is somewhat odd, particularly given that this book and *Natural Discourse* were both released in Spring 2002 and, thus, presumably were written during the same general period of time.

Despite Weisser’s decision to distance himself from ecocomposition in this manuscript, *Beyond Academic Discourse* remains useful to me for two reasons: the value of his literature review in the initial chapters, as well as the introduction of public writing as a useful rubric connecting much of contemporary work in composition. When I consider the work I admire most in composition—friends and colleagues involved in community literacy, student collaboration, oral histories, service learning, neighborhood revitalization, plus my own interests in sustainable curricula—all of this fits nicely within Weisser’s overarching definition of public writing, where before I had no easy framework within which to connect these diverse impulses. It will be interesting to see how the rubric of public writing will further connect and inform composition’s rich history of activist, student-centered pedagogies.

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Reviewed by Robin Varnum, American International College

By “activist rhetorics,” Susan Kates explains that she means studies of rhetoric that interrogate the relationship between language and identity, make civic issues a focus for discussion and writing, and emphasize the responsibility of students and teachers to engage in community service. What her protagonists—Mary Augusta Jordan of Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts; Hallie Quinn Brown of Wilberforce University in Wilberforce, Ohio; and Josephine Colby, Helen Norton, and Louis Budenz of Brookwood Labor College in Katonah, New York—have in common is that they all struggled to help disenfranchised students find their voices. Jordan’s students all were women; Brown’s were African American; and those of Colby, Norton, and Budenz were men and women of the working class.

What I find most engaging about Kates’ book is the use to which she puts her accounts of the activist pedagogies she has rediscovered. As her
epigraph to her fifth chapter, she quotes Hayden White: "The contemporary historian has to establish the value of the study of the past not as an end in itself, but as a way of providing perspectives on the present that contribute to the solution of problems peculiar to our own time." *Activist Rhetorics* is a history that not only sheds light on present-day problems but that demonstrates that historical precedents can prove useful politically in waging the current culture wars. On first examination, Kates’ work may seem much like that of other historians who have labored to reclaim the legacies of now obscure teachers of rhetoric. But whereas other historians have aimed through their historical salvage work at “setting the record straight” or at empowering teachers from various marginalized groups and providing them with historical role models, Kates reclaims past activist rhetorics in order to promote present-day activist rhetorics. She points out that “Policy makers, educators, and parents do much to undermine their current efforts to address many of the nation’s present concerns about ideology and education if they are not familiar with the specific ways gender, race, and class have been addressed by college rhetoric teachers in the past.”

Kates reminds us that controversial civic issues have stood at the center of the rhetoric curriculum for most of the twenty-five thousand years since the inception of the discipline of rhetoric in ancient Greece. She identifies three waves of activist education in the twentieth century (98–99). The first came in the early part of the century under the aegis of progressive education. The second came in the 1960s together with the Civil Rights movement and the opposition to the Vietnam War and led to open admissions policies and the establishment of community colleges. The third involves the recent attempts within American colleges and universities to acknowledge and honor the multicultural diversity of students.

Kates reads history both backwards and forwards, finding parallels between first-, second-, and especially third-wave pedagogies, classical rhetoric, and the work of Jordan, Brown, Colby, Norton, and Budenz. The actual time frame of Kates’ history runs from 1885 when Jordan joined the faculty of Smith College to 1937 when Brookwood Labor College closed its doors. But she also points out the similarities between what Brown was doing circa 1910 and what the Oakland, California School Board attempted to do in 1996 when it voted to accord Ebonics, or African American English, the status of a second language in the schools under its jurisdiction. And she draws parallels between the pedagogies of Jordan, Brown, Colby, Norton, and Budenz and the new curriculum
proposed unsuccessfully in 1990 at the University of Texas for the first-year writing course known as English 306.

Circa 1910, Brown, who was African American and an elocutionist, published *Bits and Odds*, a reciter manual that showcases African American history and includes many selections in African American vernacular. Reciter manuals, as Kates explains, were anthologies of pieces that could be recited for family and community entertainment. Among the selections in *Bits and Odds* are a poem about the Battle of Port Hudson (where black troops helped defeat the Confederacy) and the following piece, which Brown describes as “An Original Negro Lecture”:

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Well you all know dat de apple tree was the sacred vegetable ob de garden ob Eden till de sly an’ insinuvating sea-serpent crawled out ob de river on Friday mornen, bit off an apple, made “apple jack,” handed de jug to Eve, she took a sip, den handed it to Adam. —Adam took anoder, by which bofe got topsey-cated an’ fell down de hill ob Paradise, an’ in consequence darof, de whole woman race an’ human race fell down casmash, like speckled apples from a tree in a stormado. Oh! What a fall war dar, my hearers, when you an’ me, an’ I, an’ all drapt down togedder, an’ de serpent flapped his forked tongue in fatissaction. (64)
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The English here may be nonstandard, but it is richly expressive of the African American cultural tradition and way of looking at the world. Kates claims that the inclusion of this and similar selections in *Bits and Odds* makes it clear that Brown understood the connection between language and identity. An acknowledgment of this connection, Kates contends, is still vital in schools today, for in its absence “many African Americans will, and do, drop out of school.” One of the criticisms leveled at the Oakland School Board in 1996 was that its decision to teach Ebonics was trendy and without historical precedent. This charge, as Kates’ reclaiming of Brown’s legacy shows, is false. Brown’s pedagogy is not only a precedent for the teaching of Ebonics, it can serve politically as a positive example of the very kind of reform that the Oakland School Board hoped to promote. This is exactly the sort of use to which, as Hayden White points out, the work of a historian should be put.

Similarly, when opponents of English 306 at the University of Texas argued that such issues as race and gender had nothing to do with the teaching or learning of writing, the answer should have been that controversial issues have always served as the material for rhetorical debate. Kates’ book is full of examples of teachers who asked students to
write about race, gender, class, and other controversial matters. The details of one such assignment given by Mary Jordan come from a letter written by one of her female students: "Miss Jordan gives worse and worse Rhetoric Lessons. For the next, we are to write a letter to a woman older than oneself, who is very much disturbed because one is undergoing the higher education. To reassure her, and if possible change her views, and make her in sympathy. The letter is to be two sheets long. I think it will be perfectly dreadful, especially as nobody made any objections to my going to college."

Jordan, like Hallie Quinn Brown, understood the connection between language and identity. Jordan opposed coeducation and argued that an adherence to masculinist standards for speaking and writing could disempower female students. In her *Correct Writing and Speaking* (1904), she wrote, "There certainly is at present, then, no standard English, either in writing or speaking that is easily and cheaply available. There is no one correct way of writing or of speaking English. Within certain limits there are many ways of attaining correctness." Helen Norton at Brookwood also understood the connection between language and identity. She taught students how to publish "shop papers" designed to bring workers together, and she gave them this advice: "Keep the style of your paper intimate. Write about 'us workers' rather than 'you workers' or 'the workers.' Comb all the specialized ideologic phraseology out of your vocabulary and translate Marx into the thought and habit patterns of the locality." She also advised students to avoid expensive paper and elaborate printing processes and to "issue mimeographed papers whose very crudeness is effective." One of Norton's students added, "I find the greatest temptation is to get literary and write masterpieces. But the members will save you from that. They're likely to say, 'That was damned good, but it don't mean a thing to the butcher business.'"

Kates weaves her narrative from a variety of unusual kinds of texts and archival materials, including student papers, college mission statements, correspondence from students and teachers, and newspaper articles. I commend her for this and wish she had drawn upon such materials even more extensively. When she quotes from Jordan, Brown, Colby, Norton, Budenz, and their students, their voices sound rich and compelling, but she does not call upon these voices as often as I would have liked. There are few historical accounts of actual classroom practice, and Kates is only occasionally able to give us glimpses of what happened in the classrooms of the teachers she profiles.
Her resources probably were thin. Sometimes, indeed, she settles for conjecture when she lacks evidence, and sometimes she allows slim materials to carry more weight than they will bear. For example, she concedes, “While there is no indication that Jordan’s students wrote on the topic of coeducation, that Jordan herself published a number of articles opposing coeducation makes it seem likely that it was the subject of discussion in her courses.” In another example, Kates argues that the “theme of complicit exploitation of women workers by economically privileged women is a prevalent one in many of Jordan’s writings, and its presence suggests that it may have informed her pedagogy in other ways besides those that archival materials indicate.” And while discussing Jordan’s sense of the duty of women to address social problems, Kates writes, “Although she does not say so explicitly, it appears that Jordan recognized the role rhetorical study played in developing a conscious understanding of that duty.”

In at least one case, Kates uses the thinness of her materials to her advantage. She says, “While we know that many Brookwood students went on to become influential labor activists, little is known about the students of Jordan or Brown.” This allows Kates, as she says, to “avoid making assumptions about what the long-term effects of the pedagogies were or might have been partly because the kind of history I am advocating does not end or, as White says, is not an end in itself.” Kates’ purpose is not to wrap up tidy stories about obscure teachers, but to inspire twenty-first-century teachers to reconceptualize problems in their own classrooms. In this, she succeeds admirably.


Reviewed by David Rieder, University of Texas at Arlington

Thomas Swiss’ Unspun is part of a new wave of edited collections published in 2000 that take a more balanced approach to their investigations of cyberspace and the Internet. Unspun shares this wave with numerous collections that include Daniel Bell and Barbara Kennedy’s The Cybertextures Reader (Routledge 2000) and David Gauntlett’s