

Editors' Introduction

"You Can Still Fight": The Black Radical Tradition, Healing, and Literacies

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In a scene from the television series *Lovecraft Country* (Green & Sackheim, 2020), Letitia "Leti" Lewis calls the spirits of eight Black ancestors that have been trapped in her recently purchased home, along with the ghost of Hiram Epstein, their murderer. Hiram, the previous homeowner and a former scientist fired for "dangerous human experimentation," coordinated with the local police captain to capture, experiment, torture, and murder these eight Black residents in his home. As Hiram haunts and tries to harm Leti, she calls on these ancestors to help her cast Hiram away. "You are not dead yet. You can still fight," she proclaims as Hiram closes in on her. Leti and the ancestors circle around Hiram, hold hands, and chant a spell to cast him out. Their bloody and brutalized bodies, dismembered by Hiram's experimentation, become whole again in solidarity and strength. Hiram disintegrates.

This scene is exemplary of both the Black Radical Tradition (Robinson, 2000)—the collection of customs, beliefs, and values through which Black people call out and disrupt individuals and systems of oppression that deny us humanity and dignity—and the recognition of a world system that is "dependent on slavery, violence, imperialism, and genocide" (Robinson, 2000, foreword by Kelley, p. xiii; Stern & Hussain, 2015). In this scene, we witness the power of Black life (and Black afterlives) even in death, and the intergenerational forms of Black resistance exemplified by Leti and these ancestors against harm and indignity. While the show is steeped in science fiction, we recognize the parallels between the experimentation on and police brutality against Black people featured in this drama set in the 1950s and today's police in(action) and the handling of COVID-19 that disproportionately harms Black life. Yet in *Lovecraft Country*, we witness how the ancestors in Leti's home heal as they confront the harm they experienced and disintegrate their captor. As in this artistic scene in *Lovecraft Country*, this issue of *RTE* concludes with an In Dialogue essay by Gwendolyn Baxley and Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz that centers on the nexus of the Black Radical Tradition and healing through poetry. Poetry is a tool to speak truth to power, call out injustice, and envision new realities (Lorde, 2020; Neal, 1969). This essay highlights poetics as a means of healing, resisting,

and reflecting on our historical and current times. Within the lineage of Césaire (1982) and Lorde (2020), we acknowledge that poetics, as we utilize it within this introduction, encompasses poetry and so much more, because as Césaire asserts, what “presides over the poem is . . . experience as a whole” (Césaire, 1982, p. 22). This poetic project of refuge, fight, and freedom is evident in several of the featured research articles in this issue.

In “‘My Color of My Name’: Composing Critical Self-Celebration with Girls of Color through a Feminist of Color Writing Pedagogy,” Grace D. Player documents empirically and theoretically a community of inquiry premised on what she terms “critical celebrations” of Girls of Color (GOC), their ways of knowing and being, their joys and vulnerabilities, their forms of sisterhood, and their collective journey toward justice. Researching alongside Black and Asian youth who named their community The Unnormal Sisterhood, Player provides poignant and richly theorized examples of how these GOC mobilized multiple genres of writing, including poetry, in order to name injustices as well as engage in processes of personal and collective care and love, rooted in and inspired by the traditions of Women of Color writers and philosophers, such as Audre Lorde (2020) and Gloria Anzaldúa (2009). Given recent assaults from the highest levels of government on ideas from critical race theory, ethnic studies, and antiracist pedagogy, it becomes all the more urgent for teachers to (re)connect with the Black radical tradition and other intellectual legacies of anti-oppressive education. Player’s research provides one powerful model.

Grace MyHyun Kim and Lindy L. Johnson also advocate for teacher education that highlights the affective and imaginative dimensions of teaching and learning. Their article, “Playful Practices: Reimagining Literacy Teacher Education through Game-Based Curriculum Design,” documents how preservice teachers took up game-based curricular design in order to foster playful and participatory approaches to literacy instruction. Their valuing of play feels especially important in an era of skills-driven standardization and accountability, which risks squeezing the pleasure out of learning. According to Kim and Johnson, game-play curricular design may also encourage teachers’ development of a “disposition that values their students’ out-of-school literacies for in-school literacy education.” Curriculum design may thus be centered organically in the rich literate lives and social contexts of the students themselves, rather than merely being manufactured for teachers and transmitted into classrooms.

Cassie J. Brownell’s article, “Children’s Rhetoric in an Era of (Im)Migration: Examining Critical Literacies using a Cultural Rhetorics Orientation in the Elementary Classroom” provides a compelling example of curriculum derived from young children’s social worlds. We write this introduction just days shy of the 2020 presidential election, and Brownell collected the data for this study in the wake of the 2016 presidential election. She demonstrates that not only are children invariably exposed to the larger sociopolitical climate—including the current atmosphere of resurgent xenophobia and racism—but they also have the agency to engage the political, using literacies and cultural rhetorics to make meaning and

take action on contemporary issues they themselves deem significant. Brownell's research underscores the importance of viewing all students, even young children, as intellectuals who draw on a range of rhetorical traditions and make incisive claims about the world.

Calley Marotta documents the "nonregulated writing" practices of custodians within a higher education workplace, which occurred underneath, against, and beyond the race- and class-based regulation of their labor conditions. Drawing on critical race theories of literacy sponsorship, Marotta indicates the ways in which institutions of higher education, which claim to promote the attainment of literacies as a public good, enact policies that constrain and restrict the writing of workers in order to maintain an investment in whiteness. In spite of these dehumanizing conditions, the workers engaged in subversive opportunities to "use writing for their own purposes within the work context—purposes like learning, communicating, and expressing themselves." This study indicates how traditional notions of workplace literacies fail to fully recognize the ways in which self-actualization occurs beyond the white capitalist gaze—one reason to remember Toni Morrison's (2017) critical distinction: "You are not the work you do; you are the person you are."

Expansively rendering poetics, what Lorde (2007) recovers as an "incredible reserve of creativity and power" and what Césaire (1982) calls a "blossoming," the essays in this issue indicate the worldmaking possibilities of literacies steeped in rich cultural traditions of resistance that persist in spite of the unlivable conditions sustained by oppressive forces. Our freedom dreams survive, and with them, struggles for change will never cease.

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