For the second time in two weeks, I tried writing a straight academic review of Keith Gilyard’s *Race, Rhetoric, and Composition*. I don’t understand the impulse really. Maybe it’s the compulsion to belong, to assimilate, to accommodate, to deny that in some sense I still don’t belong, despite the successes. Even though I no longer feel any of that old insecurity—at least not consciously—it still must be operating somewhere within me. And it’s that consciousness of my own contradictions, a consciousness of my difference, of never not being the Other, that compels me to understand more of the nature of racism.

Gilyard’s book helps my understanding a great deal. Straight up: I’ve already adopted it for a graduate seminar in composition. It seems that we’ve danced around racism in this business, speaking more often of multiculturalism. We seem to hang on to an old idea of cultural pluralism that sounds nice until one remembers its use in the 1960s to justify the melting pot mentality of Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan and its concomitant, the bootstraps mentality (Omi and Winant 17-21). Here, in Gilyard’s book, we have some clear discussion, centered on the business we rhetoricians and compositionists do on anti-racism.

I’m glad for a book that takes me further in my effort to understand the workings of something so obviously irrational. Yale’s Sterling Professor of History, David Brion Davis, puts it this way: “Although political rhetoric often conceals this truth, as we complete the twentieth century and prepare to enter a new millennium, no issue in America is as sensitive,
potentially explosive, and resistant to resolution as the issue of race” (7). As you’re reading this, the twentieth century is behind us, but I’ll bet that nothing magical has taken place in the few months between this writing and your reading that ends racism or that even moves us forward in our understanding.

At this point in my thinking and being, I need an understanding of political economies and their rhetorics, since I’m quite convinced that racism is a product of imperial expansion and slavery or the other forms of human ownership that are part of colonialism. That’s why some part of me wishes that Gilyard had followed his initial inclination “to demand that contributors . . . take a hard materialist turn and link race explicitly to historical formations of racism and economic exploitation.” There’s much interesting work going on in this endeavor, yet decidedly little of it that I can find to date deals explicitly with the rhetorics that arise from those material conditions that give rise to racism.

In *Black Reconstruction in America*, W.E.B. Du Bois, for example, is at pains to describe the political economy that necessitated the idea of the inferiority of black folk. He argues that the American Southerner was pushed into slavery by the economics of Northern and European industry, so that the Southern slave master “was therefore not deliberately cruel to his slaves, but he had to raise cotton enough to satisfy his pretensions and self-indulgence, even if it brutalized and commercialized his slave labor” (37). Though there is a clear irony to this, Du Bois is attempting to offer an economic explanation for slavery. In this same passage, Du Bois goes on to say that

slavery was the economic lag of the 16th century carried over into the 19th century and bringing by contrast and by friction moral lapses and political difficulties. It has been estimated that the Southern states had in 1860 three billion dollars invested in slaves, which meant that slaves and land represented the mass of their capital. Being generally convinced that Negroes could only labor as slaves, it was easy for them to become further persuaded that slaves were better off than white workers and that the South had a better labor system than the North, with extraordinary possibilities in industrial and social development. (37)

Du Bois describes an economy that gives rise to a politics that is represented rhetorically, as a matter of persuasion. He later details the discussions that take place in the press and in the legislature to rectify the problem of poor white workers, discussions that make it necessary, he argues, for the African American to be reduced to subhuman status. From
1897, when he spoke on the “conservation of race” to his 1962 revision of an older essay on Africa, colonialism, and racism, Du Bois remained convinced that racism finds its roots in capitalism and imperialism.

The problem some see in this view is the idea that racism antedates sixteenth century North America (which Du Bois also recognized and wrote about). In fact, the argument is that since racism can be found to exist long before the European trans-Atlantic expansion during the fifteenth century, there is no causal relation between racism and capitalism. James Sweet argues, for example, that a rhetoric against the darkest skinned slaves ranges as far back as feudal Spain and medieval Islam. Similarly, Jennifer Morgan demonstrates how the black woman who is in some sense removed from the African continent by virtue of living in the Cape Verde Islands can appear to a European as an object of beauty (and object is a rhetorical choice here); but when the black woman is on the African continent, she is rendered a beast, with breasts hanging so low as to be confused with an additional pair of legs. In this case, the male European traveler describes her as naked, promiscuous, given to sleeping with apes, and impervious to the pain of childbirth. The bestialization of “lower orders” (which includes women of color, “sodomites,” and Jews) turns out to be a rhetorical trope—from Aristotle’s assertion that “the ox was the poor man’s slave” to the Christian depiction of Jews as “horned beasts, swine, and vermin” (Davis 12). Shakespeare describes the Moor Othello as black (Laurence Fishburne plays the lead role in the latest film rendition of the play), though Emily Bartels argues that Shakespeare is depicting the tensions between Venetians and Turks rather than Moors. Moor itself suggests a person of mixed racial heritage: the Spaniard mixed with Arab and North African Berber (this is the reason why Hegel later constructs a history that places Spain with Africa rather than Western Europe; see Dussel 21-24). This legacy continues: I think of a well-meaning William Labov who does not make the distinctions that, for example, Ana Celia Zentella makes between the Puerto Rican’s English vernacular and Black English Vernacular in the ghettos of Manhattan.

But I have strayed far afield from the argument I was attempting to make and even further from the book I mean to be reviewing. The argument is really a simple one: the view that materialist studies of racism must be dismissed because racism precedes fifteenth century expansion is uninformed. Moreover, the argument that a capitalist world system could only occur with the exploration and colonization of the New World is entirely Eurocentric. (This argument has led folks like Enrique Dussel, who opened all kinds of doors for me, to fall victim to the Eurocentric
claim that the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean and Mexico were the first Other.) Yet, there are social theorists such as Janet Abu-Lughod that write about a time before European hegemony. André Gunder Frank, whose controversial, polemical, and provocative *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age* suggests that capitalism as accumulation goes back 5000 years rather than 500.

These aren’t our conversations in rhetoric and composition studies yet. We can read Edward Said’s assertion in *Culture and Imperialism* that there’s more to be read in the political economy of imperialism than on the culture while at the same time not explore those readings that Said himself names. We are, it seems, reticent to look under that rock. Though culture, we assert, is now more down to earth than some Platonic notion of a liberal art that frees the mind, we seem somehow still to regard culture as isolated, a *haute couture* (images of a Star Trek episode come to mind in which the Stratus City dwellers literally float above the material conditions of miners). Even contributors to a special issue of *PRE/TEXT* on Marxism and rhetoric some years back (including me, I should add) found themselves locked into the work of Antonio Gramsci, and the Gramsci we have adopted is the theorist of the superstructure. Though Gramsci himself did not do much with political economy, he did see the relation between hegemony and the economy, a recognition displayed best by Gayatri Spivak’s rendering of Gramsci. Yet again, though, we seem to stop with “Can the Subaltern Speak?”

Perhaps I’m being hyperbolic here, overstating the case, ignoring folks such as Richard Ohmann. But I do think it will be a good turn of events when we begin to see more clearly that culture and political economy are integrally intermeshed and thereby discover a better way to understand racism fully. If the workings of bureaucracy can give me a breather (the busywork of academics, a matter of hegemonic control, is very effective since the busywork is tied to our economic need), the relation of culture to politics and the economy is where I’ll venture. And knowing how intellectual currents go, I trust there’ll be others, so that in some future volume Gilyard can follow his inclination and demand thorough materialist readings of race.

In the meantime, however, *Race, Rhetoric, and Composition* is really valuable and does what Gilyard wants it to do. He writes that he realized that this “race thing” is ever shifting, ever changing, and becoming increasingly complex in the ways it marks intellectual and sociopolitical communities. Thus, I changed my platform, seeking instead to publish
essays, beyond my most immediate concerns, that explored various dimensions of race as related to rhetoric and/or composition and at least attempted to render visible the implicit yet dominant discourses on race, racism, and identity.

And that's what he accomplishes.

The order of the collection is interesting: it begins by complicating our notions of who America's people of color are and how racism manifests itself; it then turns to pedagogy—in particular, the pedagogy of the white instructor who faces issues of racism and anti-racism in composition; and it ends with an instructor of color trying to discover culture and race with white students.

In the first chapter, Malea Powell provides a narrative of the "mixed-blood," the term that those who are American Indian and white have chosen to identify themselves. (We are familiar with other mixes—mulatta, Chicano, Boricua, and the Black and American Indian mixes—which our sociopolitical system quickly renders simply as "black" or "African American.") Powell weaves a story about the telling of stories and the contradictions inherent in being a part of the complex that is the academy, of that will to deny so as to prove—denying that which is Other within so as to prove the worth of that Other. It's a crazy-making puzzle we get sucked into. Confronting that contradiction, that paradox, she reads through cultural theories about the American Indian's otherness. In a kind of reductive sense (my own reduction, not Powell's), Powell seems to suggest that the task of the mixed-blood and American Indian rhetor is to play the trickster, a figure who simultaneously complies with and resists the dominant discourse.

The trickster rhetoric then becomes an American Indian version of a long-time Puerto Rican strategy of _jaiberia_, a practice of "subversive complicity" within the dominant discourse (Grosfoguel 68). Looking to the current situation in Puerto Rico—a situation in which, given economic and other power relations with the United States, colonialism is not acceptable but nationalism in untenable—Ramón Grosfoguel, Frances Negrón-Muntaner, and Chloé Georas describe _jaiba_ politics as a strategy of mimicry and parody:

According to Diana Fuss in her essay on Franz Fanon, there is a tendency within postcolonial and psychoanalytic discourse to distinguish between the practices of mimicry and masquerade. While in psychoanalysis, masquerade is understood as the unconscious assumption of a role, mimicry, according to Homi K. Bhabha, is understood as a colonial
strategy of subjugation. Fuss, however, stresses that there can be a mimicry of subversion where the deliberate performance of a role does not entail identification. The performance's contexts thus become crucial in determining its subversive potential. ... [In] both Fanon's and Fuss's texts, the most powerful example of subversive mimicry is that of the Algerian nationalist woman militant who "passes" as a Europeanized subject in order to advance the cause of national liberation. (27-28)

In the final essay in this volume "Removing Masks," Gail Okawa suggests a pedagogy for the trickster or the jaiberón. Although Okawa's central metaphor is the mask, it is not about masquerade in the sense discussed above. Identity is the task, and Okawa looks to Mitsuye Yamada's "Masks of Woman." Okawa looks at "masks imposed, superimposed, and self-imposed," following a suggestion in Yamada's poem, which she quotes: "My mask is control / concealment / endurance ... / Over my mask / is your mask of me." In terms of rhetoric, the basic pedagogical tool of ancient rhetorics, imitatio (so completely described by Quintilian, the Spanish teacher of Latin in Rome), becomes, in an anti-racist pedagogical enterprise, mimicry, masking, unmasking, narrative trickery, jaiberia.

In between these two chapters in Gilyard's collection is Anissa Janine Wardi's description of the racist discourse that followed the 1995 bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City, when all the media and police forces were immediately in search of the stereotypical Arab terrorist and all along it was the good ole boy down the block (which gives rise to a potentially long discussion of class in America, but that's another story to be told). Wardi's essay recalls Said's assertion in Orientalism that when it comes to the Arab in America there is nearly "unanimous consensus that politically he does not exist, and when it is allowed that he does, it is either as a nuisance or as an Oriental. The web of racism, cultural stereotypes, political imperialism, dehumanizing ideology holding in the Arab or the Muslim is very strong indeed, and it is this web which every Palestinian has come to feel as his uniquely punishing destiny" (27). Moreover, Wardi foregrounds the complicated notion of colonialism, since Said asserts that the East was Europe's first Other, its first colonies (and here I think of the Roman emperor Constantine's claim of Asia Minor as New Rome), and this brings to mind the whole discussion of phenotypes, a notion that those of us who are victims of racism but not phenotypically othered have to question. The matter isn't solved by a long shot. James Sweet concludes his examination of medieval Muslim distinctions between light and dark-skinned slaves with the observation that
"by the fifteenth century, 'race, and especially skin color, defined the contours of power relationships. . . . Biological assumptions that were familiar to a nineteenth-century Cuban slaveowner would have been recognizable to his fifteenth-century Spanish counterpart" (166). Though I question the notion of year zero as somewhere around 1492, the question of color remains. Meta Carstarphen addresses this question in a way that I find fascinating. She examines contemporary discourse on race in terms of black and white, traces the etymology of black as negation, and arrives at what she calls the "racial enthymeme."

Gilyard takes the pivotal position in the book. He argues for the dominance of the rhetorical nature of racism rather than the biological (though without denying the biological), and he presses the case for antiracist pedagogies that move beyond cultural pluralism.

The first four chapters, then, complicate our notion of racism and discuss the slippery rhetoric of racism. The fifth chapter begins the trek to pedagogy. Here David Holmes argues the case for "fighting back by writing black." Beginning with a retrospective look at the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s, Holmes looks to the creation of the New Black Aesthetic, the Students' Right document of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, and other sociolinguistic pedagogical tools to argue that Standard American English (SAE) or Edited American English (EAE) are a single facet of a wide rhetorical repertoire that should be afforded the student of color. In effect, he argues for a movement "from black writing to writing black" (53). He recalls how the whole issue of features of Black English Vernacular (BEV) in written discourse has been contentious for a long, long time, with the common assumption that there is a sort of transference from a spoken dialect to writing having been countered time and again (see Hartwell), and with the contention that to be an African American contains not only phenotypical verities but cultural and linguistic ambiguities. While dialect is explicitly exploited in the Black Arts Movement, Holmes asserts that the conventions of SAE and EAE can be at the black writer's disposal when arguing the case against racism. In effect, he argues the case for doing what he does in his chapter. This is similar to what I had once called the code-switcher as a "rhetorical power player," one who knows language isn't fixed and has a relativistic perception of language (Bootstraps 23).

This fifth chapter opens the way for more practically pedagogical chapters. Although I see great importance to all of the essays here, I appreciate the sixth chapter the most. As I mentioned in another context, the membership of CCCC is ninety-two percent white ("Rhetoric" 651).
I don’t know how indicative that is of the profession overall, though I know that where I work, where there is a very strong rhetoric and composition program, I am the only full-time person of color, with two others on split appointment (though I can boast that one of those split appointments and I are rhetoricians of color—two in one rhetoric program, something of a coup, I think). It’s relatively safe to assume that something in the area of ninety percent of those before the students in the classrooms are white. White is not the absence of color; it’s a color with decidedly meaningful political implications. The interrogation of the Other, however, tends not to include an interrogation of the interrogator. While there is always suspicion of “brown on brown research” (Reyes and Halcón 306-08), there is little suspicion of white on Other research. Amy Goodburn presents the story of discovering her own white privilege in conducting research on people of color. It’s a telling narrative in which she depicts her research before the consciousness of her position as white, discusses whiteness overtly and theoretically, and then reexamines her research in light of her awareness of that privilege and power. She concludes by suggesting a direction for other white researchers and instructors.

In the seventh chapter, Robert Murray writes of multicultural or antiracist responsibility and the difficulties facing white teachers and students. In response to one student’s assertion that affirmative action is a case of reverse discrimination (an assertion that drives me crazy), he argues that teachers must take a recursive and dialectical position in terms of their authority in classrooms so as to confront students’ resistance to the multicultural clashes that occur. Murray suggests that through negotiations of authority and continued discussion within Pratt’s “contact zones,” there is not quite a conversion in the distance of single semester or quarters (about forty contact hours, and thereby not even a feasible expectation), but a “reconstitution,” in his terms, an adjusted change whereby affirmative action is accepted until such a time as all those differences will be wiped out (which sounds an awful lot like that good ole melting pot). In effect, but not explicitly, Murray recalls the Rogerian rhetoric espoused by Young, Becker, and Pike a couple of decades back, in which the best to be hoped for is some engagement among students in the dialectical process that will, somewhere down the line, result in change. To be fair, he is decidedly not idealistic. He’s pragmatic, well grounded in the theory and discussion surrounding Mary Louise Pratt’s “contact zones.” It’s just that I wish for an alchemical pedagogy that would convert young hegemones into the critically conscious in fifteen weeks.
In chapter eight, Brad Peters examines the situation in which the person of color is decidedly the minority in a predominately white school, faced with a white man as teacher, confronting not only racism but gender discrimination. He offers the story of Tia, one Black woman among so many whites. Her anger, her resistance, and her strategies for coping culminate in what Peters calls "intersubjectivity"—or, an assertion of self as multiple, recognizing gender and race within a multiplicity of contexts. And this chapter is balanced by Okawa's closing essay on masks and the teacher of color in an otherwise predominately white classroom.

The collection moves, then, from the personal and the theoretical to the pedagogical. It's a neatly put together collection. If there's a single matter that truly troubles me—apart from some sort of wish that this book were another book, the one that Keith Gilyard had originally conceived, a wish that's in most senses unfair, since what he does produce is so clearly necessary—it's the absence of discussion about the Latino and Latina. Now, to a great extent I have to accept blame on this account, since Gilyard had asked me to fill that job, but life being what it is, this opportunity became one of two instances in my career in which deadlines came and went without me.

So I accept blame. And although I'm honored to be seen, evidently, as the one Latino who is able to fill the bill, I know that there are a few others of us out there. Of particular interest: Ralph Cintron's work on the rhetoric of violence in a Chicano area in Chicago; similar work from Juan G. Guerra; Cecilia Rodríguez-Milanes' research on Caribbean women of color; Dulce M. Cruz's work on gender and the myth of racial tolerance among Latinas and Latinos. There even could have been more than one Latino entry. Although I am to blame for the lack of Latino voice in the collection, my hope is that this review provides some insights into the thinking of at least one Latino and that my absence or a Latina absence does not negate the worth of this collection.

Washington State University
Pullman, Washington

Works Cited


Reviewed by Gregory S. Jay, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee

On the final page of James Seitz’s thoughtful book, the closing paragraph begins with this sentence: “The time is ripe—the time for teachers of literature, composition, creative writing, critical theory, cultural studies, and all other instructional realms within ‘English’ at large to reach beyond their disconnected classrooms in order to create a curriculum based not only on how these realms differ but also on what each has to educate the other.” Although I may be incorrect, I believe this is the first and only instance in which Seitz places “English” in the quotation mark format now so readily used to highlight concepts or institutions that are fundamentally problematic. Of course, one might say that all of Motives for