INTRODUCTION

TOO BLACK, TOO STRONG

THE BLACK RHETORICAL PRESENCE

> Well, the first difficulty is really so simple that it's usually overlooked: to be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious, is to be in a rage almost all the time. So that the first problem is how to control that rage so that it won't destroy you. Part of the rage is this: it isn't only what is happening to you, but it's what's happening all around you all of the time, in the face of the most extraordinary and criminal indifference, the indifference and ignorance of most white people in this country.
>
> **James Baldwin**

In her 2011 chair's address for the Conference on College Composition and Communication, Gwendolyn D. Pough states to an audience of scholars and teachers of writing that "as doers of the word who teach others to do what we do, we have an obligation to do it bigger and to reach every place and everyone we can reach."[1] Similarly, other conference leaders during the decade have urged scholars and teachers to broaden the field by incorporating other disciplines to teach students communication in an era characterized by highly charged and often divisive discourse. For instance, Adam J. Banks's 2015 address calls for a revision of composition programs and departments as hubs that connect the academy and local communities to create a "hub for intellectual work and for justice work."[2] Banks concludes his address by urging those who have safeguards and freedoms to "*serve* our students, to serve the local communities in which we live, love, work, and play, and to serve our broader society, which needs our attention to discourse and our ability to enter messy public conversations maybe more now than at any point in our recent memory."[3]

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What resonates with me in Pough's and Banks's addresses are their uses of music to tackle issues within the field. Pough uses hip-hop and Banks uses funk music, both of which are genres within African American music. Within the last twenty years in the field of rhetoric and composition, particularly in the area of African American rhetoric, scholars such as Pough, Banks, Elaine Richardson, Kermit E. Campbell, and Rhea Estelle Lathan have used African American music to theorize about the rhetorical practices in African American communities. By doing so, these scholars have illustrated the value of interdisciplinary work while highlighting the importance of music to African American life.

These scholars' connection to music relates to my own experiences with music. Growing up in Memphis, Tennessee, I was exposed to all types of music: the blues on All Blues Saturday on WDIA radio; the gospel music emanating from every church on Sunday and on WLOK radio every day; the soul blues of Malaco Records with its roster of artists like Johnnie Taylor, Little Milton, and Denise LaSalle; and the burgeoning local hip-hop artists such as Three 6 Mafia, Playa Fly, and Project Pat. All of this music ebbed through a city that has historically sat on the crossroads of both music and race in American culture. Some of this music eventually was heard by the mainstream and, in the case of Three 6 Mafia, was popular enough to receive an Oscar. Some had a brief heyday in the mainstream but was still revered in the community. And some never received the mainstream success and remained in the home community.

In all these cases, I witnessed the times when the music did move into white spaces and remembered the feelings I had when it happened. For instance, while waiting at a red light in Lawrence, Kansas, a group of white teenagers sitting in a car across from me were rapping to the explicit version of Three 6 Mafia's "Stay Fly." I noticed how not only did they know every word, but they had no problem saying even "nigga." This experience, among many others, led me to incorporate music to theorize how dominant and marginalized groups, in this case whites and African Americans, communicate (or miscommunicate) with each other. Drawing on other areas such as education, cinema, and history, I also aim to answer Pough's and Banks's calls for developing interdisciplinary work in the field of rhetoric and composition by illustrating how other areas can inform the field about teaching communication in an era of social and cultural upheaval.

My book is inspired by the value of storytelling. Authors such as Victor Villanueva, Morris Young, and Keith Gilyard have included elements of autobiography and autoethnography to show the connection between the

experience and theory. Therefore, I use stories to illustrate that my experiences are, to paraphrase Pough, bigger than me and is part of a larger historical and cultural moment in American society.[4] This book also chronicles my story as an African American, southern, millennial, middle-class-raised male.[5] My story reflects the aftermath of the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s and my journey to navigate America's changing racial attitudes. When I was born, I was listed as *Black*; now I am described as *African American* (I use both terms interchangeably in this book). In school the curriculum I received was influenced by *multiculturalism*; now education emphasizes *diversity* and *inclusion*. When I applied for my first job, I was a *minority*; now I am a *person of color* or part of an *underrepresented* or *marginalized* group.

Along the way, I witnessed several events related to race in America. In 1986, the year the United States first observed Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday as a federal holiday, I began kindergarten. In 1992 I was watching the evening news at my grandparents' house when Peter Jennings reported that jurors had returned a not-guilty verdict for the police officers who beat Rodney King. In 1995 I was a high school freshman when O.J. Simpson was found not guilty and heard my African American classmates joyfully exclaim "The Juice is loose!" in my high school cafeteria. In 2008 I was dancing in the streets of Lawrence, Kansas, screaming "Free at last!" when CNN called Barack Obama as president of the United States. And in 2016, the day after Donald J. Trump was elected president, I tore up my lesson plan to let students express their responses to the election results. All of these narratives reflect the racial crossroads of American society in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, and what you will read here is my journey in America's rhetorical navigation of race.

RACE AND CULTURAL LITERACY

E. D. Hirsch's *Cultural Literacy* maintains that a person is "culturally literate" when they "possess the basic information needed to thrive in the modern world."[6] For Hirsch, a culturally literate person fluently communicates with others in that culture when they become well versed on the culture's signs, symbols, language, references, and other forms of knowledge. African Americans, however, possess what W. E. B. Du Bois terms a "double consciousness" of being both Black and American.[7] Therefore, African Americans must be culturally literate in their home community but also learn the cultural literacies of the mainstream (i.e., white culture). This acquisition of

mainstream cultural literacy is necessary for African Americans to cross over and gain access to areas—such as work or neighborhoods—inhabited by whites who may have little or no interaction or knowledge with African Americans and their culture.

This acquisition of learning about mainstream cultural literacies was especially important at the end of the nineteenth century. Between the end of Reconstruction in 1877 and the early twentieth century—a period historian Rayford Logan termed the "nadir" of African American status in America—white society created a series of Jim Crow laws to segregate and discriminate against African Americans.[8] Along with legalized discrimination, whites, especially those in the American South, also enforced a cultural literacy for African Americans, which included the following:

1) Do not shake hands with a white person.
2) Do not look directly into the eyes of a white person.
3) Remove your hat in the presence of a white person.
4) Go to the back door of a white person's house.
5) Expect to be served last in a store when a white customer arrives, even if you were the first to arrive.
6) Do not try clothing on in white businesses.
7) Do not expect white people to address you with titles of respect. However, always use titles of respect when speaking to white people, even those who are younger than you.[9]

In this cultural literacy, African Americans learned that acceptable behavior around whites revolved around three ideas: inferiority to whites, invisibility to whites unless needed, and white creation into qualities of an "acceptable Negro." If African Americans deviated from these rules, they were "uppity niggers" who needed to be "put in their place," which often resulted in prison terms, sexual assaults, or lynchings.

Along with social structures, white popular media perpetrated racist stereotypes and ideologies of African Americans. In music, minstrel shows, which involved performers wearing blackface, featured more than six thousand "coon songs" that included titles such as "All Coons Look Alike to Me," "Mammy's Little Pickanny," and "My Coal Black Lady."[10] D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* featured whites in blackface playing stereotypical roles such as mammies and violent rapists, while portraying the Ku Klux Klan as benevolent restorers of law and order. Other movies such as *Gone with the Wind* and the *Song of the South* offered romanticized images of antebel-

lum southern life, and the most popular radio show was *Amos 'n' Andy*, in which two white men spoke in exaggerated African American Vernacular English.[11] Advertising also furthered stereotypes, with the product trinity of Aunt Jemima, Uncle Ben, and Cream of Wheat's Rastus.[12] All of these popular images of African Americans in white society reinforced a racial cultural literacy of African Americans as servile or childlike figures dependent on whites or as amusing buffoons designed to entertain whites.

Though the Jim Crow laws and more overt racial stereotypes have disappeared, the cultural literacy of racial etiquette and visual images of Black stereotypes haunt U.S. racial attitudes. My existence has been shaped by these remnants. When I was eleven years old, I entered a department store with my father. Wearing my "Martin, Malcolm, and Mandela: The Struggle Continues" T-shirt, I noticed a white woman following me. Unfazed, I walked into the book section and chose a biography on educator Mary McLeod Bethune. I proceeded to the checkout line to purchase it, and when the cashier asked if I wanted a bag, I said, "No, thank you," placed the receipt inside the book, and walked over to the exit door where my father was waiting.

A few feet before I met my father, the same white woman who followed me earlier in the store ran to me and—her finger directly pointing in my face—demanded, "Did you buy this book?" Before I could answer, she was motioning to take the book and call the security guard. My father walked over, got between us, and directly stated to the woman, "Yes, he did," as he gestured for me to walk to the exit door while he followed behind me. When we got inside the car where my mother was waiting, my father told her what happened and said that he would never shop there again. He then told me to be careful because "They look at Black children, especially Black boys, when in a store." When I protested, "But that's an unfair stereotype," my father responded, "Yeah, but be careful."

Later that day, my parents sat me down to discuss what I refer to as "The Talk." Though The Talk is now defined as a discussion about how to handle oneself when confronted by the police, I define it as a discussion in which adult African Americans instruct their children on contemporary Black cultural literacies concerning acceptable behavior around whites.[13] Like the cultural literacies that dictated the rules of racial etiquette during the nadir, these rules are used to help in situations that can prevent arrest or—in some cases—death. The following are some of the rules I learned from adolescence to adulthood:

1) Always have a book in your hand when walking down the street. If the police see you and ask where you are going, you can respond with, "I'm going to school/the library."

2) Always keep your hands visible when shopping.

3) Ask for a receipt and a bag when checking items out of a store. If a bag is unavailable, visibly place the receipt on the merchandise.

4) Do not become loud and boisterous in public settings to prevent perceptions of behaving "ghetto."

5) Give your child a name that does not appear "ethnic" (e.g., Laquita, Tyrone) so that teachers and employers will not discriminate against the child.

6) Avoid "ethnic" hairstyles (e.g., braids, dreadlocks) that will prevent you from getting a job.

7) Get a post office box in an affluent zip code when applying for jobs in wealthy areas. The post office box will prevent employers from discriminating against you if you live in zip codes deemed "too Black" or "hood."

8) When attending a predominately white school, sit in the front, actively participate, and go above and beyond the requirements in the assignment.

9) Be at a place ten minutes before the scheduled time instead of arriving on CPT (colored people's time).

10) Drive exactly or under the speed limit when in predominately white neighborhoods.

11) Have your license, insurance, and registration already visible before the police officer arrives at your car. Keep your hands on the wheel and always answer with, "Yes, sir/ma'am" or "No, sir/ma'am."

12) Put on your "white person's voice" (i.e., sound cheerful and nonthreatening with no traces of African American Vernacular English) when answering the phone to conduct business or request services.

13) Do not walk out of the house with hair rollers or a do-rag on your head. Make sure that your clothes are pressed and that your wardrobe does not include any loud colors.

14) Do not visibly have a disagreement or argument in front of white people, lest it makes the race look bad.

All of these rules echoed the refrain that I would hear from older African Americans during my childhood years: "Don't embarrass me in front of these white folks. They already think we're crazy. Don't go and confirm it"; "It's a white man's world out here. Better get used to learning the rules"; and "I'd rather discipline you instead of having the police beat you." There were several underlying concepts to this cultural literacy: know your place; do

not offend white people; learn the rules so that you know how to play the game; and prove that you are "worthy" and "acceptable" to enter white society. On the surface, the rules appeared to be based on what Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham terms the "politics of respectability," the ability to perform well-mannered behavior in public that would gain the esteem of whites.[14] However, another layer to these rules involved surviving in a world dominated by whiteness.[15] Eventually, you will gain entrance into places of power to change the rules for future generations.

These cultural literacy lessons continued after I graduated high school and attended a historically Black college or university (HBCU). My community's belief was that one attended an HBCU for undergraduate school and entered a predominately white university for graduate school. The reasoning for this plan was that one could gain a foundation by being educated in an environment where the majority of the teachers and classmates looked like you before entering the white world. While I took courses in African American literature and history, I was also expected to be knowledgeable about Western culture. For instance, during my sophomore honors colloquium course, we had to list our top ten favorite movies. When I announced my list, my teacher remarked that mine was "too Black" and that I needed to "expand my horizons" for a fuller cultural education. I then went to the library and checked out movies that were on the American Film Institute's Top 100 list of all-time greatest films. At a university in which more than 90 percent of the student population was African American and nonwhite students received "minority" and "diversity" scholarships, diversity meant learning about white culture to gain access in the white world.

BLACK CULTURAL LITERACY IN TEACHING

By graduate school I felt had mastered all the rules of racial etiquette. However, I soon learned that there were more rules for specific situations. One day, while teaching a bell hooks essay in my first-year writing course, a white student began a side conversation with another student. Seeing and hearing this sidebar, I incorporated my teacher training to politely ask the student, "Would you like to share your thoughts about the passage?" When she curtly responded, "We weren't talking about *that* part of the essay," I said, "Well, since you weren't talking about *that* part of the essay, then I suggest that you sit there and not say anything while I'm talking," and continued class discussion. As class was ending, the student decided to really let me know how she felt:

"You know what, Cedric?"

"That's Mr. Burrows to you."

"Well, you're not a real professor, so I can call you whatever I want. If I want to have a conversation with my friend about how I don't like this reading, then I can, and I don't appreciate you calling me out in front of the class."

"If you don't like it then you can drop this class and take it somewhere else."

We argued for the next five minutes until she stormed out of the classroom. I then went to the program's administrative office, where one administrator told me that I should "not take it personally" because the student "may have had a bad day" or "was stressed out from school" and that as a sign of goodwill I should apologize for "telling her to shut up." I wrote an email to the student apologizing for "raising my voice" but told her that if she could not respect me, then she should drop the class. She apologized for her behavior, but we still had a series of confrontations throughout the rest of the semester, and administrators still told me that the student was "learning to adjust to college," "feeling stressed," and "learning because she's still young."

I later talked about the incident to a classmate, who decided to tell my teaching mentor about the conflict. My teaching mentor, an older African American man, summoned me to his office and asked for details. When I told him what occurred, he said that I "handled it wrong" because "all these white girls got to do is cry when they go to the administrative office and they will believe them over you." To save me from any further conflict and recognizing my place as a Black teacher at a predominately white university, he reasoned that I should change her essay grade to a higher one so that it would not feel like I was "picking on her." When I gave the mentor the graded paper, he conceded that raising her grade would not work based on my comments. He then instructed me to be nicer to the student so that I "don't offend her" and offer "less controversial" readings so I won't "upset" the white students and get bad teaching evaluations.

During my teaching career in graduate school, I was often called into the administrative office for a variety of offenses that white, usually women, students claimed against me. The charges included not looking at them after asking them a question during discussion, canceling classes to hold student conferences, not responding to messages during holiday break, dismissing them from class for not reading the assigned text, teaching an overabundance of "black stuff," or being "too direct" with them. Usually, I was presumed guilty, not given the opportunity to offer my side of the situation, and told to find a way to "correct their grievances."

I now realized that my teaching advisor was giving me a pedagogical version of The Talk, and the pedagogical rules of The Talk were tailored for an African American professor at a predominately white university. This cultural literacy involved the following:

1) Always keep the door open and place the student's chair close to the door. The student then has easy access to the door to prevent any accusations of assault, especially if the student is a white woman.
2) Conference with confrontational students in a place where there are lots of people around or have someone else in your office to witness the events.
3) Balance materials written by people of color with white authors to prevent notions of racial bias, especially when the subject matter is about race.
4) Avoid challenging white students when they express racist ideas because it may interfere with your teaching evaluations, which would affect your merit pay.
5) Smile often to appear nonthreatening to your students.

With these rules, I learned that even though I was the teacher, the voice of white students would have more weight than mine in a dispute. Also, while I had to learn both African American and white culture, the institution confirmed that white students did not have to learn anything about my culture. Finally, I was supposed to be seen as not "too serious" but as someone who could nurture and at times entertain students.

"LET IT GO"

Like the other rules I learned in childhood, I believed that if I followed this new cultural literacy, I would gain respect from white society. I would smile through every microaggression and act indifferently to them, even though my white counterparts could say anything without fear of reprimand or admonishment. However, in silencing my voice, I realized that no matter how "acceptable" I would appear around whites, I would not receive the same treatment and respect. Also, during the few times I allowed myself to speak up when a microaggression occurred, I was quickly dismissed and scorned for having emotions that were often described as "threatening" or "scary." Essentially, I was told in various ways to "stay in my place." While I maintained the veneer of complicity, I felt a rage developing in me that began to infect my spirit and my health, which included bouts of depression, illness, and instances when I felt my anger rising and needing an outlet to express it.

Several of those instances are worth noting. In January of 2009, I was helping a classmate pack a professor's office and wearing my Barack Obama "Yes We Can" T-shirt in observance of the first African American president, who was to be sworn in within the next few days. While I was walking down the hallway carrying a box, a white faculty member walked past me, pointed his index and middle fingers at my shirt, and whispered, "Pow, pow," as if he was shooting at the Obama image on my T-shirt. Realizing what he was doing, I was about to hurl the box in the man's direction, but my classmate caught me before I threw it and encouraged me to "let it go." I then shouted at the person that if he knew what was good for him, he would not try anything like that around me again.

In the spring of 2012, a professor invited my friends and me to a play. As my friends walked to a food counter, I sat reading the program. A few moments later, a white man and his grandson sat two seats from me, and the child had a hard time sitting still. The grandfather then pointed toward me and said to his grandson, "You see that man? He bites." The grandson calmed down in his seat as the grandfather looked at me and laughed, as if to thank me for helping him discipline his grandson. Thinking about Trayvon Martin's murder, which had occurred a few months earlier that year, and wondering if George Zimmerman learned to fear a Black man in a similar way, I gave him the side eye and sarcastically remarked, "So you just taught your grandson to be fearful of a Black man? Good job." The grandfather looked insulted and was about to say something, but my friends returned before he could offer a response. When I told my friends later what happened, they shook their heads but told me, "Let it go."

The most striking incident occurred in July of 2015. Scrolling through my Facebook timeline, I saw a Facebook friend's post about a white man on the losing end of a struggle with a group of African American men. The description was that the white man was a member of the Ku Klux Klan, who chose to have a rally in a South Carolina town a few weeks after Dylann Roof shot and killed several African Americans in Charleston, South Carolina. The Facebook friend captioned the video with "This is how you treat a racist." While the comments under the post originally started with variations of the "two wrongs don't make it right" speech, they evolved into commentary about the Black men's conduct:

"How dare they behave that way? Don't they know that they are hurting their cause with white people?"

"This is the reason why white people don't want to be around black people. I remember being jumped by a group of black men and I haven't liked them ever since."

"Violence is never the answer. They should love this guy instead of beating him up."

Like previous incidents, I felt the rage inside my spirit. At first, I heard the familiar saying told to me when these incidents occurred—"Let it go." However, I remembered all the other incidents when I was told to "let it go," and I felt spiritually wounded. Instead of internalizing my feelings, I decided to join into the conversation with my own thoughts:

"So, let me get this straight. This community just experienced a racist go inside a church and fellowship with its members only for him to pull out a rifle, shoot the same people who offered him brotherhood, and you're saying that they should not be angry when some racist knowingly comes into their community to cause trouble?"

That comment opened a verbal battle between the commentators and me:

"Nonviolence is always the answer. Responding with violence only creates more violence."

"So, if someone disrespects you all the time, what are you supposed to do, just smile?"

"You should always diffuse the situation. Why can't black people just get over it? Racism is a part of history."

"Obviously we can't since a white man shot up a church. And obviously white people can't either since they got Confederate statues and flags flying all over the place."

"Well, why didn't the blacks stay inside their house and there wouldn't have been violence?"

"Well, why didn't the Klan stay where they were instead of going into a neighborhood trying to provoke people?"

While I knew the people were not going to change their minds, I felt victorious knowing that I reclaimed my voice and my power to challenge the commentators' ideologies. The poster of the video feigned surprise that it had evoked a highly charged response, which further angered me because it came across as flippant.

While I still felt emboldened and relieved after all those years of containing emotions and trying to be acceptable, a few lingering questions remained with me. Did the Facebook friend post the video because it was entertaining and amusing without recognizing the seriousness of the event and the implications of posting such a video in mixed company? Why were the commenters defending the Klan members instead of having empathy for a community that recently experienced a mass shooting? Why did my Facebook friend—who claimed to be an ally for African Americans—not say

anything to the commenters about their statements? Why did the comments about "Black people hurting their cause with whites" feel so similar to the concept of Black people being "kept in their place"? And, a question that became the initial research question for this book, how, as a society, did we get here?

TWO SOCIETIES, TWO NARRATIVES

How did we get here? To answer this question, I started to understand that my experiences, the Facebook friend's post, the video itself, the comments, and my response to the comments reflected racial attitudes in the United States in the last fifty years, and that those attitudes reflect two narratives living a cautious coexistence in the same country. The Kerner Commission warned that the United States was becoming "two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal," and the narratives in the last fifty years fulfilled this prophecy.[16]

One narrative is what I term as the Reconciliation and Truth narrative. This narrative has two distinct periods. The first period focused on reconciliation and honoring members of the civil rights movement while correcting and apologizing for past racial injustices. Some examples from this period include recognizing Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday as a paid federal holiday, the creation of museums dedicated to the civil rights movement, the settlements of decades-old desegregation lawsuits against state universities, cinematic dramatizations of the civil rights movement, recognizing the dialects of people of color in educational settings, public apologies and monetary reparations for victims of racist practices, and the reopening and prosecution of those who killed participants in the civil rights movement. These instances illustrated how the country was healing past legacies and moving forward with better race relations.

This narrative peaked in 2008 when Barack Obama was elected as the first African American president. Obama's election suggested that the United States was becoming a "post-racial" society that finally overcame its racism. However, with the racially tinged language surrounding descriptions of Obama and his family, along with overt racist dialogue in general, the narrative shifts from one of reconciliation to one based on truth. This period focuses on the racial reality African Americans continue to endure while using current and historical examples to help support their argument. Some examples include the Black Lives Matter movement, the call to remove the statues of Confederate generals and the Confederate flag, the renovation of

civil rights museums to illustrate a continuing history of freedom fighting, the opening of museums dedicated to lynching and slavery, and the reclaiming of lost voices of the civil rights movement. Thus, the Reconciliation and Truth narrative argues that while the United States may have acknowledged its racist past, it still has not fully recognized how that racist past influences current racial attitudes.

While the Reconciliation and Truth narrative has existed within the last thirty years, another narrative is guardedly coexisting with it. This narrative is what I term the Neo–Lost Cause/Racial Nadir narrative. As the United States deals with its racist past, the Neo–Lost Cause/Racial Nadir narrative claims that the gains of the civil rights movement are at the expense of white Americans. In response, those who uphold this narrative create a romanticized image of a pre–civil rights era in which cities were thriving places instead of "ghetto" (i.e., Black) areas infested with crime and drugs. People were judged by their merits instead of a "quota" system, and everyone pulled their weight instead of relying upon government handouts. This first era of this narrative occurred during the early 1980s with the focus on restoring the United States to a previous time of safety and "law and order." Some notable examples from this era include the call for "states' rights," the use of thinly veiled racial language during elections, the fallout from the Rodney King and O.J. Simpson verdicts, the Republican Revolution,[17] court rulings and campaigns against using race as a factor for hiring or university admissions, and racial violence such as the killing of James Byrd in Texas,[18] the arson of African American churches in the South,[19] and the racial profiling of African American motorists.

This narrative also peaked with the election of Obama in 2008. Where the Reconciliation and Truth narrative viewed Obama's election as the beginning of the "post-racial" era, the Neo–Lost Cause/Nadir narrative saw Obama's election as the height of a changing America in which white Americans were losing power and influence. In response, the narrative evolves into a newer nadir of race relations in which some white Americans feel the need to regain what they believe is their eroding power. Some examples of this period include the creation of the Tea Party movement with its slogan of "Take Back America"; the growing popularity of the white nationalist movement; the revision of history textbooks or the removal of ethnic studies programs in schools under the grounds that this curricula create narratives that encourage hatred of whites; alterations to the Voting Rights Act, gerrymandering, and the passage of voter ID laws meant to disenfranchise the Black vote; the high-profile deaths of people like Trayvon Martin, Sandra Bland,

and those killed in Charleston, South Carolina; and the presidential election victory of Donald Trump, whose slogan "Make American Great Again" contains overtones of the earlier period of the Neo–Lost Cause/Nadir era.[20]

These two narratives and their cautious coexistence led me to the creation of this book. *Rhetorical Crossover* argues that the Black rhetorical presence becomes whitened when it crosses over into white audiences. Using examples gleaned from popular music, textbooks, movies, and social movements, I contend that the rhetorical features that make African American rhetoric unique become whitewashed to render them nonthreatening or inoffensive to white audiences. This rhetorical crossover effect contributes to some whites' arguments that racism is a personal choice that people can individually overcome or "get over." However, African Americans maintain that racism is institutional, thereby creating a rhetorical dissonance of understanding race and racism between African Americans and some whites. This rhetorical dissonance gives some whites more credibility and authority in the dominant culture when discussing race and racism, while African Americans feel that they must pay a "Black tax" (the societal charges placed on African Americans) to enter white society.

RHETORIC, BLACK RHETORICAL PRESENCE, AND RHETORICAL CROSSOVER

Before I discuss the Black rhetorical presence in white culture, I first need to define rhetoric, the Black rhetorical presence, and rhetorical crossover. My definitions of these terms are influenced by scholarship in African American rhetoric.[21] Scholars in the field highlight the importance of studying African American rhetoric within African American culture without relying on Western rhetorical paradigms. Whereas Western culture tends to focus on rhetoric as an act of persuasion, African American rhetorical practices consider how race and racism affect the rhetorical subject when addressing an audience, especially one hostile to the message of the marginalized group. What I intend with my project is to specifically name and theorize a phenomenon that has occurred in African American history—the double consciousness of communicating as a Black American in white America.

RHETORIC

I define *rhetoric* as a series of communicative practices grounded in a shared cultural knowledge. This definition recognizes that culture plays an important part in transmitting information. It also acknowledges that one must acquire cultural literacy and knowledge when entering and moving into

various rhetorical communities. For example, during the summer before I started graduate school, I worked as a busboy for a local restaurant. One day, the bartender asked if I would clean his area for a significant tip. After I cleaned his station and placed the dishware on the conveyor belt in the kitchen, the bartender came into the kitchen and gave me the tip. As I was leaving the kitchen into the front area, the bartender thanked me again. One of the dishwashers overheard us talking and teasingly asked the bartender, "Did you tip him well?" When the bartender said, "Yeah, I just tipped the boy," one of the cooks proceeded to curse him out about what she felt was a slur in his calling me a "boy." As she was talking, the cook's voice and body mannerisms contained traces of the Black rhetorical presence, which included the way she clipped the *-er* off when she called the bartender a "sorry muthafucka" as she stood with one hand on her hip, the other hand pointing a finger in various directions, and her body moving rhythmically to the words she was saying.

The bartender was shocked at the cook's response and said, "What's the big deal? Besides, you're not even in this conversation. This is between me and him," as he pointed toward the dishwasher. The cook responded, "But I heard it and I don't like it!" Later, the bartender saw me and, still visibly shaken, asked me what the issue with the cook was. I explained to him about how the word *boy* affected her. For the bartender, a white man in his early twenties and raised in the Midwest, *boy* meant my gender. For the cook, a middle-aged Black woman raised in the South who rode a bus across town to create the veneer of integration and experienced trauma because of it, *boy* was a derogatory word used to denigrate Black men and to remind them of their inferior place in society. Even though the bartender and cook spoke the same language, their cultural background informed how they spoke and understood a word. The meaning of that word depended on who spoke it.

This miscommunication occurs in other instances as well, especially with how the Black body is interpreted when surrounded by whiteness. During a 2015 postgame interview with Erin Andrews, Seahawks cornerback Richard Sherman talked directly at the camera about how he was the best cornerback in the NFL and that 49ers wide receiver Michael Crabtree should never talk about him. Those within the African American community read Sherman as a person visibly hyped from winning and telling Crabtree the equivalent of "keep my name outcha mouth." However, some in the white community viewed Sherman as an uneducated "thug" who should be graceful after winning, even though Crabtree shoved Sherman's face when Sherman tried to shake Crabtree's hand after the game.[22]

African Americans saw Sherman as fulfilling a long African American rhetorical tradition of signifying and boasting.[23] Whites unfamiliar with this African American rhetorical tradition saw his behavior as unsportsmanlike, and African Americans saw the description of Sherman as a "thug" as being doublespeak for "nigger."[24] Even though Sherman was not the first athlete to celebrate a victory, because of his appearance (e.g., long dreadlocks and visible tattoos) and speech associated with African American Vernacular English, Sherman was viewed as uneducated, even though he earned a bachelor's degree in communications from Stanford University. As with the cook, Sherman's verbal and physical displays are connected to long-standing African American rhetorical traditions. However, because people outside of the rhetorical tradition do not have the cultural knowledge to understand their speech or mannerisms, the behavior of both cook and Sherman were misunderstood as humorous at best or threatening at worst.

BLACK RHETORICAL PRESENCE

This misunderstanding of rhetorical traditions then leads me to define the Black rhetorical presence. Thurmon Garner and Carolyn Calloway-Thomas note that a Black rhetorical presence is generated in African American rhetoric when one finds "cultural combinations of African American rhetorical patterns of sufficient frequency and intensity" when the "principled cultural experiences" of African Americans are "foregrounded."[25] Simply put, the Black rhetorical presence appears when the culture of African Americans is prominently highlighted rather than placed in the background. Garner and Calloway-Thomas note, however, that although African Americans may appear in various media, they may not exhibit a Black rhetorical presence. For example, Danny Glover in the film *Switchback* or Morgan Freeman in *The Shawshank Redemption* are African American actors in these respective films; yet, according to Garner and Calloway-Thomas, they do not exhibit an African American rhetorical presence in the role.

However, I argue that these actors display an African American rhetorical presence in these films because these are people who grew up in an African American rhetorical tradition and traces of that tradition would inform their roles. But because these actors are in media produced from a white viewpoint and for mainly white consumption, they have a muted or toned down black rhetorical presence or perform a Black rhetorical presence suitable for or easily understood by a white audience. Therefore, I revise Garner and Calloway-Thomas's definition of the Black rhetorical presence as one in which qualities associated with the Black rhetorical tra-

dition or the African American subject raised within an African American rhetorical tradition exhibits traits (verbal, visual, and physical) associated with that rhetorical tradition. When the subject's cultural experiences are foregrounded, the Black rhetorical presence is clearer to understand because the culture recognizes the rhetorical traditions demonstrated by the subject. When the Black rhetorical presence is placed within white culture, the traits of African American are still there; however, because the mainstream audience may not understand the qualities of African American rhetoric, the subject—either by choice or coercion—tones down the Black rhetorical presence.

RHETORICAL CROSSOVER

I name this phenomenon *rhetorical crossover*. In music, *crossover* means that an artist or song has moved from their original genre and achieved success with a larger audience.[26] For African Americans the term *crossover* means that the music of an African American artist moved from a primarily African American audience to a primarily white one.[27] To gain white popularity, however, African Americans historically altered their music by toning down features associated with African American music. Adapting the concept of crossover from music, I define the term *rhetorical crossover* as the movement of the Black rhetorical presence—either the African American subject or features of African American rhetoric—from the African American community to the white community. When the Black rhetorical presence crosses over into the white community, the features that make the Black rhetorical presence unique are watered down to become nonthreatening to white audiences. If the subject crosses over into the mainstream in its original Black rhetorical presence, the mainstream views it as something that needs to be contained. It attempts to overpower the Black rhetorical presence in two ways: by adopting aspects of the Black rhetorical presence as a source of amusement or by marketing the Black rhetorical presence as dangerous in order to contain or remove it.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

As previously stated, there are plenty of examples of how the Black rhetorical presence has been constructed and misinterpreted in mainstream culture over time, especially with the overt stereotypes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, for this project, I focus my research on modern rhetorical crossover, which I argue began after World War II, when

African Americans became more prominently featured in mainstream culture in non-stereotypical ways.

Chapter 1, "'Hey, Man, You're Taking My Heritage': Rhetorical Crossover, R&B, and Dinah Washington," serves as the theoretical foundation for the book and uses the development of R&B and the career of Dinah Washington to illustrate rhetorical crossover in five stages. First, the subject is raised within the African American community and learns the rhetorical features used by the community. Second, the subject transitions from being well known in the African American community to recognizing the limitations placed on them, thus slowly developing a desire for a broader (i.e., white) audience. Third, the subject crosses over into the mainstream but is altered through *whitescripting* (rephrasing African American discourse into a white discourse) or *whitescaping* (placing whiteness in the forefront of visual images that feature African Americans). Fourth, the subject loses a majority of the mainstream audience while trying to retain popularity with the African American home community. Finally, the dominant and marginalized cultures conflict about how the subject is remembered or discussed, which can lead to *whitesplaining* (narrating events about African Americans while ignoring the racism that surrounds the narrative).

Subsequent chapters discuss how African Americans and whites narrate the black rhetorical presence in their respective communities. Chapter 2, "Black Skin, White Discourse: Whitescripting and Cultroscripting Textbooks," examines how first-year writing textbooks anthologize King to theorize about whitescripting and offers the counternarrative of *cultroscripting*, which describes the process of recognizing all of the rhetorical traditions that influences an author. Chapter 3, "That's Entertainment? Whitescaping and Afroscaping Civil Rights Movies," uses the genre of civil rights films to theorize how whitescaping visually constructs the black rhetorical presence in movies with predominately or significant white characters and how *Afroscaping* constructs the black rhetorical presence in movies when all of the main characters are African American. Chapter 4, "Whose Lives Matter? Whitesplaining and Afroplaining Public Discourse," uses events such as the aftermath of Reconstruction, Black Power, and Black Lives Matter to examine whitesplaining and how *Afroplaining* incorporates rhetorical strategies to reaffirm African Americans and remind the mainstream of the existence of African Americans.

The conclusion, "Paying the Toll: The Black Tax and the Black Rhetorical Presence," argues that the results of African Americans' crossing over into the mainstream has created an institutional practice of making Afri-

can Americans pay the Black tax. At the heart of the Black tax is the notion that if African Americans work hard and rise above their situation without complaining about racism, they will gain privileges that whites already have. The qualities of the Black tax include presenting an acceptable form of Blackness to the white world, appreciating the generosity of white society for being allowed into its institutions, representing the race, defending and validating one's experiences and worldviews, recognizing that the African American subject is an intrusion to white institutions, and solving race and discrimination.

CONCLUSION

In "Message to the Grassroots," Malcolm X discussed the effects of what he believed to be white influence on the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. According to Malcolm X, the march was originally a revolution that involved disrupting the daily activities in Washington, D.C., instead of the nonviolent march that is remembered today. When explaining the result of the change, Malcolm X uses the metaphor of coffee and cream: "It's just like when you've got some coffee that's too black, which means it's too strong. What do you do? You integrate it with cream; you make it weak. If you pour too much cream in you won't even know you ever had coffee. It used to be hot, it becomes cool. It used to be strong, it becomes weak. It used to wake you up, now it'll put you to sleep."[28] For Malcolm X, coffee is strongest when it is only black. However, once one adds the cream, the previously strong coffee has been diluted into something that is both weaker than its original state and more palatable for the drinker. This study, then, examines the effects of when dominant society attempts to dilute the Black rhetorical presence into a state easily accessible for mainstream consumption.