

# ABOVE THE WELL

## AN ANTIRACIST LITERACY ARGUMENT FROM A BOY OF COLOR



Asao B. Inoue



Perspectives  
on Writing



**ABOVE THE WELL:  
AN ANTIRACIST LITERACY  
ARGUMENT FROM  
A BOY OF COLOR**

## PERSPECTIVES ON WRITING

Series Editors, Rich Rice, Heather MacNeill Falconer, and J. Michael Rifenburg  
Consulting Editor, Susan H. McLeod | Associate Series Editor, Jonathan P. Hunt

The Perspectives on Writing series addresses writing studies in a broad sense. Consistent with the wide ranging approaches characteristic of teaching and scholarship in writing across the curriculum, the series presents works that take divergent perspectives on working as a writer, teaching writing, administering writing programs, and studying writing in its various forms.

The WAC Clearinghouse, Colorado State University Open Press, and University Press of Colorado are collaborating so that these books will be widely available through free digital distribution and low-cost print editions. The publishers and the Series editors are committed to the principle that knowledge should freely circulate. We see the opportunities that new technologies have for further democratizing knowledge. And we see that to share the power of writing is to share the means for all to articulate their needs, interest, and learning into the great experiment of literacy.

### Recent Books in the Series

- Alexandria Lockett, Iris D. Ruiz, James Chase Sanchez, and Christopher Carter. *Race, Rhetoric, and Research Methods* (2021)
- Kristopher M. Lotier, *Postprocess Postmortem* (2021)
- Ryan J. Dippre and Talinn Phillips (Eds.), *Approaches to Lifespan Writing Research: Generating an Actionable Coherence* (2020)
- Lesley Erin Bartlett, Sandra L. Tarabochia, Andrea R. Olinger, and Margaret J. Marshall (Eds.), *Diverse Approaches to Teaching, Learning, and Writing Across the Curriculum: IWAC at 25* (2020)
- Hannah J. Rule, *Situating Writing Processes* (2019)
- Asao B. Inoue, *Labor-Based Grading Contracts: Building Equity and Inclusion in the Compassionate Writing Classroom* (2019)
- Mark Sutton and Sally Chandler (Eds.), *The Writing Studio Sampler: Stories About Change* (2018)
- Kristine L. Blair and Lee Nickoson (Eds.), *Composing Feminist Interventions: Activism, Engagement, Praxis* (2018)
- Mya Poe, Asao B. Inoue, and Norbert Elliot (Eds.), *Writing Assessment, Social Justice, and the Advancement of Opportunity* (2018)
- Patricia Portanova, J. Michael Rifenburg, and Duane Roen (Eds.), *Contemporary Perspectives on Cognition and Writing* (2017)

ABOVE THE WELL:  
AN ANTIRACIST LITERACY  
ARGUMENT FROM  
A BOY OF COLOR

By Asao B. Inoue

The WAC Clearinghouse  
wac.colostate.edu  
*Fort Collins, Colorado*

Utah State University Press  
upcolorado.com/utah-state-university-press  
*Logan, Utah*

The WAC Clearinghouse, Fort Collins, Colorado 80523

University Press of Colorado, Louisville, Colorado 80027

© 2021 by Asao B. Inoue. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International license.

ISBN 978-1-64215-124-4 (PDF) | 978-1-64215-125-1 (ePub) | 978-1-64642-224-1 (pbk.)  
978-1-64642-237-1 (ebook)

DOI: 10.37514/PER-B.2021.1244

Produced in the United States of America

#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Inoue, Asao B., author.

Title: Above the well : an antiracist literacy argument from a boy of color / by Asao B. Inoue.

Description: Fort Collins, Colorado ; Logan, Utah : The WAC Clearinghouse | Utah State University Press, [2021] | Series: Perspectives on writing | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2021016038 (print) | LCCN 2021016039 (ebook) | ISBN 9781646422241 (Paperback) | ISBN 9781646422371 (eBook) | ISBN 9781642151244 (PDF) | ISBN 9781642151251 (ePub)

Subjects: LCSH: Language arts—United States. | Language awareness. | Racism in language. | Violence in language. | Discourse analysis—United States.

Classification: LCC LB1576 .I634 2021 (print) | LCC LB1576 (ebook) | DDC 372.6—dc23  
LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021016038>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021016039>

Copyeditor: Karen Peirce

Designer: Mike Palmquist

Series Editors: Rich Rice, Heather MacNeill Falconer, and J. Michael Rifenburg

Consulting Editor: Susan H. McLeod

Associate Editor: Jonathan P. Hunt

Cover Photos: Asao B. Inoue. Used with permission.

The WAC Clearinghouse supports teachers of writing across the disciplines. Hosted by Colorado State University, and supported by the Colorado State University Open Press, it brings together scholarly journals and book series as well as resources for teachers who use writing in their courses. This book is available in digital formats for free download at [wac.colostate.edu](http://wac.colostate.edu).

Founded in 1965, the University Press of Colorado is a nonprofit cooperative publishing enterprise supported, in part, by Adams State University, Colorado State University, Fort Lewis College, Metropolitan State University of Denver, University of Colorado, University of Northern Colorado, University of Wyoming, Utah State University, and Western Colorado University. The University Press of Colorado partners with the Clearinghouse to make its books available in print. In 2012, University Press of Colorado merged with Utah State University Press, which was established in 1972. USU Press titles are managed as an active imprint of University Press of Colorado, and the Press maintains offices in both Louisville, Colorado, and Logan, Utah.

**Land Acknowledgment.** The Colorado State University Land Acknowledgment can be found at <https://landacknowledgment.colostate.edu>.

# CONTENTS

Antiracist Endowment . . . . .	vii
Acknowledgments . . . . .	ix
Foreword . . . . .	xi
An Introduction . . . . .	3
Chapter 0. Language, Politics, and Habits . . . . .	11
Chapter 1. Literacy Is (Not) Liberation. . . . .	29
Chapter 2. The Yin-Yang of Literacy . . . . .	37
Chapter 3. Racializing Language and Standards . . . . .	59
Chapter 4. Race-Judgements and The Tacit Language War. . . . .	91
Chapter 5. The White Language Supremacy in Judgements of Intelligence and Standards . . . . .	115
Chapter 6. The Economics of Racism. . . . .	145
Chapter 7. A Languageing of Color. . . . .	161
Chapter 8. Unsustainable Whiteness . . . . .	179
Chapter 9. Naming . . . . .	187
Chapter 10. I Ain't No Horatio Alger Story . . . . .	209
Chapter 11. Another Ending, or Let Me Say This Another Way . . . . .	241
Appendix. An Argument and Method for Deep Attentive Reading. . . . .	253