



Feather

BRICKS

Logo by
Sarah Fitzmaurice

The Official Newsletter of North Park Theological Seminary's School of Restorative Arts

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CHRISTMAS FACT (?) #1:

THE HOLLY KING AND OAK KING ARE PERSONIFICATIONS OF THE WINTER AND SUMMER. THE TWO KINGS ENGAGE IN ENDLESS "BATTLE" REFLECTING THE SEASONAL CYCLES OF THE YEAR. THE OAK KING IS AT THE HEIGHT OF HIS STRENGTH AT MIDSUMMER; THE HOLLY KING REGAINS POWER AT THE AUTUMN EQUINOX.

FACT, FOKLORE, OR FICTION? DISCUSS!





Letter from the Editors

Dear Students, Writers, Thinkers,
I hope you enjoy digesting this issue as much as we enjoyed seasoning it up for you. I look forward to seeing your penmanship (and faces) in 2021. Write on!
Professor Melissa



Happy Holidays, Everyone!

I was honored and very excited when I was asked to be the co-editor for this edition of **Feather Bricks**. I don't know about the rest of you, but I always get down and depressed at this time of year. I mean, we have the gloomy weather, and of course missing our loved ones during the holidays, who could really blame us for getting a little down? This year will probably be especially hard on us because of all the Covid restrictions that make missing our loved ones all the harder to bear.

This is why I asked all the contributors to this edition to produce light, warm, funny, and happy content. It was my intention to make this edition feel like its readers were receiving a care package from home. I hope it worked.

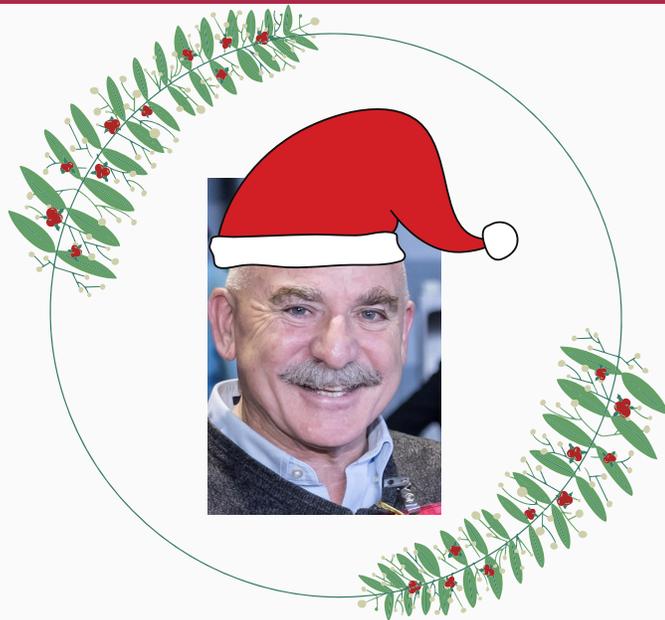
Now of course, no matter how wonderful a job we did on this edition, it still won't be able to staunch all of the heartache we are inevitably going to feel at this time, so I'm going to ask something pretty demanding from all of you reading this. Please, try to be kind to each other in the weeks to come. Force yourself to be jolly if you have to. Tell corny jokes, and bring in some levity to our environment. If actually being kind is too tall of an order to manage presently, then I'll beg you to at least not be cruel, either. Do your best not to add any more negative energy to our already negative environment. We are all hurting these days, and it does no good to take that hurt out on those around us. It is my holiday hope and prayer for Stateville that we could somehow at least pause the cycle of suffering for a bit, and maybe even console one another this holiday season. If I don't get to see you personally, have a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. Your Editor, Luigi P. Adamo



Interview with Professor Ken Saywer

Q: The theme for this newsletter is code meshing, based on English professor Vershawn Ashanti Young's explanation that code meshing is "the act of combining local, vernacular, colloquial, and world dialects of English, in formal assignments and in everyday conversation, in an attempt to embrace the diverse world in which we reside." Young goes on to argue for code meshing and against code switching, as he explains that code switching "advocates language substitution, the linguistic translation of Spanglish or AAE into standard English." What are your thoughts on Young's ideas and our newsletter theme?

A: While I have not been part of Stateville conversations about code switching and code meshing, this issue is central to me, and I recognize the central importance of these matters for Stateville residents. The conversation on language codes is especially significant within a controlled context like Stateville, where such codes are linked to identity, behavior, and safety. Further, the intrafaith and interfaith realities of Stateville render this conversation of crucial importance. How you each individually cope with difference is a matter of life and death. How you collectively describe difference is a new curriculum and a way of life. What you each risk and what you all value in each other offers lessons to all of us.



I favor Young's views and prefer "code meshing," because Young's move refuses to label intercultural skills as liabilities, inadequacies, or pathologies. Instead, he recognizes intercultural skills for what they are: assets, strengths, and skills. Young disdains the shallows of the monolingual and he repudiates the monocultural – he considers both to be less interesting and less accurate readings of our living, changing, composite identities: we all participate in several communities simultaneously. Poet Walt Whitman's declaration, "I contain multitudes," describes us all. For Young, cultural and language difference is a gift, not a threat. Young replaces apologies with affirmations and invitations when he asks that all of us decolonize and diversify our minds in order to learn to be receptive to richer, broader, and deeper conversations rooted in code meshing.

Scholar Spotlight

Young also shifts the focus from the anxiety of the listener to the joyfulness of the speaker. But as with everything, the how is as important as the what. If code meshing is practiced without an ethic that emphasizes grace, generosity, and forgiveness, then code meshing can become just another way of self-indulgence, exclusion, judgment, and harm. If difference is a gift, then we should accept such gifts, but we should also offer such gifts generously! In our communities and conversations, we are called to speak the truth, but instructed to speak the truth in love. How we code mesh is as important as that we code mesh. [Here I have just meshed by incorporating a biblical quote and invited its more general use, but switched with this clumsy explanation.]

Q: How do you see the idea of code meshing, as Young defines it, apply to your work in the classroom in general and specifically during your tenure teaching at Stateville?

A: After this interview, my secret will be out to the world, that Young's "code meshing" is near the center of all that I study and teach, and all that I seek and welcome in my classes. The study of history is an intercultural risk, and history is filled with masters and exemplars of code meshing. To study in a diverse group drawing on several faith traditions,

each as diverse as the people themselves, provides rich opportunities for code meshing, but requires an ethic of generous engagement with difference. Here we have abundant examples of encounter, engagement, transformation and adaptation, conversion and convivencia. The code meshing Young describes has its own history, too. It is the creole who best offers ways into history, blending and meshing and switching according to need and reception. To study history is to seek appropriate ways to cross borders, to creolize, to mix, match and mesh accurately and creatively, to better recognize and cultivate life, and life more abundantly. The history of missions is a field strewn with code meshers. Some code meshers were generous and gentle, others imperious and injurious. The Scriptural traditions encourage code meshing to bring more of life into conformity to the Scriptures, and more of the Scriptures into a joyfully professed life. I observed this in Stateville classes when we presented lost or undervalued histories, and as differences in understandings of, say, the office of Prophet in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam enlivened our classroom and invited further consideration and conversation. The histories of heterogenous places like medieval Spain and Ottoman Istanbul are filled with women and men who meshed codes.

Scholar Spotlight

The realities of pluralism require a recognition that code meshing, when practiced generously and well, pulls us all towards the blessed community. [Here again I have just meshed by incorporating a biblical teaching and invited its more general use, but switched with this ham-handed explanation.]

A second area of good practice in code meshing is in sharing our prayer lives and our worship language. Making our most honest selves visible, voiced and vulnerable to others deserves the most honest language most valuable to us. To pray in the language our mothers taught us, to make use of the phrases and wisdom and warnings offered us by people who sought our good, to honor those who sought to form us into better people, and to strive to displace evil done to us by doing good to others. Such efforts require the most honest language, and such efforts should be freed from the obligation to switch, and instead freed to use the best language we know, without compromise.

A third area of important promise of code meshing is in our ways of disagreeing with one another. We can invite people to hear our deepest convictions and sharpest disagreements through code meshing. My identity as a Christian has been deepened by study,

argument, sharp disagreement, and recognition of some irreconcilable and irreducible truths that continue to indicate separation from women and men I love and respect. That is a humbling truth made clearer to me by generous code meshing people around me and in the classrooms of Stateville.

Q: Do you have a favorite quote to share with readers that is either related to our newsletter theme and/or these times?

A: When the Book of Malachi reads, "... bring all the gifts into the storehouse," I consider that to include all that we are – every part of every one of us: the burnt, the bent, the boiled, the boisterous, those burdened by false conviction and those unburdened by true forgiveness. For each of us the call is to present our whole selves, every part, as a living gift, a living sacrifice, so that all can be consecrated, transformed, and sanctified. I keep returning to the changes you are making through your walk and your ways in these days. My time at Stateville has been a great blessing to me, my family, and the communities you reach through me. Your lives and witness have been part of the continuing transformative work you all do within and beyond the walls you know too well. Until these walls are dismantled, there is much to do.



Grammar Matters: The Art of Code Switching by Antonio "TK" Kendrick

I remember flying home, from Chicago to Memphis, to see my kids. As per our Saturday morning ritual, we went to IHOP for breakfast. We sat down at our table, ordered, and not long after that the waitress brought our food. While waiting for our food, I noticed that my favorite pancake topping, maple syrup, was not on the table. After the waitress placed all of our full plates on the table, I asked the waitress for some maple syrup, and she replied, "What?"

"Maple syrup," I responded. The waitress looked at me like I was speaking a different language. At that point, a lightbulb went off inside my head. I remembered that being born and raised, half my life, in North Memphis, nobody in our house ever used the phonetic pronunciation of those words. We spoke Black English at home, even though my grandmother was a schoolteacher. So, I looked at the confused young woman and said, "Syrp."

She smiled at me and asked, "Why didn't you just say that in the first place?" and off she went. I was no longer in the western suburbs of Chicago. I was in a place where "proper grammar" wasn't used. I forgot to code switch from standardized white English back to Black English.

According to Merriam-Webster's Dictionary, 11th Edition, "grammar," among other things, is "the study of the classes of words, their inflections, and their functions and relation in the sentence, and "speech or

writing evaluated according to its conformity to grammatical rules." With all that being said, grammar is simply knowing how to say and write things correctly.

Being in a prison environment, Black English is the native tongue—due to mass incarceration, and we speak it day in and day out. Guess what? There's absolutely nothing wrong with that because it's our language—African American patois. We speak it when we talk to our family and friends. We hear it being spoken on our favorite television shows and in our music. It is black people's imprint on the English language and, arguably, the most important component of black culture—the most copied and mimicked culture in the world. Our imprint on the English language has even gone Hollywood. For instance, African American super movie producer Tyler Perry is renowned for his title movie character Madea, who has grown into a franchise. Many African Americans—especially from the South—have or had a Madea in their family. . However, most people—even some black people—don't realize that the name Madea is a fusion of the two words "mother" and "dear." It is a centuries-old term of endearment for the matriarchs of black families. Madea is not just the name of a Hollywood character. It is Black English terminology.

Grammar Matters: The Art of Code Switching

by Antonio "TK" Kendrick

As people of color, we are artists with our words. This is why I love speaking our language and listening to it being spoken. It is poetry, non-stop spoken word.

Nevertheless, it is important that we master the sociolinguistic art of code switching, which is knowing when to turn one language off and another one on. We must recognize the social spheres where our culture may not be dominant. For instance, when we go home and get jobs, if someone gets promoted over us, we can't go to our employer and ask them, "How you gonna let somebody jump my gate?" Instead, we should ask, "Could you please explain to me why I didn't get the promotion?" Knowing how to turn it off won't make you any less real. Knowing how to code switch, switching from black informal English to standardized white formal English, only makes you socially fluid. It really is speaking two languages.

Have you ever been talking to a doctor, lawyer, teacher, or someone else who didn't come from where you come from, and it seemed like you just couldn't get your point across? Well, it's probably because they didn't understand what you were saying, or better yet, dey wuddin feelin you. You feel me? If we truly want to get all that life has to offer us, sometimes we've got to speak languages other than our own.

For instance, if you are interested in a Brazilian woman who only speaks Portuguese, you can shoot her your best shot in English, and it will be for nothing. Why? Because you didn't know how to turn the English off and turn on the Portuguese. So, instead of her eyes lighting up, she is looking at you in a state of confusion.

When we can flip the switch and take advantage of the benefits of grammar, our lives will open up in ways you can't imagine. When we are together, we can still do what we do, but when the scene calls for something different, be ready to do something different. As you all know, racism is alive and well in the U.S. Until we can dismantle systemic racism, it's important that we learn how to fluently speak the language of our oppressors who are looking for any reason to further marginalize us.

Let me leave you with this: Do you want to be a man for one occasion or a man for all occasions? If your answer is the latter, embrace the importance of grammar and learn how to code switch, which is, again, knowing when to turn it on and when to turn it off. After all, grammar really does matter.





Holiday Devotional

BY STEVEN FEAGIN



Scripture: Luke 4:10:

“For it is written, He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee.”

This is one of the most inspirational Bible scriptures in the book of Luke. What better time to share this scripture showing God’s love in the form of protection but during this pandemic and this holiday season.

I know it can be difficult being locked down and separated from family and loved ones. This scripture inspires me all the time. I’ve prayed it over my sons and granddaughter on many occasions, especially during the beginning of my incarceration and my separation from them. And I still pray it over them today. But what I find the most fascinating about this scripture is who is quoting it: Satan! Not one of the disciples, not Jesus, not your everyday Joe, but it’s the Devil himself during his attempt to talk Jesus into jumping off the highest point of the temple (4:9). The enemy wanted to stop Jesus from succeeding in his mission to redeem the world, so he tried to manipulate him through temptations.

There will be times during this holiday season when the enemy will try to use the word against us. He will take God’s word and twist it, trying to bring on condemnations or make us believe that God is angry with us or that we are not loved. The enemy will tempt us to quit in all ways just as He tempted Christ to give up and quit.

Be encouraged. Though temptations to quit come against you, you have already been equipped to overcome these temptations. James 4:7 says, “Resist the Devil and He will flee from you.”

Consider this: if the enemy seems to be working overtime to make you feel less than or to just stop your joy this holiday season, that just might be an indication that you’re closer to “Victory” than you think. Whatever sacrifice your dream requires, ask God for grace to endure. Trust God. Stay in prayer. And don’t give up.

--Steven AKA Sunshine!





Warm Wishes



My wish for all of you, today and for 2021, is for Hope and Courage. Remain Hopeful! Realistically define for yourself what Hopeful means for you. After you define it believe in it and don't let go of it. Be Courageous! Face each day's ups and downs with good choices and attention to your responsibilities. Find the Positives in each day. Have the Courage to look deep for at least one Positive every day. It's been a long year but we can continue to navigate wisely through the unpredictable days ahead. One day at a time we will work our way through to a New Normal.

E.F.A. Costabile

Beloved students,

Please accept our warmest wishes this Christmas and our hearty congratulations on your diligent work throughout this very challenging semester. You have met the challenges with courage and strength and we are inspired and encouraged by your work. Please know that as we pray for you during this time we will follow the example of the Apostle Paul – praying for those he loved and taught in Philippi, “I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy (5) because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now (6), being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” May God bless you and keep you this holiday season.

And we look forward to being together again.

With gratitude and respect,

Mary K. Surridge
President, North Park University

Seasons greetings to all!

I am sure you agree that 2020 has been a very rough year. COVID 19 has taken us all by storm, but 2021 promises to be better. These are hard times. Take inspiration from the great Winston Churchill, who said, “When you are going through hell, keep going.” You are following his lead when you continue to study and learn in your cell. Keep on. It will be well worth it to you. Stay safe and always remain hopeful.

Mrs. McGrath

Dear Brothers, Please receive my best wishes and continued prayers for your safety, peace, and blessings. Thank you for the gifts that you were to me. I am hopeful that I can be with you again.

Professor Mary Adams Trujillo

Holiday Greetings from Johari Jabir.

Hoping 2021 will bring you much light and joy.

The Steans Center at DePaul University is so honored to work with many of you throughout the year. We are thinking of you and wishing everyone the very best for 2021.

Warm Wishes

Sending season's greetings of peace and love to all, on behalf of DePaul and the Inside-Out instructors and students! Though DePaul has not been as present at Stateville in recent months, we have not forgotten you. We are working diligently to adjust our classes and are looking forward to teaching there again as soon as possible. Very sincerely, "Doc Rivers"

"A short holiday greeting" is a challenge for me after reading the marvels of Feather Bricks, which caused me to take elaborate notes on all of these students' discoveries. So I'll keep them for future use when we volunteers are re-admitted to Stateville, and just settle for this:

To all my friends and partners in learning, I can only express my boundless gratitude for the witness to truth and hope that you are fulfilling. --Professor Andrew McKenna

I want to send a heartfelt Happy Holidays and New Year to each and every one of you. I am so ready to say farewell to 2020! It's been a devastating year for so many of you and for us out here too.

I am grateful to you all for keeping up your spirits during this time and sustaining us all with hope and wisdom. I am looking forward to seeing you in the new year.

With sisterly love, Sarah Ross



Warmest greetings and wishes for the holiday season to all who gather in virtual community through the words and images of this edition of *Feather Bricks*. May the peace, hope, and comfort of the season be yours.

In friendship, Nancy Arnesen

Professor of English, North Park University

My prayer for all of us this Christmas is that the good news of Emmanuel- the good news that God is with us- will be the truest thing in our lives. I pray that that truth reaches all of us exactly where we are and fills us with a peace that passes understanding. Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays! Professor Michelle Dodson

I am not religious, but the holidays always make me think of possibility. Many things might feel impossible while in prison, but students in all the programs (as well as those at Stateville who will be students--and I hope that is everyone) are a good reminder of how much is possible: insight, achievement, success, love, collaboration, change, and so much more.

Thinking of you more than ever this month, Professor Tim Barnett

My thoughts are with you all during this holiday season; I'm sending positive energy and best wishes for happy holidays. -Luke Fidler (PNAP)

Praying that this Christmas season brings you joy and comfort. And may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way!

Best, Writing Advisor Abby

I have been honored to teach at Stateville through PNAP three times since fall 2017.

I look forward to seeing you in the Education Building as soon as it is safe for us to hold class again. I wish you and your loved ones as good a holiday as possible during this challenging moment.

In Solidarity,

Dr. Clinton Nichols

Warm Wishes

Dear Friends,

We are in the midst of the Advent journey in this very strange and difficult season. The longing for Christ and for a new birth seems profound and even haunting. Sandi and I both think of you often and Sandi is missing tremendously her time on campus with you. I recently came across this favorite poem and it seems to speak well, especially for this time and season.

The Risk of Birth by Madeleine L'Engle
This is no time for a child to be born.
With the earth betrayed by war and hate
And a nova lighting the sky to warn
That time runs out and the sun burns late.
That was no time for a child to be born.
In a land in the crushing grip of Rome:
Honour and trust were trampled by Scorn –
Yet here did the Saviour make his home.
When is the time for love to be born?
The inn is full on the planet earth,
And by greed and pride the sky is torn –
Yet Love still takes the risk of birth.

Merry Christmas! May you experience God's peace and hope surround you in this season. -Professor Elizabeth Pierre

This year—and especially at Christmas—I invoke the simple words of Jesus: “Peace be with you.” May you and your loved ones find succor in this benediction. May your hearts be at peace this holiday season and in the year to follow!
 --Professor Ovi Brici



Sandi and I extend our wish for new light and new birth for all of us in this season. Best, Dave and Sandi Kersten

Fellow artists, intellectuals, and scholars, it has been a very tuff year. Despite this and everything you face on a daily basis you all continue to express a passion to create and learn that is unrivaled, is contagious, and has given me hope. I cannot thank you enough for this and everything you have taught me over the years. With that in mind, I hope that you find a bit of well-deserved joy over the holidays. Know that the P+NAP community and I will be holding you all in our hearts. Peace, Aaron Hughes

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:13

Dear Brothers In Christ, Merry Christmas to you all. May you know God's deep and abiding love for each of you. Please know, too, that the members and friends of North Park Covenant Church hold you in thought and prayer daily during these challenging months and always.
 Peace, Pastor Libby, North Park Covenant Church

Many of us are entering into this Holiday season with loved ones who we cannot gather with because they have passed away, because of lockdowns and gathering restrictions, and because of the deep injustice of systems and structures. It is right there in our grief, lament, anger, and frustration of this reality that God meets us. May you feel the presence of the God who is with us, Emmanuel, and the God who sees us, El Roi, be with you right where you are at in this time. Peace be unto you.
 -Lydia Vander Stelt

"May mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance" (Jude 1:2)--today and always.

Looking forward to better days ahead when we can be together again. Shalom, Janice Kelly

Friends, We made it through another semester! Thinking of you all this holiday season and sending along my greetings as well as a few (super cheesy) Christmas jokes:

What did Adam say the day before Christmas?

What did the stamp say to the Christmas card?

What is the best Christmas present in the world?



"It's Christmas, Eve!"

Stick with me and we'll go places!

A broken drum, you just can't beat it!

Happy Holidays! Warmly, Katie Williams

Warm Wishes

I am so grateful to have this opportunity to connect with you again. I have missed my classroom time with you so very much. Though I haven't been able to communicate with you, know that I pray for all of you daily, and have prayed since last March when we were last together. I look forward to the day that I can come back to Stateville and be with you. In the meantime, please stay well and hopeful. May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. We live in this marvelous hope through the birth of our Savior. Blessings to all of you in this holiday season.

Sally Engebretson



I expect this will be a Christmas like no other. While you are incarcerated, we on the outside face a deadly virus and political unrest. In letters from prison, Bonhoeffer reflects on a similar situation. He will spend the holiday in prison and his family surrounded by war. Yet he declares, "it may perhaps bring home to some people what Christmas really is." [1] At Christmas, the Word became Flesh in an insignificant place, among poor and oppressed people, not as a great king or a valiant warrior, but as a baby: small, vulnerable, and completely dependent on those who loved him. I don't know about you, but that's how I feel a lot lately. Therefore, I take comfort knowing that God has felt this too and that into such a place God brought hope and life to the world. Come, Lord Jesus! Professor Will Andrews

[1] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (SCM Press, London: 1971) 166.

Sending warm holiday greetings to my former students and everyone else at Stateville. PNAP Teacher Lucy Cane

Dear friends, I am so blessed to work with a community where I can continue to grow every day and I am reminded of it even more as the holidays are here. Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays to all, Sarah Fitzmaurice, Writing Advisor

Merry Christmas and Advent Greetings to my fellow SRA students. I am grieved at the distance we have had since March, though you are never far from my mind. There is kinship in our expectant waiting. Maranatha, may the wait be over soon. Sara Woody

Thinking of you this holiday season and wishing you health, safety, and the comfort of friends and family as we approach the New Year.

--PNAP Professor Simone Waller

Wishing you all the peace, hope, joy, and love of Jesus this holiday season and New Year. I am grateful for the gift of God's beloved community that knows no boundaries. I am praying for and with you all. Peace, Pastor Alicia Reese

As I sit reflecting on Advent, and the waiting of Hope, of Peace, of Joy and of Love, I pray that each of you would experience their tangible reality over the coming days. I am sending you all of the Christmas cheer in the world as we close out this most challenging of years.

You know you will be in my thoughts and prayers this Christmas season, especially on Christmas morning (which happens to fall on a Friday) when I shall miss delivering your envelopes – but don't worry, January and a new semester are just around the corner!! As is the hope of what 2021 will bring! With much gratitude for this community and all that it represents, Vickie



RHYMES & REASONS

5 Holiday Haikus by Darby Agovino

1. *Christmas in my Apartment*

A small Christmas tree
A single homemade snowflake
Our heat isn't working



2. *Santa Claus*

Big white bearded man
He looked the child in the eyes
A smile, a giggle

3. *Christmas Kiss*

My face blushed with red
The smell of pine in the air
I stare into fire



4. *My Christmas Tree*

A beautiful tree
Sits upstairs- a mother's dream
Sister tree below

5. *Brrr*

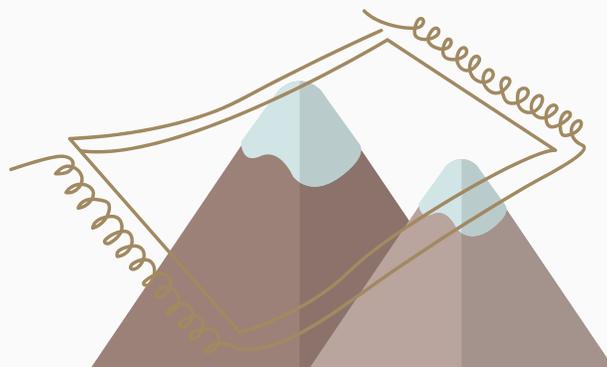
Cold-air bites my cheek
Snickers with frigid mischief
I pine for summer

Mountains with Rugs on Top of Them!

By Timothy Malone

When the first ships arrived here, Old Chris took their hospitality and turned on them. Bringing all types of disease, raping their queens, and slaughtering their kids, stealing their land and they called the Indians the savages!! "Stop playing" (sweep) kidnap, yeah kidnap.

They stole black men from their Motherland, stealing our culture, robbing us of ours. Identify (sweep) slavery, rape and hanging of Black people (sweep) Hundreds of years of cruelty, then followed by racism, segregation, and plain hatred (sweep) Japanese Americans put in camps (pretty much prison) for just being Japanese, Blacks, women, and all minorities not having any rights! (sweep) The killing of Black civil rights leaders, underfunded schools, violating our constitutional rights and Jim Crow laws (sweep) police brutality, pushing cocaine in our community to fund wars and thousands of other savage acts on the underprivileged. Them not mountains with rugs on top of them. That's Amerika, they then sweep so much dirt under them rugs, them rugs then turn into mountains with rugs on top of them!



WRITING ADVISOR CORNER

FROM THE UNIVERSITY DOORS TO THE AMERICAN STREETS; WHAT THE PEOPLE TRULY SPEAK

By: Ameerah "AB" Brown

Chinatown, Little Italy, and Greek Town are all diverse ethnic communities within the city of Chicago. Just as they have their own shops, they have their own dialect and understanding of English that does not fit the Standard English expected of them in academia and the professional workplace. However, the spoken and written word have major implications beyond their connotation—within their historic roots. The forced process of code switching destroys and oppresses other practical forms of English in order to assimilate others in the perceived notion of success achieved with Standard English use. Therefore, writing centers are a place to combat the assimilation of writing in order to maintain the unique diverse articulation of a person's writing.

"The argument [the use or status of Black English] has nothing to do with language itself but with the role of language. Language, incontestably, reveals the speaker. Language, also, far more dubiously, is meant to define the other--and, in this case, the other is refusing to be defined by a language that has never been able to recognize him" (1). Language is not just a structured form of communication but is a systematic oppressive form of communication rooted in power. Who decides the national language of a country— the elite? Language plays a role in communicating ideas that can be related to biases and discrimination. According to James Baldwin (1), "A language comes into existence by means of brutal necessity, and the rules of the language are dictated by what the language must convey." The dialects derived from English and other languages like Spanish (Spanglish) have come from the direct need to be able to communicate with others. For some people who have grown up in the culture of Spanish and English blended, there is a sense of identity in that language.

So, to go to school or work and be told that their writing and or verbal English is wrong, and then correct it with the standard form of English (known by White people) is stripping a person of their cultural identity that doesn't align with Standard English.

Lauryn Hill (2) once sung "It seems we lose the game before we even start to play. Who made these rules? We're so confused, easily led astray. Let me tell ya that." Ms. Hill recognized the failure in the linguistic system; the oppression of code-switching is rooted in stripping people of their cultural roots to follow the leader. I think about this idea often. When I was younger, the other Black kids said I acted White because I spoke too "properly," but I was too Black for the White kids because of my skin. My Grandmother had taught me earlier on how to code switch so well that for a while I didn't know how to switch back. The short loss of my Black English left me alienated from my cultural group, for I was not taught the pride and the importance of my English; "Black English is the creation of the black diaspora" (1). There is importance and significance in other forms of English.

The coerced education and enforcement of Standard English in academia and the workplaces strips people of their pride. How do writing centers come into this deep rooted systematical oppressive discussion? Writing centers are for advisors to be collaborative with writers and to be critically thoughtful in writing (3). Advisors are meant more so for the provided context of enhancing a writer's ideas; possibly providing techniques, discussing context, and critical thinking beyond the text. If advisors take on a role of editor and critique a writer for not following Standard English, they are perpetuating the oppression and assimilation of language. While advising, I've learned to not take on another person's writing as my own. I've learned to try to word my advice not as something I would do but as a technical suggestion in certain writing styles.

WRITING ADVISOR CORNER

As an advisor, you are an outside source giving thoughts and suggestions on the context. I think this is important to keep in mind. As a writer myself, I know each piece I write I come in with my own voice and style to writing. So, as an advisor it is not our job to critique another's written voice. In the words of Jamila Lyiscott (4), "You may think that it is ignorant to speak broken English. But I'm here to tell you that even 'articulate' Americans sound foolish to the British."

"These ain't no old hundreds, these new. And I ain't steppin' in no club without my crew" (5). Last year, a friend introduced me to these lyrics from West side Chicago based rappers, and immediately I understood what they were talking about. Their song, "Heavy Steppers," reached millions as their video received 11 million views (as of when I'm writing this). The artists articulate an idea in their chorus; the connection of a poor lifestyle carrying into how a person presents themselves, and how they are living a fast lifestyle (making the money back) (5). Yet, why is it that non-standard English is accepted more widely in the arts such as music? Is writing not a form of art? Now, the lyrics presented could be considered an "extreme" view of Black English being used, although my point remains the same. When is non-standard English acceptable, and why not in writing?

Now, think about this as a student coming into the writing center for help. The student presents you with an idea, but say you don't understand the English. Instead of forcing the individual to code switch or telling them that their voice is improper, a great idea is to ask for the meaning. We all write in some relation to ourselves; in your writings you can find your own history and individualistic roots from your culture and gender. Although, as advisors when we don't try to understand or collaborate with the writer then we are forcing oppression onto the writer. As Aldous Huxley is known widely for saying, "Words can be like X-rays if you use them properly--they'll go through anything. You read and you're pierced." The different dialects of English are no exception. They are words none the less that other people understand and have the potential to pierce

through. We could be stripping from the point of view of that individual that may come from their experiences as a minority—whether it be sexual orientation, race, gender, or possibly an intersection of multiple. When we correct their English in relation to Standard English, we are stating that their voice, rooted in their culture, is not acceptable in the society of writing. However, it could be said that society is discriminatory of different writing.

J.D. Salinger, the author of *The Catcher in the Rye*, is known to have said, "What really knocks me out is a book that, when you're all done reading it, you wish the author that wrote it was a terrific friend of yours and you could call him up on the phone whenever you felt like it. That doesn't happen much, though." Writing connects one person to another; the feelings and attachment to writing grow deeper when the reader can relate to the words of the author. The implantation of Standard English rules lowers the audience of readers that can connect to writing. This is limiting the number of voices that can be heard around the world, as well. So many other people with different English dialects have stories to share but are discarded because their voice doesn't match the perceived English standard. Writing centers that follow standard English can be a part of this problem. A lack of diverse writing causes many readers that speak different dialects of English to miss out on stories that they can relate to, causing disinterest and detachment from writing. As well as a lack of diversity in the content of the stories that may match the cultural experiences of different American cultures in the "melting pot". There is no importance in writing if your words make no sense to readers--millions of people of color who don't speak, write, or have the same cultural experiences as Standard English speakers are missing out on the power of words from people in their own dialects.

One might argue that having a standard helps have a universal understanding across ethnic groups. Stateville Writing Advisor Thomas Mills (6) wrote, "Yes, it [Standard English] may remove some of our cultural influences for the sake of understanding, but even in Standard English there are ways around it once you know the rule of the road."



WRITING ADVISOR CORNER

I once believed I shouldn't have to code switch, but I realized I wanted to be understood when I speak." This is a feeling I suspect many people feel and have felt, including myself. People code switch so that they can be understood. Although Mills (6) goes on to conclude that "how about we look at code switching no different than being able to speak multiple languages." If this is true, then shouldn't White people who follow Standard English try to learn some basic aspects of the different dialects of English as if they are preparing to travel to a foreign country? Just as some students come to the writing center for help on understanding the grammatical rules of Standard English, writing centers and advisors should be willing to learn rules and the understanding behind the different English dialects.

Writing centers that are understanding of different voices beyond Standard English help combat the discriminatory effects of standard English writing. When there is an understanding of the history of linguistic power which affects the writing process this helps all involved recognize different cultural writings that have been excluded or only accepted in one form of media. The acceptance of collaborating with voices that don't match Standard English allows for writing to reach and connect with people of different cultures that Standard English doesn't reach. And in order to reach the people of different English dialects, we must provide them with writing that plants a seed of curiosity and discovery that fits their soil.



"Just as some students come to the writing center for help on understanding the grammatical rules of Standard English, writing centers and advisors should be willing to learn rules and the understanding behind the different English dialects."

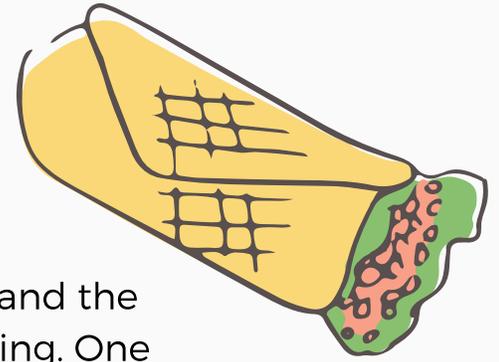
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THE AMPLIFIER



With Alex Negron



In *The Craft of Revision*, Donald Murray says, “One of the biggest differences between the successful writer and the unsuccessful one is that the successful writer says one thing. One idea dominates.” As I went through the entries of the outside student submissions, it was hard to sift through and pick my top 3 because each one was worthy of being picked. This year I decided to choose the ones whose ideas dominated the most. I would like to thank everyone who participated in this writing contest. Continue to write. That is the only way our community will continue to grow. -Alex

Thank you to all who submitted to our Writing Contest! We had 10 entries from outside students and 10 entries from inside students. Please reach out to *Feather Bricks* by sending a note to Professor Melissa if you would like to receive feedback on your contest submission. We truly enjoyed reading everything that came in, and we intend to publish more of the contest entries in future editions of our newsletter.

Congratulations to Benny Rios, the Stateville campus winner. His poem "My Voice" was ranked in 3 out of 3 Chicago Writing Advisors' "Top 3" selections. Benny mentions, "As I read Prophetic Lament by Professor Rah, I was inspired to write a poem using the acrostic format."

Congratulations to Ameerah "AB" Brown, the Chicago campus winner. Her work "Purple Hue" was ranked in 6 out of 7 Stateville Writing Advisors' "Top 3" selections. Please find the winning entries on the following pages. Read on!

THE AMPLIFIER

My greatest desire is to be heard;
 Ya' feel me? Me oyes? ; do you hear me?
 My body is imprisoned, but my mind and my spirit are free;
 What about my word, mi voz, my voice?
 Maybe my voice isn't being projected,
 or maybe the oppressor's voice suppressor is effective.

Yelling, shouting, or roaring might work;
 Then again, I might be seen as a bug, loco, crazy.
 Yaweh, hear my cries and amplify my voice;
 then I could build, connectar, connect with my community.
 Yes! Amen! Imprisonment does not mean silence;
 the oppressor's voice suppressor can be breached!

Violence is what it is to suppress the voices of the oppressed;
 what a shame to keep what's real, la verdad, the truth in the dark.
 Vocally, I will continue to proclaim my truths, our truths;
 they will be flaunted, el la luz, in the light.
 Victory then will come as silence is shattered;
 I feel the victory on my fingertips; am I being heard?

Oftentimes I find myself discouraged;
 all this yapping, hablando, talking just fades into thin air.
 Opportunities, however, arise...pen and paper—another option:
 writing puts my voice in black and white en papel, on paper.
 Oh yes! I found a weapon that is mightier than the sword;
 nothing will silence me...can you hear me now?

Incarceration is the tool that was used to keep me silent;
 yet, it's where I found my voice, mi palabra, my word.
 Ironic, isn't it? How funny it is to think voices can be silenced;
 after all, God did say even the rocks, sangre, blood will cry out!
 It is my pledge to sound my voice until it's heard;
 I will proclaim the good news and the truth to defeat injustice.

Constructing the Beloved Community equals an amplified voice for truth;
 it equals stomping out evil, injusticia, injustice.
 Concrete and steel will not keep me silenced;
 oppressor, I say no, no, no! You will hear my voice!
 Court judges, no longer will you have the final word
 because the Judge of judges speaks justice to your injustice.

Eventually, the voices of the oppressed will reign supreme;
 As they do, they will declare justice, bendiciones, blessings.
 Everyday I will liberate my voice by any means necessary;
 whether it be by writing, canción, song, I will be heard!
 Eloquence and rhetoric worked well for St. Augustine;
 will it work for me? I'll just stick with speaking from the heart, mi corazón.



THE AMPLIFIER

A Letter to Purple Hue

BY AMEERAH "AB" BROWN

Dear Purple Hue,

I know a thing or two, about the words that fall on death's ear. The choke hold that squeezes your vocal cords until a small peep can come out. When the accent or dialect of your voice is woven out of the fabric of our generations. In those times, I've asked myself: What's the point of a voice, when it's drowned out? I'll tell you.

When I was younger, my Grandmother corrected my grammar like she was nailing my behind with the rod of her mother's Master. Every little error was captured with fleeting euphoria. The meaning, of my words, was lost in between the grammatical "my friends and I" and the "ain't vs. is not". And by the bloody end, I was relieved. Eventually, silence hollowed out the car rides and dinners and family gatherings and any other events. Because what's the point of a voice, when it's gagged?

Despite this, my Grandmother might have saved my life. Little did I know, most of the doorframes I would cross reflect the same unseasoned dialogue that my Grandmother had shoved down my throat. Thrilling uncharted sectors, of my mind, were dulled; painted over with a primer by the Puppeteer.

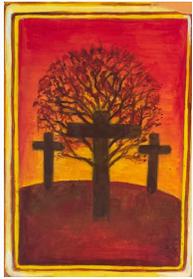
Others' kingdoms that ravished in seas of color, if they couldn't be assimilated, they were wrecked into pieces. Their dust passing through the chill of my spine.

My Grandmother wasn't wrong; she chose life over death, for me. So, what's the point of a voice, when it's casted out? If you're lucky you'll be able to exit the Big House and glide through the mush of the forest. Where colors race past each other, and flavors sprout rich wings. Stories flourishing from one branch to another. Emotions dancing from one star to the next. At night, in the safety of the moon, I walk out of Nazi Germany and straight into maple leaf Canada. Yet in the morning, I'm seized and dragged back into the hells of Germany, with the other puppets, waiting for a taste of the wind again. So, what's the point of a voice, when it's enslaved?

Till this day, 15 years later, some doorframes that I walk into I will hide my hot sauce, in my bag. And sometimes, I find myself silently gazing off in conversations. Although, I know my voice is the burning brightness in the forest, and the long-awaited storm to ease the drought. Yet, I find myself stuck in a place of two worlds. A world of puppets and, at the edge, a world of fugitives. And in these times, I know your voice is the seed of life, Purple Hue. Our Noah's ark, and at the edge we— I am waiting for you. So, don't be afraid to pollinate your voice.

With Love,
Blue Hue

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RACISM IN HIGHER EDUCATION:
 COMBATting THE STATUS QUO
 FROM THE WRITING CENTER
 BY: BELINDA BAHN

Throughout this semester, there has been an emphasis on anti-racism within North Park University's Writing Center. Each week, a different focus is presented on the syllabus regarding anti-racism and how it can play out in the writing center. Students are encouraged to explore and reflect on this topic as we dive into what it means to be a writing advisor and the role we take on as anti-racists. However, there are structures within higher education that prevent us from fully embracing this idea. How do we integrate anti-racism practices as a writing advisor? For who does the term "diversity" benefit? Throughout this essay, I will discuss why our approach to emphasize anti-racism juxtaposes the act of being anti-racist.

Historically, higher education is one of many institutions that embraced Jim Crow with segregated universities and colleges. Although North Park is located in one of the most diverse neighborhoods of Albany Park, our history is rooted in "white" values. Because our university's writing center and office of diversity are separate entities with the occasional collaboration, we are unable to fully embrace anti-racism. This is a common

layout for most universities because that is how it has always been. When you look at the Office of Diversity, it is a space for students of color, or not, run by faculty of color. Before a person enters the Office of Diversity, they understand that it is a safe space on campus, so they are able to shift into a more mindful mindset. The Writing Center, on the other hand, is mostly occupied by white women. As a center for writing, it's almost an exchange, or a service. Students don't come into The Writing Center with the idea that it is a safe-space. Therefore, their mindset doesn't shift to being more mindful of others' differences. Although the demographics are different for each entity, we have to ask ourselves: who feels welcomed? A paradigm shift is needed in order to address the importance of anti-racism within an entire institution, not just a vector of it.

North Park is a city-centered, Christian university. Our values are challenged when we think about which parts of the city we are fixated on...is it downtown with all its glam and lights? Or is it the "bad and scary" parts of the city where most people of color reside? The Catalyst606__ program is a great marketing point for our university, yet we do not get adequate funding and recognition for the important conversations that we have tried to bring onto campus. We struggled to get

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students to come listen to activist speakers and have conversations about race, while the boat dance reaches maximum capacity each year. This shows how our university, along with so many others, lack representation. It is the silence of our own voices that defeat the opportunity for real change. Ben Hecht in *Moving Beyond Diversity Toward Racial Equity* says, "Racism's legacy is complex, brutally ugly, deeply personal, and yet to be truly reckoned with, especially in the workplace." We need to address our racist history in order to break down the built-up tension and to create space for dialogue about unkept history. Addressing the institution's racist narrative is an important step towards race reconciliation.

Another point of marketing that several institutions use, especially higher education, is the term "diversity." Using someone else's culture, race, or ethnicity to your advantage is exploitative. The "language of diversity and efforts to implement diversity are bound to fail in the absence of an institutional commitment to incorporating strategies for diversity into their research, teaching, and service missions" (Brayboy). This means that there has to be active work from the entire institution to implement



diversity in all aspects--not just from The Office of Diversity. Diversity is not and cannot be an item on a checklist for a university; we cannot just display "diversity" on the cover of our textbooks, but lack it inside...it is considered misrepresentation.

When the writing center emphasizes a need for more black male writing advisors on our Chicago campus, a lack of diversity is presented. "Although I applaud the desire of institutions to address the under representation of diverse students as well as faculty and staff at their institutions, I remain hesitant about the idea of diversity...what this implementation means" (Brayboy). It isn't just about "looking good," but also truly being representative. If there are no black male writing advisors on our Chicago campus, we should ask ourselves why? Do they not feel welcomed? How can the writing center, as an entity of a white institution, advocate for writing advisors of color where they will want to become a writing advisor out of their own interest? No advertisement or convincing needed. Looking specifically for black male writing advisors is vulture-esque and puts potential candidates on the spotlight. Because "collaboration can also be used to reproduce the status quo," (Lunsford 96) diversity should not be a trend, or just a module or focus of the year- it should be a constant practice.

Furthermore, we are very fortunate to

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have other departments such as the Office of Diversity and Queers and Allies to collaborate with, but it may be an issue if we rely on faculty, staff, and students of color to educate us on race and identity. We should not make it their responsibility to benefit us on something that we can educate ourselves on. Especially during this peak of injustice and unrest for our brothers and sisters of color, we have to be considerate and mindful of the toll it takes on them and the weight that they have to bear for the comfort of the rest of us.

Andrea Lunsford, in "Collaboration, Control, and the Idea of a Writing Center," discusses the writing center as a "storehouse" the theory of knowledge, and explores how collaboration can actually be a threat to the writing center in this context. She says, "the earlier view of knowledge just described—knowledge as exterior to us and as directly accessible. The Center as Storehouse operates as [an] information station or storehouse, prescribing and handing out skills and strategies to individual learners. They often use "modules" or other kinds of individualized learning materials. They tend to view knowledge as individually derived and held, and they are not particularly amenable to collaboration, sometimes actively hostile to it" (Lunsford 93).

As writing advisors, we are privileged with an added role to our identity. However, we must not fail to recognize that identity is unique to each person. This means that we

should not make one person of color the speaker for their entire community. Instead, we can use our privilege to utilize the many resources available to us to educate ourselves to meet students of color halfway. The Writing Center, The Office of Diversity, and Queers & Allies are all acknowledged entities of the university that are essentially going against the university itself in terms of traditional higher education and its constraints.

When trying to educate students on anti-racism, one should address racism as a whole- not just within the context of The Writing Center. Vershawn Ashanti Young highlights, "Everybody mix the dialect they learn at home with whatever other dialect or language they learn afterwards. That's how we understand accents" (111). This can be applied to our process of understanding of anti-racism because it emphasizes the importance of mixing personal experiences, opinions, values, and beliefs in order to educate ourselves on the topic of race- in order to tackle anti-racism. All that you learn about anti-racism should not be coming solely from The Writing Center- technically coming from The Office of Diversity. When describing a "Garret Center" in terms of collaboration, Lunsford mentions the "American brand of individualism." She says, "They see knowledge as interior, as inside the student, and the writing center's job as helping students get in touch with this



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knowledge, as a way to find their unique voices, their individual and unique powers” (Lunsford 95). This point should be highlighted because students should understand that they need to navigate anti-racism outside of The Writing Center as well, in order to be an advocate for The Writing Center and our university. Going against the status quo of higher education means learning, gaining experience and different perspectives outside of the institution. Young also says, “we should, for instance, teach how language functions within and from various cultural perspectives” (112). In other words, we should teach how racism and anti-racism function in the outside world and within the university in order to view it as a multi-faceted idea, to form multiple perspectives, and have a more well-rounded understanding.

The roles of writing advisors are important in that they make up half of the writing center...the other half would be the students coming into the writing center! We can train and teach our writing advisors about anti-racism as much as we want, but at the end of the day, it’s a two-way street. Even if writing advisors may feel more knowledgeable about how to approach and navigate different situations and scenarios, students coming into the writing center may be the ones to exert the racism and discrimination unto writing advisors.

Several students have discussed in class how they have felt unqualified for the

writing advisor position because of their gender, their accent, because they’re an international student, immigrant, ESL student, or a student with disabilities. Our inability to control the perspectives of students coming into the writing center disables us from fully embracing anti-racism, but we sure can manage it. To prevent microaggressions from students coming into the writing center, the writing center, in a way, should be known as a place for diversity and acceptance- just as the office of diversity is.

A writing center that emphasizes anti-racism should then also be a center of diversity that helps with writing. This matters just as much as how “colored people” is an incorrect and offensive term and “people of color” is correct and respectful. The order of how we present ourselves matter because it encapsulates recognition and importance. “People of color” addresses that they are people first and foremost, rather than seeing their color first. With this mindset of inclusivity and recognition, a writing center can be a “Center for Diversity of Writing.” Lunsford says, “Collaborative environments and tasks must demand collaboration. Students, tutors, teachers must really need one another to carry out common goals” (95). This means that every person in The Writing Center must be held accountable. We all depend on one another to create a safe and fruitful experience for every

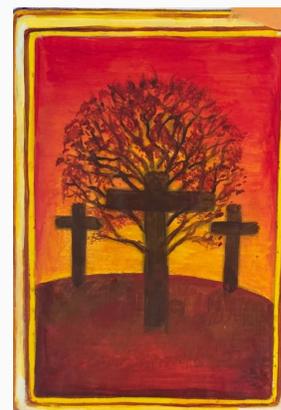


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student. Because no real person speaks academic English, the writing center should be a safe-space for students, faculty, and staff to navigate writing, through our differences. Academic English prevents students from not only embracing their own voice, but also truly embracing each other's voices. When intentionally navigating through anti-racism, we must be aware of our own actions, as to not "reinforce the fallacy that only people of color have race" because it "obscures the broad, everyday dynamics of white racial power within organizations" (Ray). The Writing Center would then not only be a center of service and relations, but also a safe-space for learning. "See, people be mo pluralingual than we wanna recognize. What we need to do is enlarge our perspective about what good writin is and how good writin can look at work, at home, and at school" (Young 112). The Writing Center, as a separate entity from the university, has the potential to not only make better writing, but inclusive writing from underrepresented writers. It all begins with self-reflection, acknowledging and addressing the faults and history of higher education.

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WORD IN THE 'VILLE

What's up, everybody?

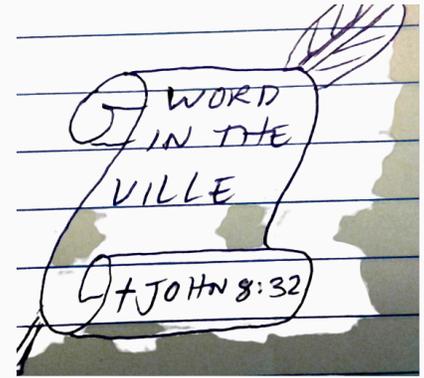


Mike Simmons here. Luigi asked me to share something happy, silly. OK. To all of you Bible scholars and theologians. You know how the Bible mentions that King David encouraged himself? Well, I've found that sometimes, well, lots of times in this place, we simply have to dig deep and encourage ourselves.

As I'm not much of a morning person (but an early riser), one of the things I do to get myself going is look in the mirror, smile, and make a silly/stupid face or two. Even when I don't feel like it, I force myself to do this, and the forced smile becomes natural. Always works.

Another thing that I do when my cellie is asleep and no one's looking...And don't laugh, okay? I'll bust out a few Michael Jackson moves just to make sure I still got it—which I still do. At least, I like to think so.

*The Writing Center would like to give an "Extra Mile Award" to Thomas Mills for exceptional communication with his writing partner such as providing feedback on Intercultural Communications and Theology classes and discussing shared texts and topics like as Kendrick Lamar, Bible commentaries, code switching, and Liberation Theology.



Condolences to those who have recently lost loved ones, especially DeCedrick Walker. You are in our thoughts and prayers as we extend our sympathies.



Christmas Fact (?) #2:

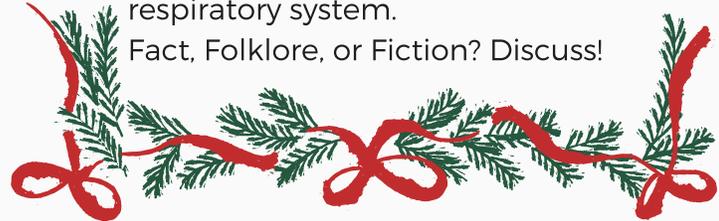
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil has the largest floating Christmas tree in the world; it is 278 feet tall.

Fact, Folklore, or Fiction? Discuss!

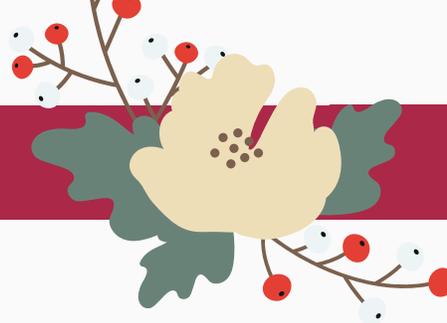
Christmas Fact (?) #3:

Rudolph's red nose is probably the result of a parasitic infection of his respiratory system.

Fact, Folklore, or Fiction? Discuss!



Mike P.'s Grammar Corner



WITH AN ASSIST FROM SANTA'S HELPER

According to Professor Pavlik, “when we talk about grammar rules, there are many trains of thought individuals follow in order to understand what choices make for correct sentences.” Professor Pavlik identifies two trains of thought: that of a descriptivist and a prescriptivist. A descriptivist sees rules as flexible depending on the reasons behind choices to follow them. A descriptivist’s hope is that writers make certain grammar and punctuation choices to best describe the effect they want to make on the reader. A prescriptivist believes that you should follow the rules.

Subject/Verb Agreement “Stocking Stuffer”

Tips:

Compound subjects joined by “and” are generally plural and require a plural verb, while compound subjects acting as a singular unit require singular verbs.

Example: Singing a carol like “Silent Night” **and** watching a movie like “A Madea Christmas” are two ways to get into the holiday spirit.

Two or more singular subjects joined by “or” or “nor” require a singular verb.

Example: My grandmother always said one candy cane **or** one cookie **was** available per child to choose on Christmas Eve but to leave the rest of the sweets for Santa.

If singular subjects are joined by “or” or “nor” to plural subjects, the subject closest to the verb determines agreement.

Example: Uncle Scrooge **or** the three ghosts of Christmas (past, present, and future) **are** my favorite characters in the story “A Christmas Carol.”

BUT

The three ghosts of Christmas (past, present, and future) **or** Uncle Scrooge **is** my favorite character in the story “A Christmas Carol.”

Often times, we write to people who can ultimately infer what we are saying even if the grammar is incorrect. The goal is to be able to communicate effectively.

Sometimes those outside your line of communication may misinterpret what you’re saying for lack of “subject/verb” agreement, or a petition filed for court may be dismissed for a “vague pronoun usage.” (Note: Santa’s Helper says we’ll discuss “vague pronoun usage” in our next issue with plenty of Valentine’s Day examples.) Grammar is essential to legal filings because of technicalities and mischaracterizations.

If you have grammar questions or need further explanation on any of these tips, send a note to Feather Bricks via Professor Melissa or Principal Costabile.

CREATIVE NONFICTION

My COVID-19 Experiences by John E. Taylor

If someone would have told me, "there is a virus that was created in China that would make its way across the entire world and affect you at Stateville Correctional Center," I wouldn't have believed that person. As a result of COVID-19, I have been deeply affected in three significant ways. My first experience of the COVID-19 involved a severe experience of detachment. Being detached from some of my close Christian brothers who are also housed in this prison troubled me deeply. There are some Christian brothers who I feel comfortable in sharing my deepest pains with, but as of March 20, 2020, I have not had any access to them. Being able to see my Christian brothers that are part of our choir here weekly really is a source. Where when I am weak, I gain strength through our fellowship. Due to COVID-19, the lockdown isn't like any normal lockdown, where we know it won't last too long, but during COVID-19 no one knows how long we will be on lockdown status. Many of the choir members reside in other Housing Units, and the real fellowship we experience with each other is lost or gone due to COVID-19. The next detachment I experienced during my COVID-19 experience is being away from the academic community from North Park Theological Seminary. Our classroom experiences are so sacred, it makes me so comfortable to be vulnerable with things I wouldn't share normally. Being in a classroom with North Park Theological Seminary students felt like all of us were on the same page. We could be our authentic self. It is as if once we leave the classroom, we have to take on a different

character. Basically, most of us have an authentic character in the classroom, and another character in the cell houses. I feel most liberated when I am in the classroom with my fellow academic community from North Park Theological Seminary. I felt detachment from brilliant and bright minds of my fellow students due to COVID-19. Many of my fellow students have enlightened me on things I may have not ever discovered on my own.

Next, I have experienced detachment from my family and friends beyond the prison due to COVID-19. My mother lives in Virginia, and my aunt who lives in Nebraska and visit me once a year aren't able to visit me due to COVID-19. Being able to see my family and friends and receive a hug from them provides a source of strength to continue to stay in the fight like nothing else does. Being able to physically see family and friends helps strengthen my hope that there are those who still love me on the outside in spite of my incarceration. This detachment has been felt not only by me, but my son as well. He wanted to come visit me, but I told him, "Son, we are on lockdown due to COVID-19 and cannot have any visitors." I



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could feel my son's mental pain through the phone as he paused for a moment before he said, "Dad when can I come see you?" I had to painfully tell my son we may not be able to visit each other until next year sometime when a vaccine is discovered.

The second profound experience I had due to COVID-19 was depression. My depression due to COVID-19 extended beyond my own personal reasons. I seemed to have taken on the depression of others. My personal experience of depression was being experienced inwardly and outwardly. The outward depression I experienced due to COVID-19 was being reflected by how over three months I did not shave or cut my hair on my head. I have never allowed my outward appearance to get as bad as it had gotten. A couple fellows I am merely on a speaking basis with shouted to me going to the shower three or four times, "JT, cut that hair off your head and face!" One of them even said, "JT. Why are you allowing your head to look like the parting of the Red Sea? You need to cut your hair and shave your beard off." I couldn't respond, but I kept walking and said to myself, if they only understood not shaving or cutting my hair off was an expression of my depression. One of the Nurses said to me, "Mr. Taylor, what is wrong? I have never seen you unshaven and your hair uncut before." I told her I am going through some depression due to COVID-19. Then she asked me, "Do you want me to get you seen by Mental Health?" I said no, I don't trust staff in Mental Health because a psychologist told me, "The Department of Corrections isn't concerned about helping prisoners, just managing them."

My inward depression kept me from reading and I could not focus or comprehend anything I was reading. I found myself crying uncontrollably. I knew it was due to depression because I had not experienced such crying episodes since my three-month old daughter died of SIDS. I have always been an avid reader, but COVID-19 revenged me from desiring to read, and when I did try to read I could not remain focused. The depression I was experiencing due to COVID-19 caused me to take on the pain and frustrations my mother and son were experiencing due to COVID-19. Each time I would call my mother and son, both of them would tell me, "I am so depressed being locked in the house and can't go anywhere." Surprisingly, both mom and my son would say the same exact thing to me. At 78 years old, my mother leaves her place more than she did before she retired. I clearly understand what she meant by not being able to leave her home. I believe my mother didn't realize I felt her pain and agony of being locked in a cell since March 20, 2020 until June 15, 2020. I am only five cells away from the exit door. I could see outside but could not go outside. It wasn't until I told my mother I hadn't been outside in nearly three months but at least she could still get some fresh air and had the luxury of almost anything she wanted to eat did she realize how blessed she was. The next time I talked to my mother she said, "Jr. I went outside yesterday for a couple hours just driving around with my windows down." My depression I was experiencing due to my mother's depression left me. My mother realizing she still had a sense of freedom in spite of COVID-19 helped her. After my mother and son had worked through their depression, I was able to



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start working on my mental health. It was a struggle to work on my personal depression because each day I watched World News on ABC and saw and heard about the thousands that were waiting in long lines for free food, my heart went out for those who had been affected by COVID-19. At times I felt guilty being blessed to receive three meals a day, and my property box filled with food in it from commissary. It brought on a different level of depression. Lastly, I lost two men here at Stateville Correctional Center due to COVID-19. Their loss of life contributed to my depression as well. One of my fellow inmates had been locked up over thirty years for a crime he did not do. For eleven months, the two of us were confined together in a room in the Infirmary, and he would tell me all the various things he planned to do when he went home in 2020. My friend Bear had a number of illnesses he fought to overcome, but COVID-19 finally took his life. My other friend and brother in Christ whose life was taken by COVID-19 was Rusty. Rusty was part of the same master's degree in Christian Ministry program through North Park Theological Seminary's School of Restorative Arts with me. His death shocked me because previously he had no major illnesses. Rusty was a genuine servant of Christ, and his death hurt me deeply.

The last significant experience I encountered due to COVID-19 was deliverance. Prior to COVID-19, most of my reading was done for academic purposes. During Covid-19, I had to return to reading for spiritual enrichment. Once I started back reading for spiritual enrichment, God was able to speak to me personally.

After God started speaking to me from His word, mysteriously, new people started coming into my life to help contribute to my deliverance from COVID-19. In fact, outside people connected to North Park Theological Seminary started writing me, and the words they shared were words that were Godly inspired words because I was moved spiritually by the way they shared with me. In spite of still experiencing the effects of COVID-19, I am being delivered from the effects of COVID-19 daily. I am back on track fulfilling my calling in the ministry. I am no longer held in captivity due to COVID-19.

In closing, sharing my COVID-19 experiences, I hope this piece may prove to be helpful to the readers. I have learned that in spite of detachments and depression that deliverance was on the horizon awaiting for me to receive it, as it is for the readers as well.



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A Christmas Story

BY LUIGI P. ADAMO

In every Adamo household, you will find a voodoo shrine of sorts. It will either be in the living room or in an alcove off to the side, or maybe in the kitchen, but it will be there somewhere set up on some table in that house, you can bet on it. Everyone has the same sorts of things on these shrines: framed pictures or small statues of Pope John Paul II, Padre Pio, the Bleeding Heart Christ, The Virgin Mother, perhaps a saint, maybe two as well, but that's not all. You will also find photos of family members: Adamos who have recently passed, are gravely ill, or are otherwise in such dire straights that to the Adamo mind the only thing that can help them is to place their likeness near holy company, and, if things are really desperate, a lit candle. It was only when I saw a photo of myself on a number of those shrines after my inditement that I began to appreciate just how precarious my legal situation really was. Seeing one's own illuminated-by-candlelight face, smiling back at them amongst the sainted, the dying, and the dead, is very disconcerting to say the least!

There was this one time before Christmas, I was out of jail on bond still awaiting trial and living at my parents' house with my

girlfriend Lisa. Lisa was working towards earning her beautician's license at the time, and had made plans to have Jess, a friend of hers from beauty school, over for a night of hanging out and watching old Christmas movies, plans that my mother threw right out the window as soon as Jess arrived.

Mom was preparing a ridiculous amount of food for our family's yearly Christmas feast and coerced us to stay in the kitchen with her, not only to keep her company as she cooked, but so she could force-feed us samples of every course she was preparing. Though made up of only samples, this meal was enormous, making me wonder what was more stuffed, ourselves or the goose in the oven. Jess would later complain, "I've never been made to eat so much in my entire life! I feel like that guy who was force-fed to death for gluttony in the movie 'Seven.'"

Well, after we were stuffed like Christmas stockings, mom's best friend Gail came over with a gift for my sister Alex, a small statue of Saint Phelomena, my sister's patron saint, that she had ordered special from Italy. We had just cleared the table of dishes and put the saint's statue on the kitchen table, and sat down to drink hot cocoa, digest, and chit-chat a little.

Lisa, Jess, Gail, and I were all smokers, and my mother being house proud lit a scented holiday candle to rid the smell of cigarette smoke from her kitchen, placing it on the table where we were gathered. As

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our conversation continued, it was clear that Mom seemed to really like Jess. I mean, what's not to like? Jess was a very nice girl, absolutely beautiful, and smart as a whip to boot. My mother, anxious to become a grandmother, saw her chance to talk up my absent but recently single younger brother Anthony and took it. Lisa and I were on the same page as Ma. Hooking Jess up with Anthony was the real reason we'd invited her over in the first place, so we too were doing our part to bring them together, but Tony was running late as usual. Gail, sensing what we were up to and trying to keep Jess' interest in my brother peaked, left the kitchen and returned with his most current picture from off the fireplace mantel to show Jess.

Mom sprang into action, grabbing the picture from Gail's hands and putting it right under Jess' nose, saying things like, "Here's my Anthony. Isn't he handsome? He's a finance student at DePaul. He's gonna be a wealthy banker when he graduates."

Jess smiled politely and said, "That's really nice. I can't wait to meet him. He sounds like a really great guy." Mom took this statement as a major victory in her campaign to "Mother-in-lawdom" and put my brother's picture on the table near the saint's statue and the second lit candle. We were all caught up in conversation when my father came home from last-minute Christmas shopping. He walked into the kitchen with bundles of wrapped presents, saw us

gathered at the table around a picture of Anthony next to the saint's statue and a lit candle, and he panicked. Dropping the gifts he was carrying on the floor, he ran over to my mother and grabbed her by both shoulders. His face was as worried as I've ever seen it before or since. He asked her in a voice that trembled with fear, "Tell me, now. What happened to Anthony. Is he all right?"

Everyone erupted into laughter as we realized how this scene must have looked to my poor father who was ignorant as to how all of those things happened to come together on our kitchen table, and in classic Adamo fashion assumed only the very worst. But who could really blame him?



THE THEOLOGICAL
ALPHABET BY
JOHN HALL

Alphabet Inspiration & Closing

A is for Adam, but it could be for Abel too
Abraham or anybody God shows favor to
B is for Bablyon, a biblical town
And C is for Corinthians, Colossians and crown
D is for Deuteronomy, David and Daniel
And depending on how you spell it, E could be for Emmanuel
But let's say it's for Ephesians, or even Eschatology
Ezekiel and F is for faith in who died for me
G is for God, and the many ways He guided me
Gideon and God Son's whole genealogy
H is for Hebrew and I's for Immanuel
My bad, that was E, but they're both unilateral
J is for Jacob, Jesus, Jehovah, Jireh
Judah, Joseph, Josiah, and Jeremiah
You know K's for the King of Kings
And L's for Lamentations, Leviticus,
and a whole lot of evil things
Like lust, anyway, M is for Matthew
Messiah, Micah, Malachi, see how I'm coming at you?
N is for Numbers, Nehemiah, and Noah
And O is for Obadiah, that's the book before Jonah
P is for Proverbs, Philippians, Psalms
Peter, Paul, Potiphar and both of Jesus' palms
The letter Q is for queen the letter R is for Ruth,
Repent, Romans, and Revelations scary parts of the truth
The letter S is for Satan; no it isn't, it's for Solomon,
Salvation, sacrifice, and servant of the sovereign one
T is for Thessalonians, Timothy and Titus
And the text, which entails a whole lot of difficult writers
Yeah U is for Uriah, dude whose wife David coveted
Or Uzzah, dude who died touching the Ark of the Covenant
V is for vision, a divine revelation
Or victory, like Joshua's fights against the nation.
W is for war, but more importantly the Word,
Worship, will, wherefore, wifing women is preferred
The letter X is for Xerxes, King of the Persians
He ruled with an iron fist against a league of insurgents
The letter Y is for Yaweh and Z is for Zion
Or Zechariah, who had a vision of people dying.
Call me a theologian
Or someone who follows Jesus and won't
hesitate to quote Him, so keep ya minds open
Cuz God doesn't want you in hell
Now you know your ABCs, next time study what they entail.

CLOSING BY DEAN MICHELLE

*CO-EDITORS LUIGI AND MELISSA
ARE CALLING FOR FESTIVITY, LEVITY,
AND JOKES, SO I SHARE A BIT OF
CHRISTMAS HUMOR WITH YOU!
PASTOR JEFF TEACHES
CONFIRMATION AT MY CHURCH,*

AND A FEW YEARS AGO, MY SON HAD
THE GOOD FORTUNE OF BEING ONE OF
JEFF'S PUPILS. AROUND THE DINNER
TABLE ONE NIGHT, I ASKED, "JOHAN...
WHAT ARE YOU LEARNING IN
CONFIRMATION?"

HE REPLIED, "WELL...THE GOD OF
THE OLD TESTAMENT IS VERY
DIFFERENT FROM THE GOD IN THE
NEW ONE!"

SECRETLY FEARING I HAD RAISED A
MARCIONITE, I ASKED, "HOW DO YOU
ACCOUNT FOR THIS DISCREPANCY,
JOHAN?"

"UMMMM...", HE PAUSED THINKING.
"I PRETTY MUCH THINK IT'S
BECAUSE GOD HAD A KID IN THE NEW
TESTAMENT."

MAY JOHAN'S INSIGHT BRING YOU
LIGHT AND LIFE THIS NEW YEAR
ALONG WITH A HOPE THAT IS BOTH
OLD AND NEW ~ OUR
GOD BECAME ONE AMONG US SO
THAT WE MIGHT BELONG TO ONE
ANOTHER.
BLESSINGS!
PROF. MICHELLE

