race; we can’t leave it behind—it continues to drag behind us like the weight of so much chain. Simply put, the legacies of raciology and race need to be confronted and worked through—and then cast off. Renouncing race and destabilizing raciology’s power to constitute the “truth” of race is to move toward what Gilroy calls “planetary humanism” or “strategic universalism”: “As we leave the century of the color line behind, we need self-consciously to become more future-oriented.” We might characterize such post-racial and post-humanist ecologies of belonging, somewhat unwieldily, as post-racial/post-humanist humanism. This clearly isn’t a return to humanism but a move toward a post-humanism refuged through a critique of race’s positioning in humanistic discourse, of race’s role in defining “humanity” and creating a system of infra-humanity (who is more human than whom) that subdivide species belonging. This is far cry from indifferent liberal platitudes that “we are all the same on the inside” and spineless injunctions to “just get along.” Raciology’s ability to sustain the ontology of race should not be underestimated and cannot be ignored, even in these times in which the sign of race seems to be fading. This is precisely the time, Gilroy argues, to renounce race and rooted nationalism altogether as the basis for identification and belonging and to imagine a post-racial, radically refuged “planetary humanism.” Against Race is a wide-ranging and impressive study of the sociology of race whose importance lies in its ability to help us resist raciology’s grip on our thinking and to imagine a “heterocultural, postanthropological, and cosmopolitan yet-to-come.”


Reviewed by Claude Mark Hurlbert, Indiana University of Pennsylvania

I started to read Smoke and Mirrors shortly after the destruction of the World Trade Center last September. It was difficult to read a book about violence in the shadow of the horror of that day, so I put it aside for a week. The week was followed by others. When I finally picked Smoke and Mirrors up again, I found that the authors in this collection
helped me to think about violence in productive ways. I am grateful for that.

*Smoke and Mirrors* is a collection of ten essays in which critical pedagogues explore the nature and causes of school and societal violence, especially in relation to the lives of adolescents. Because many of these scholars—Stanley Aronowitz, Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, Donaldo Macedo, and Peter McLaren—have wide circulation in the field of composition, some of the writing and styles will seem familiar to writing teachers. Some of the arguments will seem customary as well. As editor Stephanie Urso Spina writes in the introduction, violence is a result of the competition inherent in capitalism, the maverick, gunslinging mind-set of American individualism, and the dehumanizing effects of positivism—in other words, the customary and always-perplexing subject of critical pedagogy: American ideology. To their credit, the writers Spina has included bring knowledge of developments in fields as wide as economics, education, politics, psychology, and sociology. Research from such a large spectrum of disciplines helps to achieve the collection's stated goal, which is, according to Spina, "to expand the dialogue" about violence so as to begin to comprehend its complexity and to address its reality.

Readers will appreciate the honesty in this book, even when that honesty can leave one feeling rather hopeless. As Spina points out, "Unlike domestic and foreign-policy analysts who accept violence as the answer to intra-and international problems, unlike media moguls who insist that violence is the answer that keeps profit margins climbing, unlike social scientists and criminologists who compile lists of 'traits' that lead to violence, we [the authors in this collection] do not presume to know the answers. We have no formula, no equation, no 'quick fix' to remedy the situation." What the authors do offer, Spina articulates, is a first step, the knowledge that we have been "asking the wrong questions." Or, as Spina writes in one of her articles in the collection, "The Psychology of Violence and the Violence of Psychology," in our attempts to understand the violence committed by school students, we have been pointing to the wrong places, such as the media, and blaming the wrong people, such as everyone else's children. These misplaced efforts have brought us to premature conclusions about the sources of violence in our society. They have kept us from understanding the possibility, for instance, that violence in the media may be more purgative than damaging. In our concern, we have distracted ourselves from the real issues: "By now, most if not all of us 'know' that the 'average American child' sees
8,000 murders and 10,000 acts of violence on television by the time she or he completes grammar school. But what do we know about the millions of American grammar school children who are physically and sexually abused? What do we know or not know about our role in creating and maintaining the 'smoke screens and mirrors' that all but guarantee such discrepancies will continue?” (193–94).

These words should wake readers up. They should challenge indifference or feelings of hopelessness in the face of complex, tragic social circumstances. As this book makes clear, we are all responsible for violence. Each of us is responsible for the way we treat our children, for how our children are educated, for who we are with others, for the discourses we make in society, for the policies our politicians propose, for the actions that they take on our behalf. To put this another way, we all can address the conditions that give rise to violence. This is a point that Michael Blitz and I argued in our *Letters for the Living: Teaching Writing in a Violent Age*. We composition teachers know the enriching, life-sustaining nature of writing. We know the spiritual—existential, if you prefer—significance of composing. In teaching one of the key processes of human meaning making, we writing teachers help resist the soul-numbing forces of violence in our culture, forces so articulately described by Mary Rose O’Reilley in *The Peaceable Classroom*. When we are at our best in our composition classrooms, the process of meaning making is also the process of peacemaking.

One of the more moving articles in this collection portrays the death of the spirit that leads to violence. In “America’s Dead-end Kids,” Donna Gaines depicts youth suicide and alienation as the tragic consequences of the burdens we place on our children. We ask our children—even expect them—to be economically successful even as we maintain a society in which the lion’s share of wealth is held by fewer and fewer people. Worse, as Gaines points out, we count on our children to reach and demonstrate the spiritual fulfillment we find so elusive at the same time that they must negotiate the cutthroat business world we have constructed for them. We expect our children, as Sanford W. Reitman argues in his *The Educational Messiah Complex: American Faith in the Culturally Redemptive Power of Schooling*, to do what we have not done: to solve the world’s problems, to save it and us, and to do so practically overnight. The weight of our expectations, especially in light of our own failures, is so great, Gaines argues, that some kids will turn to suicide, rather than to us, for comfort in a world where comfort seems in short supply. Readers will want someone to intervene in the case-study narrative Gaines tells of the days
leading up to the 1987 suicides of four teenagers in Bergenfield, New Jersey. They will want to intervene themselves, to do something to stop the suicides that have already occurred. The world these "dead-end kids" inhabited was one where children have few opportunities for making original meaning; it was a world where the loss of positive agency has the direst of consequences. Gaines shows how alcohol and cocaine can replace the search for meaning when meaning fails. Suicide can, ultimately, replace even these.

One chapter that importantly contains proposed solutions to societal violence is Jessie Klein and Lynn S. Chancer's "Masculinity Matters." The authors articulate how boys are taught alienating and misogynist forms of masculinity. American culture teaches that guns provide acceptable means to right wrongs (a point seemingly in contradiction to Spina's take on the purgative nature of media violence) and that anger toward girls can be justifiably resolved through violence. Gun control is, Klein and Chancer argue, a first step toward alleviating the problem of male violence. More than that, though, we need to teach boys, and men, to begin "to develop a new masculine identity that embraces strength and sensitivity simultaneously." This process begins with us: we need to reinterpret the violence of human history and rewrite what is "normal" for male identity and behavior. A challenging solution, to be sure, but by reading this article readers will feel that there is no other way.

Not all of the authors present such daunting solutions. For one, Charles "Paco" Hernandez calls on teachers and parents to spend more time listening to children. This will sound familiar to most composition teachers, many of whom have been making the same call. We will also recognize, however, that no matter how familiar the call, it is still not universally valued in writing classrooms across the country. There are still too many writing teachers who would rather not listen to what they call their students' "dirty laundry." It's largely a tired position, usually tied to some vague notions of and allegiances to "traditional" forms of rhetoric and scholarship. After reading this book, I am also tempted to say that it is another contribution to the smoke screens and mirrors preventing us from taking responsibility for the roles we play in our students' lives, for our contributions to the environment of American violence.

I do not have time in the space of this review to mention all of the articles contained in this collection, and indeed not every article offers as fresh a vision as readers surely want. I would be remiss, however, if I failed to note Stanley Aronowitz's "Essay on Violence." In his chapter,
Aronowitz argues that the reason we see so much violence these days is that “traditional liberal models of justice and of mediation are experiencing a major crisis.” More and more we conceive of justice and mediation as “cultural ideals,” rather than as “practical” alternatives for violent action: “In the criminal justice system’s growing disregard for human rights, such as those manifested in the police abuse of Abner Louima and Amadou Diallo, as much as the new penchant of the nation to engage in ‘total’ war, organs of established power are providing models that cannot be reconciled with the prescribed rules of middle-class justice. Consequently, why shouldn’t we expect kids to invent rules of combat that correspond more to what they observe in the theater of history than to models of liberal rationality?” Our children watch us as we bear witness and, sometimes, rationalize state-sponsored violence and humiliation. When we quietly acquiesce to the marginalizing of the poor or disempowered, abroad as well as here, through fiscal policies that perpetuate rather than resolve domestic and world debt, we reinscribe the failure of our highest ideals. When we turn our attention from the contradictions of war, we teach our children that violence is an acceptable form of international grievance resolution.

One day, while writing *Letters for the Living*, Michael Blitz called me to recommend a book: Avishai Margalit’s *The Decent Society*. Its central concern is with me as I write this review. A society is indecent, Margalit claims, if its institutions humiliate people. The authors in *Smoke and Mirrors* teach us that our children suffer deep humiliation, the result of abuse and alienation. They are too often humiliated at home, in school, and on the street. Too many of our sons are haunted and abused until they are dangerous. Too many children are taunted and tortured and pushed aside and told they are worthless. Ridden with guilt and humiliation, some of them kill themselves or know anger enough to kill others. Some carry guns to school. Some are angry enough to make bombs—which, thankfully, they have not to date used in school.

*Smoke and Mirrors* challenges us. It asks us to take responsibility for ourselves and to help our children, certainly; this is a necessary beginning. So is reminding ourselves and encouraging others to take responsibility for the actions of our government. We need to continually encourage those with political power to emulate the considerable decency at the heart of our society so that, by and large, the United States will be seen as decent despite perceived contradictions in our actions. Stephanie Urso Spina reminds us on the last page of *Smoke and Mirrors* that there is
indeed much good that individuals and institutions do. One engaged
person started MADD and affected legislation across the United States.
As teachers, the authors in this collection place considerable hope in
critical approaches to education. In this perspective, we might ask
students to explore the ways that they or we or anyone have available
for living more meaningful lives—or for avoiding wasteful, tragic
deaths. We might have students examine the lives that aren’t
available to them, the ones that health requires but that pain or
institutions prevent. Readers won’t find ideas for such pedagogies in
Smoke and Mirrors. Despite the considerable accomplishment of the
book, readers might wish that the contributors had described practices for
helping students articulate their own alternatives to violence in their lives,
and ours.

A student of mine at Indiana University of Pennsylvania recently
wrote about a school shooting that occurred in 1998 at an eighth grade
dinner dance in her hometown of Edinboro, Pennsylvania: “I have trouble
feeling safe wherever I go; it doesn’t weigh on my mind constantly, but
it definitely pops up in my head every now and then. Especially when I’m
somewhere where there are a lot of people and it would be easy [for
someone] to open fire.” The result, in the author’s own words, is that
“when people ask me where I’m from I simply reply, ‘Edinboro,’ and the
majority of people respond with something about the university [in
Edinboro], but a lot will still say, ‘Isn’t that where that teacher got shot?’
Some just give me looks of sympathy and are too embarrassed to bring up
the situation, and then there are always those people who saw the
coverage on the news but only paused for that second, and said, ‘Awe
that’s sad,’ and then went on with their lives. Never again will I watch the
news and see a sad story and just forget about it. My story of tragedy is
forever engraved in my head; therefore, other people’s tragedies affect
me. I realize in the worst way that a tragic incident like my teacher being
shot affects literally thousands of people. These thousands of people will
never look at the world the same way again.”

It is our responsibility to join with these thousands, and millions, of
others and to commit ourselves to remembering. As composition instruc-
tors, as teachers of meaning making, we can know that it is possible to
teach for peace. It is not easy to do so, but in the attempt, we can know,
we create decency. There is considerable peace in that.

Reviewed by Carolyn B. Matalene, University of South Carolina

Contrastive rhetoric, like everything else in the United States, has lost its innocence. Once a benign method of teaching ESL students how to write effective academic English, its first proponents assumed a world of nation states, each country a home to its own unique coherence of culture, language, and rhetoric that was learned and practiced by all of its citizens. When many of those citizens came from around the world to study in U.S. institutions of higher learning, we discovered that they had brought their rhetoric along in their suitcases. So their teachers taught them to wear different clothes, to rely on different authorities, to arrange their ideas in a different way—our way. But we have recently borne witness to the resentment that follows from our easy assumption that doing it our way is the right way. Perhaps first understanding and then negotiating and collaborating with writers from other rhetorical worlds might be more effective than imposing our standards as absolutes. And perhaps we all, in one way or another, come from different rhetorical hometowns, bringing in our suitcases our own individual versions of literacy so different from the discourses we struggle to gain hearings in.

The essays in this collection are ordered—either by design or by default—so that they embody the discipline’s history, from text-based teaching methods aimed at turning foreigners into successful students in