Chapter 1. Introduction: Re-Inventing the University – Politics as an Actual Practice

Stephen J. Parks

University of Virginia

It is written in huge four-foot-high letters. It can be seen clearly streets away.

It is a white paint daubing on a high brick wall which shouts BAN FACISM.

It has been there ever since I can remember and that's almost twenty years.

Its paint is now beginning to fade. I remember seeing it when I had no conception of the word's meaning, and I remember not asking my parents in case it was something rude.

It is unfortunate that I ever did grow up to know what it meant, that it should be a word still relevant in the modern world.

Maybe it was scrawled up there by two young Jews with a brush and a bucket of paint at the time of the Mosely Street riots. I can almost see them in the dark slapping on the paint carefully but quickly and all the time keeping a watchful eye on the empty streets.

Having finished their night's labour, I imagine them running off into the dark not daring to look at the slogan until the following morning when along with a hundred others they could tut and gasp at the cheek of the graffiti artist's work. "Who could have done such a thing," they would say mockingly and sharing a grin. There's a funny thing about that sign. If you stand very close to the wall it's just lines and circles. It tells you nothing. Yet just by standing back a few yards its message is very clear.

Sometimes one must be free of oppression to understand that he has been oppressed.

But what of them now? What of the brave hotheads who felt they could not live that night through without advertising their emotions. Are they still as heated and eager to alight the world or have the drops of time extinguished the flame. Maybe they are tired and apathetic, maybe they are dead. No matter if they are either. For a little while at least they have left a tribute to the people they were and the politics of compulsion.

The work of those graffiti artists is as deep and honorable as anything hanging in the National Gallery. Maybe more so. It doesn't belong in

a museum though but where it is, in the street. Its audience is you and me. It is a plea and a warning.

May the fading white paint need never be renewed.

– Roger Mills, Basement Writers, Writing *(1978)*
Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers

By the late 1980s, progressive liberal politics were over. There was no grand pronouncement. It simply receded in a series of increasingly isolated fits, gasps, and, ultimately, shrugs. My family and community had been beneficiaries of many of these policies. When I entered the field of composition and rhetoric during this period, I did so by operating within the nostalgic haze being created by the then popular 1960s documentaries broadcast seemingly everywhere; documentaries that recreated spaces where visionary ambitions had not yet been dampened by internal divisions and conservative counterattacks. It was a world in which progressive politics was still winning. One way to understand the original ambitions that inhabit the essays which comprise this collection is as a personal (and ultimately collective) attempt to re-animate a set of public commitments, earned by collective advocacy, that historically enabled those on the wrong side of privilege at least the possibility of economic stability and cultural integrity.

I would come to recognize the limitations of such nostalgia, not only in public debates but also in ensuing disciplinary battles over public engagement. These lessons would be learned slowly, awkwardly, and with difficulty, as I constantly shuttled between alternating realities—the emerging disciplinarity of community partnership scholarship and the practical world of collective political advocacy. In what follows, I try to honor the lessons acquired within each domain and, by doing so, capture the contours of our professional terrain at the cusp of its re-invention in the 1970s. In doing so, I also try to trace our field's return to collective public advocacy through a rejection of the less-demanding neoliberal frameworks that in the 1990s was attempting to promote volunteerism over systemic change. To invoke and revise a famous axiom of Karl Marx, my efforts have always been to reanimate the public role of the academic advocate, but to not descend into pathways which would make such work a farce. Or to put it another way, I have learned to be cautious of the doors that open too easily, since they are often narrow, restrictive, and ultimately unwelcoming.

Nostalgia, I now realize, is a sucker's game.

Part 1: My Life is a Hesitation Before Birth (Kafka)

The Tidy House of Basic Writing

To be a graduate student at the University of Pittsburgh's English Department in the 1980s was to move between multiple realities. In its post-WW II incarnation, Pitt had been an avenue for working-class students to gain access an

undergraduate education. When I enrolled in the 1980s, though, the city's working class were under attack by a conservative ascendency. Pittsburgh was experiencing the collapse of its steel industry as a result of Reaganomics. Former steelworkers who had previously provided a comfortable life for their families could now be seen bagging groceries in local grocery stores. A legacy of economic stability was being fractured. Families were pushed into long-term precarity. But these same families, these same communities, actively resisted such a fate. Workers protested. Religious communities demonstrated, pitching blood into the lobby of banks actively foreclosing on multiple homes in their neighborhoods. And parents fought for their children's education. It was a resistance and resilience that, ultimately, allowed many from my generation to find a foothold in the newly emerging economy.

I was the inheritor of this legacy. My grandfather worked in the mills for over thirty years. After retiring from the military, my father serviced radars and radios used by the tugboats as they carried coal to these same mills. My mother worked in department stores and banks to make Pitt affordable for me. And after receiving a bachelor's degree, I applied to the graduate program in Pitt's English Department. When I didn't receive funding, my mother's labor ensured my education could continue. Once admitted, I would also benefit from a bit of luck. From what I was told at the time, I was accepted in a year where less than twenty students applied. The following year, Gayatri Spivak arrived. Given her recent translation of Derrida's *Of Grammatology* as well as her work on post-coloniality, no one seemed surprised when applications were said to have increased by multiples of hundreds. And these numbers no doubt continued to soar as Jonathan Arac, Americanist and editor of *Postmodernism and Politics,* and Colin McCabe, British cultural studies and popular media scholar, joined the department. Suddenly, after barely eking through, I was a student in one of the *star* departments.

Their entry into the program, however, interrupted the then current reality of Pitt's English Department. At this point in its history, the English Department still retained many professors who came of age during World War II. They were literary critics, schooled in bibliographic research and close reading. Emerging in their shadow were newer scholars, who brought in psychoanalysis, feminism, and cultural concerns of the 1960s into their work. Eventually, these scholars would become department leaders and bring in faculty such as Spivak, Arac, and McCabe. The Composition Program would also have its senior scholars, such as William Coles, and ultimately would be led by a new generation of scholars, such as Dave Bartholomae, Mariolini Salvatori, James Seitz, and Paul Kameen, with Education school allies such as Anthony Petrosky. Entering Pitt in the mid-1980s, however, the dominant model within the program was still marked by a commitment to working-class students. And prior to the arrival of the Spivak/Arac faculty cohort, collectively, these scholars built the foundation of a composition program designed to support the university's working-class students.

These labors on behalf of the working-class student at Pitt was best encapsulated in the Basic Reading and Writing (BRW) course, the subject of the now classic *Facts, Artifacts, and Counterfacts* (FAC) as well as individual essays, such as David Bartholomae's "The Study of Error" or "Inventing the University," which focused on the intellectual depth of (working-class) student writing. Indeed, at that point, BRW was understood as a powerful intervention in the success of Pitt to support this student population. And for working class students as myself, the focus on positioning the students in the role of historians and literary critics, creating classrooms where extended intellectual projects were undertaken, represented an argument that such academic fields were open to anyone. I recognize, of course, later critiques of this stance as a conservative gesture that did not fully incorporate a student's community insights; that it also proscribed a very narrow vision of the academy. At that time period, however, the commitment and belief in economic mobility, personally, carried more weight for me in a world actively destroying working-class communities. Certainly, BRW seemed to be much more willing to legitimate my working-class aspirations than William Cole's *The Plural I,* whose pedagogy I directly experienced during my time as a student in his class during my undergraduate days at Pitt.

As waves of applicants interested in the work of critical theory and postmodernism entered the program, however, the culture changed. These new graduate students brought with them sensibilities marked not only by an alternative sense of political commitments, but also cultural attitudes marked by a higher-class status than traditional students in the program. For instance, the first time I met Colin McCabe is when I sold him a toilet plunger while working at a hardware store. As one of the few student-parents in our program, I studied Foucault's panoptican, while also earning extra wages from midnight to 8am working for the Pittsburgh's "in-house" arrest monitoring program. The new influx of graduate students, however, often did not need to find extra work. Or as expressed to me, they might be "spending the summer working at the World Bank." Coupled with the influx of new intellectual frameworks, to me, the historical context in which composition and rhetoric operated at Pitt had shifted dramatically.[1]

The advent of cultural studies as the emerging dominant paradigm enacted a double shift within the department culture. One the one hand, there was a pedagogical move to assigning cultural studies criticism which investigated the contours of public space, with assignments where students were often asked to produce a nuanced reading of the politics of a particular cultural moment. (The arrival of Joe Harris at Pitt strengthened this emphasis.) To some extent, such a move was in line with the work of FAC and BRW in that students were just being asked to inhabit a more up-to-date vision of being a *professor* or *scholar*. The second shift, however,

---

1. David Bartholomae and Annette Vee are in the process of producing a brief history of Pitt's English Department. See https://wayback.archive-it.org/9461/20210406131846/http:/english-old.pitt.edu/history

marked a more significant alteration. For what was indirectly being built into the new model was the sense that taking a stance on cultural artifacts represented the public work of the academic. Within this model, the public work stopped at the page's edge. There was no consequent action seemingly required by the academic. Nor was there any additional training required to be able to effectively advocate for the essay's cultural insights to be actualized. To me, this seemed an alibi for inaction. This is not to say that the BRW model promised any enhanced ability to alter the material reality facing working-class students and their home communities. At its most ambitious, BRW only offered enhanced success in the university. It was, however, a promise fulfilled. Over time, witnessing the transformation of Pittsburgh's communities, I came to believe this new "cultural critique" model was working to de-skill a generation of working-class students who inhabited an obligation to use their education on behalf of their communities.

This new model of composition studies, to me, was best encapsulated in Bartholomae and Petrosky's *Ways of Reading* (WoR) 1st edition published in 1990, drafts of which were "test-marketed" in my graduate teaching practicum. (I was finally awarded a teaching fellowship due to the advocacy of Spivak, who argued the program had an obligation to support student-parents.) To some extent, I have always understood *WoR* as an attempt to provide composition a *legitimate* theoretical grounding through integrating pedagogical frameworks built to address non-traditional writers into a cultural studies research emphasizing the historically marginalized 2/3 world's resistance to colonialist frameworks. To me, there was embedded into the DNA of *WoR* a category slippage that moved the U.S.-centered working-class student writer into the position of a 2/3rd world post-colonial and/or cultural studies scholar. In some ways, this is most evident in assignment sequences which ask the student to invoke the work of Paulo Freire to discuss their own classroom experiences. There are clearly resonances between Freire's "Banking Concept of Education," the actions of local Pittsburgh banks, and the experiences of undergraduate students at the University of Pittsburgh. But it is hardly a one-to-one correspondence. There are also clearly questions of global privilege at play here. But what was most concerning to me what the erasure of the entire apparatus required to build those Freirean pedagogical moments of insight within the context of *actual* people in *actual* communities—such as the organizing work of Freire and his team creating such educational spaces for rural farmers in Chile. It was acquiring these additional skills that I came to believe were necessary if I were my classrooms were to enable students to turn their education back to the needs of working-class communities.

What the Pitt Model did importantly accomplish, however, was an effective response to the then ongoing conservative attacks on entry-level courses, such as BRW, which were represented as diluting the intellectual rigor of the university. Clearly *WoR* was not a course marked by such "rudimentary" exercises as sentence structure or building paragraphs. Just as importantly, *WoR* was also not a course which abandoned the progressive rhetoric still lingering in the field

post-1960s, rhetorics which had argued for the potential political importance of first-year writing (think Macrorie, Smitherman, or, perhaps, the Black Caucus and CCCC Progressive Caucus). In fact, *WoR* offered a framework which allowed composition instructors to imagine their work with student writing to be charged with the same seeming political urgency of Stuart Hall's Birmingham School or decolonial freedom fighters. Of course, it did so with no actual requirement to join any ongoing movement for political change. And here it should be noted that for many cultural studies figures, such as Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak, their scholarship *was* supplemented by political advocacy or community-based educational efforts. For instance, Said is well known for advocacy for Palestine; Spivak, though less well known, has dedicated decades to supporting the literacy skills of rural women in India.[2] But these *extra-curricular activities* did not seem to be a basis for teaching a more expansive understanding of "literacy skills" as the field entered the 1990s.

In the immediate moment, though, I loved teaching *WoR*. I had gravitated to the political frameworks the work of Spivak, Arac, and McCabe seemed to offer. (Arac actually directed my dissertation.) I was enthralled by the feeling my classroom was "political." And I continued to love teaching *WoR* even as I was working multiple extra jobs to afford graduate school as parent of two children. I loved teaching it even as my partner, Lori Shorr, had to lead a university-wide campaign for equitable childcare access for graduate students. I loved *WoR* even as Reagan gained a second term. Even as the Liberal Welfare state continued to be dismantled. Even as my mounting student loans became exempt from bankruptcy declarations. In fact, I loved teaching *WoR* right up to the point where I encountered alternative traditions of academic advocacy while undertaking research for my dissertation, research which was ultimately published as *Class Politics: A Movement for a Students' Right to Their Own Language*.

The Study of Error

The first positive comments I ever received during graduate school came from Dave Bartholomae in response to my seminar essay on the 1974 CCCC Students' Right to Their Own Language Resolution (SRTOL). The essay made the somewhat obvious move to link the SRTOL to the political environment of the time, in this case LBJ's great society and shifting public attitudes towards Black English. Throughout my time at Pitt, Bartholomae would remain supportive of my research on the SRTOL. He was a strong advocate for my family. He was not, though, particularly interested when my attention turned outward from SRTOL

---

2.   I am aware of the recent actions of Spivak in support of a faculty member charged with abusing graduate students. While Spivak's relationship is not the topic of this essay, Spivak was a kind and supportive advocate for my success. This book would not exist without her support during pivotal moments of my graduate career.

to how university faculty self-organized to reform the university and its class-rooms. My focus on national efforts, such as Movement for a Democratic Society or New University Conference (NUC), or disciplinary efforts such as the Black Caucus or the Progressive Caucus, were seen as a distraction. I think the hesitation was that these collective efforts expanded his vision of an "academic researcher," whose pedagogy necessarily connected the needs of the working class, marginalized ethnic communities, and systemically oppressed Black neighborhoods, towards public actions and advocacy. As such, this framework necessarily demanded learning the organizing skills required to produce material political change in partnership with these communities—whether that change be a stop sign, enhanced educational opportunities, or economic/racial justice.

Bartholomae's and others in composition and rhetoric's hesitation about my research agendas was a real concern. At that moment, I needed my disciplinary justification of the value of such organizations to my research to last just long enough to learn how to do this organizing work. The tenuous status of my graduate school career was reaching a crisis point. I was being driven out of the program by economic pressures—the cost of raising small children, a lack of savings, and a limited financial support network. I was studying these organizations, then, not only because each offered a different model of academic advocacy. I was also studying them in the hopes that by mining these efforts to learn organizational skills, such as creating mission statements or organizing action plans, these insights might be useful in what was most certainly my future non-academic career. Which is to say my actually earning a Ph.D. seemed unlikely. New career models were required. So, I gravitated to figures in these faculty organizations who appeared to have left the academy, but who also seemed to have found alternative venues in which to use their education. For this reason, Neal Resnikoff became (and remains) a central organizing figure in my professional career given his work organizing the NUC as well as, indirectly, being involved in the SR-TOL. After NUC, he appears to have devoted his life to labor organizing. My *Resnikoff Strategy* was to continue to do academic research while picking up the tools, skills, and strategies of actual collective political advocacy. It was a strategy designed to enable future economic stability. In fact, it was only my partner, Lori Shorr, receiving a grant from the *Women in Film Foundation* to support childcare costs that allowed both of us to finish; that and her successful campaign to get reduced fees for graduate student-parents at Pitt's Childcare center.[3]

---

3. Of course, when you are focusing your work on a figure such as Resnikoff, trying to navigate contentious relationships between "cultural studies" and "composition," working extra jobs, and walking around the department with small children, you are not necessarily taken that seriously. Everyone was kind, but they were not exactly wagering on my success. I was f ortunate, however, that James Seitz was hired at Pitt at this critical moment for me personally. His capacious sense of the field, willingness to invite me onto committees focused on basic writing pedagogy, was a validation that cannot be overstated.

I should add that I have never actually met Neal Resnikoff. It was through this research, however, that I was able to meet individuals who were active during the 1960s and 1970s in creating a framework which enabled an academic career invested in public advocacy, figures such as Paul Lauter, Louis Kampf, and Richard Ohmann. I was also able to attend events sponsored by 1960s and '70s advocacy efforts that had survived into the 1990s, such the *Radical Teacher Conference* held at Princeton University. This network introduced me to individuals active in forming the *Progressive Caucus of CCCC*, which had emerged in the 1980s. Through conversations with members, such as Karen Hollis, I saw how many of the political commitments from that earlier period had been integrated into curricular and research projects within field of composition and rhetoric. Echoing divisions from the 1960s, I recognized this network was overwhelming "White." And through reading Marianna Davis' *History of the NCTE Black Caucus* and published work by/about founding Black Caucus scholars, I became aware how scholars of color had consistently advocated successfully to have professional organizations respect their research and pedagogical commitments. (Here I want to acknowledge the critiques by the Black Caucus as well as scholars such as Carmen Kynard that my first book *Class Politics* failed to adequately cite the contributions of the Black Caucus or Black scholars. I have benefitted tremendously from their insights.[4])

I also learned a fundamental lesson about academic organizing efforts: Except for the *Black Caucus*, almost every other progressive academic organization that was

---

4.   It is also important to note that the Black Caucus leadership wrote a letter to NCTE objecting to the publication of a project which failed to account for the contributions of their caucus. There was also a panel at CCCC focused, in part, on the failure of *Class Politics* on this account. As an untenured professor, I was understandably scared about the impact of these protests. At one-point, senior White scholars in the field suggested I write a public apology and voluntarily withdraw the book from circulation. That evening, though, I received a voice message from Ira Shor, who offered support and trust that I would find a way forward to address these concerns. I was also reminded by Jim Seitz that it is the nature of academic life that work is critiqued. The real question, he told me, is the response. He reminded me that the Black Caucus was not wrong in their concern that its contributions had been erased by the field. He argued that an apology was both an easy way out and a failure to actually respond to their concerns. He asked what I could learn from this moment; how this moment should inform the work to come. For many years after, this "moment" was discussed in articles and conferences as a "protest by the Black Caucus." I was always being asked, in whispered tones, about "my feelings" on being called out." Yes, it was certainly a protest. Yes, it is not easy at those moments to be publicly critiqued. But, as Jim Seitz informed me, it's not about "hurt feelings." It was about recognizing that each of these moments was also an opportunity to learn, to consider questions of scholarly responsibility, to accept the limitations of the sanctioned ignorance that marked my career to that point. I will never claim to have fully addressed the Black Caucus' concerns, but I believe that what I learned from these important critiques has informed and strengthened almost every part of my career. And, I should add, the lessons and education continue to this day.

part of my graduate student research seemed to have collapsed. After an initial rush of membership and production of a newsletter as well as the formation of specific research groups, these national organizations failed to sustain a consistent membership. And while each organization left behind a significant body of essays, studies, and pamphlets, few (if any) could point towards actions which had a demonstrable effect on the material reality of a community, let alone a student or faculty demographic. In fact, this is even true of efforts occurring during the time period in which I was conducting my research, the early 1990s. For example, in response to conservative attacks on universities for failing to provide a traditional humanities education, Gerald Graff led the effort to create *Teachers for a Democratic Culture* (TDC). As with New University Conference, TDC also generated a lot of initial enthusiasm and produced public statements, newsletters, and research that countered conservative attacks. And like NUC, TDC eventually lost its membership, faltered, and collapsed. So, while I could admire the drive that created such groups, I did not want to romanticize their efforts as models to bring into the current moment.

In fact, when TDC faltered, I applied and was appointed to take over the organization. By then, I was Assistant Professor in the English Department at Temple University. And, I think, it speaks to how far TDC had fallen that I was provided this opportunity when senior scholars would clearly have been more appropriate. Working with other TDC founders, we developed a plan to support individual TDC-aligned caucuses within disciplines, echoing organizational models created by the CCCC *Black Caucus* or MLA *Radical Caucus*. These efforts were only partially successful as the rhetorical stance taken by TDC, which might be framed as a moderate progressivism, was unable to integrate itself into the emerging dominance of cultural studies, an umbrella term for post-colonial, Marxist, Feminist research informed by counter histories of the 2/3rd worlds. In fact, fair or not, TDC was seen as standing in opposition to such work, being understood with arguments that such scholarship was corrupting traditional humanities standards. Or to put it another way, when it came to threading the needle of the current political moment, TDC was no *WoR*. But neither TDC nor WoR seemed to offer a successful model for building efforts to support material changes in communities on the wrong side of privilege.

Inventing the University

Surprise was the common response by faculty and friends when learning I had been hired by Temple University. I had been a middling student with an odd project. Not the typical pathway to career success. I did, however, have powerful sponsors as a result of my interaction with *radical elders.* These individuals put my application "in play." And when the first candidate declined an offer from Temple, apparently worried about raising children in Philadelphia, I was offered the tenure track position and readily accepted.[5] It was, though, an odd feeling to have achieved my goal—a

---

5.   I should add that my children turned out great.

faculty position—with a research project that projected a non-academic career in advocacy. I had also witnessed and benefitted from the resilience of a working-class city in the face of its collapse; families that collectively pushed the next generation forward into a university. And I accepted a faculty position fully aware of how universities too often failed to educate students to address the needs of working-class communities, let alone take an active role in such solutions themselves. Based on research and personal experience, then, I entered the profession with a belief that an academic scholar must necessarily cast their lot with those on the wrong side of privilege. That university resources should be bent towards the needs of surrounding communities. And while I might have borne witness to the failures of academics who had previously built professional organizations for such goals, I had also witnessed powerful examples of individual scholars whose work and advocacy blended into projects which appeared to have been successful, whether focused on intentionally marginalized students, structurally oppressed communities, or international disregard for their homeland.

What I did not have was a ready intellectual or pedagogical framework in composition and rhetoric through which to channel my research, commitments, and community values. The Pitt model was still in ascendence, which was probably one of the reasons I was hired at Temple University. But I had never seen that model form the type of connections that produce material change in local neighborhoods. Public advocacy by academics was still present in the public ether, but models, such as TDC, were couched in defense of traditions from which my community had never been included. Such models also seemed to situate the primary work of the academic as within the university proper, stepping out in the public only to defend its own traditional privileged position. When you are on the outside of such traditions, emerging from communities outside the concerns of *cutting edge* scholarship, you do not feel quite the same desire to defend such privileges.

Instead, you end up being in a constant rhetorical battle to prove both you and your concerns belong in that privileged environment. Your time is devoted to playing a rhetorical game of prying academic language open long enough to provide you the stability, the space, which will allow alternative meanings and actions to occur. This was not the regularized process of finding new research avenues, which is often just micro-slicing an already micro debate. This was the struggle to remain economically supported by an institution long enough to be able to push for that very institution to support altering public structures of power. I had succeeded at this game long enough to earn a degree at Pitt. I was now looking for a disciplinary landing spot that was still fungible, whose content was still being determined. A framework that could be pushed in directions which enabled political work to be enacted at Temple University, which at that time was an essentially open-admissions working-class oriented institution.

In my opening months in the department, there were some false starts and embarrassing moments.

Then, I found service-learning.

Part 2: The nonexistent is whatever we have not sufficiently desired (Kafka)

Writing Beyond the Curriculum

Gaining employment is not the same as gaining stability. During my first year at Temple University, I thought I might mask this fact by wearing the same outfit every day—white button-down shirt, jeans, and black thick soled work shoes. The joke was I was replicating "Einstein," who I had heard would wear the same clothes every day so as not to be distracted from his work. Later, Steve Jobs would adopt a similar strategy. In my case, my close colleagues eventually let on their awareness that this *Steve* had a different rationale—lack of funds. And perhaps for that same reason, my colleagues recommended me to serve on (and receive a summer stipend from) the college's *Fund to Improve Postsecondary Education* (FIPSE) committee, which was studying whether "service-learning projects" could be considered research. Led by Dan Tompkins, who supported this concept, I discovered that the remaining faculty would quickly coalesce on an answer: "No. Service-learning cannot be considered scholarship. At best, such work might be registered under service. But research, no. No way." Given my experience at Pitt and with *WoR*, I was not overly surprised by this answer. In some ways, their collective answer was irrelevant to me. What interested me was the split between faculty, who were generally against this idea, and college administration, who generally supported this move. I was also interested that the larger faculty committee was navigating a divide, wanting to support the advocacy of their colleagues without also supporting the larger conservative agenda around "public service" that seemed to be pushing this debate within higher education.

Indeed, conservative advocates and scholars had been engaged in an extended critique of the university since at least the 1950s, often focusing on stopping the public work of academics, who were often portrayed as radical Marxists. Simultaneous with this critique, however, was also a seemingly contradictory argument: the university had become an ivory tower, diluting its public role of inculcating good citizenship sensibilities within students. When combined in the late 1990s and early 2000s, these conservative arguments were attempting to alter the political advocacy of professors focused on systemic injustices around race or class into the work of creating classroom which supported a volunteerist (read *service*) ethic. The central goal of the conservative argument was to frame the solution to social issues away from government intervention and towards community-based solutions. This was the next stage of neoliberal remaking of society originating with Reaganism in the 1980s. In this sense, the propagation of the civically engaged volunteer framework became the social mission of the university—welcome to the engaged neoliberal Ivory Tower. This framework is nicely captured in the *Wingspread Declaration: Renewing the Civic Mission of the American Research University*, which was influential in higher education administration circles at this time. Its focus on service through

community engagement projects nicely answered the critique of conservative critics, while still providing a small portal through which the university might enact a limited public role. It was this narrow open door that I was being asked to step through if I wanted to realize my professional and public aspirations.

Indeed, the FIPSE grant was only one node within a larger effort to support service learning in higher education. During this same period, the American Association of Higher Education (AAHE) was sponsoring a book series that explored how service-learning might be integrated across the university curriculum. The composition and rhetoric publication was titled *Writing for the Community: Models for Service Learning in Composition* and edited by Linda Adler-Kassner, Robert Crooks, and Ann Waters. As might be expected, the collected essays offer a continual exploration of what type of work might be productive for composition students to undertake, with tutoring soon becoming a bedrock service activity that also supported a student's development as a writer. Service-learning was also positioned as creating more engaged students, which indirectly improved retention. Similar arguments had been previously articulated in "Community Service and Critical Teaching," where Bruce Herzberg also highlights that by engaging in service-learning activities his business students found such volunteer work personally powerful, regardless of whether the experience informed their education. The importance of these experiences could, instead, be found in students learning how to critique political narratives of individualism. Instead of accepting neoliberal arguments that denied structural inequalities, students came to see poverty or homeless as the result of systemic inequalities. But again, such insights did not necessarily have to impact their research goals or their public actions to be found "important."

Which is to note that both the AAHE publications as well as early scholarly essays on service-learning, such as by those by Herzberg, rarely turn their attention to what fixes these systemic injustices. Even when there is an indication that systemic issues are at the root of need for volunteers, there was little to no discussion of how service-learning might engage students in developing solutions. Nor did there seem to be emerging an argument that communities possess the resources to organize successfully in their own interests— that communities themselves understand that volunteering is a band-aid inadequately masking deeper and sustained wounds. During this period, the question was rarely raised about how student research projects might support communities taking on such work, the "community" was seen as a place offering issues to be studied. It was a space where issues could be partially addressed through volunteerism. And while there is obviously profound respect expressed for community partners, the emerging research was not framing the community as a space rich with intellectuals and traditions from which students could learn. *Community* was not, at this point, typically represented as a space that might enable students and faculty to gain insight into how power is enacted on the less privileged and what a true response might encompass.

And yet, I was learning that terms such as *community*, *service*, *learning*, and *partnership* could contain the seeds of such ideas. Indeed, when talking to Johnny

Irizarry, then director of Philadelphia's *Taller Puertorriqueno*, the failure by the university to interpret these key terms as offering moments of cross-communal collaboration and investigation was argued as the principal fault of the service-learning model. It was through our discussions that I came to understand that the "politics" that best served the actual systemic needs of a community emerged from recognizing that the academic had as much to learn as the student; that *community* was best understood as the umbrella term for a network of heritages, legacies, and communal struggles; that any true partnership required this deeper understanding to move past *service,* towards solutions. And perhaps, most importantly, the end goal was systemic change, not window dressing projects. It was service to *a cause,* not "service to *a project*. Today, such claims might seem to be commonplace in the field—think Goldblatt, Banks, Kynard, Mathieu, and Cushman, who have been pivotal figures in my work. This was less the case at this point as community and service entered composition and rhetoric.

At Temple University, I recognized that strategically, at that time, service was a fungible term. It represented both desires and fears, but, as of yet, had not been actualized into a structure. In that sense, my work became how to pry open a space within the college which would provide an opportunity to define service through community-generated goals. ("Prying open terms" being a skill I had learned during my time in graduate school.) I also understood that one of the reasons NUT, NUC, and TDC's political vision faltered was their inability to find an institutional home with resources; a failure to solve the problem of "public work" in ways that relieved outside political pressure within a university setting in a fashion that secured internal funding. I began to realize that by crafting a definition of service that brought together faculty concerns on public issues, disciplinary concerns over scholarly standards, and administrative concerns about public work," an institutional entity could be created that placed academic and community intellectuals on an equal footing—intentionally representing both as conducting research. Such an entity could create moments of intersection which would enable the academic research to meet community needs and community research to inform academic needs. There could also be vehicles to publish their research within circulation networks which would reach their intended audiences. But the first step was to create the alliances which would produce the infrastructure.

"Writing Beyond the Curriculum" (WBC), written with Eli Goldblatt,[6] was the announcement of that entity, the *Institute for the Study of Literacy, Literacy, and Culture* (ISLLC). Internally the ISLLC provided that initial platform which enabled academic and community-based intellectuals to conduct research pointed towards Philadelphia. Our argument was the ISLLC would create models of

---

6.   Throughout the remainder of the discussion of the ISLCC, the reader should assume that Eli Goldblatt and I were working collaboratively at all moments. The contributions of Nicole Meyenberg, a graduate student at the time, must also be recognized since her insights informed all our work.

research which demonstrated how such service was scholarship and how they could mutually support each other. In this way, in response to the previously discussed FIPSE committee, the ISLLC was intentionally framed to provide a humanities-based rationale for its existence. Yet it was also this very language which pried open research to include the work of community members, resituating them as equals on the playing field. In particular, the ISLLC worked with community members who were involved in collective efforts at structural change. (It is no accident that a Poor People's Summit by the Kensington Welfare Rights Union was highlighted.) And it is an intentional redirection of service-learning scholarship that Raymond Williams "Culture is Ordinary**"** would be invoked in later essays to embed the "disciplinary axis" of service within a recognition of community/organic based intellectuals. In effect, the ISLLC was a twist on the conservative strategy of funding university-based conservative think tanks with outside experts. ISLLC was a think tank that defined community members as the outside experts for the purposes of re-integrating connections with academics who imagined their work as confronting the systems that left too many on the wrong side of privilege. Funding soon followed.

Consistently, publishing on such work, despite WBC, remained difficult. During this period, service-learning/community partnership essays were seen as difficult to publish in *CCC* or *College English*. At least among scholar-teachers advocating for the intellectual importance of such work, there was a sense that traditional journals were not taking such work seriously. (Which is not uncommon for new movements in the field.) Or to be more accurate, the intellectual frameworks used to support such work had not solidified to the point of implied significance within the entire field for any essay focused on community, with the evaluation then being the relative merit of this specific example within that body of work. Too often, detailed reports of projects were understood as little more than *business reports* by peer reviewers rather than intellectual interventions in the meaning of writing, literacy, and community. It is for this reason that in 2000, the same year as "Writing Beyond the Curriculum," that *Reflections on Community-Based Writing Instruction* was published, a newsletter that eventually became the *Reflections* journal.[7] And it is not surprising that in the first issue there is an attempt to do definitional work.

In "Welcome to *Reflections*," Nora Bacon and Barbara Sherr Roswell define community-based teaching in the context of "our profession's historical commitments—to a vision of teaching and learning which addresses cognitive, affective, and social development, to a vision of writing which recognizes its power to effect

---

7.   In 2007, *Reflections* was incorporated into the ISLLC's New City Community Press to ensure its long-term sustainability. I became editor from 2008 to 2011, benefitting from the insights of associate editor Brian Bailie. At this current moment, *Reflections* remains under the umbrella of New City Community Press and is edited by Laura Gonzales, University of Florida.

personal, practical, and political change—[thus] it is not surprising that interest in service-learning has been particularly strong among writing instructors." Thomas Dean's rubric for service-learning as involving writing as "for, about, and with" a community is then highlighted, a rubric emerging from his just published *Writing Partnerships: Service-Learning in Composition*. In a concluding essay to the first newsletter, "Service Learning at a Glance," Linda Adler-Kassner reiterates a central theme of the collected essay:

> Look before you leap into service-learning. It's important to be clear . . . about why you want to incorporate it into your course. Ask yourself: "What do I want students to get out of my course? What activities will help them get it? Where does service-learning fit in? Wanting to help students become good citizens is a great start—but what's the connection between that and becoming a good writer (however you define that)?" The type of service-experience you want in the course should be closely tied to what you want students to get out of it.

Adler-Kassner's summative statement is buttressed by a bibliography of recommended sources. It is interesting to note that many of the authors cited ultimately became foundational to the work of community partnership work, scholars such as Bruce Herzberg, Linda Flower, Nora Bacon, Thomas Deans, and Ellen Cushman.

But this emergent canon also begins to indicate the troublesome history that would follow. Out of all the scholars cited in the issue, only two (Cushman and Freire) would identify as scholars of color or as an international scholar of color. And within the entirety of the published article's bibliographies, a collective statement of scholarly influences, there are no listings that appear to represent the work of engaged community members. Which is to say that *Reflections* can also be understood as a particular moment in the professionalization and solidification of this work as an academic enterprise. And within this solidifying moment, there is confusion or lack of certainty about how to frame the intellectual contributions of community partners. Indeed, with the important exception of the citation of Cushman's "Rhetorician as Social Agent," few to none of the referenced academic articles represent the insights of community intellectuals as a centralizing framework to the work of service learning or community-based writing instruction. By default, then, these voices are contained as subjects within the article, but not included as intellectual foundation for the scholarly work in the bibliography.

The motivations for adopting such a traditional understanding of researcher and subject participant had already been made clear to me through my involvement with Temple University's FIPSE committee. One of the reasons that the FIPSE Committee—and even the most "radical" of scholars—could dismiss community partnership research and pedagogies is that there was no vehicle to

provide intellectual status to this work, a journal or journals to validate its scholarly worth. *Reflections* represented one attempt to fill this need. A corollary to that objection was the belief that no intellectual tradition which could justify the work. As neither *just research* nor *just teaching*, service-learning fell through the cracks within most disciplinary scholarship. At this point, the justifications for such work had emerged out of national policy organizations, such as *Community Compact*, who would also partially fund the *Wingspread Declaration*. But policy organizations are not *scholarly* organizations. They do not carry the same significance in the university. It is notable, then, in the first issue of *Reflections* that an author invokes Bartholomae's *WoR* to provide both a cultural studies context to the discussed project. It is the repeated strategy of linking a composition studies initiative to one of the dominant models within English, cultural studies. It is certainly one element of the strategy for the "Writing Beyond the Curriculum" article. In this way, at this particular moment in time, the need to find *academic* grounding for this work seemed a necessary, but unfortunate, priority.

It is out of this context that the "Writing Beyond the Curriculum" article initiated the series of additional articles featured in this collection which attempted to argue that community-engagement would not fulfill its potential within the traditional intellectual categories being used to justify its academic credibility. And to be very clear, every scholar involved in such partnership work understood and recognized that community members were intellectuals; that they were, in a sense, community-based professors whose research frameworks and goals provided insights traditional research might fail to produce. This was the subtext of many articles arguing for *equalizing the power dynamic* within such partnerships. There were just not many partnerships that had the resources and the platform that provided institutional justification for such projects as research. In many universities, service learning/community partnership work was consolidated in an outreach office which organized all such efforts. While this no doubt relieved faculty of much of the labor of organizing projects, the non-academic location of the office damaged arguments about how such work intersected with the research core of a discipline. Nor did that location open up opportunities for faculty to apply for scholarly grants which, when awarded, provided visible proof that such work was *scholarly*.

This is where, despite its limitations, the ISLLC proved a useful tool. For having initially established itself, producing several examples of community-based research and publication projects, we were understood as a scholarly and pedagogical project focused on producing rigorous research concerning Philadelphia communities, often in partnership with those communities. This profile enabled us to secure graduate student assistantships, as well as sponsor specific classes, where future "scholars" learned how to undertake such research. We became fundable to a network of foundations, ultimately securing over $750,000 to support our work. With this funding, the initial prying open of terms to secure a space to exist expanded into an operative space, featuring administrative support,

funded faculty, and extensive support of our community publishing efforts. Utilizing a different conception of public work of academics, like *WoR* but pointed toward practice, we had threaded the cultural needle, producing a pivot point to turn out support towards public advocacy across academic and community domains. It is at this point that the second push, or opening, occurred. This time the goal was to leverage community writers into the world of academic publishing as part of a collective effort to change who counted as scholars in our field. Which is to say that with *Reflections* validating the voice of the academic scholar; ISLLC could turn its work to validating the community scholar.

It should be noted that prior to community-partnerships developing in the early 2000s, there had been a movement to publish the work of students of students in academic journals. There were also existing and emerging efforts to publish the writing of community members produced by university-partnership. Many of these community projects, though, were one-off publications, often paid for by community fundraisers, circulating within the small audience of the project or outwards to a slightly larger neighborhood community. Existing outside of any recognized circulation network or institutional sponsor, such publications could be easily dismissed by conservative or traditional academics as *not peer reviewed*, the *equivalent of vanity publications*. These arguments only held if traditional academic institutions maintained the monopoly on *the means of production*. At this time, however, my colleague, Linda Hill, shared her work on community publishing in the United Kingdom. In particular, she highlighted the work of the *Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers* (FWWCP). Initiated in the late 1970s, the FWWCP was a network of working-class writing groups that were formed as one means to record their community's history in the face of de-industrialization occurring in England. Using new technology that lowered printing costs, FWWCP members published and distributed their work. At first, the FWWCP had about eight member groups located in industrial cities. Over the course of their existence, however, the FWWCP produced over one million books and expanded to hundreds of member groups located across the globe. With ISLLC funding, I was able to fund a research trip to England where I met Timothy Diggles, then FWWCP Director, and Nick Pollard, writer and unofficial archivist. (His collection of thousands of FWWCP publications eventually became the basis for an FWWCP archive in the Trade Union Congress Collection in London developed by Jessica Pauszek, Nick Pollard and myself with funding initially by the ISLLC and later Syracuse University.)

What I learned is that the FWWCP model offered a solution to the criticism that community-partnership writing in the United States faced about the scholarly merit of the work being published. First, the FWWCP had developed an articulated framework (political and aesthetic) through which to value the work of worker writers, which we might understand as community writers in the United States. In publications such as *The Republic of Letters* (Morley, Worpole), the FWWCP positioned the value of community publications against dominant literary

models, stressing both the cultural legacy expressed in such writing as well as the power of its vernacular language. Effectively, they had transplanted notions of writerly expertise with language onto publications which had previously been declared *without literary merit* by the British Arts Council. And, as proof of this argument, the FWWCP had seen its writers featured at universities, anthologized in literary collections, and creating prestigious television dramas (such as *Cracker* by Jimmy McGovern). They had provided a strategic vision of how to turn *community writers* into *intellectually important writers* within established institutions.[8]

As a result of this research trip, the ISLLC brought over members of the FW-WCP during the period where we were creating New City Community Press (NCCP).[9] The purpose of their visit was to instantiate, to demonstrate, the power of community writing as a vehicle for personal expression and legitimation of community values. It was also to show how such community writing had gained scholarly credibility. Within this framework in place, we announced NCCP was joining the FWWCP, essentially providing a bibliography to stand at the back of our forthcoming publications. Then in our early publications, such as a city-wide magazine called *Open City*, we featured the work of the FWWCP writers as a legitimating source for the value of our own community writers, who were inclusive of children, school age students, adults, and senior citizens, and who were African American, Latine, Asian/Asian American, LBGTQI, as well as other identities. Echoing FWWCP publications, we also made sure that *Open City* was beautifully designed and had other attributes, such as an ISBN number, to mark it as a "real publication." All these elements enabled New City Community Press to be seen as revolving within a larger network than just Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, or, even, the United States. This provided a sense of "global peer review" status to our projects, both in terms of those being published as well as to those purchasing the publications. Over time, this status led to recognized writers, such as Lorene Carey and Beth Kephart, submitting work for publication. And eventually, the status of NCCP laid the foundation for the *Working and Writing for Change* series, an academic series created to record the important work of CCCC caucuses and special interest groups, as well as community advocates nationally and internationally.

It is worth pausing a moment over the contributions of CCCC caucuses and special interest groups to community literacy/partnership work (See Blackmon, Kirklighter, Parks). The history being represented here, through the limitations of my personal biography, focuses on university and community-based scholars,

---

8.   It should be added that the FWWCP was never a financially secure organization. The organization collapsed soon after the 2008 financial crisis. (In partnership with ISLLC and Syracuse University, the FWWCP re-emerged as *The Fed* in 2009.)

9.   The opening success of New City Press depended upon the labor and insights of August Tarrier and Yolanda Wisher, as well as faculty partners as Linda Hill and Susan Hyatt.

policy organizations and community-based literacy organizations, and federal initiatives. The goal is to provide a broad overview of how *service* and *community* established itself in composition and rhetoric studies to frame the essays that follow. It should be noted, however, that scholars of color as well as CCCC caucuses had been undertaking these practices for decades prior to the general field taking on such work. Like the FWWCP, about a decade prior, scholars such as Carlotta Cardenas de Dwyer travelled within Latine neighborhoods collecting the work of community writers, often given to her as handwritten text on paper. She then published this work and argued for its intellectual, artistic, and cultural significance. Dwyer also consistently argued for increased support for research by Chicanx/Hispanic/Latine scholars, particularly scholarship focused on providing a culturally informed pedagogical and literacy framework for composition classrooms. Similarly, Geneva Smitherman both in her research and in her writing has consistently argued for the significance of African American language patterns. As discussed in a special issue of *Reflections*, "Historically Black Colleges and Universities," edited by Riva Sias and Beverly J. Moss, African American faculty have a legacy of creating community-engaged classrooms focused on local needs and aspirations; an issue that built upon David Green's edited edition of *Reflections*, "African American Contributions to Community Literacy," And, *Reflections,* again, published an issue focused on "Latin@s in Public Rhetoric, Civic Writing, and Service-Learning," edited by Isabel Baca and Cristina Kirklighter, Asian/Asian American scholars also possess a similarly rich history, as detailed in *Finding Home: Building a Community*. These individual efforts and publications also highlight the importance of scholars of color as editors of the research and history which informs our field.

The value of the New City Community Press framework, backed by local and international organizations, embedded in academic models of authorizing alternative research models, was that it served as a counterbalance to the traditional valuing of academic discourses and scholarly publications. We did not need to argue for the scholarly value of our work in the university because we existed in a network that included community, university, and international publishers who were validating these efforts. We did not need to prove our literary merit because established writers were being published by NCCP. In effect, "Writing Beyond the Curriculum" (and the essays which followed its publication) were almost a *how-to guide* to maximize leverage points within the university to enable the terms community partnership and community-based teaching to gain enough power to shift resources to support systemic movements for political change—movements designed specifically for such ends. As quoted in our WBC article, we were trying to demonstrate that "with dreams comes responsibility." Meaning that the actualization of terms such as *service*, *community*, *learning* and *writing* within composition and rhetoric required creating a structure which would allow it to fully operate, that there was an obligation to create partnerships which exceeded service-learning's initial goals of neoliberal volunteer programs. It required

partnerships that would support communities developing a specific set of tactics that might ultimately redraw the boundaries of privilege and exclusion.

Thankfully, we were not alone in such aspirations; and we did not need to invent these strategies on our own. By the early 2000s, the scholarship on service-learning, now often replaced or equated to community partnership, was expanding in scope and significance. And while these terms might have been percolated to the surface initially within neoliberal models of volunteerism, the scholarship of this time was being articulated within analytical frames which understood the structural underpinnings of poverty, racial inequality, and gender discrimination. It was during this time that the *Community Literacy Journal* was founded, conceptualized within an understanding of the value of community-based intellectuals. In announcing its mission, *CLJ* stated that, when addressing structural issues, such as institutional racism, "People from privileged situations, like the universities, may have something to offer to address this situation, but is more likely that the communities themselves may have the most to offer." And it was also during this period that, to me, one of the most important publications in community-partnership work emerged, Paula Mathieu's *Tactics of Hope: The Public Turn in Composition*. Through a series of case studies, Mathieu builds the argument that our field's aspirational goals of addressing injustice, our hopes, need to be more than just a sensibility. Hope, she demonstrates requires a tactical sensibility, both within our institutions and within our communities. At different moments, I have perhaps questioned Mathieu's argument that partnership work remains at the tactical level, meaning small, short-term incursions that do not rely on consistent strategic operational space. I have come to understand, however, that such a framework ensures that *committed* professors, like myself, do not over promise results to community members. And her model also provides a framework that allows students to understand how to plan and implement an action designed to highlight systemic injustices *in partnership* with organizations that have taken on the long-term responsibility of addressing larger structural issues. If *WoR* offered a solution to the field of composition and rhetoric in the late 1990s, my sense is that Mathieu has answered the question of how the vast majority of university-based teachers can effectively work with local communities on significant projects. Indeed, it was this model of creating a series of "tactics" in service of a larger community-defined goal that framed the next stage of my own work.

Sinners Welcome

At a certain moment NCCP began to operate in its own orbit. While institutionally tethered to Temple University, NCCP was slowly mutating into an entity through which working-class, Latine, and African American communities could amplify their political concerns, often using publications to frame the goals of their self-created campaigns for equity and inclusion. These publications were

occurring while Temple University had made the economic decision that middle-class students were a safer tuition bet than working-class students. As a result, the student population began to hail more from the suburban ring than the central communities of Philadelphia. Temple, it was said, was to become the *Harvard on the Schuylkill*, the central river coursing through Philadelphia. The focus on community partnerships was rapidly diminishing.

By then, however, I had learned from the FWWCP leadership, as well as my study of organizations like NUC that, to be sustainable, NCCP needed to operate at the lowest possible budget total. If developed correctly, the initial level of funding—which would establish a publishing framework, create sustainable partnerships, and build allies—should become increasingly less necessary. At one point, that is, the project should operate through organic commitments, fed by shared values and goals. NCCP had reached this goal. In that sense, the ISLLC had served its purpose of being a launch pad for community/university-based projects focused on systemic injustices. It was at that point, I decided the best path forward for NCCP was to remove it from Temple University, placing it in a non-profit incubator program. And since approximately 2003, NCCP has been independent, operating with an annual budget of less than $15,000, funds raised through book sales and targeted micro-grants enabling it to continue.

With NCCP now located outside of Temple University, I also left for Syracuse University's Department of Writing Studies, Rhetoric, and Composition, specifically hired for my work in what was now generally termed as "community engagement" scholarship. A hire focused on community-engagement at this point, though, was hardly unusual. By this time, the vast majority of advertised jobs (tenure and non-tenure stream) were listing *community engagement* as a desired sub-field next to more traditional categories, such as *writing program administration* and *technical writing*. Community engagement had also become an expected thread in most academic conferences; it possessed a constellation of *figures* whose work would attract large audiences; and it now benefitted from university-based and nationwide funding sources. Increasingly, engagement work found itself the focus of prestigious endowed chair positions. By the standards of most academic sub-fields, community engagement had achieved disciplinary recognition. This recognition seems a little less glamorous, however, when placed in the context of extensive exploitation of adjunct laborers who undertake such partnerships out of a sense of ethical obligation, but rarely get the necessary compensation or support required. And it is a telling fact about such disciplinary recognition that few institutions can point to even a modicum of consistent economic support for the local community members who expertise is the foundation of any ethically driven partnership project. In this way, community-engagement's values had little impact on how the university operates as economic institutions.

Moreover, with recognition came increased scrutiny. In 2019, the *National Association of Scholars* released a report entitled, *Social Justice Education in America*.

The scholarly basis of the report is questionable. For instance, there is a claim that "the total number of social justice advocates employed in higher education must be well over 100,000." The footnote to justify this number states, "This is an informal estimate. No detailed study exists; one is sorely needed" (24). But as we have recently learned, the value of fact-based arguments is diminishing. Indeed, the power of this report is the emotional rhetoric that decries "social justice warriors" (SJW) for distorting and diminishing a humanities-based education that inculcates traditional "American" values. For the author of the report, the central pedagogical tool enabling the success of these SJWs is, unsurprisingly, community-engagement. Or more accurately, the entire network of terms that encompass public-facing pedagogical projects:

> Social justice departments denominate their vocational training in activism as experiential learning—or related terms such as civic engagement, community engagement, fieldwork, internships, practica, service-learning. Service-learning usually refers to relatively unpoliticized experiential learning which habituates students to the basic forms and techniques of activism. The term experiential learning disguises what is essentially vocational training in progressive activism by pretending that it is no different from an internship with an engineering firm. Many supposedly academic social justice courses also focus on readying students for experiential learning courses—and for a further career in social justice activism. Experiential learning courses are what particularly distinguishes social justice education from its progressive forebears. Experiential learning courses, dedicated outright to progressive activism, drop all pretense that teachers and students are engaged in the search for knowledge. Experiential learning is both a camouflaging euphemism and a marker of social justice education. (22)

The report continues by highlighting how SJW have made such courses required for completing a major or fulfilling a university core requirement—essentially mandating indoctrination in progressive politics as part of every student's education. To show the breadth of SJWs influence, the report concludes by analyzing a range of universities and colleges in terms of how they have been *taken over* by social justice warriors through the proliferation of common core course requirements, which are actually *social justice* courses, and progressive frameworks, such as diversity, equity, and inclusion requirements, which serve the same purpose. Importantly, *Social Justice Education in America* was sent to sympathetic state legislators and deployed to justify defunding public universities, as well as implementing restrictive policies on what topics could be taught. The continued power of such arguments in 2023 is evident today where state legislators in Florida and Texas have banned funding for diversity, equity, and

inclusion efforts in state universities. High schools have also been banned from requiring (or supporting) community-engaged projects within their curriculum. And as I write, Texas is mandating a distorted *anti-woke* standard on how Black History can be taught.

It is not surprising, then, that many faculty are finding their engagement work being placed under a microscope, with its rhetorical and material practices actively monitored. It is not just the conservative or far right, though, who are paying attention. Universities, themselves, are also developing policies on how faculty or departments can engage in community partnership work. Some of these efforts are well intended efforts to stop the practice of faculty strip-mining communities for their research goals, often framed under "community-based research." But as part of such policies, and often underlying rationale for such policies, there is an effort to restrict the type of allowable projects—projects which the university will defend if attacked. And as noted earlier, universities are creating Community Partnership Centers, often located in a *quaint neighborhood house*, which serve the purpose of restricting (in the name of providing support) the political efforts of many projects. During my time at Syracuse University, my colleague John Burdick and I created a community fellows research program that eventually morphed into a community-driven campaign against a university-supported gentrification project. (See *Sinner's Welcome*). As the campaign gained momentum, our students began to be followed by university-paid community members. Concerns were raised about the ideological nature of our aligned courses, overriding student and faculty evaluations which praised the disciplinary rigor of the syllabus and readings. University funding sources were then withdrawn as a result of untenured program officers fearing for their jobs. And organizations which had previously worked with our project withdrew from participation out of concern that their funds would be withdrawn as well.

John Burdick and I were in the privileged position of being tenured faculty members. I was doubly fortunate that my colleague Eileen Schell was department chair and provided consistent vocal support of the project's value to students as well as our department. I will discuss the importance of developing such support, particularly at this current moment, below. Here I just want to mark that the triumphalism of much community-engaged scholarship needs to be placed within this spreading resistance to some of its founding values. As a graduate student, I studied similarly celebratory moments by progressive scholars, such as resolutions, organizations, government policies designed to open up higher education. As I have written about in *Class Politics,* the NUC had an entire program to transform education called "Open Up The Schools" (OUTS). Of course, NUC is gone. And today, states are shutting down many of the programs that *opened* curriculum and opportunity to those on the wrong side of privilege. If academics do not respond more effectively to these threats, one day another marginalized graduate student will read our work and wonder why it all fell apart—why we, like so many academics before us, just let it all slip away.

Of Rights Without Guarantees

Universities are large institutions, often siloed, and also often unaware of what is happening in other parts of campus. This might explain why at the same time my community engagement projects were under pressure for being *political* from the Syracuse University administration, I was invited to take part in a project in Syracuse University's Maxwell School with Arab Spring advocates focused on building democratic societies. Specifically, the hope was that NCCP might work with the advocates to produce a publication focused on their experiences. (See "After the Fall.") When this publication was complete, published as *Revolution by Love*, I found myself working with Bassam Alahmad, a Syrian human rights documentation worker living in exile in Turkey. Together, we created *Syrians for Truth and Justice* (https://stj-sy.org/en/), which documents human rights abuses of all parties engaged in the Syrian civil war. (See Parks, Alahmad, Kumari.) As part of this work, I found myself engaged in learning weapons systems and chemical weapon technology as I edited the English translations of our in-country documentary teams reports for posting on our website.

I also spent many hours reviewing, captioning, and detailing photographs of the victims of these weapons. Too often, the images were of small children, foaming at the mouth or burned after chemical attacks by Assad's brutal regime. It was clearly work for which I had no real preparation. The theories of community engagement or pedagogies of service-learning seemed disconnected, almost irrelevant, at such moments. And I would even argue that much of cultural studies and composition and rhetoric scholarship which had opened up a political space through which to do politically engaged community partnerships work fell short. This was not only because such work typically did not provide models for how its theories could be made actionable with such contexts. It was also in the nature of such work that essentialist categories, such as human rights, were more critiqued than deployed. As a result, these new community engagement projects required a different ethical epistemological framework than any of the previous projects. Or perhaps, this work highlighted how there had been a consistent, yet unacknowledged, essentialist belief in fundamental human rights throughout all my projects.

There was a second reason, though, why much of the ethical framework would turn out to be of little use—the assumption of rights was based within a Westphalian conception of nation states. Essentially, I would argue community-engagement premised much of its work on an implicit framework that political rights were granted or enforced by the nation-state (and recognized local or city governments). The basis of the advocacy was to pressure the state to recognize a right to housing, an affordable education, or healthcare. However, many of the STJ community members were stateless. Actually, since many were Kurdish, they were doubly stateless; Syria did not recognize them as full citizens with political rights; once refugees, the international and nation-state network (think

U.N.) did not fully recognize displaced individuals as having political rights, such as the ability to enter certain countries or to expect aid to address their suffering. In fact, the fact that my friend Bassam was Kurdish, living in Turkey, added another level of displacement as Turkey's President Erdogan was actively creating policies to discriminate against this community and any organizations led by this community. (We eventually had to legally move STJ to Paris, France to protect its independence.)

Of course, composition and rhetoric, as a field, had been building an international presence prior to the emergence of community-engagement work. These efforts, however, had been principally the export of the concept of first year writing courses and writing program administration. As a result, there was necessarily discussion and research on how U.S.-based models need to be revised to support the cultural and institutional histories of universities in Eastern Europe or the Middle East and North Africa. When it came to integrating service-learning or community-engagement practices into the curriculum, however, deeper issues emerged. For instance, the teaching of academic literacy in an authoritarian country, such as Russia, might be broadly accepted as long as critical thinking is finessed in ways that hide its significance. Asking Russian students to leave the classroom and organize a campaign for educational rights, however, represents an entirely different set of concerns, including physical danger. In such a context, even the slightest public effort poses an unacceptable risk. For example, I have found my students often push aside as unimportant the work of my Algerian colleague to form a book club focused on debate in his university. They are then very surprised to hear about the harsh blowback and repression which followed the creation of space for "critical dialogues" about concepts of democracy. (See *Rights Without Guarantees*; *Dreams of Twiza*.) It seems the most accurate and fair assessment of international community-engaged work that a nuanced political and ethical framework is still being developed.

But one lesson has become clear to me: It is easier to work with democratic advocates in Syria, Myanmar, Bolivia, and the Philippines, than it is to work with U.S.-based democratic advocates. For the past four years, I have been developing the Democratic Futures Project (democraticfuturesproject.com), an effort that brings together international democratic advocates, politically engaged faculty, and policy analysts. The goal is to develop an ethical and scholarly framework which enables effective partnership between the university and grassroots advocates working against authoritarian regimes. Part of this work involves creating research projects, often also embedded in composition classrooms, that enable teams of academics and advocates to explore how to bend scholarship to grassroot needs. The jury is still out on how successful this project will be. It is already clear, however, that when community engagement work defends democracy abroad, the labels of "social justice warrior" seem to fall away. Across the political spectrum, there is support for work that is understood as "steeped in American values," despite actual international actions which contradict such values.

And it has also become clear, to me at least, that for these democratic advocates there is a value, a meaning, in "the United States." Which is to say, that many of these advocates surprise my students when they speak of the need to defend the United States. This stance is partially premised on the fact, as #ThisFlag founder and Zimbabwean Pastor Evan Mawarire noted, "If I were to step outside and criticize President Mugabe, I would have been arrested and imprisoned. If I go outside of this classroom and criticize President Biden, it will hardly be noticed" (Mawarire). Which is to say, advocates experience the full force of what we consider to be "accepted freedoms." There is another element to their defense, however. As a rhetorical tool within their local and national context, the United States represents a powerful historical symbol of democracy and human rights. From my position on the left-progressive side of the field, I have been taught to dismiss such attitudes, step back from such patriotism. My father's experience in Vietnam has embedded a personal reason to distrust such rhetoric. And yet, advocates risking imprisonment, torture, and death say otherwise.

At this moment in the development of community-engagement as an international practice, I wonder, then, "How would our work change if we believed the advocates?" If we simply believed advocates like Pastor Evan Mawarire. How might such a belief begin to build a response to far-right conservative critics who want to reduce the meaning of the United States, both in terms and policies, to a modern form of White supremacy? How might working within such a belief enable community-partnership to pry open alternative meanings and histories of the United States, the meanings that global advocates find so valuable, and become part of the larger project of recreating an inclusive public sphere? And how might such work strengthen democracy here and provide additional tools to democratic advocates globally? To be honest, I don't know the answers. I only know that collectively, as a field, these are questions we must address.

Conclusion

When I look back at who I was in graduate school, I am not sure I recognize myself. The person who used his dissertation to develop an exit strategy from the academy would be filled with gratitude over the skills and opportunities provided by that piece of writing. Shocked, really. I also believe, though, that my graduate-student self would understand that latent sense of anxiety which still courses through these pages: an understanding of the fragility of the successes in this current moment. In graduate school, I was witness to the collapse of the steel industry in Pittsburgh, the distancing of a university from working-class residents, and the emergence of a disciplinary models which engaged theoretically in politics without engaging materially in political action. As a new professor, I again experienced a university distancing itself from its working-class neighbors, again saw the personal and material impact of regions where industry has left (and college-level jobs have arrived), and experienced attempts to turn disciplinary

models into neoliberal political goals. It is a storyline seemingly on a continuous loop. And so, the anxiety remains.

To be clear, the anxiety does not come out of a sense of failure. What I have tried to show in the above pages is that academics in partnerships with advocates and communities, located down street and across the globe, have done yeoman's work. In an environment marked by a conservative politics which expands corporate and White supremacist power while simultaneously shrinking class opportunity and racial, gender, and ethnic community rights, these partnerships have pried open the possibility of disciplinary language to effect actual change in the world. Through this collective effort, terms such as *community*, *service*, *learning* and *partnership* have driven university resources outwards in alliance with those struggling to change the boundaries of privilege. In this regard, the National Association of Scholars was not wrong in highlighting how university structures have been altered by the forceful and collective will that is demanding commitments to access, equity, and inclusion move from buzz words to institutionalized practices. And what I hope becomes clear in the essays that follow is a profound belief in this new generation of faculty, students, and community members will continue the fight.

Instead, the anxiety emerges from a sense of history, first explored as a graduate student hoping to find models for effective advocacy but finding only failed organizations. Today, I wonder whether the structures put in place by the work of community engagement—structures currently shifting power within significant number of classrooms, programs, college and universities—will hold. Will the faculty lines, the journals, the conference threads, and the monograph series that provide the "scholarly" justification for this work continue? This is not an idle question. Nor is it a dramatic question. It is a recognition that, historically, moments of success by progressive scholars, scholars of color, LBGTQI scholars, and working-class scholars are followed by retrenchment that attempts to push these values back out of our classrooms, our professions, our institutions. We are living in such a moment right now. Again, consider what is happening in Texas, in Florida, in West Virginia, in Mississippi, and within hundreds of school districts and local governments. We need to ask the question: Will the structures built to support the values and practices of community engagement hold? Are we winning the political struggles? I worry we are just claiming victories in the pages of academic journals while losing ground politically.

Over the past several years, I have had the good fortune to become friends with Srdja Popović , who as a college-aged student helped to create OTPOR! and drive the authoritarian leader Slobodan Milosevic out of power in Serbia. Over the decades that followed, Popović helped to create the Center for Applied Nonviolent Actions and Strategies (canvasopedia.org) which has worked in over fifty countries providing advocacy training programs in support of democracy and human rights. There are many elements to these trainings, but for the purposes of this essay, I want to focus on "capturing the middle" and "pillars of power." The importance

of "capturing the middle" in a non-violent campaign is that, obviously, it is where the majority of people are located. If you build your movement with language and concerns which alienate the majority, you will never get the numbers required to succeed. In many ways, NUC (and similar organizations) failed because there was no consistent engagement with those outside of their immediate community. Or more accurately, there was no attempt to find areas of shared values with communities who, at first glance, appear to be opponents. Doing this work, of course, means some terms will expand, some demands will moderate, and others will be added. In the process, however, you begin to build the numbers that provide you leverage to shift public debate and policies your way (see Popović ; CANVAS).

As you do the work of capturing the middle, you also want to look at the pillars of power which organize society. These are the institutions that ensure certain policies (or authoritarian leaders) remain in control. Pillars of Power are entities like the government, the judiciary, the police, the educational system, and the media. Within each pillar are smaller networks of programs, initiatives, and so on. The pillars only work because the individuals within them do the daily labor required to keep operations moving. A successful political movement needs to pull a certain number of pillars to their cause since doing so will collapse support for the policy or political leader. A reason for working to "capture the middle" is because some of your eventual supporters might work within a particular pillar. Or their parents and neighbors might work within that pillar. And through one-on-one dialogues, public events that work to attract members, that pillar will fall (either by individuals within the pillar resisting to carry out policies or publicly changing their position on the issue). Returning again to the NUC. There is very little evidence that the NUC developed a strategy designed to draw any Pillar of Power to their side, such as the Education Pillar (schools, school boards, universities, etc.) And even if such a strategy existed, the NUC did not have the numbers to demonstrate broad support of their vision. In reality, it is not surprising they collapsed.

Now let's consider the structures supporting community partnership work, structures designed to turn its values into material practices. And to make the exercise concrete, let's imagine a community partnership project located within a university, within a moderate sized city, in a politically moderate state. Founders of that program might conduct the following analysis:

> Who in my program, department, college, or university supports materially or conceptually this partnership work? Do these offices have the ability to protect the partnership? Who do I need to bring to my side to have an effective defense? Who do I need to make an ally?

> What non-university local, regional, or state educational leaders support the partnership? Do they have the ability to protect the partnership? Who do I need to bring to my side to have an effective defense?

This analysis would ask similar questions in terms of political, business, and religious pillars until it became clear where the support for the program was strong or weak. It will be tempting to ask these questions in terms of a broad term like "community." To some extent that might make sense. You might then track who among your members belongs to those institutions. But this analysis is not about individuals per say or romantic conceptions of "community," it is about understanding what institutions are blocking change, which can create change. The aim would be to focus on what institutions within that community, that are understood within a pillar (such as education), can be said to support your partnership. Do you have sufficient support among the "pillars" you're your efforts are protected against attack.

Conducting such an analysis also enables you to step back and consider how your goals, your rhetoric, and your strategies create pathways into those institutions or shut them off to you. A rhetoric, for instance, that states all university administration is corrupt, damages your ability to get some members of that administration to align with your efforts. If all your strategies involve daytime mass marches, you might eliminate those with daytime jobs, children, or mobility issues. And if your primary goal only impacts a small community (faculty who teach partnership courses), there will be no way to build mass support, to pull those operating Pillars of Power to your side. And as I have learned the hard way, your ability to protect your partnership work, to continue to support the efforts of those on the wrong side of privilege, rests on the ability to get significant numbers of individuals supporting your campaign.

Of course, there are many more steps involved, but the above represent some of the beginning moves and actions. I understand that this type of analysis is not a typical element of most academic careers. I also understand that it might be hard to conceptualize a particular partnership as gaining significant numbers of support within a university, let alone within the larger community, city, or state. I want to argue, however, that this lack of understanding is the result of a disciplinary framework that, historically, does not prepare faculty as to undertake such actions. It is a disciplinary framework that argues strategizing for support, building frameworks that draw together hundreds or thousands of people, somehow dilutes the purity or the rigor of our work. In fact, while the work discussed in the essays that follow might be seen as important by some, I have also been "kidded" about my ability to *market* or *strike deals.* I have been critiqued as unscholarly for my work at building alliances across different pillars. And to be honest, such comments do push my working-class imposter buttons. But to be blunt, how valuable is our work if it is supported by only a narrow slice of already narrow slice of humanities scholarship? How much do we actually care about our work if we will not do the strategic work to ensure its survival? And in the case of community partnership work, labor explicitly committed to those on the wrong side of privilege, what type of privilege is enacted by removing ourselves from the *undignified* work of organizing the support which will allow the work to continue?

To be blunt: A journal article is only as valuable as its ability to sustain or expand the power of a coalition. A conference talk is only as useful as it pries open opportunities for allies. A community-engaged course is only as important as the organizing work it allows to occur on behalf of the community. And yes, of course, the theories which inform that work and the pedagogical models deployed are vital to further entrench community partnership work within our discipline. I am only pointing out the self-evident truth that if we do not constantly embed our work in a strategic vision that expands our institutional allies and public support, *all* that will have been accomplished is a theoretical intervention. And that legacy would represent an abandonment of the community members, neighborhoods, and local organizations who believed *partnership* meant more than scholarship, conference talks, and lecture tours. That it meant that change was necessary; that change was possible; and that change could be achieved.

Collectively, over the past thirty years, academics, advocates, and their alliances have created a remarkable opening within the university that has enabled formerly hoarded resources to be directed in support of those historically on the wrong side of privilege. It is more than I could have imagined as a graduate student. But it is an opening that many at this current moment would like to see closed. A moment when seemingly discarded attitudes about race, gender, ethnicity, and class are once again finding oxygen. A moment that many hope to ensure the few continue to benefit from the labor of the many. It is now time for us to join the organizing work being done by those on the wrong side of privilege. With those who share our values. For in a very literal sense, the battle has been joined. It is time to ask yourself: Which side are you on? And what will you do to ensure victory?

Otherwise, we will become the nostalgia that produces good feelings, but never produces significant change.

We will be the dusty articles which record one more moment of lost opportunity. We will be a warning instead of foundation to build upon.

Works Cited

Adler-Kassner, Robert Crooks, et al. *Writing for the Community: Models for Service Learning in Composition*. Routledge, 1997.

Arac, Jonathan. *Postmodernism and Politics*. University of Minnesota P. 1986.

Baca, Isabel and Cristina Kirklighter. "Editor's Introduction: Latin@s in Public Rhetoric, Civic Engagement and Service Learning." Special issue of *Reflections*, vol. 13, no. 1, pps, 1-12, 2013.

Bacon, Nora and Barbara Sherr Roswell. "Welcome to *Reflections*." Special issue of *Reflections*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2000, p. 1.

Banks, Adam. *Race, Rhetoric, and Technology*. NCTE-Routledge, 2005.

Bartholomae, David, and Anthony Petrosky. *Facts, Artifacts, and Counterfacts: Theory and Method for a Reading and Writing Course*. Heinemann, 1986.

Bartholomae, David. "Inventing the University." *When a Writer Can't Write: Studies in Writer's Block and Other Composing Process Problems*, edited by Mike Rose. Guilford, 1985, pp.275–285.

Bartholomae, David and Anthony Petrosky. *Ways of Reading: An Anthology for Writers*. 1st ed., Bedford/St. Martins. 1987.

Bartholomae, David. *Writing on the Margins: Essays on Composition and Teaching*. Bedford/St. Martins, 2004.

Blackmon, Samantha, Cristina Kirklighter, and Steve Parks. *Listening to Our Elders: Writing and Working for Change*. Utah State UP/New City Community P, 2011.

Bousquet, Marc. *How the University Works: Higher Education and the Low-Wage Nation*. New York UP, 2008.

Boyte, Harry and Elizabeth Hollander. *Wingspread Declaration: Renewing the Civic Mission of the American Research University*. Campus Compact, 1999.

Coles, William, Jr. *The Plural I*. Holt Rhinehart and Winston, 1978.

Cushman, Ellen. *The Struggle and the Tools: Oral and Literate Strategies in an Inner-City Community*. State U of New York P, 1998.

Davis, Marianna White. *History of the Black Caucus of the National Council of Teachers of English*. The National Council of Teachers of English/The Conference on College Composition and Communication Black Caucus, 1994.

Deans, Tom. *Writing Partnerships: Service-Learning in Composition*. National Council of Teachers of English, 2000.

Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Translated by Gayatri Spivak. John Hopkins UP, 2016.

Flower, Linda. *Community Literacy and the Rhetoric of Public Engagement*. U of Pittsburgh P, 2008.

Flower, Linda. *Problem-Solving Strategies for Writing*. 4th ed., Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1993.

Ghandour, Dala, et al. *Revolution by Love: Emerging Arab Youth Voices*. New City Community Press, 2012.

Green, David, editor. "Editor's Introduction: The Community Classroom and African American Contributions to Community Literacy: Moving Forward while Looking Back." Special issue of *Reflections*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp., 1-12, 2011.

Goldblatt, Eli. *Round My Way: Authority and Double Consciousness in Three Urban High School Writers*. University of Pittsburgh P, 1995.

---. *Because We Live Here: Sponsoring Literacy Beyond the College Curriculum*. Hampton Press, 2007.

Herzberg, Bruce. "Community Service and Critical Teaching," *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 45, no. 3, 1994, pp. 307–319.

Kynard, Carmen. "'I Want to Be African': In Search of a Black Radical Tradition/African American-Vernacularized Paradigm for 'Students' Rights to Their Own Language,' Critical Literacy, and 'Class Politics.'" *College English*, vol. 69, no. 4, March 2007, pp. 356–386.

Lyons, Mark and August Tarrier. *Espejos y Ventanas: Oral Histories of Farmworkers and Their Families*. New City Community Press, 2010.

Macrorie, Kenneth. *Uptaught*. Boynton/Cook, 1970.

Mathieu, Paula. *Tactics of Hope: The Public Turn in Composition*. Heinemann, 2005.

Mawarire, Evan. "Conversation with UVA Graduate Students." University of Virginia, 2022.

Mills, Roger. *Writing*. Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers, 1978.

Morley, Dave and Ken Worpole. *The Republic of Letters: Working Class Writing and Local Publishing*. Syracuse University P, 2010.

Parks, Stephen. *Class Politics: The Movement for the Students Right to Their Own Language*. National Council of Teachers of English, 1999.

Parks, Steve. *Gravyland: Writing Beyond the Curriculum in the City of Brotherly Love*. Syracuse UP, 2010.

Parks, Steve. "Sinners Welcome: The Limits of Rhetorical Agency." *College English*, vol.76, no.6, July 2014, pp. 506–24.

Parks, Steve, and Eli Goldblatt. "Writing Beyond the Curriculum: Fostering New Collaborations in Literacy." *College English*, vol.62, 2000, pp. 584–604.

Parks, Steve and Nick Pollard. "Emergent Strategies for an Established Field: The Role of Worker-Writer Collectives in Composition and Rhetoric." *College Composition and Communication*, vol.61, no.3, 2010, pp. 476–509.

Popović, Srdja. *Blueprint for Revolution: How to Use Rice Pudding, Lego Men, and Other Nonviolent Techniques to Galvanize Communities, Overthrow Dictators, or Simply Change the World*. Routledge, 2015.

Popović, Srdja, et al. *Canvas Core Curriculum: A Guide to Effective Nonviolent Struggle*. CANVAS, 2007.

Randall, David. *Social Justice in America*. National Association of Scholars, 2019.

Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. Vintage, 1979.

Said, Edward and Christopher Hitchens. *Blaming the Victim: Spurious Scholarship and the Palestinian Question*. Verso Books, 2001.

Sais, Reva and Beverly J. Moss. "Historically Black Colleges and Universities." Special issue of *Reflections*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2011.

Soley, Lawrence C. *Leasing the Ivory Tower: The Corporate Takeover of Academia*. South End Press, 1995.

Spivak, Gayatri, and Judith Butler. *Who Sings the Nation-State? Language, Politics, Belonging*. Seagull Books, 2011.

Smitherman, Geneva. *Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America*. Wayne State UP, 1986.