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Introduction

“It ain’t that deep”

DEEP RHETORICAL ECOLOGIES AND PARA/ONTOLOGICAL BLACKNESS

Ontology—once it is finally admitted as leaving existence by the wayside—does not permit us to understand the being of the black [being]. For not only must the black [being] be black; [they] must be black in relation to the white man . . . The black [being] has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man.

FRANZ FANON ([1952] 2008), *BLACK SKIN, WHITE MASKS* (82–83)

Every research project has a story, which is the story of an arrival.

SARA AHMED (2012), *ON BEING INCLUDED* (2)

“Fresh off the boat,” as they say, just arrived in the United States, I join the student newspaper at the small northeastern liberal arts college I attend.¹ I was up in de cold to major in journalism—a service industry in my homeland, Trinidad and Tobago, then lacking the professional ethos that this bachelor’s degree would afford me. I want to use writing—something I feel is my only real “skill”—to serve my communities: telling public stories, exchanging information, mediating the world to engage it. My own “story of an arrival,”² then, truly was a “dream” in the stereotypical “American dream” sense: my parents had high-school educations; my mother did clerical work; my father was a firefighter, later a fire officer, for most of my upbringing; my siblings and I grew up in a mostly stable but modest home in a somewhat “sketch” neighborhood; we rocked handmade cloth backpacks to school, waited for the \$1TTD (about 15 US cents) from Tanty Mer every Friday not knowing what an “allowance” was in our childhood; and received clothes, books, and toys handed down from each other. In an early 2005 email, my mother describes my attitude in bagging a full-ride scholarship to a US university: “I realize that you have dreams and that you are determined to fulfill them. I also recognize that you will do what you have to do to get there.” So, she let me leave the islands to try chase them.

My first newspaper assignment, a joint one with another freshman—a white woman, Laura³—requires us to sit in on a board meeting and note-take. Getting off the bus, I see her waiting outside the building with another figure. Laura brings a white male not assigned to the story—and not involved in the paper—with her. It's strange. Is this what Americans call a "date"? They seem fidgety. She pulls on her straight brown hair, looks continually anew at mostly bare walls once we get to the meeting room. Laura and this white boy don't make physical contact. "They not even talkin' to each other," I think. I immediately feel a rupture, a sense about my *self* mapped from their presences and non-/interaction with each other and with me. Why, in the fall early-evening, would her friend care about a dreary budget meeting? After leaving the meeting room, I watch as they get into separate cars, still puzzled by their exchanges with each other, by neither of them really talking to me.

In the freshman English classroom, I learn about the (white US) middle (?) class "struggle" as we read Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. My white woman instructor dresses like the kids on *Freaks and Geeks*—a TV show a subsequent white roommate exposes me to. Her clothes resemble several canvas bags stitched together to make some kind of functional sense. I'd later associate that aesthetic with hippies—though her philosophies, teaching or otherwise, were by no means progressive. Shakespeare's *Othello* features the only character of color on the syllabus—one mediated through the author's sixteenth/seventeenth-century imagination through discourses of antiBlackness. I receive a C– on my first paper—after three pages, a slash across every one after with the message that the instructor stopped reading there. The lavish prose I was brought up on in the British Caribbean education system wouldn't work here. *Americans want a thesis*. Panicked by the high grade point average I need to continue holding my scholarship, to stay in the country, I adjust quickly and finish the course with a low A. Assimilative conversion, then, becomes my recourse. Similar to the historical colonial paradigm of my upbringing: "Education would be the condition under which [Blacks] could be perceived and recognized as fellow human beings" (Mbembe 2017, 87).

Through these encounters, I start learning what my Black(ened),⁴ im/migrant male presence and literacies in the US Northeast mean and try to "fix" to suit. But I don't do that learning alone. I live with three other Black men who fill in the picture through their experiences. Two of them—Ronald and Sean—are first-generation Jamericans who immigrated to New York City with their parents; the other roommate, Andre, is a classmate from my secondary school in Trinidad, whose mother works as a live-in nurse for a rich white family in Jersey. Ronald and Sean dip in and out of Jamaican and US registers and dialects. I notice in particular how Sean's very "articulate" standard American English on display in public spaces falls into patois when we argue about race. As Martiniquais political philosopher Frantz Fanon ([1952] 2008) explains, proximity to whiteness,

demands a whitening of the pidgin. The reverse applies in our discussions. Sean warns me not to "get take" for "no boombaclat eediat" when I naïvely contend that jokes he and Ronny make about white people play into US racial divides. But more than first lessons on code-switching, Sean clues me in through these disagreements to the fears we, as Black Caribbean im/migrant men, prompt from white peers—from Laura, from her companion. That discomfort between Laura, her companion, and me arises from a series of spatial and temporal relations: the strange, white institutional space of a budget meeting, our new roles as public mediators of information, long-standing and continuing histories of white women and Black men's "tense" relationships, white men's anxieties and (often violent) reactions in relation to those histories, and revisited public fears about Black and brown im/migrants after 9/11. While I'm surprised about the C-, Sean and Ronny explain that our Caribbean literacies are out of place—I gotta do what the white man wants me to do. I must shunt Blackness.



In the midst of my first ever winter, "what the white man wants" according to Sean and Ronny manifests itself in extremity through a series of online images posted by a white male alumnus of our historically white institution. In a Facebook photo album titled "Worthless," the former student posts an image of a handcuffed Black toddler with the text "arrest them now before they turn into criminals," another image of Lego blocks constructed to illustrate a scene from slavery, another with a cereal box tagged "Negro-ooos," and another depicting a Black university staff member with a photoshopped noose around his neck. The white seniors running the show at the newspaper assign me to cover this incident as my first major story—but, of course, I'm not trusted to do it alone. I'm particularly (though not explicitly) tasked with getting the scoop from Black folk on campus and go to the ones I know best: my roommates. In the news report, I navigate my Black male im/migrant-ness to open vistas into Blackness for the white institutions' publics—to conjure Black being in response to whiteness, as Fanon (1952, 82–83) above suggests.

The story is front-page news: "President, campus, outraged at racist images on Web." But in the article's organization, the editors orient the story and headline around the white university president's outrage; they foreground quotations from white university officials—the usual "racism will not be tolerated" mantra; they completely sidestep using the word "Black" in describing campus responses, leaving that signification up to a description of Andre (quoted) as "an international student from Trinidad and Tobago"; and they relegate me to second fiddle in the byline. I juggle the racial stress caused by the hyperracist images, the newspaper's student staff's uncredited tokenization/exploitation of me as the "race" reporter, my increasingly complicated relationship with my roommates who use

the article's publicness to speak their truth to power about antiBlack racism, and the institution's attempt to "prevent" racism from recurring—via email, a school official issues a plea with students to get off of Facebook (then, in nascence): it could ruin our careers.

These series of relations converging to fluidly re/create and negotiate my racial identity exemplify the ecological, relational, and dialectical workings of race in the historically white educational spaces of my alma mater. Affective,⁵ and *para/ontological*, fractures between the roles I attempt to play in the above rhetorical situations reveal much about race, racialization, and categories of identity. Here, "para/ontological" simultaneously describes concepts conjured in ontological "being," the "paraontological" (beside, adjacent to, subsidiary to, and beyond being), and, importantly, what flows and moves in between and across those two ideas.⁶ White spaces, characterized by dominance and resultant violence, forces (human) being, as Fanon argues, on to the Black body on whiteness' terms (1952). I'm interested in attempted resistances to such exertion and how they interrelate with philosopher Nahum Chandler's concept of paraontology—where Blackness "is the anoriginal displacement of ontology" (cited in Moten 2013, 739). For Chandler, Blackness shatters racial purity (and all its manifestations) in order to make space for nonexclusionary forms of collectivity (Black Study Group 2015), with paraontology inviting "the possibility and the necessity for theoretical work to cultivate an order of critical theoretical fiction as a fundamental dimension of its practice" (Chandler 2017). Between and along Chandler's conception, on one hand, and oppressive being in relation to dominance, on the other, para/ontology mines the fluid, fracturing, reiterative escape from Blackness mapped in "human being" on to it in white spaces.

In investigating expressed conceptions of Blackness attempting to make moving—potentially antiracist—meaning with/in para/ontology, I follow Black feminist interdisciplinarian Zakiyyah Iman Jackson's notion of ontological plasticity (Jackson 2020). Jackson explains plasticity as "a mode of transmogrification whereby the fleshly being of blackness is experimented with as if it were infinitely malleable lexical and biological matter, such that blackness is produced as sub/super/human at once, a form where form shall not hold: potentially 'everything and nothing' at the register of ontology" (2020, 3).⁷ I focus on *rhetorical fluidities of Blackness as being* across, about, in, and outside of this "everything and nothing" in antiBlack spaces—moments where racial stress reveals fractures, pullings, tuggings, breakings—in what Black being might mean. Notice how the white university through administration and mediated messages uses Blackness as putty for antiracist ethos, while dodging articulations of Blackness altogether. With/in these fractures, I navigate meaning-making between/across *attempts at being* a new Black im/migrant in US white institutional spaces, as a reporter for publics, cultured white, while the public voice for a marginalized community of Black

students proper and Black im/migrant males specifically above. Simultaneously, I endeavor to fulfill the promise of an im/migrant "dream" in relation to histories, ideologies, and realities criminalizing and authorizing violent racist fears of Blacks in the United States.

But, what if—as I'm routinely accused of via the ableist metric of "overthinking"—it just "ain't that deep"? Well, in this regard, I follow cultural studies scholar Sara Ahmed's paradoxical logic that "if you say something does not matter, it usually implies that it does" (2010, 94). Let's dig deeper then. *Black or Right: Anti/Racist Campus Rhetorics* articulates and demonstrates a lens for reading what I call *deep rhetorical ecologies* or, sometimes simply, *deep ecologies*.⁸ These ecological networks of interconnected relationships consist of evolving series of rhetorical situations in which communication occurs, which are interrelated through bodies, spaces, cultures, and contexts with *specific* regard to power dynamics and race relations.⁹ Why power? Why race? Why now? Because in late-stage capitalism, we cannot eschew reminders of the intricate historical relationships between power, race, environments, and economics. The events of 9/11 and its sociopolitical consequences, my undergraduate historically white institution, or even my freshman writing class at that university might be considered deep ecologies, as each represents overlapping sites of rhetorical encounters where bodies produce/negotiate meaning through exchanging power dynamics.¹⁰

My analytic framing of these ecologies pays particular attention to how artifacts, archives, and interactions draw on, live, and propel histories of cultural identity. Through an approach that *shows and tells the stories* of those artifacts, archives, and interactions, *Black or Right* attempts to mobilize them as literacy events,¹¹ with evolving possibilities for meaning-making. Through this monograph, expressive/narrative style entangles with content to suggest that mimetic media/modalities of Blackness offer potentials to resist objecthood through a kind of object-being. Stylistically, this book itself conjures a deep ecology: through its object-being performance, through its shifting movements between academic monograph and "critical theoretical fiction" (Chandler 2017), through its seemingly "scattered" style that actively builds ecological knowledge, through para/ontology. Reading between and across related discursive encounters within ecologies in these ways, rhetorical and media theorists might more fully realize the machinations of power dynamics in rhetorical networks and how these dynamics help to produce/negotiate fluid identities, categories of identity, and spatial culturing.

I take up Blackness as primary focus because, as political theorist Achille Mbembe explains, "the noun 'Black' is . . . the name given to the product of a process that transforms people of African origin into living *ore* from which *metal* is extracted . . . The progression from *man-of-ore* to *man-of-metal* to *man of money* was a structuring dimension of the early phase of capitalism" (2017, 40). While

neoliberalism repackages the ways in which the capitalist state engages with this structuring, the Black Lives Matter movement has recently made more visible the disregard for Black subjects in the contemporary United States and the use of Black bodies as kindling for the antiBlack state, while the resurgence of the white supremacy's philosophical and physical threat means we cannot look away.

I'm particularly concerned with instances of fracture with/in deep rhetorical ecologies. At these affective, para/ontological junctures, deep ecologies and their subjects/objects offer possibilities for producing racial meaning. Occasions narrated above when I receive a C-, when I notice Laura's white male companion, when antiBlack images appear on Facebook—moments, thus, constituted by high racial stress—present opportunities for digging into Fanonian epidermalization. Looking at these racializing instances allows us to (re)discover how such meaning might be made or negotiated ecologically—that is, in a subject's non/being that operates para/ontologically. Black feminist and surveillance scholar Simone Browne pinpoints this epidermalization: "[I]t is the moment of contact with the white gaze . . . that produces these moments of fracture for the racial Other, indeed making and marking one as racial Other, experiencing 'being for others'" (2015, 98). I follow Browne in insisting that "this making of [B]lackness as out of place must be read as also productive" (98). These junctures of possibility offer what fellow Black feminist Christina Sharpe calls "knowledge of the wake"—that is, operation "in a past that is not the past, a past that is with us still" in the afterlives of slavery (2016, 62). I join with Sharpe in "wake work," in "plotting, mapping, and collecting the archives of everyday Black immanent and imminent death, and in tracking the ways we resist, rupture, and disrupt that immanence and imminence aesthetically and materially" (13). In doing so, I suggest technologies/rhetorics of these fractures in order to move toward Black rhetorical agency—thinking about how it arises, how bodies and spaces attain it or fail to attain it.

I use the term "agency" throughout this project to describe potentials for social action and power.¹² While this summoning of agency might pose questions about energy, it also concurrently grapples with expressive form in relation to that energy—in polysemic Aristotelian ideas of *ἐνέργεια* (*enérgeia*), where energy tussles constantly between act and expression.¹³ Such potential power is co-constituted through individual bodies *along with* relations to their discourses, environments, and narrative re/tellings by/about those bodies. I choose to purposely sidestep the humanist (Bawarshi 2003; Vieregge et. al 2012; Canagarajah 1999; Cooper 2011; France 2000) / posthumanist (Herndl and Licona 2007; Lundberg and Gunn 2005; Ewald and Wallace 1994) dichotomy that tends to underscore discussions of agency within rhetoric/communication and writing studies research, looking instead toward African indigenous relational models of agency. The concept of *botho* or *Ubuntu* "requires respect and the recognition of all things living and non-living. Reality is all our connections and all our marginalized efforts

to protect and preserve those that are essential to the continued existence of all relations. Relatedness is at the core and permeates all research activities" (Chilisa 2012, 820). This theory of relatedness and how it shapes humanness, nonhumanness, and the spaces in which these concepts occur pervade *Black or Right* in its examination of deep ecologies.

Fifteen years after my "story of arrival," this project exemplifies my ongoing effort to understand racialization in the United States: how it feels, how it works, how it moves, how it manifests, performs, and churns every day. I continue to learn and live race, im/migrant-ness, and Blackness inside, outside, and in-between the classroom, as my US experience remains centered in and around educational institutions. I now also *teach* race, im/migrant-ness, and Blackness inside, outside, and in-between the classroom. I confront institutional whiteness on the daily. In some ways, I represent Ahmed's "melancholic migrant": "a rather ghostly figure, haunting contemporary culture as a kind of unnecessary and hurtful reminder of racism" (2010, 148). It won't go away. I won't go away. Yet still, I want better institutions and classrooms for marginalized folk through telling the many stories like mine. But these desires extend beyond me or my stories. I strive for spaces for Black people and our literacies as means to possible anti-racist agency, though on some days and in some ways, I'll admit, I embody the wretchedness of social death. In style/content, race work exhausts. Because to study Blackness involves living Blackness and vice versa, I hope that this project, through its Black feminist relational and African indigenous approaches, demonstrates the fluid, polysemic multiplicities in Blackness in its everyday struggles with/in white spaces.

With this theoretical background at hand, *Black or Right: Anti/Racist Campus Rhetorics* ultimately grapples with notions of Blackness in white institutional spaces to theorize how Black identity operates with/against neoliberal ideas of difference in the age of #BlackLivesMatter. The book asks: Despite diversity's theoretical "non-performativity" (Ahmed 2012), how do those racially signifying "diversity" in US higher education (and beyond) make meaning in the everyday? My move to respond critically inhabits those fractures in deep ecologies where Blackness operates para/ontologically to think through what Black antiracist rhetorics emerge and how they do so. I thus offer Black autoethnography, Black hashtagging, Black inter(con)textual reading, and reconceptualized Black disruption as possibilities.

"Yuh want to what now?": Methodology and Intervention

This study adds to a growing body of work in rhetoric/communication, writing, and literacy studies, that centers Black and brown rhetorics, literacies, and compositional practices.¹⁴ Alongside these studies, more recent scholarship

engaging specifically in antiracist critique/pedagogies in such disciplinary areas have also taken up understanding race through an interrogation of whiteness to destabilize hegemonic classroom and institutional cultures/discourses.¹⁵ Peggy McIntosh's 1989 "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" lays a foundation for what has emerged as the burgeoning impact of whiteness studies in rhetoric/communication and writing studies.¹⁶ Krista Ratcliffe, for example, offers "rhetorical listening" as means to interrogate "gender and whiteness in the public sphere, in rhetorical scholarship, and in composition pedagogy" (2005, 1). Inoue's *Antiracist Writing Assessment Ecologies* applies antiracist motives in assessment practices, critiquing what he calls the "white racial habitus" as a default for composition assessment practices (2015, 17). Both these monographs received critical acclaim and broad visibility in rhetoric/communication and writing studies, especially as winners of the Conference on College Composition and Communication's Outstanding Book Award—Ratcliffe in 2007, Inoue ten years on in 2017. Likewise, the edited collection *Rhetorics of Whiteness* edited by Tammie M. Kennedy, Joyce Irene Middleton, and Krista Ratcliffe was recognized with the same award just recently in 2018. With the fields' recent visible attentiveness to whiteness studies in antiracist efforts to combat the re/emergence of public white supremacist energy—which has dangerous consequences for our classroom and institutional spaces—scholars' push to sustain such lines of inquiry remains crucial.

Black or Right adds to that growing corpus of antiracist research in centering Black folk and their traditions, languages, literacies, and rhetorics in white institutional spaces. A focus on the traditions and theories of people of color responds to Adam Banks's (2010) and Lisa Corrigan's (2016) calls to these fields for attention to be paid to them. Continuing such work remains vitally necessary as scholarship and classrooms in the United States continue to marginalize people of color, particularly Black folk, and their cultures/literacies. So, while excellent work has been done to acknowledge and openly critique whiteness in recent antiracist scholarship—*work publicly celebrated*—I examine marginalized antiracist endeavors by reading relationships between meanings of Blackness in the United States vis-à-vis antiBlack institutional power. In spotlighting Black people and their antiracist energies, this study offers means by which these fields might destabilize institutional oppression that do not paradoxically center whiteness (in investigating its manifestations primarily).

I approach this task from intensely cross-disciplinary angles, bridging Black studies and critical race theory with rhetoric/communication, writing, and literacy studies. The project thus entwines scholarship in, and related to, those five areas from critical theory; sociology; social science; history; political science; women's, gender, and sexuality studies; digital media studies; criminal justice; media theory; postcolonial studies; and historiography, among others, striving

to dynamically and intersectionally analyze Blackness' multiplicity in white institutional spaces. Echoing Sharpe, *Black or Right* seeks to "undiscipline" the study of Blackness (2016, 13) from what Black feminist Sylvia Wynter calls "our narratively condemned status" (1994b, 70). Such departure necessitates "a turn away from existing *disciplinary* solutions to blackness's ongoing abjection . . . It requires theorizing the multiple meanings of that abjection through inhabitation, that is, through living them in and as consciousness" (Sharpe 2016, 33; emphasis in original).

In so doing, *Black or Right* takes up a transdisciplinary Black feminist approach in order to highlight relational lived experiences. At the core of such a relational methodology I use Black feminist thought (Lorde, Hill Collins, Cohen, hooks, Wynter, Sharpe, Browne etc.), buttressed by historical/theoretical work in Black studies (Fanon, Du Bois, Weheliye, Mbembe, Judy, etc.), via an African indigenious methodological approach, Ubuntu. The Black feminist philosophy of literacy as the practice of freedom underscores my work here. I pick up the concept from (Black feminist thinker) bell hooks (1994) to mobilize the processes of literacy—reading, writing, identity performance, body language, orality, and so forth—in a move to open spaces for Black peoples, cultures, and rhetorics. That endgame, however, does not bracket other uses for this project's arguments, as it seeks, more than anything, to open up *possibilities* for understanding Blackness. As the concluding chapter shows, my findings might operate in the service of Black humanism, Black posthumanism, Afropessimism, Black antihumanism, racial realism, or a combination of any such epistemological approaches.

To center Blackness and Black feminism not only means being conscious about the content of our Black study but also involves political citation practices as well as cognizance of the schools of thought we resort to for theorizing. Black people and Black women accordingly primarily populate this study's references. In terms of philosophy, I stretch diasporically across philosophies of Blackness from Caribbean, African, and Black US authors in order to signal/experience/read/write Blackness with/in its constant spatial, temporal, and deep rhetorical movements. I join folks such as Vivette Milson-Whyte (2015) and Kevin Browne (2013) (and others) in bringing discussions of diasporic Blackness to rhetoric/communication and writing studies. It would be in disservice of my own Blackness (and my theories thereof) to ignore how scholars from outside the US shape/read Blackness involved inside it. This project eschews borders—geographic, philosophic, and otherwise.

In analyzing deep ecologies and their fractures, I employ a Black feminist lens that highlights interrelations between human bodies and their environments in rhetorically analyzing how meaning is co-constituted by those relations. While "new" materialist theoretical frameworks have recently garnered much attention in rhetorical theory, this project offers as a major intervention an application of

Black feminist and African indigenous philosophies of being that stress interconnectedness and co-constitutive meaning-making that predate this "new materialist" turn. Bringing attention to these theories and methodological frameworks not only pays respect to peoples routinely absent from citation lists and syllabi in rhetoric/communication and writing studies, but also stresses their social justice roots that strive toward more just futures in their applications of relationality.

As Lorde explains, "the quality of light by which we scrutinize our lives has direct bearing upon the product which we live, and upon the changes which we hope to bring about through those lives. It is within this light that we form those ideas by which we pursue our magic and make it realized" (1984, 36). Lorde thus demonstrates the impact of our environs on shaping our subjectivities and vice versa. Patricia Hill Collins, relatedly, emphasizes the importance of alternative forms of communal relationships, stressing "connections, caring, and personal accountability" in confronting interlocking systems of oppression's objectification/commodification of Black women ([1990] 2000, 222). As Black studies scholar Alexander Weheliye stresses, Sylvia Wynter's project to "[highlight] the complex relationality between different forms of oppression," along with Hortense Spillers's criticism, speak to the foundational Black feminist positions of the Combahee River Collective ([1977] 2017, 23–24). Black feminist relationality therefore considers the exchanges between individuals, identities, bodies, cultures, and spaces and how they dynamically shape each other to produce/negotiate meaning in striving toward societal impact. This (intersectional) relationality arguably aligns with new materialists' recognition that "phenomena are caught in a multitude of interlocking systems and forces" and attempts "to consider anew the location and nature of capacities for agency" (Coole and Frost 2010, 9) in investigations of matter. However, while I gesture to these new materialist interests in spatial constitution to consider particularly the material-discursive—how, for example, words/phrases like "nigga," "plantation days," and "aight" operate in educational spaces in chapter 1—I foreground Black feminist thinkers who prioritize relationality long before recent scholarship's "new materialist turn" to spotlight racialized precarities and rhetorics of Black agency in a Black feminist tradition.¹⁷

Likewise, Botswanan social scientist and methodologist Bagele Chilisa's work emphasizes that African indigenous relational methodologies that stress connectedness, and multiple relationships between humans, their environments, and discourses, deserve attention in anti-imperial transdisciplinary research (Chilisa 2012, 2017; Chilisa, Major, and Khudu-Petersen 2017). Identity narratives can form an important basis for demonstrating such decolonizing frameworks (Drahm-Butler 2016) and thus feature prominently via my Black feminist autoethnographic orientation in this project's first chapter, which filters throughout ongoing ones. Such narratives "provide information about one's physical space, cultural locations, eco-

logical connections and relationships to others"; "through African ontologies of connectedness and relatedness to the living and non-living, research participants come to develop awareness of oneself and of belongingness and of their responsibilities to one another and to their environment" (Chilisa, Major, and Khudu-Petersen 2017, 333).¹⁸ As I move to the composition classroom's digital extensions to analyze my students' hashtag use in chapter 2, to broaden the scope of my analysis in reading the #BlackLivesMatter movement's inter(con)textual meanings in chapter 3, and to interrogate anti/racist policy practice at a historically white institution in chapter 4, I sustain this focus on interconnections, relationality, and ecological meaning. In the conclusion, I use this relationality to consider potential bridges between other strains of Black philosophy so that we might walk away understanding the possibilities rooted in the *processes* of Blackness rather than oriented primarily in their future horizons.¹⁹

Scholarship using ecological frameworks, conceptually, are familiar territory for rhetoricians and writing studies scholars. In the 1980s, Marilyn Cooper's work, for example, theorized the ecological systems in which writers operate through their compositions: "The systems reflect the various ways writers connect with one another through writing: through systems of ideas, of purposes, of interpersonal interactions, of cultural norms, of textual forms" (1986, 369). Yet, for Cooper, these systems are "concrete," as all elements could be readily "investigated, described, and altered" (369). More recent work sees ecologies as much more fluid. In Edbauer's (2005) "Unframing Models of Public Distribution: From Rhetorical Situation to Rhetorical Ecologies," the rhetorician builds on previous theories of the rhetorical situation (Bitzer 1968; Biesecker 1989) to reconsider rhetorical situations as "rhetorical ecologies" made up of fluctuating lived encounters and affects between actors, bodies, and so on, within evolving rhetorical publics. Edbauer argues that in this ecological, affective framing, rhetoric becomes a "process of distributed emergence" and is "an ongoing circulation process" (2005, 13), which can be read via "testifying"; "such testimonies would invent new concepts and deploy them in order to theorize how publics are also created through affective channels" (21). In this project, I look to literacy events as means to define and explain these testimonies, aiming to take up more fully the inter(con)textual environment of them, while highlighting the power dynamics—specifically racial power dynamics—occurring in and across these events and their racializing fractures that co-constitute deep rhetorical ecologies. I push us toward understanding Blackness as something ontological, paraontological, and para/ontological, as the ecological context for racial meaning cannot be divorced from the Blackness of a Black body qua Black body in its excess.

While Inoue also deploys the ecology in antiracist work, and does so specifically with regard to racial power, his monograph theorizes writing assessment

practices rather than public rhetorical interactions through this model (2015, 9). He proceeds by explaining the hegemonic "white racial habitus": dominant discourse cultured in the US as white and middle class that underlies classroom interaction (17). Departing from a contained focus on the classroom, from starting with whiteness and its undoing as the basis for antiracist agency, and from Eurocentric masculinist theoretical backgrounds, I take up a Black feminist intersectional and African indigenous relational model of the rhetorical ecology that prioritizes Blackness. Bringing such an approach to rhetoric/communication, writing, and literacy studies, I move toward *proactive* antiracist approaches rather than reactive ones. The project thus does not primarily strive to repair whiteness or white cultures but instead looks to transformative possibilities and questions that a focus on Blackness might offer.

"Wha'is de scene?": Scope

In Trini dialect, the familiar greeting "Wha'is de scene?" collapses a what and a when. It asks "how are you?" through an inquiry about one's place/position: it "scopes out de scene." Although this project's analysis inherently extends beyond one site of reading because of its ecological framework, my main focus is Midwestern State University (MwSU),²⁰ a large historically white land-grant university in the midwestern United States. The main page of the university's website does not explicitly define the institution, though it provides its locations visually through a map of its home state, along with user-solicited photographs through the use of "#My[Midwestern]State" ([Midwestern State] University 2018a). By asking users to visually pinpoint their own versions of the institution, the university's website places its identity within an individual/institution dynamic. Although the prompt to "Upload your pics" suggests that students have a role in defining what Midwestern State looks like, surely the institution uses some behind-the-scenes selection process for what images it features. When the website does work toward more traditional definition, through its "Discover [Midwestern] State" page, it emphasizes the university's "physical presence throughout the state" ([Midwestern] State University 2018b). Its influence might therefore be understood as not simply bound by the geographies of the physical campus—no doubt conjuring the reflexivity of its name. These snapshots articulate the university's identity as one of physical expansiveness, made up, however, of (curated) individual contributions and posturings. In terms of its human presence, as of the autumn 2018 semester, MwSU's main campus (the primary site of investigation here) comprised 61,170 students. Its website designates 21 percent (12,873) of that campus's population as "total minorities," of which 6.1 percent (3,713) are termed "African American" ([Midwestern State] University 2019).

Black or Right reads Midwestern State and its contexts within the sociopolitical context of the Black Lives Matter movement. I describe this temporality as "post-Ferguson," emphasizing the heightened tensions and public visibility of race relations after the events of the Ferguson Uprising in the summer of 2014. These race relations specifically (re)call attention to tense historical and cultural conversations and protests surrounding Black life and state violence against it. After the acquittal of George Zimmerman for the murder of unarmed Black teenager Trayvon Martin in 2013, #BlackLivesMatter came into the US public spotlight and that focus heightened exponentially with the police shooting death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, in August the following year. While I use the preposition "post" to signify its literal meaning "after," the phrase "post-Ferguson" does signify a different understanding of racialization in the United States than understandings prior to the Uprising. With the reanimation in the age of social media of the idea that the US legal system remains inept at validating Black folk as human via rights-based discourses, coupled with the notion that video evidence of injustice routinely fails to prove such injustice in both the courts of public opinion and the courts of law, the movement sparked widespread (pro-Black and allied) digital and in-person resistance in the United States and worldwide. That resistance is importantly led by Black queer women and their antiracist philosophies. Chapter 3 also demonstrates how previous race-related events (like 9/11 and the election of President Barack Obama) set the table for racial dynamics of the post-Ferguson cultural moment by feeding into heightened state and public suspicion of Black and brown bodies in reaction to the dangerous ideology of racial "colorblindness." By placing my analysis within that sociopolitical context, I think through how larger-scale (sometimes national) events inform the spatial and cultural relations in historically white educational spaces—particularly Midwestern State's.

"How yuh going?": Objectives

Another typical Trini salutation, "How yuh goin'?" and its usual response, "I there, X,"²¹ signal a how and a where. The greeting queries one's current condition on the basis of movement, with an assumption that a subject ontologically is both temporally and spatially present and moving; in a way, the call and response gestures to the para/ontological. *Black or Right* foregrounds its Black feminist rhetorical analysis with an eye toward this kind of fracturing multiplicity, building from Ahmed's work in *On Being Included*. I expand Ahmed's focus on diversity practitioners, while also zooming in on one particular institution in fluid relation to related cultural artifacts and events. Ahmed dynamically follows diversity documents and the people who use them around in her study. She asks questions about what diversity does and fails to do, about where it goes

and fails to go, and in what and whom it is deposited and not deposited to “not only talk to diversity practitioners, but also to inhabit the world of diversity, to offer an ethnography of this world” (2012, 11). Engaging in “Black British feminism” (13), Ahmed draws on her own position and experiences as a diversity practitioner, apposite meetings, conferences, workshops, “fleeting encounters,” and events to flesh out this ethnography. Inspired by the complexity of Ahmed’s monograph—and, indeed, its mobilization of interconnected relations between people, documents, and events related to diversity in analysis—this project builds on her pronouncement that such an approach requires a kind of “multi-sited”-ness due to the “mobile subjects and objects . . . networks and connections that are necessary for things to move around” (11–12). I therefore emphasize differing positions/locations within the historically white institution as I move through chapters, while adopting differing vantage points or roles from which material is analyzed.

These shifts work to enact and reflexively validate the project’s African indigeneous and Black feminist relational methodology, highlighting how identity and reading might shift in fluid spatial, temporal, and even intellectual field orientations. I therefore move through the roles of autoethnographer and archivist with a concentration on graduate student/instructor positionality in chapter 1; the roles of digital media critic and critical pedagogue in investigating undergraduate student digital composition in my antiracist writing classroom in the following chapter; the role of cultural rhetorician/media theorist to interrogate the sociopolitical context of historical, populist, and pedagogic meanings of #BlackLivesMatter in the third chapter; and a combination of all three previous roles through critical discourse analysis as I read the praxis of institutional policy at Midwestern State in the fourth. *Black or Right* works—through each chapter’s particular argument—and in assuming multiple relationships to those arguments—to highlight the complexity of relations between the Black body, Black resistance, and Black meaning-making at a historically white university and beyond. Position, style, content, and analysis wrap up in each other throughout.

I call the field’s attention to Black struggles and potentialities with/in those spaces to finally draw together the Black rhetorics of this monograph in theorizing (in chapter 4) what I call *rhetorical reclamations*. These rhetorical acts (gestures, performances, language use, embodiment) do “wake work” (Sharpe 2016); they draw on cultural histories, contexts, and traditions to suggest agency through re/asserting racialized identity in instances of fracture when white institutions stigmatize Blackness. Such reclamations respond to *white institutional defensiveness*, policies, and practices that posture tentatively (often in racially colorblind ways) so as to avoid causing racial stress for white individuals in institutional spaces.²² In arriving at these theories, I ask the following key questions through various chapters:

1. What are the multiple meanings of Blackness playing out in the United States—in particular, in white educational spaces of Midwestern State University—in relation to institutional power during the post-Ferguson cultural moment?
2. How would/could we define that “cultural moment” as it relates to institutional power?
3. What roles do the #BlackLivesMatter movement play into fashioning those multiple meanings of Blackness in historically white educational spaces and in defining the post-Ferguson cultural moment?
4. How do those multiple meanings of Blackness play out as they relate to (a) graduate students/instructors at the historically white institution; (b) undergraduate students in composition classrooms; (c) antiracist policies at the university; and (d) racist, and particularly antiBlack, practices resulting from, or encouraged by, policies at the institution?
4. What are ways in which students can find potentials to resist oppressive meanings of Blackness at Midwestern State?
5. How does the style of our Black study mimetically conjure, while entangling, possibilities for resistant Black energy?

“We does remember verse and not chapter”

Home again in summer 2019, listening to my brother’s car radio, I hear Trini media personality and comedienne Rachel Price make the above declaration. It strikes me as critique of impulse-driven thinking sometimes demanded of Black survival—of living for a now without the context of now. Let’s resist such a politics of temporality as we move through *Black or Right*, routinely drawing on relations, to im/mediate (re)turning to our above questions. Verse, in ways, is chapter, is world, if we open ourselves to such possibilities. I invite you into the coming chapters in a fractured state of here and there, as I embody differing roles in each.

Chapter 1: “‘Are you black though?’: Black Autoethnography and Racing the Graduate Student/Instructor,” offers a Black autoethnographic approach—an application of African indigenous methodological “self-knowledge”—as potential antiracist rhetoric to mobilize my positionality as a Black im/migrant instructor at historically white institutions. That mobilization aims at presently reading my precariousness as a Black graduate student/instructor in the past, nuanced through my reflexivity/reflectivity as an able-bodied Black im/migrant male. I take this Black feminist autoethnographic approach to operationalize my ecological lens in rhetorical analysis based in a methodological tradition of Black *griots-as-scholars* in US academia. Griots-as-scholars intertwine Black personal narratives to fuel their critical analysis. I chart an ancestry of such work in

rhetoric/communication, writing studies, and literacy studies from June Jordan (1985) to Carmen Kynard (2015).

Mobilizing the history to which this chapter belongs, I propel it onward in three sections: visualized, (em)bodying, and (per)forming difference. In grounding my narrativized analysis in historicity, I contemplate how a historically white liberal arts college uses my Blackness to publicly visualize their diversity. In considering my (affective) (em)bodiment of difference in relation to historically white universities, I relate an account of being profiled and jumped by a white vigilante in the Midwest. I historicize that account with an anecdote of similar profiling and brutalization by Texas police while a graduate teaching associate in a "colorblind" first-year writing program. I end by (per)forming Blackness and its racialization in white educational spaces. This chapter seeks to reflectively/performatively analyze the racing of the Black graduate student/instructor through a method that prioritizes African indigenous agency, acknowledging the politics of one's own interconnectedness to the deep rhetorical ecology's meaning-making potentials. "Are You Black Though?" argues that Black autoethnography generatively disrupts the Black object-being's rhetorical bind of representing the "problem" of difference for historically white institutions.

"Composing Black Matter/s: Hashtagging as Marginalized Literacy," chapter 2, develops means by which undergraduate students at Midwestern State University might engage with conversations on race and Blackness through Black annotation (Sharpe 2016) to contribute to viral Blackness (Greene Wade 2017). We engage hashtag composition in the neoliberal space of the classroom as a means of resistance, as a Black rhetoric—not as a fetishized "extra" assignment/requirement but as the backbone for decentering traditional ways of reading/writing in that space. The site of intervention is my second-year writing class, which fulfills Midwestern State's general education social diversity requirement. I introduce the "Tumblr Commonplace Book" assignment, which asks students to interact in racial ecologies through conceptualizing and composing hashtags as counter/public commonplaces on social media to analyze texts on Black resistance. "Composing Black Matter/s" marks hashtagging as a *marginalized literacy* based on social-media-user demographics and recent social movements mobilized by hashtagging—as picked up by the next chapter with #BlackLivesMatter. I specifically use the term "marginalized literacy" to describe how hashtagging as a literacy practice has been encultured through use by oppressed populations to invert the tags' potential hegemonic purposes as commonplaces and/or to strive for social justice for such peoples.²³

Hashtagging also represents an "out-of-school" composing process used mainly for the purposes of social media communication. By deploying an agential nonacademic composition process in academic spaces, I blur the nonacademic/academic binary as a call to looking beyond the academy for agen-

tialized literacy. In doing so, "Composing Black Matter/s" argues for hashtagging as a creative, analytic composition process with potentials to build, curate, archive, protest, and continue histories that interact with, and themselves constitute, social acts. Hashtags as both rhetorical objects and performances in the service of Black rhetoric augur a kind of epistemic rupture, here in relation to "diversity" requirements at historically white institutions. I examine students' use of hashtags to demonstrate the creation/negotiation of fluid racial meaning as students participate in a process of arguably culturally nonappropriate counter/public Black activism. The chapter analyzes participation in Black protest in attempts to foster classroom culture that mobilizes generative Black agency to counteract notions of antiracist work as punitive to "destructive" whiteness.

Chapter 3: "All my life I had to fight': Shaping #BlackLivesMatter through Literacy Events" considers the broader question of what Blackness means during the post-Ferguson cultural moment in the United States as it relates to institutional power, through an inter(con)textual Black feminist relational reading of three artifacts related to the #BlackLivesMatter movement. It argues for inter(con)textual reading as rhetorical means to Black antiracist agency particularly congruent with #BlackLivesMatter's dynamics. This kind of reading points to and provides conditions for interconnections not readily noticeable between bodies, identities, movements, and it finds meanings within deep ecologies that produce/negotiate ways to question co-constitutive meaning. In the role of cultural rhetorician/media theorist, I more fully explicate my critical lens for such reading: deep rhetorical ecologies, made up of fracturing literacy events (Heath [1982] 2001) that (re)make racial meaning through rhetorical encounters. I contend that notions of inter(con)textual meaning-making implicitly forwarded by the #BlackLivesMatter movement through its activist discourses demand such a lens that can reflexively read Blackness in the movement's cultural moment (post-Ferguson). Institutional confusion in conceptualizing race and Blackness provides exigence for it, and I demonstrate how antecedent cultural moments play into white institutional defensiveness that results in #BlackLivesMatter's overtly Black feminist intersectional stances.

The chapter then employs that lens in reading three cultural artifacts or literacy events that demonstrate the movement's historical, populist, and pedagogical institutionalization. These "events" illustrate resistant Black meaning-making in the post-Ferguson United States in each respective category: Alicia Garza's "Herstory of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement" (2014); Kendrick Lamar's "Alright" (2015a); and Frank Leon Roberts's blacklivesmattersyllabus.com (2016). Throughout my inter(con)textual analysis, I implore that we maintain cognizance of the archival production/negotiation at work in reading across those artifacts in such contexts. Reflexively, this chapter argues for remaining attuned

to, and reflective of, the generative role of historiography in the re/making of racial meaning, central to resistant methodologies.

The fourth chapter, "The Politics of Belonging . . . When 'Becoming a victim of any crime is no one's fault,'" uses the previous chapter's lens to interrogate discourses that make racial meaning with specific regard to the practice of policy—regarding diversity and security—at Midwestern State. It asks what happens when we reconceptualize Black disruption/deviance in relation to diversity policy's nonperformativity and white security as generative Black rhetoric. To do so I rhetorically analyze three literacy events: the April 2016 *Black Lives Matter in Classrooms* events; public safety alerts from a six-month period in 2016 and related public safety efforts at MwSU; and a YouTube video, "[MwSU] Administration Threatens Expulsion against Students" (Keep[MwSU]Public 2016).

I spotlight *Black Lives Matter in Classrooms* ([MwSU]BLMIC.org 2016) to consider the university's attempts at antiracist work, paying close attention to its visual rhetoric, keynote presentation, and interrelations with pedagogy. That visualization and its keynote work in ways to demonstrate what Black agency might look like framed as coming from or situated within the institution. I concurrently investigate a series of public safety email announcements, highlighting how they not only criminalize Black bodies within the historically white institution but also how through these messages Blackness operates as a specter of cultural criminality. Related public safety publicity artifacts highlight the *white institutional defensiveness* that couches such cultural criminality. I also read the YouTube video to consider a critical incident where Black bodies encounter policy-makers in protest, analyzing racial meaning at play between notions of difference and security. In that video, the specter of criminalized Blackness materializes as white authorities use policy as justification for threatening expulsion of Black bodies from the institution. Analyzing these events, I characterize the work that policy explicitly and implicitly performs in producing/negotiating racial meaning at the historically white institution, looking to fractures in deep ecologies to tease out ideas of para/ontological Blackness in relation to disruption and prospects for inverting those relations through *rhetorical reclamation*.

The concluding chapter, "De Ting about Blackness (A Meditation)," thinks through Blackness in relation to "new" materialisms. It spends some time with rhetorical reclamation, acts of turning stigmatizing racialized attention mapped onto Black identities back onto the gaze of historically white institutions to publicly question/critique their power in moments of fracture. Rhetorical reclamations tie together the arguments of each respective chapter of *Black or Right*, demonstrating how rhetorics of Blackness—in Black autoethnography (chapter 1), hashtagging (chapter 2), inter(con)textual reading (chapter 3), and reconceptualized Black disruption (chapter 4)—offer potentials for resistant Black antiracist agency in historically white spaces to counter white institutional defensiveness.

In further unpacking rhetorical reclamations, I show how the object-being of para/ontological Blackness allows for possibilities of mobilizing objectness that speak across a spectrum of Blackness (and Black theoretical frameworks) from rhetorical silence to technologies of cancelling. Since this project focuses on multitude, I end by rhetorically asking of Blackness:

How do we write its story if we become objects acting in it while being acted upon?

How do we write its story if we do or don't claim humanity?

How do we write its story if we refuse to write its story?