

# “Let the People Rap”: Cultural Rhetorics Pedagogy and Practices Under CUNY’s Open Admissions, 1968-1978

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*ABSTRACT: This article writes the histories of CUNY Open Admissions and hip-hop toward each other, illuminating both. Bringing Open Admissions to bear on hip-hop history helps us see that, while historians locate the birth of hip-hop culture in a 1970s New York gutted by divestment and displacement, in fact the decade before hip-hop’s birth was characterized by a flourishing Black and Puerto Rican arts scene in New York and the radical education of tens of thousands of students of color in the CUNY system. Revisiting the archives of Open Admissions with a hip-hop lens draws attention to the cultural rhetorics education being taught in remedial writing classrooms by adjunct lecturers like June Jordan, Adrienne Rich, and others, who drew students’ attention and inquiry to their own communities and language practices. Looking at a selection of documents chosen for their use of the term “rappin,” including teachers’ reflective writing, administrative documents, and community writing, this article argues that, as bureaucratic language evolved to disguise racism in the 1960s and 1970s, a resistive, identity-based language of rappin evolved in response. Ultimately, hip-hop language only entered the commodity market at the end of the 1970s when CUNY instituted tuition for the first time in its history, pushing out many of the students Open Admissions had been designed to welcome in.*

*KEYWORDS: Adrienne Rich; Basic Writing; Black Arts Movement; cultural rhetorics; hip-hop; June Jordan; Open Admissions*

Histories and hagiographies locate the birth of hip-hop culture at a Back to School party thrown by Clive Owens and his sister Cindy Campbell in the Bronx, New York, during the summer of 1973. A Jamaican immigrant, Owens arrived to New York with knowledge of Jamaican DJ culture, lessons he continued learning from his father (Chang 79). Known as DJ Kool Herc, Owens is credited with looping the first break beats, using duplicates of records spun back by hand, his technical and rhetorical innovation making the dancers go wild. That night in ’73, when he became the first MC to rap over the break beat, hip-hop was born.

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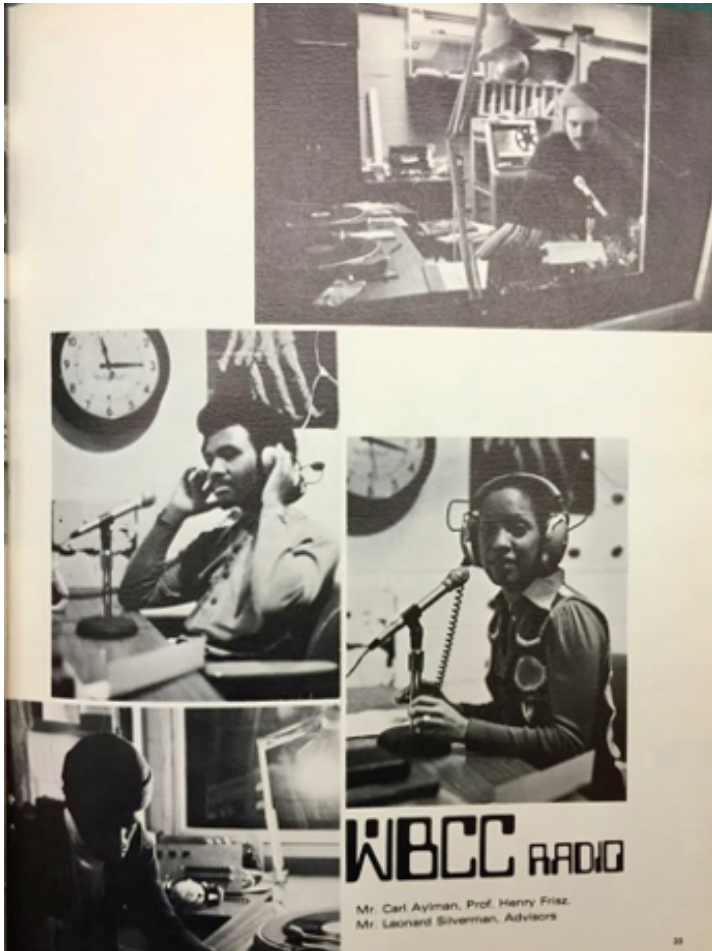
But why Owens and Campbell were excited to go back to school, historians don't know. By the early 1970s, massive deindustrialization had gutted New York's labor market, and intrusive city planning projects led by Robert Moses had been uprooting these increasingly unemployed communities. Jeff Chang and Tricia Rose both open their hiphop histories with the construction of Moses's Cross-Bronx Expressway, which displaced 170,000 Black, brown, and ethnic white residents of the borough, re-creating the city in the interests of white commuters and the financial industry they sped to past the neighborhoods of the city's increasingly desperate working poor. Literary theorist and CCNY professor Marshall Berman recalled that during his childhood in the Bronx, “through the late 1950s and 1960s, the center of the Bronx was pounded and blasted and smashed,” creating a “deafening noise” (293-94) that may well have inspired hiphop's powerful early sounds. While Berman's Jewish family moved to the suburbs, Black and Puerto Rican families like Owens' were increasingly pushed into housing projects being built in the South Bronx. By 1970, Daniel Moynihan would famously suggest that these communities be handled with “benign neglect” as federal policy (qtd. in Chang 14).

Despite this dominant framing, scholars know that hiphop did not emerge *sui generis* from Black and brown youths' survivalist response to structural devastation; hiphop culture's five elements of rapping—DJing, graffiti writing, breakdancing, and “dropping knowledge”—also drew on generations of African-American and African practices of storytelling, sound organization, and dance. Less consideration has been paid to hiphop's immediate cultural precedent in the African American artistic community in New York, the Black Arts Movement (BAM) although Marvin Gladney has argued that hiphop's rage, Black capitalism, and Black aesthetic emerged directly out of BAM, an argument taken up by Gwendolyn Pough when she charted connections between hiphop and the Black Power Movement. And no one to my knowledge has interrogated the relationship between hiphop culture and the Open Admissions years at the City University of New York system, a shift in admissions standards that brought hundreds of thousands of additional students into the multi-campus college system, including its flagship campus, the City College of New York (CCNY). Located on the north side of Manhattan, between Harlem and Washington Heights and just south and west of the South Bronx, the CCNY campus was “a major site of protests and uprisings for Black and Puerto Rican students” in the late 1960s (Kynard 160). These protests, taken up by New York legislators of color, led the state to found the Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge (SEEK) Program

in 1966 with a small class of students of color who would be traditionally excluded from the CUNY system. Compositionist Carmen Kynard carefully recounts how “it would be the SEEK students who [then] led the way for campus inclusion policies” (161). In 1969, students led a sit-in at CCNY with one of five key demands being that the racial makeup of the CUNY system reflect the racial composition of New York’s public high schools (Arenson).

After 1970, the year Open Admissions was fully implemented, the freshman class across all CUNY campuses ballooned from 17,645 to over 34,000 (Lavin and Hyllegard). Racially, the numbers of white students rose to about 26,000 from 15,000, while the numbers of students of color rose to over 8,000 freshmen annually from about 1,600 in 1969. With these numbers, which admitted an increase of over 50,000 students of color between 1970 to 1978, CUNY reached its goal of matching its demographics to New York’s public high schools (Arenson). David Lavin and David Hyllegard’s important study of the impacts of Open Admissions show that 50% of students admitted to community colleges ultimately transferred to four-year colleges (48), a number made easier by the Open Admissions policy allowing automatic transfer between CUNY’s community and four-year colleges. They also show that, although degree attainment by students of color was lower than that of their white peers, Open Admissions tripled the number of Bachelor’s and Associate’s degrees going to Black students and significantly multiplied those for Hispanic students as well (67).

Beyond merely admitting students to college, the SEEK program offered counseling, stipends, tickets to cultural events, and free textbooks (“The CUNY Center Seek Program 1969-1970 Catalogue” 7). Thus, during the decade that hiphop culture germinated as a local culture and launched into a major musical and culture industry that has overtaken global fashion, music, and dance trends, tens of thousands of New Yorkers of color, predominantly Black and Puerto Rican students (including AfroLatinx Puerto Ricans), as well as immigrants and ethnic whites, streamed through often POC-led classrooms at CUNY where before had been underfunded and undervalued, functionally segregated K-12 public education. The energy of the Black Arts Movement rushed into the schools as community educators, artists, and organizers became university professors—often off the tenure track, as adjuncts.



**Figure 1.** Photos of WBCC Radio operators from: *Bronx Community College Yearbook 1975*. Archives, Bronx Community College, Bronx, NY. Accessed 4 August 2016.

In *Vernacular Insurrections*, a book inflected with hip-hop but not about hip-hop's origins, Kynard shows that, in New York and nationwide, the Black Arts Movement was deeply intertwined with the Black freedom struggle, a fusion that profoundly shaped late 20th century American literacies. Rewriting the Black Arts Movement into the history of postsecondary writing instruction, Kynard argues that the new literacies of Black and Puerto Rican student protestors, embedded in chants, signs, demands, leaflets, course proposals, and other extracurricular writings (Kynard 125), “redefined what it means

to be successful and literate” (65). While compositionists have long studied the history of the Open Admissions period at CUNY with a focus on Mina Shaughnessy, the white woman administrator of the CCNY Basic Writing program, Kynard re-roots that history in artistic Black activism, identifying compositionist, sociolinguist and Black woman Geneva Smitherman as a more appropriate avatar for the period. While Kynard clarifies the contributions of BAM and the Black liberation struggle to composition studies, these twin cultural and activist movements have not been adequately theorized for hip-hop’s history.

In this study, I return to CUNY’s archives to interrogate the coincidence, in both time and space, of the birth of hip-hop culture with the Open Admissions period at CUNY. My attention to what Amy Devitt calls the “origin of genres”—in this case, hip-hop genres of rap, graffiti pieces, DJ compositions, and break dances—shapes a study of rhetoric pedagogy and production at CUNY under Open Admission that extends beyond the disciplinary limits of writing and speech classrooms. In my archival visits—to institutional archives at CCNY, Hunter College, Medgar Evers, Bronx Community College, and Queens College, to Radcliffe to look at Adrienne Rich’s and June Jordan’s papers, both writing instructors in SEEK at CCNY, as well to Spelman to look at the papers of Toni Cade Bambara (from CCNY) and Audre Lorde (from John Jay)—I used my knowledge of hip-hop’s roots in musical, poetic, technological, and protest traditions to guide the materials I studied. Beyond looking at institutional documents relating to SEEK, Open Admission, and Basic Writing on multiple campuses, I also looked at yearbooks, student publications, and in course catalogs at departments of English; Ethnic, Black, and Puerto Rican studies; Music; Speech; Visual Arts; and Engineering. This purview allows me to expand on the work of composition scholars like Steve Lamos and Mary Soliday whose focus has been restricted to writing classrooms. This widened scope for rhetorical research allows me to recognize the wide-ranging and overlapping studies in rhetoric, critical ethnic studies, and artistic and technological production undertaken by tens of thousands of poor and working-class New York college students during the decade of 1968-1978 at CUNY, an enormous educational movement that has not been previously theorized as part of the history of hip-hop.

Building on Kynard’s attention to Black teachers and specifically Geneva Smitherman as a foil to Shaughnessy, as well as Sean Molloy’s attention to the lecturers teaching in the SEEK program at CUNY, in this article, I repopulate our historical memory of the Open Admissions years across multiple CUNY campuses, focusing on the teacher-artist-activists Shaugh-

nessy managed—Toni Cade Bambara, Barbara Christian, Addison Gayle, and in particular June Jordan and Adrienne Rich. Claimed by women’s and Black studies, these individuals, active in the Black Arts Movement and the women’s movements, all taught in Shaughnessy’s Basic Writing program at CCNY yet their presences and pedagogies have not been studied by compositionists. I conclude with attention to course offerings and writing in student newspapers and yearbooks during the same time frame, looking at materials from Hunter College, Queens College, and Medgar Evers to better understand the rhetorical culture of CUNY students during Open Admission, in the years immediately preceding and coinciding with hip-hop’s rise. Ultimately, I argue that a resistive literacy of rappin was growing and cultivated within the CUNY system during this decade, developing dialogically with an emerging bureaucratic language of standards developed in response to the Civil Rights gains of the late 1960s.

The intellectual, cultural, and political clashes between progressives and reactionaries from 1968 to 1978 in New York City are important sites for understanding the current ideological moment, and its genesis over the last fifty years. In the decade after 1968, when Black people protested the unmet promises of the Civil Rights movement across the nation’s major cities, state power moved to reconstruct racism as what Ferguson has called an “increasingly illegible phenomenon” (58), developing new colorblind or what Kynard has termed “race-evasive” (166) discourses to reinscribe white power using unraced language. In the papers of CUNY’s teachers and students, unspooling across a decade of investment in and then divestment from equitable public access, we can see the development of resistive rap discourses that use the language of personal identity and experience to counter the dehumanizing language of the white bureaucracy. These language practices are developed in the context of bureaucratic processes around funding and hiring, defunding and firing, that disproportionately affected students and teachers of color, but never using the language of race. While hip-hop scholars root the culture’s history in destitution, it was only after the CUNY retrenchment took hold with the institution of tuition for the first time in the school’s history, in 1976, that hip-hop transcended its roots as a community art form to enter the commodity market. By the 1982, when Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five released “The Message,” with its snarling chorus—“It’s like a jungle sometimes it makes me wonder/ how I keep from going under”—hip-hop’s critical thesis of bureaucratic abandonment, urban decay, and racial capitalism had solidified in an idiom borne, I argue, out of a decade of critical and open access education.

## **Liner Notes: Toward a Hip-hop Feminist Composition Historiography**

If this article were a hip-hop track, Carmen Kynard's *Vernacular Insurrections* would be the bassline, Roderick Ferguson's *The Reorder of Things* would be the snare, and Sean Molloy's research, some for this journal, the hi-hat. Looped as the chorus would be Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations*, pitched up, sped up, and reversed. Rapping over this track are all the Black, Puerto Rican, and queer students and adjunct teachers of Open Admissions, theorizing their world in their own words, many quoted here. June Jordan sings the hook; Dean Ted Gross mutters in the cut. The riddim is a faint sample of Jeff Chang's "dub history," a hip-hop history from below.

But if this article were an article, it would continue like this:

Hip-hop, an increasingly important exigence in the study of student writing practices, is what originally drew me to the archives. Hip-hop culture, now a dominant feature of the U.S. cultural landscape, has been prompting compositionists, rhetoricians, and literacy researchers to account for the rich composing processes that occur in hip-hop's multimodal culture of five elements: MCing (writing and delivering raps); DJing (producing or spinning beats); drawing, spray/painting, or "writing" graffiti art; breakdancing; and philosophizing or "dropping science" (see Alim, Banks, Craig, Green, Kirkland, Milu, Pough, Richardson). Across multiple disciplines, hip-hop feminists draw attention to the contributions and negotiations of Black and brown women, girls, queer people and femmes within hip-hop culture (Lindsey). Emerging from a vernacular artistic culture, hip-hop's continued resistive politic is in tension with its contemporary shape as a source of mass-marketed commodities. Using a hip-hop lens to study rhetorical production foregrounds multimodality and cross-genre composing, because hip-hop's intrinsic multimodality reflects African American cultural priorities that resist Western taxonomies that separate communicative modes like speech, language, music, and dance.

Studying cultural rhetorics like hip-hop redirects our attention to the rhetorical production and theorizing of marginalized groups, while also defamiliarizing the Euro-American discourses we regularly accept as normative (Powell et al.). Cultural rhetorics provides a useful framework for understanding the ways that SEEK's Basic Writing lecturers, themselves active in local ethnic and gender liberation movements in New York City, theorized out of their own locations and explicitly invited students to do the same. Their pedagogies were "culturally relevant," defined by Gloria



Ladson-Billings as pedagogies which “empower[ ] students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (16-17). In the U.S. context of composition and rhetorical studies, cultural rhetorics approaches have enriched studies of and with indigenous peoples, Latinx communities, African-Americans, Asian-Americans, white-identified groups, queer people, disabled people, digital media users, and rhetorical relations between and among them (see Banks; Bratta and Powell; Gubele, King, and Anderson; Haas; Hitt and Garrett; Mao and Young; Powell; Pough; Pritchard; Royster; Ruiz and Sanchez). As a critical scholar of white femininity (Brown), I recognize how cultural rhetorical studies can help us critique dominant rhetorical frameworks like those ultimately embraced by Shaughnessy (Molloy) while also reminding us to decenter whiteness and center the work of rhetors of color, as I do here.

Culturally relevant pedagogies that directed students to their communities’ rhetorical practices were embraced by CCNY SEEK lecturers, including June Jordan and Adrienne Rich. Yet the story of Jordan and Rich must be understood intersectionally, because the differences in how they were treated by Shaughnessy’s Basic Writing program, and the white English Department professors she reported to, highlights how systems of power intersect to create different experiences of privilege and oppression for groups and individuals with different identities (Crenshaw). Although Mina Shaughnessy was a powerful woman administrator, her experiences as a white woman gave her considerable advantage over her female colleagues. None of the adjunct women instructors I consider here—Adrienne Rich, June Jordan, Barbara Christian, Toni Cade Bambara—had the same normative female identity as Shaughnessy, a cisgendered heterosexual white woman, who was, by many accounts, considered very pretty by other white people. Shaughnessy’s identity gave her an advantage vis-a-vis the white power structure, run by straight white men like English Department chair Theodore “Ted” Gross, over queer white women like Rich and queer Black women like Jordan.

Intersectionality is also a rejoinder to remember Puerto Rican faculty who do not appear in this study but who are present in the archives as pedagogical innovators and objects of discrimination. While my study focuses on Black students and teachers, their studies, and their language practices, Puerto Rican students and teachers fought for and participated in Open Admissions, and the archives are full of their presence and their languaging. Indeed, even thinking of these groups separately obscures the identities of Afro-Boricuas in New York and surely present in Open Admissions classrooms.



Recognizing the tension between administrators like Shaughnessy and Ted Gross and radical lecturers like June Jordan is a recognition that the forces that would undo Open Admissions were present from its beginning. Derrick Bell's critical race theory of interest convergence holds that "the interest of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interest of whites" and not when it diverges with whites' interests (23). This notion is crucial for understanding the wave of investment and divestment that swept CUNY and communities of color nationwide from 1968 to 1978. Interest convergence is engaged by multiple historians of Basic Writing, including Kynard and Steve Lamos, as well as literary and higher education theorist Roderick Ferguson, to explain how the impetuses that made Basic Writing and Open Admissions possible seemed so quickly, a decade later, to disappear. The mass anti-racism protests of the late 1960s (including uprisings in Philadelphia, Watts, Newark, Chicago and Pittsburgh as well as student protests across the country) coupled with the U.S.'s international Cold War persona as the land of liberty against Soviet autocracy, put it in the white power structure's interests to make concessions to the demands of marginalized groups—for example, the higher-ed investments advised by Nixon's 1970 President's Commission on Campus Unrest (Kynard 120, Lamos 23-24). Compared with a narrative of racial progress, interest convergence and divergence better explain how between 1968 and 1969, 700 higher-education institutions added "ethnic studies courses, programs, or departments" (Ferguson 33) and by 1971 600 Predominantly White Institutions had created remediation programs for newly admitted poor students and students of color (Kynard 166), yet, by changing admissions tuitions requirements, the presence of people of color in higher education collapsed from the mid-1970s into the 1980s. Kynard recognizes this austerity move as part of a "united front in social policy" (Kynard 230) that starved communities of color, while independent scholar Alexis Pauline Gumbs theorizes Open Admissions alongside the expansion of prisons in New York as "two sides of the coin of population control" for New Yorkers of color (241).

"On location" (Kirsch) in the archives, I found that moving through the materials was an emotional experience. The early documents from SEEK at CCNY are suffused with positive affect: teacher and student enthusiasm, a sense of a changing and opening world, the joys of learning and teaching. Course catalogs are full of revolutionary curricula, and student newspapers and yearbooks are full of vibrant student voices. Yet even in the files from the 1960s, I could feel the coming retrenchment like a tide, like when you

can feel the undertow pulling away at your ankles even as the water is still rushing in at your waist. The pressure is there, but no single drop is to blame. Drawing on interest convergence, Ferguson theorizes the institutional discourses that developed to reinstate white rule against desegregationist civil-rights era policy, positioning “excellence” as a discursive caveat to policies that opened the doors of white colleges and universities in the 60s and 70s. Looking specifically at Open Admissions CUNY, and closely engaging June Jordan’s writings from her time at CCNY, Ferguson argues that the advance of standards-based arguments was a way for schools to present *de jure* desegregation while maintaining “standards” that functionally locked out people of color. In my study, I match a rhetorical attention to bureaucratic and identity-based discourses with an intersectional, materialist attention to racialized and gendered labor relationships. I follow contemporary scholars of Writing Program Administration like Stacy Perriman-Clark, Collin Craig, and Asao Inoue in seeking to racialize discussions of workplace management in writing programs across hiring, curriculum design, pedagogy and assessment practices.

Gesa Kirsch and Jacqueline Jones Royster’s notion of “critical imagination” as feminist rhetorical research practice grounds my inquiry into previously untheorized intersections of hiphop and Open Admissions, and grants me the gumption to challenge the near-ossified narratives of hiphop’s birth. Writing separately, Kirsch with Joy Richie also enjoin me as a white feminist researcher to recognize how “whiteness structure[s] my] thinking” (10), and with Royster reminds me to demonstrate “respect for the communities [I] study” (226). As a white Jewish woman, a queer teaching off the tenure track, I come to this history in solidarity with my sisters of color and with an intersectional recognition that the unjust systems I navigate are magnified for my colleagues of color.

The remainder of this article is constructed around a selection of documents from teachers and students loosely chosen for their engagement with “rap,” a word with long roots in Black American speech (Campbell 36). When Wonder Mike of the Sugarhill Gang intoned incredulously in 1979, “Now what you hear is not a test, I’m rappin to the beat,” he was acknowledging the transference of the verbal art of rappin onto and into a four-beat musical line in the first-ever recorded hiphop song. In studying these instances of “rap” under Open Admissions, I see the cultural rhetorics of rappin being sharpened in dialogic opposition to neoliberal discourses of standards and excellence. I theorize the “rap literacies” of Black and Puerto Rican New Yorkers as reveling in the opposite of whatever it is that “standards” mea-

sure—the richness of identity, experience, and language, the opposite of administrative doublespeak that only Jordan (and recently, Kynard) had the nerve to call racist. In the documents I sample from the archives, rappin refers to making connections the man doesn't want you to make, using language he doesn't want you to use, in genres he doesn't know how to standardize. The language of rap offers one through-line between the cultural rhetorics of Black and Puerto Rican New Yorkers in the late sixties, CUNY classrooms, and the emerging hip-hop culture of the 1970s. In the sections that follow, I focus on a 1968 NEA report in which several lecturers reflect on their summer writing workshops; pedagogical materials by as well as institutional documentation about June Jordan and Adrienne Rich, and writing by students and staff for campus papers in the context of on- and off-campus Black poetic culture. These texts demonstrate a sense of reflexive, critical rap literacies as a discursive tool marginalized teachers and students, all scholar-artists, used to self-define and self-defend against encroaching bureaucratic abjection.

### **“The Square People Versus the Globular People”: Rap and Resistance in a 1968 SEEK Summer Session**

A coauthored SEEK report from an NEA-funded summer seminar in 1968 offers compelling evidence that Black teachers rooted in the Black Arts Movement pioneered rap pedagogies at SEEK centered around the cultural rhetorics of Black and Puerto Rican New Yorkers and their ancestors, pedagogies that were not fully appreciated by Shaughnessy and were never taught to scale. While Molloy shows that Shaughnessy moved CCNY's writing instruction from a more rhetorical model towards grammar-focused test prep (“A Convenient” 8), my research suggests that, at least for a time and at least in individual classrooms, lecturers of color were teaching a deeply rhetorical curriculum focused on the rhetorics of modernity, the African diaspora, the postcolonial world, New York City's communities of color, and students' own experiences of these spaces and heritages. In the typescript report on the 1968 summer seminar, prepared to document their work for the NEA, instructors Mina Shaughnessy, Fred Byron, Toni Cade (later Cade Bambara, and referred to such throughout the following), Barbara Christian, David Henderson, and Addison Gayle were each tasked with describing and reflecting on their assignments' successes after being given significant freedom to design their own courses. In the instructors' descriptions of and reflections on their courses, we can see how, although all the teachers were deeply invested in their students' successes, the white teachers tended

to teach toward school literacies, forwarding the discourses of lack that plagued the students, while teachers of color and creative writing teachers were more driven by introducing students to the unseen richness of their home cultures. Paradoxically, the existence of the report itself both attests to a culture of reflexivity within the teaching ranks of SEEK Basic English even as it demonstrates how the program’s reliance on grants for funding, under Shaughnessy’s leadership, immediately imbued it with a research agenda that had been deprioritized only a year earlier as reported in other records.

Comparing Gayle, Christian, and Cade Bambara’s pedagogical reflections with Byron and Shaughnessy’s dramatically illustrates the differences between culturally relevant, cultural rhetorics pedagogies that move across multiple rhetorical modalities, and pedagogies oriented toward institutional whiteness. Addison Gayle’s class centered on storytelling culture from African and African American history, and worked to root students’ writing and storytelling in a grand literary culture. He reflected that

we also made the point that many of the successful black writers have also excelled as orators, in the cases of Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, Eldridge Cleaver, Malcolm X, and Lester. And that as orators they were aware of the way words sounded to the ear and of the order in which a talk is organized. This knowledge, we maintained, was an essential element in the discovery of one’s own voice. (26)

Gayle’s reflection showcases an integrated understanding of written and spoken rhetoric rooted in the Black literary tradition. In his section of the course, students focused on two main texts: *Look Out Whitey, Black Power’s Gonna Get Your Mama* by Julius Lester, and *Tales from the Arabian Nights*, by Richard Burton. Gayle built up student confidence not by directing students to school culture but by turning them away from it to reconsider the home cultures and heritages they could draw upon in their own rhetorical production across writing and speech. He wrote:

we held a lot of discussions. We had the students relate anecdotes, write them down and then compare them. . . We talked a great deal about the oral tradition in Africa. Of how African people were used to hearing news and stories instead of reading them. We read *The Arabian Nights* and talked a great deal about the literary devices employed in the rendering of these tales by Shahrazad. . . We also had the running assignment of interviewing our older relatives, our grandmothers and grandfathers, grand aunts and the like, so

as to give us clues to the ways of our clan. We discussed at length the fantastic Odyssey of Alex Haley, the editor and compiler of the *Autobiography of Malcolm X*, in discovering and tracing his ancestors back to a small town in Africa. In general, we attempted to provide our aspiring writers with a base from which to work. And to buttress them with historical fact and tradition. (26-27)

Connecting students' "grandmothers and grandfathers" to Shahrazad and Malcom X, Gayle's pedagogy is an example of the culturally situated Black Arts pedagogies that were present at CUNY in the years before hip-hop's emergence as a dynamic Black rhetorical culture.

In another reflection, Barbara Christian noted that she specifically asked students for input and recommendations, then built "a course that they would like." Student suggestions led to a "focus on Black literature, contemporary preoccupations, techniques of argument" (10), using texts like Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice*, and LeRoi Jones's *Home* to study "Colonialism, Neo-Colonialism, and Liberation." Beyond recommending newspapers to them, she wrote, "good libraries and bookstores were suggested to the students" (1). That the students recommended these texts speaks to our need to re-contextualize this curricular moment in the broader New York City cultural moment, in which Black bookstores were thriving and seeing city and state investment, and students descended from the overlapping African and Caribbean diasporas were taking a broad-minded interest in third-world solidarity and the transition out of the colonial era. Looking beyond the SEEK archives, we can see that by 1969 the SEEK program already had curricular offerings in ethnic studies, so that students learning about the rhetorics of Black and Puerto Rican communities in their Basic English courses were also learning these cultures' histories, philosophies, and literatures elsewhere across the curriculum.

Kynard's argument that literacies from the Black Arts Movement anticipated a range of later composition trends is borne out by Christian's suggestion, in line with later pedagogies like literacy narratives or Writing About Writing, that students' research begin with themselves. She writes:

The students suffer from a lack of awareness of the importance and relevance of their own lives. The most frequent complaint in just about any beginning course is "I don't have anything to write about." And particularly for our students, who are mostly black and Puerto Rican and who therefore have seen little resembling their

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own lives in a written form, the problem is compounded. The books that I chose to work with in this course, then, were crucial. (17)

Like Gayle, Christian saw students as unaware of their own cultural context as resources for their own writing. Christian continued on to discuss her section’s focus on integrated discussions of literature and music:

I had intended *Blues People* to be a counterpoint to *Invisible Man* since it is primarily a book-length essay rather than a novel. But the students saw a tie-up between Ellison’s constant use of the blues in his novel and Jones’ analysis of them. We got into the music much more than we did into the essay form. They all knew this music, some of them were ashamed of it, some proud but they were all surprised to see that it could be analyzed, discussed and related to a cultural history of a people. Along with the reading of the book, I brought records to class, dating back from Work Songs, Early Primitive Blues all the way to Contemporary Rhythm n blues and New Jazz. It is particularly noteworthy that most of the students were not aware of Contemporary Jazz and had not even heard of such classic names as Charlie Parker or John Coltrane. . . I left the summer session with a feeling that we had just gotten started, that the jump to more rigorous writing could be made in a few weeks, that some though not all of the students had begun to overcome their fear of writing. (18)

Despite Christian’s in-class focus on music, she sees her students quickly becoming more advanced writers as well, and develops her own improvisational ethic in course design and her attention to the integration of different modes of cultural production in Afrodiasporic cultures. Thus, in Gayle and Christian’s reflections we can see the similarities between their pedagogical strategies and the work of cultural rhetorics, as they drew students’ attention to the rhetorical practices they had already, perhaps unknowingly, learned from their home cultures, or could root in their cultures’ historical and current practices.

Meanwhile, Cade Bambara’s reflection on her course included an extended discourse by one of her students which we might view as a self-assessment given and received in a culturally relevant pedagogical context. What better way for a student to synthesize course concepts, than to rap? In any case, Cade Bambara saw fit to reproduce this extensive account of her student’s speechifying, and I follow her in doing so. She writes:

At least one hour was given over to students. . . The last meeting, for example, ran two hours over the usual end because one student needed “uninterrupted time to rap.” He delivered non-stop machine gun style interrupting his interrupters on the third or fourth syllable a two and a half hour dissertation on at least 80% of themes we had touched on in the last two and a half month time and hit upon related ideas which cemented the themes together: the irrationality of logic, the impossibility of objectivity, the stultifying [sic] effects of the English language, the masking role of reason which makes mental gymnastics pass for reality, the defects in Black Nationalism, the holes in Fanon, the criminality of education, the paternalism of the Seek Program, the stupidity of students who kept raising their hands to challenge him as he spoke (“Do you think Paul McCartney and John Lennon ran all the way up to the mountains to bug the guru with ‘hey Mahareeshi, you wrong baby’? No, they sat and listened.”) point omega in one’s consciousness, the square people versus the globular people, the evolution of the Black man, the foolishness of “things are getting better,” the limited role of regular teachers as opposed to real mentors. After his treatise on the freedom and limits of learning, he offhandedly congratulated the instructor as the only one who had sense enough to listen and urged the others to realize that had they been sure of who they were, they would have felt no compulsion to argue audibly but would simply have checked him out and separated the brass from the gold quietly, privately, within their own “globe.” Quite a wind-up. (11)

In this excerpt we see rap as a space for verbal play, for making connections, for critique. In quoting this passage at length, Cade Bambara valorizes this student’s speech as knowledge-making of value to the academy. Its description as a “dissertation” and a “treatise,” connecting and “cementing” the themes of the course, suggests a view of assessment on Cade Bambara’s part that is far distant from standardized language exams and is rather rooted in the student’s own culturally-situated ways of making meaning and discourse, that is, by rapping. In this extended student speech we can see the outcome of a pedagogy that invites students to compose from their own personal and cultural locations—that is, to rap about what they learned.

In the report, the pedagogical approaches of Gayle, Christian, and Cade Bambara, which rooted instruction and assessment in students’ home cultures, differed from those of their colleagues Fred Byron and Mina



Shaughnessy, who taught toward school literacies and seemed more attuned to what students lacked than to the cultural resources they already held. For example, Shaughnessy's reflection relays that "I have often noticed. . . that students usually 'talk' a better-organized paper than they write" (30), but doesn't make any note of the value placed on oral communication in Black cultures. And Fred Byron, teaching an all-male, almost all-European syllabus of Chekhov, Sartre, Akutagawa, Stevenson and plays from Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and Shakespeare, wrote that "My particular aim in the scope of this summer course was. . . to provide these students with a broad (liberal arts), classical foundation or background of knowledge." He continued:

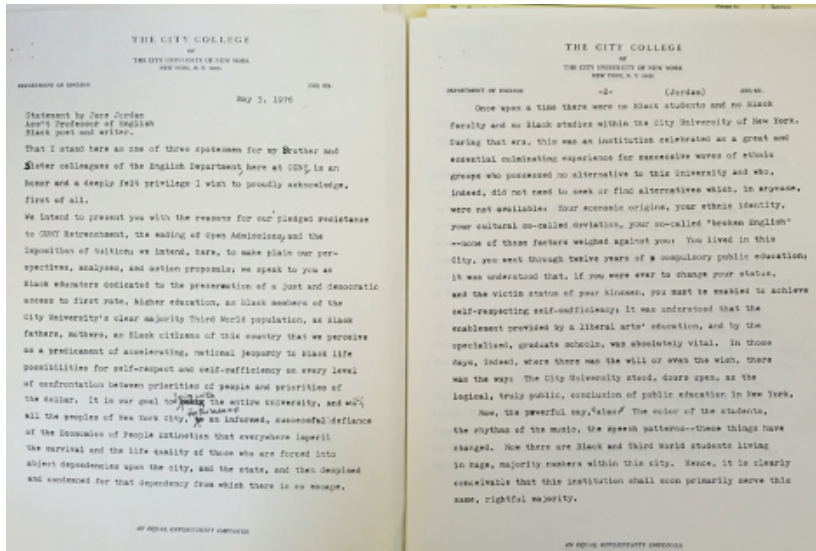
I am sure that I am not alone in having been told by students as they have sat in my English classes that they are sorely "lacking" or "deficient" or "weak" in background reading, especially the "classics," and so they are pitifully unable to make the necessary cross-references or to understand the allusions which continually barrage them in their English and Social Science/Humanities courses. Hence, my two summer seminar courses (which I trust will be readily replicable) were, in a sense, attempts to supply this much-needed background material to students who feel inadequate. (6)

To his credit, Byron goes on to describe some very successful lessons, noting that students "began to radiate with confident knowledge and rewarding self-achievement" (6) after delving deeply into the character of Iago. But his focus on student deficit regarding European classics—his characterization of students as "pitiful[ ]," "barraged," and "inadequate" in their attempted acculturation to white liberal arts study—is a different approach than that of some of his Black colleagues, Cade Bambara, Christian, and Gayle, all of whom were writers active in the Black Arts Movement.

Taken together, these reflections show a program of writing teachers working collaboratively and reflectively to support experimental pedagogy that engaged students' hearts as the way to their minds. All the teachers were deeply motivated by igniting student pleasure in learning—Shaughnessy concluded her reflection by remarking that, "I can only say that we seemed often to be talking about writing in a way that made sense to the students and a way that they seemed to enjoy" (34). But when we think back to the innovations and student successes under SEEK Basic English, it behooves us to remember and foreground the major pedagogical contributions—in what

today we'd call multimodality, translingualism, remix theory, and cultural rhetorics—of teacher-practitioners active in the Black Arts Movement and foundational to Black Studies like Toni Cade Bambara, Barbara Christian, and Addison Gayle, those teachers granting their students time and space to rap.

## “Alas”: An Intersectional Comparison of Adrienne Rich and June Jordan’s Working Conditions



**Figure 2.** Manuscript pages from: “Statement by June Jordan/ Ass’t Professor of English/ Black poet and writer.” TS. Box 76, Folder 14. 5 May 1976. June Jordan Papers, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. 8 August 2016.

An “integrationist narrative” (Kynard 150) of Shaughnessy’s work at CUNY casts her as the hero who made change for students of color. However, the archives attest to the rich poetic culture of Black New York in the 1960s, a culture that Open Admissions did not create but simply allowed onto campus. Audre Lorde’s collection of ephemera from her years at John Jay includes references to numerous grassroots organizations for Black poets in the city, including the Harlem Writers’ Guild, Black Poets Reading, the Black Academy of Arts and Letters, and the Langston Hughes Community Library and Cultural Center. Her papers hold a clipping from a 1972 copy of the new publication *Essence Magazine* on “The Explosion of Black Poetry”

which highlights the role of identity and self-definition to the new Black poetry. The article quotes June Jordan as well as Lorde herself on this subject, with Jordan stating that “Poetry is the way I think and the way I remember and the way I understand or the way I express my confusion, bitterness and love,” and Lorde adding, “I am Black, Woman, and Poet—in fact and outside the realm of choice. I can choose only to be or not to be, and in various combinations of myself. . . The shortest statement of philosophy I have is my living, or the word ‘I’” (66). In 1977, Columbia and the Frederick Douglass Creative Arts Center on 104th Street co-hosted a Cultural Festival in which Black poets were featured prominently. Organizer Quincy Troupe told the *New York Times* that

black poetry was “entering a new phase, evolving.” “It is drawing more on personal experience,” he explained, “becoming more personal and relating back to the African- American folk roots, especially in its use of idiomatic speech, colloquialisms and the vernacular. It is also drawing on the rhythms of jazz and blues. . . [It] has located itself in black American culture and, like a tree, it is branching out to communicate internationally with cultures around the world. . . We are being listened to now. . . The speech and language of the African-American has had an impact. (Fraser)

With Open Admissions, this blossoming poetic culture was welcomed onto campus especially through the staff and non-tenure-track faculty who were hired to teach the newly admitted students. Beyond this reflexive poetry’s presence in classrooms, SEEK provided curricular and extracurricular support—through theater tickets, movie screenings, and course offerings—for newly admitted CUNY students to embrace off-campus culture and bring those cultural happenings back onto campus as well.

Before I visited the archives, my inkling that rap might have been present at CUNY during Open Admissions was first confirmed by Adrienne Rich in her essay, “Teaching Language in Open Admissions.” Rich recalls:

Some of the most rudimentary questions we confronted were: how do you make standard English verb endings available to a dialect-speaker? how do you teach English prepositional forms to a Spanish-language student? where are the arguments for and against “Black English”? the English of academic papers and theses? Is standard English simply a weapon of colonization? Many of our students

wrote in the vernacular with force and wit; others were unable to say what they wanted on paper in or out of the vernacular. We were dealing not simply with dialect and syntax but with the imagery of lives, the anger and flare of urban youth—how could this be used, strengthened, without the lies of artificial polish? How does one teach order, coherency, the structure of ideas while respecting the student’s experience of his thinking and perceiving? Some students who could barely sweat out a paragraph delivered (and sometimes conned us with) dazzling raps in the classroom: how could we help this oral gift transfer itself onto paper? (261)

This quotation is remarkable, first of all, for how many of these questions composition teachers are still grappling with, now often under the labels of translanguaging, code-meshing, and contact-zones. It resonates, too, with Kynard’s critique of Shaughnessy’s *Errors and Expectations* as valorizing revisions of student writing that elevate “artificial polish” over the “anger and flare” of earlier drafts (Kynard 205-209). Yet in the workplace of SEEK at CCNY, Rich was Shaughnessy’s ally, not her critic. To understand the racialization of workplace dynamics in the context of innovative student-centered pedagogies, it is instructive to compare the records of Adrienne Rich with June Jordan’s. Even as defunding already threatened Open Admissions from its earliest days, individual teachers like June Jordan and Adrienne Rich worked to theorize and teach writing as a practice that would allow students to intervene in worlds that sought to control and limit their fates. Jordan and Rich both used and developed the intellectual practices of reflexivity that were being strategically engaged in the rhetorics of the 1960s liberation movements to theorize from their own experiences and identities, and teach their students to do the same. Their pedagogies built on the Black poetic tradition—writing from the word “I”—that emerged in Lorde’s archives.

In her Basic English syllabi, Rich stressed the value of theorizing the world from personal experience, and from a willingness to engage with the real world—what Kynard theorized as anticipating our field’s “social turn” (33). In a 1969 syllabus, Rich wrote:

I am concerned with the student’s response to literature as a part of his life, rather than as a preparation for scholarship in an English Ph. D. program; and with his discovery that one writes because one needs to say things to others, that he himself has much to say, and that when writing effectively one is addressing a potential reader,

not simply fulfilling an academic requirement. (2)

Rich’s socially-situated pedagogies root rhetorical production in the world, which is to say, in culture and in identity. Her theorizing continues in a 1971 syllabus, which began:

This class will start from the idea that language—the way we put words together—is a way of acting on reality and eventually gaining more control of one’s life. The people in the class and their experiences will be the basic material of the course, about which we will be talking and writing. In writing, we will be trying to define the actual experiences we ourselves are having, and to make others more aware of our reality as we perceive it. The reading will consist of writings in which the authors or their characters have tried to understand and criticize their situations, and to change or move beyond them.

Although Rich was a white Jewish woman, her archives reveal a significant effort to engage with Black and Puerto Rican students’ home cultures and to encourage them to do the same, for example by visiting local bookstores listed on a handout titled “Books to buy, beg, borrow, steal, or read standing up in the bookstore.”

While Rich’s attention to students’ home rhetorics are admirable, an intersectional comparison with Jordan’s materials show how Jordan’s pedagogy, own writing, and experiences of institutional discrimination were shaped by her Black identity. In a handwritten journal from 1969, we can see Jordan theorizing writing for her pedagogy and for her essay “Black Studies: Bringing Back the Person,” which Ferguson engages extensively in his book. In one undated entry, Jordan wrote, “Now language is our medium of community. . . For these reasons and for other reasons, reasons I hope our course of studies will articulate and analyze, language is always political. Always political. . . As a Black person and poet, I entertain an excruciating sense of language as political” (12-13). On another page, perhaps addressing her students, she writes, “I call upon you to self-consciously abandon the passive voice, in your writings + also watch the verbs you choose so that you don’t combine 3 verbs where one would serve more forcefully” (65-66, formatting in original). A few pages later, a strange note appears in hard blue ink, forceful against the pencil on the rest of the page:

obe | is | ant

written description of course

AND Reconsider curriculum (76, formatting in original)

This entry in particular suggests that even as Jordan was theorizing writing for her students in ways that would have a national and historical impact, she was receiving pushback from administrators—presumably Shaughnessy—for her curriculum. In 1970, Jordan penned an extended letter to Shaughnessy highlighting her students' work investigating issues in their communities in papers with titles like "Inferior Education in the Williamsburg Community"; "Self-Concept As A Determining Factor in Choice of Occupation: The Black Male Hustler"; "Inadequacy of Acceptable Food and Inadequate Systems of Food Supply in Harlem"; and "Drug Addiction in the South Bronx" (1). In this letter, Jordan inveighed against the testing regime Shaughnessy implemented for the English Department. Jordan wrote:

I object to the value placed upon writings accomplished under stress. . . If you want to know what a student thinks, how a student can synthesize different ideas and aspects of material given to him, then so-called leniency should be the rule. Leniency: Extra time granted, as requested, consultation of books, as desired, and so forth. . . [C]onsider what our literary heritage would be, if writers were forced to submit their manuscripts, ready or not, on the day of the contracted deadline. I guess I am saying that the problem papers, for example, reveal more important data about a student, when the student is working hard, and trying for excellence, than any contrived examination-essay. (2)

In this passionate statement, Jordan draws on her own expertise as a professional writer to fundamentally challenge the validity of timed, standardized tests. With its plea for "leniency," this statement challenges the validity of the "standards" students at CUNY were held to, arguing that such standards are arbitrary, "stress[ful]," and invalid measures of students' thinking and writing skills which bear no resemblance to the demands of real-world writing situations. This letter resonates with Ferguson's analysis of Jordan's 1969 essay, in which he argues that "One of the ways Jordan summarized the 'deadly' and 'neutral' aspect of excellence was by demonstrating how it

rendered black and Puerto Rican students as the antithesis of standards and achievement” (86-87). In the letter above, we can see Jordan longing for a view of assessment that makes space for rapping, like Toni Cade Bambara did in 1968.

By 1976, as the defunding of Open Admissions deepened into crisis and full reversal, Jordan spoke more holistically about the role of standards and testing in the oppression of Black and brown students. In May 1976, she wrote:

We intend to present you with the reasons for our pledged resistance to CUNY Retrenchment, the ending of Open Admissions, and the imposition of tuition. . . we speak to you as Black educators. . . Now, the powerful say, ‘alas:’ The color of the students, the rhythms of the music, the speech patterns—these things have changed. . . Now, the powerful say, ‘alas:’ CUNY is no longer ‘a great university;’ it has become a ‘jungle’, a ‘carnival’, ‘an unmanageable problem.’ What do they mean?. . . We say that the judgement, the aim, and the consequences of this changed attitude towards the City University, we say that the Kibbee Plan, Marshak’s Retrenchment Proposals, we say that the impending end of Open Admissions, the impending establishment of tuition requirements are, one and all, racist events that we cannot countenance, nor in any wise [sic] accept. If you do not agree with this analysis then how can you explain the elimination of The Hostos and Medgar Evers Colleges as fully operating, distinct schools serving predominantly Black and Hispanic students?. . . How can you explain official estimates that the proposed transformation of the City University will result in a 65% decline in Black enrollment, come September, 1976: Sixty-five percent! [Yet this is] the City of New York that can spend more than two hundred million dollars on Yankee Stadium. . . (“Statement by June Jordan” 1-4)

This statement has commonalities with Jordan’s 1969 essay “Black Studies—Bringing Back the Person.” According to Ferguson, Jordan’s careful efforts to clarify the racist effects of race-evasive funding decisions occurred in response to the move by state powers in the post-Civil Rights era to “construct racism as an increasingly illegible phenomenon” (58). By calling for “Black studies as life studies” (Jordan qtd. in Ferguson 109), Jordan works to rhetorically analyze the race-evasive discourses of standardized assessment



and dispassionate financial policy decisions that profess equal access to all while materially damaging the possibilities for Black and brown lives.

The quoted statement above was written in May 1976. In August of that year, Jordan received a dismissal notice from the college which noted that “The College’s budget for fiscal 1976-1977 compels us to discontinue the services of persons currently holding appointments. The reason your services are being discontinued is that all employees in the rank of Assistant Professor with less than four years of continuous full-time service are being discontinued” (Marshak). Jordan was then rehired in 1977, but lost her seniority (Malkoff). Meanwhile, in 1975 Adrienne Rich was granted a “Special Leave of Absence” through January 1976 with no loss of seniority (Marshak). These disparities between the institutional treatment of Rich and Jordan are reflective of the ways that funding cuts disproportionately affected women of color instructors, especially vulnerable because they were often adjunct instructors, off the tenure track, who had been recently hired. For example, in 1970 the *New York Times* covered ten SEEK lecturers’ claim that they were “purged” from the SEEK program at CCNY for being disruptive, that is, for protesting with students (Farber). And a letter from the Black and Puerto Rican Faculty at John Jay College from 1972 informed the Personnel Review Committee that three-fourths of the adjunct faculty not rehired were women of color.

In the spirit of critical imagining (Kirsch and Royster 21), it is worthwhile to consider these firings and layoffs juxtaposed with the extremely rapid promotion of Mina Shaughnessy, a process carefully reconstructed by Sean Molloy, who finds that “in the spring of 1967, Shaughnessy was hired as an untenured lecturer” in City College’s new SEEK program; “before she even started work in September, Shaughnessy was promoted to be SEEK’s English Coordinator” (106). Molloy continues:

As a City College lecturer with no PhD and almost no academic publications, Shaughnessy normally would have had little hope for a tenure track appointment. But in the chaos of open admissions, normal faculty politics were temporarily suspended. In December of 1969, Shaughnessy was promoted to assistant professor. . . The new English Chair Ted Gross noted that Shaughnessy’s abilities had already “won her recognition, unusual for one of lecturer rank, throughout the college” (1969 3). Even for a promotion endorsement, Gross’s personal admiration was remarkable: “A woman of rare and keen intelligence, poetic sensibilities, and humane warmth,

she is an extraordinary teacher and a fine human being who has won the unstinting admiration of her students, her Seek staff, and her colleagues in this Department" (1969 2). . . Gross named Shaughnessy as "an Assistant Chairman in charge of all composition work in the English Department" (Gross 1970). Shaughnessy now administered all City College composition courses and all writing placement tests for incoming students (Shaughnessy 1970). She quickly expanded her program and asserted her authority over it. (114-15)

Shaughnessy was not the most qualified lecturer employed by the new SEEK program in 1967. While she may have possessed a "poetic sensibility," her colleagues—later her charges—were poets. June Jordan, also an untenured lecturer in the program, by the time of her employment by CUNY was a published writer and had already successfully run writing workshops for teens of color. It is important to consider Shaughnessy's rise in the context of other forces at work at CUNY, not all of which supported the equalizing mission of Open Admissions. That Shaughnessy's rise was supported by Theodore "Ted" Gross is also noteworthy. In many ways, Gross—who left his position in the English department to become a Dean—was responsible for turning the public against Open Admissions. In 1978, the *Saturday Review* published a salacious excerpt of his forthcoming memoir, with the article titled "How to Kill A College: The Private Papers of a Campus Dean." The article, in which Gross pays lip service to Open Admissions' mission but insists it led to a lowering of standards and student quality, led to public outcry from students and a public repudiation by City College president Robert Marshak. To Gross's description of "black, Puerto Rican, Asian, and varieties of ethnic white [students] playing radios, simulating sex, languidly moving back and forth to classes, dancing and singing, eating and studying and sleeping and drinking from soda cans or from beer bottles wrapped in brown paper bags" (Gross "How to" 78), Marshak wrote in a public letter:

I find it hard to believe that the Dean of Humanities would publish an article so deeply offensive to our students and faculty and so devoid of understanding of the progress made in the past few years at City College. . . I also question the tone, style, and insensitivity of your article. Your use of code words and stereotyping language about women and minorities constitutes a dangerous appeal to the forces of unreason and bigotry in our society. ("Open Letter")

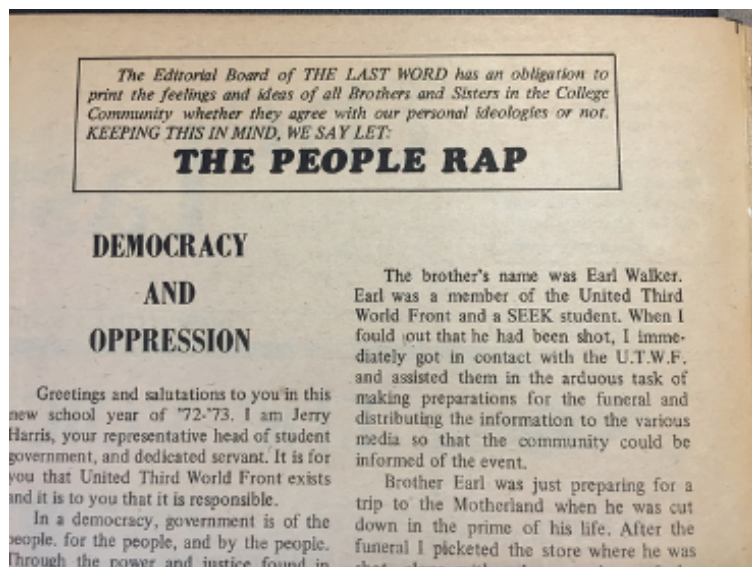
As we reconsider writing pedagogies under SEEK, we must remember how the forces of white supremacy still constrained the teaching and promotion opportunities for writers and teachers of color on the faculty, limiting their implementation of meaningful cultural rhetorics pedagogies.

### **“Who We Intend to Be: Ourselves”: Developing the Rap Idiom While Being Pushed Out of School**

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, ethnic studies offerings expanded rapidly throughout the CUNY system. Black, Latino, and Caribbean literatures were included in the SEEK curriculum at CCNY as early as 1969, with separate SEEK courses in Black Literature and Latin American Literature and Romance Languages courses in Puerto Rican Literature, Contemporary Spanish, and Spanish American Literature (“The City University of New York University Center Seek Program 1969-1970 Catalog”). Meanwhile, students in the Music Department could take a course called “History and Literature of Jazz” offering a “return to personalized expression in rediscovery of origins leading to ‘soul’, rock, etc. and experimentation and development of new techniques” (“Spring 1970 Course Descriptions”). During the early years of SEEK, these offerings were also supplemented with film screenings and theater workshops that similarly blended white institutional boundaries between literature, music, and visual art (“SEEK Alamac Cinemateque”). Hunter College’s Department of Black and Puerto Rican Studies also offered significant coursework in nonwhite literatures. In 1972-1973, the department’s courses included “African Literature,” “African-American Literature,” “Puerto Rican Literature” (Hunter College Bulletin 72-73), and by 1975, offerings had expanded to include “Puerto Rican Folklore” and “The Image of the Puerto Rican National Identity in Its Literature.” Courses were also offered in Afro- American Humanism, African Literature, Afro-Caribbean Literature, Puerto Rican Literature, Spanish Language in Puerto Rico, and Autobiography As a Special Theme in Black Literature (“The Hunter College Bulletin 75/76”). Medgar Evers College, founded in 1971 to serve Brooklyn’s populations of color, offered courses like these and more, with Economics courses on “Economics of Poverty and Racism” and “Economic Development of the Inner City” (MEC 117 Bulletin 1973/74). In the Speech Department, the course descriptions promised analysis of speeches by only Black orators—mostly male, though students could alternatively register for “The Black Woman Speaks.” All these courses were part of the context of students’

educations in their writing classrooms, especially in classrooms like Cade Bambara’s, where student input directly shaped curriculum.

Access to school resources gave students opportunities to develop the literacies of their home communities, and learn new modes of communication. Yearbooks from these years are full of pictures of desegregating academic departments and clubs, including new clubs based around ethnic identities and the desegregation of older extracurriculars like campus radio stations and the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (*Genesis* 1967). In a 1969 speech contest at City College, “two of the eight finalists were in the SEEK Program, and a freshman SEEK student took second place” (Berger “University Programs”). In 1978, Medgar Evers College students placed second in the New York Reggae Festival Song Competition, singing an original song about Jamaican women’s role building the modern state of Jamaica (“Everites Place 2nd in Reggae Contest”).



**Figure 3.** Detail from: “Letter from the Editor.” *The Last Word* 1.1. 29 September 1972. Box 1. Open Admissions Collection 1969-1978, Queens College Archives, Queens, NY. 3 August 2016.

Against the ebb and flow of investment and retrenchment at CUNY, with the help of non-tenure-track instructors of color, students engaged what they themselves described as rap literacies to theorize themselves and their worlds in student publications. The three student papers I studied, from Hunter, Queens College, and Medgar Evers, all used the language of “rap” to

describe speech that was purposive and productive, whether describing letters to the editor, exchanges with faculty, or conversations between friends. *The Last Word*, the SEEK paper at Queens College, proclaimed at the top of its letters to the editor page: “WE SAY LET: THE PEOPLE RAP!” (“Letter from the Editor.”) These publications also demonstrated a tremendous interest in poetry among youth of color in New York, and specifically articulated a BAM-aligned orientation to poetry that was about self-definition, community uplift, and political action, with all three papers, not to mention several yearbooks from these years, devoting significant space to student poetry. In fact, *The Last Word* devoted two pages in every issue to student poetry, and in one issue from 1970 the editors remarked:

So far we have received a great deal of poetic material. Because of the tremendous interest in poetry, we think that it would be a good idea if the COMMUNICATOR sponsored and invited some well-known poets of the Third World to Hunter College. . . The over-all purpose of such a meeting would be to discuss methods and ways to improve, and, moreover, create more effective poetry, and thus better poets. (“Editor’s Note”)

This wasn’t an idle hope, since the papers from both Hunter and Queens described campus visits by BAM poets Amiri Baraka and Nikki Giovanni.

The *SEEK Communicator*, the SEEK paper at Hunter College, showcases how newly hired SEEK staff members from the community—not all as famous as June Jordan—helped shape student literacies. In an issue from October 1970, a staff member, a self-identified Black woman named Yvonne Stafford, penned an extended history of SEEK which rooted the program in the rise of Black Power, the rhetoric of Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael, the English translation of Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth*, the rise of Black Art as defined by LeRoi Jones, the music of James Brown, Aretha Franklin, Coltrane and others, and Black dance like the Jerk and the Boogaloo (“The Idea of Student Action in the SEEK Program”). As in Barbara Christian’s class discussions, Stafford’s intellectual history of SEEK at Hunter collapses categorizations between the poetry, music, dance, and theory of this activist, artistic, decolonial moment. As a SEEK counselor, she writes, “the object as I saw it was not destruction, but construction. I had to lend my help in getting students through in such a way that they would not be jammed by the traditional European educational rap.” With this goal in mind, Stafford helped set up the theater workshop

students had been asking for by starting as a poetry group with the theme "Black is (a definition of Blackness)" (Stafford "The Idea"). This genesis is expanded upon in another *Communicator* article. Information Officer Joel Washington penned a "Philosophy and History—What We Are About—What We Intend to Be: Ourselves." He wrote, "seizing the opportunity to introduce ourselves, we have decided to rap a little about definition. We are about meaningful expression. . . We are about being a workshop. . . We are about culture" (7). In the explicit language of "definition," we can see the context of an audience that was not listening to how these young people defined themselves, despite allowing their presence in the CUNY system. The explicitness of Stafford's institutional history stands in stark contrast to a poem she wrote in another issue which asked, rhetorically, "If we wrote them a revolutionary poem/ Would they read it?" ("IF").

Yet as Ferguson has theorized, demands for disciplinarity are contradictory and ironic: creating new departments insulates the old ones. Curricular spaces remained hostile to Black and Puerto Rican students' cultural rhetorics, and the opening of new spaces often insulated legacy institutions from change. While in 1972-72 Hunter's Department of Black and Puerto Rican Studies offered extensive coursework in Afrodiasporic and Caribbean literatures, in the 75-76 course catalog, only one writer of color, Ralph Ellison, was mentioned in any of the English Department's class descriptions ("The Hunter College Bulletin 75/76"). And at CCNY, one essay topic on a 1972 Proficiency Exam, which determined whether students could graduate, went like this: "The world that college graduates will be entering requires writing and reading skills of a high order. I refer not to the 'gift of gab' but to those forms of communication that have been developed for the academic, political, and scientific professions. . . . They [future workers] will have to carry on the counseling, conferring, interviewing, proposing, reporting, reading, interpreting, and writing that most jobs are already requiring." ("Essay Topic").

Despite this resistance, throughout the '70s, student newspapers helmed by students of color contained creative writing, institutional histories, reviews of popular cultural events, and opinion and reporting on issues like international third world politics, socialism, campus administrative policies, and local and state education policy. In the Medgar Evers *ADAFI*, student writers chronicled the decay of school funding and morale as policy priorities shifted. In 1974, amidst the joy at receiving teacher certification capabilities, the paper noted that faculty were already leaving due to "apathy. . . because of gradual deterioration in school services and subjective admin-

istrative policies” (“Why are M.E.C. Faculty Leaving?”). Amidst coverage of underfunding and the state’s plan to begin charging tuition for the first time in CUNY’s history, the paper reprinted students’ protest cries as headlines: “Don’t let them kill free tuition” and “Medgar Evers must not die twice.” Amid a 20% overall drop in applications to CUNY for the 1976-1977 school year, the paper published a special issue to be distributed within Brooklyn, countering the rumor that the school had closed and informing community members about new federal grant programs. But the paper’s archives abruptly end after 1978, suggesting the end of the story students had fought so hard to keep alive.

Further research is needed to see whether individual CUNY students, admitted through the Open Admissions policy, were active in the New York hip-hop scene that became a serious presence in the mid-to-late 1970s. We do know, however, that students admitted through Open Admissions were sources of rhetorical excellence. The tens of thousands of Black and Caribbean students who flooded into CUNY during these years—and then were pushed back out with the onset of tuition in 1976—have not been taken into accounts of hip-hop history. And the historical record is clear: hip-hop did not emerge as a commodity product—that is, hip-hop was not pressed onto wax and labelled “For Sale”—until 1979, in the years immediately after the retrenchment took hold at CUNY. Perhaps the story of hip-hop’s early history is not of a culture rising from the ashes, but a culture negotiating with a stark economic reality: when the door of funded public education closes, the window of individualist pursuit of capital stays open, beckoning.

### **Outro: Reflexin, Or, Why Pedagogy Is a Labor Issue**

As a white Jewish woman I have a queer relationship to the histories I promote here. I am white like Shaughnessy, part of a history of white women literacy educators in a colonial U.S. education system. I am also a white Ashkenazi queer like Adrienne Rich—who, though a radical educator and thinker, was politically aligned with whiteness in the CCNY Basic Writing program, a friend and ally of Shaughnessy’s while working alongside the specifically Black brilliance of June Jordan, Toni Cade Bambara, and Barbara Christian. Throughout the archives, though I do not dwell on it in this paper, I noticed how Jewish community groups appeared in tension with the prerogatives of Open Admissions: Jewish alumni fought Open Admissions at City College; Jewish students charged the Queens College SEEK paper *The Last Word* with anti-Semitism. Yet a mere thirty years earlier, Jewish students had been those



newly admitted minorities whom conservative faculty wanted cleansed of their accents and identities. The later alignment of Jewish communities with white supremacist priorities suggests the ways that white power pitches its own interests to other minoritized groups in the service of anti-Blackness. As we continue to enrich our understandings of the diverse rhetorical production during the Open Admissions years, the earliest years of hip-hop culture, we must stay attuned to the complex interplay of “interests and opportunities” (Lamos) that opened, closed, and guarded avenues toward equity, advancement, and autonomy, and be willing to reflex on our own place in these historical movements.

In my case, I notice that my research for this article was funded by the continued support of a Mellon Mays fellowship I received as an undergraduate, meant to diversify the ranks of university faculty. Yet the open-ended language under whose guidelines I was awarded the fellowship—“This goal [of a diversified faculty] can be achieved both by increasing the number of students from underrepresented minority groups (URM) who pursue PhDs and by supporting the pursuit of PhDs by students who may not come from traditional minority groups but have otherwise demonstrated a commitment to the goals of MMUF” (“Mission”)—was developed in response to a call from the second Bush Administration’s Office of Civil Rights for “colleges and universities to change or drop race- and ethnic-specific academic enrichment and scholarship programs” (Roach). Despite NAACP complaints, this anti-affirmative action direction from the Bush Administration opened the way for white and structurally privileged students like me to take advantage of programs and funds meant for structurally disadvantaged students of color. Perhaps as much as anything in the archives, this element of my own story clarifies how, as Ferguson says, neoliberal discourses emerged “as a way of preempting redistribution,” (191). By acknowledging how I, a white woman, profited from race-blind discourses, I hope to demonstrate even further how reflexive narratives, a discursive tool developed by Black poets like June Jordan in the 1960s and 70s, have transformational power to disrupt such processes. The tensions and play of privilege between June Jordan and Adrienne Rich continue to question how a minoritized white woman can stand in solidarity with her sisters of color.

Twenty years ago, Ira Shor insisted that “if we are serious” about good teaching and learning, “then we need a Labor policy on the one hand and a curricular policy against tracking, testing, and skills-based instruction on the other” (100). This paper’s archival findings suggest that protecting vulnerable faculty and promoting valid, culturally relevant assessment prac-

tices are not two tasks, but one, and that providing innovative, culturally relevant pedagogies to diversifying student bodies is primarily a labor issue, a question of hiring, retaining, promoting, and following the lead of faculty whose identities resemble in some ways those of their students. Put another way—as woke as I may be or become, I just can’t teach Black discourses like that. With their knowledge, their language, and their pedagogies rooted in their identities and their experiences, Black queer women poets like Audre Lorde and June Jordan remind us that supporting minoritized pedagogies is not separable from supporting minoritized teachers.

When we think of hip-hop’s emergence in mid-to-late 1970s New York, we must remember the decade beforehand when tens of thousands of students were formally educated in the rhetorical practices of their home communities by members of those communities; free books and theater tickets were distributed by SEEK; the academy directed newly admitted students to their home bookstores and theater workshops; a large network of community literacy and poetry organizations received city, state, and national funding and attention; students received education in media production in TV, radio, and sound engineering; and wide swaths of students at the college and high school level brought the lessons of the Black Arts Movement into their lives, using first-person poetry, fiction, and essays to define themselves in the context of their cultures, their communities, and their plans to change the world. As hip-hop embraced the commodity market at the beginning of the 1980s and took the world by storm with its third world consciousness, griot poetics, and Caribbean beats, it emerged not merely out of destruction but out of the destruction of a funded public education system deeply oriented to cultural rhetorics, taught and theorized by untenured faculty of color inviting students *to rap*.

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