



Global Black Rhetorics: A New Framework for Engaging African and Afro-Diasporic Rhetorical Traditions

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ABSTRACT

Given the influx in people of African descent immigrating to the United States from diverse national, linguistic, and ethnic backgrounds, the demographics of the US Black community has shifted significantly over the last several decades. As a result of these changes, it is imperative that approaches to rhetorical studies, especially African-centered cultural rhetorics, remain inclusive and representative of diverse Black experiences in the United States and abroad. Toward this end, the authors propose a new disciplinary subfield called Global Black Rhetorics (GBR). GBR emphasizes engaging similarities and differences across Black experiences, positions of power, and privilege, which includes acknowledging, studying, and prioritizing the histories, languages, rhetorical traditions, and practices of continental Africans, Afro-Caribbeans, Afro-Latinx, Afro-Europeans, and other people of African descent across the African Diaspora. The authors introduce a four-themed framework for GBR that includes: assessing methods of education about global Black experiences, studying and teaching Black language diversity, teaching and citing contemporary rhetors and texts from Africa and African Diasporic contexts, and prioritizing healing as a communal goal for all Black people. The essay concludes with an introduction to the contributors of this special issue whose research advances the authors' call for a globalized approach to Black Rhetorics.

KEYWORDS

African American rhetoric; African rhetorical traditions; Black immigrants; Black Rhetoric; Global Black Rhetorics

The documentary *Talking Black in America* concludes with an interview with linguist and language scholar Renée Blake who recounts an exchange she witnessed on a train ride in New York City. She describes a young, Black woman loudly and proudly rapping the lyrics to Sir Mix-A-Lot's 1992 song "Baby Got Back," which attracted the attention of her fellow passengers, many of whom were "all shades of Black people." The young woman's singing ultimately sparked a multicultural dialog among her fellow Black passengers on the train, which Blake describes as follows:

... you just saw all the Black Diaspora interacting, coming together, mixing and transforming right there in-front of your eyes. . . . [T]here was this wonderful cadence, rhythm, impromptu articulations of who they were. . . . I just looked at my husband and said, "We are gonna be okay. We are going to be okay, if this is what is coming behind us." (*Talking Black* 56:05–55)

We begin with this story because it is a snapshot of what is happening all across the United States. Black¹ diversity in the United States has expanded over the last several decades in part due to transnationalism and immigration. Anderson and López note that the Black immigrant population has increased fivefold

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¹In this article, we will use the term Black as a collective term to refer to all people of African descent. This includes continental Africans, as well as all people of African descent from across the African Diaspora, such as African Americans, Afro-Latinx, Afro-Caribbeans, Afro-Europeans, Afro-Asians, and others. Although the term Black may refer to a specific phenotype, our use of Black also includes shared cultural identities, traditions, histories, languages, and ways of knowing that are rooted in ancient, precolonial African traditions and philosophies that are shared, and can be traced, throughout the continent of Africa and the African Diaspora. When we use the word Black,

since 1980. The US Census Bureau projects that by 2060, 16.5% of US Blacks will be immigrants (qtd. in [Anderson](#)). This influx of people of African descent immigrating to the United States from various national, linguistic, and ethnic backgrounds is changing the demographics of the Black community in the United States. The coming together of the Afro-Diaspora in the United States gives rise to new language and cultural practices that are challenging the field's understanding of African American Rhetorics. For example, in their book *On African American Rhetoric*, Keith Gilyard and Adam Banks speak directly to the impact of the changing demographics on this subfield:

Over the last fifty years, we have seen the pronounced emergence of a U.S. based Black population that cannot be contained or described simply as African American in the traditional sense. This shift has created a need to examine what we have called African American rhetoric in conversation with African, Caribbean, Afro-Latinx, and Afro-European traditions and to explore the ways that population shifts in the United States have influenced contemporary African American rhetorical practices. (122–23)

In imagining future directions for the field, Gilyard and Banks reject scholarship that advances one narrative, or seeks to draw boundaries between groups and traditions. Instead, they advance the call for “interconnectedness” (122), the study of [African American Rhetorics](#) in conversation with other traditions. We agree with Gilyard and Banks that interconnectedness is a necessary step toward broadening the scope of African American Rhetorics in a more inclusive and representative way. On one hand, when we make visible our interconnectedness as Black people, we create opportunities to recognize how African American Rhetorics is a part of a collective of Black Rhetorics that are all intricately and dynamically linked and rooted in African rhetorical traditions. On the other hand, we also acknowledge that difference is an essential component of this conversation. Although there is a shared African heritage among people of African descent, and common African rhetorical traditions and roots that can be used to identify links between African American Rhetorics and other rhetorics by people of African ancestry, we must also prioritize points of difference, contention, and even disconnectedness. To do so effectively requires critical engagement with all Black voices, positionalities and positions of power, locations, languages, histories, and experiences of trauma due to racism, white supremacy, enslavement, and colonialism. In other words, non-African American stories and rhetorics have to be acknowledged, interpreted, and understood independently, not always in relation to African American Rhetorics and people. If we are to resist monolithic representations and single narratives of Black experience in the United States (or anywhere), we must make space for difference and diversity. Because of this, there is an urgency to not only revisit the scope and inclusivity practices of African American Rhetorics as a subfield, but there is also a need to explicitly discuss and interrogate how African American Rhetorics is uniquely situated among many other less visible and privileged African and African Diaspora rhetorics. We propose naming Global Black Rhetorics (GBR) as an overarching discourse that explicitly recognizes and engages the interconnectedness between, and differences among, diverse African and African Diaspora rhetorics.

We make this call for GBR while also acknowledging the extensive, ground-breaking scholarship that has founded, defined, and established African American Rhetorics as a disciplinary field of study. African American Rhetorics, an interdisciplinary field with scholars and scholarship housed across rhetoric and composition studies, communication studies, sociolinguistics, literature, literacy studies, women and gender studies, history, and African American and African studies, has created a designated space for theorizing the strategic, innovative, persuasive, embodied, rhetorical, communicative, meaning-making practices of African American people. Also, Afrocentric approaches to rhetoric have been crucial to shifting the discourse of rhetoric to acknowledge non-Greek-Roman and nonwestern cultural rhetorical traditions, philosophies, and subjectivities. African American Rhetorics

we are referring to the expansive and diverse body of people across the world whose heritages and identities are rooted in Africa. When we refer to specific ethnic and cultural groups within the Black community, we will identify those groups explicitly. For example, when we refer to African Americans, we are specifically referring to people of African descent who are the descendents of enslaved Africans in the United States of America. When addressing their unique histories, experiences, languages, and knowledge, we will explicitly refer to this cultural group as African Americans. On the other hand, when referring to African Americans as part of a larger Black collective or Black community, we will say Black.

has utilized ancient African oral traditions, philosophies, spirituality, languages, and texts to affirm African origins of rhetoric and its continued influence on the contemporary world. Although we cannot possibly name all of the subjects, points of inquiry, and scholars who have contributed to this disciplinary community, we briefly acknowledge the range of African American Rhetorics scholarship, such as: *Black oral and literary traditions* (Bacon and McClish; Brooks; Lee; Leeman; Young and Robinson), *Black language and Black language pedagogies* (Babb; Baker-Bell; Gilyard; Gold; Perryman-Clark; Richardson; Smitherman; Williams), *Black literacies* (Campbell; Craig; Kareem; Kinloch; Kirkland, Genishi, and Alvermann; Price-Dennis and Muhammad; Pritchard; Richardson; Young), *Black feminist rhetorics* (Atwater; Browdy; Carey; Cooper, Morris and Boylorn; Pittman; Pough; Royster, *Traces of a Stream*; Wilson Logan), *Black activism* (Epps-Robertson; Kiesling; Kynard; Lathan; Ore), and *Black digital expression, technology and communication* (Bailey; Banks; Benjamin; Jones and Williams; Sawyer).

Although we honor the contributions of 50+ years of scholarship in this subfield, we are cognizant that there is still more work to be done, especially in regards to representation, inclusivity, and diversity. Most of the scholarship aforementioned focuses on rhetorical practices of African Americans, which has been a necessary focus given this cultural group's special history in the United States, including African Americans' often undermined and erased contributions to the founding of this country and continued fight for equality, justice, and freedom. However, it is necessary to continue expanding this discourse, which includes considering what additional sites, contexts, experiences, rhetors, genres, and modes of inquiry are arising as the global African Diaspora continues to merge and interact in the United States and elsewhere. It is also important to assess how effectively the subdiscipline of African American Rhetoric is meeting its objectives and aligning with its original scholarly mission.

For example, Ronald Jackson II and Elaine Richardson, in their book, *Understanding African American Rhetoric: Classical Origins to Contemporary Innovations*, define African American rhetorics as “the study of culturally and discursively developed knowledge-forms, communicative practices and persuasive strategies rooted in freedom struggles by people of *African ancestry in America*” (“Introduction,” xiii, emphasis added). While this definition by Jackson II and Richardson suggests that African American Rhetorics should be theorized and practiced as inclusive of all “people of African ancestry in America” (xiii), we have noticed that actual scholarly and pedagogical practice does not typically offer such broad representation of people of diverse African identities and/or various African rhetorics. We are particularly concerned that the rhetorical practices of Black people who do not share African American identity, what H. Samy Alim calls “normative black identity” (2), get marginalized, silenced, and ultimately erased from African American rhetorical discourses. Perhaps this is in part due to the complexity of defining who is African American and who is not in the ever expanding Black community in the US, an issue Molefi Asante, in “*The Future of African American Rhetoric*,” observes must be addressed by the rhetor of the future:

First of all, the rhetor will have to appreciate the diversity of the African diaspora. There are more Africans in Brazil than in the United States, and since Brazil is an American nation, the African Brazilian could claim to be African American. This is so for many central and South American peoples. Many Africans in Brazil see this specific North American dominance as a part of North American dominance in general. In other words, as they have come to realize, the use of the term “African American” by the African in North America robs the South American African of any effective use of the term when in fact the larger number of Africans is on the South American continent, not the North American continent. (291)

Asante admits he does not know how this problem of African American identity will be resolved, but says, “I know the rhetors of North America will eventually have to speak to it” (291).

This special issue is an attempt to speak to it. We propose and situate GBR as an overarching name for an expansive rhetorical discourse that includes African American Rhetorics and rhetorical traditions and practices by all people of African descent in the United States and around the world. Further, this project seeks to revisit and revive the original mission and vision of the six African American rhetoric scholars—Charles Hurst, Molefi Asante, Jack Daniel, Dorothy Pennington, Lucia Hawthorne, and Lyndrey Niles—who came together to conceptualize and propose the Black Rhetoric Institute, “an entity that would be dedicated to *the rhetorical inquiry by, for, and about Black people throughout the diaspora*” (Jackson II

and Richardson xiii, emphasis added). Although the institute never took off because of underfunding and understaffing, this special issue is one effort to make their vision a reality. The institute might not be physical—that is, located in a specific geographical location—but we, the rhetors of today, can keep it alive through our scholarly and pedagogical practices.

To further our argument that this move toward a more expansive and inclusive framing of African and African Diasporic rhetorics is necessary, in the next section we offer our stories as two Black women who self-identify as a Black transnational from Kenya, Africa, and an African American woman from Florida, respectively. Our stories offer a snapshot of the diversity in Black social, cultural, linguistic experiences, but also common connections. In coming to understand our different Black positionalities in US contexts, we realized that we (as Black people in a global sense) *are not ok. We got issues*. Through our stories, however, we illustrate that *we gon' be alright* if we make space for both interconnectedness and difference as Black people in the United States, including as Black students, scholars, and teachers. Next, we discuss in more detail our conceptualization of GBR. We outline and propose four themes that may guide GBR as a field of study and action inside and outside academia, including:

- (1) assessing our past and present methods for educating Black people about Black people,
- (2) studying and teaching Black language diversity in the United States and in transnational contexts,
- (3) utilizing both historical and modern texts and rhetors from various African and African Diasporic rhetorical traditions, and
- (4) prioritizing healing as a communal goal of GBR.

We conclude by introducing the six contributors to this special issue who illustrate what these GBR ideas look like in practice. Their work demonstrates the scope of GBR, particularly as it engages African and African Diasporic communities, stories, rhetors, texts, and rhetorical practices.

We Are Not Okay: Our Stories

This project has been a long time coming. Our first conversation on this topic happened in 2014 while driving together to a peer and mutual friend's graduation party. During the long car ride, we passed the time by conversing about our identities as Black women in the United States, particularly our shared and differing experiences as an African American woman born and raised in Florida (Ronisha) and a Black transnational-immigrant woman, born and raised in Kenya (Esther). We quickly realized that these differences among our national, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic identities as Black women are often glossed over, despite the ways they impact how we navigate, interpret, and communicate within the world. As we drove down the highway, we began to delve more into this truth, sharing with each other our experiences as Black people from two sides of the globe. This sharing included being vulnerable and truthful about how these perspectives included misunderstandings, stereotypes, and internalized prejudices against each other.

For instance, Ronisha directly asked Esther, "So, what is your experience as a Black Kenyan in the US? How do you identify yourself?"

After a long pause, Esther replied.

"Well, I never thought about whether I am Black or not until I moved to the US. Being Black is not something Africans think about. I am African, so obviously I am Black. Africans do not think about their Blackness, at least not as deeply as you guys, I mean, as African Americans."

"Why do you think that is the case?" Ronisha prompted, wanting to know more.

"Because the majority of people in Africa are Black. I have noticed people in the US think in terms of Black versus White. This is not the case in Africa because after African countries gained independence from European colonialism in the 1960s and 1970s, White people have remained a very small minority. While African Americans have had to deal with issues of white supremacy or racism, this is not the case for Africa, except for Indigenous South Africans who experienced race-based discrimination because of apartheid until the 1990s. So, to answer your question, Ronisha, when I moved to the US, I identified as Kenyan or African. But I learned very quickly that being Kenyan or African was not

recognized as a real ethnic or racial identity in this country. People saw me as Black. I was uncomfortable with this identity because I thought only African Americans were Black, not continental, transnational, or immigrant Africans. Obviously, I was wrong. We are all Black. So, I had to transform from African to Black, which has been a process.”

Esther continued to narrate her experience *on becoming* Black in America.

Esther's Story

I moved to the US from Kenya in 2008. Since then I have been reflecting on how being born and raised in Kenya has shaped my perspective toward other Blacks in the diaspora. Mostly, I have been reflecting on how my past educational experiences contributed to my lack of education about African Americans and other Afro-Diasporic Blacks. In fact, it was through taking graduate coursework in the US that I realized how my schooling experience in Kenya, particularly in elementary and high school, did not teach me anything about African Americans and other Afro-Diasporic Blacks. I attribute this to Kenyan educational curriculum that was mostly shaped by a colonial ideology that sought to promote European epistemology and worldview, marginalizing all African Indigenous knowledges, experiences, and languages. Although Kenya tried to decolonize its curriculum after gaining independence in 1963, to emphasize the histories, knowledges and experiences of people of African descent, the story and impact of the transatlantic slave trade on Africans and Afro-Diasporic Blacks is missing in Kenya's education curriculum. I think this is true for many other African countries.

Growing up in Kenya, I knew there were Black people in the US and their history was rooted in slavery, but I did not know how this history shaped their everyday experiences. For example, the first time I vaguely learned about African Americans' racial experience was in 2004. I was enrolled in an African American literature graduate seminar at the University of Nairobi, where we read literary works by Alice Walker, Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison, and Richard Wright. I remember my colleagues and I being confused by the English some of the characters spoke. Our professor explained that African Americans spoke a special type of English to resist their white master's language, and also to affirm their identity as Africans in the US.

Although reading such literature gave my colleagues and I an idea of African Americans' linguistic and racial experience in the US, it was not enough. We still did not fully get it, partly because our professor talked about slavery and racism as something that happened many years ago, not as an everyday experience in the US. We also lacked a proper understanding of US cultural and socio-linguistic context. Besides, we were constantly fed positive images of African Americans in the US through popular culture—Mariah Carey, Destiny's Child, TLC, Jay-Z, Oprah, Serena Williams, Michael Jordan, Magic Johnson, and the Black Christian influencers like T.D. Jakes, Kirk Franklin, and Mary Mary. These images would not let us imagine African Americans having negative experiences in the US. Instead, they gave us the perception of a beautiful and prosperous Black America. I remember that, in high school, my peers and I talked about how great it must be to be an African in the US—we thought they were on another level. In addition, the image or the idea of America as the most democratic, progressive superpower added to our naïve imaginations. We compared African American experiences with Africa's real, imagined, and exaggerated political and economic struggles. To us, being African in the US was the best version of being African in the world.

It was not until I moved to the US that I began to get a full picture of the African American experience. Learning that they had to deal with everyday racism was a big shock to me; that although slavery happened more than 400 years ago, they still live with its impact. It was consolation to learn that my lack of knowledge of African American experiences was not unique or based on ignorance. Like me, most continental Africans learn about African Americans' racialized experiences when they travel or immigrate to the US. Reflecting on her first encounter with African Americans in 1968, Nobel Peace Prize winner [Wangari Maathai](#) notes the following in her memoir:

Years of colonial education on the subject of America had somehow kept the African American part hidden from us. Even though we studied the slave trade, the subject was taught in a way that did not leave us appreciating its inhumanity. An African has to go to America to understand slavery and its impact on black people—not only in Africa but also in diaspora. It is in America that words such as “black,” “white,” “Negro,” “mulatto,” “skin color,” “segregation,” “discrimination,” and “the ghetto” take on lives of their own. (78)

Like **Maathai**, when I arrived in the US in 2008, I was confronted with a different understanding of what it means to be an African American. My positive image of African Americans dramatically changed. Initially, most of the negativity came from my fellow immigrant Kenyans and Africans. One of the comments I heard often was, “African Americans are very different from us. They might be Black like us, but they are not Africans.” I remember specifically being advised on schooling and education:

“You must show teachers that you care and are involved in your children’s school activities, that you care about their education,” I was told.

“Why?” I asked.

“Because you don’t want them mistaking your child for an African American,” they argued. “African Americans don’t care about education. They also speak broken English. They curse a lot and don’t practice African cultural values like us,” they would emphasize.

I started internalizing these negative attitudes toward African Americans. In fact, I became very conscious about my ethnic identity in America. In predominantly white educational and other public settings, whenever I was asked to introduce myself, I made sure I said, “I am Kenyan or African.” I did not want to identify or be racialized as African American. Koigi wa Wamwere, a Kenyan who studied in the US in the 1970s, offers his perspective on why continental Africans’ view of African Americans changes when they move to the US; Wamwere’s explanation nicely captures my change of attitude toward African Americans:

Many Africans as longtime victims of racial and ethnic dehumanization, upon meeting African-Americans, are programmed to think that they are . . . superior. They are so different, they say. They are just like white Americans. But then the cultural bias of the powerful and rich elite will correct them to think another way, that African Americans are inferior. (101)

However, my attitude and view of African Americans went through another process of transformation when I enrolled in a graduate seminar entitled Language and African American Community. The course was taught by Dr. **Geneva Smitherman**, a.k.a., Dr. G. In this class, I gained an in-depth knowledge about the African American community, their history of enslavement, language, culture, and racial experience in the US. From this course, slavery, racism, Black English, and Black culture took a new meaning for me. I learned how the historical injustices of slavery and structural racism continue to impact the African American community, even in the present day. I learned about African American linguistic culture as we traced it back to West and Central African languages. It was an eye-opening experience for me to learn that, for four centuries, African Americans had maintained the linguistic and cultural infrastructure they brought from Africa; that Black English is a language system, distinct from the dominant American English variety. Learning that the rhetorical or communicative practices of Black language are rooted in African oral tradition invited me to see the connection among continental Africans, African Americans, and other Afro-Diasporic Blacks. I remember reading Smitherman’s work on playing the dozens and proverbs and thinking to myself, “[W]ait a minute, this is so African! This is what we do!” Her discussion of African spirituality, citing my tribesman, John Mbiti, got my head reeling with excitement. “We are the same people,” I kept thinking. This class began to debunk the myths and stereotypes I had developed toward African Americans. Ironically, it was in this class that I learned how to better value my African Indigenous linguistic heritage, a story I share in my essay, “Talking Some and Leaving Some: A Community-Grounded Approach to Teaching and Sustaining African Languages in America.”

It was also in this class that I started thinking deeply about my African identity and what it means to be Black in America. Although I had finally come to see how Africans and African Americans were more similar than different, in this class I still had moments of feeling different, alienated, marginalized, and very aware of my African cultural and linguistic Blackness. This was especially the case

because, when I was with other Black language scholars, our conversations were dominated by one Black language history and experience, that of African Americans, descendants of enslaved African people in the US. I started becoming conscious and critically aware of my African-Kenyan linguistic Blackness, which was very different from theirs. For example, while theirs was rooted in slave history, mine was rooted in what [Ali Mazrui](#) calls “triple African heritage” (21); in other words, it is shaped by Indigenous-African, Islam-Arabic, and European linguistic cultures. However, despite my desire and effort to speak and affirm my African linguistic identity, the pressure to assimilate to the “normative Black identity” ([Alim 2](#)) was overwhelming. To put it differently, my racialization and “process of becoming Black” had begun. [Awad Ibrahim](#) explains how continental Africans undergo a process of becoming Black when they move to North America. In other words, they “enter a social imaginary—a discursive space in which they are already imagined, constructed, and . . . treated as Blacks by hegemonic discourses and groups” (170). As such, African immigrants are not only forced to learn how to navigate new ethnic and racial identification practices, but also expected to act and speak Black. It was not just White people who expected me to be Black, but African Americans too.

This was hard for me, because I did not know how to embody Black or African American cultural and linguistic identity. In fact, as I continued to interact more with African American students in graduate seminars and contexts outside academia, our differences became more apparent. I experienced an unexplained tension, a love-hate attitude, and language-based discrimination toward my Kenyan-accented English from my African American colleagues and students. Commenting on this attitude, [Smitherman](#) notes that African Americans harbor a contradictory “love-hate” relationship toward particular language practices within their communities, and consciously or unconsciously, extend it toward their Black brothas and sistas from the Diaspora:

In an effort to establish and maintain themselves as first-class citizens, African Americans, on one hand, subscribe to the linguistic ethnocentrism of the dominant society; for example, they may decry those speakers with foreign accented English. On the other hand, their history of struggle has depended on this for its success in cultural and linguistic solidarity situated within a Black Experiential, that is, Afrocentric, framework. (295)

Reflecting on [Smitherman’s](#) observation, I shared with [Ronisha](#) how I continuously reflect on the root cause of this contradictory relationship and tension among Blacks in the US. I told her that I speculate that the over 400 years of physical separation had contributed to physical and psychological distance among Black groups, which leads to negative attitudes, misconceptions, prejudices, stereotypes, and myths about each other. Through various interactions with my African American colleagues and students, I observed that they did not know much about Africa, or Africa’s contemporary experiences, in the same way I did not know much about African Americans when I moved to the US. What frustrated me though, was that they did not express much enthusiasm in learning about Africa. I also learned they had misconceptions about Africa. I remember one of my students telling me, “I am so glad slavery happened because I can’t imagine living in Africa in such poverty.” This statement and many like it revealed the misconceptions and stereotypes African Americans had toward Africa. From some African Americans, I also got a sense of superiority complex, an elitist attitude that viewed Africans as the worst version of being Black. [Wa Wamwere](#) touches on this when he writes:

Negative ethnicity between Africans and African-Americans flows both directions. Those African-Americans who identify only with Blacks who share their culture, language, historical and urban experience, see Africans as an inferior and sometimes treacherous breed. One African who has been living in America for many years told me: “African-Americans have called me a ‘double Nigger.’ They think we are inferior and have come here to grab jobs from them. Others say we sold them into slavery.” (102)

This quote further reveals a distance and love-hate relationship, but also “tribalism” among Blacks. In their article, “Black Versus Black: The Relationships Among African, African American, and African Caribbean Persons,” [Jennifer Jackson and Mary Cothran](#) conducted the first study of its kind, surveying 427 persons from the three communities to gain a better understanding of what types of relationships they have toward each other. The study revealed a variety of myths, fears, stereotypes, and misconceptions each community harbored toward the other. The authors, drawing from their

findings, argue that some of the factors that contribute to these tensions are slavery, racism, colonization, divide and conquer tactics used by colonizers and slave masters, and a Eurocentric Western education that has contributed to ignorance and miseducation about different Black groups. These issues hinder productive relationships, collaborations, and intellectual work among Blacks, not just in our field, but in other contexts. As I reflected on my story, I wondered if GBR could become a space where Blacks of all backgrounds can come together to reeducate Black people about Black people, reconnect with each other, and develop strategies of healing from the traumas we have all experienced.

Ronisha's Story

I grew up in a small, predominately white town in central Florida. Within this space, there was limited discussion of ethnic and cultural diversity. "African American" was the politically correct way to reference the fact that my family was the "Black family" with the house on the corner, and I was the "Black girl" in class. Within the context of this little suburban bubble, I thought about being Black a lot, but I did not think about the cultural or ethnic specifications of my Black identity, or even consider the diversity of Black experiences, languages, and worldviews beyond my own until I went to college.

For my undergraduate degree, I stayed in-state, attending a public university with a predominantly white student population. Even with predominantly white institution status, in comparison to where I grew up, where being the *only* Black person in the room or even the entire building was normal, the population of Black students at this university was substantial to me at the time. I was excited by this new environment and sought opportunities to interact with other Black students and finally really engage Black culture in an educational setting. With these goals in mind, I strategically enrolled in courses that centralized Black history, literature, and language.

For example, to fulfill my foreign language requirement, I chose beginning Haitian Creole. This class was taught by a graduate teaching assistant we called Pwofesé Lyonel, or Pwofesé L. Pwofesé L had immigrated from Haiti with his family when he was seven. A majority of the students in his class were also first- and second-generation Haitian Americans, and several already had a strong background in speaking Kreyòl but wanted to improve their written skills in the language while fulfilling their foreign language requirement, too. On the first day of class, Pwofesé L did an informal, "raise-your-hand" survey of the class demographics, asking us to raise our hands if we were Haitian American or from another African cultural or ethnic group. Quickly, I realized that out of a class of about 20 Black students, I was one of two students who did not identify as Haitian. On the one hand, for the first time in my life, I looked around my classroom and everyone was Black (including the teacher), which felt amazing. On the other hand, also for the first time, African American was not the centralized, assumed, default Black identity. This experience was both empowering and uncomfortable.

The explicit message of the course was twofold. First, the purpose of the course was to learn to speak and write Kreyòl, which included understanding the many cultural influences of the Haitian language, such as Spanish, Taino, Portuguese, and, most notably, West African languages and French. The second component of the course was about engaging Haitian history, music, dancing, religion, and understanding Kreyòl within the context of contemporary Haiti. For example, Pwofesé L would talk about the importance of Kreyòl to Haitian people, and how divisions in class and power created this built-in oppression of Kreyòl despite it being one of the official languages of Haiti and the primary language of a majority of Haitian people.

Reflecting back to this time, I now understand that many of the arguments Pwofesé L was making about misconceptions of Haitian Creole as "broken French" align with similar arguments made about African American Language as "bad English." Prior to taking this class, I ignorantly thought that I would take Haitian Creole as an entry-level course to learning French—a stepping stone—without understanding that this language has its own distinctive vocabulary and grammar, or understanding the relationship between French and Kreyòl within the context of Haiti. In boasting that I *actually* wanted to learn French, and was opting for an "easier version," I was ignorantly aligning myself with elitist practices that situate Kreyòl as inferior to French. These elitist practices influence how information, including

official documents, newspapers, and literature, is disseminated in French (the language of a few) rather than Kreyòl (the language of the majority) in Haiti. Now, I understand why Pwofesé L checked me on that first day of class. I remember him saying something to the effect of, “[I]f I, or anyone else, wanted to learn French, or any other Western language, we were free to return to the course registrar and enroll in said course. But, if we wanted to learn the language of his culture and people, we were welcome to stay and affirm a language spoken by millions of people all over the world, a language that did not need to be conflated with French to have value and validity.” I was shame, but that lesson changed how I thought about my identity as a Black person—as an African American. This new perspective made me realize how I was conflating all Black experiences and histories by assuming sameness instead of difference. I was centralizing my African American views, and Western perspectives and needs, even within a space—Haitian Creole—where such thinking would obviously be inappropriate. I needed to be checked then, so that I could learn how to check myself now.

Experiences where I found myself surrounded by Black cultures and ethnicities that were not rooted in African American experiences continued throughout my undergraduate education, even within African American literature and studies courses. At the time, being surrounded by these other Black students with cultures, languages, and experiences that seemed so distant from my own as an African American made me feel insecure. *Basic*. Although I was raised in an African American family that used stories, images, movies, and books to educate me about African American history, activists, and community leaders, and I have parents who instilled in me a sense of pride toward my Black identity, to be honest, being in contact with these other Black identities and experiences—their connectedness to Africa—made me feel like my Blackness was whitewashed in some way.

I was embarrassed that all I knew about Africa was what I read in a few pages of my history books and countless movies about enslavement in America that often depict Africa (if at all) as some distant land we were too removed from to fully claim or remember. Africans were often portrayed as impoverished and uncivilized. I remember the “for just \$10 a day” infomercials that depicted Africa and Africans as lacking basic resources like food and water, as well as the movies like *Coming to America* where being African was something to poke fun at—a joke. On one hand, I internalized this harmful information about Africa and Africans and used it to create distance between myself and these “other” Black folks. On the other hand, the more I came in contact with Black peers from different cultures, the more I watched them chat informally about where they were from, or switch their dialect or entire language as soon as a family member called them on the phone, the more I wanted to connect to my African identity.

By listening to Esther speak from her multicultural perspectives and multiple geographical contexts, I started to realize how significant my conscious and unconscious relationship with Africa and other African people truly was. For example, I can remember presenting my “family tree” to my predominately White classmates in elementary school. At the conclusion of my presentation, I was asked by my teacher to answer the last question of the assignment sheet; that is, “[W]here does your family come from?” I remember responding, “[M]y family is from Africa.” As my peers nodded, my teacher blurted out an unforgettable laugh. It was a laugh that suggested to me as the only Black person in the classroom (a dark-skinned Black girl with a head full of braids and beads) that not only was my answer absurd and wrong, but so was I. In an attempt to give the “right” answer, I fumbled through the last bits of my family history I could remember, naming US states where my family had resided: Florida and New York. My white teacher still did not seem satisfied. I felt my body get hot. I was embarrassed but also angry. Why were my peers allowed to make assertions of being one-third this ethnicity, or one-sixteenth that identity, but I could not make similar claims about my own Black ancestry? Why were their answers acceptable, but mine was laughable?

These questions have remained with me ever since, including a few years ago when I contemplated taking an ancestry DNA test as part of a personal research project. When I shared this desire to know the “roots” of my family to my grandmother, I was met with a stiff response of, “You don’t need to go across an ocean to Africa to find our family. Our people are from right down there in South Carolina. Cheraw. That’s where your people are from.” At the time, her words stung. She completely shut down my Alex Haley moment. But what my grandmother was trying to get me to understand was that there

was nothing wrong with the answer I gave to my teacher years ago. There was nothing wrong with wanting to have a connection with my African ancestry, but it needs to include my American one as well. If I was willing to cross an ocean to visit West African countries that I had only just learned about, like Benin, Nigeria, Ghana, I better keep that same enthusiasm driving to Cheraw, South Carolina; Live Oak, Florida; Oviedo, Florida; and Rochester, New York. Similar to how [Nikole Hannah-Jones](#), in her introduction to the *New York Times Magazine* “1619 Project,” speaks of her misunderstanding of her father’s pride toward the American flag, my grandmother was trying to remind me that my people have contributed greatly to the founding of this country and they should be respected and honored. The sacrifices they made, the pain they endured, the land they occupied, worked, and died on “right down there in Cheraw” is just as important as the shorelines of Africa that I was so eager to visit. If I’m going to tell my story and understand who I am—I need both sides: the African and the American.

As I spoke with Esther on that car ride, and many times since, I concluded that there are so many stories that need to be told, heard, and interpreted within our global Black community. I wondered to myself, “Is there some unspoken rule—a system of rules—passed down through the generations across the African diaspora that says we as Black folks are not allowed to even see each other fully? How blind has white supremacy, colonization, separation, enslavement, genocide, colorism, linguisticism, religion, racism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia, and patriarchy made us to each other? What uninterrogated conflicts of consciousness still exist, beneath the Veil W.E.B. [Du Bois](#) referred to in *Souls of Black Folks: Essays and Sketches*, or the white masks that [Frantz Fanon](#) and [Paul Laurence Dunbar](#) wrote so eloquently about? In an age when technology has created opportunities to bring our diverse, local, and global communities together, why do we remain separated by ignorance, misunderstanding, and prejudice?”

These silent rules and the rhetorical practices they inspire are a festering infection. They epitomize the darkest and most treacherous circle of [Jordan Peele](#)’s “sunken place.” To “get out” collectively as Black people will require falling deeper into ourselves to heal the generational seed of internalized oppression. A seed that functions as a source of self-hatred and communicates the message, “I dislike you because you embody the parts of me that I was taught to be ashamed of, or was not taught about at all. I dismiss you because, although I see you and I hear you, I do not understand you. Therefore, it is best that I go my way and you go yours.”

“... But We Gon’ Be Alright”

As we continued to share with each other well beyond this first encounter, we noted how our individual miseducation connected to larger societal, cultural, and systemic issues within and outside of the Black community, such as linguisticism, colorism, xenophobia, intraracial discrimination, and the perpetuation of narrowed representations of Black identity, standards of Black performance, and Black experience and thought. In our own stories, we saw the consequences of internalized oppression sustained by formal and informal education and socialization. We connected what we were experiencing to the works of scholars directly speaking on the implications of this kind of miseducation, including those who have noted how this miseducation is contributing to Afro-Diaspora wars, Afro-Diaspora divide, and disharmony among the Black community ([Asante](#); [Clarke](#); [Russ](#)).

In this special issue, we begin to interrogate how oppressive ideologies and representations of Africa and people of African descent from across the Afro-Diaspora impact and affect our scholarly and pedagogical work within rhetorical studies, including African American Rhetorics. We also consider how we might more formally reimagine rhetorical discourses that centralize the experiences, knowledges, and practices of people of African ancestry in America and around the world as a part of a collective disciplinary field called GBR. This united banner of GBR allows space to recognize the interconnectedness among African American Rhetorics, continental African Rhetorics (ancient and contemporary), Afro-Caribbean Rhetorics, Afro-Latinx Rhetorics, Afro-European Rhetorics, and all Afrocentric Rhetorics. Black Rhetorics also helps us recognize historical, cultural, ethnic, religious, linguistic, and other differences, as we imagine a globalized and inclusive field and community that can continue the work of eradicating rhetorical and physical threats against Black humanity, Black life, and Black power.

We imagine a rhetorical field that can do the critical, vulnerable, and uncomfortable work of acknowledging we as Black people individually and collectively are “not okay,” while remaining committed to addressing our shortcomings with the vigor and enthusiasm of the mantra of our generation proclaimed by **Kendrick Lamar**: “We gon’ be alright . . . Do you hear me? Do you feel me? We gon’ be alright.”

To this end, in the next section, we outline four themes of GBR that represent principles and practices that prioritize inclusivity, interconnectedness, and difference across African and African Diasporic Rhetorics. We then conclude with introductions to our contributors whose work in this special issue illustrates some of these principles.

Toward GBR: A New Framework for Engaging African and African Diasporic Rhetorics

Although it is not possible, or within the scope of this introduction, to fully develop a comprehensive theory of a globalized Black Rhetorics, we are interested in identifying key concepts, ideas, and practices to imagine this field of study. Our intentions are to identify ways to make space for diverse Black experiences, voices, traditions, histories, perspectives, and practices within and outside the subfield of African American Rhetorics. This new field is important because, although the term Black Rhetorics is not new, it is commonly used synonymously with, or in association with, African American Rhetorics, which continues to centralize African American people, rhetorical traditions, language, and literacy practices, as opposed to more broadly representing and theorizing diverse Black experiences. Below, we highlight four themes of GBR that answer the call for interconnectedness made by **Gilyard and Banks**, while also recognizing and engaging difference, which we suggest is essential to understanding the diverse rhetorics of people of African descent in the United States and other contexts. These four themes include: (1) assessing our past and present methods for educating Black people about Black people, (2) studying and teaching Black language diversity in the United States and in transnational contexts, (3) teaching both historical and modern texts and rhetors from various African and African Diasporic rhetorical traditions, and (4) prioritizing healing as a communal goal of GBR. These four themes are not exhaustive; in fact, we invite a response from scholars, teachers, and students of rhetoric writ large to propose additional themes that further emphasize inclusivity, interconnectedness, and difference in GBR.

Reeducation: Assessing Our Methods of Educating Black People about Black People

As illustrated above in both of our individual stories, education, in both formal and informal settings, played a major role in how we understood ourselves as Black people in relation to one another; that is, Black people from African cultural and ethnic backgrounds other than our own. Formal settings like educational institutions (e.g., public school and university classrooms), as well as informal settings such as popular culture, familial and social circles, and daily interactions, are all spaces where education about Black identity, history, interconnectedness, and differences take place in positive and problematic ways.

Within a globalized Black Rhetorics, it is important to engage these educational spaces that can be incubators for perpetuating stereotypes, misrepresentations of Black identities, and acts of discrimination, including among Black people. As researchers, practitioners, students, and teachers of GBR, we must be privy to the power of these formal and informal educational sites, noting how they can contribute to miscommunication and perpetuate practices of internalized racial oppression.

In their introduction to the edited collection *Internalized Oppression: The Psychology of Marginalized Groups*, **E.J.R. David and Annie Derthick** describe oppression as occurring “when one group has more access to power and privilege than another group, and when that power and privilege is used to maintain the status quo (i.e., domination of one group over another)” (3). Oppression includes those in positions of power imposing their worldviews on the oppressed, and using their access to resources to justify oppression (3). **David and Derthick** identify several forms of oppression, including: oppression by imposition or force, oppression by deprivation, institutional or systemic oppression, interpersonal oppression, and subtle oppression within contemporary contexts (e.g., microaggressions). In practicing a globalized Black

Rhetorics, it is important to understand these multiple forms of oppression and interrogate how they impact the daily lives of people of African ancestry, including Black rhetorical practices, communication, and ways of seeing and navigating the world.

In terms of working toward a collective, diverse, and inclusive GBR, and continuing the work of affirming Black Rhetorics as a part of the larger rhetorical field, interpersonal oppression is worth further examination here, especially because it contributes to how individuals from various identity and social groups interact with each other, experience internalized oppression, and contribute to intragroup conflict. In discussing internalized oppression, [David and Dirthick](#) begin with an overview of postcolonialist theorist Frantz Fanon's four-phase model of colonialism from his book *The Wretched of the Earth*. In particular, in the fourth phase there is an "establishment of a society where the political, social, and economic institutions are designed to benefit and maintain the superiority of the colonizer while simultaneously subjugating the colonized" (8). This phase of self-sustaining oppression is why the theme of reeducation must be a priority within GBR. Schools, churches, and homes are spaces where oppression is perpetuated and discrimination is taught to those of privileged identities and to those from historically oppressed and marginalized backgrounds. For oppressed groups who continuously have to navigate discrimination, stereotypes, and marks of inferiority, there is risk of internalizing oppressive views of their identities. [David and Dirthick](#) cite Lipsky's definition of internalized oppression as "turning upon ourselves, upon our families, and upon our own people the distress patterns that result from the . . . oppression of the (dominant) society" (6)" (9). Although Black popular culture likes to use exaggerated figures like Uncle Ruckus from the animated series *The Boondocks* and Samuel L. Jackson's character, Stephen, from the [Quentin Tarantino](#) film *Django: Unchained*, as humorous representations of internalized racial oppression within the Black community, what scholarship on internalized oppression, and our own stories, reveal is that internalized oppression is not a laughing matter.

The consequences of internalized oppression include intragroup fragmentation, disconnect, conflict, horizontal violence, and "the incorporation of negative stereotypes into cultural values and traditions . . . so that oppression becomes a cultural norm transmitted across generations" ([David and Dirthick](#) 10). These are points of miscommunication and miseducation that stand in the way of interconnectedness among various Black rhetorical traditions and people, and they stem from the final phase of colonialism that ultimately recruits the oppressed into positions that uphold their own oppression. Reeducation means relearning how to see ourselves as Black people, creating space to learn about a diversity of Black experiences and positionalities, and developing new methods for navigating differences that do not rely on oppressive systems.

Another area of re-education is racial literacy. Esther's story revealed that continental and immigrant Africans need racial literacy education. Formal and informal institutions in Africa do not raise continental Africans' awareness on racial experiences of Afro-Diasporic Blacks in the United States and in other predominantly white contexts. Consequently, African immigrants lack knowledge and skills to engage critically and thoughtfully in conversations about race and racism when they immigrate and become part of the US Black community. In fact, some think race and racism is an African American problem, and some may choose not to participate in antiracist and anti-Black struggles and conversations. The murder of George Floyd was a wake-up call for continental and immigrant African communities, as many began understanding their African identity does not give them immunity from police brutality and race-based discrimination. In "Viewpoint: What It's like to Be an African in the US," journalist [Larry Madowo](#) interviews Africans living in the United States who reveal how immigrant African parents have begun equipping their children with racial literacy skills after Floyd's murder and many others that have happened in the recent past. In this theme, we argue that it should not take Africans to have to visit or immigrate to the United States to learn about race and racism through traumatic experiences like the murder of Black people. They should come already prepared to participate in struggles that seek to counter anti-Black racism and dismantle white supremacy. We propose that African schools should design racial literacy curriculum that draws from critical race and decolonial theories to equip Africans with knowledge and skills on how to

identify racism, critically talk about it, counter it, and understand its implications on Black people globally. Furthermore, racial and social justice conversations should become the norm across the US in African immigrant communities and homes.

We acknowledge that emphasizing reeducation, including broader and more complex representations of Black people within history, has and will continue to be met with strong resistance and criticism on individual, institutional, and sociopolitical levels. For example, attacks on the *New York Times Magazine's* "The 1619 Project," its creator [Nikole Hannah-Jones](#), and contributors, as well as current educational policies in states across the country attempting to ban the teaching of critical race theory, are manifestations of an educational system that cannot be relied on for educating Black people about Black people. The very purpose of "The 1619 Project" was to commemorate the arrival of 20 to 30 enslaved Africans in the British colonies in 1619, while acknowledging the substantial influences slavery has had on the founding of America, and the major contributions of African Americans in the building of this nation. Hannah-Jones's intentions were to write a history of the United States not commonly represented in our history textbooks, discussed within our national narratives, or communally taught or interrogated within Black communities and circles. GBR, as a field of study and a community, should involve advocating for, producing, and theorizing such historical rewritings of US history. Furthermore, GBR should be about expanding and complicating these narratives to include the experiences of Black people in America and around the world in new and underrepresented ways. For example, a recent report by *Newsy* interrogates how US policies following the banning of slavery in 1808 made it difficult for Black people, and people of color in general, to immigrate to America for over 150 years ([Newsy Staff](#)). The 100,000 Black people who were able to immigrate to the United States in the 1920s were from the Caribbean and entered through Ellis Island. The report states that it was not until 1965 that "Congress passed the Immigration and Nationality Act, which did away with the quota system and opened the door for an influx of migrants from Africa, Asia, and Latin America." Stories of Black migration to the United States often leave out these narratives and policies that have impacted Black diversity in the United States. Furthermore, understanding these various pathways to the United States by people of African descent is important in countering oppressive beliefs about who belongs here and who does not.

Finally, it is important to imagine and anticipate the possibilities of expanding our current practices of GBR through reeducation. It is also important to consider potential constraints, or roadblocks, to understanding. As rhetoricians, we must anticipate points of miscommunication, particularly when it comes to talking across differences in Black perspectives, stories, and practices. We need to assess our current practices of communicating as a Black collective, prioritizing how we can effectively, ethically, and equally listen to diverse Black voices singly and simultaneously. In considering how we might prioritize listening as an integral part of reeducating Black people about Black people, as well as all people about diverse Black histories, experiences, and rhetorics, we find [Gesa Kirsch and Jacqueline Royster's](#) framework for practicing feminist rhetorics in *Feminist Rhetorical Practices: New Horizons for Rhetoric, Composition, and Literacy Studies* incredibly useful.

Specifically, the practice of strategic contemplation is a powerful practice that can be adapted to serve the needs of a globalized Black Rhetorics. [Kirsch and Royster](#) describe strategic contemplation as "a genre of research and scholarship traditionally associated with the process of meditation, introspection, and reflection" (84). Furthermore, strategic contemplation offers an opportunity, for those who employ it, "to observe and notice, to listen to and hear voices often neglected and silenced, and to notice more overtly their own response to what they are seeing, reading, reflecting on, and encountering during their research processes" (84). For GBR, this practice of strategic contemplation, deliberative and critical reflection, listening without immediately drawing conclusions, and allowing oneself to linger within discourses as we engage underrepresented subjects and subjectivities, is important because it presents opportunities to interrogate internalized pain that silences Black voices.

We propose employing strategic contemplation within the context of GBR as an individual and communal practice that requires telling, listening, and interrogating Black stories—many of which are false and incomplete. Within many cultures, anti-Black Rhetoric has been integrated into formal and informal educational settings, and strategic contemplation—really listening with the intention of

understanding others from their perspective, not responding/attacking/defending—can make visible these structures that continue to create platforms for miseducating everyone about Black people, knowledge, and experiences. Ultimately, reeducation is about expanding Black stories, especially among Black people, and it is also about locating and resisting systems that perpetuate practices of internalized oppression and miscommunication among people of differing African ancestry.

Studying and Teaching the Diversity of Black Languages in the US and Transnational Contexts

Another pathway to gaining a broader understanding of African and Afro-Diasporic rhetorical traditions is studying the diverse Black languages spoken in the United States. Scholars who follow the African-based tradition or the Creolist school of thought argue that Black languages spoken in the Afro-diaspora (Black Atlantic), including African American Language (AAL), are indeed Africanized languages. In other words, they are part of a linguistic continuum from the languages spoken in West and Central African countries. Smitherman explains how, over the years, Afro-Diasporic Black language scholars have engaged various methodological approaches, including language reconstruction, kinship analysis of language families, etymology, and philology, to explain the presence of linguistic Africanisms in the New World (*Talkin That Talk* 29–30). This research demonstrates similarities in terms of linguistic structure among African languages and Black Englishes and Creoles spoken by descendants of enslaved Black people in the Americas. Notable scholarship by Beryl Bailey, Melville Herskovits, Joseph Holloway, John Holm and Alison W. Shilling, Salikoko S. Mufwene and Nancy Condon, John and Angela Rickford, Lorenzo Turner, and Winifred Vass, among others, also illustrates this point. The term Ebonics, coined by Dr. Robert Williams and his colleagues, was meant to capture the similarities between West and Central Africa languages and Englishes and Creoles spoken in the Caribbean and the United States by descendants of enslaved Black people (qtd. in Smitherman, *Talkin that Talk* 28). Since the study of linguistic patterns of Black languages cannot be separated from their rhetorical patterns, some of this scholarship also discusses Black rhetorical styles, arguing Black rhetorical practices in the African Diaspora are an extension of African oratory or rhetoric.

African American rhetorical scholars who follow the African-based tradition have used AAL scholarship to help the field of rhetoric and composition understand Black Rhetorics. These scholars emphasize that gaining awareness of the lexical, grammatical, and phonological features of AAL and Black modes of discourse like signifying, sermonizing, indirection, repetition, call and response, and narrativizing (among others), offers the field a more comprehensive understanding of the richness and complexity of African American Rhetorics. Adisa A. Alkebulan explains:

... the study of African American rhetoric is also a study of African languages (continental and diasporic, ancient and modern). It is difficult to speak of African American rhetoric absent a discussion of language given the paramount nature of the oral culture. ... African American rhetoric is best understood within the field of linguistics associated with culture, called cultural linguistics. ... A true discussion of rhetoric, in an African context, cannot be separated from a discussion of language. (“The Spiritual Essence” 23)

While AAL scholarship has been critical in introducing Black Rhetorics to the larger field of rhetoric and composition, we argue AAL is just one among the many diverse Black languages spoken in the United States. A focus on AAL only offers the field one window to understanding and appreciating Black Rhetorics. The expanded GBR calls for diverse representation of Black languages for a fuller appreciation of Black rhetorical practices. We therefore recommend studying and teaching other Black languages in dialog with AAL for an expanded and comprehensive understanding of GBR.

Smitherman draws our attention to the linguistic diversity of the US African American community, identifying US Ebonics, a variety of Englishes, Arabic, Swahili, Creoles, and other foreign languages as part of the community’s linguistic repertoire (20). This diversity continues to grow with the continued increase of Black immigration and Black transnationalism. In the proposed expanded field of GBR, we wonder: How might studying and teaching Black Creoles spoken in the United States, such as Haitian

Creole, Jamaican Creole, and Guyanese Creole, among others, expand our understanding of Black Rhetorics? As we write this essay, we wonder, for example, why isn't Gullah (Geechee), a Black language spoken in Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina, centralized in the theorizing and teaching of Black language pedagogies and Black Rhetorics, just as much as AAL? We argue that teaching Creole languages, alongside AAL, can broaden the field's understanding of Black Rhetorics, while also contributing to the theorizing of Black language pedagogies that acknowledge language differences among Black students.

In arguing for diverse representations of Black languages and Black Rhetorics, we are calling for transnational Black language work that studies and teaches the linguistic and rhetorical patterns of contemporary Black languages in Africa and other Afro-Diasporic contexts, highlighting the shared histories, similarities, and differences. We see this as important, not just for teaching inclusive Black Rhetorics, but also for theorizing Black language pedagogies for all students. For example, contemporary scholarship on Creoles spoken in the United States and in transnational contexts, like the Caribbean (see *Creole Composition*), and African Indigenous languages spoken by immigrant and transnational African students in the United States (see Kigamwa and Ndemanu; Milu), are beginning to challenge Black language pedagogies that draw on AAL scholarship only. Similarly, focusing on AAL only to theorize Black Rhetorics overlooks potential contributions of other African and Afro-Diasporic languages in the theorization of Black Rhetorics. Transnational Black language work that dialogs African languages with Diasporic languages, both ancient and modern, offers the field one pathway to understanding rhetorical practices from other traditions beyond African American.

We have also noticed that, while Creole and AAL language scholarship continues to dialog with African languages, typically the goal of this dialog is to explain the history or presence of linguistic Africanisms in these languages. The scholarship does not engage with modern African languages or emerging languaging practices in Africa. We therefore recommend studying African/Black languages and putting the scholarship in dialog with Black language scholarship in the United States and other Afro-Diasporic contexts. For example, we wonder: How can studying Liberian Kreyol and Sierra Leonean Krio, two Black languages spoken in Africa but whose history is rooted in the language patterns of descendants of freed enslaved people returning back to Africa from the British Empire, Canada, the United States, and the West Indies, add to our understanding of the transnational flow of Black languages and rhetorics? How is the transnational flow of Black languages, like Jamaican Creole and AAL, back to Africa through genres like Reggae, Dance Hall, and Hip-Hop, transforming modern African languages, and consequently, Black Rhetorics? What can the cross-language and language-sharing work happening among African, African Americans or Afro Caribbean, and Afro Latin music artists teach us about Black Rhetorics? What can we learn from films like *Black Panther*, which extensively represents African languages and accents? How does Kendrick Lamar's collaborative work with South African Hip-Hop artist Sjava (Jabulani Hadebe) on the *Black Panther* album, with songs written in Zulu and AAL, teach us about Black Rhetorics in popular culture? We wonder, too, how can languages like Swahili, Arabic, or Papiamentu enhance our understanding of Black Rhetorics?

The language examples and the questions we raise seek to advance an argument that, when it comes to understanding Black Rhetorics, we have barely scratched the surface. We believe understanding the diversity of Black languages in the United States and Black global diaspora can begin to expand our understanding of the diversity and complexity of GBR.

Studying and Teaching Modern Texts, Rhetors, and Genres from Diverse African Rhetorical Traditions

Maulana Karenga argues that to dialog "with African culture is to engage its texts, continental and diaspora, ancient and modern" (5). Building on Karenga's proposal, we argue that emerging Black rhetorical scholarship does not demonstrate a dialog with modern African and Afro-Diasporic texts, similar to how it does not engage with modern African and Afro-Diasporic languages, as discussed in the previous theme. In our proposed GBR field, we argue that diverse African rhetorical traditions will

need to connect and dialog with each other through studying and teaching rhetors, texts, and genres from diverse ethnic, national, and linguistic backgrounds. To do this work, we invoke [Jacqueline Royster's](#) metaphor of "landscaping." In "Disciplinary Landscaping, or Contemporary Challenges in the History of Rhetoric," Royster uses the geographical metaphor of "landscaping," and calls for a remapping of the field's rhetorical terrain, to include female rhetoricians of African descent as worthy contributors shaping the history of the field. Royster uses *Daughters of Africa*, an anthology edited by [Margaret Busby](#), which showcases scholarship and writing by over 200 women from Africa and the African diaspora. The women come from geographical regions ranging from Africa, Asia, Central America, Europe, North America, and South America. Royster argues that although Busby's book focuses on orature and literature, it is useful for rhetorical studies as a field because it shows how "women historically linked to Africa have been speaking in public arenas, writing, and thinking critically about writing and themselves as writers for many, many centuries" (152).

While Royster is arguing for inclusion of these women in the larger field of rhetorical studies, which has historically been dominated by white males, her proposal and approach is instructive for GBR. When studying and teaching GBR, we ask scholars and teachers to ask themselves: Do the rhetors and scholars I include in my syllabus represent various African and Afro-Diasporic rhetorical traditions? What Black rhetorical traditions am I privileging and why? Are the genres and texts I am teaching reflective of the diversity of rhetorical practices in African and Afro-Diasporic rhetorical traditions?

For those asking where to begin, we recommend the following scholarship as a starting point, while also recognizing our own limitations, awareness, and access to available scholarship. From the Caribbean, we recommend scholarship by [Kamau Brathwaite](#), [Kevin Adonis Browne](#), [Pauline Felicia Baird](#), and [Felicita Arzu Carmichael](#), which offers theorization of Black Rhetorics from a Caribbean perspective. [Yomaira Figueroa-Vásquez](#) and [Jessica Marie Johnson](#) offer important perspectives on Caribbean histories, feminisms, and rhetorics, focusing specifically on Black Latinx experiences. Activists such as [Dash Harris](#) extend theorizations of Black praxis across Latin America, providing insights into Black languages (including but not limited to Black Spanishes) from various Latin-American perspectives. Harris curates a wealth of resources documenting Afro-Latinx research, activism, and praxis, and showcases the work of writers and activists such as Dominican sociocultural critic [Zahira Kelly](#) and Afro-Peruvian journalist [Sofia Carrillo Zegarra](#). All of these Afro-Latinx women provide important perspectives on Black Rhetorics from different positionalities.

From continental Africa, the "origin" of Black Rhetorics, we recommend the groundbreaking work of African folklorist and linguist [Ruth Finnegan](#), who did extensive scholarship on African oral literature in the early 1970s. Postcolonial African scholars have expanded on Finnegan's work through their research on African oral literature, such as [Isidore Okpewho](#), [Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o](#), [Pio Zirimu](#), [Chinua Achebe](#), [Wole Soyinka](#), [John Pepper Clark](#), [Ezekiel Mphahlele](#), [Okot p'Bitek](#), and [David Rubadiri](#), among others. Studying and teaching Black rhetorical scholarship from diverse African rhetorical traditions, we argue, not only raises awareness and expands our understanding of diverse historical Black rhetorical genres, like proverbs, oral poetry, oral narratives, riddles, prayers, word play, drum language, names, drama/theater/plays, incantations, and dozens of others, but also contributes to the field's understanding of contemporary Black genres like literature, Hip-Hop, Jeremiads, Black Twitter, Black film, and dance.

We conclude this theme by offering examples of scholarship that may serve as models for studying and teaching Black Rhetorics in ways that dialog with modern texts, rhetors, and genres (e.g., [Richardson's](#) *Hip-Hop Literacies*, [Rickford and Rickford's](#) "'Cut Eye' and 'Suck Teeth,'" and [Smitherman's](#) "How I Got Ovuh").

Healing as an Overarching Theme for Studying and Teaching Global Black Rhetorics

For any meaningful Black rhetorical work to happen that connects and dialogs with diverse African and Afro-Diasporic communities, we argue that healing is a fundamental step. The healing should involve everyone in the global Black family, which is why we begin our discussion of this theme at Pikworo Slave Camp in Ghana, Africa.

This camp, founded in 1704 and active until 1845, was a slave transit center where slaves were auctioned and later sold to Dutch, English, French, and other European slave traders. There are many similar slave transit and holding centers across Africa, but we are using Pikworo symbolically to represent all of them as we introduce the fourth GBR theme: *healing*. We argue that all Black people, regardless of where they reside in the world, have suffered the trauma of the African Holocaust or Holocaust of Enslavement. The African Holocaust, which describes the history and ongoing effects of slavery and other atrocities, like colonialism and racism, inflicted on people of African descent, continues to negatively impact them. In the documentary *Talking Black in America: The Roots and Diaspora*, Chiké Frankie Edozien, a professor of Journalism at New York University, Accra, Ghana, explains why local communities in Ghana do not visit Pikworo Slave Camp, which today is a tourist attraction and a memorial site:

There is a reason why Pikworo, as beautiful as it is, locals don't go there because they are traumatized many generations later. . . . When we look at our history as . . . Black people in the world today, there is a lot that we have to contend with. We have a legacy of strength and resilience but the collective trauma that many of our communities have experienced has not really really been something that people have looked to try and *heal*. (00.05:50–6:35, emphasis added)

Edozien's observation emphasizes our argument, which is that Black people everywhere, continental and Diasporic, must seek approaches to healing from the physical and psychological wounds caused by the African Holocaust. Healing, for us, means acknowledging that the chains of slavery—physical and metaphorical—are still binding Black people. The chains are not just on our bodies but our minds and spirits as well. Some of these bindings are so invisible, and subconsciously buried, that they have become normalized in dangerous and self-oppressive ways. As we revealed through our stories, these bindings contribute to stereotypes, prejudices, misrepresentations, misunderstandings, and miseducation that lead to intraracial strife in our communities, while also standing in the way of effective communication and Black solidarity. Because the trauma is a collective experience, the healing must be collective and communal, involving both continental African and Afro-Diasporic communities. By acknowledging physical locations like Pikworo Slave Camp, we locate the history of slave trauma, and also offer an example of how the trauma of slavery continues to haunt all of us—including continental Africans— even in the present day.

We argue that GBR classrooms should become spaces where all Black students dialog about how slavery and other atrocities that came with it—like colonialism and anti-Black racism—caused, and continue to cause, injury to Black bodies and Black psyche. Other scholars have described the psychological traumas of slavery, colonialism, and racism on Black people, including disorders like double-consciousness (Du Bois); colonial mentality (Fanon) and inferiority complex (Wa Thiong'o). These scholars, representing Africa and the African diaspora, emphasize the need for healing in Black communities.

We know that this work is not easy.

We do not have all the answers on how to heal, or what healing will look like in practice or in the classroom. We also do not claim expertise as “healers” in the medical or spiritual sense. However, as Black people affected by this trauma, we suggest drawing on African philosophical and spiritual concepts to begin theorizing possible paths to healing. For example, a GBR field should draw on and teach the guiding principles of *Maat*, a deity and religious practice that informed the social order of ancient Egypt (Kemet). Research on ancient Egyptian rhetoric (Blake, Fox, Lipson), upholding the moral values of *Maat*, including truthfulness, justice, harmony, balance, order, reciprocity, and propriety, is important in all aspects of life, including understanding the connections between humanity and the universe, determining one's existence in the afterlife, and in the practices of moral and harmonious communication. According to Alkebulan, “[T]he orator's concern [guided by the principles of *Maat*] was with the spiritual harmony of the audience or the community” (27). GBR, drawing on *Maat*'s ethical and spiritual principles, can collectively help us seek to: (1) make visible the diverse and varied traumas of the African Holocaust; (2) contemplate what constitutes global Black justice as diverse Black communities navigate the aftermaths of the African enslavement, colonialism, and racism; and (3) develop strategies that Black individuals can adopt to restore balance, harmony, and order in US Black communities and in the global Black world. Doing this work effectively will require having a strong sense of relationality, which brings us to another African philosophical and spiritual concept: *Ubuntu*.

Ubuntu expresses an African philosophical worldview that all humanity shares a universal bond because we are all related and connected. Ubuntu relationality is translated as “I am because we are,” which means, “a person is a person through other people.” Ubuntu is a spiritual concept because it also emphasizes that we are all related to each other, not just as humans, but also with the natural environment and the spiritual world. Ubuntu further emphasizes that a person makes sense of who they are in relation to others. We want to reintroduce this concept in the context of healing, because, as we mentioned earlier, the physical separation caused by the transatlantic slave trade has created a physical and psychological distance among diverse Black communities. Ubuntu should remind us of our relationality, despite the geographical separation. Ultimately, it affirms the idea that we are all relatives; that is, brothers and sisters from the same mother: Africa. Key to Ubuntu is how we define ourselves in relation to each other. For example, how does Ronisha, as an African American, define herself in relation to other Blacks from Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America, and elsewhere? Similarly, how does Esther, an African immigrant, define herself in relation to other Blacks who are descendants of Black people in the Americas? Ubuntu, while a powerful concept, has not adequately been considered in the shaping of African Rhetoric. *Karenga* touches on the concept to explain how European conceptions of self, “I think therefore I am,” contrast sharply with the African version, which views self as “a related and relating subject.” For Africans, the concept means, “I am related and relate to others, therefore I am. It is in being-with, being-of and being-for others that I discover and constitute myself. And it is through communicative practice within ancient and ongoing tradition that I achieve this” (emphasis in original 17). Building on this, we believe Ubuntu can help us redefine ourselves to each other as Black people and redefine ourselves to the world. This process of redefinition can help us see the value of collective and communal healing. Ubuntu explains why we should approach healing as relatives—brothers and sisters—not strangers.

Last, we can draw on the theoretical concept of *nommo*, which has been widely used to theorize African rhetoric (Asante; Jahn). *Nommo* is the defining principle of African rhetoric and is described as the magic of the spoken word. According to Jahnheinz Jahn, *nommo* has “a life force, which produces all life, which influences ‘things in the shape of the spoken word’” (124). What this definition makes visible is the significance of spirituality to African Rhetorics. Thus, because of the generative and spiritual power of *nommo*, African Rhetoric has the divine power to change one’s circumstances by speaking what one wants into existence. As a concept for healing, we hope practitioners of GBR can invoke the power of *nommo* to practice rhetorics that seek to restore order in the broken Black worlds, Black bodies, and Black spirits. As shown in our stories, at times Black people have spoken words that have brought disorder and disharmony in the community. We have used rhetoric, or *nommo*, to break each other’s spirit, particularly in the ways we use words to describe each other. How might we use the power of the word to empower each other, rebuild our community, and strengthen our relationality as Black people?

Global Black Rhetorics in Action: Contributor Introductions

The themes discussed in the previous section are only a starting point to imagining GBR. Ultimately, the construction of GBR has to be a collective effort, and we see the six contributors and their essays as further defining and illustrating what this expansive, diverse, and globalized approach to Black Rhetorics looks like in action. The culmination of their efforts help to situate GBR as a disciplinary- and community-oriented homeplace. *bell hooks* says the following about homeplace:

This task of making homeplace was not simply a matter of black women providing service; it was about the construction of a safe place where black people could affirm one another and by so doing heal many of the wounds inflicted by racist domination. We could not learn to love or respect ourselves in the culture of white supremacy, on the outside; it was

there on the inside, in that “homeplace,” most often created and kept by black women, that we had the opportunity to grow and develop, to nurture our spirits. *This task of making a homeplace, of making a community of resistance, has been shared by black women globally, especially black women in white supremacist societies.* (37–38; emphasis added)

Homeplaces not only offer spaces of protection, but also make space for experiences and knowledge traditionally marginalized and silenced within mainstream discourses. In this special issue, we situate GBR as an overarching disciplinary community for representing, interrogating, and understanding African and African-Diasporic rhetorics, communication practices, languages, histories, and people. GBR is a homeplace. Furthermore, although the influences and references draw broadly across nation of origin, race, ethnicity, and gender, we make visible and affirm that this entire special issue was composed by eight Black women. Our collective labor created this scholarly space and moment. We recognize all the Black women academic and nonacademic intellectuals who came before us and continue to inspire us as *sistah* scholas. Below, we introduce the six contributors and their essays in this special issue as a welcoming into our GBR homeplace.

Maria Martin’s essay, “Self-Identified as Nonpolitical: Locating Characteristics of African Rhetoric in Nigerian Women’s Words,” offers a strong representation of the GBR theme of studying modern texts, genres, and rhetors from diverse rhetorical traditions. Her essay focuses on the Women of the Federation of Nigerian Women’s Organizations (FNWO), to demonstrate how they developed a rhetoric of nonpolitical nationalism in the 1950s. According to Martin, these Nigerian women’s rhetoric and activist work has been ignored by the current politically elite male-led narrative of African nationalism. Martin’s research seeks to join scholarly conversations in the field of women’s historical rhetorics by achieving two objectives: (1) highlighting the unique rhetoric of Nigerian women in the FNWO, and (2) analyzing these women’s words to uncover the characteristics of nonpolitical thought and situate it within a broader African rhetorical tradition.

Suban Ahmed Nur’s essay “On Being and Becoming Black in a Globally Dispersed Diaspora” explores the rhetorical strengths and limitations of the Black identity as experienced in varying geographic locations across the globe. Drawing from the work of Ruth Simms Hamilton, Nur argues that the African Diaspora was connected via an “active site of cultural and political action and struggle,” as Black bodies remain racialized in a Western context where “being defined as an inferior race and in racial terms is pertinent to the people formation process” (404). Using the migratory/displacement narratives of the Somali diaspora as an example of a people who were, are, and are still becoming, the essay takes a geographic approach to consider the impact of place on the Black experience, and to understand the existing nuances and diversity within it. Nur nuances the broadness, aliveness, and richness of the Black/African diaspora while highlighting the uniformity that can be found in the experience of Black racialization across the globe.

The third essay is by Wonderful Faison, and is titled “Full Disclosure: Black Rhetoric, Writing Assessment, and Afrocentric Rubrics.” Faison focuses on writing assessment and explores the embedded, raced construction of writing assessment and rubrics commonly used in First Year Composition courses. The author posits that rubrics used to assess what Asao Inoue termed as Habits of White Language cannot effectively assess, and may be detrimental to assessing, speakers from different linguistic backgrounds, specifically African Americans. In response, Faison develops and implements an Afrocentric rubric using the principles of African American Rhetoric as a means for both expanding the rhetorical triangle and providing ethical assessment of Black Language in writing.

Shewonda Leger, in her essay “Caribbean Women’s Rhetorics: Voicing and Actions Toward Cultural Representations,” argues for more representation of Caribbean women in rhetorical studies, specifically Haitian women. Leger offers a Caribbean women’s rhetorics (CWR) framework—an interdisciplinary, multicultural, feminist framework and space where Caribbean women’s lived experiences are the primary focus of making, producing, sharing, and recognizing underrepresented rhetorical knowledges. Leger analyzes her interactive digital book *The Cultivation of Haitian Women’s Sense of Selves: Toward a Field of Action*, which she then uses to identify specific features and practices of CWR.

The fifth essay, titled “Blerd Knows Best: Black Family Rhetoric in Service of Antiracist Pedagogy,” is by Shelagh Wilson Patterson. Patterson invites readers to see that Black rhetorical studies is one important location for finding solutions to the late-capitalist antimony of trying to dismantle structures of racism using Eurocentric modes of meaning-making. Through an analysis of publications and performances from three members of the author’s family—Phillip Patterson’s *The Serenity of Knowing*, Michael Patterson’s *Humanist Solutions to American Problems: An Apolitical Approach to Governing*, and Morgan Deane’s “A Light in the Night: Reopening & Operating Nightlife Venues in the Time of Covid-19”—Patterson animates Tracie Morris’s theory of grace as an African proverb performance rooted in Black family rhetoric to make visible rhetorical traditions and strategies used to create literacies for working across difference and surviving and thriving despite racist hegemonic structures of oppression.

This special issue concludes with an essay by Angel Evans titled “From David Walker to John Chilembwe: Global Black Collectivity as Resisting Race and Affirming Culture.” Evans argues that Western notions of race have never been for Black people. Rather, culture has historically functioned as an “insider” discourse, representing our ways of living, knowing, and communing with one another. In her essay, Evans asks, how might Black folks remain mindful in our treatments of race and culture, and ever cognizant of how we wield these constructs to our collective global advantage? She reflects on how three Africana historical figures, David Walker, C.L.R James, and Reverend John Chilembwe, have engaged this question, and then considers how these three figures resisted race by affirming global Black collectivity as a cultural homeplace, thus informing how we may theorize and practice Black rhetorical studies today.

We believe the culmination of these essays offers a provocative start to engaging GBR. This special issue is an opportunity to consider the transnational interconnectedness of Black Rhetorics specifically, and rhetorical studies broadly. For those who are ready to join this multivocal and multilocal movement, we leave you with the following reflective questions that we also hope you will respond to through your scholarly and pedagogical practices:

- (1) What are the cultural, social, ethnic, regional, and national origins of our commonplaces as Black people? How have these commonplaces led to inclusion and exclusion of certain experiences, stories, viewpoints, voices, rhetors, genres, and identities in African American/Black rhetorical studies?
- (2) What are the various -isms (linguicism, racism, colorism) and prejudices, misconceptions, myths, stereotypes, miseducation, and misrepresentations that exist in Black communities, and how do they hinder productive and collaborative rhetorical Black work?
- (3) What new rhetorics and literacies are being produced and circulated within the Afro-Diasporic and global Black world? How are digital technologies and new genres like hip-hop, reggae, film, and social media facilitating circulation of new Black knowledges, rhetorics, and literacies within the Afro-Diasporic/global Black world?
- (4) What are the differences and similarities among African Rhetorics, African American Rhetorics, Afro-Caribbean Rhetorics, Afro-Latinx Rhetorics, and other Black Rhetorics?

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