's ethos is devalued and they are treated as less capable and less credible deliverers of God's word which is a troubling and limiting view that pigeonholes church women to roles that are often far away from the pulpit. Another text that I added to my independent reading list, was Geneva Smitherman's *Talkin and Testifyin*. As was the case with my experiences reading Carey's discussions about her experiences being inspired by Jakes, I found myself feeling connected to aspects of Smitherman's text that felt familiar to me and I could relate to. As a reader, I believe that when we can find ourselves and our experiences in texts, the texts can help us believe in our own ability to be present. In the same way that I related to Carey's reflections on the impact T.D. Jakes' preaching had on her, I related to Smitherman's (158) reflections on her familial ties to a preacher and the ways that impacted her. Smitherman writes:

Toasts are usually kept alive in black culture by males, although some females, having heard Toasts from their male friends or relatives, will recite them occasionally (such as



the present writer, who learned them from her male cousins, much to the dismay of her Baptist preacher father!).

In the aforementioned points, Smitherman (158) acknowledged that she is the daughter of a preacher and like Carey (84) discusses the important and powerful role the Black church plays in the rhetorical tradition and legacy of Black people. Work like Smitherman's affirms my own thinking that the writing and speaking I do as an African-American woman rhetoric and composition scholar is a continuation and reflection of the preaching my Grandma Helen did in the pulpit. Smitherman writes: "Whichever of the four traditions a term in the Black English vocabulary comes from, what is basic here is the fact that Black Semantics represents Black Americans' long-standing historical tendency to appropriate English for themselves and their purposes" (58).

While I was not in a graduate program while my Grandma Helen was alive, if I was, I could only imagine how much I would've loved and enjoyed talking with her about Carey's discussions of T.D. Jakes. I would've loved to tell her about Smitherman's discussions of the Black church in *Talkin and Testifyin* or Alim and Smitherman's discussions (67-68) of Jeremiah Wright's delivery of speeches, his use of the Black jeremiad (78) and their discussions (Alim and Smitherman 79) of Wright's influence on President Barack Obama. I know my Grandma Helen would have some thoughtful and thought-provoking insights to offer about the ways Black rhetoric and composition scholars (Banks; Carey; Smitherman; Alim and Smitherman) discuss the Black church in their discussions of Black language and Black rhetorical traditions. These scholars' work provides me with a language to, in this work and in future work, discuss my Grandma Helen's brilliance in the pulpit.

She would be able to learn about how her delivery of sermons in the pulpit influenced my delivery of lectures in classrooms and presentations at conferences. In some of Carey's discussions of the Black church, she (84) explains how significant and essential the Black church was to the Black community's existence and freedom. She writes:

As a site of literacy development, the church was a transgressive space where African Americans refashioned the scripture messages of servitude and submissiveness that their former masters had preached into messages of liberation and acceptance. Moreover, these 'hidden' religious meetings were also means for African Americans to transfuse the projected Christianity of their masters with the spiritual expressions brought with them from Africa and transmit ways of knowing and subversion necessary to survive or escape transgression. (Carey 84)

Carey's (84) discussions of the history and legacy of the Black church, and the ways that Black people transformed faith for their own spiritual purposes, inform and educate me about the tradition and legacy that my Grandma Helen belonged to as a Black preacher. Similarly, Carey (10) informed me about the lineage of Black rhetoric and composition scholars that I am a part of. Carey (10) explains that:

There is an existing body of rhetorical, linguistic, and literacy scholarship on the shared epistemologies, language and speech acts, literacy practices and technologies African American men and women use to asset, preserve, and transform themselves, their communities, and their sociopolitical conditions.

For me, Carey's *Rhetorical Healing* is a tool that informs and influences my understanding of the professional field I am in, affirms what I know about Black history, legacies and experiences and Black religious practices and expands my knowledge of these topics. In my discussions of Carey

and Smitherman's insights about the Black church and the role it plays in the Black rhetorical tradition and legacies, I am able to evidence the ways that my Grandma's Helen time in the pulpit contributed to preparing me for my time in academia. For me that is both progress and prosperity and evidence of how my Grandma Helen and I used our literacy practices to achieve it and connect with the audiences we address. In "The Role My Grandma's Time in the Pulpit Played in My Progress and Prosperity," I will discuss my Grandma Helen's literacy practices in her role as a reverend and how her practice of religion, love for God, spirituality and time in church informed and influenced me and my literacy practices.

### **The Role My Grandma's Time in the Pulpit Played in My Progress and Prosperity**

When I was a kid I went to church with my Grandma Helen, who is my paternal grandma. I was grateful then, and I am grateful now for all the different church functions, meetings and events she took me to. I would go with my grandma to some of her Bible studies, choir practices and other church functions, which included attending functions like another church's presentation of the "Seven Last Words from the Cross" sermon around the Easter Holiday. As a kid and during my youth, I also went to youth church events and participated in church activities that were for kids and youth. Since I was in the children's choir, I attended choir practice. I regularly attended Sunday school. Even though I attended the church activities that were for kids and youth, on some occasions, I joined my grandma at adult bible study. There were opportunities for me to volunteer, like the feet washing nights, which were typically attended by older members of the congregation.

Before delving deep into my discussions of my memories of my grandma's time in the pulpit and continuing on about my church days and Sunday school days, I will pause my discussions to call attention to Baker-Bell's discussions about how one of her students and

research study participants experienced what she refers to (Baker-Bell 29) as “Respectability Language Pedagogies” in church. Doing this allows me to consider my own experiences with the literacy learning and language use that were a part of my church experiences, and the experiences other Black people had in church. In Chapter Three: Killing Me Softly, where Baker-Bell is sharing the students’ experiences with Anti-Black Linguistic Racism, she shares a conversation between two students, Janel and Lola.

It really is! Even sadder that it happened at church too,” Janel said in a very serious, but frustrating tone. ‘When I used to go to church, there were a whole bunch of boujee people who was like from 21 mile. They was like, ‘she ghetto. She don’t know nothing. She just gonna be a rat or turn out to be a baby momma’...they were being so judgmental. In church, though!? In church!’”

Because of the way you talk?” Lola asked.”

‘...because of the way I talk’ Janel quickly responded (52).

While my discussions in this section will provide insights on my own experiences in church, it is also important to shed light on the experiences of other Black people, including Black girls like Janel, whose experience evidences that sometimes some of the most oppressive attitudes about Blackness and Black language derive from and exist within the Black community. That is a reality that Baker-Bell reveals and discusses in *Linguistic Justice: Black Language, Literacy, Identity, and Pedagogy*, which can be used to work towards creating linguistically just spaces where people do not feel denigrated and deleted for their language use, especially in spaces where they are looking for spiritual healing, instead of what Love (34) refers to as “spirit-murdering.”

In Love and Pritchard's work they both discuss their experiences in spaces where their Blackness was affirmed, but their queerness was not. At the time I was attending church and Sunday school, I embraced my identity as a Black girl and felt that those aspects of me were welcome. While no one ever told me I would not be welcome if I showed up as my little Black queer self, and my parents and family showed love to all human beings, I still do not believe that being queer would've been affirmed or accepted at church. I was exposed to ideas and perspectives about what it meant to be ladylike and had examples of "what ladies were like and who they liked." I was aware of how my parents were chastised and or questioned about me being too much of a tomboy. Even though I loved going to church on Sundays, I reached a phase in my life when I missed church services and functions for sporting events. Along with my grandma voicing her perspective about the importance of church, she also shared her perspective about sports and me not needing to be out there getting roughed up with the boys.

Unlike Janel (qtd. in Baker-Bell 52), I did not feel like anyone at my church would've critiqued my language practices, but I did have phases of my life where I thought aspects of me would be condemned and considered unacceptable at church. Again, these realities exhibit how places where people go for spiritual affirmation and a sense of community may not always be spaces where they will actually receive those things, which my chapter four and five discussions of Pritchard's *Fashioning Lives* will evidence.

Even with the aforementioned remarks in mind, church, like other spaces I have been in, contributed greatly to my development of literacy practices and profoundly shaped me as a person, and my ways of being in personal and professional spaces and society. The adults in our church, like adults in our community, really invested their time and energy in teaching us and providing guidance for us. The choir directors prepared the children's choir for singing in church

when it was our Sunday to sing. Being a part of the children's choir involved attending choir practice and learning the songs and being prepared to sing and perform the songs in front of the congregation, which helped me gain experience performing in front of an audience, who was not my family. In terms of participating in the choir at church, our choir director and teachers had expectations of the choir members and those expectations included knowing which direction we needed to sway in, knowing the words of the songs and being sure to be in the proper and right positions where we could be heard and seen by the audience.

As a choir member, we had to be prepared for the person to step out front and sing their solo and be prepared to sing when it was our section's turn to sing. If you were an alto, you needed to be prepared when it was the alto section's turn. If you were a soprano, you needed to be prepared when it was the soprano section's turn. We all needed to be prepared to sing in unison when a song required that of us. I learned what to do in front of the congregation from paying attention to the instructions given at choir practice and also learned songs and what to do as a choir member from watching the adult choir, which my Grandma Helen, Grandpa Henry and Great-Uncle Roscoe, my grandma's brother, all participated in.

Everybody at our church had their own preaching style. When your family members preach, I feel like it comes with a kind of unspoken expectation to appreciate and value their sermon. Still, despite what I believe was a familial obligation to support my Grandma Helen in the pulpit because she was my family, I was proud and honored to support her and follow her every word. I admired her and was enamored by her style, the ways she prepared for the pulpit, her evident love for God and her desire for everyone to love God. Even if she was not my grandma, I would've been enamored by her wordplay and ability to powerfully recite scriptures

and deliver a sermon that resulted in people saying, “preach” “Amen” “Alright, now Helen” and the host of other responses that people shared when she preached.

My Grandma Helen would get in the pulpit with style. She always rocked a freshly-done hairdo that was in with the times. She wore a pressed robe that evidenced the pride everyone in our family takes in looking good. Underneath that robe, she was always dressed to the nines in an outfit that could be classified as anyone’s Sunday’s finest. Along with making sure she was fashionably fly for church, she made sure I was fashionably fly for church by taking me on shopping trips to pick out dresses. I will forever be grateful to my grandma for sharing her love, her time, and for always modeling what it meant to look and be your best and encouraging me to do the same.

When my Grandma Helen was in the pulpit or approaching the pulpit, someone would sing a song. I am very blessed and fortunate that I had the opportunity to listen to her sing in the choir and preach sermons on so many Sundays. My Grandma Helen had a beautiful, anointed and strong voice and based on my parents’ recollections of my Grandma Rosette, who was my maternal grandmother, she also had a beautiful and powerful voice and sang with anointing. Although I never got to hear my Grandma Rosette sing in church, I got to hear her voice, so I know that I would’ve found her singing just as captivating as I found her voice when she was sharing words of wisdom or just catching up. I know I would’ve loved her singing just as much as I loved my Grandma Helen’s singing and preaching. My Grandma Helen would sing a song that went, “What is this, that makes me laugh when I want to cry... Whatever it is, it won’t let me hold my peace... You know it makes me love my enemies and it teaches me how to treat my friends...”

As a kid sitting in the pews at church, I would listen to my grandma and the other preachers preach. Back then, I didn't know what citations were but now I realize that the preachers were citing Bible scriptures and engaging with texts when they referred to different scriptures in the Bible. My Grandma Helen was a trained, ordained minister and she was an extraordinary, anointed, well-prepared and well-informed preacher. In order to get in the pulpit and preach, she had to train, study and earn her qualifications to preach sermons and address members of the congregation. When she stepped in the pulpit, she made connections between everyday life and biblical scriptures, shared her testimony and gave people a reason to testify.

I listened to my Grandma Helen and all the preachers including the regulars who were members of our congregation, which meant they were on the rotating weekly schedule, or they were the visiting preachers coming from one of the other area churches. Whenever my Grandma Helen preached, it was always clear that she knew God's word and wanted other people to know God's word. When she preached, she preached in a way that helped people see how they could apply the word of God and the message she shared to their lives.

She preached words that should've moved many to live their life with God and for God. No matter what my walk and journey with God and with religion has been or will be, my Grandma Helen, like my mom will always be someone who inspired and still inspires my walk with God, someone who helped me to step into my faith and stay in my faith. Since she was my grandma, she didn't need the pulpit to motivate and inspire me, but that pulpit helped her share words that motivated and inspired me and other people to have a consistent relationship with God and unwavering faith in God, and to think about what it meant to be our best for ourselves and other people.



I observed my Grandma Helen prepare to deliver the messages she shared with the congregation, and that taught me something about what it means to prepare to deliver and present a message. My grandma preached like an unwavering, holy-ghost filled and confident superstar who was certified to say the things she was saying about God, religion, life and Bible scriptures. When preachers were going to preach, they sat in the pulpit, where there were also other religious leaders present. Preachers sit in the pulpit because they have something to say to the congregation and they stand in the pulpit to direct their message to their audience sitting in the pews. Preachers receive training and an education, but no one can give anyone an anointed spirit or make them a person who practices their faith and has the ability to encourage others to be faith practitioners. My Grandma Helen had all those things.

Preachers deliver the word of God, like teachers present activities and assignments to students. The Bible is their text. They cite the scriptures and their life experiences to testify about the ways God works in peoples' lives and to provide evidence of the work God has historically done. While the majority of the congregation at the church I attended when I was growing up was Black, I do not recall anyone referring to it as a Black church. Still, the choir members were Black. The pastor was Black. The preachers who preached on a consistent basis were Black and the congregation was largely Black. My Grandma's time in the pulpit, and my observations of her style, use of language, the ways she prepared and studied, her ability to connect with the audience, confident delivery, verbal dexterity, knowledge of scripture and her subject matter, and her ability to powerfully deliver an enlightening, well-informed and inspiring sermon, are among some of the things that inform and inspire the speaker and teacher I am. I am influenced by the way she engaged in call and response with the audience. I am influenced by how she preceded her sermons with music. In considering the ways my Grandma Helen influenced me, it is

productive to consider the legacy and tradition of the Black church and religion influencing Black people's language and literacy. Smitherman (55) explains:

The fourth tradition that helped give birth to Black semantics is that of the traditional black church. Because of the profound influence of the black religious tradition on black culture, many expressions and semantic concepts in the Black English vocabulary have a religious base (albeit secular users may be completely unaware of the fact).

I remember when my grandma would preach she would interact with the crowd, and she and other preachers would say things, like "Can I get an Amen" or ask questions about God that they knew would receive an affirming response. Smitherman (118) explains, "Calling-responding; stating and counterstating; acting and reacting; testing your performance as you go— it is such a natural, habitual dynamic in black communication that blacks do it quite unconsciously when rapping with other blacks." Smitherman (118) explains how call and response may pose challenges to white audiences<sup>13</sup> not familiar with it, which evidences the need for people to be familiar with different language practices, how language is used in different communities and to know the purposes certain rhetorical traditions and literacy practices serve.

As someone who regularly attended church, I was very familiar with the practices and routines associated with church. As an audience member, I knew how to engage and respond. The preachers would sit in the pulpit and they would get announced and after they were called to deliver their sermon, they would deliver it. It was an honor and privilege to see and hear someone from my family delivering God's word and hearing people say "Amen," "Preach the word, Reverend Donald," "Speak." It was uplifting and inspiring to witness my Grandma Helen preaching the word of God and it resulting in people standing to their feet. Every time my

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<sup>13</sup> In "Trini 2 De Bone" episode 7 of season three of television show *Atlanta* a character who is a white child being raised in America who was taken care of by a Trinidadian nanny attends his nanny's funeral, where he knows how to praise and worship with the family, but his parents who are accompanying him do not.

Grandma Helen stepped foot into that pulpit, she was my grandma. She was my brothers and cousins' grandma. She was my dad and my uncles' mom, my mom's and my uncle's wife's mother-in-law, her siblings' sister, her parents' daughter, and my Grandpa Henry's wife.

My grandma would take me with her to other peoples' churches and we would listen to other people preach the word of God. Even when she wasn't preaching, she would learn through other preachers preaching their sermons. I remember her reflecting about things she appreciated about other preacher's delivery of a sermon. I remember doing things like going to another church to check out "The Last Seven Words from The Cross" with her. I am indebted to her for being a traveling follower of God, a carrier of God, a student and teacher of religion and the word of God. In traveling with her, I got to see the different types of people who preached and the different ways people preached. Her journeys to other churches, reflections on people's preaching techniques and delivery of their sermon, her own preparation for the pulpit and the ways she delivered her sermons all illustrated the time, energy and commitment that people must invest in their endeavors, when they are doing what they love, and or what they believe they must do. Whether my Grandma Helen knew it or not, she, like my parents, and other role models I have had throughout my lifetime, was preparing me for some of the work and experiences my career in academia entails.

When you value something and believe that it is essential for your life and improving your life and the lives of other people, you will travel for it and to it. You will make time to learn it. You will make time to invite other people to hear and experience it. You will make time to do your part to share it. You will not shy away from opportunities to do any of those things. You will immerse yourself into experiences to do things you love, even when you don't know the outcome of participating in those experiences.

When you value what you are doing, and believe it is valuable for not only you, but can be valuable for other people, you work to share it with other people. You include other people in the learning and teaching that are a part of your experiences. My Grandma Helen did this when it came to exposing me to church and the word of God. I remember going to the church basement for adult Bible study with my grandma and sitting next to her. I could see her Bible. I could hear her reading scriptures. I was a kid in adult Bible study, where I could hear adults talking about God and talking about the scriptures. They read. They talked. They learned and I learned. In being present, I could be with my grandma. In being present, I could also, if the moment was right, ask a question to try to make sense of what I was hearing. I suppose the early exposure to an adult literacy space in some ways informed my belief that education and information should not be reserved to a specific audience because it can be used to enhance and improve the lives of any audience who is exposed to it.

Everybody in our church had a role. At some point, my mom became one of the ushers, who wore white pressed dresses and white shoes. Throughout various phases of my mom's life, she regularly attended church. Throughout every phase of my mom's life, her faith and belief in God has been undeniable and unshakable. The same can be said for much of my family on both my mom and dad's side. Members of the congregation or people who were attending church would go to the altar at the front of the church to receive prayer from preachers or other people who were deemed qualified to pray for people in church. I sat in the pews, just wanting to be closer to God and just wanting to be like the church members who were so actively engaged in doing something for other people.

Whether it was my Grandma Helen's turn to preach or she was just another member of the congregation like me, I sat in the church pews and was proud of my grandma and honored to

be related to someone who was a preacher and felt proud knowing that I knew someone who impacted people in the ways that she seemed to be impacting people who listened to her preach and who interacted with her inside and outside of church. As a kid, who was raised to give back to the community, spend time with family and to speak with confidence and take pride in how I looked and carried myself, I couldn't have a better role model than my grandma who embodied all of those things. She stressed the importance of taking pride in yourself, looking in the mirror to see how you looked and ensuring that you were speaking up when you talked. In my home, my parents taught the same lessons about taking pride in ourselves and recognizing that we should always be willing to make positive contributions and share our perspectives.

My Grandma had an exceptionally strong and deep faith in God, that I saw her exhibit at times when faith or God would be the furthest things from most people's mind. She shared the gospel and word of God and testified whether she was wearing her robe or not and whether she was in the pulpit or not. People who were around my grandmother got to experience God, religion, faith, church, her love for God and her love for people. She loved her family, friends, and the people in her life and never met a stranger. She worked, attended church, and went to Bible study and choir practice. When she had a garden plot, she spent time working in the garden and took her grandchildren with her. She helped other people, spent time with family, and listened to gospel music. She took her love for people, love for life and love for God into the pulpit with her.

I miss hopping in the car with my Grandma Helen and listening to her gospel music. She played legends like Donnie McClurkin and Kirk Franklin. We would go to tag sales, church, the Goodwill and other stores to shop. We went to New York to get our hair done at a Dominican Hair Salon and at African Braiding Shops. She would wake me up to go out and go shopping

with her on Black Friday. As a kid, I would kneel at the foot of her bed and pray at night. I went to church with her on Sundays and some days when it wasn't Sunday. I would burn her Gospel CDs. Technology serves many purposes and through the years it would continue to aid in the process of my grandma practicing her faith, including when she had a Bible scripture app or feature on her phone, where she would get her daily scriptures. Even when getting to a church to praise God wasn't an option, whether through those scriptures on her phone, the family prayer line, her acknowledgement of God, and her interactions with other people – it was always evident that she was serving God and calling others to do the same.

When she eventually got her *Facebook* page, which she got years after *Facebook* had been out, she made sure to share a message about God while pointing to herself. As she posed for the picture that would become her profile picture, she said “God did this.” My Grandma's faith, my family's faith and my own faith has existed and exists regardless of the space we are in, and that is a testament to the ways African-American literacy practices live and exist and lead to us living prosperous lives and making the kind of progress we want for our lives. In “Any Space Where Progress and Prosperity Dwells Is a Home to African-American Literacy Practices,” I will continue these discussions while also discussing the various places African American literacy practices have informed and some of the ways they have been and can be used.

### **Any Space Where Progress and Prosperity Dwells Is a Home to African-American Literacy Practices**

Carey's (116-117) discussions about how the Black Urban Theater provided Black audiences with entertainment and exposed them to art and culture that considered their experiences and identities, and catered to them, expanded my knowledge of the Black artistic and cultural traditions that Tyler Perry's films were connected to. When reading Carey's text, readers

will have a fuller and deeper understanding of how the Black Theater housed and displayed African American literacy practices and traditions. An example of this is Carey's (117) discussions of how the Black Urban Theater incorporated Black Negro spirituals into their art. Such insights about Black art and Black culture provide examples of the various places where African American literacy practices have lived and how they have impacted people's lives.

In the same ways that Carey's discussions of the Black theater appeal to me, Kynard's (123) discussions about the role Smitherman played in the Black Arts Movement (BAM) and the significant role Smitherman's work and the Black Arts Movement played in composition appeal to me. Kynard (123) explains:

Between 1969-1977, Smitherman's work unfolded how BAM could propel new writing and composing possibilities not just for artists and activists, but for students in English classrooms, thus launching an attack on the field's prior definition of what counted as writing and who counted as writers. Her scholarship can be characterized with a type of seamlessness between black students' composing rights and the Black Arts Movement. Smitherman's work defined the Black Arts Movements as the counterpart to the Black Power Movement that redefined art to be functional and relevant to the lives and daily struggles of black people.

One of the reasons I am pulled into Kynard and Carey's insights about these artistic and cultural movements and artforms, is because it is inspiring to see the ways that they, as Black women in rhetoric and composition scholarship, used their writing to detail the histories and experiences of Black people. In Kynard's (123-124) discussions of Smitherman's contributions to BAM, she sheds light on the positive and useful role Smitherman and the movement played in students' learning and experiences in writing classrooms and Black peoples' lives in society. In Kynard

sharing her goals for chapter three, “Ain’t We Got a Right to the Tree of Life?: The Black Arts Movement and Black Studies as the Untold Story of and in Composition Studies,” she explains her goals writing that:

My main interest in this chapter is to ask and look at the kind of social worlds compositionists produced in the field when they explicitly connected classrooms and writing to the Black Power Movement, Black Studies, and the Black Arts Movement. I hope to see how imagining an alternative social world would also imagine alternative language arts pedagogy and theories. (Kynard 111)

The field of rhetoric and composition can benefit from accepting Kynard’s (122-124) invitation for the field to acknowledge the impact of an influential and visionary scholar like Smitherman. Along with this, it is productive for rhetoric and composition scholars and educators to accept Kynard’s invitation (111) to envision the possibilities and promise in recognizing the powerful and rich contributions of the movements and areas of study she reflected on.

In acknowledging that Carey and Kynard’s discussions about Black art, Black history, Black people and movements are productive for the field to pay attention to both for pedagogical purposes and scholarly endeavors, it is also important to acknowledge that while their work appeals to me because of my interest in Black literacy practices, Black histories, experiences, and culture, that these topics should be of interest to everyone, because these topics only being relevant to the people within the communities they come from is a devaluation and invalidation of the topics. Carey and Kynard shed light on the role writing and literacy practices played in Black peoples’ experiences and content-creation.

Kynard and Carey invite everyone who picks up their texts to learn from the progress, struggles and successes associated with Black movements, culture, communities and the people



who contributed to them. These histories and experiences are important to be engaged with, but it is important for scholars, teachers and others to be mindful of their engagement with the work. Learning from and about Black peoples' histories and experiences is an affirmation of Black people's contributions and presence in academic spaces.

It is the work that Black and non-Black educators and students must engage in, instead of not engaging with Black people and their contributions, or under-engaging with it, which suggests they, their communities and their work do not belong. It is important to consider and be considerate of scholars' (e.g., Carey, Pritchard, Kynard) using their writing and literacy practices to offer discussions about histories such as anti-literacy laws and the ways Black people acquired their education and essential literacy skills regardless of the harsh, dehumanizing and at times deadly consequences. I believe that considering these histories can serve as a source of inspiration to better support Black teachers and students and to also remove limitations, doubts and uncertainties about what we can use our literacy practices to achieve. I believe it can also motivate and inspire people to be mindful of the kind of historical and current harms and damage that can be caused when literacy practices are used for harm, oppression and inhumane actions.

Hortense Spiller sheds light on how writing was used to create rules that legalized the dehumanization and devaluation of Black people, whose labor and output were the only things that were valued. Spillers (78-79) refers to William Goodell's study to provide information about White peoples' perspective of Black people during slavery and legal content that legalized dehumanizing and degrading Black people who they owned. Presenting Goodell's insights about Maryland legislation from 1798, Spillers shares the following content from the legislation:

In Maryland, a legislative enactment of 1798 shows so forceful a synonymy of motives between branches of comparable governance that a line between 'judicial' and

‘legislative’ functions is useless to draw: ‘In case the personal property of a ward shall consist of specific articles, such as slaves, working beasts, animals of any kind, stock, furniture, plates, books, and so forth, the Court if it shall deem it advantageous to the ward, may at any time, pass an order for the sale thereof.’ ([56] qtd. in Spillers 79)

The inhumane and dehumanizing content from the 1798 Maryland Legislative Enactment that Spillers (79) presented shows the misuse of language, and the racist and hateful perspectives expressed in legislation in America. Such content can not be detached or removed from the history of perspectives presented about African-American people in America. As writing teachers, it is our job to ensure that we encourage students to steer clear of writing that presents dehumanizing and oppressive views, and to also advocate that they do not support rhetoric that equates anybody to property and animals, or being subjected to living and working conditions where they are subjected to inhumane and oppressive practices.

When I consider the instances when someone has struggled to understand the relevance of learning about African-American people, or experiences, when people have failed to take seriously an invitation to read African-American scholarship or engage with the scholarship or scholars, my mind goes to the histories that I believe such behavior stems from. I have learned to not always let my mind make such associations, but at the same time, when oppression and anti-Blackness show themselves I do not view them as detached from the kinds of histories and legislation that Spillers (78-79) shed light on.

Even though the Maryland legislation that Spillers (78-79) wrote about is about 225 years old, the kind of hateful and racist attitudes expressed in the content are still present in the attitudes and actions of some people. Considering this, when teaching writing and writing, we should ensure that we ask questions like: How it could’ve ever been acceptable for people to use

their literacy practices to enslave people and to write legislation to legalize the idea of people being property, and what we must do to prevent this from occurring again? We have to ask: What misuses of literacy practices are occurring now and how we can teach students to not be supporters or endorsers of writing and communication that causes harm to people, devalues them or subjects them to inhumane living and working conditions? Instead, it is important that writing and communication be dedicated to ensuring that the descendants of people who were subjected to such harsh representations of themselves and who endured inhumane treatment, experience education that is free of racism and free of financial charges their ancestors labor has already paid for.

When writing teachers and rhetoric and composition scholars are invested in doing liberatory and anti-racist work that considers Black people, it results in us working towards creating a society, where education, which is essential for all of our lives, is accessible for everyone. Black people have written their own freedom into existence, and their writing is writing that every teacher and student in a writing classroom can learn from. Anytime I step foot into a writing classroom to teach, the histories and legacies that prevented some of my ancestors from doing so are attached to me, so it is important for me to ensure that, I myself am aware of those histories and legacies, and that my colleagues I work with, and students I teach are aware of those histories and legacies too. When I read Kynard's *Vernacular Insurrections*, Carey's *Rhetorical Healing* and Pritchard's *Fashioning Lives*, I expanded my knowledge of the power in African-American and Black people's literacy practices, and those are histories that it also essential for me to be aware of, and for my colleagues that I work with, and students I teach to be aware of.

I argue that there should be no resistance to Black people having access to educational spaces, where they can learn about the ways their literacy practices have historically enhanced their community and society – and where they can learn how they can use their literacy practices to enhance their lives, communities and society. Kynard (29) reflects on how “out-of-school literacies” were used by Black students to shape and define educational spaces and other spaces in society. Kynard (11) explains the importance of focusing on Black histories and experiences and the purposes it serves in the writing classroom. Kynard writes:

Thus, I am attempting to ‘resurrect’ events that have vanished from the site of our composition-literacies theories and to represent ‘flashes’ of the ‘past’ as vernacular insurrections. I treat central texts and figures as what Baker calls ‘discursive formations’ that have political and social origins that ‘can be traced and whose *regularities are discoverable*’ (emphasis mine). Such a tracing allows me to unravel ‘the locations and authorities for discourse...rather than the motives, intentions, or transcendent subjectivity of individual speakers.’ (11)

In my dissertation, I treat texts the same way Kynard (11) reflects on treating texts, and in doing so I share her hopes for the productive possibilities that can come out of engaging with texts as live-changing and life-improving tools. As a Black person who has learned in integrated settings and educational spaces, I see the value in learning within diverse settings and spaces where students and educators can learn more about cultures, histories and identities and how those things should inform their future. Still, I can not overlook that I am earning my third degree while many people have not had the opportunity to pursue their first degree and the ways that being Black decreases people’s opportunities to pursue one degree or have equitable educational experiences throughout their lifetime.

In turning to African-American rhetoric and composition scholarship and the work of African American scholars, we can learn about the way that Black people were historically oppressed, the oppression they overcame and be invested in ensuring that we are not contributing to the inequalities, injustices and disparities that are connected to, and influenced by oppressive and racist writing. Along with this, as writing teachers, we can ensure that the writing, reading and communication practices that we teach are ones that support and affirm students' and teach them how to do the same for others. We can also ensure that we as teachers learn from the ways students come into our classroom already supporting and affirming people and the ways they dedicate themselves to improving society.

It is important to value the writing and scholarship of writers who value Black people and Black history, because doing this combats, opposes and suppresses ideologies and actions that have historically equated Black people to property. As rhetoric and composition scholars and educators, it is imperative that we are aware of what Black people achieved as writers, and what they used their literacy practices to achieve in the face of oppression and racism. Doing this makes us think more deeply about what we must do to ensure that students succeed in college writing classes even when they are faced with challenges that are still rooted in racism and injustice. In the following insights from Kynard, she helps us understand what Black people achieved during times when laws legalized racism. Kynard (25) writes:

Jim Crow segregation in the United States also required the production of black lawyers, teachers, doctors, journalists—essentially, black college students—who would deconstruct the racial hierarchies that excluded them. They too, to borrow from Rodney's own words of emphasis, pushed the architects of Jim Crow's white supremacy and the U.S. apartheid structure of education 'much further than they intended to go.'(25)

Considering Kynard's (25) insights about what Black people achieved while enduring the violent, harsh and racist conditions of Jim Crow, what are we doing to "push" oppressive, inequitable and racist ideologies out of educational spaces where it should be illegal for them to dwell. Turning to the work of scholars like Kynard, Pritchard, Royster and Williams and Jackson II, who she light on the histories that have historically been overlooked, prepares teachers to ensure that students learn about how Black people achieved and progressed, even when enduring opposition and oppression that existed solely to trouble and threaten their existence. When returning to those histories for inspiration and to determine what can be gleaned from them, it is important to take the Black community's progress into account and the inhumane conditions that Black people experienced as they worked to progress.

Acknowledging Kynard's (25) discussions about how Black people endeavored into professional and academic paths that resulted in them building careers and serving their communities in America, where they experienced inequality, provides people with an inspiring example of what they can achieve in today's times when inequality and legislation aims to marginalize people and eliminate their histories. Kynard (25) helps us understand the progress and prosperity within the experiences of Black people, and how even Jim Crow could not prevent Black people from pursuing professional paths where they could change laws, educate people, heal people, and document and report their own progress, even if others worked to suppress it. Such histories make me aware of how I can and must persist.

Similarly, Carey's (116-118) discussions of the Black theater illustrates what Black people have historically achieved through arts and theater, while also providing illuminating insights about the current success and possibilities associated with the Black theater, which she

sheds light on by talking about how Tyler Perry uses the creative tradition and space to thrive.

Carey (118) explains:

Despite these contentions, the Black Urban Theater remains attractive for audiences and actors because of the freedom it affords. Much like the Black church — which developed out of African Americans’ resistance to exclusion and desire for a space to escape surveillance and engage in their own ways of worship, world making, and critical resistance – the Black Urban Theater is a counterhegemonic space that has transmitted politics, visions, and themes of nation building typical in the Black public sphere.

Carey’s (118) insights about the Black Urban Theater educate us about how Black people created spaces for themselves when they were not permitted to exist in the spaces that existed. In this day in time, it is important to consider these histories in relation to circumstances like those that Nancy Kathryn Walecki reports on in her article “Musician esperanza spalding Departs Harvard,” where she shared reflections from Spalding’s e-mail. According to Walecki’s article, spalding stated, “Sadly, what I aspire to cultivate and activate in organized learning spaces is not (yet) aligned with Harvard’s priorities” (spalding). In her article, when discussing spalding’s exit, Walecki reported that, “Her departure comes after multiple conversations with University officials about implementing her ‘Black Artist-Educators Decolonizing and Placemaking (BAEDAP)’ model, which she envisioned as either a course or initiative.”

When considering spalding’s circumstances and how the conflict she encountered when trying to do work that she envisioned as possible within an academic space resulted in her leaving, it is clear that her experience and motivations were not different than the experiences and motivations of Black people, who Carey (118) writes about developing Black churches and the Black Urban theater. When we take the histories that Carey (118) sheds light on into account

and Spalding's experience which happened in 2022, can we truly say that universities have made a real commitment to ensuring that Black people do not feel out of place in universities and educational spaces? What work do educators, scholars and universities have to do to prevent Black people, and other people from historically marginalized communities, from feeling that they have to detach from the university or become displaced from academic settings in order to do work that serves their communities? It is imperative to be committed to creating opportunities for students and supporting them and their visions about what they want to create and contribute. Turning to Carey's (118) insights about how Black people created the Black Urban Theater positions educators and students to recognize the powerful, positive and affirming spaces that can come out of creating and producing for one's community, and to work towards ensuring that people have institutional support and are not confined to corners where they have to create and produce because they have been denied the right to create and contribute in already existing spaces, which their contributions would greatly enhance and transform.

The power in African American rhetoric and composition scholarship is that it does not provide a limited view of history, but instead takes into consideration the plight and the progress of Black people in ways that better position us to always recognize that progress and prosperity are possible. Kynard writes:

After Lincoln and Wilberforce, missionary groups worked to create a system of colleges and schools for blacks with the American Missionary Association (AMA). It founded seven black colleges and thirteen common schools between 1860 and 1870 even though the founders were underfinanced by the North, attacked by the South, confused and annoyed with how former slaves insisted on worshipping, and conflicted about how and for what purposes blacks should be educated. (48)



Despite every challenge that Kynard (48) names, she goes on to provide (Kynard 48) insights about the academic success of Black people by sharing the data about the number of people who graduated. In reading the history that Kynard (48) sheds light on, it makes me wonder, what could've been achieved, if instead of Black people having to experience the lack of support and investment in their community that they have historically experienced, that the North decided to provide financial support and the South protected Black people instead of threatening them? What could've happened if Black people were allowed to maintain the beliefs and perspectives that aided in acquiring their freedom without having to face opposition? What can be achieved by any community when they are not faced with oppression, racism, and obstacles? In writing classrooms and society, how are we eliminating historical and current obstacles and barriers to make the journey to earning a degree as achievable as possible? Turning away from these histories, and or suggesting they are irrelevant, by inquiring about their relevance is a continuation of oppression.

If people both inside and outside of academic institutions are exposed to texts like Carey's *Rhetorical Healing* and Kynard's *Vernacular Insurrections*, they will learn a great deal from the Black women's discussion of the ways writing, communication and literacy practices have historically been and are currently being used by Black people to progress and prosper. Such learning can result in people deciding that they may be interested in professional and academic careers in universities or higher education. As educators and scholars, a part of our work should be generating an interest in our work, because that can afford people with opportunities to do work that considers their needs, their community's needs and provide them with an opportunity to invest time and energy in doing work in academic spaces that helps to improve society.

Along with referring to Carey and Kynard's text as educational resources, it is important to engage in dialogue about them, and to envision ways that their scholarship can be used for scholarly purposes. Considering the significance of their discussions and work and the focus that they place on both issues and matters within academic settings and in society, their texts are of value to both audiences with academic institutions and public audiences who may or may not have access to higher learning educational spaces. In Kynard and Carey's text being a part of a curriculum, I believe that other Black graduate students and educators will find themselves, their stories, histories and experiences in the text and that all readers will be better prepared for the work they should do in writing classrooms and in academic spaces. For me, Kynard and Carey's discussions of the Black community's investment in continually creating and maintaining spaces where they could experience educational, spiritual and or recreational prosperity, encourages me to be committed to remaining invested in that work.

### **Being Educators and Scholars Who Are Committed to African-American Peoples' Progress and Prosperity Is the Only Way to Create Prosperity for Everyone**

As rhetoric and composition scholars and educators, it is important that through our teaching, facilitation of classroom discussions, feedback on student's writing, responses to their questions, sharing of resources and other aspects of our teaching, that we help students achieve what they want and need to achieve as writers, communicators and literacy practitioners. At the beginning of the semester, I assign a low- stakes writing assignment, "Course Goals and Aspirations," to provide students with a chance to talk about what they want out of the course, what they hope to achieve in the course and how I can best provide support to help them reach their goals. It is important for me to learn about students' goals and aspirations because I consider their goals and aspirations in my feedback, teaching and to determine what resources I

can share to raise their awareness about support and opportunities. I also consider their goals and aspirations, and response to my inquiries about the type of support they need to determine how I can best support them as students and people.

When considering how some individuals and communities have historically lacked access to opportunities and resources that factor into success, it is important that educators invest in students and their futures. I believe we are better prepared to do this when we consider realities, experiences and histories like those that I highlighted from Carey and Kynard's work. Doing this results in us exhibiting an awareness, knowledge and understanding of how students' community's writing, literacy, and communication practices have historically been considered, perceived, responded to and engaged with, and how that has impacted their successes and failures. It is our job to support students as writers, communicators and literacy practitioners and to ensure that they will be confident in their ability to write, communicate and deliver their perspectives. I want to ensure that students are comfortable exhibiting their ways of being and doing and that they possess the skills and confidence to help create and shape spaces where other people can confidently contribute.

Kynard's *Vernacular Insurrections* and Carey's *Rhetorical Healing* provide rhetoric and composition scholars with valuable and historical knowledge of what Black people have achieved with their writing, literacy and communication. Kynard and Carey's discussions of their own teaching and pedagogical practices provide insights that other writing teachers can use to evaluate and hone their teaching and pedagogical approaches. Rhetoric and Composition scholars Carl Whithaus, Karen Lunsford and Jonathan Alexander hosted the "Wayfinding: Writing After College Symposium." The symposium series featured Adam Banks, who delivered insights that I will later engage with. Whithaus described his and his colleagues Alexander and

Lunsford's work as focusing on "How students are focused on writing at work, home, school and play and in a variety of contexts" (Whithaus).

Whithaus, Lunsford, and Alexander's focus on the "variety of contexts" that writers write for and in is important. As a teacher, I view their project's important focus as connected to the work that Kynard does when she stresses the importance of recognizing students' "out-of-school literacies." My own experiences, including my discussions of the different literacy practices I learned in my home with my parents, siblings, and family, the literacy practices I learned in church, and from watching my Grandma Helen preach, all illustrate the various places I learned and the essential learning I did out of school. All of that learning shaped me as a writer and communicator and scholars like Kinloch, Moss, and Richardson, Baker-Bell and Love through discussing the impact their family's literacy practices had on them evidence the important role family and home play in African-American people's development of their literacy practices. Along with following Kynard's guidance to affirm students' "out-of-school literacies," while recognizing the significant role those literacy practices played in Black and Brown students' societally and institutionally changing contributions, it is important to as Whithaus, Lunsford and Alexander express their study aims to do, think about the ways that students do and will use their writing beyond the classroom and the various purposes they use their writing for.

Learning literacy practices and honing those literacy practices happens in places other than writing classrooms and with people other than writing teachers. Considering this, as teachers of writing, we must be as invested in learning about the writing and communication that students do before they've entered the classroom, as we are in the writing and communication they do in the classroom. We must also be invested in the writing and communication that they are going to do when they are working, living, contributing to society, and trying to positively

impact society. Considering this, along with assigning students the “Course Goals and Aspirations” assignment that I mentioned earlier, I also assign them a “Your Rhetorics” writing activity, which was shared with me by a fellow educator, Marvin Diogenes. I adapted the writing prompt, but as was the case with the original prompt that was shared with me, the writing activity still provides writers with a chance to talk about the rhetorics they enter into an academic space with and to consider the ways they use their literacy practices, rhetorics and languages with the communities and audiences they write to, talk to and address. It also invites students to reflect on, if, and how their literacy and language practices vary in different places and how they can use the literacy and language practices they come into the classroom with, in the places they are trying to go.

In Adam Banks sharing his reflections at the Wayfinding session, he pushed people to consider what can be gleaned from students’ cultural traditions and engaging with cultural rhetorics in the writing classroom. Banks reflected on the significance of *Students Right to their Own Language*, advocated for teachers to honor all students’ languages, and think about curriculum that considered traditions like Black, Queer and Indigenous traditions. I excitedly listened to Banks and felt affirmed by his insights because they were in alignment with work I do and hope to continue to do.

Banks posed the question “What can we learn from people who wouldn’t have been considered in academic discourse?” and expressed his interest in learning from those examples (Banks). Banks’ expressed interest in learning from the voices of people who have historically not been listened to, like Jackson II’s (118) advocacy for thinking about which rhetorical legacies don’t get to be left out, evidence the value of my work and need for my work. As writing professors and teachers of rhetoric and composition, English, literature, communication or other

related courses, it is important to ensure that our teaching, curriculum, and texts acknowledge histories and legacies that have not been focused on and that scholars like Banks, Jackson II, and Royster and Williams recognize as too often absent and overlooked. Like Pough (307), Banks acknowledged the importance and value of academic discourse, but also reflected on how academic discourse has limitations and is not enough all on its own. In Pough's work, she (307) urges readers to think about this when writing:

I believe that showing students the nuances of academic writing is important, and that making them stronger writers for their lives outside of the university is important also. It is valuable work, and I am proud to be in a group that takes on this task. Love it. Value it. And I think we need to continue doing it. Having said that, however, teaching writing is not the be all and end all. It isn't the only thing we should be doing with students in the classroom. And I am not the first Chair to suggest that we need to bring other issues to bear in the classroom.

Along with taking Pough's (307) insights about what the classroom should be and needs to be into consideration, it is useful to consider Bank's insights about teaching writing. Reflecting on productive ways to approach writing instruction, Banks expressed:

The study of rhetoric has been about what the exemplary text and exemplar moment can teach us...I don't argue against that, I argue (about what) exemplar(s) can do in our work. What can we learn from people who wouldn't have been considered in an academic discourse? I'm interested in looking (at) every bit (of) what the examples have to teach us. (Banks)

For me, Kynard's *Vernacular Insurrections*, Carey's *Rhetorical Healing* and Pritchard's *Fashioning Lives* are the kinds of exemplary sources of knowledge that Banks, like me,

acknowledges the power and usefulness of. As Black women in rhetoric and composition, Kynard and Carey are a part of a culture and community of Black women producing scholarship (e.g., Logan, Pough, Richardson, Baker-Bell, Perryman-Clark) that displays and demonstrates their ability to write histories that would otherwise go unwritten. The aforementioned scholarship by Black women evidences how they used their own literacy practices to call attention to how Black people have used their writing, literacy practices and communication to emerge from challenging and turbulent times and how they've also used their skills and abilities to enhance their circumstances and conditions. Acknowledging this, I view these texts as essential texts to refer to as educational resources that can and should inform writing teachers' work and scholarship.

An example of a way that *Vernacular Insurrections* can be used is by referring to Kynard's discussions where she (161) sheds light on how Black and Puerto Rican student-activists and change-makers, whose efforts with SEEK (Search for Education, Elevation and Knowledge) increased the amount of Black and Puerto Rican students in CUNY's senior colleges. Kynard writes:

In 1966, black and Puerto Rican activists, including Shirley Chisholm, Percy Sutton, Charles Rangel, Basil Paterson, and Anthony Travia, pressed the state legislature to pass a bill that would bring in more than just its then one hundred black and Puerto Rican students at CUNY. Chisholm herself, in her 1970 autobiography *Unbought and Unbossed*, calls the bill one of the highlights of her career as the first African American congresswoman. (161)

Kynard's (162-163) discussions of the Black and Puerto Rican students being committed to improving their educational experiences and the ways their work created opportunities for other

people to receive education should serve as a blueprint. As a writing teacher, I could identify various purposes that Kynard's (161) insights about SEEK, and the student-activists' work could serve. Any writing teacher, who is teaching in any times should be invested in helping students recognize the ways that they can use their writing and literacy practices to focus on matters, topics and issues that are important to them. Those teachers can assign Kynard's text to students to inspire and motivate them to understand that their use of their literacy practices and writing can have a positive and long-lasting impact. In assigning aspects of Kynard's texts, students will also be broadening and deepening their understanding of African-American history, African-American people's experiences, including histories like those that Kynard teaches (35) about when reflecting on how African-American people, who were formerly enslaved, built the educational system in America.

Kynard's (161) discussions of the student activist-work help to illustrate how underrepresented students' literacy practices helped them represent and present their views and perspectives about the change they believed was necessary. I view a reading and discussion of those insights as something that would positively influence and inform students' understanding of the power they have to make social change. While I offered some insights about the ways writing teachers can implement Kynard's discussions about student-activism into the writing classroom, it is important to also highlight the ways Kynard (131) informs us about the significant contributions Smitherman made to help transcend writing classrooms into spaces where teachers and students can do the kind of work I am advocating for.

As previously acknowledged in my earlier discussions of Kynard's insights about the Black Arts Movement, much can be gleaned from Kynard's discussions of BAM. Kynard's discussions of Smitherman, her legacy and contributions connect readers, who are



scholar-activist with a role model, whose career and scholarship provide an example of what it means to be a scholar and teachers who continues to focus on community and society and support efforts, initiatives and movements outside of the university. Kynard writes:

Smitherman should, thus, be regarded as both a literal and figurative marker of BAM's transgressive definitions of language and writing for the 1960s and the precursor for what the field of composition studies might now call transcultural rhetorics, alternative discourse, mixed forms of border crossing, ethnic or cultural rhetorics. BAM made all this possible for composition studies, not the depoliticized, postmodernist trek to semantic fragmentation that many scholars invoke. (131)

Acknowledging Kynard's (131) discussions of Smitherman's significant contributions to the Black Arts Movement and composition studies, better positions people to acknowledge her remarks about the undeniable ways that Black Arts Movement influenced the field of rhetoric and composition. My discussions of Kynard's work evidence that it is an example of the ways rhetoric and composition scholars can write, share and archive the field's history in ways that Royster and Williams call scholars in the field to do. Kynard offers an accurate historical account of how Smitherman and the Black Arts Movements shaped the field of rhetoric and composition.

Similarly, Pough's and Logan's discussion of Black women in the 19th century offer a repertoire of knowledge about the ways Black women have used their writing, oratory and literacy practice to call attention to injustices and ills and advocate for the kind of changes that must occur for Black people and Black women to have rights and access to opportunities. Such work provides the field with more than enough texts to do the kind of Afrocentric focused teaching that Perryman-Clark and Craig speak of as essential for the writing classroom. It also equips both Black and non-Black teachers and educators with the materials and content they

need to do the work that Love writes about as imperative for improving Black students' educational experiences. Love (121) writes:

Abolitionist teaching is not sustainable without joy. Dark students have to enter the classroom knowing that their full selves are celebrated. Not just their culture, language, sexuality, or current circumstances, but their entire selves, past, present, and future. Their ancestors, their family members, their friends, their religion, their music, their dress, their language, the ways they express their gender and sexuality, and their communities must all be embraced and loved. (120-121)

While Kynard and Carey's work covers many of the categories that Love (121) identifies, my spotlighting of their scholarship and discussions of the various ways their scholarship can be used by educators, scholars and people invested in making positive changes in academic spaces, and or in society, and my analysis of Pritchard's *Fashioning Lives*, provides readers with a text that results in ensuring that peoples' "...full selves are celebrated," in ways Love advocates (120-121) for.

In conversations I've had with people, they have expressed a commonly asked question: "Why didn't we learn more about Black history and why are Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X and Harriet Tubman the Black figures we typically learn about?" That is my articulation of a question that has been asked by various people, who express an interest in increasing their knowledge and society's knowledge of Black historical figures and the significant contributions Black people have made. In my dissertation, my focus on Kynard, Carey and Pritchard answers the question, by spotlighting them and their work and discussing what can be gleaned from Black rhetoric and composition scholars and their scholarship, and how they can guide us in our efforts

to create equitable, just spaces where oppression, racism and hate do not compromise peoples' ability to progress and prosper.

I greatly value Kynard, Carey, and Pritchard for shedding light on histories and experiences, and in doing so solidifying their place in history. So, my work is an answer to the question asked by many people who have wondered about the other significant historical figures and the significance of other contributions made by Black people. My dissertation is an assurance that my Black womaness does not trump my Black lesbianness, and confirmation that one of my identities does not have to be comfortably tucked away while the other identities comfortably come out of the shadows. I am in conversation with scholars who help all of my identities be present, and I spotlight these scholars and their scholarship, so we can all learn from them and be committed to ensuring that other people with these identities, and other identities, which have historically been excluded can be present and succeed. Prior to presenting Chapter 4, where I will center and focus on my identities as a member of the Black LGBTQ community and draw on Pritchard's text, I will talk about the obligation of doing this work, and the opportunity that comes with that obligation.

### **The Obligation and Opportunity**

If you have the ability to do something and it needs to be done, are you required to do it? What does it mean to balance a career that is full of obligations and opportunities to provide commentary and solutions about current day circumstances and matters? What does it mean to work to keep alive the legacies of Black writers and orators like those that Logan sheds light on in *Liberating Literacies* or that Cornel West longs for in *Black Prophetic Fire*. As people, are we required to write and communicate about what we observe and how it has impacted us and the impact we want to have on our community and society? Are we obligated to reflect on our

experiences in our places of employment, in our churches, our parks, at beaches, in our communal and private spaces? When we do, what opportunities does this provide? Which opportunities may be denied when we share our experiences? At times, I have been asked to participate in research studies, and in a recent one, it was noted that there was “no risk” for me doing so.

Which writers are obligated to write about improving conditions and circumstances in society for not only themselves and their community, but the entire world? Which writers have to use their writing to do that work, while also encouraging the rest of the world to see that they should similarly use their writing and literacy practices to improve society, and enhance their own and other people’s experiences? Identify those writers, who have fulfilled this obligation, even when the opportunity has not presented itself. I have. Carey tells us about the way Black women writers have. Kynard tells us about the way Black and Brown students have. In chapter four, I will shed light on how Pritchard teaches us about how Black LGBTQ people have. The ability to do this type of writing does not only exist within Black people. It exists within everyone, and is exhibited by anyone who has done it, but within my dissertation, I am focused on the legacy of Black people’s writing and literacy practices.

How do educators prepare students to tap into their desire to write? How do writing teachers will students to write, when reality is composed in a way where great Black women like Ida B. Wells have used her writing and communication to oppose lynching (Pough, Threadcraft, Logan) but it is still necessary for other Black women writers to address similar atrocities? What would we do without Nikole Hannah Jones? I ask even though I am so busy writing this dissertation and trying to find my next academic home that I have not had the chance to read the copy of *The 1619 Project* that my mother got for me for Christmas in 2021 during our trip to

Northshire Bookstore in Vermont, Manchester. My mother has always and will always nurture the writer and reader in me. As a result, I nurture the writer and reader in my students. In your reading of my work, how will you be better about nurturing the writer and reader in your students?

Recently, I read Jessica Reed's "A Love Note to Black Educators: My Trip to New Orleans," a piece, in which, Reed reflects on her experiences in New Orleans, and teaches readers about the power and possibilities associated with learning from Black women educators and community-engaged learning and community education and the ways that those things make learning and thriving possible for Black students, Black people and the Black community. Reed's writing exhibits how she drew on her experiences to shed light on what can be learned from realities where Black people have had to create a better way for themselves because of the barriers and limitations the Black community has historically been presented with.

How can a writer move beyond the fixed racism, the fixed classism, and the fixed oppression that are not the result of their obsessions to oppress people, but that they have to become obsessed with combatting in order to improve conditions and circumstances for themselves and other people? What work does this require of us as educators? At some point, are our pens and keyboards positioning us to continually engage in a conversation that we already know the outcome of? Should we instead be withdrawing from that conversation and composing based on what history has told us about the likelihood of our writing, language, communication and literacy practices being received by audiences who refuse to read?

What do we need to do as writers, readers, and communicators to ensure that people hear and understand what we have historically had to do as people to improve our lives and society? I have been in rooms with people whose questions and attitudes express that I should read for

them, and they should take notes about all the reading I've done without being willing to pick up a book. Such attitudes and practices are continuations of my labor being something that can be lived on, but that my life is not worth reading about.

In this dissertation, I am pushing readers to read and do something different before they return to me with questions or more obligations for me, and they again fail to embrace the opportunity to learn from another Black queer writer. As earlier expressed, like Baldwin I wonder, "How much time do you want for your progress?" In writing, I have offered you encouragement to learn from the ways African-American people have been committed to making progress and prospering even in the face of what Love (22) refers to as "White rage." Explaining White rage, Love (22) writes:

America's first public schools, often called grammar schools, were only for White, wealthy males. And over time, when any group outside of the established norm fought for the right to educate their children, particularly by the way of their culture and/or language, they were met with White rage.

I don't want to have to invest my energy in countering and combatting what Love (23) refers to as "white rage," but white supremacy won't stop raging unless we remain invested in doing work rooted in what bell hooks refers to as a "love ethic" (hooks qtd. in Pritchard 38), which Pritchard identifies as a concept that is central to their work in *Fashioning Lives*, where they discuss the power of "restorative literacies."

Explaining their use of love, Pritchard writes:

Emerging from my analysis of in-depth interviews, I examine love as a force for justice and other forms of sociopolitical change that animates my research participants' employ of literacies to create a life on their own terms; a litany of small acts of liberation for self

and community that contribute to the big acts of social transformation on a myriad of fronts. (38)

Love, like joy, is essential for acknowledging how African-American literacy practices can be used to create progress and prosperity regardless of doubts about the possibility of achieving those things. I briefly tuned into a *CNN* report about the devastation in Buffalo where Black people were targeted and killed by a lone gunman, who decided that their Blackness was a reason to eliminate them. One of the speakers on the *CNN* news segment talked about something called “replacement theory” and described it as a belief that people migrating to the United States or other non-white communities were here to replace White people. Rhetoric like “replacement theory” is untrue, hateful, problematic and contributes to inhumane and racist people killing Black people and other historically oppressed people.

What do writing teachers need to do in writing classrooms to ensure that students do not endorse, promote and or present hateful, racist and inaccurate information in the writing classroom. What do educators and scholars need to do to increase peoples’ awareness of the harm that has historically been caused by people using their literacy practices to espouse harmful views? Reading Kynard’s (166) discussions of how James Meredith, a Black man was inhumanely treated and endured racism when he tried to earn his education at the University of Mississippi provided writing teachers with a resource that can be used to inform students about the legacy of racism and anti-Blackness and the ways it has existed in academic and institutional spaces. Kynard writes, “Once, when Meredith’s plane flew across Mississippi airspace, a decoy plane was used in fear that the Mississippi National Guard would try to shoot down Meredith’s plane” (167).

Nobody should ever encounter oppression, racism, and acts of violence, and it should be illegal for people to commit acts and present thoughts that cause people to experience such ills in public spaces, including spaces, where they are pursuing their professional and academic goals. People definitely should not experience institutions and agencies carrying out atrocities and injustices that are a part of an inhumane, oppressive, and hateful legacy, which Kynard's (166-167) insights about James Meredith's experiences educates readers on. Having conversations with students about these histories could potentially discourage them from being the creators of unjust, inequitable, racist and life-threatening futures, which no human being should have to experience, and the Black community has historically endured and is still enduring.

No human being should have to endure the reality of learning about the horrific and nightmarish act of terrorism committed in Texas, where a gunman killed children at school. Violence is always unnecessary, and it should never occur and should certainly not be a tradition. In America, we must be invested in ensuring that we can live in a safe, peaceful, equitable and just society where violence does not occur. We can live without tragedy. It is possible. The public, family, friends, and loved ones of victims, students, and teachers, and communities are saddened and devastated about gun violence.

The unnecessary violence and tragedy, heartbreak and loss of life that tragedy causes has resulted in people living in a constant state of fear. There is fear about going to school to learn. There is fear about going to grocery stores to shop. There is fear about driving to work and being pulled over for a traffic stop. There is fear about going to church and praising God. There is fear about watching a movie at a movie theater. People should not have to live with any of these fears, but I know I do. I personally know how gun-violence negatively impacts people and have



experienced losing a family member to a self-inflicted gun-related death, and like every living human-being should be, I am tired of seeing people die premature deaths because of violence. I am also tired of knowing that throughout peoples' lives, they are being denied the opportunity to live a safe, peaceful and just life.

People terrorizing other people had to learn about terrorizing people from somewhere. The kind of terror that Kynard (166-167) writes about Meredith experiencing should never occur. Considering this, it is important that we ensure that writing classrooms are places where students learn that we can have a safe, just, equitable and peaceful society. It is important that writing classrooms are places where students can think about how they contribute to creating a safe, peaceful, just and equitable society. It is important that students and teachers in writing classrooms focus on the way their writing, reading, speaking and other communication skills play in developing a safe, just, peaceful, and equitable society.

It is important that the writing classroom is a place where students learn that they can write legislation that harshly penalizes those harmful and hateful actions. Writing classrooms should be blueprints and havens where everybody can safely learn and prepare for prosperous lives and focus on how they can use their writing and literacy practices to progress and help other people progress. We need to support and affirm educators, scholars and students, who are making space for people who have never been welcome in spaces. There should be consequences and repercussions for people who engage in harmful, violent, and racist actions and writing and thinking that makes people feel unwelcome and unsafe and devalues them and depreciates their quality of life.

While attending the NCTE Conference, I listened to George Johnson talk about the book ban placed on his text *All Boys Aren't Blue*. Why didn't the people who invested in banning

Johnson's work invest time and energy in banning hate speech, homophobia, racism, anti-immigration, islamophobia, anti-semitism, anti-Blackness, anti-Asian racism, oppression and violence against historically marginalized groups and violence and hatred in general? In 2022, United States President Joe Biden had to stand at a podium and instead of announcing that a solution for world hunger was found, or letting people know that student loan debt had been eliminated, he had to address the ways that White Supremacy continues to kill people.

In 2022, like in other years, as a nation, America stood asking questions about what to do when faced with holding individuals and institutions accountable for racism, anti-semitism, sexism, and other issues that should not exist? It is 2023 and society is still not free of violence, racism and hateful mindsets and actions. Can anyone really be free when anyone is living in fear and when any human being is being treated inhumanely? President Joe Biden has demanded that we rid society of White Supremacy in a country where other presidents have owned slaves and some people are more invested in continuing on the harmful legacies and traditions associated with slavery, than they are in joining Biden in eliminating White Supremacy. Along with using his presidential podium, Biden uses social media to combat racist and hateful attitudes. Biden tweeted:

I just want to make a few things clear: The Holocaust happened. Hitler was a demonic figure. And instead of giving it a platform, our political leaders should be calling out and rejecting antisemitism wherever it hides. Silence is complicity. (Biden, Twitter, qtd. in Brown).

Biden's remarks evidence that we are living in a cultural and societal moment that is not dissimilar to past cultural and societal moments, where people must be reminded that histories and atrocities like slavery, the holocaust and the hatred, oppression, violence and struggles

stemming from those atrocities should never be refuted, denied or dismissed. Biden's remarks evidence him using his literacy practices to oppose and speak out against antisemitism. Along with it being important to publicly speak out and challenge oppression and hate, Carey's (6;16-17) insights about Black women's perspectives about the use of writing as a solution illustrate how people can personally progress and prosper despite what's happening in society, and despite how they are treated and perceived.

African American rhetoric and composition scholarship is a tool and a resource for teachers and students working through using their writing and literacy practices in a society where we are unfortunately still dealing with people denigrating and devaluing communities. Through drawing on hooks' work, Carey (17) offers some valuable insights about the powerful role literacy practices and texts can play in healing, which is necessary for anyone dealing with the hurt, pain, and devastation that is associated with inhumane acts. Carey writes:

Teaching individuals the ways of knowing, being, and acting that enable them to reread their pasts, revise their sense of self, and resume progress towards their life goals becomes a way to help ensure individual and community survival. Ideally, reeducation becomes a learning cure. (6)

As teachers of writing, we must engage students in learning, research, writing, reading and classroom activities where we are encouraging them to use the kinds of learning cures that Carey (6) reflected on while also creating and maintaining classrooms spaces that acknowledge peoples' identities, histories, and current state of being and experiences. Considering the importance of teachers' teaching students to do this for one another, they must also ensure that they are calling their own histories, experiences and identities into the classroom. For me, as a

Black woman and member of the LGBTQ community the texts I focus on in my dissertation better position and prepare me to do this work.

When teachers engage with Pritchard, Kynard and Carey's scholarship, they are engaging with scholarship that makes it impossible to overlook, and or deny Black history and literacy practices, and what Black people have achieved with their literacy practices. In acknowledging Black histories and experiences, we are doing the essential work of acknowledging all histories and experiences, and considering how we can apply what we learn to our current day experiences. Carey, Kynard, and Pritchard's texts evidence how scholarship can archive history and experiences, so people have sources that shed light on experiences, conditions, and circumstances that communities have endured and excelled through.

It is imperative that discussions about Black invention, experiences, ingenuity and ambitions for progress and prosperity are read, watched, discussed and supported. We have to work towards ensuring that it is possible for Black students and all students to experience opportunities to exhibit their ability to be inventive and to see the ways their writing and literacy practices can be used to create the resources and experiences they want and need, and the opportunities that they want to pursue. As a society, and as writing teachers working with students, we have to ensure that we aren't making room for anything that threatens or jeopardizes peoples' educational experiences, daily lives, well-being and continual commitment to being and that we work to ensure that our work with each other and students prepares all of us to create spaces that will support people's progress and to address any thinking, writing or action that threatens or limits that progress.

In terms of considering what educators and teachers of writing can do to ensure that students' identities and experiences are considered and not treated in a way that dismisses what

can be learned from their identities and histories, which scholars like Adam Banks reflected on the value for at the Wayfinding symposium, I turn to Carey's (150-151) discussions of Jacqueline Rhodes and Jonathan Alexander's work about the negative consequences of "flattening." Carey (150) writes:

Recently scholars such as Jonathan Alexander and Jacqueline Rhodes have challenged writing teachers to disrupt the need for 'narrative coherence,' or a tendency to privilege a universal human experience rather than exploring difference within multicultural classrooms, by showing how these appeals to collective comfort produce a form of 'flattening' that erases the specificities of marginalized or under-studied populations.

Carey's (150) spotlighting of Alexander and Rhode's points show how you should acknowledge and value the cultures and identities of every student in the classroom. Diversity, equity and inclusion can not just be talked about. Such work requires people to be aware of, focus on and examine histories, cultures, communities and experiences in ways that Royster and Williams in "History in the Spaces Left" Robert J. Connors in Octalog I, Jackson II in Octalog II and Richardson in "Dukin it out With the Powers to Be" call the field to do. In doing this work, it is important to pay attention to discussions like Kynard's discussions in *Vernacular Insurrections* which provide a history of what Black people have used their literacy practices to create and the obstacles and challenges they've had to overcome to create. I agree with Connors perspective that:

Composition history cannot exist in a narrow valley of 'history of ideas,' because all of our disciplinary ideas have been based in people's struggle for a better life. Purely philosophical history is mandarin history. Meaningful historical writing must teach us

what people in the past have wanted from literacy so that we may come to understand what *we* want. (7)

Along with considering Connors' (7) insightful points about what we want and need from literacy, it is important to pay attention to the reality checks Kynard, Carey, Pritchard and other African-American rhetoric and composition scholars and Black scholars offer to institutions. For me, these texts help to reinforce my thinking that educational and academic spaces should be ones that everyone should have access to, and that the Black community still having limited access to educational opportunity is a continuation of the harmful, racist and inequitable injustices that the community has historically endured. Being enlightened by these texts is not enough, because enlightenment on its own will not result in progress, and prosperity for Black people, who were denied the right to receive education and to have equitable educational experiences.

There has to be a consistent commitment to ensuring that Black people can access education and that the community continues to educate themselves on what must happen in order for Black people to progress and prosper. Carey, Kynard, Logan, Royster and Williams and Pritchard's work should not be skimmed. Readers should not solely rely on my reporting on the texts. African-American rhetoric and composition tells us how Black people have historically used their literacy practices and what their writing, communication and literacy practices have made possible for them both within institutions and outside of them. Like Logan's discussions in *Liberating Languages*, there are non-rhetoric and composition texts like Bettina Love's *We Want to Do More than Survive* that illustrate how Black scholarship provides illuminating insights about Black people's abilities as orators and writers.

I spotlight this work to share examples of texts and discussions that can be focused on in the writing classroom. Along with providing examples of what Black people achieved for themselves, it is also important to shed light on what can be achieved with the support of non-Black people and the power in coalitional work that involves people from a diverse range of races, ethnicities, socioeconomic statuses, educational backgrounds, sexual orientations, gender identities and other identity-markers. In Love's discussions (95-97) of Beacon Hill, she offers an example of the power in coalitional work. Love (95-97) describes Beacon Hill as a kind of integrated utopia that focused on improving conditions and opportunities for Black people, Black students and Black women.

Writing (Love 95) about Beacon Hill and The African Meeting House, which she said was built in 1806, Love (96) identifies several prolific and influential figures that spent time in the home in the Beacon Hill area. While I find all of Love's (93-98) discussions about Beacon Hill to be fascinating and illuminating and believe that rhetoric and composition scholars and teachers could create insightful lesson plans from her discussions of the space, I want to highlight and engage with Love's discussions of the orators and writers (96), who spent time on Beacon Hill and the visionary work that was done in the integrated space, because I think those are the most useful for the teaching of writing. A discussion that I am interested in is one that focuses on, compares, and recognizes the viable solutions that exist in Kynard's (183) discussions about the ways Black educators and the Black community supported Black education and Love's (96-97) discussions about the inter-racial progress made on Beacon Hill. Kynard (183) writes:

What is more tragic here is the complete dismissal of the rhetorical and ideological foundation of a people straight out of slavery to create and sustain a unified vision of

schooling for their own youth at a time when public education was not the right or even desire of most Americans. The very history of African Americans cannot be adequately understood without understanding the lives of teachers who ‘symbolized, articulated, and furthered’ these black aspirations.

In Kynard’s (183) insights, we learn about the rich and longstanding legacy of Black educators and communities’<sup>14</sup> making education possible for Black people who could not rely on the systematic and institutional support that in modern day is still too often lacking, which a text like Love’s *We Want To Do More Than Survive* shows. In turning to Love’s text, we are able to see some of the coalitional work between Black and White people, who worked to combat ills and oppression by being financially and intellectually invested in Black education and progress. In discussing Beacon Hill, Love writes:

Funds needed to build the Meeting House were donated by Blacks and Whites. Frederick Douglass, William Lloyd Garrison, and Maria Stewart – who in 1833 became the first American-born woman to speak to a mixed-gender and mixed-race audience and who lived on Beacon Hill with her husband – all delivered their historic speeches at the African Meeting House. Born in 1803, nineteen years before Harriet Tubman and six years after Sojourner Truth, Stewart was a pioneer of Black feminism. She published her writings in the *Liberator*, which, like her speeches, called for women’s rights, committing one’s self to a life of activism and creating Black-owned businesses. (96)

From Kynard’s (183) insights, we learn of what Black people do when they do what Richardson refers to “makin’ a way outta no way.” In turning to Love’s (96) insights, we are able to learn about what she refers to as doing the work of being a co-conspirator, and being actively engaged

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<sup>14</sup> Refer to Jess Reed’s “A Love Note to Black Educators: My Trip to New Orleans” for discussions of the ways that the support of Black community members in New Orleans is creating educational experiences and opportunities for Black people to thrive.



in ensuring that the realities people envision for their lives are achieved. The success of people within communities, including writing classrooms is contingent upon how much support is provided for that success. We see this in turning to Kynard's (23) discussions of the supportive and affirming community she provided for her students, including Raynard to do work that was representative of their rhetorical abilities and experiences. Kynard writes:

It took an hour of class for Raynard to read this story aloud and it made everyone, including me, laugh to tears. Raynard's essay was probably one of the best essays I have ever read. Each shift in or 'alternative' approach for register, language, sequencing, and tone was not only appropriate but *rhetorically required*. Now that's some serious skill! And, if you do not believe me, I encourage you to write a fifteen-page essay, no spaces, and make the marker of its sole success the full attentiveness of twenty fifteen-year-old HipHoppas in the Boogie Down Bronx. (23)

We are also able to see the fruitful outcomes of affirmation and support in Love's insights about Black women writers like Phillis Wheatley, residing on Beacon Hill, where people were invested in the rights and equality of Black people and women. Love writes:

Beacon Hill is an example of what people can do when the ideas of abolitionism turn into a way of life; a way of seeing the world that does not normalize hate, White rage, and the inferior conditions for dark people; a way of life that relentlessly pursues and protects Blacks thriving. Beacon Hill also demonstrates that you do not have to be Black to be an abolitionist. (97)

Like Love (97), I want people to acknowledge that they do not have to be Black to do the work I am inviting scholars, educators and others interested in learning about Black peoples' histories, experiences and literacy practices to do. Are we still capable of creating a community like

Beacon Hill, which means that Black writers and voices and non-Black writers and voices are focused on, listened to, learned from and working together to make positive change? Are we still capable of creating a writing classroom like the one Kynard (23) reflects on Raynard thriving in and a community like Beacon Hill, where Love (97) reflects on people being dedicated to creating better educational experiences for Black children? Can we all be as actively invested in fighting for Black peoples' rights and women's rights as these communities have been in fighting to improve humanity?

How can Beacon Hill be a model for rhetoric and composition scholars invested in recognizing that a better state of being for all of humanity requires improving circumstances for Black people and members of humanity who are treated inhumanely and subjected to having limited rights? How do Love's (96-97) discussions about the great orators and writers who were focused on Black liberation and the other great contributors who spent time in the Beacon Hill community illustrate the ways that we can collectively focus on and work towards progress and prosperity? How can we turn to texts like Kynard's and Carey's to help writing classrooms become the powerful and essential space that Love wrote about Beacon Hill being?

### **There is No Better Time Than Now: Engaging with Kynard's *Vernacular Insurrection* and Carey's *Rhetorical Healing* in the Current Moment and Climate**

In today's society, it is imperative that we contribute to creating Black joy as what Love refers (22;25-26) to as "white rage" continues to rage on. In chapter three, I spotlighted and discussed insights within Kynard's *Vernacular Insurrection* and Carey's *Rhetorical Healing* that shed light on the histories of Black people's literacy practices and present their discussions on the different ways Black people have used their literacy practices. I also presented their perspectives about their experiences as Black women teaching writing. While I encourage

readers to engage with these texts on their own, by reading my dissertation, readers experienced the ways I put these texts in conversation with one another, and the ways that I believe Carey, Kynard and other African-American and Black scholars' work could be used for pedagogical purposes in the writing classroom and in their scholarship. In concluding this chapter, I discuss some of the essential aspects in Kynard and Carey's texts that I want to spotlight. Some of the points include recognizing the struggles and obstacles African-American and Black people endured in their educational endeavors, and envisioning the work educators, communities and institutions have to do to ensure that Black people can progress and prosper without the struggles and racism that their ancestors endured. I will also provide guidance and direction for rhetoric and composition scholars and educators and reflect on the ways the scholarship inspires me.

In Kynard's (166-167) discussions of the inhumane response to James Meredith attempting to attend the University of Mississippi (Ole Miss), she illustrates how White people have abused institutional and state power to keep Black people from accessing spaces, resources and opportunities. It is important to be aware of Kynard's (166-167) discussions of what Meredith endured during his pursuits of an education, because it better informs people about what Black people have historically endured, when trying to access the educational opportunities and spaces they created. With writing teachers having an awareness of these kinds of histories and realities, which I discussed earlier in the chapter, they can better tend to the needs of students who may still be negatively impacted by the histories and legacies that are still pervasive and ensure that students' have equitable and prosperous experiences in writing classrooms.

As a Black queer scholar, being aware of Meredith's experiences lets me know that no form of racism, oppression, homophobia, sexism, elitism, classism or anything else I encounter and endure can run me out of the institutions that my ancestors ran into to make progress for the

Black community and society. As rhetoric and composition scholar and educator, I encourage writing teachers to be cognizant of how important it is for all students to be aware of the ways their communities have persisted past pain and pushed into progress, so that they can continue to persist and push on in the face of times that contain the highs and lows of the 60s and 70, while also presenting the challenges and realities that come with what Kimberlé Crenshaw refers to as the “twin pandemics.”

At a time when some of humankind is abusing pens to disempower human beings, it is important for writing teachers, scholars, students and educators to turn to Black rhetoric and composition scholarship which shows how even in these times, writing can be used to empower. Referring to African-American scholarship offers examples of the ways people have successfully written to address oppression and written the realities they wanted into existence. As earlier discussed, Perryman-Clark and Craig (13) shed light on how Adam Banks and NCTE President Ernest Morell wrote a letter to speak out against the inhumane treatment Ersula Ore experienced at her university where she was assaulted by police for trying to cross the street while Black.

Black people do not silently endure the kind of painful, unnecessary, and threatening actions that Ore experienced, or the experiences that Maraj, in *Black or Right* reflects on himself and other Black people enduring. Banks and Morell’s writing to advocate for Ore and address the violence she endured, and Maraj’s (109) discussions<sup>15</sup> about the ways students participated in a sit-in to make their voices heard to make institutional change evidence how Black people and people from historically marginalized communities use their literacy practices to combat the oppression and inequality that they and their community experience. In these pursuits, their

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<sup>15</sup>On the night of April 6, 2016, a coalition of student groups, collected around a mission to ‘#Reclaim [MwSU],’ engage in a sit-in protest of university administration, emphasizing their silencing, the corporatizing of the university’s food and energy investments, and MwSU’s support for anti-Palestinian companies as issues in need of attention” (Maraj 109).

writing, communication and literacy practices are essential to making the positive change they want to make and to the likelihood of them being able to progress and prosper in spaces.

The Black community also has historically communicated that they are never going to just be present and endure and tolerate injustices that makes spaces of benefit, like schools, jobs and or other spaces that are essential for their lives inaccessible and unappealing, but that they are going to present their perspectives to contribute to improving spaces, conditions and experiences for themselves, other people and society. This is evidenced in Kynard's (75) discussions of Ernece Kelly's contributions at the NCTE conference where Kelly shed light on issues within the field and within society. Kynard (76) writes:

After the conference, Kelly continued working with her students on a newspaper called *Black Libre* and a conference with the association of Afro-American Educators. It is clear that black student-composers and black teacher-compositionist were engaging a praxis that fell outside of what white compositionist and CCCC were making central in the field at the time.

If the field of rhetoric and composition views the field as being capable of doing the kind of valuable and essential work with students that Pough (308) in "It's Bigger than Comp/Rhet," encourages them to do, they would be doing work that is in alignment with the work that Kynard (76) celebrates Kelly, and other Black teachers and Black students for doing. Instead, it seems to be that people who belong to communities who are constantly impacted by oppression are doing the majority of the work to fight that oppression. How can Kynard's (76) discussions of Kelly's contributions and legacies be the focus of rhetoric and composition education for graduate students and for the field? How can those discussions be used as a guide to ensure that Kelly's focus on societal justice and use of writing for societal change is work that Kynard (76) reflects

on being work that is classified as work that is “central to the field?” What are ways that the field is actively engaged in society in ways that evidence our commitment to doing the societally focused and community-engaged work that Kelly viewed as a part of her career?

When working to answer these questions, it is productive to pay attention to, and work to respond to Pough’s (305-306) calls when she writes:

It has made me a little weary of our own profession when I see us digging in our heels and demanding that everything have something to do with writing or the first-year writing course as if that is the only thing we do. It’s bigger than comp/rhet. We are bigger than comp/rhet. Hell, comp/rhet is bigger than we are allowing it to be when we limit it the way we have a tendency to do. I’m not saying that we are the center of the universe or anything like that. But there might just be a reason why our logo is the sun...And we own writing...

Along with agreeing with Pough’s (306) points, about how the work we do in the field is bigger than comp/rhet, I believe it is important for the field to view the ways that rhetoric and composition is a part of the work everyone does and the living that everyone makes. In recognizing that, we have to see ourselves as contributing to the continuance of writing and rhetoric in different spaces and ensuring that people’s writing can get them into any space they want and need to be in.

In some of Carey’s (15-16) discussions in “Are You Sure You Want to Be Well? Healing and the Situation of Black Women’s Pain,” she draws on bell hooks and Toni Cade Bambara’s work which includes their encouragement for Black women to remain committed to acts and practices that enhance their lives and circumstances. Carey (15-16) also calls attention to the ways that Black women should be invested in creating the lives they want and need for

themselves regardless of what society has or does not have in store for them. Through drawing on Bambara and hooks, Carey (15) writes about how Bambara urges people to rely on themselves and what can be done from within to change what is going on outside of themselves.

Carey (15-16) writes:

This was a worldview that situated ‘first the interiority of an in-the-head, in-the-heart, in-the-gut region of discovery called the *self*’ and tested ‘the desires, the longing, the aspirations of this discovered self with and against its possibilities for respect, growth, fulfillment, and accomplishment.

What human being can’t benefit from engaging in self-reflection and writing that is connected to personal healing in ways that Carey (15-16) reflects on Bambara guiding Black women to do?

For those interested in learning more about how other African-American and Black scholars have reflected on the ways writing can be used as a tool linked to wellness, I recommend people turn to the work of Love and April Baker-Bell. Love and Baker-Bell place a focus on the need to consider Black women’s well-being, while Baker-Bell, like Carey, considers the role of writing and reflection in the process of focusing on well-being.

When Nick Sanders, a non-Black scholar shared “For Loretta: A Black Woman Literacy Scholar’s Journey to Prioritizing Self Preservation and Black-Feminist Woman Storytelling” with me, his actions exhibited the contributions and caring that are essential for Black people to progress in academic spaces. As I progressed in my professional and academic journey, Nick’s sharing of Baker-Bell’s piece evidenced how both Black and non-Black scholars can be invested in one another’s progress, ensure that people are prospering as they progress, and provide essential support for each other’s journey. How can scholars and teachers apply the approach Nick applied? What ways can teachers apply these practices to their development of writing

assignments and in their in-class discussions? How can we participate in these practices to ensure that people are supported as they pursue the lives and careers they want to have?

In my earlier discussions, I presented Logan's (133) insights about how Black people used their literacy to develop a sense of community, refute and combat the denial of their humanity and improve the human experience for themselves and other people. Logan's (133) insights about how Black people used writing as a tool to ensure that others recognized their humanity and Carey's (15-17) discussions of the ways Black women writers have encouraged Black women to prioritize and consider themselves can be productive for writing educators to work into their teaching of writing.

When working with Black graduate students and faculty members, faculty members should, as Nick did for me, consider passing along pieces like Baker-Bell's "For Loretta." Along with this, they should facilitate class discussions with Baker-Bell's piece and Carey's (15-17) discussions on the ways Black women shed light on how reading and writing are central to well-being practices for Black women and her discussions about the usefulness of Vanzant's (70) and Jakes' writing activities and exercises and what they offer to their audiences. Carey (70) writes:

In what appears to be a second stage –that of interpretation – Vanzant models how expressive and reflective journal writing can be used to make sense of past or present issues and apply spiritual principles to decipher the roots of trauma, crisis, or miseducation as reinforcement and application of the deciphering activities of the first course.

Within Carey's reflections of the work of T.D. Jakes, Iyanla Vanzant and Tyler Perry are her critique of some of their practices and the messages that their work communicated to Black



women. Carey's critique does not overshadow her spotlighting and celebrating the cultural icons, the types of spiritual healing their work offers. Carey's reflections show how the Black thought purveyors have achieved Black excellence and how their content provides their audience members with tools, information and practices that may not otherwise be available to them. In discussing (Carey 117), the Black Urban Theater, Carey also informs us about how there is a history of Black people creating content for Black audiences, who were not allowed to be entertained and educated in spaces that were deemed as being spaces that were only for White people. In providing insights about the Black theater and the chitlin circuit, Carey (117) offers readers insights about how the Black theater provided a source of entertainment for Black people, whose Blackness denied them the right to be entertained, which I offered deeper discussions of earlier in this chapter.

When considering Carey's (118) discussion of the value of the Black Urban Theater and the sense of community and sense of joy that it provided for Black audiences, it is evident that the space was essential and helped Black people see that they were essential while also helping to expand their sense of self and the various versions of themselves that they were exposed to. Although Carey's (117-118) insights about the Black theater show how the art and entertainment space, like Black educational spaces and the Black church emerged out of Black people not being allowed to be in the spaces that White people created for themselves, there are no discussions in her text or other texts that suggest that those spaces denied white people the right to enter and to be present.

I share this to help eliminate concerns that a focus on Black people, Black histories and work that considers them and their interests would result in other people being uninvited from educational experiences. I also share it to acknowledge how Black people have historically

invented and created spaces where they can enjoy and experience life in ways that they were not allowed to experience and enjoy it in white spaces, and that in creating those spaces, the rest of society benefited.

Love (29) and Kynard's (183) discussions of the ways Black and Brown children experience educational disparities in past (Kynard) and current times (Love), evidence how spaces, places and people, like Beacon Hill, which uplift and support the learning of Black children remain essential. Such spaces are essential because they help to combat oppression and to ensure that students can thrive, progress and prosper and have experiences that are not riddled with inequalities and disparities. The ways that disparities and inequalities still exist in the modern- day school system are alive in Love's points where she states that:

Schools located in low-income neighborhoods are underfunded, which means they have fewer school resources, less school personnel, and, ultimately less social and economic mobility. Black students are six times more likely than White students to attend a high-poverty school. Latinx students face triple segregation: by race, poverty, and language. Overall, only 9 percent of low-income students graduate from college. (29)

As Love (29) explains some of the ways racial disparities impact Black and Brown students' access to education and the ways a lack of access to education decreases the likelihood of them going on to pursue higher education, Kynard (182-183) provides insights about the lack of funding of historically black colleges and universities, which she credits for educating Black professionals. While Love is focused on K-12 educational experiences, if that is the struggle students face in the primary school educational system, how can they even make it to a college writing classroom? Do rhetoric and composition scholars have any obligation to help get

students to college writing classrooms, and to ensure that those writing classrooms are in alignment with diversity, equity and initiative efforts?

If so, what is their obligation? Kynard (183) sheds light on the work of Black educators whose efforts and contributions made it possible for students to receive an education. There is no way that there shouldn't be solutions to eliminate educational disparities like those that Love (29) speaks of as existing in current days and the ones that Kynard (183) speaks of as historically occurring, oppressing and negatively impacting Black people. In the field of rhetoric and composition, what are the ways that departments and programs are working to ensure that there is a presence of Black faculty, Black undergraduate and graduate students? How does a lack of ensuring this suggest that there is no effort to eliminate the disparities, but instead an investment in maintaining them?

My earlier discussions of Kynard's insights (183) about Black people using their literacy practices to ensure that their community could receive an education illustrate that whether in HBCUS or predominately white institutions, the presence of Black students and Black teachers plays an important role in the success of the students. Like Kynard, in "When and Where I Enter," Logan (427) also offers insights that evidence the ways that the presence of Black educators can potentially positively impact Black students and improve their educational experiences. Kynard (183) writes, "As Logan and Royster have shown us, *activist* and *teacher* for black women in the nineteenth century were synonymous." It is important to take seriously Kynard's call (183) to acknowledge and learn from the work that Black teachers did to make education possible for Black students, who society was not interested in educating.

Reading the scholarship of Black rhetoric and composition scholars, such as Carey, Kynard, Logan, Pough, Pritchard, Banks and Richardson evidences the ways Black rhetoric and

composition scholars within their field are similar to the teachers Kynard credits for their efforts to advance “...black aspirations” (183). Baker-Bell, Baker-Bell, et. al, Alim and Smitherman, Smitherman, Dillard and Niesha Ann Green’s work on Black linguistic justice and Perryman-Clark and Craig and their collaborators (19) focus on creating an “Afrocentric approach” evidence the continued investment in people working to ensure that Black students and their language practices, and literacy practices are acknowledged in ways that guarantee that they progress and prosper in academic spaces.

Kynard’s (183) insights illustrate Black people’s investment in their progress and prosperity. Similarly, Combahee River Collective’s reflection about Black women’s experiences evidence the ways that the investment to make progress for one’s self and community, is consistently only treated as that community’s obligation. In vain with this thinking is Love’s thinking about what she refers (27) to as “dark suffering.” Love (27) writes, “If we are honest, most dark suffering goes unnoticed by too many Americans, but America’s educational history is overrun with dark suffering” (27). Love (27) provides specific examples of the ways that what she refers to as “dark suffering” (27) has impacted the Black community.

If dark suffering was eliminated, what work does that position Black students and educators to do in academic spaces and society? What aspects of Kynard’s *Vernacular Insurrections* and Carey’s *Rhetorical Healing* are you willing to teach and engage with to help to eliminate the kinds of dark suffering Love (27) speaks of as being so pervasive that it is polluting Black people’s lives and educational experiences? African-American people have historically invested in not only their own well-being, progress and prosperity, but that of other people and America, so other people, including non-Black people and America should be as equally invested in the Black community and their progress. Rhetoric and composition scholars and

educators, within writing classrooms have the opportunity and the obligation to ensure that people are invested in the success, progress and prosperity of all people. Rhetoric and composition scholars and educators also have the opportunity and obligation to recognize the unique needs, histories and experiences of the Black community and how their investment may be the initial and only investment in the community, other than the community's own investment in themselves.

As a field, we can not skim or quickly reference text that discloses information about histories that have already been overlooked and communities that have historically been exploited. In "A Seat at The Table: Reflections on Writing Studies and HBCU Writing Programs," David F. Green's discussions about the ways he has students engage in a cypher should be work that we have our students do, and we should adhere to his guidance (59) on cyphers being work that we engage in with our colleagues. In Green's definition of the cypher, he writes:

The cypher is a spatial and conceptual metaphor drawn from hip-hop culture that defines an imagined and physical space used to prepare others to think through complex networks of competing thoughts. Cyphers, at their best, provide pathways for contemplating how publics read and remember together, as well as how such interpretive work helps to address difference as a social, cultural, and material reality of all writing instruction. (51-52)

Along with Green's definition of the cypher in the context of a writing classroom, Green offers insights about how he and students engage in a cypher in his writing classroom. Green (61) writes that:

The opening cypher includes Jacqueline Jones Royster's "When the First Voice You Hear is Not Your Own," Jabari Mahiri and Soraya Sablo's "Writing for Their Lives: The Non School Literacy of California's Urban American Youth," Keith Gilyard's "Literacy, Identity, Imagination, and Flight," and Shirley Logan's "Why College English."

I still need to read Mahiri and Sablos and Gilyard's work, but that does not prevent me from understanding or seeing the ways that the cypher that Green (61) recommended could be useful for students. I can envision the ways that such an activity would expand teachers and students' minds and understanding of Black literacy, the ways it's been used and the history of Black literacies. The fact that I have more reading to do is evidence of the ways that a cypher is continual, and that my work as a writer, reader, teacher, scholar and thinker is continual. Where in your cypher are you going to add Kynard, Carey, and Pritchard's text?

One potential way to engage with Carey's work is acknowledging the usefulness of the legacies and practices she (Carey 138) sheds light on in "Recognizing and Seizing Positive Opportunities." Along with this, it is also important to, as Carey (146-147) does, acknowledge the value in doing work that involves seeing how everything can be productively used to produce results, despite the drawbacks and shortcomings associated with it. Drawing on Alice Walker's work to make these points, Carey (146) writes:

In her short story, "Everyday Use," Alice Walker reminds readers that the remnants of a problematic tradition or practice do not necessarily need to be discarded. Instead, as African Americans have shown many times over, the undesirable and the complicated can be repurposed towards generative ends. (146)

These days, many people are consistently participating in cancel culture, which calls people to learn about and recognize the faults, wrongdoing, missteps and misspeakings of individuals.

There is value in the accountability that comes with cancel culture, and the ways that it rightfully positions us to not engage with harmful people and their contributions, and challenges us to think about our own actions and speech, but we also have to think through and about what it means for, if and how, people can use their writing, reading, speaking and other literacy practices to make future contributions, once they have proven to do that without causing the harm that they caused in the past.

Carey's (146) insights about using things "towards generative ends" and her analysis of Jakes, Vanzant and Perry and their work exhibit that despite the flaws she finds with their work, she still acknowledges how their messages and work significantly contributes to the communities and audiences that rely on them. Considering this, in turning to Carey's (146) insights, readers can learn how to repurpose and reuse positive and meaningful aspects of people's work and contributions, while discarding the harmful, useless, counterproductive and problematic aspects of their work, in ways where we can potentially consider how we can engage in the act of remixing content, like Adam Banks' offers insights on in "Remix: Afrofuturistic Roadmaps: Rememory Remixed for a Digital Age."

When teaching in cancel culture, how can the content, perspectives and actions of those who are canceled be focused on and discussed in classroom spaces, to determine if they can be used for what Carey (146) refers to as "towards generative ends" (146)? With fear of speaking, sharing and contributing because of seeing the ways that people have been both rightfully and wrongly canceled for articulating thoughts, but seeing that such cancellation does not seem as likely for all of humanity, students from communities that have already been silenced and or lacked opportunities to present their perspective may become even more afraid to do so.

In engaging students in dialogue about the state of communication, cancel culture and how these things can be productively used to better position them to mindfully consider the experiences and rights of all people, we are teaching students how to use their writing and communication to navigate society and engage as human beings living through cancel culture. Rhetoric and composition educators can also work to address the ways that cancel culture may uniquely suppress, hinder, diminish cause further oppression for speakers and writers from communities who have historically been denied the right to share their voice and perspectives, or participate in political and social processes, like voting or accessing segregated water for swimming and drinking.

In doing this kind of work in writing classrooms, students and educators would be helping all of society find ways to improve the way people share their perspective, engage in dialogue and do those things in a humane way. Another use of Carey's text, is referring to some of her insightful discussions (71)<sup>16</sup> on audience and readers, including the following ones where she writes:

As Jamilah King observes in the 2011 *Color Lines* article, "Three Feminists talk About the Media's Obsession with Unwed Black Women," Black women are the group that have contributed the most in propelling Harvey to the status of 'relationship expert.' 'If Black women were not buying the Steve Harvey book,' she reasoned. Furthermore, 'if we weren't tuning into these specials...there would be no conversation.' (King qtd. in Carey 146)

As teachers of writing and rhetoric, students are our audience and what we teach them about the power of language and literacy and what language and literacy positions people to do is

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<sup>16</sup> "Encouraging readers to tap into their spiritual power and the legacy of Black women who were able to 'make it against all odds,' Vanzant emphasizes that the value of this practice is that it allows readers to reinforce their own agency, to, in essence "create the energy' of their environments" (71).



important. We have to be focused on teaching students the value in being an audience member who knows the power they possess to tune out harmful, hateful, racist and oppressive rhetoric, and to tune into societally just rhetoric that uplifts all human beings. In teaching such lessons, we create, and or help to nurture writers and communicators who do not write harmful legislation that proposes that people are further marginalized and disenfranchised. Instead of posing harm and oppressing people with writing and communication, we would be inspiring students to become writers who write legislation that ensures that people do not have to be hungry, disenfranchised, homeless, or endure the oppression and inequality that comes from having their rights be denied.

As expressed earlier, we need to acknowledge Carey's (164) guidance and direction about how "...we must pay attention to projects such as healing, empowerment, and wellness that show us the systematic ways African Americans go about solving social problems..." We also need to engage in learning about how to make a distinction between human beings making mistakes with their writing and speaking, and malicious and hateful speech that only intends to harm. We must recognize the need for the kind of rhetorical healing that Carey shows Vanzant, Jakes, and Perry provide their audiences, while also thinking through what it means to engage in the powerful and insightful critique of content like Carey does. In this chapter, I offered discussions that I hope encourage rhetoric and composition scholars and educators to do this work and to make use of Carey and Kynard's texts for scholarly and teacherly purposes.

This chapter should help educators consider how to approach their work in the writing classroom with the kind of abolitionist teaching that Love advocates for, while creating the Black Joy, Love (119-121) calls for. I hope educators and scholars will return to this chapter and when working to hone their pedagogical practices, refer to my sections, "The Obligation and the

Opportunity” and “Language. Life. Literacies. Are you Still with Me? Considering How Audience Shapes Our Writing, Literacy Practices and Use of Language” as guides and educational resources for doing the work of ensuring that they are valuing and honoring Black histories, Black Literacies, Black Legacies and Black futures.

I shared stories about my own learning and the people, places and texts that inform me and my literacy practices. I also provided some questions, reflections and discussions to encourage rhetoric and composition scholars to think about how we can experience progress and prosperity for ourselves and how our work in writing classrooms can result in progress and prosperity for the students we teach.

## CHAPTER 4: OUR FATHER WHO ART IN HEAVEN, HALLOWED BE THY NAME...MAY YOUR WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

### Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I discuss some of the lessons I learned from reading Pritchard's *Fashioning Lives* and share some of my own experiences as a Black lesbian to answer Pritchard's call (10; 41; 242) for more work focused on Black LGBTQ people, their experiences and their literacy practices. I also discuss some of the ways that Pritchard's text can be used by scholars and teachers working with students in writing classrooms while showing how the applicability of Pritchard's work spans beyond the field of rhetoric and composition. Along with this, I spotlight some of the aspects of *Fashioning Lives* that expanded my knowledge of African American history, including Black queer history and the history of African American people's literacy practices and how those literacy practices are alive in the Black queer experience, which Pritchard also speaks of as birthing and influencing other literacy practices.

### A Snapshot of Pritchard's *Fashioning Lives*

In *Fashioning Lives*, Eric Darnell Pritchard pushes readers to recognize that it is not acceptable to tuck Black queerness in a box to be buried and funeralized, and treated as something that should only come to life during an episode of *Pose*. Although Pritchard educates readers about the harm, violence, and danger associated with literacy normativity<sup>17</sup> and provides examples of the life-threatening and life-taking actions connected to it, they also present an abundance of discussions about how Black people use what they refer (24) to as "restorative literacies" to enhance their own circumstances and existence and ensure that they protect their happiness and peace and can live in ways where they can experience happiness and peace.

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<sup>17</sup> "Each of these details contributes to a belief system that says literacy is abnormal and irreconcilable with Blackness" (64).

Explaining the focus they place on their research participants' literacy practices, Pritchard (35) writes, "Instead, my analysis focuses on uses of literacy for one's own desires, pleasures, fantasies, hopes, and needs." In Pritchard's opening of *Fashioning Lives*, when explaining their text, they write:

This *too* is a story—for this study flows from life stories by Black lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people to theorize the myriad ways individuals have learned and employed literacy in their quests to build a life on their own terms and, more specifically, towards the goals of self-and communal love, healing, care, and other modes of survival. (1)

Like the work of Logan, Kynard, Carey and other scholars, Pritchard's work provides valuable insights that present the history of Black people being determined to learn and hone literacy practices that were essential to them improving and shaping their lives, communities and society. What Pritchard greatly contributes to those conversations is the light they shed on the resilience of the Black Queer community, and the power and possibilities associated with the Black queer community's literacy practices, which is, as they in *Fashioning Lives* acknowledge are a part of the African American literacy history and tradition, and an influencer and shaper of the history and tradition. Along with this, Pritchard (65) includes Black LGBTQ people into African American history and informs readers about the vital role people's literacy practices played in them getting rid of the constraints and limitations that were placed on them. Pritchard (62-63) informs readers about how Black people, even against all odds and at all costs pursued goals and aspirations they had for their personal, spiritual, communal and professional lives.

Although Pritchard (10) acknowledges the absence of Black queer experiences in the field of "literacy, composition, and rhetoric," and holds the field accountable, they are not fixated

with chastising people for the lack of discussions about Black LGBTQ people and their literacy practices. Instead, *Fashioning Lives* exhibits how Pritchard is committed to focusing on Black LGBTQ people and their literacy practices and calling others to recognize that they should also be recognizing the power of Black queer peoples' literacy practices, while determining what can be gleaned from how Black queer people used their literacy practices to create and develop for themselves and their communities. Pritchard (14) acknowledges that they are giving Black queer people and their literacies a level of attention and acknowledgement that they have not received<sup>18</sup> but deserve.

While learning about the history of African American people's literacy practices can teach scholars, educators, students and other people about how the community used their literacy practices to progress and prosper, it would, as Pritchard (43;242) communicates, be an incomplete history without a discussion of Black queer literacy practices and Black queer people's experiences. Within *Fashioning Lives*, Pritchard answers the following question:

How do they take something that has been used for unloving acts and make it do the work of self- and communal love, building a life on their own terms? Investigating the personal, institutional, and interactional in Black LGTBQ literacies is a clear entryway into such considerations, while it also allows one to maintain a complex view of what normativity is and what it is doing in those literacy practices. (30)

In answering this question, Pritchard (30) offers a solution-focused text that can be used as a guide to show how people within already existing spaces and within spaces that they have

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<sup>18</sup> "Outside of a handful of exceptions, including my own previously published work, narratives of Black LGBTQ literacy practices remain absent in literacy, composition, and rhetoric (LCR) generally as well as in work that centers on African American, Feminist and LGBTQ literacies, composition, and rhetoric. For African American literacy, composition and rhetorical studies, this problematic is reflected in scholarship and pedagogical tools that fail to examine the diversity and complexity of Blackness and intersectionalities. My work queers that theoretical and historical monolith" (10).

created use their restorative literacies to eliminate the literacy normativity that decreased, and at times eliminated their opportunities to contribute and troubled and tainted their existence.

### **Solidifying Black Queer People and Their Literacy Practices Place in History While Considering the History of African-American's People's Literacy Practices**

*Fashioning Lives* was one of the texts I added to my concentration exam reading list, so when I read it, I wanted to make sure I invested time and energy in reading the book, taking notes as I read, and learning from the text. I did not want to skim the text, and or conveniently read hand-picked portions of it. In reading *Fashioning Lives*, I learned about Black queer peoples' histories, literacies and experiences and found myself feeling affirmed both by the people and practices I had never heard of, and those that I was familiar with, and that resonated with me. *Fashioning Lives* was worth the time I spent reading and taking notes about key concepts and scholarship that Pritchard references and cites.

Fortunately for me, my reading of Pritchard's text for my concentration exam was not my first time engaging with the text. During my time in my master's program, Matthew Cox assigned the text for a Cultural Rhetorics course. At that phase of my academic career, I did not read the text in its entirety, so the opportunity to return to it and immerse myself in it is something I am grateful for. In this chapter, I reflect on some of the potential uses for the illuminating and visionary text, which affirmed me, and also encouraged me to participate in the conversations about power and possibilities associated with Black queer literacy practices that Pritchard is dedicated to.

As someone who had known since youth that there were time periods where it was illegal for Black people to read and write, I became better informed about that oppressive and racist reality from Pritchard's (63) discussions of African American people's pursuits to learn to

read and write, despite being faced with literacy normativity and anti-literacy laws. Pritchard's discussions offer powerful insights about how African-American people used their literacy practices to overcome the oppression they endured, and shed light on how Black LGBTQ people used their literacy practices despite the oppression, dangers and risks they faced, which I will later delve into a deeper discussion of when discussing Pritchard's (63) discussions of Anne Lister.

As was the case for the learning I did when reading Logan, Richardson, Banks, Carey and Kynard and other scholar's work, Pritchard's text expanded my knowledge of the ways Black people have used their literacy practices to progress and prosper. Along with this, Pritchard expanded those discussions by shedding light on Black LGTBQ people's literacy practices and experiences. Explaining how people abused institutional power to write legislation that incriminated Black people for reading and writing, Pritchard writes, "These laws spread all over the United States, resulting in violent punishments if enslaved Blacks were seen learning to read or write or practicing reading, and writing, including dismembering one's hands and also death" (63).

In acknowledging African American people's history which includes people being killed for learning to read and write, I will never be in a position where I fail to recognize how essential reading and writing is for myself and other Black people. I will also never be in a position where I do not take educational opportunities seriously or devalue reading and writing and the significant role they both play in our lives and society. Like Logan, Baker-Bell, Kynard, Smitherman and Carey, Pritchard calls our attention to the struggles Black people endured when trying to engage in educational endeavors.

To do this, Pritchard draws (63) on Heather Ann Williams' work about anti-literacy laws, which they acknowledge (63) included the early laws enlisted in 1740 following the Stono Rebellion in 1739 when enslaved people from South Carolina killed 20 white people during their efforts to get free. In addition to shedding light on that history, Pritchard (63) informs readers about the atrocities and hardships that African-American people endured when working to acquire writing, reading and speaking skills, which they do by drawing on Elaine Richardson's work. Pritchard writes:

African Americans have had a complex historical relationship to literacy. This relationship is complex partially because, on the one hand, literacy has been a powerful tool through which African Americans have sought and achieved social change. Indeed, numerous scholars have noted, as Elaine Richardson states, that an African American ideology of 'freedom through literacy' is at the heart of the centuries of struggle Black people have waged against systemic oppression in favor of claims to humanity, citizenship, and self-community autonomy (25).

Richardson's (qtd. in Pritchard 25) ideas about "freedom through literacy" resonate with me, because, like Pritchard and Richardson, I acknowledge the vital role reading and writing has played in my life. Pritchard also recognized how the Black LGBTQ community valued their literacy practices and how essential Black people's literacy practices were for defining their lives and ensuring they have the kinds of experiences they want and need to have. Pritchard writes:

Reading and writing are key tools that everyday Black queers use to survive and thrive in the midst of normative attempts to marginalize individuals and groups. Restorative literacies is a concept that projects literacy as integral to people's everyday lives and their production, consumption, and reception of writing and other cultural productions. (37)



It is imperative to consider Pritchard's (37) reflections about literacy practices like reading and writing and restorative literacies, which play a vital role in progress and prosperity, and their (37) insights about the way Black queer people have used "restorative literacies to "...survive and thrive..."

Pritchard's (37) acknowledgement of writing and reading being essential tools, and my awareness of the histories struggles and successes associated with Black people accessing and acquiring higher education, are among the realities and histories that inform and influence how I pursue my own education and how I endeavor in educational spaces. An example of this is, in graduate school, when I heard people recommending skimming texts, I oftentimes struggled to embrace the idea of adopting the practice. One reason I was mentally resistant to using the practice was that I believed it would be ridiculous and arrogant for me to have the honor and privilege of being in graduate school and working on earning my third degree and deciding that reading and immersing myself in texts was not worth my time, especially in America where my ancestors had been denied the right to read and some people still were not afforded the opportunity to pursue an education, let alone a degree.

Being aware of African-American people's history of fighting to learn and receive an education and their efforts to do so in equitable and integrated spaces with resources and support, contributed to me viewing skimming as a counterproductive practice. When I heard the phrase skimming, I heard that I was going to skip over knowledge and insights that might be vital for acquiring the education and knowledge I was supposed to receive and use for my professional career and share with others. I heard that I would be engaging in a practice where I was not fully embracing and taking advantage of an opportunity to read and learn, which were opportunities my ancestors were denied, and that some Black people still do not have equitable access to. I was

aware of how Black people were denied the right to read, write, and pursue an education. I was also aware of the way that my own family valued education and how Black people sacrificed in order for people, including myself to pursue academic and professional endeavors.

The value Black people place on education and their commitment to ensuring that people can receive an education is evidenced in Kynard's points where she explains Black people's educational experiences. Kynard writes:

In this era, black teachers were not merely instructors but community leaders who did not simply teach in schools but helped to *form* the schools, often raising the funds for schools themselves. Teachers whom the community could rely on could in turn rely on the parents to set up special plots on which to grow foods that would be sold to make money for the school, to host entertainment and various shows for school fundraising, and to board teachers in their homes for free. (183)

In my mind, I need to be as invested in education as Pritchard reflects (64) on Black people being when they created "pit schools"<sup>19</sup> and as Kynard reflects (183) on Black teachers being when working to ensure their community received an education. It is important for rhetoric and composition scholars and educators to learn the histories of Black people being denied the right to read and learn. This work is important because I believe it will result in people being sure that they are not devaluing Black people's educational experiences or denying them the right to receive an education that considers them, their histories and their futures.

Along with this, possessing this knowledge serves as a motivator to ensure that people can access resources needed to shape their experiences and communities, and writers can learn to write legislation that exposes people to educational opportunities instead of denying them opportunities to pursue an education. Hope College President Matthew Scogin's *Hope Forward*

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<sup>19</sup> See p. 54 for my discussions of Pritchard's (64) definition and discussion of "pit schools."

vision is work that is focused on helping students access education in an affordable and equitable way, and that is work that should inspire educators and leaders of educational institutions to be similarly invested in making education accessible. Discussing *Hope Forward*, Scogin explained that:

Too often, students from different socioeconomic backgrounds cannot access the same college or universities. That stems, in part, from the current-day, broken higher education business model. We're turning that on its head with *Hope Forward*, a new financial model based on a pay-it-forward aspiration for funding college. We fund students' tuition up-front, asking in return that they give something to Hope every year after they graduate. (Scogin qtd. in Rabinowitz)

My work will help educators do the kind of essential and inspiring work that Scogin is doing or some version of it with a sense of urgency and motivation to serve students who were historically denied the right to receive education. In order to do that work, scholars and educators working with students in writing classrooms must be aware of the histories and experiences of the students they are teaching. As a scholar, Pritchard (10;242) recognized that within the field of rhetoric and composition, there is a lack of scholarship focused on Black queer people, their experiences and literacy practices and calls for scholars to expand and grow the discussions about Black queer people, their experiences, and literacy practices. Pritchard writes:

The same geography of literacy, composition, and rhetorical history, theory, and pedagogy that created the mountains of African-American and LGBTQ literacies also creates the valley where complex Black queerness remains unconsidered, waiting to come into focus through deliberate interventions, not just because I would otherwise go overlooked (which is in itself is important enough) but also because, as I have shown

throughout this book, Black queerness helps us to recalibrate our view so that we can see what we thought we knew differently and look beyond what already exists. (242)

While Logan, Pough, Richardson, Carey, and Royster and Williams provide insights about 19th century Black women writers and orators and scholars, Pritchard (242), as they acknowledge merges the history of African-American people's literacy practices and history with the Black queer experiences from that time period. Along with making such a powerful and much needed contribution, Pritchard educates readers about the additional concerns and challenges endured by Black queer people, and their unique ingenuity to navigate through those challenges and concerns, which is evidenced in their following insights. Pritchard (62-63) writes:

Attention to literacy concealment among Black LGBTQ people is both an extension of the practice of literacy in camouflaged spaces and places within the African American tradition, as Cornelius, Smitherman, Baugh, Nunley, and others have cogently demonstrated, and also a signpost pointing to the ways Black LGBTQ people disrupt and open up an alternative (his)story of hidden literacies in the African American literacies, composition, and rhetorical tradition.

"Stealing literacy" is among the practices that Pritchard (64;85) said Black people used to learn to read and write and acquire the literacy practices they needed for their lives. Since it was illegal for Black people to read and write, having to steal literacy communicates how the community was even criminalized for pursuing education. Along with Black people having to steal literacy, Pritchard (60) also sheds light on them acquiring literacy by using a practice referred to as "literacy concealment," which helped them hide their learning. While other scholars have shed light on these matters, what Pritchard adds to Black rhetoric and composition scholarship is a focus on how Black queer people made use of these different practices to acquire their literacy

practices, and how they are a part of the African American Literacy history and experience. In Pritchard's (63) discussions of "coded literacies," they reflect on a Black queer woman's use of the practice and how their queerness impacted their use of their literacy practices.

Pritchard writes:

Ann Lister, a nineteenth-century lesbian in West Yorkshire, England, developed a secret code to write love letters to female partners without revealing her lesbian sexuality to others, given the sense of danger and unsafety of writing to them in decipherable print (63).

What should be evident in Pritchard's (63) aforementioned insights is that while Lister did not have to steal literacy because of her Blackness, her being a Black lesbian who wrote content where she expressed her desire for another woman resulted in her engaging in what Pritchard (60) refers to as "literacy concealment." Having to secretly write to a lover because loving that person was illegal, and the love was considered to be illegitimate, along with her being a member of the Black community, whose writing and reading practices were at one time illegal illustrates how what Kimberlé Crenshaw refers to as "intersectionality"<sup>20</sup> impacted Lister and influenced her use of her literacy practices.

Lister's identities as a Black woman and Black lesbian subjected her to having to conceal her ability to write and to express her perspectives and desires at a time where the consequences of her doing so as a Black woman had subsided, but the consequences of her doing so as a Black lesbian remained. Along with shedding light on the ways that Black queer people's use of their literacy practices was historically limited and or had to be coveted because of literacy

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<sup>20</sup> In Pritchard's discussions (9-10) of intersectionality, they write about how June Jordan's essay "A New Politics of Sexuality" deepened their understanding of the concept and in later defining the concept writes, "Intersectionality demands nothing less than to imagine a world outside of our own as a point of entry into a more just, empathetic, complex, and connected relationship to one another and also a richer way of understanding ourselves, particularly with regard to our positional ties in the realities of power and difference" (Pritchard 13-14).

normativity, Pritchard educates readers on how literacy normativity still harms Black queer people, and threatens their life, or worst has factored into the violence that has been committed to take their lives.

Pritchard's (56) discussions of the inhumane and unjust murder of Lawrence King, who he referred (56) to as "queer youth of color" shows how the consequence of death that resulted in some Black people losing their life for reading and writing is akin to the literacy normativity that shaped the perspective of the murderer who deemed it unfit for King to freely use his literacy practices the way he wanted to. Writing about King being murdered, Pritchard explains that:

Lawrence King's murder points to how literacy and normativity are linked through an innocent expression of love within a very traditional literacy tradition: a kid's valentine for their crush. The beliefs about literacy encoded in a Valentine's Day card are of note.

First, the incident suggests that some literacy activities are read as nonnormative or used to mark one as nonnormative. (Pritchard 56)

In Pritchard's discussions of King (56) and their discussions of Lister (63), they provide examples of queer people of color using their literacy practices in a way that Richardson (25) and Logan (133) speak of Black people's efforts to vehemently communicate they are human beings. As those scholars' work illustrates, those efforts have involved Black people using their literacy practices to advocate to fully experience a just and equitable human experience where their Blackness, and as Pritchard's work pushes us to recognize their Black queerness does not result in them having to endure inhumane conditions and experiences. Explaining the connections between the way Black queer people have productively used their literacy practices and the African American history those practices are attached to, Pritchard writes, "As such, restorative literacies are part of the long African American tradition Elaine Richardson calls 'survival

literacies.’ These survival literacies work to guard individuals against what composition theorists Anne Herrington and Marcia Curtis call ‘the living death of silence’ (34).

Along with recognizing the value and truth in Elaine Richardson’s concept “survival literacies,” it is important to ask, what can Black people use their literacy practices for if they didn’t have to constantly focus on using their literacy practices to survive? Why should anyone have to use their literacy practices to fight for survival, instead of being able to use their literacy practices to live a long prosperous life where their prosperity is guaranteed? Taking Pritchard’s discussions of Black queer literacies and the history of African American literacy practices that they are connected to into consideration is important because much can be gleaned from the community’s use of their literacy practices. In my forthcoming discussions in this chapter, I will discuss Pritchard’s definition of literacy and highlight aspects of their research participants’ experiences, which I discuss in relation to my own experiences to shed light on the ways that rhetoric and composition scholars can both learn from Black queer lives and ensure that they support Black queer people’s efforts to stay alive and live the lives they want.

### **Lessons in Pritchard’s Definition of Literacies**

It is important to engage with Pritchard’s definitions and discussions of literacy (20), “Black LGBTQ literacies” (24) and “restorative literacies,” (34) because Pritchard expands our knowledge and understanding of literacy and what can be classified as literacy while informing us about how Black queer literacies and experiences should be factored into our defining of literacy. Pritchard’s (20) definitions of literacy encompass Sojourner Truth’s literacy practices, which involve her not being able to read and write, but having the skills and abilities to understand people, an awareness of how their decision-making informed and influenced her life, and an awareness of the ways she wanted to be the decider and determiner of what happened in

her life. Including Truth's literacy practices and abilities into their definition of literacy, Pritchard (20) points out the parallels between Truth's literacy practices and Freire's perspective on literacy. Pritchard writes, "Freire, like Truth and myself, describes literacy as a practice of meaning-making that does include print, but also as a way of reading everyday life as significant to literacy practice" (Pritchard 20).

Like Pritchard's (20) discussions of Truth, Johnson, and Kynard provide examples of Black people achieving success and progress while using non-traditional literacy practices. In Johnson's work, he discussed (488-490) how despite his grandfather having limited traditional literacy practices, he still had a successful and professional career working on the train, where he was able to use his experiences and knowledge acquired on the job to do his job and to train others to do their job. Similarly, Kynard shows the value in the knowledge and literacies people possess when she discusses (1; 113-114) different literacy practices Black and Brown student protestors used to push universities to be more inclusive learning spaces where they could pursue and receive an education. Those kinds of literacy practices show the value in what is learned and can be learned in non-academic settings and spaces and how people can learn and hone skills and practices that can be used in any setting and experience.

Pritchard's (20) discussions of Freire's perspective of literacy and their reflections on Truth's literacy practices, make it clear that literacy practices allow people to comprehend what they are expected to know for their lives and create what they know is necessary for their lives. Pritchard's (24) definition of Black queer literacies broadens what literacy practices are and how they enable people to be shapers and definers of how they present themselves and live their life. Defining Black LGBTQ literacies, Pritchard writes:



Regarding Black LGBTQ literacies, they are the ways Black LGBTQ people make sense of, negotiate, and contribute to their social, political, and cultural world. These literacies include not only more frequently visible literacy activities such as discernment, singing, dancing, and style of dress. Analysis of these literacies positions us to see a range of ways they are used to social, political, cultural, and economic ends, and it situates us to observe the larger implications of what look to be seemingly personal literacy practices but are actually that and much more. (24)

Viewing literacy with Pritchard's understanding of it, allows us to consider the people who have historically not been considered (e.g., Royster and Williams, Banks, Jackson II, and Pritchard) and how they acquire and exhibit their literacy practices in a variety of ways despite their community's history of enduring laws, violence and inequality that tried to keep them illiterate and worked to dictate what their contributions could be.

While Brittney Griner was detained in Russia, her wife's consistent public advocacy for her freedom illustrated how a Black woman, married to another Black woman, used her literacy practices to address the President of the United States, be physically present at WNBA basketball games, and engage in interviews with media and press outlets. Griner's own writing of a letter to President Joe Biden also illustrates the powerful ways she used what Pritchard refers (34) to as "restorative literacies" to help liberate herself. While many scholars have presented definitions and discussions of literacy, including Logan (4) who draws on Royster's definition of literacy<sup>21</sup>, as Pritchard articulates, Black queer people and their experiences have been largely absent in discussions about literacy. Pritchard's focus on Black queer people and their literacy practices

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<sup>21</sup> "Jacqueline Jones Royster in *Traces of a Stream: Literacy and Social Change among African American Women* offers a definition of literacy that takes into account the combined abilities it demonstrates; it intersects comfortably with my own. She defines it as the 'ability to gain access to information and to use this information variously to articulate lives and experiences and also to identify, think through, refine, and solve problems, sometimes complex problems, over time' (Royster, qtd. in Logan 4).

positions the Black LGBTQ community as a community with people whose lives can be learned from. In Darlene Clark Hine's *Speak Truth to Power*, she writes about how a person can serve as a text that can be learned from. Hines writes:

In the first section, consisting of autobiographical essays, I situate myself as a professional middle-class black woman within a predominately and historically white elite academy. My life and career experiences form a text from which to explore past and present black professional class consciousness, race and gender concerns and identities. (Hine xix-xx)

Similarly, Pritchard's discussion of their own life and their research participant's lives and experiences serve as the kind of text that Hine (xix-xx) speaks of as rendering knowledge and guidance. Along with this, Pritchard (24; 34) defines and discusses "restorative literacies" and discusses (34) how it connects to Richardson's concept "survival literacies" to show how Black queer people carried on the traditions and practices of the African-American community that they are a part of, while also being inventive and innovative and removing constraints and limitations that were placed on them for being Black and queer. Defining "restorative literacies," Pritchard (33) writes:

Restorative literacies are a form of cultural labor through which individuals tactically counter acts of literacy normativity through the application of literacies for self-and communal love manifested in a myriad of ways and across a number of sites and contexts toward the ends of making a life on one's own terms.

Pritchard (24) writes about "restorative literacies" being used to combat literacy normativity and discusses how their research participants used 'restorative literacies' to reimplement themselves into religious communities, to re-engage with religious practices to create their own religious

movements and communities (169-170) and create spaces like “Black, feminist, and LGBTQ bookstores” (92-93). Pritchard also discussed one research participant’s use of “restorative literacies” to do research and create scholarship <sup>22</sup>that educated and informed people on the Black queer histories and experiences that were overlooked, underrecognized and under-celebrated and that they believed it was imperative to spotlight and shed light on.

Like Kynard’s (29) discussions of “out of school literacies” and “student authorship,” (Kynard 163), Pritchard’s discussions of Black queer literacies and “restorative literacies” push us to consider the power of our literacy practices and the histories of the powerful ways Black people have used their literacy practices. This knowledge is important to consider inside and outside of writing classrooms, where people need to always be aware of their abilities as writers and speakers, their literacy practices and how they can present and deliver themselves and their content to create the experiences they want to have. As Pritchard tells us:

We cannot understand the experience of Black LGBTQ life without more fundamental attention to reading and writing as a part of that daily living, and also for the role it plays in social, cultural, and political phenomena that have drawn the attention of Black Queer Studies. (242)

In the next section, I offer scholarship focused on Black LGTBQ experiences, which Pritchard (10) identifies as scholarship that there needs to be more of in the rhetoric and composition field. In the following points, where Carey (152) acknowledges the expansiveness of African American scholarship focused on how Black people have effectively and productively used their literacy practices, she acknowledges the significant contribution Pritchard made by focusing on

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<sup>22</sup> “She became determined to disrupt the historical erasures and the silencing of Rustin’s story as a result of his gay identity. Reading works by or about Rustin and Lorde introduced Craig to the concept of a multiplicity of identities as a lens of intersectional analysis. She would later apply this lens to challenge historical frameworks and narratives that erase Black LGTBQ subjectivities by separating race from analysis of sexuality” (Pritchard 118-119)

Black LGTBQ literacy practices and shedding light on the Black LGBTQ community, and the community's histories and experiences. Carey writes:

Rhea Lathan's discussion of gospel literacies in *Freedom Writing: African American Civil Rights Literacy Activism, 1995-1967*, and Eric Darnell Pritchard's analysis of the literacy practices Black queer and LGBT communities use as forms of bibliotherapy and scriptural interpretation in his forthcoming ethnography are rich models for the work we're doing to expand our understandings of how sexuality, social movements, and spirituality influence African Americans' literacies. We can still ask more questions though. Is vision, for example, always a gendered resource? What are the circumstances that cause arguments about the incentive of literacy to shift? (Carey 152)

Pritchard's call (10;242) to see more scholarship and work focused on Black queer experiences and literacy practices, is something I aim to respond to by discussing some of my experiences as a Black Lesbian and the role that literacy practices played in my understanding of myself and affirmation of myself and others. I also engage with Pritchard's insights about what practices and experiences deepened their own knowledge of themselves while reflecting on who and what factored into me accepting, affirming, and embracing my Black queer self.

### **Learning to Celebrate Self**

In my adult life, *Fashioning Lives* provided me with what my three *Ebony Pictorial History of Black America* Encyclopedias provided for me in my childhood. Some of the things I gained from reading *Fashioning Lives* include a deeper sense of myself and an increased knowledge of my history. I learned about the contributions of people who shared my identity and was inspired by how they moved through challenges, endured harsh circumstances, yet still did

not forsake the identities that they were chastised for. Along with my own life already providing proof that for some people, my Blackness and queerness meant that I should be chastised, condemned or subjected to less than humane and equitable experiences, through reading Pritchard's insights about their research participants' experiences, I was accompanied by others who lived through realities I had either similarly or differently experienced.

In chapter three "Echoes of the Ancestors: An African-American Woman Rhetoric and Composition Scholar's Engagement with Those Before Her," I discuss some of my experiences as Black girl who spent time in the church, admired her grandma preaching in the pulpit, and in adulthood shared the experience of seeing T.D. Jakes preach live with my Grandma Helen and my brother Garrick. In those discussions, it is clear that religion, church, the *Bible*, reverends and congregations, and my experiences in the church have all impacted and informed my literacy practices. They all informed my understanding of using your words to serve a specific purpose, referring to evidence, and being aware of what communicators must do to connect with the audience. While those things and people informed my Blackness, some of my literacy practices, and the kind of Black religious practitioner I was, like Pritchard (5) recalls when discussing their experiences in a community learning space, they did not inform and or affirm my queerness. In Pritchard's (153) discussions of one of their research participants' experiences, they powerfully shed light on what it means for Black queer people to experience the condemnation that comes from people using the *Bible* as a tool to dictate what people should and should not do with their life. Pritchard (153) writes:

Craig's referencing of the Bible, the same text her parents used to condemn her, is one example of how individuals enact restorative literacies to survive uses of text that wound or harm. Authorizing herself to question their actions and name them as hurtful, Craig

fashions understandings of Christian doctrine to empower all of her identities, Black, lesbian, *and* Christian. Through restorative literacies Craig reimagines and remakes herself and her community, transforming the use of texts from one that wounds into one that affirms, supports, and loves. Doing so, for Craig, transforms the Bible into a source that affirms a relationship to a religion often used by others to harm her and others.

What Pritchard (153) refers to as restorative literacies need to be used, engaged with and taught as practices that can help people think through and about either when and how they've used restorative literacies, or envision themselves using them. As an adult, when I went to see T.D. Jakes with my Grandma Helen and brother, my sexual orientation was known to members of my family, loved ones, friends and people in professional settings, who knew me. At the time, my wife was my girlfriend. While my Grandma Helen knew her and loved her, I also was aware of how my grandma, at one time, felt about non-traditional relationships. I had to grow to a place where I accepted and embraced me and didn't tuck that aspect of myself away to avoid judgment from people who viewed my love differently than I did.

As I stood next to my Grandma Helen praising God in that arena, I was my Black queer self, dressed in church clothes that some people steeped in old time religion would probably argue should only be worn by men, since it wasn't a skirt and blouse, and or a dress. As I stood there, serving God, I had love in my heart for the woman I was in love with, for my family, for my God and for my grandma. I view my ability to engage in praise and worship with my Grandma Helen, and to at that phase of her life, experience her loving me as I was and loving who I was with, without condemning us as a restorative literacy. It was an experience that exhibited the ways that the woman I loved could be a part of my life, and that I did not have to lose my Grandma Helen, a reverend who preached God's word and lived by it. She could see that

I loved God, like she loved God. I praised God like she praised God and in our some of our other experiences, she was able to see that the kid, who she taught to pray at the foot of the bed, was still a praying person who trusted in God and valued God's word and being engaged in religious traditions, that she and my mother, and other religious practitioners helped to inspire and nurture in me.

As I read Pritchard's<sup>23</sup> text, I interacted with another Black queer person. Even though that interaction came through text, it provided an example of a member of the Black LGBTQ community thriving in the field of rhetoric and composition, where I am an emerging scholar. For me, the presence of people from communities, who have historically not been invited to present themselves or their perspectives and contributions equates to the possibility of me and more people from that community being present. Like Logan, Richardson, Pough and Carey's work made me feel accompanied by other Black women, who were part of my community and my field, Pritchard's work let me know that I was not alone in discussing my queer identity, experiences and histories. Reading Pritchard let me know I was not alone in discussing my Black queerness, because of how they greatly contributed to building the foundation of focusing on Black queer literacy practices in rhetoric and composition and encouraged others to contribute to those discussions.

As I read about Pritchard's (4-6) experience in Ms. Kelley's "Rites of Passage" class," a class that they reflected on as focused on Black excellence and lessons about Black maleness and Black femaleness, with Black queerness being nowhere to be found, I found myself deeply connected to those experiences and reflections. While Pritchard in reflecting on their experiences in the class notes that, "I didn't yet know exactly what it meant to be 'queer' or how to express a

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<sup>23</sup> Prior to reading Pritchard's text for my PhD studies, a professor, Dr. Matthew Cox assigned *Fashioning Lives* for our Cultural Rhetorics course, and at the time I did not read the text in its entirety but read enough to know that eventually I needed to return.

gender that is nonconforming, but I did feel displaced by the expectations and definitions of what it meant to be a Black man or Black boy – I just couldn't articulate it" (5), they continue on to share some of the valuable and culturally affirming learning experiences they had in the course. Pritchard writes, "Ms. Kelly taught us about responsibility, revolution, honesty, and compassion –lessons coming through the history of Black people throughout the diaspora" (6).

As Pritchard's reflections (6) of what they learned in Ms. Kelly's class illustrate, my youth contained meaningful experiences where I learned about my Blackness and Black history. I had no shortage of Black heroes growing up and before leaving elementary school probably could have taught most of my teachers about Black history. Well into my adulthood, what I could not do was confidently name and identify Black queer heroes or reflect on their histories. Well into my adulthood, what I could not do, was recall experiences of Black queer people being celebrated for their queerness, although I could recall times where phrases like "no homo" and references and statements, including derogatory references and statements to sexual orientation were mentioned. Those statements were not things made to celebrate queer people, but things that made fun of people, like me, or to ostracize people whose gender identity and sexual orientation, and or other ways of being didn't align with the heterosexual way of being and living that was not ostracized, which Pritchard (8) reflects on. Explaining their educational journey and experiences, their own literacy practices and the work they did to inform themselves about Black queerness, Pritchard reflects on the reading and writing that they did. Pritchard (9) writes:

Through my self-created pedagogy and for the first time in my life, I saw Black LGBTQ people depicted as brilliant thinkers, resilient people, lifelong warriors; I learned that they loved and were loved by others, that they laughed and danced and sang and painted and prayed and dreamed just like everyone else. I saw, especially in reading Hardy, that these



Black LGBTQ people were not mutually exclusive of Black communities, but would be part of those communities, gay and lesbian communities, and making art completely comprised of the aesthetics of Black queer life. (8)

The kind of “self-created pedagogy” that Pritchard (8) reflected on creating is a part of the history of “self-education” and “private learner” practices that Logan (29-30) identified as being a part of the African-American community’s literacy learning practices. Explaining the term, Logan writes that private learner was:

...a term used in the nineteenth century to describe the individual who engaged in some form of self-education. Nan Johnson observes that this learner was more visible in the late nineteenth century, when rhetorical ability became as much a personal asset as an essential tool of civic activism. (29)

Although, I have some recollection of reading Iceberg’s *Slim Trick Baby* sometime during my youth, and I recall watching *Life* and seeing Biscuit and Jangle Leg’s relationship, most of my learning about queerness came through what I knew about myself, hearing references to people’s sexual orientation made by people other than them and, personal experiences, like babysitting for a same-sex couple and coming out stories, like when Sheryl Swoopes, my favorite WNBA player of all time, announced she was married to a woman. I had friends who were aware of their queerness and while I embraced them, I also reflected on what my proximity and closeness to them meant for how people would perceive me and or my relationship with them, which at times impacted me.

Young me, oftentimes was concerned about what their embrace of themselves would communicate about our relationship. Throughout much of these experiences, I did not identify or embrace my Black queer self. As a result, there were times when I found myself wondering

about what my embrace of other queer people meant. At other times, I found myself sulking in realities of people embracing their queerness, sexual orientation and ways of being in ways that I had not yet felt I was allowed to do. At one phase of my life, during an occasion, sometime in my teenage years when talking to my dad about dating and on another that occurred sometime in my college years, when talking to my now wife, who was then just a woman I liked and was attracted to – I identified as asexual. Identifying myself as asexual was safe and an identity that I did not believe people would condemn. While I have a lot more learning and reading to do and have a copy of *James Baldwin: A Biography* and Audre Lorde’s *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* lined up in the books on my desk, I know more about Black queer people and my own queerness than I did.

Unlike Pritchard (8) who intentionally developed pedagogy focused on queerness and Black queerness in their youth<sup>24</sup>, I did not intentionally or knowingly develop such a pedagogy. Still, my lifetime includes experiences when I can recall trying to bring Shug and Celie’s love and relationship in *The Color Purple* to life or thinking it was acceptable for Cleo to have a girlfriend in *Set It Off*, even before I accepted that as a possibility for myself. I recall being emotionally moved by *Women of Brewster Place* not just because it was focused on Black women’s experiences, but because it included Black women who were in love with each other in an intimate way and in some way I related to that. I suppose all of these things and the connection I felt to them were my unintentional efforts to develop a pedagogy for myself. Now,

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<sup>24</sup> LaMonda Horton-Stallings in her lecture at the Black Feminist Summer Institute on August 3, 2022, provided powerful insights about Black queerness in relation to youth and discussed her experiences as a child prodigy and writer whose queerness was exhibited in her writing. This footnote is included because I view her experiences as relevant to the discussions and as experiences that would be classified as what Pritchard (8) would classify as a “self- created pedagogy” which I was writing about and thinking about before I attended the BFSI seminar. While I was writing about my experiences and what texts and films gave me some image of myself, in the evening, I returned to include some reflections pertaining to *The Color Purple* and *Shug and Celie* which I watched in my youth and teenage years because, although I had not yet acknowledged myself as queer or same-sex attracted, I viewed that as akin to the kinds of childhood/youth experiences related to queerness that Horton-Stallings and Pritchard discuss.

and for some time now, I have been more committed to intentionally developing the kind of pedagogy that Pritchard (8) reflects on developing in their youth.

I am still developing my pedagogy, as I am sure Pritchard is still doing. I am still currently expanding on my knowledge of the histories and experiences of Black queer people. Prior to graduate school and during my time in graduate school, I read essays in Lorde's *Sister Outsider*. During graduate school, I continued to pursue my childhood interest in Black history. As an adult my interest in Black history more fully encompasses and considers Black queerness and Black queer histories. In my youth and young adulthood, I was concerned about what such inclusion would mean for me in this life and in an afterlife. At times that impacted me, and how I interacted with other people. Within my time as a graduate student, I've continued to educate myself on the Black queer legacies and histories I am a part of. That education has come in a variety of ways including through reading texts like *Fashioning Lives*, Angela Davis *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*, Christopher Lewis' articles "Cultivating a Black Lesbian Shamelessness: Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*" and "Queering Personhood in the Neo-Slave Narrative: Jewelle Gomez's *The Gilda Stories*" and the *Combahee River Collective Statement*.

Long before I was reading texts where Black queerness was celebrated (Pritchard; Davis; Lewis) and where there was a recognition of the powerful and essential contributions of Black queer people (Davis, Pritchard, Lewis, "Combahee River Collective Statement"), my research around being a lesbian involved things like, trying to determine which religions would accept me as a lesbian, and the queerness that I had reservations about accepting. While being a lesbian, bi-sexual or dating someone of the same sex was not something I was unfamiliar with, because I had friends and acquaintances who were same-sex loving people, bi-sexual and or queer, it took time before I embraced my sexual orientation.

While I was not ignorant about LGBTQ people's existence, and embraced and accepted people from the LGTBQ community, I was not accepting and embracing the reality that I was a part of the community. Despite an awareness of my attraction to the same-sex, I didn't think that my awareness needed to shift into an acceptance that could result in compromising the comfort that came from just not recognizing my sexual orientation. Instead, I thought it was more appropriate to do what my peers were typically doing, which was have a crush on the opposite sex, express my admiration for a friend's guy cousin, and mimic the heterosexual behavior that was the norm.

The other option was communicating that I did not find anyone attractive and that I was okay alone. In my mind, alone was a better option than the thought of being abnormal, not being accepted, being judged or condemned. The thought of being condemned was discomforting. Even though I accept, love and embrace myself, the ways that my sexual orientation may be condemned by others – is still discomforting. Unlike now, back in the day it used to feel like a kind of constant pressure that I had something wrong with me that I needed to get right – even though, at that time no one was telling me that there was anything wrong with me.

When I was a college-aged person, who still had not reached my 21st birthday, but was over the dating age requirement of about 16-years-old that my parents had established in our household, I was casually dating my now wife, who was the first woman I ever dated. During one occasion when I visited her at her college, I cried uncontrollably as I sat at the edge of her bed in her dorm room. I cried, concerned that my feelings for her meant God would feel differently about me and that the love that God has for all people would no longer be love God had for me. I cried because I grew up in the church and I didn't know if the church would accept the feelings I had for another woman and my attraction to her. I cried because I was finally

expressing and experiencing feelings and emotions that I had for a long time worked not to acknowledge.

No human being should feel like that, but considering my own experiences and Pritchard's (164-166) discussions of some of the exclusionary, condemning and homophobic mindsets and practices Black LGBTQ people who participated in their study experienced, it is evident that Black queer people too commonly experience the kinds of hurt, hate, pain, exclusion and rejection that may result in some of us just being Black, due to not wanting to doubly experience the oppression, hatred, and homophobia that comes with being a Black queer person. Writing about one of their research participant's experiences, Pritchard explains:

Numerous research participants recalled episodes where family, friends, and other church members confronted them with a Bible-based condemnation of their gender and sexual identity. These instances often relied on interpretations of written texts. Additionally, many other participants recalled incidents where unwritten discourses and ideologies around gender and sexual politics helped perpetuate spiritual violence. (164)

I can testify that thinking that God doesn't love you because of who you love is worse than any heartbreak you can ever experience from a romantic relationship. I say that as a same-sex loving person who can testify that any heartbreak that I have experienced in an intimate relationship hurts just like it hurts when someone has their heart broken by the opposite sex. Nothing hurts like wondering whether being in love with someone of the same sex is so much of a sin that you would be better off without experiencing love in this lifetime because of the afterlife you're trying to secure for yourself once this lifetime is done. At the phase of my life, when I referred to myself as asexual or reflected on how being a nun was a part of my future plans, I believe I did so, because I thought being asexual or a nun was a life path or future God would approve of. In

dealing with the first heartbreak that I ever experienced, a woman, who later became my first girlfriend, helped me get through a tough time which I am still grateful for. When I was dealing with the heartbreak of my now wife deciding that it was time for our casual dating to come to an end, the woman who became my first girlfriend was present, willing to talk and listen and not shame, judge or condemn me for an aspect of my identity that I still was not comfortable telling everyone about. The love she exhibited for me while providing support for me as I worked through heartbreak, and the love she provided for me in our actual relationship is love that even years after the breakup, in a marriage that involves being married to someone I am happily married to, and far removed from any desire for that relationship, I still wonder whether religion or concerns about the perception of, and or condemnation of a same-sex relationship ultimately factored into our breakup.

With my first girlfriend, I experienced love and fell in love in a way that I had not before. For the first time, I felt like I was a part of a larger community that acknowledged Black people and our queerness, and both my Blackness and queerness were invited and welcomed. Although there were times when we needed to remain closeted, because we were not out to everyone, I was able to affirm and accept myself, and experience the love and attraction I felt when I dated her. I could acknowledge her to some friends who I was out to and met a friend of hers, who had a girlfriend. At times, although only on some rare occasions, we were able to be out as a collective community of Black women, who were dating other women. I had seen other people be out and in same-sex relationships long before I myself was in a same-sex relationship.

While I lived through several phases of my life, where I was not out to my family and all of my friends, or out to people within the various communities I was a part of, I was more out than I had been before. I was in love and was learning to love and accept an aspect of my identity

that I had on various other occasions thought was not acceptable. We went on dates. We experienced love and experienced life, and it was beautiful and at times challenging – especially for a person like me, who was at a later age than most people in my first serious relationship, which involved more of a commitment and building of a relationship than the casual dating I had done.

As out as I was at times, I was very closeted at other times, which resulted in often not revealing that I had found love, and definitely not acknowledging who I was in love with. If I had relationship questions, and or needed relationship advice, I definitely could not seek that advice from people, who did not know I was in a same-sex relationship. Although I am a woman, Pritchard's (58) discussions about the ways a Black boy's "bookishness" can be classified as queerness resonates with me. Already aware of how people perceived me being a girl who played sports, and at times wore clothes and attire that were classified as being for men and as someone who understood some people's reactions to me playing sports, or not having a boyfriend, I was concerned about how people would perceive public expressions of affection and intimacy with the same-sex.

I had to determine when my literacies of love, and how I felt for women were literacies that I could present and speak about, and I had to decide where and when it was appropriate to acknowledge that aspect of my identity. Pritchard (60-61) writes about literacy concealment in relation to literacy practices like writing and reading. Pritchard explains:

Strategies of literacy concealment, such as stealing books from libraries or sneaking off to Black, feminist, and LGBT bookstores to read or purchase queer-themed texts without others knowing, carry the burden of emotional distress such as worry and also the

possibility of being discovered, punished, or harmed, and therefore are not completely safe. (61)

It is important to take seriously the potential and actual danger and threats to one's life that Pritchard (61) reflects on being a part of Black queer people's attempts to use texts and other practices to learn more about themselves and their communities, as well as the dangers associated with expressing themselves like King was justifiably doing with his Valentine's card. Pritchard (56) details the dangers that are likely unfortunately always a part of a Black queer person's fears about what can happen to them, when they write, "Second, details around King's death suggest that some literacy activities are better kept secret or hidden, or never employed at all, because one is at risk of being ostracized or becoming a victim of violence" (Pritchard 56).

When I learned that my first girlfriend was breaking up with me, I needed a place where I could cry because I wasn't out to my parents and didn't want to have to explain heartbreak that was already unbearable because I didn't know if that would then involve having to deal with a broken heart and being condemned for my heart being broken by a woman. I felt safe at home, and, for that, I was and am fortunate. I felt loved at home, and, for that, I was and am grateful. I was confident that I would not experience any physical harm because of my sexual orientation. Still, at the time, I could not guarantee that my sexual orientation, and or having a girlfriend would've been received with arms wide open, no judgment or a reaction that was completely detached from the kind of literacy normativity that Pritchard educates us on.

Me being heartbroken over a person that I introduced as a friend wouldn't make any sense and I was not at a place where I felt ready enough to explain to my parents that I had a girlfriend, so I definitely was not in position to explain that a woman broke my heart. So, I chose to express my broken-heartedness outside of my parents' home. I hid my broken-heartedness in



ways that could be classified as the kind of “literacy concealment,” that Pritchard is discussing when talking about accessing and hiding texts (Pritchard 60-61). Hiding my broken-heartedness involved me hiding something that if not hidden would reveal my sexual orientation, which I was concealing. Hiding that I was dealing with heartbreak was challenging for a number of reasons, but E. Patrick Johnson’s (19) discussions about “homeplace,” a concept he credits bell hooks for provides insightful reflections about why it was so difficult for me to feel like I should not and could not share my heartbreak at home, and to think that I had to go elsewhere for a remedy. E. Patrick Johnson explains:

Cutting across the lines of class and gender, homeplace provides a place from which to critique oppression. I do not wish to romanticize this site by dismissing the homophobia that circulates within homeplace or the contempt that some of us (of all sexual orientations) have for ‘home.’ I am suggesting, rather, that in spite of these contradictions, homeplace is that site that first gave us the ‘equipment for living’ (Burke 293 qtd. in Johnson 19) in a racist society, particularly since we, in all of our diversity, have always been a part of this homeplace: housekeepers, lawyers, seamstresses, hairdressers, activists, choir directors, professors, doctors, preachers, mill workers, mayors, nurses, truck drivers, delivery people, nosey neighbors, and (an embarrassed?) “etc.” SNAP! (E. Patrick Johnson 19)

My parents and brothers affirm me and who I am, and who I love. They are not homophobic and are allies of the LGBTQ community. I consistently experienced embracing and loving experiences in the home, and I now looking back, wish I had told them about my same-sex attraction to women sooner, and trusted what I now know is their truth, which is that they unconditionally love me for who I am and how I am. Even with these reflections about what

living life as myself has allowed me to confirm, at the time, I was not comfortable with the idea or the reality of coming out to my parents, my siblings, or in some of the communities I was a part of. I had my reasons for being reluctant, and for thinking that my intimate relationship needed to look like and be like the intimate relationships my peers, parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and friends, and my friends' parents were in. I had heard and seen enough to know that same-sex love was not viewed the same, and not celebrated, accepted and or what people were talking about when they said love is love. It was the way of being that people were talking about when they said things like, "I'm not like that," or this or that person is "like that" or "they go that way" or a sexual-orientation related phrase was used as an insult.

Despite being raised in a home where being optimistic and avoiding too many tears and bouts of sadness felt like requirements, home was still the source for mending all of life's non-intimate heartbreaks that I had experienced and the place where I was uplifted by my parents, siblings and family when I was feeling down. Home was and still is the place where we did not have to be down to be uplifted and where our goals, interests and ambitions were supported. Home is still the place where my parents taught us to love people, and to not judge people and to respect people, and take pride in who we were as people. Still, I knew that Blackness had always been affirmed and uplifted in my house, and that while queerness and my lesbian identity is now something I do not shy away from embracing and accepting among family and friends, at the time I did not feel I could guarantee that I would be accepted if I came out.

Regardless of how my parents unconditionally love me, and the ways that they accept and affirm my wife, and are LGTBQ community allies, looking back, growing up, I did not see Gay Pride being something that could co-exist with Black pride. I'm thankful to God that I now

know that Gay Pride and Black Pride can co-exist, and I will never question and or doubt that. I am thankful to God that my parents and brothers continue to love and affirm my wife and I, and that my parents never stopped viewing me as their daughter, and my brothers have always viewed me as their big sister. Failing to do any of those things would be inhumane. Literacy normativity is pervasive though and it can show up in anyone, and or their attitudes or perceptions, and once it is engaged in and attitudes associated with it are shared, it makes it hard to view affirmation of people within the LGBTQ community as possible. Literacy normativity made it hard for me to affirm myself and made me reluctant to believe that people I loved would continue to love me. While my family and I have a relationship, Pritchard's *Fashioning Lives* help us see that for some Black queer people, such a reality is not possible.

Considering E. Patrick Johnson's (19) remarks about everything that is gained from the home, and what people associate the homeplace with, as well as my own reflections about the essential role home and family played and still play in my life should make it clear why it was challenging to deal with heartbreak away from home. Through all the tears and the time, I spent in bed crying, my sad and melancholy mood and heartbreak and all the other symptoms of heartbreak, which even concerned my first girlfriend, who broke my heart enough to check in on me and my well-being, I did most of my crying and mourning of the relationship outside of the home. I found people to confide in.

Although some of my mom's later reflections and disappointment suggested that she would've preferred for me to confide in her, at the time, I didn't believe that I should and was not sure that I could. Even now, I still believe that considering my life experiences at the time, and what I understood peoples' perceptions and attitudes about sexual orientation to be, I would've still dealt with my heartbreak outside of the home, because I still don't know if and how I

would've dealt with the potential heartbreak and rejection that could've come out of me sharing my sexual orientation, and truth, which was that a woman I was in love with broke my heart.

Looking back, I wish I had of told my mom first and trusted that the love that she and my dad had was love that they would never stop expressing, but the stigmatization and condemnation of people in the LGBGTQ community, and the hatred that is expressed for people within the community oftentimes overshadows the belief and possibility that you can share your truth and be accepted, affirmed and loved. Even though the heartbreak was serious, I never really doubted that I would be able to get over the break-up and knew I would survive it. I had more confidence in my ability to recover from the heartbreak than I had in my ability to recover from whether God's love for me would go away if I was attracted to and or in love with a woman.

While my first girlfriend breaking up with me involved dealing with the feelings that typically come from being broken up with, the hurt and pain of not knowing whether God still loved me, which is the hurt I had previously felt, resulted in me wondering whether I would have to choose between loving someone, or not being able to be a part of the faith and religion I loved, and having to deal with the heartbreak of not being worthy of God's love. Experiences like these evidence the need for the kind of "restorative literacies" that Pritchard (33) writes about. I was also trying to understand what my attraction to women meant for the rest of my eternity, my other identities, and how being a part of the LGTBQ community would impact being a part of other communities I was part of. Although there were times when I struggled to deal with feeling like my attraction to women was something that would jeopardize my relationship with God or being a faith practitioner, I am fortunate that I ultimately decided to maintain my relationship with God and continue to study and practice religions. These days, I am grateful for the incredibly loving and beautiful marriage I have with my wife and the way I remain committed to

my faith, as we both increase the faith we have in God. Our truth is that God blessed us with one another. My family loves me and my wife, and we love one another.

Again, I know that is a reality that some Black LGBTQ people do not experience, due to people being confined to narrow, judgmental and restricting views about what love and romantic relationships should be. As a family, we support and affirm the LGBTQ community, and recognize that not everyone experiences the fortune and blessing of their family loving them in a society, where LGBTQ people have to fight to ensure that their rights are protected and that they have the same employment, healthcare and housing rights as everyone else, and where they do not have to fear that same-sex marriage will be ruled unconstitutional. Still, there are times where my identity means I have to, even with family and loved ones, speak up and be the one leading the conversations about the threats that LGBTQ people face when trying to find a home without being discriminated against, or when talking about how Brittney Griner's sexual orientation, gender, and ways of being put her more at risk for harm when she was detained. There's times, like one occasion, when I believed that someone was doing double-takes, and or moving apprehensively, watchfully, and being less than friendly and stand-offish, because I was showing love to my wife or using and exhibiting, what Pritchard (24) refers to as "Black LGBTQ literacies" and my dad felt like I was misreading the situation, and it was just the person's disposition and way of being. My dad and I disagreed, because my experiences told me, the person's reception to me and perception of me was based on my sexual orientation, ways of dressing and presenting, gender, race, expression of love, and other aspects of my identity that impact mine and other LGBTQ peoples' experiences and if and how other people interact with us and respond to us. When the individual finally interacted with me, and realized I was a human

being, both of our families had a beautiful and heartfelt interaction that is too often missed due to limited perspectives about who belongs and who does not belong.

We have to hold ourselves accountable for not perpetuating and or promoting heteronormative attitudes and perspectives that displace people. We have to ensure that people do not deem it illegal or illegitimate for LGBTQ people to be represented in society and culture. We have to have intergenerational discussions about pronouns, gender, sexual orientation, binary and non-binary people, and the ways we all belong, and to condemn behavior and discourse that suggests people do not belong. That is work that we all have to be involved in and that is not above us, and that we have to hold ourselves and each other accountable for.

My days of dealing with the heartbreak of wondering if God will stop loving me for my sexual orientation are behind me. Ahead of me are my hopes of helping other people see that God loves them regardless of how people condemn and judge them. I can now better affirm, support and celebrate other members of the LGBTQ community, because I have learned to do these things for myself. Now, if I deal with heartbreak, it is likely because I am concerned about someone or something threatening my rights to be married to my wife or oppressive ideologies and actions that aim to dictate what rights two women who are married to one another should or should not have. Pritchard (55) considers the rejection that Black queer people experience, while inviting readers to think about how Black LGBTQ people use their literacy practices to continue on despite rejection. Pritchard writes:

My attention, however, was drawn to the details where specific literacies were treated as unacceptable. What do Black LGBT people do to *restore* even a modicum of safety to their literacy practices in the face of the real threat or experience of harm levied at them

because of some detail of their literacy performance being depicted as deviant or to mark them as non-normative. (55)

It is important to keep in mind Pritchard's (55) points about people being classified as "non-normative" and the impact that can have on people. I know how I was and have been impacted by the stigmatization and judgment that comes from the kind of "non-normative" labeling that Pritchard (55) shed light on. Regardless of home always being the best and safest place for me to be, when I brought a woman home with me, even if she was more than a friend, prior to really affirming and accepting myself, I always only introduced her as a friend. I didn't use language that accurately captured the status of my relationships because I didn't know how people would respond to me acknowledging my same-sex relationships, attractions or me being a lesbian. Pritchard (106-107) refers to ancestors, fictive kin and elders, which they explain when they write:

Through these figures and an array of literacy practices employed for intervention, research participants persist in fashioning Black queer lives as they create and preserve historical links, share cultural traditions with others, and engender Black queer identity formation and affirmation. (107)

As writing teachers and scholars in rhetoric and composition, something we should be invested in, is answering the question: How does our teaching of writing and scholarship invite Black queer people, and all students to connect with ancestors, fictive kin and or other systems and communities of support that may provide them with affirmation and proof that their lives are worth living? Even after accepting myself, it was a while before I learned how to take part in celebrating my Black queer self and take pride in that aspect of my identity. I hope to one day be

an elder or ancestor that someone can look to and am grateful I can look to Pritchard's work as a resource that has greatly informed me about some of my Black queer ancestors.

Despite spending a lot of my childhood and youth in church, even when I had become more comfortable being a Black queer woman at home, around family and friends and in professional and academic spaces, it took me time to get to a place where I felt like I could comfortably sit in church without someone condemning me for my Black queerness. Even now, I am never 100 % sure when saying that I have a wife or am a member of the LGBTQ community is going to result in someone expressing a level of discomfort or disapproval. Similarly, I recognize the ways that educational spaces as Pritchard illustrates can be spaces where people can similarly fear the way that they and their identities will be responded to. Regardless, I have learned to accept myself and to not be a condemner of my own sexual orientation.

Depending on the church I am at and or the type of sermon the reverend is delivering, I still may feel a level of discomfort and a level of doubt about whether my love is the kind of love that is accepted by the church. I know how it feels to have to conceal an aspect of your identity in ways that can be classified as what Pritchard (60-61) refers to people doing when concealing their literacy practices and the texts they read and engage with. I know what it means to be who you were raised to be and to be somebody who has had to raise conversations about who you are because of the ways that those conversations didn't come up when you were being raised.

I am not afraid to admit that because of how uncomfortable society is with my Black queerness that it took time for me to get comfortable with it. While I recognize society still has a lot of work to do to create a more accepting, affirming and loving world for Black queer people, my life is a testament to the way that work starts with self and family. I have learned that my Blackness, womaness, and or queerness do not have to take a backseat to one another and that all



of these identities are always present, and should never be displaced by me or anyone else. Still learning these things, does not mean that I am not still learning new ways of accepting, affirming and embracing myself and other people, and improving my ways of doing these things, and how I encourage other people to do the same. In my life experiences, my affirmation of myself and embrace of my own identities resulted in my family and I increasing our knowledge of an aspect of my identity that is something that we all love, embrace and celebrate in various ways. The kind of celebration of every aspect of students' identities that Love (120) encourages educators to engage in, starts with people being able to affirm and celebrate themselves while also not condemning others for their differences.

### **Investing in Spaces, Places and Practices that Enhance the Black (Queer) Experience**

When George Floyd was killed in 2020, I remember having a virtual church service to attend on Sunday. At the time of the violent, inhumane and unnecessary murder of Floyd, the violence, oppression, death and systematic injustice that Black people have historically faced seemed to be at an all-time high. Along with the murdering of Black people seeming to occur at increasingly higher rates, Black people along with everyone else were trying to survive in a pandemic and being directly impacted by what Crenshaw refers to as “the twin pandemics.” While my wife and I during the pandemic, regularly<sup>25</sup> streamed and attended the Elevation Church worship services, after the police's inhumane act of terrorism against Floyd was committed, I did not feel motivated and inspired to attend a church service. I recall letting my wife know that I was not interested in going to church unless they planned to talk about the tragedy and the church's role in combatting the racism, police brutality and malpractice,

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<sup>25</sup> We regularly attended *Elevation* Church prior to ultimately deciding to no longer attend the church as a result of a visiting preacher, Pastor Jentezen Franklin on February 5, 2023, in his sermon “This is Not Your Final Chapter,” sharing a homophobic statement in the church's pulpit, and what we through dialogue with a church leader learned first-hand about the church's views on same-sex couples and marriage.

systematic issues and ills that contributed to the tragedy. At the time, my attitude and actions, including my writing, reflected my expectations for people and institutions to combat the systematic injustice, racism, oppression and violence against Black people that had ended Floyd's life. Ultimately, due to my wife's interest in us maintaining our routine of attending church, her expressed support, which came through her powerful exhibitions of understanding the hurt and pain we were both experiencing and recognizing my reservations, we decided to attend church.

As we tuned in and listened to the service, it was a rare and too infrequently occurring church service where the violence and injustices too-often committed against Black people were being addressed. Pastor Steven Furtick and John Gray engaged in a dialogue titled, "Become the Bridge: A Conversation with Pastor Steven Furtick and John Gray." Furtick and Gray met the requirement I had on that Sunday morning, when, I like many people were dealing with the irreconcilable pain, confusion, sadness and hopelessness that was attached to living in a pandemic, and being reminded that being Black was more deadly than COVID-19.

In Gray and Furtick sitting down and talking about race and racism in America during a church service on Sunday, they acknowledged how racism impacts Black people in America. Along with this, they exhibited the significance of religious leaders confronting and combatting racism from the pulpit. Such an acknowledgement serves as support for those who are enduring and experiencing the pain that racism causes, which is more productive than not acknowledging racism and the issues that it causes for people in their personal, professional, political, societal, recreational and religious lives. Although I was relieved at the focus Pastor Furtick and Pastor Gray placed on racism and its impact on Black people in America and the attention paid to the murdering of Floyd and what that illustrated for the church's presence in conversations about the

terrible and tragic outcomes of racism, I have little faith in whether the church would similarly engage in conversations that address the negative and at times deadly acts that are motivated by homophobia.

Alim and Smitherman's discussions (67;-69) of the backlash Jeremiah Wright faced for his sermons, "The Day or Jerusalem's Fall," and "Confusing God and Government," illustrate why religious leaders may be reluctant to speak on race and social justice due to how the public may not be receptive and affirming of religious leaders delivering sermons focused on societal justice that include calls for racial justice and reckoning with atrocities and oppression that have occurred in America. Alim and Smitherman (70) also reflect on how such discussions within Wright's speech are a part of what they refer to as the "Biblical jeremiad tradition," and explain what participating in the tradition positions preachers to achieve. Alim and Smitherman write, "As Hendricks points out, the function of Wright's Biblical jeremiad 'is to remind Americans, lest we become self-righteous in our righteous indignation, that we too have engaged in mass destruction of innocents'" (Obery Hendricks qtd. in Alim and Smitherman 70).

Hendrick's points (qtd. in Smitherman and Alim 70) about the 'mass destruction of the innocents' and the ways that Wright, a Black religious leader addressed that destruction in his sermons shed light on how religious leaders can increase their congregations' awareness of the importance of being accountable and recognize their own role in the oppression, tragedy and struggle people endure. As someone who is a part of the LGBTQ community, I believe it is extremely important to, as Pritchard does in *Fashioning Lives* when talking about Black queer experience, acknowledge the church's participation in oppression, marginalization, and ostracization of people who they deem as unworthy of existing in society and or unworthy of attending church.

The public continues to maintain the unhealthy and troubling legacy of there being little to no outcry when Black queer people endure premature deaths, as the result of being murder victims, and or, as the result of them enduring mental or physical violence that contributes to their death. Black LGBTQ people continue to experience violence, harm, incarceration and or death that is connected to someone's disapproval of their sexual orientation. As Pritchard reflects on when discussing (56) the inhumane, unfortunate and unnecessary murder of Lawrence King, who was killed because of a Valentine's Day Card, danger is something Black LGBTQ people experience because of inhumane actions and oppositional and condemning views of their sexual orientation. Black LGBTQ people are killed, ostracized and or treated inhumanely because of the perception that it is unacceptable for them to hold hands, kiss in public or mention their same-sex attraction, and or acknowledge that they have a partner with the same sex, and or because they or someone they love do not fit within "traditional" gender norms.

As a human being, any tragedy that impacts any other human being is hard to endure, and takes an emotional toll on people, while also instilling some level of fear or uncertainty, but tragedy always weighs the heaviest on those who are directly impacted by it and those who fear similar fates. Considering this, and my love for church, religion, my faith, and my belief in God, and my love for my wife and the way that my religious identity and sexual orientation are intertwined and co-exist, I view it as is imperative for the church to disavow all forms of violence, while holding the people who have historically committed violence accountable and protecting those who have historically endured it. If the church does not condemn violence against the Black community, the LGBTQ community and other communities that have historically been marginalized, are they too, not accountable for causing the chaos, catastrophe, trauma, personal hurt and public struggle that the violence causes?

I want to be certain that the church sees Black queer life as life that they should not be closeted about mourning, but that they should be publicly protecting. Turning to Pritchard's *Fashioning Lives* positions readers to learn from Pritchard's teachings on Black LGBTQ people's experiences within religious institutions and learn from Pritchard's discussions of how Black LGBTQ people have used their restorative literacies to create religious and spiritual spaces and practices that aid in them progressing and prospering. Pritchard (162) draws on Horace L. Griffin and E. Patrick Johnson's work to shed light on the limited amount of support the Black church has historically provided for the Black LGBTQ community. Pritchard writes:

Theologian Horace L. Griffin notes that historically 'Black church leaders and congregants have been resistant and even closed in treating [LGBTQ] congregants equally or, in many cases, offering simple compassion to the suffering of [LGBTQ] people.' Thus, 'the Black heterosexual majority is presently engaged in a 'biblical indictment' that identifies [LGBTQ] people as immoral. (162)

These insights in Pritchard's work offer some understanding of the work that religious institutions still need to do to accept and embrace LGBTQ people. The discussions also provide explanations for how and why Black people are subjected to going outside of the Black community to search for a sense of belonging in other religious spaces, which Pritchard (163) sheds light on. In Black people's search to find a church home that does not reject them or condemn them for their sexual orientation, as Pritchard (163) informs us, they may find that sense of belonging, but may not find religious traditions and ways of worshiping that are akin to praise and worship and religious practices that they became accustomed to in Black churches or religious spaces.

Having aspects of one's identity affirmed while another aspect of their identity is not considered, could cause people to not engage with religion and may result in them detaching from their religious communities. Pritchard in some of their chapter three discussions of their research participants' use of "restorative literacies" illustrates how the research participants are able to engage in religious and spiritual practices that they find fulfilling. Pritchard provides evidence that shows how Black queer people and African American people have historically used religious texts, traditions and practices to serve their own purposes and meet their needs. In reflecting on what can be gleaned from recognition of Black queer people and histories within religious contexts, Pritchard (158) explains:

When we acknowledge the truth that Black queer subjects are and always have been present in African American religious and spiritual communities, we are confronted by the mandate to question and challenge the investments in the linear and neat narrative we currently work from.

Pritchard (156-157) discusses how Black queer people use "restorative literacies" and techniques like "co-constructing" and "appropriation of literacy" to deepen their own understanding of religious and spiritual texts to combat what they (Pritchard 164; 190) refer to as "spiritual violence." In their discussion (159) of a research participant, Phylisia Craig, Pritchard sheds light on the power of the use of "restorative literacies," and how "restorative literacies" equip "...Craig and other research participants.." with the opportunity to create and engage in religious and spiritual practices that may otherwise be inaccessible to them. Along with what can be gleaned from the research participants development and deployment of the practices they use to create fulfilling spiritual and religious practices, there are also lessons in Pritchard's (168-171)

discussions of people forming communities and spaces that serve the needs of people whose lives aren't thought of as worthy of providing service to.

As a person interested in ensuring that everyone can access spaces where they are acknowledged, affirmed and uplifted, and where literacy normativity, racism, homophobia and other isms are classified as crimes and violations that result in legal punishment, I find Pritchard's (168-171) discussions of the Unity Fellowship Church Movement (UFCM) to be inspiring. Pritchard's discussions of the UFCM provide an example of how people can collectively work together to create communities, spaces and organizations focused on meeting a specific community's needs while also being invested in supporting that community in ways that help them prosper and progress. Pritchard's discussions of UFCM's history shed light on how the organization's consideration of their community's needs evolved into UFCM serving various religious, spiritual and societal purposes for people. Pritchard (169) writes:

In 1982, the UFCM began as the Unity Fellowship Church Los Angeles, a weekly Bible study and prayer meeting for Black lesbians and gays that Carl Bean and others held at a private residence. When UFCM began it did so just as a number of Black activists and allies were publishing newsmagazines and holding events discussing the antigay interpretations of religious and world history, questioning how important African American religion was to the gay civil rights movement, and debating the usefulness of a Black LGTBQ church. In 1984, the group underwent a reorganization that formally established it as a church, complete with non-profit status, in 1985. Some of the Black gay and lesbian activists of that era became ministers and liturgical leaders in Unity and in other LGTBQ churches.

The communal support, networking and opportunities that existed within UFCM is akin to the type of support, uplift and camaraderie that Kynard writes (127-128) writes about being a part of the Black Arts Movement. Kynard writes:

While BAM was ‘an unquestionably generative period in the development of U.S. Black women writers,’ Broadside’s publication record of black women writers remains unrivaled, though the Chicago Black Arts Movement was actually home to the most black artists and activists. Randall’s press, thus, captures both: (1) the techne of BAM, in terms of how and why the press distributed materials in new and ingenious ways and; (2) the literacies of BAM, in terms of shifting the landscape of who were readers and writers and the social purposes for engaging new texts. (126-127)

Like Kynard’s (126-127) aforementioned insights about the supportive and productive relationships between the writers, activists and participants within the Black Arts Movement, Pritchard’s (169-170) discussions of UFCM shed light on how “new literacies” emerged from the work they did to provide support for a community, that society and existing institutions failed. Kynard and Pritchard’s discussions evidence how the resourcefulness and creativity of Black people played an essential role in the community not letting institutions’ refusal to support them prevent them from progressing, and how their investment in themselves created opportunities and experiences that they wanted and needed to have. As Pritchard (170) communicates, UFCM met the Black community’s spiritual and religious needs, medical needs and relationship needs and acknowledged and honored Black LGBTQ people’s desire to participate in society while having access to equitable and just conditions without being discriminated against. As important as it is to recognize all that UFCM became equipped to provide for their community, it is also important to recognize Pritchard’s (169) insights about the other communities and systems of



support that UFCM credits for making valuable and essential contributions that improved peoples' experiences and lives.

Within Pritchard's (169) acknowledgment of the way that the members of UFCM engaged in coalitional work with "Black activists," who made press and media related contributions, they offer an example of an organization, community, and peoples' literacy practices that can be more deeply explored and examined. There are various audiences who could benefit from turning to Pritchard's discussions of these histories. Some audiences include, rhetoric and composition scholars, interested in the work of Black LGBTQ people and activists using their literacy practices to improve their experiences and enhance society, and teachers who work with students in writing classrooms, where they can engage in reading, activities, dialogue and work about what can be gleaned from the histories Pritchard discusses. In discussing (170) UFCM, Pritchard informs readers about the community-oriented work the church was involved in and the way the church expanded to serve Black LGBTQ communities in various cities.

Pritchard explains:

The UFCMS's numerous national ministries and programs demonstrate resistance to literacy normativity affecting Black LGBTQ people. These ministries also reflect restorative literacies in that they promote and support congregation members' steps toward identity formation by forming new literacies centered on being a Black queer of faith. (170)

When thinking about how to create inclusive writing classrooms and educational spaces, or other places in society that people want and need to access, it is helpful to consider how these communities have created those spaces for themselves, and what must be done in spaces for people to feel like they can truly co-exist without their existence being condemned. It is also

productive to refer to Pritchard's (162-163) discussions about practices and traditions that could result in churches or religious spaces being uncomfortable for Black LGBTQ people. In Pritchard's (162- 163) discussions of Horace L. Griffin's points about how "...Black LGBTQ people in Black churches must adopt as a means of 'passing' to survive what he calls the 'heterosupremacy' of Black churches..." (162), they inform readers about how judgmental and homophobic views can result in people not being able to live their truths, and or fully experience their lives as themselves.

Working to address and eliminate the pervasiveness of literacy normativity and heteronormativity in religious spaces and schools in ways that Pritchard advocates for readers to do, better positions and prepares people to determine how they can invite people to use their restorative literacies to exist in places that have historically excluded them and educates them on how they can make contributions that help with the enhancement and evolution of spaces. While some people may struggle with understanding if and how they can make themselves or their work, contributions, and or literacy practices seem of value to institutional and traditional spaces that have never valued them, I believe that turning to Pritchard's *Fashioning Lives* should motivate and inspire people to see the role our literacy practices play in making progress and prosperity possible. Pritchard's discussions about how Black queer people, including their research participants used their "restorative literacies" to maintain and reclaim their own spiritual and religious practices and to create religious communities for Black queer people are motivators. Pritchard explains:

In every interview, after research participants discuss how or if they identify themselves in terms of religion or spirituality, I would follow by asking, 'What do you do in order to center or observe your personal sense of faith or spirituality?' For Ivans, his observation

of his spirituality shifted content and contexts, as he answered: Music is one. Music and dancing to music is definitely one because it comes from such a deeply spiritual and pure place inside of me...Also just connecting with other people through music and dance in similar ways that other people connect through religion. (185-186)

Pritchard's (186) sharing of their research participant Ivans' acknowledgement of how he uses music for spiritual uplift provides an example of peoples' ability to create and invent habits, practices, and routines that help them experience joy and thrive. Within writing classrooms and within society, people can benefit from reading Pritchard's discussions of their research participants, like Ivan's use of their restorative literacies, because it can help them consider how they can and should use their literacy practices to improve and enhance any aspect of their life, and how they can use their literacy practices to create what they want and need. Along with Pritchard's text evidencing what an individual can use their restorative literacies to achieve and create, as I earlier discussed, it is also an educational resource that sheds light on how people can collectively use their literacy practices to meet a community's needs and provide support for them.

In Pritchard's (169) discussions of UFCM, they shed light on how Black queer people participated in organized religion and the ways they organized a church and built relationships in order to create a church and movement that would acknowledge and affirm Black LGBTQ people. In spotlighting the work of UFCM, Pritchard (170) presents insights about the church's visionary work, including how Black LGBTQ people became religious leaders and how the church created celebrations, such as "weddings" that were symbolic gestures for the LGBTQ members who were not able to get married because it was not legal to do so. The enlightening discussions that Pritchard (167-172) provides about UFCM and the various ways the church

affirmed people, exposed them to spiritual and religious practices that help them restore and maintain their faith, and gave them chances to be active religious practitioners, who were invited to worship and mobilize evidence how “restorative literacies” are an essential and powerful tool that help people develop what they need for themselves and other people.

Pritchard’s (178) points about how “A number of research participants named anti-LGBTQ spiritual violence as a primary reason for their decision to cease practicing Christianity or identifying as Christian,” evidence why and how Black LGTBQ benefited from UNCF providing spaces and experiences where Black queer people could practice their faith without condemnation. Pritchard’s *Fashioning Lives* is an important resource for people interested in learning about how self-reliance, coalitional work, and institutional support all play an important role in peoples’ progress and prosperity.

While recognizing the power in the support that comes from institutions and organizations endorsing practices that affirm and uplift people, it is also important to like Pritchard does in *Fashioning Lives* and Carey does in *Rhetorical Healing* recognize how individuals using their own literacy practices can contribute to their progress and prosperity. It is important for me to draw the parallel between Pritchard and Carey’s acknowledgement of how personal and individual practices can contribute to people experiencing life in a way that affirms their existence, and also positions them to address the opposition and oppression aimed at troubling or terminating their existence. Similarly, Kynard’s discussions of “out of school literacies,” push us to recognize the abilities, practices, knowledge, and skills people possess within themselves and how they can use those things to produce and create what they want to see outside of themselves.

In Pritchard's discussions of their research participant Ivans' spiritual practices, they write, "It has spiritual meaning because Ivins says so; thus, creating vernacular divinities means one's own perspective is what matters and does not need to be shared or understood by others in order to have value" (186-187). It is powerful to know that people can create and produce affirming, uplifting and soul-fulfilling experiences for themselves, as illustrated in Ivans' (qtd. in Pritchard 186) insights about their spiritual activities and Pritchard's (187) analysis of those activities. Similarly, in drawing on James Pennebaker's scholarship and Beth Daniel's study on Al-Anon participants, Carey, as she does when reflecting (16-17) about Black women writers' perspective on personal writing, sheds light (72) on how writing can positively benefit and empower people. Carey writes, "The process of composing is thought to decrease internal turmoil because it requires writers to structure and organize a potentially traumatic experience into a narrative and organize a potentially traumatic experience into a narrative" (Carey 72).

Drawing on the work of Black women writers, Carey (16) talks about the productivity and power that is associated with reading (16) and writing (18). Carey writes:

In *Sisters of the Yam: Black Women and Self-Recovery*, bell hooks explains how teaching *The Salt Eaters* to a group of young Black women illuminated conditions that wound members of the group and revealed how their writing sometimes contains imaginative 'maps to healing.' (16)

Carey (17) continues on to discuss Black women writers and draws a parallel between what she said hooks "...describes as the transformative aspects of books..." and Patricia Hill Collins' perspective on the way writing and reading empower Black women. Carey (17) writes:

Historically, literature and essay writing have been some of the most potent textual spaces for Black women's self-empowerment because, as Collins explains readers can observe

women moving from states of ‘internalized oppression’ to the ‘free mind’ of self-defined, womanist consciousness. (Carey 17)

Like Carey’s (17) discussions of hooks and Collins’ perspectives about how Black women’s literacy practices played an essential role in them undoing the damage that oppressive and destructive systems and practices caused them, Pritchard’s work reveals how Black queer people, including their research participants, use their restorative literacies to similarly improve their state of being and experiences. Carey (16), Pritchard (189) and Kynard’s (29) insights of people’s use of their literacy practices for self-growth and to enhance their own and or their community’s experiences illustrate how people’s investment in themselves and use of their literacy practices can lead to the kind of progress they, and other people who they are supporting struggled to achieve due to a lack of institutional and societal support. I advocate for turning to *Fashioning Lives*, *Rhetorical Healing* and *Vernacular Insurrections* as resources that help people better understand the aforementioned lesson and how it can be applied to their efforts to personally and professionally prosper and positively impact society in the process.

## CHAPTER 5: A STORY ABOUT TEACHING WITH BLACK QUEER HISTORIES AND EXPERIENCES IN MIND

As an educator, I have experienced how useful and productive it is to have students in a writing classroom read Pritchard's *Fashioning Lives* and the ways the text helps to generate discussions about literacy, race, sexual orientation, identity and not engaging in oppressive practices that harm people. While I have already discussed some of the pedagogical purposes *Fashioning Lives* can serve, this chapter, like Chapter three: "Echoes of the Ancestors: An African-American Woman Rhetoric and Composition Scholar's Engagement with Those Before Her," is a pedagogical tool and resource for rhetoric and composition scholars. In the chapter, I discuss my experiences teaching a Writing Center Theory and Praxis course. My discussions of my experiences teaching the Writing Center Theory and Praxis course are useful for teachers training writing center consultants. I will also discuss those experiences and some of the other pedagogical purposes I believe Pritchard's text can serve and spotlight some of their discussions of their own teaching experiences focused on Black LGBTQ experiences.

During the Spring 2022 semester I taught a Writing Center Theory and Praxis Course and some of the topics covered in the class were race, language, writing center history, identity, community-engaged work, providing feedback, doing anti-racist and anti-ableist work. While I believe these topics should be focused on in any writing classroom, as a teacher, who trained writing center consultants, who were going to work in the Writing Center at Michigan State University and community writing center at a local library, it was imperative for me to ensure that students in the class read about, learned about and considered those topics in their work.

Throughout the semester, students, myself, and an intern in the class reflected on how to apply the scholarship we were reading to writing center consultations and writing center work.

We were visited by guest lecturers, who I invited to come to talk about their work and provide their perspective on how it can be applied to writing center work. Among the texts I assigned in the course was content from Pritchard's *Fashioning Lives*.

"Restorative literacies," "Black queer literacies" "literacy normativity," and Pritchard's discussion of hooks "love ethic" (38) and love, "literacy myth" and "freedom through literacy" were among some of the concepts and topics within Pritchard's *Fashioning Lives* that I spotlighted for an in-class discussion focused on thinking about how the text could be incorporated into writing center work. For a class discussion, I presented the following questions, "What did you learn about literacy from reading about Pritchard's (25; 26;29) discussions of literacy? "How can Pritchard's definition of Black queer literacies help us with understanding what can be classified as literacy or a literacy practice?" and "When thinking about working with writers in the writing center, what are some insights in Pritchard's text that you believe would be valuable to consider?" (Botex "011222WRA395Class") Students also read Gloria Anzaldúa's "How to Tame a Wild Tongue," and were asked questions pertaining to the connections between Pritchard and Anzaldúa's text, including "How can Pritchard and Anzaldúa's discussions about identity and experience be taken into consideration for writing center work?" (Botex).

Discussing a concept like "literacy normativity" and Pritchard's discussions of Black queer people's experiences positions teachers to, as I did with the students within my class, focus on how to avoid engaging in writing, feedback-giving or community-engaged practices that could result in someone being negatively impacted by literacy normativity, racism, homophobia, or some isms or ills that rids too many BIPOC and LGBTQ people from spaces and opportunities to pursue their professional and personal goals. In the students sharing the responses to some of the outlined topics in Pritchard's text, I was able to learn about how they understood Black



LGBTQ literacy practices, the importance of approaching work with a loving and patient mindset that considered human beings and their experiences, and the ways that influenced feedback, which is in line with what Pritchard (38) said hooks refers to as a “love ethic.”

We were able to think through and about the varying experiences and identities that may be a part of our writing center work and what it meant to affirm and support those identities and experiences within consultations, through feedback and resource-sharing. While I have my own experiences with the usefulness of assigning a non-writing center focused text like Pritchard’s in a class focused on writing center work, for scholars interested in additional insights about how such texts can be used within a writing center space, I recommend reading Zandra Jordan’s “Womanist Curate, Cultural Rhetorics Curation and Antiracist, Racially Just Writing Center Administration,” which is another text I read with the students in the Writing Center Theory and Praxis course. In her article, Jordan writes:

One of these professional development activities involves excerpts from the cultural rhetorics materials in the Center’s library. Discussion of these texts...enriches tutors’ knowledge of the rhetorical traditions of people of color and their appreciation for a more expansive range of literacies. We can then discuss the ways that this knowledge can inform tutoring practices. (Jordan “Movement 2: Resisting”)

In assigning content from Pritchard’s text to my writing center theory and practice course, I can attest to Jordan’s insights about how exposing writing center tutors to scholarship focused on culture and people’s experiences helps to expand their minds and understanding of people’s lives in ways that can be productive for their work as tutors. Reading content from Pritchard’s *Fashioning Lives* with my students evidenced that my experience of being a Black lesbian woman was not representative of the entire community, and that the stories and experiences of

other Black queer people could also be teachers that we could learn from. The engagement with Pritchard's text created a dialogue about our own and other people's identity, language and literacy practices and how identities, language, and literacy practices can be and should be acknowledged in writing and feedback-giving.

### **Lessons in Pritchard's Discussions About Teaching and Pedagogy**

In *Fashioning Lives*, Pritchard discusses their work as an educator exposing students to Black queer experiences and histories and delves into discussions that shed light on the work they believe educators should do to consider Black queer experiences and literacies, and how literacy normativity and other things impact Black LGBTQ people. My discussions in this subsection of the "Teaching with Black Queer Histories and Experiences" are focused on the light Pritchard sheds on their work as an educator and the types of pedagogical purposes I believe their text can serve. To offer these discussions, I shift away from discussing the ways I have already used Pritchard's text for my work with students in a class focused on training writing center tutors into discussing some of the future ways I and other writing teachers can apply Pritchard's *Fashioning Lives* to our work with students in writing classrooms.

Prior to reading Pritchard's *Fashioning Lives*, I approached my work with students in a mindful way that considered their identities and experiences and the ways these things could be factored into their writing or influence their writing. Even as someone who approached my teaching and work as a scholar in those ways, Pritchard's text provided me with a knowledge of concepts like "literacy normativity" and helped me to think more deeply about some of the potential specific needs of Black queer students. Although, I had myself experienced "literacy normativity," knowing the actual concept and reading Pritchard's discussions of "literacy normativity" deepened my understanding of the concept and further affirmed my desire to ensure

that I am uplifting students, and not deleting or diminishing their identities in my work as a writing teacher. It is important for writing teachers to provide feedback that does not delete or cause detriment to students and or their perception of themselves, and what they believe they have the ability to become. It is also important to facilitate class discussions that invite students to participate in dialogue without being condemned for who they are, how they identify, how they carry themselves or any aspect of their identity. Pritchard (45) offers insights on both what scholars should consider within their research and in their teaching practices to better support LGBTQ students and to ensure that their work considers a vast range of experiences without endorsing presumptuous attitudes about the perspectives students express in their writing, including in their discussions of their identities and experiences. Within questions Pritchard asks (45) and insights they offer, Pritchard (45) guides educators to challenge themselves to interrogate how their own race and students' race factors into their responses to homophobia in students' writing. Pritchard writes:

How does a White writing teacher engage a student of color about their homophobia in their writing without reinforcing racial stereotypes? Such are the avenues of exploration that engaging race with queerness invites us to consider, and it is virtually impossible to engage such questions without giving race consideration in queer theories of literacies and composition pedagogy. (45)

Along with pushing teachers to think about how a students' race and an educators' race may factor into their response to homophobia in student writing, Pritchard (45) acknowledges how "...the avenues of exploration that engaging race with queerness" which they do in their text can help to combat the kind of oppression and racism that are pervasive in student writing, and or student and teachers' engagement with writing focused on LGBTQ experiences. *Fashioning*

*Lives* provides the kind of “...queer theories of literacies and composition pedagogy” that Pritchard (45) identifies as essential for properly acknowledging queer experiences and addressing homophobia in student writing. Along with this, Pritchard (45) provides valuable insights that provide educators and scholars with guidance about the kind of work that can be done on “coming out” disclosures and other forms of sexual and gender identity disclosures. Pritchard (45) explains:

Many of the earlier works concerned how students and teachers navigated coming out in writing assignments and classrooms. While we must observe the importance of these works, we must also remember that issues affecting LGBTQ students and teachers are as wrapped up in queer sexuality and gender as they are with race, class, disability, citizenship, colonialism, and other factors.

*Fashioning Lives* is a resource that educators can use to hold themselves accountable for recognizing the kind of issues that impact students and teachers who are a part of the LGBTQ community. The text can also serve as a resource for dealing with the kind of realities that impact LGBTQ people in society, where both homophobic and affirming attitudes about the LGBTQ community are presented, as is the case in this news story lede:

A Republican-backed plan to prevent a former state lawmaker who is openly gay from serving on a university board amounts to an attack on the LGBTQ community, Democratic Lawmakers said Thursday during a heated discussion session of the Michigan senate. (Boucher)

In a writing classroom, teachers and students can read and examine a news story like the aforementioned story to learn more about some of the challenges and oppression the LGBTQ community endures. They can also be encouraged to avoid over-consuming only negative news

where people are consistently condemned and criminalized for their race and sexual orientation. Within classroom settings, students should feel welcome to reflect on their identities and experiences, and in doing so will have the opportunity to provide knowledge and wisdom on their own experiences and the ways that they and their identities have been affirmed or scrutinized. Such reflections better position people to support, uplift and affirm other people they encounter in the future and should encourage them to exhibit a community of support and care where people can see themselves as contributing, progressing and prospering.

Educators within writing classrooms can help to affirm communities that have been historically marginalized and oppressed by celebrating them and their contributions. The news can also serve as a source of inspiration that helps students and educators learn more about the positive experiences of members of the LGBTQ community and positive and productive experiences they have within various sectors in society. Headlines like: “My goal is to Normalize’: Phoenix Suns Basketball Operations Executive Announces He’s Gay” (“ESPN”); “WNBA Star Candace Parker Announces Birth of Son with her Wife, Anna Petrakova” or “Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot Pitches Dome for Soldier Field to Entice Bears to Remain at Stadium” spotlight and celebrate different aspects of the personal and professional lives of people within the LGBTQ community, and offer examples of how people in the community are progressing and prospering. Examples like these can help to increase the awareness of how LGBTQ people exist in society and the ways that LGTBQ people contribute to society.

In 2022, when Brittney Griner’s wrongful detainment in Russia was on many people’s mind and appeared in an abundance of news stories and headlines that shed light on her detainment and her being sentenced to 9 years, it was important to not overlook the harsh realities and grim circumstances faced by Black LGTBQ people. Along with acknowledging the

harsh realities, such as how her successful basketball career, commitments to her community, and more importantly her wife, Cherelle Griner, and family were out of reach for her, I also acknowledged how she, her wife and so many people advocating for her powerfully used their literacy practices to advocate for her freedom. Brittney and Cherelle Griner used their literacy practices to advocate for Brittney's freedom with various audiences. Some of their actions and efforts included Brittney Griner writing a letter to President Joe Biden, Cherelle Griner attending the WNBA All-Star game, and participating in several press interviews, engaging in dialogue and advocacy work with politicians, athletes, and community members. Other exhibitions of people using their literacy practices to advocate for Brittney Griner included Women's College Basketball coaches, Dawn Staley and Tara VanDerveer donning<sup>26</sup> "We are BG" styled gear on women's college basketball sidelines, and sports broadcasters mentioning Griner's case and circumstances while commentating a game. All of these efforts, advocacy and actions, and efforts and advocacy that I didn't reflect on here were powerful and essential exhibitions of people using the literacy practices for liberation. As a scholar, I believe it is productive for us to engage in dialogue and learning and writing experiences, where we examine and consider how Cherelle and Brittney Griner, who are a part of the Black LGBTQ community used their literacy practices and explore how people used their literacy practices to advocate for Griner's freedom. Doing so positions us to learn from powerful examples of how literacy practices were effectively used for Griner's liberation<sup>27</sup>. Such examples evidence the ways people use their literacy practices to change and enhance their own, and other peoples' experiences.

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<sup>26</sup>Voepel, M.A. "South Carolina, Stanford coaches use matchup to back Brittney Griner." *ESPN*, [https://www.espn.com/womens-college-basketball/story/\\_/id/35069124/south-carolina-stanford-coaches-use-matchup-back-brittney-griner](https://www.espn.com/womens-college-basketball/story/_/id/35069124/south-carolina-stanford-coaches-use-matchup-back-brittney-griner)

<sup>27</sup> I do this work in my unpublished paper, "When We Position Ourselves in the Air or on the Bench: Where Will Society Position Us? Defining and Determining Black Women's Place in Current Day and History?," which I presented at the *Tracing the Stream* Symposium. I am continuing to search for a venue for this article.

Stories and press coverage of these experiences and efforts can be read in a classroom setting where students and teachers can collaboratively explore news headlines and coverage focused on the experiences of LGBTQ people, and or other communities to learn more about the variety of narratives associated with the community. Referring to examples like these, and other stories about peoples' experiences in a writing classroom increases the texts and sources that can be included in what Pritchard (36-37) refers to as "cultural production." Along with adhering to Pough's advice (308) to rhetoric and composition educators to engage students in learning about the press and news delivered by media outlets to teach them to decipher and discuss the news in order to be critically engaged citizens who can think for themselves, educators in writing classrooms must also teach students to look to the news as an archive of the contributions that are being made and the history that is being written, while encouraging them to be writers of a history that does not exclude them or anyone else.

Using the news as a source of information for positive and uplifting stories about LGBTQ people's experiences, and to deepen students' awareness of the ways that the community endures hardships, challenges writing teachers to focus on and acknowledge these realities and experiences in personal, communal and professional spaces. In considering the different places that we can enhance when we consider the experiences of everyone in those spaces, Pritchard's *Fashioning Lives* remains an insightful resource that can help educators and scholars do that work. Along with this, like Kynard's discussions of "out of school literacies," and Carey's discussions of healing traditions and practices that the African-American community created, Pritchard through their discussions of Black LGBTQ peoples' literacy practices and experiences, expands readers thinking about the role that non-traditional learning spaces and practices play in shaping people, their literacies and practices.

In Pritchard (81) writing about “Extracurriculum activities,” a concept they credit Ann Gere for, Pritchard writes:

‘Extracurriculum,’ as theorized by Ann Ruggles Gere, refers to sites of literacy learning and practice that occur out of formal settings, such as the school. These sites, Gere says, are crucial to scholars gaining a more complexly informed history and theory of people’s literacies because it decouples literacy as occurring exclusively in recognized literacy institutions like school and refocuses our critical eye on the situatedness of literacies, especially those that occur out of plain sight or away from where one generally is looking (Gere, qtd. in Pritchard 81).

In the following insights from Pritchard, they shed light on how activities that can be classified as what Gere calls (qtd. in Pritchard 81) “Extracurriculum activities,” impacted one of their research participants. Pritchard writes:

It is also important to note that Davis first learned of Hemphill and Lorde through a community organization. This is significant because it shifts the pedagogical scene away from the classroom, inviting us to imagine – just as we imagine identities as intertwined – the pedagogical possibilities of school and out-of-school spaces in tandem instead of mutually exclusive. (125)

Again, Pritchard’s (125) focus on the “pedagogical possibilities of school and out-of-school spaces in tandem” is similar to Kynard’s discussions of “out of school literacies.” Within Pritchard’s discussions, they reflect (168) on an educational experience they and their students had outside of the classroom. Pritchard writes:

In June 2007 I attended church services with a group of twenty-one students and four other instructors from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. We brought the students



enrolled in an experimental learning course titled ‘The LGBTQ Civil Rights Movement, 1950-1980: Exploring History and Consequences’ to the Baltimore and Washington, D.C., area to meet with local LGTBQ activists. In addition to meeting with organizers and activists of the LGBTQ movement, students would receive in the course a survey of key moments in the history of LGTBQ rights through engagement in the actual scenes of the movement. (Pritchard 168)

As a writing teacher, who recognizes the value in students being able to use the kind of “out of school literacies,” that Kynard reflects on the usefulness of and the kind of “pedagogical possibilities” Pritchard (125) identifies as existing inside and outside of the classroom, I view Pritchard’s (168) reflections on they and their students’ trip and experiences learning about the LGTBQ Civil Rights Movements as a valuable learning tool for teachers in the writing classroom. There is a lot of productivity in students doing the kind of out of a classroom explorations that Pritchard (125) reflects on. As a teacher interested in students within writing classrooms doing community-engaged work that helps them deepen their understanding of how their writing, communication and literacy practices can be used in various personal, professional and communal settings, Pritchard’s work provides me with an example of how educators can exit the classroom space and enter communities to expand their knowledge of the ways those communities used their literacy practices.

Whether a student is a member of the LGTBQ community or not, there are many valuable lessons in learning about how people worked to ensure that they could experience justice and equality and practice religion and be able to put an end to being excluded from spaces that are essential for their life. Students are better prepared to know how to use their literacy practices to create what they need and want for their own personal, professional and communal

lives when they can learn what was involved in people's efforts and endeavors to improve their lives and their community's circumstances. Along with this, in the process of this learning, students should have access to resources and be supported in their efforts to create opportunities to engage in enriching and fulfilling experiences.

Along with seeing the value in the kind of out-of-school explorations that Pritchard (168) reflected on them and their students engaging in, I believe that there is also value in writing teachers referring to students' writing assignments and their contributions in class discussions to determine what support, resources and communities that they need to connect students to. Doing this, can result in students being affirmed and invited into spaces and opportunities where they can use their literacy practices, and have their identities and literacies affirmed. Along with this, teachers should learn about the communities that students are a part of and contribute to and invite students to reflect on their experiences in those communities. Through reading students' work and providing feedback, writing teachers can share information about spaces, communities, organizations and communal and institutional support students may benefit from being connected to. Such engagement with students and their writing and work can result in connecting them to communities of affirmation and organizational and institutional support that will benefit them as people and provide them with opportunities to contribute and engage in supportive personal and professional relationships.

## CHAPTER 6: REFLECTIONS ON FUTURE WORK AND CONCLUSION

In my dissertation, I spotlighted Kynard's *Vernacular Insurrections*, Carey's *Rhetorical Healing*, and Pritchard's *Fashioning Lives*, and shed light on the pedagogical, scholarly and societal purposes the texts can serve. I also reflected on the ways the texts have personally and professionally impacted me. In doing so, I advocated for the use of these texts, and evidenced the value in the insights Kynard, Carey, and Pritchard, and other Black rhetoric and composition scholars present in their work, and exhibited how the scholarship serves as an archive for histories about how Black people, who were, identified as property, defined their humanity, created what they wanted and needed for their lives, and shaped society. Throughout my dissertation, my engagement with scholarship, including the texts I spotlighted provides powerful and inspiring discussions about how African-American people have used their literacy practices to achieve success, progress and prosperity despite being identified as property, and having to create what Pritchard (64) refers to as "pit schools" to acquire literacy.

Along with Carey, Pritchard and Kynard shedding light on the reality that African American people had to do things like create learning spaces for themselves, and engage in private learning (e.g., Logan and Pritchard), the scholars' text powerfully exhibit the evolution and growth that African-American peoples' literacy practices are responsible for. Kynard, Carey, and Pritchard's text are exhibitions of an above-ground learning tradition, and an exhibition of how Black people have used their literacy practices to create prosperous careers in academia for themselves, the students they teach and people like me, who have read their texts and been affirmed by the ways they celebrate and acknowledge Black histories and legacies. In sharing my own literacy narrative, and reflecting on the people, texts, places, and experiences that have positively impacted me, inspired and contributed to my professional and academic journey, I

joined these scholars in their efforts to inspire and motivate the community, society, educators, and students, to keep working towards reaching their goals and aspirations, while recognizing the role their literacy practices play in those pursuits.

Considering the work I have done in my dissertation, and the way that my aforementioned reflections are delivered and presented, I will continue to do work that celebrates and acknowledges African American rhetoric and composition scholarship. I will continue to acknowledge the various purposes African American rhetoric and composition scholarship can serve for academic spaces and society. My future work will involve incorporating the topics, histories, experiences, and scholarship I focused on in my dissertation into curriculum and teaching courses focused on the discussions within my dissertation. Along with this, I hope to explore more African American rhetoric and composition texts and find ways to make connections to my own experiences, Black peoples' experiences, and portrayals of Black people in media, television shows and music. In doing this work, I hope to continue to call attention to the struggles Black people endure and contribute to creating solutions for those struggles by shedding light on how the African American community has historically used literacy practices to progress and prosper. I plan to contribute greatly to people's prosperity.

I hope that will inspire other people from all cultures and with any identity to realize that they should never be limited or constrained and that African American literacy history and what the community is currently doing as educators, writers, doctors, lawyers, athletes, judges, health care professionals, law-enforcement officers, chefs, mindful and wellness guides, poets, bankers, truck drivers, therapists, scholars, religious leaders, podcasters, entertainers, musicians, and creators of film and television content evidences the progress and prosperity that is always possible when we use our literacy practices to positively contribute and create.

In this dissertation, I like Kinloch, Moss and Richardson in their interview with Cynthia Selfie in “Claiming Our Place on the Flo(or)” discuss my literacy practices, literacy journey and the people, places and texts that informed and inspired me. Like Kinloch, Moss, and Richardson, I shed light on my personal and professional experiences, and how both home, academic spaces, experiences and people shaped me and my literacy practices. In the future, I plan to continue to do this kind of work. I have been blessed to have an abundance of professional and personal experiences that have positioned me to see first-hand the ways that I, as a Black Queer woman and other people use their literacy practices to create positive personal change for themselves, communities and society. In my future work, I will discuss those experiences in both narrative-style writing, speaking engagements and in continued participation in moderating dialogue and creating programming where other people can connect and share their stories and experiences.

The sharing of stories and experiences are important, because I believe there are plenty of narratives that can cast doubt on pursuing academia as a career. Acknowledging this, and the ways that I was fortunate to be affirmed and inspired by the scholarship I spotlighted and discussed, and people I engaged with, and experiences I had, it is imperative that there are more experiences that evidence how Black scholars are experiencing “Black Joy. In sharing those stories, it is important to present discussions of experiences that exhibit the power and possibilities associated with being a scholar and teacher in the rhetoric and composition field and the joys, successes, progress and prosperity associated with pursuing a career in academia. In the future I will keep doing the work of discussing the power and possibilities of working within academia, and in the field of rhetoric and composition while reflecting on how this work positions us to positively contribute in classrooms, academic spaces, and society.

These accounts should not overlook struggle, and only focus on success. Instead, the accounts should embody the ways that *Fashioning Lives*, *Vernacular Insurrections*, *Rhetorical Healing* and other African American scholarship shed light on people's ability to progress and prosper even when faced with oppression and obstacles. During a period of time when I was working on my dissertation, I noticed a Toni Cade Bambara quote in Eric Darnell Pritchard's e-mail signature and insights from the quote in fellowship-related content in an e-mail from Ruth Nicole Brown and Christopher Long. The Bambara quote presented in Pritchard's e-mail signature was, "The job of the writer is to make revolution irresistible" (Bambara qtd. in Pritchard). I am interested in what my readers believe the role of the writer is. I am interested in what my readers believe about how people's literacy practices and their communities' history with literacy impact and influence them and their ability to progress and prosper.

I am interested in if and how I have motivated and inspired readers to turn to the texts I spotlighted, and how that may turn around discussions about doing uplifting work that encourages students in writing classrooms to pursue their goals and aspirations. I wonder how this work will inspire and motivate people to consider the identities and experiences of students, and how my identity and experiences will impact my future. I am already aware of how they have greatly impacted my past and society. I am interested in how my readers' beliefs, their literacy practices and what they have come to know about African-American people's literacy practices will impact their scholarship, their work with students, their work in society and their efforts to engage in helping themselves and other people prosper and progress.

In honoring and acknowledging Bambara's insights about the role of the writer, it is important for me to share my beliefs about the role of the writer. I believe that the job of writers is continuing to discuss progress and prosperity, even when progressing and prospering seems

impossible. I believe that the job of the writer is spotlighting the histories and legacies of those who have come before us and who are working alongside us and recognizing their influence while shedding light on the future influence they can have. I believe the role of the writer is seeing yourself as among the contributors whose work should be invested in ensuring that others will progress and prosper and ensuring that others can define what that means for themselves. In my dissertation, I have shared my own stories and experiences and attached them to histories that existed before me. I hope doing so will lead to progress and prosperity for not just me but for my readers.

At some point in the process of working on my dissertation, I reflected on how if someone told the kid-version of Sharielka that she would be writing a project focused on Black history, Black writing and literacy practices, and spotlighting and uplifting people whose work inspired and influenced her and sharing stories about her family, her experiences, the identities she celebrated and affirmed and the aspects of her identity that it took a longer time to celebrate and affirm, and that she was doing this project, she would've been proud and excited and jumped at the opportunity. I also know that if someone told the teenage me, the college student me, the me that worked as a reporter, gas station attendant, certified nursing assistant, the aspiring graduate student me, the graduate student me, who was admitted to a Masters' English program with an exception, or any of those versions of me, that they all would've jumped at the opportunity.

I know because of how I treated the obligation of doing this work as an opportunity that I was blessed to have. My ancestors' unwavering commitment to acquiring their literacy practices, education, and the ways they valued education positioned me to not have to jump over the hurdles they jumped over. I hope that there will be no hurdles for the generations to come and

that the education I so greatly value and that I know is essential for everyone's life will be available to everyone. Turning to texts like *Vernacular Insurrections*, *Fashioning Lives* and *Rhetorical Healing* will help to make such a reality possible. That is progress and prosperity, that I hope you will join me in creating for yourself and others.



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