

Producing the Future: The Book I Need

(Presented at CCCC 2017)

Hello. I'm Jaquetta Shade, a citizen of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma and a PhD candidate at Michigan State University, and I'm here to talk about "the book the field needs." When Steve Parks invited me to join this panel at the recommendation of a colleague, he asked me to talk to other graduate students and to new faculty to help me answer the question, "what book does the field need?"

I was nervous about this. First, how could *I* represent the emerging scholars in our discipline? Then, my emphasis shifted to the more practical question of how could I *represent* the emerging scholars in our discipline? How could I gather enough feedback from my peers and colleagues to represent us all, and how could I shape that into a response that argues for *one* book? These questions shaped my approach to this task, and led me to what I'm calling a methodology of listening.

I talked with other graduate students and passed around an informal Google Form survey amongst some of my peers. I asked that question, "what book does our field need?," both on the survey and in conversation. One of the challenges that I faced in my "study" was that not everyone was familiar with all of the publications in the Studies in Writing and Rhetoric series. Most of us had read some, but not all of the 39 books listed on the SWR series page on the NCTE website. These texts cover a vast array of topics, and as I scrolled through the list of publications and read the descriptions, it was challenging to imagine one specific book that what was *not* represented there, but that also represented a need across my generation of Rhet/Comp scholars. I looked to the responses of my survey, which were minimal, but left me with useful suggestions such as these:

"I would like to see work about land-based approaches to pedagogy and scholarship published as part of the series, as well as more writing that has undergraduate students in Rhetoric & Writing courses as its primary (or "a" primary) audience"

"Focus on issues that impact Indigenous and Latinx students, graduate students and faculty in particular"

Additionally, I considered the verbal responses that I had received to my question, which had also led to useful suggestions. Yet, I had difficulty pointing this data that I had gathered from a rather limited range of my colleagues to one specific need, one specific book.

Then, the 2016 US election happened. The next morning, as I walked the hallways of my department towards my office, I noticed small clusters of graduate students and professors gathered together, asking each other the sorts of questions that I was asking myself: “How do I address this in my class today? How can I help my students who are worried for their safety? How can I hold space for them? And how on earth can we talk about writing mechanics today?” As I sat with my office mates, we talked about those questions and brainstormed ideas for how to conduct our classes that week. Our First Year Writing Director came by and talked with us too, and our First Year Writing Workshop that week shifted from a teaching workshop on a particular assignment to a space for us to discuss what that election meant for our students and our classes. On social media, these same sorts of conversations were happening. My Twitter and Facebook feeds were ablaze with provoking posts from folks in the discipline, sharing their concerns.

Then came the Presidential Inauguration. The next day, hundreds of thousands of women marched in protest, and in the weeks and months since, we have seen several more demonstrations against the oppressive platform of President Trump and his administration. Then came the “alt-facts” about the size of the inaugural crowds, the Bowling Green Massacre, Russian interference in the election process. Then the President’s War on Media began. For some of us, it became overwhelming and we had to look away for a little while. The worried conversations and social media posts about the current administration have slowed down over the last month or two, but they haven’t stopped, nor has the fear and worry about policies that have very real impacts on many of our lives.

Throughout all of this, I had still been wondering what to say here at this conference about what book we need in our discipline. I was worried because I thought that I hadn’t gathered enough feedback, that I hadn’t listened enough, that I hadn’t heard from enough grad students and faculty to share with you a collective response. But then, I realized that I had. I had been listening to their feedback all along. It is that thing that we have all been talking about, on social media and in our hallway conversations.

The book that our field needs, that we emerging scholars need to give us tools for navigating our classrooms for the next few years, is a book on teaching writing in the time of Trump. In this era of alt-facts and alt-news, we need a book that can help us to develop pedagogical practices that reinforce the values of our discipline. We need a book that can help us to teach ethical research and logical writing to our students in a time when the highest offices in this country are not upholding those values.

We have some questions: How do we teach inclusive writing practices when the elected leader of our country promotes sexist, racist, homophobic, ableist, classist, ageist, and predatory ideals? How do we teach our students to support their work with credible evidence in the age of alt-facts? How do we teach them to carefully evaluate media biases when CNN and the New York

Times are blocked from attending White House press briefings? How can we empower diverse student writers when they feel targeted by a government that is supposed to protect them? And as one of my fellow graduate students asked recently, “how can we [as a diverse body of emerging scholars] do the work we’re trained to do in a country that outright dismantles and rejects us? How do we teach this? Is it safe to? Who will protect us?”

The book that we need from the Studies in Writing and Rhetoric series is a book that will help us to answer those questions, a book that offers us tools for the work ahead. The theme of this conference is *Cultivating Capacity, Creating Change*. We need a book that will help us to cultivate our students’ capacities to create change in this highly politicized era, in a time when “radical” professors are targeted and added to watchlists. We want a book that can help us as we guide our students to engage critically in information literacies, to empower them as scholar-activists, to discern credible news from fake news, and reality from alt-facts. We need a book that can help us as we teach the next generation of writers, because now, more than ever, the world needs more writers.