Relaxing in the Margins: Using Black Feminist Pedagogy with Black Student-Athletes to Challenge AI Compliance and Protect Black Voices in First-Year Writing

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Abstract: In this article, the authors confront AI usage through multiple lenses: Black student athletes' use of Black English alongside a PWI's enforcement of agreed-upon standards established by a white, hegemonic first year writing program that excludes Black rhetorical traditions. Working together in a tutor/student relationship, neither party can truly relax; but the authors subvert power and collaborate as two scholars from the margins disrupting assumed white authority. Within this PWI's structure, Black Feminist Pedagogy serves as a lynchpin—not only for the students' writing, but also for teaching approaches that more effectively bridge the critical gaps left exposed in Black student-athletes' first-year writing instruction. The article concludes with an insistence that the margins will never hold the talent that awakens when Black student athletes' energy is effectively harnessed. Student athletes can be dawgs on the field and in the classroom when they work alongside Black feminist pedagogues.

Keywords: Black Feminist Pedagogy, First Year Writing, Black Student Athletes, Black language liberation, White Supremacy, AI/ChatGPT

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"I Gotta Be Me"—*Notes from a Black Feminist*

My 11-year-old son, Adam, recently started playing tackle football. By some standards, he could be considered a late bloomer, but I needed time to get used to the idea of him getting hit versus playing with flags. Adam is tall, lean, athletic, and well-built for sports.[1] He also has beautiful hair. No matter what I say, he's going to play football because, like many Black boys, he imagines a future in sports. I specifically asked Adam how he feels when he's on the field. He said, "Sometimes I feel nervous, but when I play more, I feel more relaxed." His words made me pause because in many cases, this also applies to life. Sometimes we're nervous, but as we play more, we feel more relaxed.

My role as a "literacy specialist" at a predominantly white institution (PWI) in the American South frequently made me nervous, unable to fully relax. I was hired to work with student athletes and close their "literacy gaps" since some had "low reading levels" determined by the PWI's testing measures that I often—and still do—question.[2] As their literacy specialist, I followed departmental guidelines to help students complete their tasks and assignments. I was highly skilled because I carried a master's degree and was a doctoral student in English rhetoric and composition at another PWI in the same city. Managing this labor was challenging, and the country miles between work, home, and the two PWIs were too many to count. However, I quickly realized my need to affirm the students' literacies because I was co-creating a Black feminist rhetoric with Black student athletes—one that dignified their speech and reimagined learning in ways that resisted the status quo.

1 Name has been changed for the sake of anonymity

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Like Adam, I often felt nervous because the athletes' stakes were high, and they needed to remain academically eligible to sustain their positions on the team. I couldn't relax when I was heavily surveilled by white colleagues who questioned my competence. I couldn't relax when the coaches had made substantial financial investments in these players and needed a guaranteed return. The summer months were crucial because their grades needed to be high enough to make up for and/or replace any failed classes from previous semesters. I couldn't even relax into a summer dress code because the department suddenly enforced a policy prohibiting non-university-affiliated t-shirts. This meant my shirts touting names like bell hooks, Opal Lee, and James Baldwin were punishable offenses. Meanwhile, my doctoral program had its own demands and required my conference participation, publications, and examinations in exchange for its investment in me. But most importantly, Adam and his siblings needed a mother who was unbroken, emotionally present, and able to meet the needs of her children. Relaxing wasn't part of my pedagogy when pressure arrived from every direction. Black women are rarely afforded the luxury to relax, especially when we navigate multiple environments that require our relentless labor. Therefore, I use the phrase "relax" to highlight its subversive nature: relaxing is a privilege routinely denied to Black women, Black students, and even Black scholars, but remains an optional gesture for white teachers who firmly plant themselves in racialized power.

As a football player, my student, Randy, couldn't relax when he needed to stay active on the roster and prove his value to the team. Passing classes wasn't Randy's primary concern, even though he was a good student. Early morning lifts, practices, meetings, and facing the demands of his sport ordered his days. He was a paragon of intensity, incapable of relaxing due to his unwavering love for his beloved game. Securing his spot on the team met the minimum standard, but he still had to outperform other players in his same position and outshine his competition. Surviving this PWI pressure cooker for both of us brought heat and smoke from all directions. But I trusted my ethos as a Black feminist teacher and scholar who was anchored in unapologetic Black love. As we both stayed rooted in our shared identity, we found fleeting moments to relax.

I've previously theorized about my role as an anti-racist healer, radical thinker, and truth teller.[3] The young men I worked with were not my own sons, but as a Black feminist, they were my sisters' kids who needed to be treated with care. I saw them as simply older and bigger versions of Adam. But I grew tired of watching first-year writing teachers miss the mark with the students on my caseload and refused to relax my pedagogy when white systemic standards anchored course syllabi. Therefore, I write this article alongside Randy, who was also tired of white-language ideologies that refused his self-expression and creativity. Randy was a restless artist with an uncultivated art form who described his FYW teachers as "janky." I use this writing to show how my Black feminist pedagogy became a critical framework when Randy was tasked to write his final paper in his first-year writing class. Cynthia B. Dillard advocates for the necessity of this praxis when engaging the "ways, words, and understandings of younger Black people, especially those who have something profound and necessary to say to fields of education" (19). With Randy's profound and necessary understanding of education, our collaboration allows us to clap back against institutionalized white dominance and reclaim our final words.

3 "Baa, Baa, Black Sheep, Where my Dawgs at?" Implementing an Anti-Racist Pedagogy as a Literacy Specialist with Student Athletes" – Under Review

Randy and I worked closely together to meet his white instructor's bland, unremarkable pedagogy. Too many teachers uphold whitewashed curricula and rubrics, thinking these approaches are the most productive way to learn. Randy and I both disagreed and decided to pop off.[4] His pop off, titled, "I Can't Be Me," appears after I explain his summer course dynamics, his instructor, and our collective efforts with his final project. I hope our pop off proves not only the need for more voices like Randy's in first-year writing spaces, but also shows the beauty and brilliance that exists in Black student athletes when their energy is not just witnessed, but also harnessed. According to Dillard, these collaborations remain "absolutely essential to imagining a future that is worthy of Black engagement and brilliance" (19). Moreover, our writing can prove the need for FYW teachers to relax their rubrics and reimagine written English in more inclusive ways.

Randy comes from the "trenches," and wears the knowledge of the streets on his chest. But in FYW classes, he is silenced and treated like his Black language is a problem needing to be fixed, as is the case for many Black students and Black student athletes at PWIs. Randy and I were paired together because Randy had been out of school for one year prior to his spring semester arrival, and his academic counselor wanted to ensure that he had adequate support. Upon arrival, Randy came face to face with college football's racial, Ivy League, historical roots, and was now playing his sport in a space initially imagined for upper-class white men (Canada 17). Acknowledging the origins of college football is important in the present moment because Black football players do not neatly fit within its original framework of masculinity, honor, white nationalism, and racial exclusion, as described by Tracie Canada (17). The principals they fail to meet as "white gentlemen who were expected to understand their work in relation to their college and their nation" (17) are made especially clear when they speak in Black English.

Randy and his teammates contribute to a college football apparatus that generates billions of dollars, but in writing classes, they are silenced due to their speech patterns and punished even further by the academic support infrastructure. Just as my wardrobe choices were surveilled, so, too, were Randy and his teammates when they missed appointments with me. Their absences would result in fines, physical punishment from their coaches, or loss of playing time—all of which further complicated my position. Although Randy and I worked well together, many Black football players are treated like outsiders under constant scrutiny and oversight from the very departments where they should be able to relax. Victor E. Ray explains how universities have always been structured by racial inequality, insisting that "racial inequality is a bedrock principle of the American educational system. White educational opportunity has been premised on the exclusion of people of color" (92). In other words, universities have consistently omitted Black students from historic, educational narratives, while Randy and his teammates were only imagined in narrow ways.

Too often, colonized educators refuse to relax and instead uphold a white racial order that denies students of color their intellectual freedom. As Asao B. Inoue explains, "we live, learn, and teach not simply in the racist ruins of bygone eras but in schools and disciplines firmly built and ever maintained by white supremacy" (373). The fact that we are working in an educational system governed by white supremacy is undeniable. And yet, here come Randy and his teammates, ruffling the pale feathers of the FYW teachers who

4 "Poppin' Off at the Mouth: Reimagining First Year Writing Classes for Black Student Athletes and Black Graduate Students" – Under review

clutch their pearls, purses, and rubrics. Randy's writing undermines white hegemonic moves toward an era of conventions and standardization. In fact, Randy and his teammates uphold linguistic practices that violently shake, upset, and disrupt the legacy of white standardized language norms propagated throughout university systems writ large. When Randy and his peers' indifference to white comfort destabilizes the bedrock of a private institution that refused to imagine students of color in the first place, white women can no longer relax in their assumed authority, and the problem must be contained.

Randy's FYW instructor's solution was not unusual. Her standards followed those of the entire department: a rubric that enforced white codes. All his papers were expected to demonstrate "proper" use of grammar, mechanics, diction, syntax, vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation. These are categories that never fare well for Black students, and we frequently had to comb through their papers to anticipate and prevent severe grading penalties. This professor's rubric also forces students to consider their audience, one understood to be white by default. To that end, Carmen Kynard identifies how audience functions as "a terministic screen for whiteness and the excuse white folx give to never unravel their preferred Western conventions or not challenge their own need to be centered in a conversation" (carmenkynard.org). Randy could never relax as a writer when he was expected to center his teacher's "Western conventions." Use of Black language will never work for Randy's professor or any other FYW instructor at this PWI because Black discourse rests too far outside the archipelago of their standardized requirements.

To create even more estrangement, Randy's instructor's rubric adhered to the English department definition of "Standard Written English" as "the generally agreed-upon set of grammatical syntactic, punctuation, and spelling patterns found in published expository writing in English."[5] But these so-called "agreed-upon" standards, ones that Randy and his peers clearly disregard, must be called into question. Those who agreed upon the standards favored a set of rules and conventions established by a Eurocentric playbook that eliminates all other critical voices. Moreover, the phrase "published expository writing in English" discredits every Black writer who has published using Black discourse. Black cultural scholars such as Geneva Smitherman, H. Samy Alim, Gwendolyn Pough, April Baker-Bell, Elaine Richardson and countless others have collectively written against white racialized hierarchies that seek to devalue and delegitimize Black language. Scholarship by Jonathan Rosa and Nelson Flores detail ways racialized subjects' language practices are viewed as inherently deficient. Meanwhile, Richardson describes "blackademic literacy" as African American language and literacy traditions that move beyond surface level syntax, phonology, vocabulary, etc. into speech acts, nonverbal behavior, and cultural production (162-163). Broadening this framework, Kynard describes "vernacular insurrections" as moments when speech acts become counterhegemonic and wield their own power using language, identity, political methodology and social understandings formed in communities (10-11). Despite the critical mass of robust, intellectually rigorous, and culturally grounded scholarship that legitimizes Black language practices and proves its value within the academy (and beyond), the "agreed-upon" definition of "Standard Written English" propped up Randy's course and the department as a whole.

Sociolinguists have long ago denied the validity of a standard American English, while Alim and Smitherman emphasize challenging its hegemony. Students must be encouraged to ask more questions and imag-

5 Introduction to Academic Writing Assessment Rubric from this PWI's Common Curriculum

ine new linguistic possibilities that dismantle the power structures sustaining both standardized English and, by extension, whiteness. Rejecting the existence and value of these scholars not only deepens the divide between Randy and his instructor, but also further complicates the labyrinth of white logic he is expected to navigate. Furthermore, just as Randy was banished to the margins, left isolated in the classroom, and expected to demonstrate mastery of a language he cared little for, the scholars whose work would have offered a more inclusive and effective foundation for his teacher's pedagogy were never even mentioned. Relaxing was impossible for Randy when his writing instructor anchored her class in systemic injustice and Eurocentric standards, and Randy knew his Blackness was being judged.

After Randy wrote his first two papers on AI—the theme of his instructor's online summer class—we were both fatigued. His teacher wanted students to be forthcoming about their personal relationships with AI, with each essay centered around AI in general, ChatGPT, and its family members, but students also needed to discuss the drawbacks of AI resources. Her goal was for students to discuss ways they could establish a healthier and productive relationship with AI and its relatives. To appease his teacher, Randy admitted to using AI when he needed concepts simplified or when he was introduced to unfamiliar material he was expected to quickly master since he didn't bring the private school background many of his classmates carried. I often wondered "What could be healthier than using AI as a learning tool?" Once we started brainstorming Randy's final paper—a culminating project discussing the value and limitations of ChatGPT while also including AI in the essay—I suggested he write about how AI becomes a survival strategy for Black students in a PWI where they are required to write in standard written English.

Randy was also expected to include required readings such as *Mastermind: How to think like Sherlock Holmes* by Maria Konnikova, another repeat offender the student athletes had little interest in getting to know. He could also include his engagement with the film *Coded Bias* from a previous paper, but Randy's voice had to always remain consistent; otherwise, his instructor would question the authenticity of his writing if it sounded too "perfect." Any actual use of AI was restricted to a paragraph and had to be included in quotes. Randy had to once again acknowledge the drawbacks of AI and discuss existing problems with Large Language Models, (LLMs) to demonstrate his critical engagement with both sides of his argument. Finally, Randy had to adhere to his instructor's preferred Western conventions to meet her agreed-upon standards of written English, as well as include scholarship from academic sources to help support his claims.

Despite his instructor's strict guidelines, Randy was excited and ready to relax with a topic he could easily pop off about—but I was nervous. As a football player, Randy must remain academically eligible to remain on the team and sustain his scholarship. If this white woman felt Randy didn't adhere to the agreed-upon rubric, she could fail his paper, or worse: fail him in the course. As Kristiana L. Baez and Ersula Ore explain, troubling whiteness "always comes at a cost" (334), and jeopardizing Randy's academic standing was not in my job description. With this high of a price tag, relaxing was impossible. But I had agreed upon my own standards that differed from the FYW teachers I'd observed in the department. My Black Feminist pedagogy introduced him to another team—one filled with scholars who could support our vision and validate his voice. As I listened to his language refuse boundaries and reject systemic whiteness from within my office,

the sound of him shaking the margins made me nervous, but my vow to the culture was unwavering. Randy's intensity with these Black writers eased my nerves because he had something meaningful to say.

Recognizing our shared politics and encouraging Randy to pop off became my form of activism. I was mothering Randy's mind using Black Feminist pedagogy in the same tradition Patricia Hill Collins describes as a vital relationship that develops between "African American women teachers and their Black female and male students" (247). Once Randy's mind was awakened, he spoke truth to white hegemonic power. Black Feminist pedagogy is rooted in truth and freedom, both of which we were collectively seeking in that moment. Truth-telling is easy for Randy because he raps with his brother and drops verses at any given moment to prove his rhetorical skills. In fact, he is best described as a linguistic maven who could teach me a thing or two about language (2020 CCCC Conference).

But his FYW papers had only quelled his language sophistication and his instructor punished his techniques. She wrote comments like, "the biggest issue I had with this paper was the grammar, run ons, and amount of errors that don't really look like a final paper." She failed to acknowledge his ideas and content and refused any possibility for revision. We realized the need to attend to his grammar before submitting his work, but I was behind closed doors explaining how Black students are too often forced to code switch. My pedagogy deconstructed ways white supremacy would have us believe our grammar is incorrect, but we must refuse a status quo that upholds systemic whiteness. My resistance to Randy's FYW teacher is best described by Lisa A. Flores's scholarship. Flores explains how scholars of color are tired and "drained by the endless expectations that we perform whiteness and the persistent scolding when we inevitably fail at those performances" (350). I, too, was indicted in Randy's feedback due to the "amount of errors" Randy's final paper allegedly possessed, and we both endured his teacher's persistent scolding. Scholars of color can never relax when the expectations of a white performance remain nipping at our heels.

Teaching Randy to perform whiteness in his papers was an impossible task for this Black feminist, and I refused to relax into Eurocentric ideals that did us little favors. Teaching Randy grammar rules would leave me depleted, so my Black feminist activism became more important. I had watched Randy and his teammates whitewash countless papers, attempting to solve a problem that wasn't theirs to fix. Black students should not have to manufacture white-sounding papers at the expense of their cultural authenticity. His teacher outright refused to imagine the course outside her lens of whiteness, relying instead on a course description with generic language found in most first-year writing courses: "Students learn to analyze arguments by employing higher-order critical thinking skills: identifying sound versus faulty premises, detecting logical fallacies, evaluating conclusions, assessing sources, and becoming information literate." Randy's teacher chose willful ignorance by refusing Black literacies, dismissing Black scholars, and failing to recognize her own logical fallacies. When students engage in critical thinking within a space that affirms their linguistic identities, they are fully capable of meeting—and often exceeding—the goals of the course. Constantly punishing students for using their own linguistic variations rests on a faulty premise–one that assumes academic excellence can only be achieved through the university's agreed-upon definition of standard written English. While scholars such as Lisa Delpit and Christopher Emdin work to dispel myths that Black students are innately inferior and less capable, Randy's instructor relaxes in a white imaginary that lives in a false reality.

Linguistic freedom must exist in FYW courses, especially for student athletes arriving at PWIs with a cultural historiography that celebrates their Blackness. The football fields that nurtured them were the antithesis of first-year writing courses. Football is a space where they learn black modes of discourse through call-response, signification, and other categorizations theorized by Geneva Smitherman in *Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America.* Football taught Randy codes he was expected to switch upon arrival to this PWI, but we both resisted. Randy and I knew language outside of white hegemonic dogma that refused our cultural expression. Meanwhile, Adam was also learning football rhetoric that forced him to relax white standardized English and answer a critical question every week on game day: "Who Got Yo' Back?!" Before charging the field to attack their opponents, Adam and his teammates would scream: "I Got Yo' Back!" Football as a cultural discourse community was one Randy had mastered alongside Black language, and his multilingualism was punished by his white instructor's rubric that held his freedom of expression hostage. Her comments made clear she did not have his back—and never would—with such a culturally punitive rubric.

As Randy emphasizes in his essay, he couldn't be himself as a writer. The solution for Randy and his teammates is AI resources that allow them to write in ways their professors require. In "For the Culture Pedagogy: I'm Starting with the Woman in the Mirror,"[6] I ask, "What if first-year writing classes offered [a] fugitive writing space where they could pull from their own archives instead of generating countless essays that only advance settler colonizing logics?" I refuse to relax my questions and remain critical of teachers who choose cultural incompetence because I know other possibilities exist for FYW classes, including Randy's. While Randy felt pressured to produce white sounding papers, his relationship with his FYW instructors remained tenuous because like many Black students, he valued his native language. This timeless dilemma is one that Gloria Ladson-Billings discusses in *Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: Asking a Different Question*. She insists that culturally relevant pedagogy must give students ways to "maintain their cultural integrity while succeeding academically" (27). When professors refuse these pedagogical approaches, students like Randy can slip into an AI world that will meet his professors' demands since Randy's linguistic abilities are disregarded. Randy knows the beauty of his authentic language as well as the options ChatGPT and its relatives present. If a convenient program can mask Randy's language that continues to face punishment, at least he can relax knowing there is an alternative LLM to ensure his papers fit the agreed-upon standards. ChatGPT can do the work Randy resists.

Fortunately, scholars like Adam Banks and his all-Black team refuse to relax their academic pursuits and are expanding the discourse around Black rhetorics and LLMs to dignify Black languages and literacies. Banks' scholarship would have been a valuable addition to Randy's AI course, but Randy's instructor was steadfast. She dismissed all possibilities of relaxing her rubric, denied Black scholars entry to her syllabus, and ignored inclusive innovations in BlackGPT that Randy would have appreciated. Nonetheless, Banks offers solutions to the AI dilemma Randy's department was battling, writing:[7]

6 "For the Culture Pedagogy: I'm Starting with the Woman in the Mirror" Forthcoming: Writer's Craft and Context, July 2025.

7 "Black GPT: Interview with Harriett Jernigan and Adam Banks."

> There are educational possibilities. As we discover more ways to incorporate LLMs into our classroom settings, we will see how something like BlackGPT can be used to complement creativity, scholarship, research, and communication. One of the things I think is most important is the centering of Black Englishes, Black rhetorics, Black rhetorical practices and culture. I think this is the kind of representation our students need, our society needs. This is the kind of work that can do things like instill a sense of pride among Black people who have been told most of their lives that their language is not on par with the dominant culture's standard dialects. ("BlackGPT")

Banks is advocating for BlackGPT to function alongside and on par with other LLMs so students like Randy don't feel the need to assimilate, code switch, and eventually glitch. Randy and his teammates take pride in their linguistic talents and should be affirmed; sadly, they are punished, devalued, silenced, and denied opportunities to use their home language. Centering Black English, Black rhetoric, and Black culture decenters whiteness and demands a reckoning with Eurocentric values that leave white women like Randy's teacher quivering in their Southern boots. But when Opal Lee—the Grandmother of Juneteenth—gets banned from my chest, Banks and his award-winning research have no chance of appearing on this woman's syllabus because institutionalized white dominance remains consistent. This is both a pedagogical problem and an ideological issue that Randy alone cannot resolve. ChatGPT functions as a blanket for Randy and his teammates to cover their writing so white women instructors can relax, but when he wants to pop off in his native tongue, Randy reclines with the quilts of Black feminist pedagogy. These pearls of wisdom got his back.

Although Randy's teacher and I agreed Randy's essay should be published because the voices of Black student-athletes are not often heard, she dropped the proverbial ball he had launched in her direction. AI has become an existential crisis for many schools and universities across the nation; his teacher could not deny the importance of this conversation, especially coming from a football player who spoke his truth. But her words were hollow, made empty by her resistance. She thought she possessed a cosmopolitan understanding of the topic, but omitting Black scholars who legitimize Black rhetorical traditions and depending on Sherlock Holmes to advance her pedagogy prove her inability to adequately address an issue so in vogue. Randy's instructor and her colleagues complain about students' use of AI, but when a Black male student speaks openly and honestly about the utility of online support for students like him, she moves the goalposts and blocks his opportunity to score.

Black feminist pedagogy becomes even more necessary when professors fail to articulate clear strategies for students to take their writing to the next level and refuse to affirm–or even acknowledge–students' linguistic differences. Randy's paper emphasizes: "Teachers and administrators may lack training in recognizing and respecting linguistic diversity, leading to a failure to accommodate and validate AAVE speakers." Again, this disconnection isn't Randy's to repair, nor can the burden of reconstruction rest on my back. His grade on his paper didn't reflect his effort, but I refused the weight of translating her whiteness. Besides, Randy's original descriptor of janky was close enough. If his essay was worth publishing, why didn't he earn an A? Or did publishing according to her agreed-upon standards first require a more gossamer cloth to erase his unmistakable disgust with a system that denies his linguistic freedom and identifies his instructor's deficiencies? Rationalizing her thoughts is an intellectual effort beyond my capacity to pursue, so I am instead choosing to share our collective truths as a Black male and a Black Feminist. I intercepted where Randy's white

instructor fumbled and suggested to Randy that him and I write together—not as his "literacy specialist," but as two scholars from two PWIs with intention to unsettle the margins. If Randy can rhyme with his brother, he could flow with me. Randy's essay, "I Can't Be Me," provides a glimpse into his experiences as a young, gifted, Black student navigating the legacy of a PWI that punishes Black males and their speech patterns. The featured section appears below in Randy's own words and illustrates his critical negotiations with language, identity, institutional standards, and AI usage.

"I Can't Be Me"

As a young black male that grew up in the trenches, I never would've thought coming to college would make me have to change who I am. Coming to *** taught me being me, aka being Black, ain't good enough. Where I'm from, people would die to be in my shoes until they see you gotta play the white man's game to be who you wanna be. In this project I intend to explore how ChatGPT succeeds at white washing essays by students of color like me. When using AI and/or ChatGPT, we might meet the rubric criteria, but our creative language and expression gets hijacked and our authentic voices are muted.

Before addressing how ChatGPT becomes the solution to writing in standardized English, we must first recognize what is Black language? Many think Black language is ghetto, uneducated, and lastly, improper grammar. These generalizations are often supported by feeble and inadequate reasoning (Moore & Parker, 207). However, according to *Linguistic Justice: Black Language, Literacy, Identity, and Pedagogy*, April Baker- Bell writes, "Black language is also the native language and rich linguistic resources that so many Black children bring into classrooms every day" (13). In other words, Baker-Bell is saying Black language is a way to bring character to the class because Black language is powerful. Black language is unique because it's something that can't be taught. Baker-Bell also points out how Black language "gets appropriated, exploited, and colonized" (13). She talks about how it's okay to use Black language in commercials, tv shows, or even advertising it on clothes and merchandise, but all hell breaks loose when a Black student tries to use his or her form of speech in a classroom. Therefore, ChatGpt becomes our best friend once we step into a PWI, because ChatGpt helps us speak in standardized English.

Once Black students arrive at PWIs, our black language gets muted when we write against these white-washed rubrics. As a Black student at a PWI, when I write, I am frequently penalized for the same things: grammar, syntax, punctuation, and mechanics. However, Black language is unique, so why change something so rare and precious just to fit a rubric? Arriving in college and learning a new language is difficult. I'm not saying it's an impossible task, but it will take time. When writing teachers force Black students that speak Black English to meet specific rubric criteria, they're asking students to not only stop being who we are, but to step into a world of white language we aren't used to. This takes away our personalities and creates a standard for our essays to sound the same. In "When Robots Come Home to Roost: The Differing Fates of Black Language, Hyper-Standardization, and White Robotic School Writing (Yes, ChatGPT and His AI Cousins)," Carmen Kynard writes, "students should not look and sound identical to one another and peers across the country" (carmenkynard.org). In other words, just because darker skinned students attend a PWI doesn't mean we have to sound like everyone that attends the school. If you ask me, ChatGPT is our best friend

because it's the only source that can help us meet a PWI's standards since they say Black language isn't good enough. If teachers don't allow Black language, students will start becoming dependent on AI.

When using AI and/or ChatGPT, we might meet the rubric criteria, but our creative language and expression gets hijacked. In "Classroom Writing Assessment as an Antiracist Practice: Confronting White Supremacy in the Judgments of Language" Asao B. Inoue writes "writing assessments are ecologies in which we can— and perhaps should always—explore the nature of judgment itself as an intersectional racialized discourse" (375). Inoue is saying rubrics create environments that are judgmental and reject students' multiple intersections. Teachers may not understand the different environments their students come from and for damn sure don't understand our language. Therefore, we have to resort to AI in order to meet a standard that's often impossible for us to reach due to the many factors working against us. Having students read about Sherlock Holmes when we don't even know who he is is a logical fallacy. What I mean by this is how am I supposed to connect with somebody I don't even know? And if students like me don't even know who he is, we won't understand the value of reading like Sherlock Holmes. I can't speak my home language, but I am supposed to think like some stranger? This is part of the ecological problem Inoue is challenging when he talks about writing assessments and the way we are judged.

If teachers keep having problems with Black language then we should be allowed to keep AI in the conversation to help us meet their standard. When I asked ChatGPT why isn't Black language recognized at PWIs, some of the reasons were: Linguistic Bias, Cultural Hegemony, Educational Policies, Social and Economic Implications, and lastly, Language Ideologies. But the main one that stuck out to me was Educational Policies. Chat GPT stated "Official policies within educational institutions may not acknowledge or support the use of AAVE. Teachers and administrators may lack training in recognizing and respecting linguistic diversity, leading to a failure to accommodate and validate AAVE speakers." I understand white teachers don't often hear or come across Black language, but once they do, they feel as if it's ghetto, uneducated, etc. Black students have to mute their creativity, and even Chat GPT itself can answer why Black language continues to be unrecognizable in PWIs when the teachers themselves cannot.

However, ChatGPT does still have its biases that we can at least acknowledge. In "ChatGPT Can Be Kind of Racist Based on how People Speak, Researchers Say" AI models are covertly racist when it comes to Black English. This article is pointing out important biases that AI is pairing people that speak Black English with jobs that don't require a university degree (Serrano). The article also says, "They found that the LLMs chose to sentence people who spoke African American English to death at a higher rate than people who spoke Standard American English" (Serrano). This is saying AI is still run by people with their own beliefs. This leads me to believe that teachers aren't the only ones that see Black language as inferior. In other words, AI has the potential to be just as racist as writing teachers who uphold rubric standards that Asao Inoue talks about. Black students are being judged in all directions.

I can't be the only one that feels rubrics attack Black language and force us to use ChatGPT to meet the status quo. Why can't we be accepted for who we are? We stay up late at night stressing over essays all due to teachers not letting us be free. Students of color arrive at PWIs expecting to sound and write white. The

film *Coded Bias* (2020) explores the implications of artificial intelligence (AI) and its embedded biases when white faces are paired against Black ones. In the film, Joy Buolamwini researched at MIT that AI technology is based on facial recognition software, but it did not work for darker skinned faces. Her research discoveries make me think about how students of color use AI technology to whitewash our assignments. In the film, another researcher, Cathy O'Neal, stated "what worries me the most about AI or whatever you want to call it- algorithms- is power, because it's really all about who owns the fucking code" (09:20-25).What she is speaking towards is no matter what we put into ChatGPT or AI there is still a human programmer who brings their bias. When using AI and/or ChatGPT, we might meet the rubric criteria, but our creative language and expression gets hijacked, and our authentic voices are muted because we don't own the code. It's like being caged birds that don't have freedom of speech. How can we really see if writing is our thing or if we actually like it?

Teachers use the same rubrics and want us to meet the same standard without ever thinking about our language. Now I ain't no expert or nothing, but paying ninety thousand dollars a year just to get told to follow one rubric's way of writing and not be able to put what I know or things I want to know on paper sounds like a scam to me. Then, when students like me come across a helpful tool like AI or ChatGPT that can whitewash our papers, we get punished. How I see it is that AI has taught me more than a teacher on a college campus has ever taught me. Instead of taking AI away, maybe teachers should try letting us be ourselves. Just like Buolamwini said black faces needed white masks to be recognizable by AI software, black students are putting white masks on our papers in order for them to be acceptable. How is that going to help me in the real world? The only thing putting a white mask on my papers teaches me to do is this: in order for me to be successful in this world as a young Black man, I can't be me.

"Not Like Us"—*Reclaiming our Last Words*

We tried to relax in the margins. When we listened to Nipsey Hustle while editing his papers, my office door remained closed. I introduced him to other Black feminist scholars like April Baker-Bell and Carmen Kynard because their pedagogies had become my compass in the academy. Baker-Bell described the racism associated with Black language in terms Randy valued, and Kynard's authenticity reminded us both to stay unapologetically Black in predominately white spaces. Randy was still in the trenches, only the setting had changed. Despite the manicured gardens, sculptures, fountains, and pristine buildings, he was scored at the bottom of a cultural rubric that denied his intellectual curiosity and most authentic voice. Randy's statement in his paper, "Black students are being judged in all directions" speaks to his awareness that he is surveilled and evaluated at every corner of the university. He could never fully relax under the white gaze, but Randy's commitment to the truth met my own. I operated from within my windowless office that locked in our collective vision of Black academic excellence. Adam Banks celebrates the griots in African American culture: storytellers, preachers, DJs, and rappers like Randy who effortlessly drop bars when they clap back in the streets. Banks insists that harnessing the griot talent offers a framework towards seeing writing "as serving local communities as well as the official purposes we assign writing in schools and workplaces" (161). Similarly, Elaine Richardson demands "concentrated effort to explore Black discourses and language styles" (22). When FYW teachers tap into new visions that offer Randy and his teammates opportunities to pop off rhetorically

and speak their collective truths, university stakeholders will no longer question the written performance of Black student athletes. Instead of punishing the artist for not following systemic white agreed-upon codes, we must recognize his rhetorical ability, honor his cultural practices, and advance the talents that rest in the DNA of all Black students because we wear a wealth of knowledge on our chests.

But I was not completely innocent. My ability to perform white writing secured my two positions in two PWIs so I could financially support my family. As Flores explains, "for all that we resist whiteness, we participate in it" (352). I, too, was tethered to an apparatus that upheld whiteness while I navigated Randy's need to pass his FYW class. Flores insists on inclusion, and Randy's voice is critical to the cultural milieu if we are going to expand the PWI landscape that refuses to relax its white academic standards. As a Black male, Randy brings currency to a bankrupt space, one so desperately in need of his perspective. But Randy's essay would not exist without my labor. Writing together as a Black feminist and womanist alongside a Black student athlete prove our combined capital. Randy taught me our value increases when we collaborate, combine forces, and align our efforts to collectively resist institutionalized white dominance. His white instructor thought she had the last word after she graded his final paper, but we reclaim our voices, redeem our worth, and redress our wrongs when our words slide through gatekeepers and refuse to remain silenced. In fact, I can finally relax knowing the lesson Randy is learning through our partnership that further legitimizes his true written talents. Randy remains a lyrical maven who can be a dawg[8] on the field and in the classroom.

The college sports industrial complex is a multi-billion-dollar industry and capitalist venture, operating on a "conveyor belt" as theorized by William Rhoden in *Forty Million Dollar Slaves*. Although Adam aspires to reach Randy's position one day, too many of these student athletes are recognized on the field but shipwrecked in their classrooms. In *Sula*, Toni Morrison's narrator describes Sula as dangerous because she is an "artist with no art form" (121). Morrison writes, "had she anything to engage her tremendous curiosity and her gift for metaphor, she might have exchanged the restlessness and preoccupation with whim for an activity that provided her with all she yearned for" (121). When Black student-athletes in FYW classes write tired essay after tired essay in standardized English, their curiosity remains untapped and they're never able to relax. They become restless artists with an uncultivated art form. Randy isn't the only lyrical maven who likes to write. Many of the student-athletes in FYW courses carry a "gift for metaphor," but their giftedness remains lost at sea. When the Black student-athletes arrive at this PWI, they are greeted by biased Eurocentric assessments, colonized rubrics, and white supremacist agreed-upon standards that quell their "tremendous curiosity" and engagement in the classroom. White supremacy insists on further drowning the lyrical talents they are dying to express, but this Black feminist resurrects possibilities for every "Randy" in the academy and refuses his white female instructor's final words.

Fortunately, Black student athletes and Black feminists who work alongside them are disrupting the margins and shaking the university's foundation. The more we write, the more we relax into truths we clutch, stand on, and protect. But we remain dissatisfied with white supremacist logics, rubrics, conventions, and pedagogies that deny our individuality, creative freedoms, and refuse our gifts. Our collective rhetoric and activism are always necessary so that others walking in these spaces can see alternate frameworks that respect

8 In football discourse, a "dawg" is a player who is aggressive, determined, unafraid, and ready to attack his opponent.

the artists and our streets. The margins are exploding with endless talent that students like us bring to the university. April Baker-Bell calls for an education system where "Black students, their language, their literacies, their culture, their creativity, their joy, their imagination, their brilliance, their freedom, their existence, their resistance MATTERS" (3). When Black students and all we embody become centered in classroom spaces, Randy can be himself without AI resources, and Black feminist pedagogues who exist alongside him in the margins can relax with a vision towards freedom.

Dedication

This project is for every teacher who ever said our language wouldn't amount to nuthin'. These lyrical birds are now free! Randy, working with you made my purpose clear. You and your teammates have my deepest gratitude.

Biography

Kelly Franklin is a Doctoral Candidate at Texas Christian University in English Rhetoric and Composition. After earning a degree in American Literature from UCLA, Kelly later earned a master's degree in English literature from Boise State University. Her work centers Black Feminist Pedagogy, Black Student Athletes and first year writing.

Randy Reece is a sophomore at East Texas A & M University, where he is majoring in film and playing as wide receiver on the football team. Randy is a native of Dallas, Texas and graduate of South Oak Cliff High School.

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