

INTRODUCTION

Sometimes We Expect Great Things

Newborn American babies. Newborn citizens of these United States. Free, and with rights guaranteed by the Constitution. But let's take a closer look. These arrivals in a typical American town have equal legal rights. But in class, they are not equal at all. Each has a social status handed on to him by his family, ascribed to him at birth . . . Eighteen years later . . . Friends forever, they say. Well, maybe, in a way. But these boys come from families of different classes, and the lines of social class are real here in America . . . As years pass, class boundaries will separate [these friends] even more.

—*Social Class in America* (1957)

IN THE 2003 HBO documentary *Born Rich*, filmmaker and heir to the Johnson & Johnson fortune Jamie Johnson interviewed ten of his fellow millionaire friends who stood to inherit fortunes made in industry, publications, retail, and real estate. Johnson's purpose was to examine how people talk about money, and how these individuals feel about the privileges and burdens that wealth brings. His interview subjects ranged from overwhelmed (Josiah Hornblower, of the Whitney and Vanderbilt lines) to the braggart (Luke Weil, heir to many gaming establishments) to the self-aware (Ivanka Trump, of the eponymous real estate dynasty). For each of the interview subjects, fortune brings its own problems; these twenty-somethings' articulations of what it means to be *born* rich—rather than to be *made* rich from one's own accomplishments—evinced a significant discomfort with common stereotypes about America's most affluent citizens.

Johnson's film begins and ends with scenes from his twenty-first birthday party—the entrée into his inheritance triggered by that critical

milestone. This party is built on a Great Gatsby theme, and the guests are dressed in exquisite flapper-era attire, drinking from sparkling fountains, and dancing with the expected reckless abandon of the Roaring Twenties. All seems right and well. But Johnson quietly—and with elegant understatement—offers the film’s audience quite a different assessment of the situation at hand. As Johnson bleakly declares, putting on his white gloves and top hat and heading downstairs to the party that will inaugurate his adult life as a man of means, “I live in a country that everyone wants to believe is a meritocracy. We want to think that everyone earns what they have. I guess if it makes you feel better, keep telling yourself that. It doesn’t work for me anymore.”

Johnson’s frank summary of the US economic class system—the system that few want to talk about, least of all his wildly rich friends and their families—stands in sharp contrast to the other myths about social mobility and hard work that Americans live by. Johnson demonstrates, through the course of his insightful documentary, that in fact everyone does *not* earn what he or she has. Many of these young people whom Johnson interviews are completely detached from how their families’ fortunes were earned. Others are keenly aware of the legacy of their wealth, but unable to see a meaningful connection between past family artifacts of progress and the daily workings of their own lives. When Johnson, for example, asks his father what he suggests as a career after college graduation, his father posits—somewhat quizzically and after a bit of thought—“collect historical documents?”

In fact, no one in *Born Rich* will ever realize what it means to earn what he or she has. And so it is very easy to dismiss this film, and the tiny fragment of our population that it spotlights, as not worthy of our critical attention. But these heirs and heiresses narrate a powerful truth about the state of class divisions in this country, as illustrated by their own detachment from the very system that we believe can erase such divisions. Many of us who are not born into the middle or upper-middle class, let alone the moneyed ruling class, spend much of our lives trying to circumvent who we are. Unlike the materially aware men and women of *Born Rich*, those of us born into the lower classes see the road up and out of our birth class as being paved by education. This despite all sorts of warning signs to the contrary, from record unemployment rates for college graduates, to a glut of applicants for professional and graduate schools, to a general devaluation of trade and journeyman professions that once sat squarely at the center of our nation’s economy and of our self-conceptions of work, worth, and virtue. Today, few of us are “born rich,” but believe we can and

should *be* rich—and further think that education will make that belief a reality. But the emerging truth is that education alone will not make this dream come true.

Why do we persist in pursuing education as not a path to self-education, or a journey toward a greater and more expansive intellectual foundation, but as a ticket to a good job or a certain lifestyle? We are aware of the symbolic value of education versus its typical material benefits, especially where the critical interfaces of morals and “taste” are concerned. We know about concepts like Pierre Bourdieu’s *habitus*—even if we do not use this term—wherein classes coalesce around like behaviors and values, and create work and leisure systems that aim to solidify class boundaries rather than transcend them. We understand the concept of *myth*—defined by Roland Barthes as a “semiological system which has the pretense of transcending itself into a factual system” (*Mythologies*, 134)—fraught in our patronage of venues for obtaining postsecondary education advertised as cheap, quick, and most of all, *guaranteed* to transform any citizen. We observe the nagging reality that different classes of people rarely find themselves living or working within a true “mix” of classes in our socially stratified mass culture; we perpetuate this stratification by moving out of our neighborhoods when the “undesirables”—those who are unlike us in race, class, or sexual orientation—move in. We shop, work, and socialize within strict geographical and economic boundaries; many of us live in the towns where we were born, and send our children to the schools we ourselves attended. In our popular representations of class behaviors—particularly the clash between the upper and lower classes—we illustrate the intractable nature of one’s birth class, often through humor. Consider the rags-to-riches tales presented in popular situation comedies of past decades—such as *The Beverly Hillbillies* (1962–1971), *Diff’rent Strokes* (1978–1986), and *Fresh Prince of Bel Air* (1990–1996)—as just one manifestation of our simultaneous fascination with the wealthy and our recognition that, to paraphrase Will Smith’s character in *Fresh Prince*, you can’t take West Philly out of the boy.¹ Mobility? It appears to be a fallacy.

Yet even as we look at all this evidence—all these damning, deeply entrenched artifacts of our own enforced and inscribed stasis—we still say, *school is my ticket out*. We continue to believe that the lower classes must seek out formal education alongside their upper-class counterparts, and that at the completion of this education—no matter where it is, or what it actually teaches, or how well it does so—socioeconomic equality will be achieved, and the slate of class hierarchies will then be

clean. As Jamie Johnson would say, go on believing that if it makes you feel better.

Certainly, it would be hard to argue that education hurts us. And I make no argument that people should not seek out higher education; more knowledge and a smarter populace is always, in itself, a public good. But it is just as difficult to argue that education is a tonic providing, on its own, an erasure of all other class-based markers of difficulty in a free society. Due to my fascination with this ongoing paradox, this book is about class as it affects and is affected by education, specifically literacy instruction at the secondary and postsecondary levels. I focus on how literacy has been transmogrified by mass media instructional products that purport to be egalitarian and class-blind, but actually harbor deep class markers. These products have slowly come to replace individuated and teacher-designed writing instruction in schools, starting with innocuous classroom visual technologies in the mid-twentieth century and culminating in more ominous mass-marketed, extra-institutional distance education today. I trace what I see as the technological starting point for where we are now, in our eschewing of the individual for the masses: the postwar instructional film, a subset of the “mental hygiene” film so often the subject of ridicule rather than historiographic investigation or archival recovery. I examine in this book how the creation, distribution, and exhibition of instructional films concerned with literacy-based behaviors—made in the 1940s and 1950s by burgeoning media companies with strong ideological ties both to the educational textbook industry and to corporate stakeholders within the larger consumer culture—affected and were affected by the class-conscious literacy values of postwar students, parents, and other community members. These films were a starting point for how we currently regard the relationship between class aspirations and educational attainment, and how we use mass visual technologies to stand in for the more difficult individuated teaching that students need to become literate citizens, and to be aware of the social and political acculturative forces in writing, not just the mastery of writing as a rote skill or generic economic good.

As my opening example of *Born Rich* illustrates, we often tell our truest tales through images, drawn or imagined. As a medium, film is a powerful, pervasive, and steadfast artifact of the articulations of our culture, doing work that the culture cannot accomplish through words alone. Popular film has been therefore a previous point of study for other recent literacy scholars, chief among them Bronwyn Williams and Amy Zenger. As they argue, “Films that explicitly foreground literacy often

convey highly positive messages about it. Films about literacy also often reinforce the belief that literacy is an autonomous set of skills that one can, and should, adopt to join the dominant culture” (9). Yet, as Williams and Zenger note, Hollywood film can also show us markers of literacy that are unattainable; and further show us the economic consequences of poor literacy skills, determined to teach us what *not* to do. Specifically, in classical mainstream films, literacy practices as relevant to social class are “either enforced by social institutions to frustrate a character’s aspirations, or used to attribute particular virtues and admirable qualities to characters that allow for blurring social class boundaries” (15). Williams and Zenger further argue that in many recent (1980s–2000s) Hollywood films, “literacy is held out to characters as a lure and promise of material gain . . . Economic status will translate into social class, and the people who read and write themselves into better jobs will be able to move up the class ladder, or at least be able to move their children up” (41). Literacy in popular film “brings liberation, love, personal fulfillment, and security to its learners,” even as the mythologies and stumbling blocks toward actually achieving those ideals are rarely examined. As Williams and Zenger conclude, popular film tells us that literacy is a “key component” of what capitalism needs to function (164); as such, “even short and mundane representations of literacy [in film narratives] can be invested with a power beyond what we might rationally expect” (164).

What happens, then, when we transfer these troubling paradigms to film genres outside classical Hollywood cinema? What happens when narratives about literacy and literacy-based behaviors are displayed and modeled for students not to live by as they see fit—in public theaters, or in private homes or other elective settings, but to learn by—as a core element of an education in reading, writing, and critical thinking? Williams and Zenger recommend that we take the opportunity, as we teach popular film in our literacy-based curricula, to examine the mythologies present and delve deeper with students into the assumptions being presented as truths or givens (165). Whereas the authors hypothesize that filmmakers likely “give little explicit thought to how they are portraying literacy, drawing instead almost instinctively on its power as commonplace, metaphor, and identity trope” (168)—a hypothesis that I accept, even as I realize art *is* power, created by many deliberate choices—films made for the classroom are far more didactic constructions of myth, designed to teach specific behaviors and values through visual narrative. How might uncovering these same mythologies—presented in films that are compulsory rather than elective viewing, instructional tools weighted as heavily as written

texts and even teachers themselves rather than as art and entertainment employed by teachers for alternative uses—change our understanding of film as a historical medium that should be critically examined and recovered for archival study in the field of rhetoric and composition studies?

With the intent of furthering Williams and Zenger's initial observations about film, literacy, and class, and seeking to answer these resulting questions, I analyze the creation, rhetorical construction, and distribution and exhibition of instructional short films centered on literacy-based behaviors and made by a dominant company known to many educational film historians, and likely many readers of a certain age—Coronet films of Chicago. These films, among others within the instructional genre, rose to prominence as a teaching supplement in the 1940s and 1950s, and consequently were on view in classrooms around the nation. These films—made for and shown exclusively in secondary school settings—in several cases intersect with the design and import of the larger category of mental hygiene films, as they link emotional and social behaviors to literacy instruction and formal schooling practices.

I argue that postwar instructional films both reinforced class-based teachings of literacy principles that were present in current traditional pedagogies—as James Berlin and others have termed them—and provided a uniform platform for instructing children in behaviors and attitudes most befitting of American democracy rooted in middle-class values. In doing so, I aim not to reinforce a simplistic notion of current-traditionalism that excludes other possibilities and strategies that may have been at work in local classrooms. Rather, I aim to illustrate how a mass-produced product inarguably displayed what we would consider classical features of this pedagogical approach, and how this display was potentially damaging as a tool of enculturation in literacy-focused classrooms containing students outside the idealized middle class. I further argue that these films were not created in isolation. Instead they were collaborative products of the textbook industry and educational organizations (such as the National Council of Teachers of English [NCTE]) in that they reflected the values of these sponsors of postwar student literacy—to borrow from Deborah Brandt—and sought to reinscribe these values through a medium attractive to teens, desirable to teachers (in its promise to streamline lessons and relieve the workload of literacy instruction, in some cases), and of course, profitable to instructional film executives.

In terms of recovering historical artifacts for gainful use in the present, in this book I illustrate how these postwar films begin our long-standing investigation into what “media literacy” means in secondary education in

the twenty-first century. In my reading, visual media content focused on proper literacy behaviors and presented today via mass delivery systems (i.e., the Internet) hypothetically replicates the mass delivery of these instructional films in postwar classrooms, with the same mass acculturating aims. These aims sidestep both the teacher and student as developing individuals and in turn provide a mass acquisition of literacy skills that is both more efficient and more effective—due to the genre’s ability (and desire, even) to disregard the “interference” of the locally specific teacher as agent in the process—in communicating the broad social and intellectual standards that secondary schools hope to promote. Even if those standards are, for some students, ultimately unattainable, or culturally undesirable.

This book therefore argues that instead of disregarding postwar instructional films as pithy products of a lost generation—the artifacts we safely mock as “kitsch” or embrace as nostalgia—we should instead regard them as important cultural artifacts of literacy practices and beliefs, including damaging ones. Instructional films are the first tangible entry into a historiographic examination of visual media as both a socializing device for students and a philosophical display of “proper” mass behaviors associated with a “proper” literacy education, as defined by middle-class values, and taste. Recovering these films for rhetoric and composition studies allows us to better interrogate how and why we often turn to visual technology, including Internet delivery systems and products like MOOCs (Massive Online Open Courses), for generic assistance in the teaching of writing, and with what social and material consequences for our diverse, class-conscious students. In this introduction, I sketch out the premises informing these films as artifacts, and explain how their recovery enhances rhetoric and composition studies’ inquiries into class-based literacies and media-based pedagogies, especially given the increased emphasis in twenty-first-century culture on high school as a mere perfunctory gateway to higher education for all.

Meet the New Class. Same as the Old Class?

We rarely talk about education on any terms other than these positivist ones. This is because the average American believes several hopeful things about education itself. Among these are that education not only ensures, but entitles an individual to a meaningful career; that this career is positioned at the somewhat-imaginary and quickly receding middle- to upper-middle-class marker of the American social strata, if not higher; and that this career will enable an individual to more fully engage in and

profit from the material spoils of American capitalist life—essentially what Thorstein Veblen in 1899 famously termed “conspicuous consumption,” back when college was available to only the tiny *Born Rich* social minority.

But is education, in fact, the catch-all solution to America’s class problem that it purports to be? And if so, how much education is “enough” to really solve the problem? The answer to the second question seems to evolve with each passing generation. For example, looking at the decades prior to World War II, the National Education Association (NEA) reports that in 1890, 1 in 500 high-school-age children was actually enrolled in high school. But by 1930, that number had risen to 1 in 22. Similarly, in 1910, the NEA reported that less than 5 percent of college-age students were enrolled at a college of some kind, whereas by 1932, almost 13 percent were—more than a doubling of students, but still a very small percentage of the eligible populace (“The Effect of Population Changes,” 35). David Tyack and Larry Cuban comparatively note that in 1900, 50 percent of children age five to nineteen were enrolled in any level of schooling, but by 1950, 80 percent were enrolled, and by 1990, nearly 90 percent (21).

In general, prior to World War II, a proper (i.e., complete) education was defined as completion of the eighth grade, and the inclination to see educational attainment beyond this as a leveling instrument between poor and wealthy students was very slight.² As the twentieth century progressed, a satisfactory education for citizens living outside the family farm, or within other isolated, rural settings, slowly became the high school diploma. With the surge in enrollments at land-grant universities, and later regional comprehensive institutions (many of which began as normal schools) that allowed students to matriculate in schools closer to home, higher education became more attainable. After World War II, the definition of a complete education rose to much more frequently include college, at least for some individuals, as that definition began to be complicated and expanded by access-minded government measures such as the GI Bill, which promised an educated workforce and offered in its design a reciprocal agreement between servicemen and -women and the government for sacrifices to the war effort. Until this point, however, the high school diploma was viewed as the end-point accomplishment for many young people; along with this view came a greater acceptance than we now see of professions that did not intrinsically require advanced degrees, many of which have dissipated in the new global economy. As the decades rolled on from the 1950s to the 2000s, higher education increasingly became a cultural expectation for all students from all class

backgrounds, replacing the high school diploma as the standard “end” to schooling.

As we entered the twenty-first century, the number of students attending colleges continued to rise. Between 2000 and 2009, the number of traditional-age students (18–24) rose by 27 percent, while that population as part of the United States total populace rose by only 14 percent. The number of nontraditional-age students (25 and over) comparatively rose by 43 percent. Between 1985 and 2009, or roughly the span of one generation, postsecondary enrollments by students of both groups combined grew by 73 percent.³ That number will only rise over the next decade with the continued proliferation of online degree programs, particularly for nontraditional students; in fact, the National Center for Education Statistics predicts that the enrolled nontraditional student population will continue to grow at twice the rate of traditional-age students between 2011 and 2019. We will also see growth in the precollege age (14–17) demographic, thanks to time- and cost-cutting interventions such as dual enrollment, middle college, and early college for this group, who previously were not a sizeable portion of the college-going population, as well as MOOCs for traditional college-age students and older adults.⁴

In sum, education is serious business in the United States, insofar as its mythologies are attractive, substantial, and persistent. Collectively as a nation, college is presented to us as the answer to our fears that drive our deepest personal doubts—of getting and keeping a job, of having a disposable income, of holding personal and exhibiting vocational value in a global digital marketplace, of “keeping up” with our peers and attaining leisure time in proportion equal to or greater than work time. Secondary education, in particular those critical, formative high school years, has become so *de rigueur* as to be a mere blip on a student’s trajectory of schooling. Whereas once high school was the site of “finishing” a person’s mass educational training, now it is perceived as a fairly pedestrian hoop to jump through on the way to what we perceive as real and more important things. But these critical high school years—where compulsory education reaches its apex, and then ends—is also where the strongest formulation of status aspirations and lifestyle goals arguably begin to take hold.

This is why I focus my argument here on mass education for American high school students past and, in my final chapter, the foreseeable present, in order to examine the ways in which class aspirations of high school youth affected and were affected by the homogenized narrative representations of literacy-based behaviors in postwar instructional films. These films were compelling vehicles for enforcing and reinforc-

ing the pedagogy that itself embodied class-based distinctions in writing and critical thinking, namely current-traditionalism. I maintain that during the postwar era, not only were many of our current conceptions of wealth, status, and commerce solidified, and the conceptions we now live by cemented, but also during this era we were first presented with the immense social power of film as a teaching tool in the classroom that would reinforce these conceptions, and serve as a cultural artifact for later study.

It is these conceptions and myths of the postwar era that we ultimately cater to when we articulate what schooling stands for today, especially the belief that fundamental literacies are highly relevant to aspirations of class transcendence. If you have any doubt that either our preoccupation with class began in full force in the mid-twentieth century, however, or that we have not shaken this preoccupation as we have moved into the twenty-first century, please indulge me in a brief presentation of two comparative artifacts, separated by some forty years.

The first of these artifacts is the public service/government-backed propaganda film from 1954, *The House in the Middle*. Produced by the National Clean Up, Paint Up, Fix Up Bureau, with cooperation by the Federal Civil Defense Administration, this twelve-minute film takes as its central position that a clean and tidy house⁵ is safe from nuclear attack. Constructed primarily as a series of filmed experiments with atom blasts on three miniature houses transplanted to the desert and existing in different states of repair—dirty and disheveled, cluttered and overgrown, and clean and kempt—the film’s stern narrator (an unnamed, middle-aged white man dressed in a suit and sitting behind a desk) gives viewers a look at how in the event of a blast meant to replicate the “outskirts” of a nuclear attack on an urban center, only the clean and tidy house survives. The film shows three different blast experiments in order to argue for the value of clean living in the most literal of respects.

The tests are meant to show that a freshly painted house that is also well maintained and clean on the inside is the only type of structure that will resist and withstand atomic attack. Conversely, the dirty and cluttered houses collapse, burn, or disintegrate every time, whereas the clean house stands. The narrator admonishes the viewing audience to “clean up trash, weed your gardens, and plant flowers” and directs schoolchildren as well as adults to clean up their neighborhoods, showing a group clearing papers and debris from an alleyway behind housing that looks suspiciously lower class in its cinder block design and high-back fences. Home and community maintenance is our civic duty, the narrator says, but is also an act of “civil defense.” He closes the film with the warning

that to keep our homes clean—inside and out—will mean the difference between disaster and “our survival.”

Aside from how ridiculous this entire argument sounds to us today—if we are to believe that all that is keeping us from nuclear death and destruction is an afternoon of good wall painting and floor scrubbing⁶—the film is meant to be a gravely serious statement about the importance of cleanliness and the “good average” of American living, and carries an ancillary message to support the National Clean Up, Paint Up, Fix Up Bureau, who had cooperation for this film from the FCDA. The house, symbolically, is painted white—connoting allied images such as the white picket fence of ideal suburbia, as well as a “clean slate” of purity and aesthetics (and, not at all out of the realm of possibility, the connotation of whiteness as a racial concept). The house is positioned in the middle of the three sample houses, figuratively representing the middle—not at the end, as in the Three Little Pigs fable, which narrates a house of sticks, a house of straw, and *finally* a house of bricks. The “house in the middle” is in the figurative *middle* of American culture. It is neither ostentatious nor exceedingly plain. It is in the center of our vision, and symbolically, in the center of our mass culture and capitalist system. It is the norm whereas the others—the dirtier, the messier, the poorer houses—are the outliers. The children who attend to keeping our neighborhoods clean in this film are clean and “middle” as well, emerging from a generic classroom with an average-looking, (white) bespectacled teacher at the helm, and going about their alley clean-up without being named, without speaking, and without acknowledging the camera.⁷

It is no coincidence of history that *House in the Middle*—a film that would have been classified, broadly, as “instructional” in its time—is an artifact from 1954 rather than 1934, 1974, or 1994. The postwar era is well known to historians of urban geography as a decade of mass slum clearance and the subsequent erection of federally sponsored public housing projects in cities such as Detroit, Chicago, and New York. These projects were touted as answers to the various ills of slum living—a long-awaited mass response to the narratives of writers such as Jacob Riis, and a perverse response to the work of community activists for underprivileged citizens such as Jane Addams. But what the projects really symbolized, as sociologists have noted, was the erasure of the lower-class culture in any visible form, and the mass standardization of the image of lower-class living into cleaner, orderly units of life. In Chicago alone, mile upon mile of tenement housing and row houses were bulldozed to make way for large, modern, and imposing low- and high-rise buildings in projects such as

the Robert Taylor Homes, Stateway Gardens, Henry Horner Homes, and other famous disasters of urban planning that would fall into ruin within twenty years and eventually become the site of their own slum clearance, to make way for mixed-income housing and newer architectural visions of urban life. Such housing today—even the more misguided versions of New Urbanism that pop up in various suburbs every year—aims to better mimic principles such as Jane Jacobs’s theories of the importance of sidewalks and the economies of human scale, favoring the brownstone communities of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries wherein people lived on a more intimate scale with one another. Such principles recognized the innate power of communities built not upon huge structures populated by primarily youth under the age of eighteen, but by persons of all ages, races, and professions who make each other’s lives meaningful.⁸

The sociological message of *House in the Middle* reinforces the close alliance between the concept of middle-class “cleanliness” and the core impulses of public education. Since the postwar era of material progress, proliferating suburbs, and widespread consumer consumption of goods and services, Americans have regularly and rather unconsciously linked the ways we think about class and social standing and the use value of interventions into our daily lives that are governmentally imposed, such as compulsory education. We perpetually want to live a better life than what we have; we want to be clean and safe and be part of the class that has the comfort and ability to look back with nostalgia and remember when it was not so very comfortable, or so safe. We want each generation of our families to have it (materially) better than we do; this is how we link increased consumption and consumer capital with the goals of a good democracy. And our culture’s systems support this want, especially the system of public education, even as it especially promises that which it cannot deliver equally, nor without caveat or significant compromise.

This promise of the always-better life has not died, even as housing projects are being torn down left and right. I now turn for illustration to my second, and more recent, textual example of cleanliness and middle-class values and aspirations to set beside *House in the Middle*, and its implicit class-based promises of health and prosperity. This example takes us from the world of urban planning and civil defense to the rhetoric and composition studies, wherein scholars have for the last forty-plus years fought mightily against the barriers to education that social stratification presents.

For many in the field, Lynn Z. Bloom's 1996 *College English* piece, "Freshman Composition as a Middle-Class Enterprise," as well as James Sledd's published response to it the following year, brought to the surface uncomfortable assumptions about the teaching of writing as it has historically relied on class-centered behaviors and values. In this exchange, readers can see echoes of the "clean" house that so valiantly stood in 1954 as a cultural symbol of middle-class good and virtue against enemy attack. Early in her essay, Bloom asserts: "Composition is taught by middle-class teachers in middle-class institutions to students who are middle class either in actuality or in aspiration—economic if not cultural. Indeed, one of the major though not necessarily acknowledged reasons that freshman composition is in many schools the only course required of all students is that it promulgates the middle-class values that are thought to be essential to the proper functioning of students in the academy" (656). Bloom goes on to outline the major pedagogical aims of first-year composition that correspond to American middle-class values—self-reliance and responsibility, respectability, decorum and propriety, moderation and temperance, thrift, efficiency, order, cleanliness, punctuality, delayed gratification, and critical thinking (658–67). She concludes by noting that the primary goal of writing teachers should be to push back against these embedded class values in composition classrooms, to "have an ethical as well as a cultural obligation to respect the world's multiple ways of living and of speaking" to undermine the assumption that writing is, in fact, an endeavor limited to the middle class (or higher) and to overturn the assumption that writing instruction inculcates students into this preferred class (671).

Bloom argues that American education has been historically dedicated to "not putting the 'finishing' veneer on an elite class, but enabling the transformation and mobility of lives across boundaries, from the margins to the mainstream success and assimilation on middle-class terms" (668). As such, the ways in which writing instruction mimics the values of the middle class should not mean that we interpret the gates of that class to be at all closed to students from different socioeconomic or cultural backgrounds. Bloom sees education as a critical step toward social mobility, rather than a site for keeping classes separate and stationary.

The following year James Sledd rigorously responded to what he called Bloom's dismissal of any "serious class analysis" in her argument (712), and proceeded to define the American middle class in what he deemed more realistic, relative terms. For Sledd, the middle class is

all those persons who look up to a group that gets and spends more than they do and look down on a group that gets and spends less. The great object of middle class life is to shrink the first group and enlarge the second. That is the envious, covetous ideal of upward mobility in the proud and wrathful mainstream culture—the ideal which the professional societies of English teachers publicly acknowledge when they talk piously about the teaching of Standard English to the dispossessed. In recent years, however, getting has grown harder, while spending (consuming) has remained essential to the upward anguish. (713)

Sledd concludes his response to Bloom by likening the teaching of writing in the university to a plantation, advocating that “at the ugly moment, powerless English teachers can at least try to think critically about the class structure to whose lower levels they are consigned” (714). In doing so, Sledd’s response represents a resistance to the myth of education, whereby “85 percent of the population” calls itself middle class—but little to no distinctions are made within that large percentage of persons (712). Indeed, the open recognition on Sledd’s part that the overwhelming majority of Americans (in 1997) considered themselves to be of the middle class—one might say, the *neutral* or perceived-to-be *dominant* group by its own antidefinitive foundation—points to the extreme power of class *avoidance* in American society, given that it has never been the case that only 15 percent of the population resides above or below this neutral and “comfortable” vague standard of living.⁹

Sledd’s response to Bloom is at its root primarily concerned with the ways in which labor is materially constructed in English studies, as well as how students become stratified through writing curricula frequently contingent upon their prior socioeconomic backgrounds and opportunities. This in itself is a logical and important debate in which to engage, in the tradition of other writing and literacy scholars who engage with matters of class. But it is the final lengthy paragraph of Bloom’s response to Sledd that I find the most worthy of further consideration in light of cultural expectations of social mobility secondary to a “good” education. Following her articulation of the humanistic values that both encompass and are encompassed by higher education, and her reaffirmation of her desire to promote those values, Bloom concludes:

These are the reasons why I do not now and would not ever sneer at the existence, even the possibility, of order and civility and cleanliness and courtesy and decorum and temperance in our society. These are the

reasons why I would and do work for a society that, at least in theory, guarantees such social benefits to all of its members. The predictable existence of these middle-class virtues . . . also makes it possible to concern ourselves with humanistic ideals—in and out of the academy. That these ideals are promulgated in the standard English of America’s great documents of freedom and exaltation of common people—including the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, Leaves of Grass, and “Letter from Birmingham Jail”—is both a reflection of and a tribute to our national character. (715)

I am intrigued by the rhetoric of patriotism and nationhood that characterizes the above paragraph, as it almost makes me visualize that brave little house, and those who keep it clean and painted with a “fresh” coat of white paint. To be clear, I do not aim to criticize Bloom’s position here so much as spotlight her train of thought, her accepted and ingrained (and familiar) values relevant to class and education that resemble those first offered en masse in the postwar era. Bloom’s original article arguably is the piece that has become the most cited of these two *College English* publications. But it is her ultimate defense of middle-class values as a laudable standard within the teaching of writing in this response to Sledd that is the most salient point for a reexamination of the historical links between literacy and democracy, between the “dominant” middle class that came into being, conceptually and economically, after World War II and the traditional pedagogies that for so many years have undergirded the teaching of writing. In her closing remarks, Bloom manages to include not just the Declaration of Independence, but also the Constitution, Whitman’s iconic poem (which arguably symbolizes, to a great many readers, the very core of humanistic values that characterize the best American intellectual pursuits), and Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “Letter,” which may be the most oft-anthologized and assigned piece of nonfiction prose (née oratory) in first-year writing textbooks today. Where Bloom sees her “normal” home community as functioning on invisible assumptions regarding class practices, she also sees the enterprise of composition as appealing to these same values of cleanliness, order, and propriety. Indeed, Bloom notes that from an early age, she and her female friends “knew right from the start how to *function* as middle-class teachers” (676). It is this functionality—this knowing *how* to be in a class, as well as how to teach students from that position-function—that resonates with both films like *House in the Middle*, and with the instructional films’ teachings that I examine in this book.

Bloom's assertions may sound laudatory when positioned within their mid-1990s educational and social context. Readers may even wonder, what's so bad about keeping a clean house, and aiming for a good and safe life for ourselves and our children? Why shouldn't the government encourage us to maintain a certain standard of living, either through our own upkeep of our own tidy houses, or through large-scale projects that reposition us into tidy living situations, like housing projects, that eradicate our inabilities to *do* said upkeep? It may not be a bad thing to want order over chaos, uniformity over individuality—if these compromises yield material progress. But I am arguing that in fact, such compromises typically do not lead to idealized outcomes, especially when—as is the case with these postwar instructional films—these compromises are presented as in situ conditions unavailable to many a captive student viewer, and insufficient on their own for work toward meaningful class transcendence.

Bloom's argument—a position certainly not unique to her—virtually embodies our citizenry's concept of the American educational system and its social core, and remarkably echoes the value systems in place postwar, value systems that started Americans on what may now be characterized as a blind quest for social mobility at any educational price. This embodiment is important to recognize, as it demonstrates the strong carried articulations of class and education that have been with us these past sixty-odd years. If Bloom is correct in arguing that her stated goals are, in fact, the foundation of writing instruction, then what can we say about the stalled thought that keeps us in this mind-set, equating literacy instruction with class aspirations, and class aspirations with the very purpose of schooling itself?

Current-Traditionalism and Mental Hygiene Films: A Postwar Marriage of Convenience

I do not contend that our current schooling principles are based on the exact values and behaviors exhibited in mental hygiene films as a genre, nor on individual, more overtly propaganda-based films such as *House in the Middle*. Certainly we have moved quite a distance from the days when secondary school classrooms spent instructional time on topics such as how to date; how to behave at a party; or how to write letters to our aged relatives or grandparents. Of course, one reason we *don't* spend time on this might be because we have the Internet to do all that modeling and teaching for us. I do recognize, certainly, that these films are mid-century products. I further recognize that my observation of these films as ide-

alized middle-class portrayals of American life is not revolutionary. Any reader can watch any one of these instructional films that I spotlight and see the artifacts of class consciousness that I also see. In other words, I do not use this book to rehearse the argument that the postwar era brought to us idealized portraits—in educational films, and in other media—of the way things should be, socioeconomically speaking; neither do I subscribe to the view that the 1950s were a fully sanitized time, as is quite clear from a broader survey of all cultural and countercultural products that are still available archives of the era. No period in our history can be so easily categorized.¹⁰ This is not a book about the content of these films, or the ways in which that content reflected the values of an era. Rather, this is a book about how the power of the postwar instructional film started us—scholars, teachers, and other stakeholders in literacy—down a path littered with the promises of technology as a means of uplift and efficiency for an increasingly diverse, sometimes diffident, and ever-aspirational community of student writers who struggle mightily with the challenges of civic literacy and academic discourse, and a dedicated, but overworked, body of educators who continually seek ways to help these writers become everything they so want to be in the world.

This book is about the legacy of a class-conscious approach to literacy education represented in instructional films that is still with us today in more seamless, institutional terms that continue the argument for mediated instruction that does not regard the individual student and his or her positionality in the classroom and in the community: in our uses of advanced visual technology of various kinds—from film to television to the Internet—to augment alphabetic-text instruction in writing classrooms. Such instruction, in its fundamental design, has the potential to perpetuate a pedagogy based on *mass modeling* of what should be *individual* intellectual choices and practices, choices ever-more important to make in our highly stratified, class-based economy, wherein students cannot rely on hopeful imitation and modeling in order to achieve the socioeconomic or educational goals they want. Like the hundreds of thousands of citizens shuttled into housing projects in the late 1940s through the 1950s, the use of visual technology to represent a standard and idealized way of living that will lead to material and social successes assumes a mass acceptance of dominant cultural paradigms, and a framework for living and learning that is applicable to all, packaged in a generic, efficient, and—yes—clean, box. It is false advertising at its worst (or, from another perspective, best).

I offer here, therefore, a new material focus on the role played by in-

structional films in historical studies of American writing instruction. In particular, I examine the relationship of these films to the pedagogical embrace of what is typically attributed to James Berlin's use of the term "current-traditional" rhetoric in describing mid-century writing pedagogies. Current-traditionalism is generally regarded as emphasizing external truths and correctness over complexity, and de-emphasizing the role of the student in his or her own learning process (as opposed to Berlin's named later waves of instruction, i.e., expressivist rhetoric, and his preferred socio-epistemic rhetoric). David Russell has most succinctly defined current-traditional rhetoric as a pedagogy that "emphasizes writing in modes (exposition, definition, narration, argument—EDNA); division into words, sentences, and paragraphs; mechanical correctness; the reading of professional models; and other things, depending on the historian. It does not emphasize communication, invention (in the classical tradition), or the process of writing" ("Composition's History," 252). As Russell notes, it was not Berlin who actually coined this term, but in fact Richard Young. In a 1980 article, "Richard Whatley and Current-Traditional Rhetoric," Berlin summarizes Young's concept of current-traditionalism as "the emphasis on the composed product rather than the composing process; the analysis of discourse into words, sentences, and paragraphs; the classification of discourse into description, narration, exposition, and argument; the strong concern with usage (syntax, spelling, punctuation) and with style (economy, clarity, emphasis); and so on" (31). The thrust of all this, of course, is a rhetoric which offers principles of style and arrangement that are to be applied to the written product, not learned as a process. Significantly, invention is excluded from the rhetorical act" (11).

I do not mean to simplify or gloss current-traditionalism as a concept, as not every scholar of composition studies agrees with the primacy of Berlin's taxonomy, or its core assumptions.¹¹ I do want to demonstrate, however, how these very principles—especially the emphasis on correctness in all areas of writing and writing-related behavior and style and arrangement over invention—are also the postwar classroom lessons at the core of current-traditional values, which were borne out in texts that were visual as well as alphabetic, and were additionally tied to key principles of social class stratification for an anxious, upwardly aspirant postwar populace. Instructional films emphasized and importantly *modeled* for students the importance of correctness and absolute, external truths in language construction, mimicking that correctness and truth in everyday reenacted social relations meant to stand as exemplary for captive

student viewers. But as products of instruction divorced from meaningful individual learning—*invention*, in rhetorical terms—they were simply advertisements for class maintenance that afforded no prospect for social change.

An examination of these films in the context of postwar culture therefore provides insight into the not-so-subtle institutional reinforcement of the larger societal values behind current-traditional rhetoric. Even as there were likely many local postwar contexts within which the current-traditional model did not always prevail, I argue that the conflation of morals—particularly democratically minded morals—and literacy instruction manifested itself nationally as the standard by which secondary students would be taught. And these principles largely excluded any student who resided below the middle class.¹²

My argument, however, is not just about historiographic recovery of a genre in order to understand a past decade in our intellectual history; it is about seeing the through line between that genre and other similar mass educational products in use in the twenty-first century. Despite the attempted interventions of the aforementioned composition and rhetoric scholars and teachers, and many others who have authored countless publications on class and education,¹³ literacy and poverty, and schooling and liberation, the socioeconomic approaches to teaching literacy that came into dominance after World War II—including the reconception of the function of the American high school and the patriotic alliances between upper-middle-class ideals and markers of literacy on view in instructional films—are still very much with us.

The legacy of visual media as a means of enforcing those class-based teachings is evident in our widespread embrace of digital technologies used inside the traditional as well as the virtual classroom to augment, and often completely replace, the previously primary pedagogies of face-to-face interaction. Since the postwar era, we have been more than content with using visual technologies to model for students the ways in which “correctness” and class-based behaviors are aligned. I would not go as far as to say that we are returning to a favoring of current-traditional techniques. I do believe, however, that our lack of attention to mass literacy instruction’s ignorance of individual student agencies is in keeping with current-traditional emphases on product over process, style over substance, and uniform goals of “taste” that so often accompany idealized conceptions of “good” writing in and out of our schools. And this sense of taste is invariably linked to class.

Class, Literacy, and the Instructional Film

Although the average lower-class or disadvantaged American sees education, specifically literacy education, as a site for transcending class boundaries and breaking into the realm of the middle class (or higher), postwar instructional films show us a very different impetus. These instructional films emulated for students the idealized place of upper-middle-class literacies, but at no point explicitly spoke to, or invited into the conversation, any students whose class standing was below this level. In fact, some of the films explicitly *discouraged* any aspirations of class mobility. The title of this introduction comes from one such film from 1951 that I will discuss later in more depth. In *Snap Out of It! Emotional Balance*, the protagonist, Howard Patterson, is told by his high school principal Mr. Edmonds, to not expect “too much” when he aims for a better grade in history (or any of his other subjects). For the sake of “balancing your emotions,” Howard is told that he should instead realize that “sometimes we expect great things,” which in turn only leads to heartache. Howard and other seemingly “average” students should temper their expectations, lest they constantly strive for a goal (educational or otherwise) that is ultimately never to be reached.¹⁴

These powerful directives for students to stay in their class-designated educational and intellectual places served as important augmentation to alphabetic literacy instruction, reinforcing the concept of external, fixed truths and a singular style of “correctness” that was an ideal not all students were equipped to obtain. In addition, these films put students in the position of moral arbiter, in many cases, of difficult ethical situations posed in the films, situations that were almost always solved by a combination of manners, taste, and intelligence—with emphasis on the first two qualities. This is where the instructional film focused on literacy practices intersects in the most tangible ways with the broader category of “mental hygiene” films, which instructed children in proper social and psychological behaviors affording good childhood. Taste, as a function of class, is historically presented as an innate quality that is not “teachable,” because it is heavily dependent upon one’s birth class. Pierre Bourdieu argues such class-based qualities of behavior and values are what forms the *habitus*; in mental hygiene films, *habitus* is the governing principle limiting and even barring altogether the prospect of social mobility. Student subjects in these films are encouraged to practice the behaviors and embrace the ideals of the upper classes, but such behavior is framed as *recall* of known principles rather than *instruction* in new ways of thinking or

being. In short, the students are admonished to “remember” themselves, rather than transcend or transgress class-based behavioral boundaries. Students who were not taught these proper behaviors in the first place are permanently shut out of the diegesis of the films, and out of the films’ imparting wisdom.¹⁵

Mental hygiene films as a larger genre and as a cultural phenomenon have received some popular treatment of late, most notably in books such as Ken Smith’s comprehensive *Mental Hygiene: Classroom Films 1945–1970* (1999); Geoff Alexander’s *Academic Films for the Classroom* (2010); and Devin Orgeron, Marsha Orgeron, and Dan Streible’s *Learning with the Lights Off: Educational Film in the United States* (2012). Each of these books carefully catalogs the history of the instructional film genre through archival materials and interviews with individuals involved in the production and distribution of the films themselves, and provides important factual and technical information upon which to build my theoretical claims. In terms of public accessibility, a great number of the original instructional films themselves have been made available in ways impossible prior to the widespread growth of the Internet and digital technologies. Chief among these sites is the Prelinger archives, which has aided dramatically my ability to write about this genre.¹⁶

It is surprising that despite the availability of these film catalogs, only a scant bit of attention has been paid to the lasting social and intellectual import of the instructional film in secondary school classrooms, notably Elizabeth Ellsworth and Mariamne H. Whatley’s collection *The Ideology of Images in Educational Media: Hidden Curriculums in the Classroom* (1990).¹⁷ Ellsworth and Whatley’s book concerns itself more broadly with the enterprise of classroom films than the mental hygiene type per se. But it is Ellsworth’s opening chapter, “Educational Films against Critical Pedagogy,” that serves as one tenet of my study; namely, that the instructional film as a genre provides a “vision for the future” that is incompatible with the ideals of liberatory pedagogy—and by extension, the values of educational icons such as John Dewey and his theory of progressive education.

Ellsworth argues that, first, these instructional films position the viewer physically in a fixed place *outside* the diegesis of the film, severely limiting viewer identification with the narrative at hand, as is more typically the case in fictional films. Second, the films position the viewer structurally as beholden to what she calls the “before/after” (16) structure—in which a problem is posed and the “after” is seen as the positive resolution of the problem, made possible by significant narrator (voice-

over) intervention, and persuaded to be the *right* solution for the teenage subject at the narrative's core. Finally, the films position viewers socially "as that of a son learning at the knee of his father" (19), presenting a patriarchal (and usually capitalistic) view of the world that has "a single, static, seemingly perfect future" (21) within which all viewers are required to reside, and accept. Indeed, Ellsworth argues that instructional films therefore do not present a world mitigated by experience or knowledge, or struggles with power, but instead present a world in which "knowledge is defined as certainty arrived at through the search for correspondence between external reality and its representation in language" (22).

Ellsworth's book as a whole thus provides an important starting point for my own project. As illustrated above, she articulates a theory of current-traditional rhetoric without labeling it as such, and stops short of linking instructional films to the tenets of current traditional rhetoric, or to literacy instruction in general. Building on Ellsworth, I offer an additional possibility for historical and socioeducational connections between film studies and rhetoric and composition studies, and between historical constructs of visual media as a teaching tool postwar and current conceptions of class within literacy instruction that linger, and are aided by more current visual technologies, in the twenty-first century.

I undertake a reading of these films using three overlapping and intersecting methodologies. First, I read the films alongside theories of writing instruction, comparing how and where they reinforce tenets of high current-traditionalism, and where they openly value correctness as a hallmark of literacy. Second, I read the films in light of current historiographic views of public secondary education, specifically the images and narrative structures that mirror social values regarding the role of the high school in our nation's quest for a civic populace, and a patriotic (read: appropriately literate) middle-class youth. Finally, I read the films as early, unrecognized artifacts of technological tools for teaching writing and literacy, and in doing so reset the accepted timeline whereby "media literacy" concerns emerge for teachers working in secondary school classrooms. This cross-referencing of cultural artifacts allows me to piece together the links—and contradictory messages—that brought together emerging social theories and public school writing instruction during this era.

In triangulating these theoretical viewpoints in my readings of the films, I maintain that scholars of rhetoric and composition studies must return to instructional films and reconsider their archival value. These

instructional films served as visual illustrations of the values and beliefs taught in the current-traditional pedagogies within writing classrooms, which were themselves built on a very simple notion: that education as a singular measure *solidifies* but does not *elevate* one's social standing. Literacy as a mass concept and as a subject for schooling keeps students in their ascribed social classes, but stops short of lifting them up to classes into which they were not born, and to which they do not belong, socially or economically. Like Howard in *Snap Out of It!*, the featured student subjects in the majority of the instructional films I examine—and, by extension, their viewers—are encouraged to understand their limitations, live within their intellectual and social means, and curb their enthusiasm for a better or less stratified life.

In turning scholarly attention to the import and legacy of these films as both moral directives and technological interventions into literacy instruction, this book asks the following questions relevant to scholars and teachers of rhetoric and composition studies, visual media, and literacy. First, how explicitly are our writing pedagogies connected to unexamined notions of class and taste? How do the structures and parameters of our public educational systems continue to propagate the mythology of upward mobility? Second, what can technology reasonably accomplish in relation to societal goals for education? Are we relying too heavily on teacher “stand-ins” when communicating critical information to students, and does this reliance have its roots in seemingly innocent technologies such as instructional films? Third, what do visual “reinforcements” in the form of technologies such as instructional films help students achieve in terms of literacy education that modeling and other instructional strategies in the classroom cannot—and what myths do these visual technologies promote that, in turn, become absorbed into our core pedagogical culture? How do we account for discrepancies between the lessons of visual and digital technology and the materials more completely in control of the classroom teacher, such as individual lessons, texts (insofar as these may be locally modified or augmented), and assignments? And finally, what should our future goals be, as a continuing democracy, and as a culture currently dominated by the alliances between testing companies, school districts, and software companies, in terms of the promotion of education-for-all, and the assumption that college is an inevitable extension of high school? How do we ultimately want students to achieve a literate education, especially if we know that this literacy will be unequally meaningful as it moves from one student population to (an)other(s)?

To work toward more concrete answers to these questions, this book is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 sets the theoretical stage for my argument by outlining how several prominent literacy theorists contextualize public education in terms of deeply ingrained views of social class in America, and how these views may be read back onto the postwar films under study here. This chapter also provides an overview of overlapping sociological theories from the present time and the postwar era that more directly inform the lessons regarding literacy and stratification that appear in the instructional films themselves. Chapter 2 then examines the critically important alliances made between literacy, patriotism, and nationalism during the latter years of World War II, which set the stage for the prominence of the instructional film in the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s. First, I examine the writings of two historical figures in public education, John Dewey and James Bryant Conant, in order to understand the tenets of schooling that underscored public views of education during this time period. I then use this examination as a lens for reading selections from the government weekly *Education for Victory* (1942–1943) against features in the NCTE publication *English Journal* (1942–1944), the flagship journal for secondary school English teachers, in order to illustrate the kind of governmental and professional values in literacy teaching that allowed for the postwar emergence and proliferation of the mental hygiene film in American high schools.

Chapter 3 examines manuals and compendiums from the instructional film industry in the historical context of the Payne Fund Studies, a large-scale research project from the late 1920s that sought to prove the illicit influence that popular film had on youth. I argue that this study, and the collective aims of the instructional film industry as a whole as represented in its promotional publications, fed neatly into the concomitant aims of the English textbook industry during and immediately following World War II. To illustrate these connected aims, I review several prominent grammar and style textbooks from the late 1930s through the late 1950s in order to spotlight how “current-traditional” was a class-based pedagogy employed as a mainstay value system in English courses during the postwar era. I compare the philosophies present in these textbooks—including analyses of mid-twentieth-century textbooks already done by other scholars in rhetoric and composition, against the arguments by the instructional film industry for using visual media in the secondary classroom during the 1940s. I argue that both textbook publishers and instructional film companies saw themselves as “sponsors” of student literacy—à la Brandt’s theory—and both viewed student learning as pos-

sible through an assembly-line approach in the classroom, promoting standard views of class and literacy and disseminating significant interpretations of cultural values through their products.

In the next two chapters, I turn my attention to a textual analysis of select instructional films themselves, spotlighting in particular the products of arguably the most dominant instructional film company of its time: Coronet Films, based in Chicago, Illinois. Chapter 4 begins with a closer look at the concept of “mental hygiene” and how instruction in this concept was incorporated into postwar English and writing classrooms nationwide. I then examine more closely the brief history of the Coronet corporation itself, and how its production values mimicked those desired by teens used to classical Hollywood cinema, and at the same time catered to conservative and class-minded parents and teachers who sought a lack of “messiness” in narrative design and resolution. I also make the argument for focusing exclusively on Coronet in my study, as it was the preeminent instructional film company operating during the postwar era, as evidenced by its own promotional materials and school districts’ responses to these materials, which I also discuss.

I divide the Coronet films under discussion into two main categories. Chapter 4 focuses on those films that implicitly promote standards of literacy via the modeling of proper social behaviors through idealized literacy practices; while chapter 5 addresses those films that more explicitly teach the tenets of postsecondary, middle-class literacy through actual instruction in acts of reading and writing. These two chapters contextualize these different approaches in terms of possible responses to current-traditional pedagogies of the time, and in consideration of the worries and fears parents, teachers, and students had regarding social class, economic success, and educational attainment. It is important to recognize the subtle differences between these two industry approaches to literacy acquisition in the films, in order to understand the two possible manifestations of current-traditional teachings in the postwar classroom: those that incorporated such teachings into a larger lesson on public discourse both inside and outside of school grounds, as only aligned with “good” literacy-based behaviors, versus those that endeavored to keep the films’ messages and subjects strictly within the classroom milieu, as part of a direct system of instruction, through visualized narrative examples of desirable behaviors to emulate.

In addition, I argue in chapter 5 that the films more directly instructing students in actual literacy acts were deeply affected by publications and policy statements from NCTE, postwar scholarship on writing and

rhetoric and media, and discussions of teacher workload and secondary school conditions, each of which called for a more efficient, simplified way of teaching literacy fundamentals in the face of an increasingly overcrowded and diverse classroom in terms of social background and representative abilities. In doing so, I emphasize the interconnectedness of not only field scholarship and the material at work in the films, but also the reflexivity of instructional and other types of mass media (such as classical Hollywood film and corporate documentary) during the postwar era, where attitudes toward class, literacy, and socioeconomic habits were concerned.

In my final chapter, I make the argument for the connections between the class-based literacies promoted in postwar instructional films as a genre and current mass technology products aimed at serving thousands of students from a distance, modeling similar behaviors and values in the process. I begin by reviewing some recent studies of student socioeconomic levels as relevant to their admittance to and persistence in higher education settings—as well as responses to these study findings by testing companies such as ETS, and multistate conglomerates such as PARCC and Smarter Balanced, who represent the assessment arm of the Common Core Standards. I analyze how the aims of these testing companies align with more streamlined and homogenized visions of both secondary and postsecondary literacy education than may be reasonably possible in our current national school climate.

I subsequently examine the rhetorical economies of writing-based MOOCs in order to compare the deeper impulses of these products with the earlier impulses of instructional films, especially in terms of how MOOCs serve an efficiency function in twenty-first-century literacy learning paradigms promoted by state and corporate agencies. Examining the promotional materials of two MOOCs in depth—those from Duke University and Mt. San Jacinto Community College—as well as recent secondary scholarship on MOOCs and distance learning, I question whether a pedagogy of representation, and specifically online mass literacy pedagogies, is a fair and useful augmentation of more human-human pedagogies wherein emulation takes place on a selective, one-person scale and within a supported and dialogic environment, as opposed to the representations of “correct” writing and style (and associated behaviors) that can permeate visual technologies in writing classrooms. In closing this chapter, I posit that MOOCs are, in fact, not revolutionary as a tool but in fact a remediation of prior technologies and pedagogies like

the instructional film, via an application of Bolter and Grusin's theories. Most critically, I offer this analysis of mental hygiene films as applicable to MOOCs and other emerging distance technologies as one possible model for subsequent reexamination of other overlooked—and unmediated—technological aids used in the teaching of writing and literacy in our own classrooms, past or present.