

DESEGREGATION STATE

*College Writing Programs after the
Civil Rights Movement*

ANNIE S. MENDENHALL

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Logan

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Published by Utah State University Press
An imprint of University Press of Colorado
245 Century Circle, Suite 202
Louisville, Colorado 80027

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The University Press of Colorado is a proud member of
the Association of University Presses.

The University Press of Colorado is a cooperative publishing enterprise supported, in part, by Adams State University, Colorado State University, Fort Lewis College, Metropolitan State University of Denver, Regis University, University of Alaska Fairbanks, University of Colorado, University of Denver, University of Northern Colorado, University of Wyoming, Utah State University, and Western Colorado University.

∞ This paper meets the requirements of the ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992 (Permanence of Paper)

ISBN: 978-1-64642-202-9 (paperback)
ISBN: 978-1-64642-203-6 (ebook)
<https://doi.org/10.7330/9781646422036>

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Mendenhall, Annie S., author.

Title: Desegregation state: college writing programs after the civil rights movement/
Annie S. Mendenhall.

Description: Logan: Utah State University Press, [2022] | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2021045123 (print) | LCCN 2021045124 (ebook) | ISBN
9781646422029 (paperback) | ISBN 9781646422036 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: College integration—Georgia—History—20th century. | Writing centers—Georgia. | English language—Rhetoric—Ability testing—Georgia. | Reading—Ability testing—Georgia. | African American college students—Georgia. | African Americans—Education (Higher)—Georgia.

Classification: LCC LC214.22.G46 .M46 2022 (print) | LCC LC214.22.G46 (ebook) | DDC
378.1/9829960730758—dc23/eng/20211021

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021045123>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021045124>

Cover photographs: courtesy, John Lavoie/SavannahNow.com (*top*); courtesy, Georgia Southern University Special Collections, Savannah (*bottom*)

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INTRODUCTION

On the first of September in 1977, the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia (USG) submitted its *Plan for the Further Desegregation of the University System of Georgia* to the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) in what was then called the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW). The OCR was, throughout the 1970s, collecting desegregation plans from formerly segregated states whose university systems remained largely segregated more than two decades after *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) legally ended segregation. In this plan, the USG wrote, “the question of special compensatory activities speak directly to the heart of the problem of increasing minority student enrollment. Many minority students come from cultural and educational backgrounds which were not conducive to strong academic development. It is essential that appropriate programs be provided for such students if they are to have reasonable expectations of success in college level work” (Oxford et al. 1977, II:48).¹ The heart of the USG’s desegregation plan was to remediate Black² students, not to remedy segregation.

When I began working for the USG in 2013 as an assistant professor at Armstrong State University, one of the USG’s historically white colleges and universities (HWCUs)³ in Savannah, I heard talk about efforts to desegregate Armstrong and nearby Savannah State University, one of the USG’s Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). As one colleague told me on a tour of campus, “Armstrong can’t offer a business degree because of desegregation. We got teacher education instead.” Having no idea what this comment meant, I did what most archival researchers would do: I went to the archives. It was there that I came across the USG’s desegregation plan I quote above and realized that what happened during the 1970s desegregation period did more to transform the curriculum at Armstrong and Savannah State and in the USG than most people realized and had far-reaching repercussions nationally.

Up to this point in my career, I was like most white faculty in that I believed racism was important to address in my teaching, but I lacked

direction for anti-racist action at my university (García de Müller and Ruiz 2017; Perryman-Clark 2016). As I began perusing desegregation records, I was developing a methodology for reframing my perspective on racism as a central, not peripheral, force in higher education in the United States. I realized that white resistance to postsecondary desegregation informed the policies for remediation, retention, and assessment that exist today, particularly in my fields of literacy, composition, and rhetoric (LCR).⁴ I read the writing of Black activists in desegregation who traced white supremacy in the institutional language of race neutrality and meritocracy. But, I realized, their most transformational demands—for a redesigned admissions process, for Black-centered courses, for a new core curriculum, for Black leadership, for grading and assessment—went unrealized. Nothing would stop universities or myself from reproducing racism if these institutional transformations were never to take place. Nothing will happen if we keep failing to remedy the past.

My concerns crystallized one fall when I went to teach my first class of English Learning Support, the USG's newest iteration of remedial writing for students, and I walked into a class of twelve students, nearly all of whom were students of color and a majority of whom were Black. This English Learning Support course was part of a USG initiative in partnership with Complete College Georgia (CCG). CCG (2019) asserts that redesigning learning support contributes to “removing common barriers for minority . . . students” by allowing students who placed into remediation to bypass the older non-credit-bearing three-credit-hour remedial writing courses required by the USG since desegregation. Learning Support was redesigned as a “co-requisite” course, meaning students must take it at the same time as a regular first-year composition class, allowing them to earn first-year composition credit immediately during their first term of college. I helped design the co-requisite English Learning Support class at Armstrong my first year as an assistant professor. At that time, I was swayed by arguments in basic writing scholarship that co-requisite support was more equitable, particularly if it eliminated conventional grades and provided a space for students to question writing conventions (Grego and Thompson 2007; Adams et al. 2009). I also helped administrators set an English Placement Index, a calculation used by the state for placement into learning support, which considered SAT or ACT scores, high school GPA, and Accuplacer writing test scores. Based on our enrollment data and admissions requirements, we agreed to set the score slightly higher than the minimum so we would be able to run a full section of the learning support course to better facilitate

student interaction. It was a pragmatic, race-neutral decision. I felt I had helped create a course that our university system data showed eliminated a curricular obstacle for students and improved pass rates, particularly for Black students (Denley 2017). In reality, I had conflated improvement with justice and allowed myself to be satisfied with pedagogical changes rather than the harder work of institutional transformation.

Walking into a predominantly Black classroom on an HWCU campus as a visibly white, middle-class, able-bodied, straight woman, ostensibly there to remediate students' literacy "deficiencies," profoundly underscored for me the ways I was reproducing a racist educational history through literacy norms. After all, I am a third-generation college student who largely benefited from my parents' and grandparents' access to flagship state HWCUs and whose career trajectory was shaped by a line of white women writing instructors who told me I was a "good writer" and encouraged me to study English and go to graduate school. This classroom reproduced literacy norms defined during segregation, which manifest in racial disparities in writing placement, or "disparate impact," where conventional placement criteria disproportionately place students of color in remediation (Poe and Cogan 2016; Poe et al. 2014). I had viewed myself as transforming an older system, but co-requisite learning support merely lowered the credit hours and changed the timing of remediation without addressing the history of using literacy remediation to avoid more comprehensive anti-racist curricular reform. The state's guidelines still cast literacy in terms of deficit, stating that co-requisite courses must "strengthen both reading and writing competencies in which [students] have deficiencies" (University System of Georgia 2019, 30–31). If students performed better with less basic writing, were their writing deficiencies really the problem? Shouldn't we be questioning the entire structure of our required core writing courses? Shouldn't we be talking about how the same literacy standards that produce faculty like me reproduce the racist dynamics of (de)segregated educational spaces?

Furthermore, I realized that what involved only a dozen students at my university might involve a larger number of students at an access institution. Disparate impact reinforces institutional racism by placing the burden for remedial credit hours on the state's least selective institutions, where Black and Latinx students are disproportionately enrolled (Carnevale et al. 2018). Complete College America (2017) recommends that states assign funding based on institutions' retention rates for underrepresented and minoritized student groups. While one could argue that this directive allows states to direct funds to institutions with

low retention rates, in reality, it typically penalizes attrition by removing resources, worsening the tendency for less selective institutions to have fewer resources to support student retention and contributing to higher attrition rates for Black and Latinx students (Jones 2017; Bombardieri 2019; Carnevale et al. 2018). This funding practice does not empower programs to hire secure faculty, reduce course caps and teaching loads, or develop more valid (but labor-intensive) placement or assessment practices—practices that contribute to retention but are typically sidelined in administrative decisions. These programs fail students by attributing racial disparities to students’ deficiencies and placing students in a system largely taught by non-tenure-line faculty, who tend to be the most diverse and least secure faculty (Finkelstein et al. 2016). This system was designed to work against Black students. During desegregation, states, and in some cases the courts, relocated remedial writing primarily to less selective and open-access institutions, arguing that they provided a pathway to Black students attending more selective institutions even as southerners proclaimed “Segregation now, segregation forever” (Harbour 2020; Greene 2008; Sellers Diamond 2008).

I am not arguing against student support services or literacy instruction in college; I am arguing for changes to curriculum, policies, and assumptions about students and literacy formed in opposition to desegregation. Policy change requires negotiation with multiple stakeholders, particularly in a centralized university system like mine that mandates writing curricula across its institutions. And many stakeholders lack the historical knowledge to identify racist policies—something I know from personal experience. Using this knowledge myself has only resulted in limited success. For example, I worked with the center in charge of our university’s Learning Support program to discontinue using SAT scores in placement. But I have had less success convincing them to implement directed self-placement, as recommended in scholarship and, I will show, by desegregation activists, or to share data supposedly showing that students with low Accuplacer scores would fail first-year composition without learning support. My efforts to explain how first-year composition hiring policies create instability and higher turnover for faculty of color have been met mostly with inaction or justifications of race-evasive policies.⁵ And in 2019, much of my work had to be restarted from scratch, negotiated with new parties in chaos, when Armstrong was merged with Georgia Southern University—a “white flight” college for many white Armstrong students in the 1970s. This book is my attempt to detail a usable history of the racism in everyday institutional practices. It’s a deeply personal project since I, my parents, and my grandfather all

earned college degrees from HWCUs in the USG. My family history is intertwined with its history of segregation and desegregation in this university system. As Sara Ahmed (2012, 182, original emphasis) writes, “We need feminist and antiracist critique because we need to understand how it is that the world takes shape by restricting the forms in which we gather. The time for this is now. We need this critique now if we are to learn *how not to reproduce what we inherit*.” It is imperative for white faculty like myself to investigate how *we have reproduced* a racist system, to hold ourselves accountable for our failures, and to leverage our resources to advocate for change.

LITERACY AND HIGHER EDUCATION DESEGREGATION

Desegregation State argues that literacy requirements for admission, placement, retention, and graduation developed in opposition to the monitoring and enforcement of postsecondary desegregation in HWCUs and white-controlled university systems. This book contributes to existing studies of postsecondary desegregation by illuminating a period typically overlooked. Scholars have detailed desegregation from the 1930s through the 1960s, accomplished through the legal activism of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People’s (NAACP) Legal Defense Fund (LDF), the protests of Black students on college campuses, and the eventual defeat of the last, often violent holdouts for segregation in the South (Williamson-Lott 2018; Wallenstein 2008). Beginning in the 1930s, desegregation litigation attempted to upset the presumption of white superiority in white social spaces, resulting in the legal end to segregation in *Brown*. By the second half of the 1960s, even the most resistant state-funded HWCUs admitted Black students, threatened with the loss of federal funding after the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Higher Education Act (Williamson-Lott 2018). But histories skip over the period between the tremendous progress of civil rights activists in the 1960s and the rollback of civil rights in the 1980s. What happened in the 1970s when the federal government began enforcing postsecondary desegregation was critical, as explicitly segregationist arguments against admitting Black students to HWCUs transformed into race-evasive justifications of ongoing segregation.

Federal desegregation enforcement gave states control over desegregation plans. Much to the LDF’s frustration, states consistently attributed ongoing patterns of segregation to Black students’ supposed lack of preparation for college and inability to acclimate to the academic

“standards” of HWCUs. Remediation became a central focus of desegregation, based on the theory that Black students would be unsuccessful in HWCUs without it. Social scientific theories of cultural and linguistic deprivation in the 1960s and neoconservative policies in the 1970s and 1980s explained illiteracy, poverty, and protests among African Americans as a product of a deprived culture rather than racism (Raz 2013; Omi and Winant 2015; Smitherman 1977). Academic and political discourse claimed that the cultural norms of whites, particularly with respect to literacy conventions, were superior academic “standards.” Writing programs, including writing centers and writing across the curriculum (WAC), were formed to remediate literacy skills, particularly dialect but also logic, organization, clarity, and punctuation—all racialized features of language. These programs expanded to support the labor-intensive work of testing and remediating students to determine whether they could enter or exit college, adding extensive and unrewarded work for writing programs at HBCUs that has affected their visibility in LCR scholarship (Jackson and Jackson 2016; Daniel 2016; Ford 2016; Fulford 2019; Lockett and RudeWalker 2016; Coupet 2017; Jackson et al. 2019).

The USG centralized its writing program policies in its desegregation plan. One of ten states cited in 1969 for ongoing postsecondary segregation, Georgia has a single university system for public colleges and universities that has operated since 1931 (“Overseeing” 2021). The USG is governed by a Board of Regents, which oversees the state’s public colleges and universities and whose members are appointed by the state’s governor to a seven-year term (2021). As a national example of the challenges of desegregating nearby Black and white colleges, Savannah State and Armstrong showcase the ways desegregation policies contributed to systemic disparities between HBCUs and HWCUs—particularly in the case of literacy policies—with disparate impact on the placement, retention, and graduation of Black students. In chapter 1, I describe how the social scientific theory of cultural deprivation redefined desegregation as remediation, prompting pilots of remedial writing programs and literacy tests in Georgia during the late 1960s and early 1970s. In chapter 2, I explain how Georgia’s 1974 desegregation plan described remediation as a retention strategy, echoing national discourses. The plan expanded remediation at Savannah’s two colleges, disparately impacting the growth of Armstrong and Savannah State. In the third chapter, I examine how Armstrong and Savannah State constituents negotiated a desegregation plan, with Armstrong asserting literacy standards to argue for preserving its white identity. In chapter 4, I show how the USG’s

mandated literacy competency test, the Regents' Test, harmed Savannah State, resulting in additional citations against the state by the OCR. With support from the Reagan administration, the USG responded to these citations by requiring its Black colleges to offer additional writing remediation, under surveillance by the state. In the coda, I discuss post-secondary desegregation after the 1990s, arguing that postsecondary desegregation literacy policies are a vestige of segregation that warrants anti-racist program and policy development.

LITERACY, RACE, AND RACIALIZED INSTITUTIONAL SPACES

Literacy policies are sites of power contest because in the United States, literacy is viewed as a possession that contributes to socioeconomic advancement (Pritchard 2017; Brandt 2001; Graff 1991). While typically defined as “discrete linguistic and scribal skills,” literacy is an interpretive practice inextricable from social context and identity, including race (Brandt 2001, 3). I define race as a sociohistorical construct that shapes people’s self- and perceived identification, which has influenced law, policy, and the systems for distributing resources and assigning worth in the United States and globally through a history of racist belief (Bonilla-Silva 2006; Omi and Winant 2015; Mills 1997). Given literacy’s perceived social power, whites have historically controlled literacy norms and education since slavery by defining literacy as “white property,” a resource legislated and evaluated by whites (Prendergast 2003). However, African Americans have used literacy for social change and empowerment and to resist requirements employed to block access to literacy learning, voting booths, schools, and other resources (Royster 2000; Moss 2003; Richardson 2003, 2004; Banks 2006; Lathan 2015; Pritchard 2017; Epps-Robertson 2018). Black literacy practices, Elaine Richardson (2003, 16) explains, developed a tradition of “vernacular resistance arts and cultural productions that are created to carve out free spaces in oppressive locations.” Seeking to suppress Black social advancement, whites have historically asserted the superiority of white “literacy standards” to diminish, exclude, or penalize Black literacy traditions.

Literacy norms work in tandem with what April Baker-Bell (2020) calls White Mainstream English, the linguistic and rhetorical practices culturally associated with whites, often called Standard English. White Mainstream English is taught in schools as the path to socioeconomic mobility, presuming that whites will occupy positions of social power and that Black students who assimilate to white literacy norms will have equal opportunities. This anti-Black linguistic racism, as Baker-Bell (2020) calls

it, labels Black ways of speaking and writing as unfit for professional advancement, yet it masquerades as a race-neutral “standard” equally applied to everyone despite well-established links among culture, race, and language. This is not to say that white or Black language practices are fixed or homogeneous. Differences within racial groups exist across regions, ethnicities, and different class, gender, and sexual identities. However, linguistic racism means that divergences from linguistic and rhetorical norms are racially marked by listeners and readers and differently understood and disparately evaluated because of that racialized identity (Pritchard 2017; Johnson and VanBrackle 2012; Lindsey and Crusan 2011; Davila 2016, 2017). For example, whites rarely use Standard English consistently, but their language practices are typically considered normal and standard, with deviations or “errors” more likely to be overlooked or rated as less severe (Johnson and VanBrackle 2012; Ball 1997).

Scholars today argue that race-evasive literacy instruction perpetuates anti-Black linguistic racism (Pimentel et al. 2017; Comfort et al. 2003; Richardson 2003; Ball and Lardner 2005; Lockett 2019; Baker-Bell 2020). As sociologist Edward Bonilla-Silva (2006) explains, race-neutral practices leave racist ideologies and institutional structures in place, perpetuating racism through race-evasiveness in the absence of explicit racist intent. Race-evasive views of literacy may take note of race, as the National Assessment of Educational Progress does when it reports that Black students perform lower than other racial groups on writing assessments, but they present racial disparities as a result of deficient literacy skills rather than anti-Black linguistic racism (National Center for Education Statistics 2011). Rather than dismantling anti-Black linguistic racism for its role in racism in housing access, hiring, criminal justice, and policing (Victorelli 2019; Baker-Bell 2020), proponents of “literacy standards” suggest that “better” education or remediation will result in parity. Writing assessments penalize Black students for dialect, stylistic conventions, or organizational strategies, depending on the assessment construct; and features of Black English are treated more harshly than writing features associated with other racial groups (White and Thomas 1981; Kynard 2008; Inoue 2015; Poe et al. 2014; Balester 2012; Fowler and Ochsner 2012; Johnson and VanBrackle 2012; Ball 1997). In contrast, studies demonstrate that teaching about Black literacy practices and anti-Black linguistic racism can improve students’ rhetorical and language awareness—the foundational concepts in learning to write for diverse purposes and situations (Ball 1993; Smitherman 1993; Richardson 2003; Redd 1992, 1993; Redd and Webb 2005; Ampadu 2007; Stone and Stewart 2016; Perryman-Clark and Craig 2019a; Lockett et al. 2019).

Examining the intersection of race, literacy, and educational policy contributes to emerging scholarship on the racialization of higher education. In 1997, Charles W. Mills argued that racism is perpetuated by tacit agreement to a “white racial contract” that has justified colonization, slavery, segregation, and economic exploitation by defining white spaces, worldviews, and people as superior—biologically, cognitively, or culturally. The racial contract governs who is seen as belonging where and whether they are granted full personhood by the policies and laws governing that space. This theory explains how institutional spaces, such as colleges and universities, are racialized based on their student demographics and segregated histories, marking HWCUs as normal and Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) as raced. Gina Ann Garcia (2019) argues that the racialization of institutions devalues and under-resources MSIs. Diane Lynn Gusa (2010) argues that HWCUs privilege white worldviews on academic achievement, resulting in a “white institutional presence” that contributes to the attrition of students and faculty of color. Others demonstrate that the racialization of colleges informs institutional rankings, funding policies, program evaluations, the distribution of resources for faculty and students, and media and community representations of institutions (Wooten 2015; Coupet 2017; Hill 2012; Fulford 2019; Daniel 2016; Spencer-Maor and Randolph 2016; Kirklighter et al. 2007; Newman 2007; Millward et al. 2007). The racialization of higher education also impedes efforts to create inclusive HWCUs. Sylvia Hurtado and colleagues (1998, 285) found that HWCUs’ diversity initiatives are undermined by failing to acknowledge exclusionary histories and ignoring “embedded benefits” for white students on campus, focusing instead on interpersonal harmony among students.

Given the ideological role of literacy in higher education, diversity and inclusion projects often intersect with the work of writing programs and writing program administrators (WPAs) like myself. Whether directing first-year composition, basic writing, WAC, or writing centers, WPAs participate in admission, retention, and graduation initiatives. Writing is considered a high-impact practice, promoting retention, and a “gateway” skill often believed to predict success in later courses. (Though, since students are required to pass first-year composition before taking many other courses, this prediction itself may be a tautology.) Without historical knowledge of racism and literacy, such initiatives can exclude students, forward ineffective models for literacy learning, and exacerbate racial and institutional inequalities. While HWCUs certainly have a history of racism to examine, this work may also be useful for HBCUs in explaining the effects of constraints imposed by white trustees and

accreditation systems or desegregation policies that mandated they recruit more white faculty and students. To develop racially just programs and policies, we need to understand the harm done by desegregation policies premised on anti-Black linguistic racism.

SEGREGATION AND DESEGREGATION IN THE HISTORY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Thus far, I have used the terms *segregation* and *desegregation* as if they are self-explanatory, but that is far from the case. Defining *desegregation* in higher education is challenging, given student choice; institutional selectivity; and distinctions between private, for-profit, and state-funded (or public) institutions. Legal and education scholarship debates whether desegregation has been achieved or whether it can be achieved through law and the courts (Wilson 1994; Maples 2014; Wooten 2015). As M. Christopher Brown (1999, xviii) has observed, “Higher education is still without a prevailing legal standard that clearly articulates what it means for postsecondary education to be desegregated or to have dismantled dual educational structures.” The history of resistance to desegregation is critical to understanding higher education today.

Defining the Terms of Desegregation

Histories of postsecondary desegregation focus on the first Black students who enrolled in all-white southern universities in the 1950s and 1960s, after the decision in *Brown* (1954) made segregation illegal. These first admissions were largely the result of court order after Black applicants were rejected, and in many cases, they were met with violence or protest through the 1960s (Wallenstein 2015). Peter Wallenstein (2015, 19) calls these cases “proto-desegregation,” the first steps of “a process, a series of steps, not something that happened all at once.” James T. Minor (2008, 863) defines desegregation as “dismantling infrastructure in public institutions that intentionally separates individuals on the basis of race, with the goal of ensuring the fair and equal treatment of every citizen regardless of ethnicity, sex, religion, or national origin.” Desegregation is different than integration, or the individual choice to attend an institution in which a student is a racial minority (863). The process of desegregation involved what I call “desegregation enforcement,” or monitoring of formerly segregated states by HEW under the 1964 Civil Rights Act. This monitoring had to be enforced by the courts, beginning in the 1970s when HEW

failed to de-fund segregated university systems and was sued by the LDF in a series of cases called the *Adams* cases, beginning with *Adams v. Richardson* (1973).

Segregation, or the enforced separation of individuals by race, exists in two kinds: segregation as a legal practice (de jure segregation, or segregation by law) or a pattern of enrollment attributable to white supremacy (de facto segregation, or segregation in practice, literally by fact). De jure segregation was ruled illegal in *Brown*, and Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act sought to enforce *Brown* by mandating that the federal government de-fund any institution discriminating on the basis of race. However, given resistance to desegregation, de facto segregation has persisted, most markedly in states that had segregation laws.⁶ Laura W. Perna and colleagues (2006) found that enrollment and graduation rates are inequitable in most of the states involved in the *Adams* litigation. Further, these results are stratified across institutional tiers (that is, institutional level, based on selectivity of admissions), with Black students having the most inequitable outcomes in four-year HWCUs and public flagship institutions. Edwin H. Litolff III (2007) examined patterns of segregation, finding that resegregation has occurred since the 1990s and is worse in *Adams* states. In examining Mississippi and North Carolina, Minor (2008) found evidence of a “segregation residual” in enrollment patterns, attributable to desegregation-related admissions policies, transfer agreements, and decisions about where to place new academic programs.

Today, de facto segregation continues nationally and affects student outcomes. The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce reported in 2013 and 2018 that the distribution of funding, admissions requirements, and institutional selectivity contribute to disparities in the enrollment and graduation rates of Black and Latinx students (Carnevale and Strohl 2013; Carnevale et al. 2018). Anthony P. Carnevale and colleagues (2018) found that whites are overrepresented in selective public institutions and have higher retention and graduation rates than Black and Latinx students. They attribute these trends to increasingly selective admissions processes. While racial disparities in SAT test scores contribute to segregation to some extent, there are enough Black and Latinx students with above-average test scores to have proportional representation in selective institutions. Furthermore, students with lower SAT scores have higher retention rates at selective universities, which provide greater funding for instruction and student support, suggesting that institutional resources and system funding practices matter.

Segregation in the History of US Higher Education

Existing patterns of segregation are connected to the history of segregation and resistance to desegregation. Early American colleges were primarily accessible to white men and supportive of slavery and segregation (Wilder 2013; Karabel 2006). African Americans attended and graduated from HWCUs as early as 1799, when John Chavis attended Washington and Lee University, and 1823, when Alexander Lucius Twilight graduated from Middlebury College with a bachelor's degree ("Key Events" 2020). The first postsecondary institutions to offer widespread admission to Black students, Black colleges founded during the mid-nineteenth century⁷ were mostly controlled by whites, particularly abolitionists and religiously affiliated groups, through the early twentieth century (Rogers 2012). Whites sought to control Black colleges, either as vehicles to emigrate educated Black people to Africa or as white abolitionist colleges teaching assimilationist curricula (Rogers 2012; Royster and Williams 1999). By 1870, around thirty colleges and universities were open to Black students (Smith 2016). Some were integrated institutions founded during Reconstruction by the American Missionary Association, which believed that re-educating whites through the co-education of Black and white students could eliminate racism (2016).⁸ However, early efforts at postsecondary integration fizzled out by the early twentieth century as segregation was codified in southern states and enforced through law, funding practices, or the dictates of external stakeholders, such as the American Medical Association (Smith 2016; Rogers 2012). During this time, competition for prestige among institutions and emerging ranking systems produced a racialized and stratified postsecondary system that discouraged early integration efforts (Smith 2016, 12).

From 1890 to 1935, higher education was segregated by law in seventeen southern states and mostly segregated by practice throughout the United States (Wallenstein 2008). Wallenstein (2015) argues that segregated HWCUs were specifically anti-Black colleges, having the strongest opposition to the enrollment of Black students while allowing limited enrollment of Jewish, Asian, Latinx, and Indigenous students. The federal government subsidized segregation under the 1890 Morrill Land Grant Act, which conditioned funding for land grant institutions in legally segregated states on the establishment of separate Black colleges (Chun and Feagin 2022, 8). The land and funding for land grant institutions came from the seizure and sale of Indigenous peoples' lands (6). State-funded Black colleges were often restricted to vocational or agricultural curricula, although some, including Savannah State, resisted

and offered liberal arts programs (Wooten 2015; Brooks 2014). Many Black colleges were white-controlled (Rogers 2012). Although technically the 1890 Morrill Act prohibited the neglect of Black colleges, states routinely underfunded them without repercussions (Wooten 2015). However, starting around World War I, Black activists pushed for more control over Black colleges' leadership, faculty, and curricula; a surge in the enrollment of Black women happened during this period, with women constituting the majority of Black college graduates by 1940 (Rogers 2012, 21).

Despite growth, Black colleges were disadvantaged within a system measured by white norms. In the early twentieth century, accreditation agencies like the Southern Association for Colleges and Schools (SACS) were segregated (Williamson-Lott 2018). When they began to accredit Black colleges, their criteria were based on white colleges, resulting in some cases in the denial of accreditation or the use of a separate evaluation scale (Wooten 2015; Fester et al. 2012).⁹ Black colleges were also disadvantaged by the GI Bill, which provided funding for veterans to attend college, under the administration of the Veteran's Administration (VA) (Herbold 1994–1995). While granting VA claims to white veterans, like my grandfather, the VA denied claims for Black veterans to attend HWCUs, and under-resourced HBCUs could not accommodate all Black applicants. Hilary Herbold (108) estimates that at least 20,000 Black veterans were unable to use GI funds at Black colleges. As Melissa E. Wooten (2015, 2) explains, “The racial dynamics of the United States that relegated black Americans to a subordinate class did the same to the organizations that sought to serve this community, making it difficult for black colleges to succeed in the areas that critics now use to judge their relevance.” Limited funding, restricted curricula, and exclusion from policy formation contributed to stereotypes of Black colleges as inferior to white colleges.

Resistance to Desegregation Post-Brown

Higher education was an early battleground for ending legal segregation, as the LDF targeted graduate programs at HWCUs, which clearly violated the “equal” requirement in “separate but equal” (Brown 2004). As early as 1935, some states allowed white colleges to admit a few Black students and to invest in upgrading Black colleges to prevent litigation (Wallenstein 2015). In 1938, the LDF won its first case in the US Supreme Court against the University of Missouri School of Law (Williamson-Lott 2018). By the time of *Brown*, only five states remained

completely segregated: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, and Mississippi (Wallenstein 2008).¹⁰ Along with other Deep South states, Georgia's stance toward desegregation in the 1950s was characterized by "unyielding resistance" (Wright 1955, 4). Georgia's state legislature issued resolutions in favor of revoking the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth constitutional amendments and impeaching Supreme Court justices (Anderson 2016, 79). In 1954, Georgia adopted a constitutional amendment that allowed the state to direct money to individuals for private education ("Questions" 1954). Expressing fear that desegregation would lead to interracial marriage, some legislators proposed sex-segregated schools (Cook 1955). The Georgia Board of Education banned all teachers affiliated with the NAACP in an effort to oust Black teachers from white schools (n.a. 1955). State officials were willing to publicly resist desegregation through the 1950s and early 1960s. It was not until 1961 that the first Black students were admitted to Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech) and the University of Georgia (UGA), under court order at the latter (Pratt 2002).

After *Brown*, many southern states tried violence and resistance. For example, the admission of James Meredith to the University of Mississippi required a court order and the National Guard in 1962 (Wallenstein 2008). Court orders were required for the next two Black students admitted after Meredith, one of whom was later expelled (Wallenstein 2015). In 1963, Mississippi set a minimum ACT score requirement of 15 at its three flagship HWCUs—more than twice the average score of Black students at the time—against the ACT's own recommendation not to rely solely on test scores for admissions decisions (*United States v. Fordice* 1992). Other admissions requirements were used to prevent desegregation. For example, the USG passed a resolution in 1958 that required college applicants to submit proof of "good moral character" and "good reputation in the community," evidence of which included two alumni letters of recommendation or a certificate from a superior court judge (Armstrong College 1960, 11).¹¹ A law also formally restricted admission to students under the age of twenty-one, unless the student had served in the military or had proof of "ability and fitness" (General Assembly 1959, 20). Even after Georgia Tech had admitted its first students, the university was accused of using entrance exam scores to reject Black students ("7 of 8" 1961). By 1964, 64 percent of HWCUs in the South were still segregated (Minchin and Salmond 2011, 45). Further complicating this problem, white university systems began to establish or expand HWCUs in close proximity to Black colleges in the 1960s and through the 1970s, exacerbating segregation.¹² Armstrong, for example,

was added to the university system, made a four-year college, and moved to a larger campus between 1959 and 1966 (Stone 2010).

Recognizing ongoing opposition to desegregation, the 1964 Civil Rights Act sought to enforce *Brown*, with Title VI requiring all institutions receiving federal funding to practice nondiscriminatory admissions. By this time, however, segregationist leaders in the states and higher education systems had implemented race-evasive policies that limited the scale of Black student admissions to HWCUs and placed programs that allowed for surveillance and remediation throughout curricula (Wooten 2015). ACT admissions requirements in Mississippi were defended through the 1980s as an effort “to redress the problem of student unpreparedness” (*United States v. Fordice* 1992). In contrast, Louisiana and Tennessee operated open admissions programs but adopted remediation requirements for enrollment or literacy competency tests and remained largely segregated (Greene 2008). These race-evasive policies were challenging to overturn because proponents justified them as upholding academic standards.

Resistance to desegregation caused overall Black college enrollment to remain low through the 1960s, both in the South and throughout the United States.¹³ Reports by scholars and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) on Black postsecondary enrollment from this time place it at under 6 percent of total postsecondary enrollment, with more than half of Black students enrolled in Black colleges (Scranton et al. 1970; Hill 1985; Snyder et al. 2016). The 1965 Higher Education Act sought to improve resources to Black colleges, creating an official HBCU designation. HBCUs became important sites for desegregation activism in the mid-1960s, influenced by the Black Power Movement (Williamson-Lott 2018). Around 10 percent of HBCU students were active in protest movements, despite significant pressure from white trustees at state-funded HBCUs (93). These campus protests motivated the desegregation of HWCUs, but affirmative action and equal opportunity programs often came with remediation requirements (Karabel 2006; Lamos 2011; Kynard 2013).

It was not until the late 1960s that HEW began investigating whether formerly segregated states had adequately desegregated their university systems. In 1969, the OCR, a unit of HEW established to monitor civil rights enforcement,¹⁴ investigated nineteen southern and border states¹⁵ and cited ten of those states for having dual systems of higher education. During this period, many southerners shifted on segregation, as white politicians recognized the formation of a powerful Black voting bloc (Minchin and Salmond 2011; Kruse 2007). For example,

Georgia's investigations began under the term of Governor Lester G. Maddox (1967–1971), who campaigned on his infamy after brandishing weapons at civil rights activists trying to enter his restaurant, the Pickrick (Rice 1988, 196). The USG's desegregation plans, however, were written during the terms of Governors Jimmy Carter and George Busbee, who disavowed segregation to different degrees (Henderson and Roberts 1988). Kevin M. Kruse (2007) argues that southern white resistance to desegregation shifted to accommodate changing social norms into a conservative ideology of “white flight” that recast ongoing segregation as a matter of personal liberty, providing race-evasive justifications for segregationist practices. This ideology upheld claims that postsecondary segregation could be explained away as a product of student choice and meritocracy—individual achievement in academics, particularly in literacy.

Postsecondary Desegregation Goes to Court

In 1970, frustrated with HEW's failure to enforce violations, the LDF sued HEW in the District Court of Washington, DC, in a case known as *Adams v. Richardson* (1973). The court had to rule whether nondiscriminatory policies alone constituted sufficient desegregation when systems remained segregated in practice. For two decades, the courts and the federal government wrestled with this question. Following nearly twenty years of decisions and appeals, *Adams*¹⁶ was dismissed from court in 1990 with the declaration that it was no longer appropriate¹⁷ to bring litigation against the entire Department of Education (DOE)—the newly reorganized branch of HEW created in 1980—and that higher education desegregation must be enforced by district courts in individual states against specific institutions (Brown 1999). This ruling limited the power of the courts in postsecondary desegregation.

From the 1970s through the 1990s, district and appeals courts litigated not only the *Adams* case against HEW but other postsecondary desegregation cases in Tennessee (*Geier v. University of Tennessee* [1979]), Alabama (*Knight v. Alabama* [1991]), Louisiana (*United States v. Louisiana* [1989]), and Mississippi (*Ayers v. Allain* [1987]; *Ayers v. Fordice* [1995, 1997]). After ongoing appeals and little resolution in most of these cases, the US Supreme Court ruled on Mississippi's case, in *United States v. Fordice* (1992). *Fordice* established a precedent for postsecondary desegregation, remanding the monitoring of desegregation plans back to the district courts. The *Fordice* standard stated that a practice traceable to de jure segregation must be examined to determine if that practice

continues to perpetuate segregation; if it does, then the courts must determine whether the practice is educationally justified and if it can be “practicably” eliminated.¹⁸ The court specified areas of concern to examine, including admissions requirements, institutional missions, and the duplication of programs at nearby white and Black colleges.

Limitations of Postsecondary Desegregation Litigation

While *Fordice* did acknowledge that postsecondary desegregation needed its own standard, the ruling created two major problems that are relevant to this book. First, *Fordice* justified remedial education as an educational practice, particularly in Mississippi and Louisiana (Inman 2013; Greene 2008). Remedial programs in reading, writing, and math—even if they disproportionately enrolled Black students—were seen as having “sound educational justification,” and the courts accepted them as necessary for Black student retention in HWCUs, without clear research supporting these claims and even if they limited the number of Black students gaining regular admission (*Ayers v. Fordice* 1997). In Louisiana and Tennessee, statewide open admissions programs that had been implemented in the 1960s were dismantled in favor of selective admissions and the relocation of remedial coursework to community colleges or lower-tier institutions (Greene 2008; *Geier v. University of Tennessee* 1979). Second, *Fordice* refused one of the many demands made by Black plaintiffs—the upgrading of HBCUs—arguing that enhancing HBCUs would constitute the creation of a “separate, but ‘more equal’” dual system (*United States v. Fordice* 1992).

Scholars across disciplines argue that ambivalent desegregation outcomes contribute to racial injustice today. Ryan Tacorda (2003) argues that desegregation was limited by a reductive definition of the “vestiges of segregation”—a phrase intended to allow courts to redress racial injustices but subsequently used to limit intervention by requiring a direct link between a de facto policy and de jure segregation. Tacorda (2003, 1573) defines vestiges of segregation as any “phenomenon whose ‘cultural meaning’ provides evidence of unconscious discrimination that may not be observed directly but that is regarded with racial significance by society generally.” This definition allows us to consider policies premised on anti-Black linguistic racism as vestiges of segregation, specifically the view that Black language and rhetorical practices are unfit for academic or professional use and that Black students need literacy remediation. While I do not pretend to make a legal argument here, my use of the term is intended as a heuristic for identifying histories of

racism that explain racist biases and racial disparities in higher education today.

Three critiques of desegregation provide a theoretical basis for understanding the role of literacy in impeding desegregation and contributing to ongoing vestiges of segregation in LCR. First, desegregation was limited by the failure of the courts to allow for race-conscious policies, that is, policies that acknowledge and seek to remedy the social reality of racism. Many scholars have discussed this problem, including Gloria Ladson-Billings and William F. Tate IV (1995), M. Christopher Brown (1999), Jerome Karabel (2006), Shaun R. Harper and colleagues (2009), and Anthony P. Carnevale and Jeff Strohl (2013). Early race-conscious policies were undermined almost immediately. Affirmative action rulings since *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (1978) have limited consideration of race to the goal of achieving “diversity” rather than remedying racial injustice, dismantling the processes put in place to desegregate universities that acknowledged the racism Black applicants experience throughout the admission process (Karabel 2006; Olivas 2013). Similarly, *Fordice* did not support the enhancement or institutional upgrading of HBCUs. Race-evasive policies increasingly encouraged writing programs to eliminate race-conscious writing instruction, which made remedying racial disparities an explicit part of the pedagogy or placement and assessment processes (Lamos 2011). As I will show in this book, LCR scholarship and desegregation policies justified race-evasive writing program curricula and policies by arguing that race-conscious policies would promote segregation and disempower Black students, turning the language of civil rights against itself.

Second, desegregation rulings focused too narrowly on integration in student enrollment. Charles M. Payne (2004, 85) argues that desegregation rulings have been limited since *Brown* by defining racism as an interpersonal problem, that is, a matter of how individuals feel about one another, rather than a means of social and political exclusion. Tate and colleagues (1993) describe how interpersonal solutions to desegregation resulted in plans designed to increase interactions between racial groups in educational spaces. A key feature of these plans, they explain, was a focus on “physically manipulating the students’ school placement,” a practice they describe as a “mathematical solution to a socio-cultural problem” (259–260). In other words, desegregation became about the student demographics of a school or college rather than the transformation of racist institutional structures. As Carmen Kynard (2013, 152) explains, this focus on “shifting demographics” avoided “the more ambiguous questions that racial and educational justice demand:

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What will we do with existing structures of oppression in which the participation of ‘new minorities’ will take place? Should participation have a transformative bent? What counts as transformative participation and who defines it?”

One example of how this “mathematical” approach undercut desegregation is the “program swap” between Armstrong and Savannah State described in chapters 3 and 4, which exchanged students and faculty from two high-enrollment degree programs. Teacher education went to Armstrong and was not offered at Savannah State; business went to Savannah State and was not offered at Armstrong. This approach literally transferred students of one race to the college of another race, and the decision was rooted in a claim that Armstrong had a superior teacher education program based on standardized test scores. In failing to address anti-Black linguistic racism, this plan reinforced concern about declining literacy at Armstrong that fed into an early WAC program designed to encourage all faculty to grade student writing. The repeated refrain of upholding literacy standards at Armstrong justified more literacy testing, writing assignments, and course requirements that established barriers to graduation for Black students.

A third critique of desegregation solutions is that they failed to account for ongoing anti-Blackness in education. According to Tacorda (2003, 1571), courts have failed to define academic disparities as vestiges even when plaintiffs have presented strong evidence that achievement disparities stem not from cultural or cognitive deficiencies but from teacher bias, low expectations for Black students, or disparities in Black and white schools’ resources. *Brown* and other desegregation litigation perpetuated the idea that segregation left African Americans culturally deprived and educationally deficient, when many civil rights activists argued that segregation perpetuated belief in white superiority (Bell 2005; Crenshaw 1988; Prendergast 2003). Some historical scholarship in LCR has suggested that early basic writing programs at white colleges were “race-conscious” and promoted what critical race theorist Derrick A. Bell Jr. (2005) calls “interest convergence,” racial progress accomplished when white interests align with Black activism (Lamos 2011). However, Bell (2005, 1066) argues that interest convergence cannot operate on *deficit* theories based on “the assumptions of white dominance and the presumptions of black incompetence.” As I show in this book, deficit theories were pervasive in desegregation policies. Plaintiffs, such as those in Alabama’s desegregation case, *Knight v. Alabama* (1991), were generally unsuccessful in arguing that “whites’ underexpectations of blacks are precisely the attitudes of white superiority and black

subordination” that perpetuated segregation. Blaming Black students’ literacy deficiencies for ongoing segregation remained an acceptable defense in many states.

Finally, desegregation did not center HBCUs in the ways civil rights activists wanted. Wooten (2015) explains that the courts fundamentally misunderstood the rationale behind postsecondary desegregation litigation. Plaintiffs and other invested parties primarily wanted states to redress decades of funding and status disparities at Black colleges.¹⁹ Without funding to improve facilities and programs and provide resources for students, Black colleges could not counteract the discriminatory attitudes white students had about attending Black colleges or about students coming from Black colleges. Instead, whites used academic standards to control the desegregation process. For example, Aldon Morris and colleagues (1994, 67), describing their experiences as witnesses in Alabama’s desegregation case, state that Alabama justified its refusal to upgrade its HBCUs by claiming that “the top [HWCUs] earned their superior missions and deserve the prestige and resources they command,” while “the missions of the two [HBCUs] should not be enhanced to flagship status because such enhancement would be educationally unwise and economically detrimental.” Such arguments demonstrate the extent to which white self-interest maintained institutional identities despite desegregation (Tate, Ladson-Billings, and Grant 1993). As I show in chapter 3 of this book, fear of declining “literacy standards” was used to benefit HWCUs. Armstrong and the USG insisted that desegregation policies apply equally to white and Black colleges, requiring both Savannah colleges to set equal admissions standards and resulting in an over-enrolled and under-resourced Special Studies Department at Savannah State. In LCR, recent calls to center HBCU writing programs recognize that this history erased scholars from the field (Cheremie 2004; Spencer-Maor and Randolph 2016; Lockett and RudeWalker 2016; Ford 2016; Royster and Williams 1999; Kynard and Eddy 2009; Green 2016).

As I hope to show in this book, these critiques of desegregation can be illuminated by understanding how anti-Black linguistic racism became ingrained in the policies for writing programs that developed during desegregation. This analysis complements existing or proposed methods of examining or remedying racial injustices in LCR (Poe et al. 2014; Poe and Cogan 2016; Inoue 2015; Condon and Young 2017; Ruiz 2016; García de Müeller and Ruiz 2017; Clary-Lemon 2009; Gilyard and Banks 2018; Richardson 2003; Moss 2003; Villanueva 2006), including support for historical work designed to examine racial injustice (Inoue

2009; Hammond 2018; Lathan 2015; Epps-Robertson 2018; Kynard 2013). Scholars also call for articulating anti-racist practices for writing program administration (García de Müller and Ruiz 2017; Perryman-Clark and Craig 2019b; Craig and Perryman-Clark 2011; Craig 2016; Green 2016). This work is vital given research showing that white WPAs continue to associate Black students with basic writing and lack direction for racial justice initiatives in writing programs (García de Müller and Ruiz 2017; Perryman-Clark 2016). Institutional history can help WPAs and other faculty and administrators identify and dismantle pedagogies, policies, and programs that perpetuate anti-Black linguistic racism. While insufficient on its own, this analysis may provide a useful starting point for WPA activism, such as revising race-evasive policies, dismantling deficiency theories of literacy, developing race-conscious pedagogies, and transforming the rhetoric used to promote writing programs.

REVISING THE HISTORY OF DESEGREGATION IN LCR

LCR historians have already contributed to an understanding of postsecondary desegregation as an influential force in writing program development. Kynard (2013) provides an excellent history of the role HBCUs, the Black Power Movement, and the Black Arts Movement played in LCR during desegregation. Steve Lamos (2011) describes efforts to desegregate the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, which established basic writing as part of equal opportunity programs. Other histories of basic writing describe the role of desegregation in open admissions at the City University of New York (CUNY) (Horner and Lu 1999; Soliday 2002). However, only two article-length works on desegregation enforcement in the South currently exist in LCR history. Here, I review their findings to explain common themes and current limitations in histories of postsecondary desegregation, and I argue for a revision of this history grounded in the multidisciplinary critique of desegregation litigation reviewed above.

Rethinking Representations of Access in Desegregation

Nicole Pepinster Greene (2008) describes how desegregation litigation led to a statewide open admissions policy and the founding of basic writing in the 1950s at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette (ULL), a white college. Although most southern states did not implement statewide open admissions, Greene's history confirms that desegregation in Louisiana established and grew writing programs, beginning with basic

writing and expanding into a writing lab, university-wide faculty writing workshops led by composition scholars, and retention initiatives for Black students. This growth in writing programs in white colleges during desegregation enforcement mirrors the trends I identify in Georgia.

Although Greene argues that basic writing facilitated desegregation, her description of the program suggests that basic writing did not offer Black students equitable access to ULL. The program employed a pedagogical strategy called “bidialectism”—a term used to describe literacy pedagogies that teach Standard English while also viewing other English dialects as legitimate, grammatical varieties of English.²⁰ Greene (2008, 74, original emphasis) describes how “the new students raised the faculty’s interest in dialects. . . . In the remedial classes faculty encouraged students to use their ‘natural mode of expression’ in journals. These faculty wanted students to be able ‘to communicate in *both* languages’—‘standard’ and ‘nonstandard’ English.” However, “nonstandard” English was only allowed in students’ journals, not in formal essays, presenting dialects deemed nonstandard as inappropriate or inadequate for academic writing—a form of anti-Black linguistic racism as Baker-Bell (2020) defines it. Furthermore, basic writing disproportionately enrolled Black students and failed them at higher rates than whites, information that was hidden from the desegregation enforcement monitoring committee to avoid scrutiny (Greene 2008, 75).

A 1987 review of Louisiana’s progress found that segregation had worsened over the decade, a majority of students failed to graduate in six years, and the state’s HBCUs had high attrition rates. The district court argued that these findings were due to open admissions’ “fail[ure] to organize students by academic ability” (*United States v. Louisiana* 1989). If colleges admitted students on the basis of academic ability, then attrition rates would be lower and colleges would “forc[e] high schools to respond to the preparation challenge” (1989). The court ordered Louisiana to develop a tiered admissions plan, with remedial programs phased out at selective institutions beginning in 1990 (1989). Meanwhile, community colleges were tasked with providing “remedial education of those who might be excluded from the less accessible four-year college system, thereby helping to ensure a racially balanced system” (1989). This ruling cast remediation as an access strategy, while creating new obstacles—in the form of transfer—that displaced responsibility for desegregation onto high schools and community colleges.

I would argue that both Greene and the court misread the role of remediation in addressing racial inequality. For Greene, institutional racism in pedagogy, grading, and desegregation compliance is not

presented as a serious obstacle to access. Instead, the termination of this basic writing structure, as Greene (2008, 93) puts it, “greatly affected the lives of many underprepared students in the area.” In the context of desegregation, this remark codes under-prepared students as Black and remediation as genuine access for under-prepared students. Ironically, the court’s termination of open admissions makes the same assumption, representing attrition solely as an academic preparation issue, even though ULL’s program suggests that institutional racism was prevalent. Even more problematic, the court *still* cast basic writing as the solution, only it removed basic writing from most selective colleges. As critiques of desegregation have explained, focusing on enrollment demographics obscures larger institutional problems. For historians studying desegregation, access must be defined as what Adam J. Banks (2006, 45) calls “transformative access,” which provides African Americans with “genuine inclusion in technologies and the networks of power that help determine what they become, but never merely for the sake of inclusion.” Louisiana’s history suggests that presenting basic writing as access for Black students ignores the system in which access is circumscribed through a racialized and racist system of instruction that allows HWCUs and white faculty to define academic standards and to prioritize their own role in providing access.

Shifting White-Centered Perspectives on Desegregation

Alongside rethinking access, desegregation histories require centering the demands of Black activists and HBCUs to understand how desegregation enforcement undercut transformational access. As I note above, orders to prioritize HBCUs in desegregation remedies were dismissed by whites who demanded “equal” treatment of HBCUs and HWCUs. Any history of desegregation must ask what HBCUs and Black students wanted desegregation to look like. How did their requests seek to dismantle segregationist ideologies about intelligence and cultural deprivation? What compromises were made by these parties? How have those compromises affected writing programs and perceptions of institutions and students?

These questions suggest an addendum to the history of basic writing in Joyce Olewski Inman’s (2013) account of desegregation enforcement in Mississippi after *Ayers v. Fordice* (which went to the Supreme Court as *United States v. Fordice* and was remanded back to the district court for a settlement). As Inman explains, desegregation litigation dismantled open admissions at some colleges and mandated identical

admissions and the formation of a summer remediation program across all Mississippi colleges and universities. She details the ways whites' appeals to race-evasive academic "standards" supported this summer remediation program, which consisted of a screening and Accuplacer testing in the spring and a ten-week summer program in reading, writing, and math—"taught both in traditional classroom settings and through computer-assisted individual components" (*Ayers v. Fordice* 1997). As in Louisiana and Georgia, desegregation enforcement centered on remediation policies, many of which required self-remediation (with computer assistance).

Inman (2013, 299) argues that this new non-credit remedial structure "ghettoize[d]" basic writing. However, there is a tension here in the way basic writing is labeled a ghetto primarily for its separation from the curriculum and not for its work as a remedial writing program. Does the segregation of basic writing from regular college coursework reflect, as Inman (2013, 314) argues, the state "not valu[ing] the educationally underprepared" or the separation of "student demographics perceived to be on the borders of white middle-class America?" Are basic writers demographically "other" in white institutions? Or are they underprepared? There is a real risk of misrepresenting the stakes of segregation when using the term *academic ghetto*, as Alexandria Lockett (2019) explains. Focusing on writing centers, Lockett describes how writing programs in HWCUs function as academic ghettos, spaces designed to "correct" literacy deficiencies by enforcing white mainstream literacy standards. The problem with the academic ghetto, Lockett argues, is not that its inhabitants are deficient but rather that such writing programs seek to assimilate students to white mainstream literacy in spaces physically separated from places of privilege, where inhabitants lack power to control the resources of the space. These two issues have been conflated in disciplinary discourse as HWCU-centered histories reiterate HWCUs' and states' arguments that Black students *need* remediation to access privileged white spaces—spaces where they are rarely granted the power of transformative access.

However, rereading this history to include HBCUs reveals that *Ayers* failed to center HBCU demands. As Inman (2013, 304) mentions, the plaintiffs in the original suit—Black citizens of Mississippi—asked for a desegregation plan that would raise the admissions requirements at HWCUs while making Jackson State University, an HBCU, an open-admissions institution. This request seems to defy representations of basic writing as key to Black students' access at HWCUs—an argument that often leaves basic writing's pedagogy and identity unproblematized.

In fact, plaintiffs pointed out that the summer basic writing program, which had not been tested for educational efficacy, would not simply segregate students; it would actually “significantly reduce the number of black students eligible for regular admission to the university system” (*Ayers v. Fordice* 1997). Furthermore, the plaintiffs argued that the courts failed “to consider the educational soundness of alternative proposals that would have excluded fewer black students” (1997). Although the courts denied the plaintiffs’ request,²¹ their proposal is an example of the ways HBCUs sought to circumvent the state’s control over admissions requirements. The problem is not that a space is demographically other; it is that the demographically other is assumed to be under-prepared for white institutions and therefore is placed into a devalued, assimilationist space.

Forefronting HBCUs’ arguments about admissions requirements in desegregation reminds us that admissions requirements and basic writing have never been neutral tools in desegregation; they have often been at the very center of efforts for HWCUs to maintain white identities and institutional power. While basic writing may segregate students, that segregation is a symptom of a larger structural exclusion rooted in a history of opposition and recalcitrant compliance in desegregation enforcement. HBCUs’ proposals for desegregation reveal that white-controlled admissions requirements and basic writing translated the under-resourcing and racist perceptions of state-funded HBCUs to new spaces designated for remediation in HWCUs. These were not programs designed to transform anti-Black racism in higher education.

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR INSTITUTIONAL CRITIQUE

Desegregation State seeks to revise existing histories of postsecondary desegregation enforcement by employing archival and interview methodologies for the purpose of institutional critique, that is, history with an investment in analyzing institutions to promote change (Lamos 2012a). Institutional critique examines the consequences of the systems that shape our institutions. As Ryan Skinnell (2016, 40) argues, writing program histories need more attention to the ways “non-disciplinary institutional exigencies” shape writing instruction, given that writing instruction has often been conscripted into political or institutional agendas. I see institutional critique as part of David F. Green Jr.’s (2016, 170) recommendation that WPAs use historical research to “invest in alternative composition histories that trouble discriminating attitudes toward

linguistic and social differences” and to use that historical research to inform writing program development.

However, institutional critique does not inherently confront racism if I, as a white researcher, do not confront the role institutional racism plays in my position as researcher and in the composition of and access to historical records. As scholars have noted, LCR histories are prone to exclude or negatively portray Black students and writing programs at HBCUs and to depict white writing instructors and HWCUs as heroes in providing access and opportunity to Black students (Prendergast 1998, 2003; Clary-Lemon 2009; Kynard 2013; Craig 2016). Throughout this research process, I have asked myself why and how these histories reproduce racism, sometimes under the banner of antiracism. I think part of the problem lies in the tendency, or more aptly the desire, of white researchers to view ourselves as operating outside of institutional racism, even when reproducing the very genres and methodologies that emerged from this system. Ahmed (2012, 170) observes that white scholars seek to feel happy with our work, deploying antiracism for the purpose of “generating a positive white identity that makes the white subject feel good” about their scholarship while letting “racism . . . remain the burden of racialized others.” The power of methodology is that it can be described for the purpose of feeling good about our research rather than addressing the limitations of research. Ahmed describes how her work with universities developing diversity plans is inextricable from a racist system, and to ignore that fact would be to gloss over what we can accomplish in these constraints. Here, I outline my methods, the processes I considered in determining those methods, and the limitations of this research.

Ashley Farmer (2018) details the ways archives are informed by whiteness, in terms of who has decided what gets archived and how the “normal” archival researcher is raced. Institutional archives contain records that powerful actors placed there and that institutions support through preservation (Royster and Williams 1999; Glenn and Enoch 2010; Masters 2010). Although the “Code of Ethics” for the Society of American Archivists now includes diversity and social responsibility as critical to its work, it does so in part because of a long history of “underdocumented communities.” Records of and by marginalized actors may be absent or limited, and resources directed toward preserving and cataloging materials differ across institutions. When I walk into the archive, then, it is something akin to when I walk into a classroom, enabled by a history of racist literacy practices that make my presence as a white person normal, capable of perpetuating white preservation practices or

resisting the tendency to read absence or marginalization at face value. Part of this resistance involves what Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa E. Kirsch (2012, 84) call “strategic contemplation,” making transparent how I, as the researcher, “process, imagine, and work with materials” to highlight archival inequities. My reading is an invested reading of archival records with a recognition of the social realities of racism. For example, institutional documents at Armstrong and the USG reproduce the stereotype of Black students as remedial. Recognizing that those institutional documents are selective representations recorded by those with institutional power means that I must read against the grain of these accounts, considering multiple ways of framing enrollment data and refusing to present absence from archives as absence from history. But, as Farmer (2018) argues, the structured exclusion of Black people (as archivists, researchers, and authors of records) is a larger problem than methodology can resolve. Resources need to be sent to faculty and institutions trying to remedy this problem.

As a white Armstrong faculty member, my affiliation with an HWCU also contributes to an inequitable power dynamic in accessing archival records and conducting interviews. Savannah State has been misrepresented by Armstrong and the white Savannah community and media for decades. Any attempt at reciprocity between myself as the researcher and historical or present-day participants is limited by what Katrina M. Powell and Pamela Takayoshi (2003, 418) describe as “a complicated process inextricably imbricated onto issues of power, control, and agency.” Much community work needs to be done to redress the historical injustices against Savannah State, but that work cannot proceed without a revision of Armstrong’s history of desegregation (reduced to an Armstrong-centric loss of a business degree, which it can now offer as Georgia Southern). In addition, there is more research to be done to recover the legacy of literacy and activism at Savannah State, research I hope scholars will take up.

One place where this limitation becomes apparent is in interviews, which I conducted to invite “multiplicity” into telling this history (Royster and Kirsch 2012). This decision, however, raised questions for me about how to negotiate the risks of asking participants about experiences related to racism: either a participant risks saying something racist, a participant says something that accuses the universities’ or USG of racism, or a participant is asked to recall experiences of racism that are traumatic (particularly if uncertain about a white interviewer’s position on racism). If I were going to ask participants about desegregation, I wanted, first, to disclose the argument of my project to explain my

position; second, to allow participants to withdraw from the project after the interview without any material going public; third, to maintain their anonymity; and fourth, to avoid possible repercussions from either university. These considerations informed my decision to interview faculty no longer employed by either university, with the interview plan and consent forms first reviewed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), instead of collecting public oral history archives (which I hope will one day occur). I worked with archivists and community connections to extend invitations to participate, both to establish some connection with participants and in some cases to allow people to refuse invitations anonymously. These decisions restricted the research practically, by limiting both the number of available participants in an already small pool of people and the ways participants might personally benefit from this research.

I selected prospective people to interview based on Brad Lucas and Margaret M. Strain's (2010, 261) recommendation to consider whose perspectives need to be represented. In archival records, I already had substantial archival comments from general faculty and students and a number of records of white faculty's perspectives on writing programs at Armstrong. Furthermore, I had written accounts that included faculty interviews from other histories of Armstrong and Savannah State, as well as accounts of desegregation in books by Armstrong alumnus, Savannah State faculty member, and Savannah mayor Otis S. Johnson (2016) and former Savannah State president Clyde W. Hall (1991). Given my existing resources, I ultimately decided to interview Black faculty involved in the literacy programs I study in this book. My decision did ignore that white faculty might have new perspectives that would be valuable to hear. My questions about literacy remediation and instruction also risk reproducing the dynamic Royster and Jean C. Williams (1999) criticize of white scholars delimiting participation to an identity participants did not wish to claim. When conducting the interviews, I explained what I had learned about racism in Savannah's desegregation process first, so I was transparent about my goal of critiquing institutional racism, and then I asked participants to describe their experiences working during and after desegregation. I did not limit their contributions to the topic of my study, and I allowed participants to define the direction of the conversation, often to concerns of teaching philosophy and career achievements—information that proved vital for understanding the events I describe in this book (Powell and Takayoshi 2003). I also shared chapters of this work in process to provide participants with an opportunity for feedback or to discontinue their participation if desired. Evelyn

Baker Dandy from Armstrong and Carolyn Warnock from Savannah State²² describe their experiences as Black faculty teaching literacy courses during and after desegregation enforcement activities. I include their recollections and pedagogical recommendations as literacy educators who navigated the institutional environments and state policies that affected their work and their students. Their contributions detail the importance of Black literacy educators in creating educational spaces for Black students amid the challenges of desegregation and institutional racism.

One final concern, particularly given the recent nature of this history, is privacy. Writing institutional critique raises questions about how to name and represent historical actors whose actions or language are critiqued. J. W. Hammond (2018) argues that naming racism in historical research is not necessarily presentism, since sources show that critiques of racism have existed throughout the history of the United States. However, when describing recent history, Laura Clark Brown and Nancy Kaiser (2012) recommend exercising caution with respect to privacy, especially in cases where an individual named in the archives may still be alive. I take a hybrid-institutional approach to naming actors (Lamos 2009), delineating “what constitutes private, social, and institutional spaces” when talking about people and texts (Royster and Kirsh 2012, 150). I follow Lamos’s (2009) recommendation that researchers consider the power and publicity of the person writing a particular document when deciding to protect privacy and omit names. I do not redact all individuals’ identities from citations and references, but when describing institutional spaces, I focus on the documents as a reflection of institutional spaces without mentioning specific individuals. When describing public social spaces, such as comments made in public-facing documents, I typically reference names and titles, since those individuals are nearly always easily identifiable by the time period (for instance, the chancellor of the USG). However, in documents shared within smaller communities, as when students or faculty are speaking or writing for a limited audience, I omit names and instead refer to participants by institutional title (e.g., assistant professor of history, student government association president). These choices emphasize that institutional structures and individual choices uphold racist ideologies within a framework in which power, identity, and position matter.

As *recent* history, the subject of this project is still tender. This sentiment is perhaps best conveyed in the words of Mayor Johnson, whose advocacy for Savannah State during desegregation is well documented in the archives: Johnson served on the Savannah Community Liaison

Committee (discussed in chapter 3) and regularly advocated civil rights activism in Savannah State's student newspaper. In his memoir, Johnson (2016, 168) reflects on the fight to keep Savannah State: "This was a very difficult section of this book to write. . . . It pains me to know there are still political forces in Georgia that want to destroy black institutions of higher education. . . . Black institutions, especially state-supported ones, will be in constant danger because their funding is dependent on the good will of white-dominated state legislatures." I have kept Johnson's comments in mind while working on this book. There is pain and harm in university histories, and HWCUs and university systems must acknowledge that fact. I hope to explain the troubling histories behind the ways writing programs are supported on our campuses and how those actions have affected Black students and HBCUs. HBCUs have been central to the status LCR has attained as a discipline, in ways that have continually gone unrecognized and unrewarded, as Royster and Williams (1999) and Kynard and Eddy (2009) have already argued.

Despite being recent, this history is important for a moment in which universities are reconsidering the role of testing in admissions, testing organizations have proposed measuring student disadvantage, scholars are advocating changes to the uses of retention data, and WPAs are debating whether we have an obligation to teach Standard English on public listservs. This history is important for a moment in which the United States is experiencing a rise in hate crimes, state brutality against Black and Brown people, efforts to eliminate critical race theory from diversity training, and nostalgic calls from white politicians to return to a segregated time in our history. We have questions before us that demand action: Will HWCUs once again succumb to political pressures for race-evasive policies, or will they acknowledge the reality of racism and our need to take an active role in redressing it? Will policymakers and other stakeholders reconsider the ways they evaluate MSIs, and can their contributions rewrite white institutional norms for retention and student success? Can LCR rewrite a disciplinary history in a way that supports current arguments to rethink writing assessment and writing instruction for racial justice? Will we disinvest in the surveillance of correctness in writing and the penalties assigned to those targeted by this surveillance? Can the discipline commit to change students' and stakeholders' perceptions about what kinds of communication practices are valued and valuable? These questions demanded our attention long ago, and we must confront them now.