

MAPPING RACIAL LITERACIES

*College Students Write about
Race and Segregation*

SOPHIE R. BELL

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Logan

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Published by Utah State University Press
An imprint of University Press of Colorado
245 Century Circle, Suite 202
Louisville, Colorado 80027

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The University Press of Colorado is a proud member of
the Association of University Presses.

The University Press of Colorado is a cooperative publishing enterprise supported, in part, by Adams State University, Colorado State University, Fort Lewis College, Metropolitan State University of Denver, Regis University, University of Colorado, University of Northern Colorado, University of Wyoming, Utah State University, and Western Colorado University.

∞ This paper meets the requirements of the ANSI/NISO Z39.48–1992 (Permanence of Paper)

ISBN: 978-1-64642-109-1 (paperback)
ISBN: 978-1-64642-110-7 (ebook)
<https://doi.org/10.7330/9781646421107>

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Bell, Sophie R., author.

Title: Mapping racial literacies : college students write about race and segregation / Sophie R. Bell.

Description: Logan : Utah State University Press, [2020] | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2020051114 (print) | LCCN 2020051115 (ebook) | ISBN 9781646421091 (paperback) | ISBN 9781646421107 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: English language—Rhetoric—Study and teaching (Higher)—Social aspects—United States. | College students' writings. | Culturally relevant pedagogy—United States. | Anti-racism—Study and teaching (Higher)—United States. | Racial justice in education—United States. | Racism in language.

Classification: LCC PE1405.U6 B45 2020 (print) | LCC PE1405.U6 (ebook) | DDC 808/.042071173—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020051114>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020051115>

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To my students

For sharing this work with me and—wherever you could—making it your own. Thank you for your patience, insight, humor, and risk-taking. Thank you for making every possible use of the opportunities offered in our classroom, in particular when you have been able to push my thinking, and that of other students, in new and productive ways.

To my mother, Claudia Swett Gwardyak

For her unequivocal support of every attempt I've made to write, since the days when she sat at the typewriter and transcribed my youthful ideas. For her own work against racism and sexism. For her unshakable faith in education as a tool of liberation, and the work she does to put that faith into action.

To my late father, Michael Davitt Bell

For his love of teaching and writing and his commitment to racial and gender justice. For his excitement about passing that love and commitment on to the next generations of our family.

In essence, meaningful opportunities for cross-racial contact are diminishing, especially in schools. What effect is that having on students, both White and of color, and their teachers? What are the implications for classroom performance and academic achievement? Interpersonal relations? Our evolving democracy? What can we as educators and citizens do to ensure that the arc of the moral universe continues to bend toward justice in our society?

Beverly Daniel Tatum, *Can We Talk about Race? And Other Conversations in an Era of Resegregation* xi

Racism is a structural phenomenon that fabricates interdependent yet paradoxical relationships between race, class, and geography. [Countering it] requires a new racial literacy, meaning the capacity to decipher the durable racial grammar that structures racialized hierarchies and frames the narrative of our republic.

Lani Guinier, "From Racial Liberalism to Racial Literacy: *Brown v. Board of Education* and the Interest-Divergence Dilemma," *Journal of American History* 117

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The premise of this book is that teachers can and must continually learn alongside their students. I am extremely grateful to my students for teaching me so much over the years. In particular, as a white teacher exploring the role of racial literacy and racial geography in my students' lives, and my own, there have been many things I have struggled to understand and process in the conversations and writing that take place in my classes. I have appreciated the opportunity to learn with and from my students during this process. However, expecting to learn exclusively from my students in these areas would be irresponsible. I have also benefited enormously from the insights and generosity of other people who listened to these stories, encouraged me to theorize and write about them, and helped me move this account of my teaching out of my classroom and into this form. This process has been exciting, nerve-wracking, and error ridden, and I am grateful for many forms of support and correction along the way.

This book was written during a semester's leave and three semesters of course release. In the teaching-intensive field of composition, supporting classroom research is crucial to fostering pedagogies conducive to student learning and teacher growth. I thank St. John's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences for providing this for me, and Dean Jeffrey Fagen in particular.

When I brought my initial idea to Utah State University Press, Michael Spooner agreed it would make a valuable contribution and helped me buckle down and clear the decks for writing. When Michael retired, Rachael Levay stepped in with creativity, conviction, and strategic thinking that anchored my progress. The anonymous readers for the press offered a generous combination of compassion and critique. While affirming that this portrait of learning had value for other teachers, teachers-in-training, and teacher-leaders, they pointed out my areas of confusion and wrongheadedness. In short, they modeled exactly what I strive for as a teacher and needed as a writer. Finally, Daniel Pratt's

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cover design captured the spirit of this project in a delightfully unexpected way.

The editorial collective of *Radical Teacher* has provided a decades-long home base for critical analysis of educational politics, attention to the complexities of classrooms, and warm fellowship for embattled teachers. Dick Ohmann in particular has encouraged and supported my writing about schools since I taught high school in the 1990s.

The idea of writing about the racial politics of my classroom was fostered by colleagues at St. John's and beyond. Members of the St. John's Teaching and Race Working Group from 2015 to 2017 introduced me to the racial history of composition studies and explored how to bring that history into our classrooms: I am profoundly grateful for the insights and wisdom of Collin Craig, Ashwak Fardoush, Ikuko Fujiwara, Sharon Marshall, Amanda Moulder, and Alison Perry. I deeply appreciate the members of the New York Metropolitan American Studies Association Americanist writing group—Jeff Allred, Sarah Chinn, Anna Mae Duane, Joseph Entin, Hildegard Hoeller, Meg Toth, Jennifer Travis—who never batted an eye when I started writing about my students' writing as well as nineteenth-century American literature. These colleagues' keen insights and crucial questions shaped many early chapter drafts. Late in the project, Amanda Moulder and Liz Kimball formed an indomitable small writing group. Their keen eyes and generosity with field-related expertise and creative solutions to rhetorical and pedagogical problems were especially crucial as I wrote chapter 3 and the introduction. Stephanie Wade offered a generous ear to the dilemmas of this project and advice for centering oneself when the way is unclear. Gabriel Brownstein helped me apply for crucial support. Anne Geller offered advice and encouragement through the process of finding a publisher. Sharon Marshall and Tamara Issak modeled how to honor dual commitments to teaching and writing, offering me daily inspiration. Dohra Ahmad helped me see vernacular language's connection to racial literacy, inspiring and encouraging chapter 3.

My sister Cathleen Bell offered countless daily encouragements to keep writing and incisive help describing my research methodology. Elisabeth Kanner listened to many of these teaching stories on repeat and responded with a relentless focus on student learning. She routinely used humor to deflate roadblocks, as well as pretension, in my teaching and writing. Hannah Weyer told me to write down these stories. Meg Toth offered accountability and companionship while launching this project on a shared semester's leave. Betsy Klimasmith offered crucial help with the book proposal. Nadya Bech-Conger listened while I talked

through the entire concept at enormous length, which was invaluable as I wrote the introduction. Gayle Kirshenbaum unpacked problems and offered inspiration with her powerful writing, listening, and activism. Kathy Belden offered compassionate fellowship, mentoring, and expertise on creating books that promote racial awareness, while remaining vigilant about one's own misperceptions. Lena Entin affirmed that this work mattered beyond academics. Claudia Bell, Walter Gwardyak, Audrey Entin, David Entin, Dorothy Riehm, Leslie Holt, and Amy Smoucha offered me time and space to write, fed me while I was writing, and offered generous interpretations of my daily progress.

Writing about institutional change is good, but changing institutions is better. While I developed this curriculum and wrote this book, people on the campus where I teach began to undertake the difficult task of improving the university's culture and practices of equity and inclusion for students, faculty, and other community members from marginalized and minoritized groups. Student activists—in particular, the members of Spectrum, Students of Consciousness, the Black Student Union, and the NAACP—displayed courage, clarity, and leadership in imagining and demanding concrete, positive changes. Many administrators and faculty members put themselves on the line when students called for institutional change, doing deep work on many levels to create conditions to make it happen. In 2020, several faculty have founded the Critical Race and Ethnic Studies Program. At the university level, Nada Llewellyn, Manouchkathé Cassagnol, and Monique Jernigan have stepped forward to offer creative, transformative, engaged leadership. I acknowledge their inspiring work and also acknowledge others who are changing my institution in ways I don't know about. I hope the classroom work I describe in this book contributes to building capacity for such institutional change. However, the entrenched inequalities my students report will remain unchanged without the leadership of courageous students, faculty, and others.

This is a book about my own position as a white woman invested in teaching in ways that challenge whiteness. While white teachers need to do this work, our ability to do it has many limitations. I am grateful to people of color who have honestly challenged me and/or collaborated with me. I appreciate and value the feedback I have received from colleagues of color at St. Johns and beyond. I am also grateful to other white people for the opportunity to learn alongside you as we share our struggles to see, understand, and address racism, especially our own.

Several students have kept me informed about the ways that they navigate the issues we raised in class after graduation. This has been a

deep gift. I am particularly grateful to Priscilla Agyeman, Kiah Lashley, Nicole Lawrence, Gabriel Lopez, Victoria Natanova, Richée Reeves, Dannie Rouse, Chriss Sneed, Miguel Vasquez, and Tahmir Williams for sharing some of your journey with me, offering me inspiration and new perspectives.

My daughters Miriam and Rachel helped me talk through and reconsider my students' perspectives when I was stumped. They also encouraged me to lighten up, which is challenging but essential to the heavy work I ask my students to undertake. I learn tremendously from their insights into the extraordinary impact of race, class, and geography on our lives and their schools. In addition, they have both offered me meaningful help with my teaching and this book. I am grateful for Rachel's technical assistance with the online components of my teaching and for Miriam's help with citations in my final draft.

My husband, Joseph Entin, offered compassionate and perceptive readings of every chapter, as well as consistent and persistent support for this project on all levels. He is a stalwart comrade-in-arms through decades teaching and learning, hope and pain, trail and error, and a whole lot of excellent debriefing. His own determination to contribute to the world in a positive way, and his extraordinary ability to find interesting arguments lurking in thorny places, make him a staunch ally in writing this book, and in our mutual struggle to lead joyful, useful lives together in and out of classrooms.