

# CONTENTS

*Foreword by Suresh Canagarajah*     *vii*

Introduction     3

- 1 Sexy Ass Cajuns: The Complicated Reasons We Comply     31
- 2 Bas Class: Cajuns and the US Class System     74
- 3 “I Will Not Speak French. I Will Not Speak French”: The Grand  
Dérangement de la Langue     119
- 4 Don’t Blame Teachers (Not Too-Too Much): The Limits of  
Classrooms     160
- 5 Beyond Classrooms: Debunking the Language Myths     213

*Acknowledgments*     256

*Appendix: Survey on Cajun Vernacular English in Classrooms*     258

*Notes*     290

*References*     294

*About the Author*     304

*Index*     305

## INTRODUCTION

*Our culture of literacy functions as though it were a plot against the spoken voice, the human body, vernacular language, and those without privilege. That is, our pervasive cultural assumptions about speech, writing, and literacy—especially as they are communicated through schooling—seem as though they were designed to make it harder than necessary for people to become comfortably and powerfully literate.*

—Peter Elbow, *Vernacular Eloquence*

*Writing theory must move beyond composition studies' neurosis of pedagogy, must escape the shackles of classrooms, students, and management.*

—Sidney Dobrin, *Postcomposition*

Growing up Cajun, one of my favorite compliments was being mistaken for non-Cajun. My upwardly mobile Cajun friends and I identified with mainstream white US culture, and we rarely lapsed into our Cajun accents, except to make fun. Our linguistic work was praised by family members. “Good God but you smart!” my grandfather once exclaimed after reading a lengthy paper I wrote. I lapped it up, but I knew a huge factor in his praise was that, to him, use of standardized English was a sign of intelligence, whereas even deft use of Cajun English (CE) or Louisiana French was a sign of illiteracy and backwardness. My grandfather, born to uneducated sharecroppers, did his best to hide the fact that his first language was Louisiana French because he worried that it would prevent him from climbing the ranks at his insurance job and providing for his family. That anxiety is so entrenched among Cajuns that many of us have resisted progressive policies designed to honor and preserve our home languages, Louisiana French and CE, even though these languages are virtual treasure troves for linguists. I certainly did throughout my schooling, and then in retrospect I wondered why. Why do we comply with language inequality? Why do we help enforce language prejudice by self-censoring and even by policing each other’s speech? Why do we, like my grandfather did, buy into the idea that someone’s way of speaking can determine his or her intelligence, employability, and even social worth?

As I answer these questions, I'm balancing between the reproduction model of sociopolitical inequality and the resistance model, between Robert Phillipson's assertion in *Linguistic Imperialism* (1992) that language inequality is unilaterally imposed on marginalized people (forced assimilation) and A. Suresh Canagarajah's reply in *Resisting Linguistic Imperialism in English Teaching* (1999) that marginalized people actually choose to appropriate and subvert the dominant language for their own purposes (a form of resistance). In this theoretical space, marginalized people do choose to comply with language prejudice—but not quite voluntarily. It's a clever choice made in the interests of getting a leg up, per Canagarajah, kind of like working the system. But the choices have been predetermined by the center, which designed the system to be quite unequal: conform linguistically or face failure in some form.

Phillipson theorizes the sociopolitical “might is right” dynamic that says nations have languages, while tribes have only dialects or vernaculars, building on the work of Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, who coined the term *linguicism* in *Linguistic Genocide in Education* to describe language discrimination. As she puts it, “Linguicism is a concept which describes more sophisticated forms of racism . . . I have defined linguicism as ideologies, structures, and practices which are used to legitimate, effectuate, and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources (material and immaterial) between groups which are defined on the basis of language” (Skutnabb-Kangas 1988, 40). She argues that English is a “killer language,” choking out the “necessary diversity” of other languages, and that English language teaching (ELT) is fraught with ethical concerns because it poses a threat to local communities and languages: “If you are an ESL [English as a second language] teacher and/or you teach minority children through the medium of a dominant language, at the cost of their mother tongue, you are participating in linguistic genocide. You are killing the necessary diversity and the prerequisites for life on our planet” (25).

In response to the idea of linguistic biodiversity embraced by Skutnabb-Kangas and others, Salikoko Mufwene in *Language Evolution: Contact, Competition and Change* is more cautious about portraying all processes of language change and loss as negative, since these processes have been common to all linguistic history. He further points out that “the rhetoric has been less about the rights of speakers than about the *rights of languages* to survive [and] . . . about the benefits of *linguistic diversity* to linguistics (especially the extent to which the research on language universals and typology is negatively affected by the lost languages)” (Mufwene 2008, 226). Languages do change over time, and

it's important not to conflate them with the people who use them, but language domination is inevitably linked to sociopolitical domination. Phillipson consequently argues that ELT is a tool of imperialism and, listing three types of colonial power—"sticks (impositional force), carrots (bargaining), and ideas (persuasion)"—he writes that ELT belongs in the third category, which he later expands as part of cultural hegemony (Phillipson 1992, 53, 72).

I take up this third category, but not from the perspective of someone in the center thrusting ideas upon unsuspecting periphery students, as ELT is generally understood. I'm more interested in the perspective from which Canagarajah writes—a periphery user of English making decisions about how to use the empire's language. Canagarajah maintains that Phillipson is limited by his "center" position, and he criticizes Phillipson for focusing on the reproductive function of ELT without representing "the subtle forms of resistance to English and the productive processes of appropriation inspired by local needs" (Canagarajah 1999, 3). He proposes instead a "resistance perspective" in which periphery communities neither conform unthinkingly to center values nor reject English but find ways to "*reconstitute* it in more inclusive, ethical, and democratic terms," something he argues that many of his fellow Sri Lankans and others from former colonies already do very well (2). He goes on to examine the ways periphery teachers and students negotiate intersections of the mainstream and the local in their daily classroom experiences. Vinay Dharwadker offers a helpful phrase for understanding this nuanced view of language politics when he calls for the "decolonization of English" in "The Historical Formation of Indian-English Literature" via intermixing Indian languages and English, instead of rejecting English (Dharwadker 2004, 262). This periphery perspective of English allows for language change, something Mufwene argues is a normal process, while still acknowledging the politics of language use and contesting inequalities in gatekeeping standards. Canagarajah also espouses this kind of language intermixing as a form of resistance to linguicism.

Ngūgĩ wa Thiong'o, another periphery writer, is famous for his decision to totally reject English because language domination is so inextricably connected to political domination. But another important difference in perspective is between those of the first generation, who were forced to speak English in school, and the following generations, who are often monolingual native English speakers. As is the case for many other marginalized and colonized groups, Cajuns initially had to be strongly persuaded to give up Louisiana French, and that persuasion

came via ELT. The experiences of the first generation of Louisiana French speakers to learn English in school were similar to what Ngũgĩ describes in *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (Ngũgĩ 1981) as a physically and psychologically violent tension between his home Gikuyu culture and the British culture in school. In the same vein as Phillipson, Ngũgĩ writes that ELT is a weapon of imperialism, a “cultural bomb”: “The effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people’s belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves” (3). Ngũgĩ sees no way of redeeming English from its imperialist past and has since made the decision to write only in his native Gikuyu, which he later translates for English readers, in contrast to writers like Chinua Achebe, who write in English but mark it with their home languages. But things are different three and four generations after the cultural bomb, when the local culture has been rebuilt around a French-inflected English, and most Cajuns no longer have the option to resist by speaking only Louisiana French.

I appreciate Canagarajah’s spotlight on the agency of periphery speakers, not just their automatic consumption of the center’s language and ideas. Models that blame only the center for inequalities, ignoring the agency of periphery speakers, tend also to propose solutions from only the center, and the end result is that people at the periphery are once again acted upon instead of acted with. But in my experience, Cajuns don’t appropriate the dominant language and use it as a savvy form of resistance against the center. Unlike Canagarajah’s experience in Sri Lanka, the bulk of the periphery speakers I know and grew up with decide to conform to the center as much as they are able, consciously censoring any influence of Louisiana French and CE from their public and especially school- and job-related speech performances. They seem to have the same mindset I grew up with, more along the lines of conforming than resisting. So, like Phillipson, I’m looking at the hegemonic reproduction of language inequality but, like Canagarajah, I do so from the perspective of periphery speakers, and I’m asking why many of us—who could resist—don’t resist.

Overwhelmingly, my research has revealed that Cajuns believe they must appropriate standardized English for the sake of socioeconomic success and, in many cases, for mere financial stability. Linguistic assimilation is no longer forced—at least not in school—but resisting it doesn’t seem to be a responsible option to most Cajuns. I was genuinely surprised to find in my survey that Cajuns usually learned to self-censor their Cajun linguistic markers from their mamas, not their

schoolmarms. For these Cajuns, speaking standardized English is part of a good work ethic, like being on time for work or dressing appropriately. Because the motivation to self-censor is not pedagogical in the case of most Cajuns today, as well as many other internally colonized groups, the implications are that even the most progressive pedagogy will not help them resist linguistic assimilation. Sometimes the most ardent supporters of monolingual and monodialectal language policies are actually the people against whom the policies most discriminate.

Perhaps an important factor in Cajuns' linguistic compliance is their status as an internally colonized group within the United States. Though the United States is a "center" nation, many native-born Americans speak forms of what Canagarajah calls "periphery Englishes." As Victor Villanueva has argued in *Bootstraps: From an American Academic of Color*, the process of internal colonialism (an idea developed in Hechter 1975) has created multiple groups of minorities within the United States whose languages are subject to domination by English. He describes, for example, a cultural erasure among Puerto Ricans living in the United States. Referencing the work of John Ogbu, he explains "the essential differences between immigrants and minorities": "The immigrant enters; the minority is entered upon . . . The difference between the immigrant and the minority amounts to the difference between immigration and colonization" (Villanueva 1993, 24, 29).<sup>1</sup> Villanueva argues that English-only policies are a form of language discrimination for these internally colonized communities, leading to the academic lag of minority children (who internalize their failure) and linguistic insecurity among academics of color. This insecurity can in turn prompt academics of color, on the one hand, to espouse patriotism and monolingualism and, on the other hand, to resist progressive language policies and pedagogies even more ardently than their white peers. Other examples of internally colonized groups are Mexican Americans, Native Americans, Hawaiian Americans, African Americans and, of course, Louisiana Cajuns and Creoles.

Though language has been and continues to be an extremely important educational concern in South Louisiana, this is the first book-length study of those language issues in the field of composition and rhetoric (comp/rhet), which has a strong history of considering "students' rights to their own language" and the nonprivileged dialects of native English-speaking minorities. Geneva Smitherman (1986) gave a groundbreaking analysis of African American English in *Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America*, and Victor Villanueva (1993) introduced the idea of Puerto Rican rhetoric in English in *Bootstraps: From an American*

*Academic of Color*. Malea Powell (2002) presented American Indian forms of written English in “Listening to Ghosts: An alternative (Non) argument,” and Kathy Sohn (2006) brought Appalachian English to the attention of comp/rhet theorists in *Whistlin’ and Crowin’ Women of Appalachia: Literacy Practices since College*. Other theorists have written about the nonprivileged Englishes of native English speakers from former colonies. For example, A. Suresh Canagarajah (2006) introduces Sri Lankan English in “The Place of World Englishes in Composition: Pluralization Continued,” Vaidehi Ramanathan (2005) discusses Indian Englishes in *The English-Vernacular Divide: Postcolonial Language Politics and Practice*, and Caroline Macafee (2004) writes about Scottish English in “Scots and Scottish English.” LuMing Mao (2002) discusses the influence of Chinese discourse on English in “Re-clustering Traditional Academic Discourse: Alternating with Confucian Discourse,” and Min-Zhan Lu (1994a) contrasts the rhetorical traditions of Maoist Chinese essays with western English essays in “From Silence to Words: Writing as Struggle.” CE has been heavily documented in applied linguistics, and it merits a stronger presence in comp/rhet, a field that has long recognized the tensions between center and periphery discourses within the United States.

So in this book I investigate the hegemonic language exchanges that reproduce inequalities in US educational sorting practices, particularly the factors that lead to individual compliance with language inequality. I offer the history of the linguistic assimilation of the Cajuns of Southwest Louisiana as a case study, presenting new data from archival records, previously unpublished interviews, and my own survey of Louisiana teachers in four colleges. I weave history, sociolinguistics, politics, socio-economic theories, Cajun studies, pedagogical and educational theory together with family memoir. I have an enormous family—six siblings, six more stepsiblings, and dozens of aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces, and nephews; this is a book stressing the role of family in institutionalized language inequality, so they show up a lot. The lens I use to discuss the role of individual consent is Pierre Bourdieu’s (1991) theory of the legitimate language in *Language and Symbolic Power*, which he developed after studying the language dynamics in his own internally colonized group in France as well as other historical cases of language inequalities. Exploring his theory, I describe the language hierarchy that was established during US nation building, the sociohistorical background of Cajuns that predicted their low linguistic status even before their US assimilation, the English-only educational policies that all but eradicated Louisiana French, current educational practices that relegate the

newly emergent Cajun English to the status of a slang, and the cultural myths that justify institutionalized language inequality. My depiction of Bourdieu's theory and terms is accurate but maybe a little tidier than in his original text; I systematized some of his discussions on language inequality into a framework upon which I drape my case study. His main argument is that language functions as a form of capital in a nationalist, capitalist economy; people's access to power tends to be determined by how much of the legitimate language they inherit from their parents. After examining the reproductive function of language hegemony among Cajuns in this framework, I conclude by discussing alternative forms of organization for normalizing counterhegemonic ideas about language equality, specifically in working-class family social structures.

Composition scholars have lobbied for policy changes in primary, secondary, and postsecondary schools—focusing mainly on educational changes to push back against linguicism. Smitherman has lobbied to institutionalize multilingualism in schools, most notably in *Talkin and Testifyin* (Smitherman 1986) and “Toward a National Public Policy on Language” (Smitherman 1987). She argues that standards are too narrow in US education when they deem only one version of English “correct,” and she envisions a multilingualism that includes nonprivileged Englishes such as African American English (AAE) and other languages. Bruce Horner and John Trimbur, in “English Only and U.S. College Composition” (Horner and Trimbur 2002), build on Smitherman's vision by imagining ways to institutionalize multilingualism rather than monolingualism (for instance, making use of more diverse research to lobby for changing university policies). They argue that, just as English only has been institutionalized in schools over time with the reorganization of college departments (that territorialize other languages as “foreign”) and other factors, multilingualism can be reinstitutionalized.

These proposals are geared toward creating policies to implement Students' Right to Their Own Language (SRTOL), a 1974 position statement about students' rights by the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), an annual meeting created to discuss composition pedagogies:

We affirm the students' right to their own patterns and varieties of language—the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style. Language scholars long ago denied that the myth of a standard American dialect has any validity. The claim that any one dialect is unacceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another. Such a claim leads to false advice for speakers and writers, and immoral advice for humans. A nation proud

of its diverse heritage and its cultural and racial variety will preserve its heritage of dialects. We affirm strongly that teachers must have the experiences and training that will enable them to respect diversity and uphold the right of students to their own language. (Smitherman 1995, 21)

Since the resolution's acceptance, some of its tenets have come under criticism. The editors of *ALTD* point out, for example, that SRTOL encourages ethnic inequality and the assimilation of less privileged groups: "'The Students' Right to Their Own Language,' whatever revolutionary sentiments may have animated its framers, turned out to espouse methods to make assimilation to the dominant culture easier, at least in theory, for students from politically marginalized social groups" (Schroeder, Fox, and Bizzell 2002, vii). Canagarajah (2011) further points out that some of its ideology is based on nationalism and unnatural language processes (which I explain in chapter 4). SRTOL has also lacked institutional support since its acceptance, revealing the economic interests of the field in preserving the linguistic status quo.

In spite of its lack of institutional support and ideological problems, SRTOL has spurred more pedagogical responses. Min-Zhan Lu writes in "Professing Multiculturalism: The Politics of Style in the Contact Zone" about "how to conceive and practice teaching methods which invite a multicultural approach to style, particularly those styles of student writing which appear to be riddled with 'errors'" (Lu 1994b, 442). As Lu writes in "From Silence to Words: Writing as Struggle" (Lu 1994a), her perspective on multiple discourses is informed by her own background, having been raised with a tension between the home language and literacy practices of her family and the nationalist policies and pedagogies she encountered at school. At home, Lu's Chinese family favored a Western humanist discursive upbringing, featuring the power of the individual and economic success, while her teachers at school stressed the values of Maoist China, featuring the strength of the collective and the virtue of common labor. She long kept these discursive voices separate according to context but later decided to merge them. Lu concludes by encouraging educators to let students "see themselves as responsible for forming or transforming, as well as preserving the discourses they are learning" (175). Expanding on this idea of multicultural style later in "Professing Multiculturalism," Lu asks why students are not permitted the same stylistic deviations as "real" writers, and she poses the student construction *can able to* as a discussion piece in the contact zone of the classroom, urging her students to feel confident in making stylistic decisions in their own work and in assessing the decisions of others (Lu 1994b, 446).

Canagarajah has similarly worked on creating practical pedagogical strategies that accommodate both multilingualism and college language standards. Building on his earlier work in *Resisting Linguistic Imperialism* (Canagarajah 1999), Canagarajah writes in “The Place of World Englishes in Composition: Pluralization Continued” (Canagarajah 2006, 613) that teachers can support multilingualism by teaching what Vershawn Young (2004) calls *code meshing*, the practice of interweaving linguistic contributions from home discourses and the conventions of academic discourses in writing done for school. In Canagarajah’s conception of code meshing, multilingual students write neither entirely in their home languages and vernaculars nor entirely in standardized English. Rather, he proposes appropriating “the high-brow activity [of] inserting Greek or Latin without translation into English texts” and practicing it with untranslated bits of nonprivileged languages and Englishes (Canagarajah 2006, 598) or merging rhetorical styles of home and academic discourses. He stresses that he encourages code meshing even for final products, in contrast to Peter Elbow’s allowance for multilingualism in rough drafts only, because, as he writes, “The editing of the other Englishes in the final product may also lump these varieties into the category of ‘errors’ to be avoided” (598). He proposes teaching code meshing to students as a substantial form of resistance to unequal language policies and also as a way to begin implementing equal policies: “The classroom is already a policy site; every time teachers insist on a uniform variety of language or discourse, we are helping reproduce monolingualist ideologies and linguistic hierarchies” (587). Canagarajah’s proposals on the use of code meshing are an important development for creating usable pedagogies that address the very real pressures of language inequality while allowing for and even teaching student resistance.

A more recent collection of essays, *Code Meshing as World English: Policies, Pedagogy, and Performance* (Young and Martinez 2011), builds on the idea of code meshing in the directions of pedagogy and policy. The volume, which includes chapters on Hawaiian Pidgin, CE, AAE, Appalachian English, and Spanglish, hosts important scholarly discussions of what are acknowledged to be language inequalities. In the introduction, the editors (with Julie Ann Naviaux) write, “We wonder why, in the forty-odd years since NCTE adopted the *Students’ Right to Their Own Language* resolution, something like code-meshing has not been instituted, remains a wish, and is still not a fact of practice” (xxii). They conclude with a “charge” to teachers of English to consider implementing code meshing. In his afterword, Canagarajah proposes that code meshing is valuable not only for its political function but also because

it is a more normal state for languages than discreteness: code meshing “is the basic process by which language appropriation and localization has always taken place in English and other lingua franca” (276). Canagarajah writes that code meshing is not only a form of world English but a process of world Englishes.

These examples of attention to the Englishes of minority, immigrant, and working-class students in the United States illustrate the concern for language equality in the field of comp/rhet. Like most of the discourse surrounding language inequalities in comp/rhet, these authors’ arguments generally focus on changing pedagogies and policies. This focus makes sense because the heart of the field is pedagogy. But there has been less discussion in an area I’m particularly interested in, the hegemonic values in the United States that push back against these progressive policies and pedagogies. In Canagarajah’s (2011) afterword to *Code Meshing as World English*, he concludes that, in order to transform pedagogies and policies, there must also be challenges to hegemonic values about language, particularly the ideas of language purity and change. Along those lines, my hope is that *Good God but You Smart!* contributes to the work already done in comp/rhet by addressing the hegemonic values about language that reproduce inequalities *outside* of classrooms.

Peter Elbow also argues the importance of publicly challenging inaccurate ideas about language correctness in his nonacademic volume *Vernacular Eloquence: What Speech Can Bring to Writing* (Elbow 2012). Elbow’s main argument is that writing will benefit from the directness and clarity of speech. Writing tends to get convoluted—specifically because there is an unspoken rule that the less likely we are to utter something, the more academic and proper it is (and this is because of class distinctions, as he points out)—whereas speech helps us get to the point more clearly. Like other writers in comp/rhet, he concludes with pedagogical suggestions—the same pedagogical stance, in fact, that Canagarajah previously criticizes him for in “The Place of World Englishes in Composition” (Canagarajah 2006). Elbow recommends having students edit multilingual or multicultural influence from their final products (unless it is “hidden” meshing, something I explain in chapter 4) until language standards have changed to allow vernaculars in formal writing.

Elbow also makes a conscious effort to influence hegemonic beliefs about language inequality so that we can begin to move in the direction of accepting vernaculars in formal writing. He writes, “My main goal is to change how everyone *thinks* about writing and literacy” (Elbow 2012, 8). He works toward this goal by making it a point to include nonacademics

in the conversation about language standards and change their minds about “correctness” by writing to a public audience. He explains the classed and raced origins of language inequalities; literacy standards that function more as gatekeepers than social mobilizers; and the hegemonic values that uphold these standards, through the lenses of pedagogy, theory, history, politics, and public opinion. As he addresses beliefs, he also encourages every English speaker, novice and expert, to take ownership of the English language and help it evolve to more closely reflect spoken Englishes by “speaking onto the page” (though not in gatekeeping moments like final exams). In the end, he hopes that writing will not only benefit from speaking, but that the gap between improper speech and proper writing will disappear as the laws of language divergence kick in, as people follow his guidelines and get more comfortable with the idea of democratic language (and in the process actually democratize language), and as the Internet increases our comfort with “talkiness” and decreases our need for formality. Parts of Elbow’s model are problematic, as I discuss later, but it’s a significant move in comp/rhet scholarship in that it addresses the hegemonic values that reinforce discriminatory pedagogies and policies concerning language.

#### THE LIMITS OF PEDAGOGY

Like Elbow and Canagarajah, I think it’s important to change societal definitions of correctness and proper language behavior. Throughout my research, I have found many discussions of classroom-based solutions for addressing language prejudice, but very little attention to the language prejudice in families and home communities that can foil the best progressive attempts at language equality in classrooms. A major reason that policies and pedagogies haven’t been entirely effective in creating language equality is that it’s not only teachers and administrators reinforcing these unequal standards, but also just about everyone else. There is a network of forces *outside* schools that pressure individuals into complying with unequal language standards. These forces are connected to what happens in school, but they can operate apart from school as well, so that people who don’t go to school or who have finished their schooling are constantly reminded and compelled to abide by the language hierarchy and even enforce it on others.

Working-class families often resist “liberal” educational policies designed to create an equal playing field for their children in the classroom, striving instead to gain the same educo-linguistic capital as people from the middle and upper-middle classes (what Bourdieu 1984

calls usage of “high distinction,” already controlled by the affluent as a class-based privilege). The parents of the children and their communities, whom these educational policies are intended to benefit, are often the most vehement detractors. In *Your Average Nigga: Performing Race, Literacy, and Masculinity*, Vershawn Ashanti Young cites, for example, the work of Mary Rhodes Hoover on this contradiction among African American parents, who are resistant to allowing African American English in schools as a valid language choice (Young 2007, 2). Chatting together at a convention in 2011, Young and I discussed the incredible levels of resistance to—and sometimes ridiculing of—progressive language ideas that we’ve heard from our own families. Young and I veer slightly on how to teach code meshing, but we agree emphatically that people’s learned beliefs about language standards are one of the greatest impediments in the struggle for language equality.

Some of the most famous texts in the comp/rhet canon illustrate the pressures that students feel to censor their home languages, pressures that circulate in classrooms but aren’t pedagogical in nature. The coming-to-literacy narratives of Richard Rodriguez (1982), Mike Rose (1987), Keith Gilyard (1991), Victor Villanueva (1993), and Vershawn Young (2007) relate the academic biographies of minority scholars who must negotiate home and academic discourses. Generally, the authors narrate their experiences going through the US school system, beginning in a working-class family and ending with a “successful” writing or academic career. They debate the meaning of success in light of their lost or compromised connections with their home communities and personal identities. Along the way, the authors also describe the *nonacademic* pressures to censor their home discourses—pressures from important individuals and even their entire communities. These pressures are portrayed as leagues more important and motivating than pedagogical pressures.

Richard Rodriguez (1982), for instance, describes in *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* a class tension that prompted both his well-known critique of language-based diversity policies and his linguistic disidentification with his own family. Unlike other writers who grew up bicultural, Rodriguez rejects Spanish and embraces English only. He concludes by criticizing affirmative action, ethnic studies departments, and the practice of allowing other languages and Englishes in schools. Changes to college policies are too little, too late. A true left reform, he writes, would be concerned with early education, housing, nutrition, and other social factors: “The revolutionary demand would have called for a reform of primary and secondary schools” (162). It was his attention to class differences that also led Rodriguez to distance himself from

his family and their language. As a child, he hoped to identify with middle- and upper-class people who spoke English instead of what he calls “los pobres” (the poor) who spoke Spanish. The same desire prompted him, as a “scholarship boy,” to seek the praise and attention of his teachers instead of his parents early on in elementary school. He stayed after school to “help” and devoted pretty much all his free time at home to reading the books recommended by his teachers. Familial intimacy gave way to alienation as he mastered English and his academic identity. One summer in college, after meeting and utterly failing to relate to a group of los pobres, he realized that he had achieved middle-class status. After that, he celebrates the fact that, unlike his parents at his age, he is part of the middle class: “I wear double-breasted Italian suits and custom-made English shoes . . . I register at the Hotel Carlyle in New York and the Plaza Athenée in Paris” (146–47). In the prologue to his book, which he calls “Middle-Class Pastoral,” he concludes that he has arrived: “I write this book as a middle-class American man. Assimilated” (1). Rodriguez’s drive to master the dominant literacy values of the United States and distance himself from his family was fueled by class pressures woven into the economy and pushed on him by teachers and parents alike.

In response to Rodriguez’s narrative, Keith Gilyard also discusses the pressures he felt to self-censor his home discourse. He alternates chapters of narration with chapters of analysis, also alternating between AAE and standardized English as he explores the tension between his two identities and his two languages in *Voices of the Self* (1991). Unlike Rodriguez, who wanted to impress teachers, Gilyard was driven by a desire to impress his classmates and feel a sense of belonging to his community. He writes that he coveted the admiration and affirmation of his fellow students, letting himself be pushed into doing things he didn’t even believe in, like brokering a “silly” peace treaty between the boys and girls of the class and almost getting kicked out of school when it ended with his hitting a white girl (47–51). As part of his desire to win his classmates’ recognition, he writes that he also “scored highly on all [his] tests and raised [his] hands as vigorously as anyone else” (45). This desire to be accepted and admired by peers conversely led him into crime, drugs, and multiple legal encounters later when he moved to a poorer community, where grades weren’t valued but street bravado was. He writes, “I was torn between institutions, between value systems. At times the tug of school was greater, therefore the 90.2 average. On other occasions the streets were a more powerful lure, thus the heroin and 40 in English and a brief visit to the Adolescent Remand Shelter” (160). Gilyard concludes by calling on educators “to successfully challenge current practices that

justify eradicationist attempts aimed against African-American identity and the language variety in which that identity is most clearly realized” in schools (165). But in addition to eradicationist pedagogies, Gilyard felt intense class- and race-based pressures from his peers in the middle-class community to excel at standardized English. It was ultimately the approval of his peers, which he sought through academic success, that drove him to censor his language, not the pedagogy or feedback of his teachers. Gilyard and the students around him had absorbed cultural messages about language, possibly from their parents and other educational encounters.

Mike Rose similarly traces his journey from a working-class, Italian American neighborhood to a professorship at UCLA in *Lives on the Boundary: A Moving Account of the Struggles and Achievements of America's Educationally Underprepared* (Rose 1987). What pushed him from being a mediocre, “just wanna be average” student to working his tail off to excel in literacy was not pedagogical, policy-related, or even class-driven: he was trying to win the approval of his new father figure, Mr. McFarland, who initiated his students into the mysteries of the classics. His biological father had slipped into a coma during his junior year, never to wake again, and the inspiring English teacher “couldn’t have come into [his] life at a better time” (32). Rose writes, “I must tell you that venal though it might have been, I loved getting good grades from McFarland” (34). Rose immediately began striving for the best grades and eventually decided to go to college upon his new father figure’s urging. Examining his experiences as a minority student and educator later in the book, he asks other educators to reconceive the dynamics of language, failure, and poverty in their pedagogies by rethinking literacy crises, error, and the “canonical approach to education” (237). Striving to orient and assimilate working-class students like himself into the language protocols of the elite academy, he proposes close tutorial mentoring in academic usage and disciplinary canons for working-class students who are lost in a sea of academic expectations. He recommends this kind of mentorship because the father-son bond he felt with McFarland was so influential, whereas standard schooling had failed. It was a form of family pressure that compelled him to depart from the working-class lifestyle he had been prepared to inherit from his own parents and instead spend long hours outside school cultivating his grasp of literacy so he could go to college.

Another landmark coming-to-literacy story is *Bootstraps*, in which Villanueva (1993) narrates his struggle to belong to both his family’s world and the academic world, beginning with his experiences in his

working-class Puerto Rican neighborhood in Brooklyn and winding up with his position as tenure-track assistant professor at Northern Arizona University. He writes that his academic success was due to a natural facility with language but then compounded by his desire to be accepted racially and nationally in the United States: “I have never stopped trying to assimilate,” he writes (xiv). In spite of his family’s patriotism and his commitment to learning English, he was considered “foreign” at his new high school in East Compton and ultimately became, as he writes about himself, “the only portorican rhetorician he knows” (5, 13). He strove to speak standardized English as part of working out his national identity and later came to understand that cultural rhetorical differences are often viewed as illogical or inferior instead of simply different. Examining his own desire to assimilate and that of other internally colonized groups, Villanueva argues that national language identification is the reason members of minorities are often the most ardent defenders of English only and standardized English policies. Hegemonic beliefs that link nationalism and language compel people to excel in the nationally recognized language. He explores theories of changing the hegemony so that one need not be ethnically either/or but both/and, and he concludes by suggesting an exercise for teaching students to question hegemonic “common sense” in fairy tales. These hegemonic beliefs that Villanueva discusses circulate both inside and outside classrooms—from homes to jobs to the military—leading both insiders and outsiders of the US economy to comply with stereotypes and language standards that reinforce prejudice.

Vershawn Young discusses the challenges faced by young black males who want to do well in school but still be perceived as sufficiently masculine in their home communities in *Your Average Nigga: Performing Race, Literacy, and Masculinity* (Young 2007). Like other comp/rhet writers who examine their literacy narratives, Young began life in a low social position and in a nonwhite family. Born to a single mother in a ghetto of Chicago called the Governor Henry Horner Homes housing projects, he struggled with choosing between performing black masculinity or white masculinity throughout his childhood. His interest in books and the literacy practices he learned at home, he writes, made him appear to be “acting white” to his peers. Though the behavior worked well for him in school, it constructed him as a “fag” in his home community, where he needed not only to “act black” but also continually to perform his masculinity “less as a faggot and more as a nigga” (54). This dilemma followed Young throughout life, and he usually settled on performing whiteness because it was easier: “I’m a dark-skinned black man who spent a good

deal of his youth wishing he were white because he believed he was failing miserably at being black” (1). Looking back, he writes that he longed to be white not because he had internalized the oppressor and not because of self-hatred, but just because “race-switching” was so taxing. It seemed easier to perform whiteness most of the time and make brief gestures toward black masculinity only when he felt it necessary. “I was tired” is a refrain throughout the book. Three hours at his brother’s house, for example, exhausted him so much that he pretended not to hear people calling him gay at a nightclub later that night (70–71). As an educator with a PhD, he writes that he is still confronted with the dilemma, but he wants to create pedagogical choices for students, choices that aren’t so polarized. Young argues that the pedagogical practice of code switching amounts to the same thing as race switching: students must perform either whiteness or blackness, and are rarely given any other options. Instead, he proposes code meshing: students can represent themselves linguistically somewhere between black and white, something he argues is closer to reality anyway. Interestingly, neither pedagogies nor teachers seem to have influenced his academic performance and awareness of racial prejudice. As a seventh grader, he was so confident that he “marched straight to [his] class” to challenge a teacher and later a principal about the racial expectations and limitations they put on him (31). What drove him to embrace standardized English—to perform whiteness through language, as he puts it—was his older brother’s dogged taunts that he was a “fag.” He grew so tired of having to prove his black masculinity that he began to ignore his brother, treat him as invisible. Likewise, he began to live as if there were no dilemma, and he avoided having to prove his gender identity as much as possible by simply performing whiteness.

The perspectives and suggestions that these theorists bring to the field of comp/rhet have been critical for furthering discussions of US language inequalities and influencing pedagogy and policy decisions. But I’m focusing on these texts because they are actual stories of minority children who learned to censor their home discourses and appropriate standardized English so well that they earned the ultimate achievements in English composition—doctorates, tenured professorships at reputable institutions, publications that are amply cited, keynote status, and high gatekeeping positions in some cases. In these narratives, which might be the most famous success stories in the composition field, the reasons the authors excelled in school rarely had anything to do with classroom policies or pedagogies. They were motivated by the desires to get good jobs and provide for their families, to feel a sense of belonging

with a community and peers, to win the approval of family members, and to earn political, gender, and racial legitimacy. There is no question in my mind that these are completely valid motivations. But they are all extrinsic to school, though they are tied to and enforced by schools, and they cannot be addressed by pedagogy or policy changes alone.

My own literacy experiences were similarly most heavily influenced by things happening outside the classroom. Like other Cajuns in my generation, I was born into the cultural assumption that I would pursue “good” English, a solid education, and various elements of the American dream. I was happy—proud—to be Cajun, but I worked as hard as anyone else in my class to learn to speak standardized English for school and professional settings. Code switching seemed to be part of being Cajun. I can recall feeling ashamed of my Cajunisms only when I was making an effort to code switch and didn’t pull it off too well. Like Villanueva, Rose, Gilyard, Rodriguez, and Young, I was already exceptionally good with language, and I became an outlier after I devoted myself to learning to use English well. In my case, though, it wasn’t in an effort to identify with a certain gender, nationality, socioeconomic class, or family figure. I clung to literacy a little more tightly than most of my Cajun classmates because it became an escape for me from abuse and a resulting social anxiety that I couldn’t physically escape. I preface this by saying that I’ve made peace with everyone in this story, and I have a deep sympathy for the difficult things they were dealing with in their own lives that spilled over into mine. My family is very dear to me, so it’s with great care that I share our stories. It’s not my intent to sensationalize or expose anyone, but I feel compelled to be as transparent as Villanueva, Rose, Gilyard, Rodriguez, and Young have been about the struggles that pushed them to excel in language.

Raised by a single mother on welfare in one of the poorer areas in Louisiana, I turned to literacy as an alternative to running away from home. I was my mother’s second teenage pregnancy, born a couple months before my father left. My mother’s parents were financially stable and lived on the next block, but they believed their children would learn best from hard work, so they tough-loved my mom by trying not to help too much. They pushed her to go back to school for nursing and, meanwhile, they became a second set of parents for my brother Jade and me while our mother worked days and studied at night. It was a pretty good life; I was happy and outgoing. But I dreaded going to my father’s house, where my stepmother taunted and tormented me. She had a special hatred for me—I guess because I looked like my mother, whom my father happened to admit he was still in love with about a week

or so into his new marriage. My stepmother kicked my brother and me, with our tiny floral-print suitcases, out of the house on the first weekend we came over for our court-appointed visit. I was three and Jade was five. On another visit she tried to run us over in her little green car, a Datsun. Physical violence was normal. All five of us kids—my brother, me, and her three children—would pile on my stepsister’s bed to cry and hold each other while our parents crashed and yelled in the next room. When I could make out the yelling, it was usually about Jade and me. My father explained that my stepmother was a little moody because of a hysterectomy due to uterine cancer, and he stayed with her because divorce is a sin. He tried to make it easier on Jade and me by telling us that his wife loved us very much but didn’t know how to show it, and he made us promise not to tell my mother about anything that went on at his house because she would stop our visits. We were very good at keeping secrets. I didn’t tell anyone about the time I came inside for a drink of water and found my stepmother pointing a rifle at my father. He was very still, like someone approaching a feral cat, softly asking her to put the gun down. I watched for a while, then went outside to play again. I didn’t tell my other siblings.

Keeping secrets took a toll on me. I developed a stomach condition (spasms) in the third grade—“Stress,” the doctor said—then boils on my legs, like Job from the Bible. When the boils appeared, my stepmother, a nurse, “applied a warm compress” to the back of my leg by laying plastic bags filled with boiling water directly on my skin. She had stretched me out on kitchen chairs and told my father to hold my hands and help me stay still while she burned me. Every time the bags cooled enough for me to stop shaking, she’d put them back into the microwave until they reached a rolling boil and reapply them. Again and again. I can’t remember how many times; I just remember digging my fingernails into my father’s hands and focusing on the microwave with its giant red sticker proclaiming, “JESUS HEALS CANCER.” Since she was a nurse, I’m guessing she knew her ministrations would make my skin blister, ooze, and finally settle into shiny, mangled burn scars. But she said at the time that what she did was “necessary”—the same thing her youngest son, my half brother, would say a few years later as he pointed a pistol at my face, preparing to shoot me and then the rest of the family, shortly after my stepsister’s boyfriend shot and killed his own parents, who had been our pastor and Sunday school teacher. While my legs healed, my stepmother wouldn’t let me sit on any of the furniture in the house because I “might infect” her. I was allowed only to sit on the floor. I think she needed to humiliate me that way to make up for her own humiliations and losses

in life. She seldom spoke directly to me, but often made announcements to the rest of the family that I—“Princess Di,” as she called me—thought I was better than everybody else because I was sitting quietly or because I wore a dress to church or because my hair was thick. Once, as I stood washing dishes at the sink, which came to my chin at the time, my stepmother walked in and said, “You wash dishes like a nigger. Get out of my kitchen.” My father explained that she was sick, so I loved her and told her so, but I think she hated me more for it.

Maybe I was an unwanted stepchild at my father’s house, but I was still a pretty happy and balanced kid at my mom’s house. I was very close to my grandparents and brother, and I was Mom’s “cuddle bunny,” lying in her lap every night after supper. But things changed when I was eight: my mom fell in love, married a nice man named Pat who yelled a lot (but insisted he wasn’t yelling), moved us to his house in a new town but continued to commute to her old job and work overtime, and enrolled Jade and me in separate schools. In all the shuffling, I lost my deep connections with anyone who had made my life stable. Between my mom’s new romance and her long commute, we rarely spoke anymore, and I only saw my grandparents on occasion. Jade and I grew apart, keeping to ourselves except to vent our frustrations on each other in loud, physical fights during the long hours we were home alone. I continued to keep my father’s secrets, which leaked into the rest of my life as a pretty bad lying problem, so even when I tried to reach out to my mother—like about my stomach spasms—only the emotions came out, not the words. My mother became frustrated with me for having meltdowns for no apparent reason and would often walk away irritated, calling me “Miss Priss.” She says in retrospect that she saw me drifting away, that she knew she was neglecting me when I needed her, and she kept promising herself she would make time for me soon. I remember watching her cuddle with my stepfather on the sofa every night after supper and wishing she would hold me. I began to feel like a stepchild in my own home.

Things worsened when my mom switched Jade and me to a new school, a private school that she was proud to be able to afford with a great deal of sacrifice. It was a college-prep school with a demanding classical curriculum and homework load, quite a contrast from my public school experience. Most of the students in my sixth-grade class had been together since pre-K, so, once again, I recognized the feeling of being a stepchild. One of the last things I remember confiding to my mother was that nobody at school liked me. “Why do you think that? Are they mean?” she asked. “No, they’re all nice. I just *know* they don’t like me,” I said. My grades bottomed out, and I developed extreme social anxiety.

I dreaded having to see other kids; I panicked knowing I had to interact with them between classes, at recess, or waiting for the bus. What would we talk about? I exhibited classic signs of child abuse but, since nobody at the new school knew I had been happy and extroverted before, nobody could tell the difference. To them, I was just odd. I tried lying to my teachers about being sick in order to go home. After getting several sick calls about me, my mom started showing up with her stethoscope and interrogating me on my symptoms: “Loose stool? Fever and chills? No? You’re not sick.” Thinking I needed a little help making friends, she enrolled me in after-school activities. More panic and terror. I was a disappointment to every coach because I was too scared to do anything productive. I knew what kind of well-adjusted student I was supposed to be—I was surrounded by them—but I was terrible at faking it. I wanted to escape, to rest, to be somewhere alone, not required to lie and pretend anymore. I couldn’t focus on anything going on in church or class or various sports matches because I was always fantasizing about running away—literally running out the door and maybe knocking a few people down in the process. I was nervous, and my nervous system was set for flight at all times. I became obsessed with exits and escape routes. I kept a suitcase packed in my closet with my favorite white jeans and looked for opportunities to run away from home. I thought a lot about dying.

And then my great escape presented itself. If I put a book between the world and me, the world left me alone. I didn’t have to lie or pretend or watch people wince at my bad acting anymore. Reading was safe. All the words and story lines were spelled out there in black and white, third-person omniscient. I was still stuck in the same school and situation, but I finally had an escape. It was like I just disappeared. Not only did people leave me alone, but I went somewhere else in my head. If it’s true that the mind can’t tell the difference between books and reality, I had a pretty stable childhood from then on (except for *Alice in Wonderland*, a terrifying story about angry and violent adults, unclear rules and expectations, and a young girl who is barely staying alive). I already liked reading, and it soon became one of the only things I did. I read almost every series known to children (and completed many), everything I could afford from the Scholastic book order sheet, every book in my library that looked interesting, every bulletin board in the classroom, the backs of shampoo bottles—anything to keep from being wherever I was at the moment. Other “book nerds,” as they called themselves, gravitated toward me, and after a while I let them sit with me during those stressful unstructured play times. Somehow, they were fine with how cold and awkward I was.

It's worth noting that in all my reading, nobody was Cajun. The canon of preteen literature and classics available to me was based on an already structured hierarchy of languages that I recognized from the cultural code-switching practices I had been born into. And my new school, a Christian private school, embraced a strictly classical curriculum based on the greatest hits of past empires. Run by reformed Presbyterians with libertarian leanings and severe cases of anglophilia, my school was like something out of *Dead Poets Society*. We studied Latin, memorized entire psalms from the Bible, and read Augustine's *Confessions* and other "great books." Imagine a bunch of Cajun kids practicing Shakespearean recitations. That was us. Meanwhile, we learned the glories of capitalism, the US flag code, and all the verses of "The Star-Spangled Banner." We had to copy the Bill of Rights for detention. We were told at least once a week how depraved and despicable and about six other adjectives starting with *d* we were without God by this one Lutheran teacher who was kind and jolly but tended to spit a lot. My history was rewritten. I still feel as much kinship with John Calvin as with my great-great-grandpa Omar Vizinat (who was, incidentally, the only man my Paw-Paw Jeff was ever afraid of). My school's administration specifically recruited teachers from the North, maybe because there weren't enough Calvinists in the South, so we learned their northern accents. All these things combined, and people in my hometown began mistaking me for not Cajun. I was still proud to be Cajun, especially when the northern teachers joked about our Cajunisms. But I was also honored years later when my coworkers at McDonald's said they thought I was from the North. In all this, I never felt any dissonance. I was doing what Cajuns in my generation most wanted, learning to code switch very well. Family members, especially my grandparents, who remembered the terrible stigma of being Cajun during early assimilation, were very proud of how American I sounded.

After a couple years hiding behind books, things got easier. I began imitating other girls in my class, and I grew more confident in my social performances. When I got to high school and met the senior boys (who were notoriously interested in freshman girls), I didn't even need to talk, just giggle. And once again I had Jade by my side, since the entire high school—just shy of seventy-five students—lunched together. Our group of friends formed around our rigorous involvement in a coed Boy Scouts troop, our appreciation for Monty Python, and a fair amount of teen angst. Those were good years. But my group graduated a year ahead of me and I found myself alone and nervous again, ready to dart, my senior year. I still didn't tell my mother what went on at my father's house, not even about the pistol incident. Two days into my senior year,

my younger half brother ambushed me with a gun, weeping and telling me he loved me but had to kill me. He would kill the rest of the family when they came home. We had always had a deep connection, so I didn't know why he wanted to kill me. I was confused and sad. There were murmurs later implicating violent video games and a change in his attention disorder medication. I remember staring at the pistol, inches from my face, and deciding not to repent for making out with the hot guy at the party the night before. I was sorry, but it seemed more respectful to both God and myself to own my actions than to weasel out with a deathbed confession. I was ready to die.

My dear brother never pulled the trigger—I snatched the gun from him at one point when his eyes were forced shut with a strong sob—but the incident triggered something in me, like the pistol shot that sets free all the runners from their marks. I had faced death with not a drop of fear. I shook and shook afterward, watching our other brother wrestle him down like a calf in one of his rodeos and hold him till our parents returned. But I hadn't been afraid to die; I had bigger balls than anyone I knew. I could do anything I wanted. And what I wanted most was to escape my family, my school, Cajuns, Christians, Louisianans, Americans, almost any group of people I found myself in. So I did. I reverted to being cold to everyone I didn't give a damn for anyway, and now I really did escape school, skipping much of my senior year and secretly doctoring the attendance records so that I could pass. I began using literacy as my escape in a new way. With all that reading and maybe an eye for detail I already had, I had become pretty good at reading, writing, punctuation, grammar, spelling—all things literate. I landed in gifted programs, tested at college levels, rocked the ACT with a 33 in English, and graduated at the top of my senior English class (though my teacher threatened to fail me because I had missed so many classes). In college, I chose English as my major because I knew I could travel with it.

Like the authors of other literacy narratives in comp/rhet, I'd need an entire book to give a proper analysis of my childhood, but I want to focus on the fact that virtually none of my pivotal language decisions happened in or as a result of a classroom. My story may be more extreme than most other Cajuns' language experiences, but I think it serves to illustrate more starkly the way other pressures are involved in most people's decisions to assume the hegemonic perspective on language inequality. In terms of the rags-to-riches narrative, I am now a "successful" academic in English, having gone from welfare to a PhD, and it took a lot more than pedagogy in my language classes to cause me to disidentify with my home community enough to (again, scare quotes) "succeed." For me,

the factors were abuse and isolation, a debilitating social anxiety, a near-death experience, a natural propensity for language arts, an exceptionally rigorous college-prep school, an already existing widespread cultural decision to reject Cajun languages, and the pride and support of my family in my code switching. My family was key in my literacy decisions; I code switched because they urged me to learn standardized English, along with other important aspects of employability, and I excelled at it because I wanted to be financially independent of them.

The literacy narratives of Rose, Gilyard, Villanueva, Rodriguez, and Young are also tied strongly to family and other circumstances, more so than pedagogy in many cases. But changing family dynamics alone can't undo linguisticism; likewise, the entire burden of change doesn't belong to schools. To that end, I use the next few chapters to look at the network of pressures involved in language inequalities to understand why upwardly mobile Cajuns self-censor cultural linguistic markers and why many of us like people in other minority groups, balk at progressive language policies. Canagarajah touches on this complexity when he argues that periphery language speakers often assimilate the dominant language as a tool for their own benefit (not just because they're brainwashed), but I want to look at why periphery language speakers also assimilate dominant language attitudes. Though I am drawn to classroom practices—something I'm trained in and very much enjoy—I strive in this book to balance educational considerations with socio-economic and family pressures in order to more fully understand linguisticism and the complicated reasons we comply.

#### WHAT'S IN THIS BOOK

In chapter 1, “Sexy Ass Cajuns: The Complicated Reasons We Comply,” I explain the stereotypes surrounding Cajuns and, consequently, Cajun ways of speaking, especially in pop culture contexts like movies and TV shows. Pop culture representations, which are pretty accurate reflections of hegemonic values, consistently depict Cajuns as buffoons, murderers, mystics, and sex objects—all standard postcolonial roles. I introduce the two most common Cajun languages, Louisiana French and CE, and I discuss language attitudes inside and outside South Louisiana that bring down the “market value” of CE and increase the value of standardized English. As in the case of other internally colonized groups, the ethnic label *Cajun* helps sell foods and promote tourism, but it works against folks who want the American dream. This chapter also introduces my methodology (a case study) and my framework (Pierre

Bourdieu's theory of the legitimate language in *Language and Symbolic Power* [1991]).

Chapter 2, "Bas Class: Cajuns and the US Class System," details the origins of stereotypes about Cajuns and the illegitimate status of their languages by describing how the legitimate language was selected during codification and why Cajuns were destined to speak something illegitimate before Louisiana was even ratified as a US state. Because class position is so important in determining the status of languages, I explain the history and position of Cajuns in the US socioeconomy—from their ethnic cleansing in present-day Nova Scotia to the way that the label *Cajun* has been used in Louisiana as an insult. I discuss the differences between Acadians, Cajuns, and Creoles as well as past and present racial ambiguities. Today, Cajuns have mostly assimilated to capitalism, with some lingering precapitalist, clan-based traditions that are, like their persisting Cajun linguistic markers, considered "quaint" but not "American" by surrounding communities. I also report current understandings of how a standardized English was selected during US nation building and its connections to the capitalist economic system that was established. As a result of early socioeconomic and language planning, the lines between class, race/ethnicity, nationalism, and mastery of the legitimate language tend to be blurred in US education.

I turn to reports from Cajuns who endured the 1921 French ban in chapter 3, "I will not speak French. I will not speak French': The Grand Dérangement de la Langue," to illustrate the level of influence that schools have on language decisions. After the legitimate language is codified, which I described in the previous chapter, it must be normalized by state institutions (the most important being the educational system) so that individuals learn to self-censor. In that vein, I describe the shaming and punishments from the 1920s to the 1960s of Cajun children who were forced to quit speaking French and normalize to standardized English. As children, they were physically and psychologically punished until they learned English, and then many pretended not to know Louisiana French as adults. The sometimes shocking reports from these previously unpublished interviews and letters reveal the normalizing power of schools, but they also demonstrate how self-censoring became a required practice in Cajun families, an institution that is equally powerful in normalizing the legitimate language.

In chapter 4, "Don't Blame Teachers (Not Too-Too Much): Code Censoring in Classrooms," I caution that any pedagogies and policies, no matter how progressive, that help prepare students for job markets will reinforce US linguisticism. Since schools exist to integrate youth

into the US economy, pedagogies—or *sociopedagogies*—generally follow the economy, so there is a contradiction between promoting language equality and equipping students for gatekeeping moments in an economy that is structured on race, class, and gender inequality. Economic shifts have prompted national reorganization and, consequently, changes in sociopedagogy that correspond to new worker-training needs. The first part of the chapter paints a picture of the landscape that prompted a shift from eradication to bidialectism. I report, based on survey responses, the pedagogical decisions of college English teachers in Southwest Louisiana, the Cajun and Creole regions of the state. All the teachers write that they mourn the loss of Louisiana French and reject the eradication practices I describe in chapter 3, yet almost all of them report that when it comes to CE they teach code switching, a practice that many scholars have argued is equivalent to eradication. Next, I address “translingual pedagogies,” which have emerged recently as an answer to SRTOL and a shift to transnationalism. While I strongly support these translanguaging pedagogies, I caution that, in light of the current economic shift to global capitalism, they can be used sociopedagogically in the same ways that code switching has been used—to integrate students unthinkingly into their current sociopolitical layout—and I stress the importance of layering them with critical pedagogy.

I conclude by reporting in chapter 5, “Beyond Classrooms: Debunking the Language Myths,” some optimistic stories of Cajuns who came to value Cajun languages. Based on their experiences and the writings of resistance theorists like Paulo Freire, I consider ways to introduce counterhegemonic ideas to people who are beyond the reach of classrooms. Pervasive myths underlie the values and practices of the “language markets,” which in turn determine the economic potential of all language users. I propose that, in addition to pedagogy and policy, the collection of language myths is an important site for addressing language inequalities because these myths help define the language markets and ultimately the job markets toward which education is geared. Because schools exist to integrate students into these language markets, it’s difficult to work solely within schools to debunk the language myths circulating in US cultural hegemony. I suggest that it’s possible to network within the family social structures of minority and working-class groups, especially when our increasingly polarized economy is forcing many families to depend on each other even more. Finally, I ask anyone who was interested enough to pick up this book to quit consenting to language inequality in small, daily ways. After all, hegemony is based on mass consent, so mass dissent can change it.

This is a timely study in several ways—first, because we’re at a pedagogical juncture in comp/rhet. *Good God but You Smart!* bridges and anticipates a transition regarding vernaculars from code switching to translanguaging. Because of that transition and because the debates about vernaculars are often circumscribed by the ways people outside comp/rhet (for instance, composition teachers with no composition training) talk about it, I present a complete body of literature and analysis about both code switching and the newer translanguaging pedagogies. This is also a timely study because of what’s happening in Louisiana and the Cajun community right now. Governor Bobby Jindal cut education budgets by more than 50 percent and took extreme measures to undermine faculty governance and tenure. Former US assistant secretary of education Diane Ravitch (2013) writes that Jindal, backed by major out-of-state corporate leaders, was intentionally defunding public education in order to privatize it, and she warns that Louisiana is intended to be a test case for other states seeking to dismantle public services. On a different note, this study is also timely because the first Cajun generation of English speakers is aging and disappearing, so it’s becoming more and more difficult to gather firsthand accounts of events that are not thoroughly documented.

This book is geared toward two audiences: scholars in comp/rhet and local Louisianans who are interested in learning more about language issues in Southern Louisiana. Because I think this is an important public and political issue, and because I think that internally marginalized groups have traditionally been excluded from decisions made about them, I’ve made it a point to create a conversational bridge between Cajuns (with about a high school education) and experts in the field of comp/rhet in several ways. I’ve avoided jargon as much as possible and I was a little more explanatory than I may have needed to be if writing for only an academic audience. Also, because a primary Cajun teaching strategy is telling stories, I’ve designed the anecdotes in my chapter introductions and conclusions to embody the important points from my more opaque theoretical sections, so that Cajun nonacademics can skim the theoretical sections but still understand my arguments. Finally, I include local Louisiana voices in my discussions, not just the “experts.” Academic conversations often exclude nonexperts, and the result is the creation of policies and pedagogies that ignore their needs and preferences. This dynamic is similar to past forms of ideological domination in which the dominant make decisions for the subordinated, based on the idea that the subordinated are incapable of ruling themselves. So I strive to make Cajuns heard by the people making policy decisions, and I strive

to help Cajuns understand the arguments of policy makers. I quote the experts in my discussions, and I quote Cajuns right alongside them.

A few caveats. I'm cautious about codifying CE because once language is standardized, there can be a right and wrong way to use it, whereas CE (like other dialects) varies by region, audience, and context—in accents, phrases, register, even vocabulary. That's normal behavior for a language. Similarly, I'm cautious because it's difficult for languages to remain fluid and living once they've been codified. There's museum culture, and then there's living culture. But that puts me in a mess because I need to be able to explain it and give examples for the sake of this book. So I'm "defining" it from the research of sociolinguists, but not all other Cajuns will be able to relate to everything, and that's fine. In fact, in my research of CE literature, I found that some of what has been documented as CE in general was actually specific to only certain regions of Louisiana (not mine), but that's an inevitable problem with trying to codify a living language. There's no way to represent all parishes (Louisiana is organized by parishes instead of counties), neighborhoods, and families here. Not all Cajuns will relate to my personal Cajun experience either. I grew up in Opelousas, where it's common to pronounce *striped* and *checked* with two syllables, like *blessed*, but that's probably more southern than Cajun. Opelousas, one of the larger rural Cajun towns, is also 80 percent African American. In my language studies, I've sometimes had a hard time discerning AAE from CE because of the language mixing in my town. That's also normal behavior for a language. And I want to emphasize that CE will continue to evolve and possibly transition into something very different, as all languages do. I'm not fighting to preserve it, just fighting for the rights of the people who currently speak it, as well as anyone else who speaks a nonstandard English.

Another reason I'm not interested in codifying and/or standardizing CE is that standards can be used to measure people's Cajunness—whether or not someone is truly Cajun. Young has explored the problem of conflating ethnicity and language; he writes that he isn't "ghetto enough for the ghetto," but he's also not "white enough for white folks," leaving him in some "liminal" space he has to figure out (Young 2007, xvi). Villanueva has also spoken about not being able to totally fit into his worlds. The conflation of language and cultural identity is becoming prevalent in Louisiana; one strand of Cajun activists argues that one is not really Cajun if one doesn't speak Louisiana French. Me, I don't speak the Louisiana French—*je comprends just un p'tit peu*—but I'm still Cajun. What makes a Cajun and what constitutes Cajun talk are things that are ever evolving due to context and experiences. I think it's all

right to be Cajun and speak a little Spanish or AAE in there too—or even a little Academese—just like it’s fine to be Cajun and cook Lebanese food. After all, this linguistic and cultural integration is what produced Cajuns in the first place, as I’ll explain in chapter 2. There is no such thing as “pure Cajun.” Our culture and language have been mixing for centuries. Might as well keep going with it, eh?

I also don’t want to love on CE too-too much because languages are usually defined for the sake of nationalism. I’m critical of the United States’ (and other empires’) use of nationalism to persuade the poor within the nation’s borders to work and die for the rich’s causes and wars, and, while I understand that smaller groups and ethnicities want to protect their languages and cultures, I disagree with trying to compete with the bully by imitating the bully.<sup>2</sup> There has been a movement among members of the Acadian diaspora to create an Acadian nation, so there have been multiple attempts to codify Acadian and Cajun French in service to this movement. I support the efforts of minorities and disempowered folks to preserve their language and culture in the face of forced assimilation (though I’m cautious of the word *preserve* because of my concerns expressed above about what happens when culture is put in a museum), but not for the sake of another nationalism and not at the expense of keeping languages and cultures from continuing to evolve in contact with other languages and cultures. That said, though, I do support native language movements that push against colonial and nationalist impositions of legitimate languages, such as the efforts of the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana (CODOFIL) to keep French public in Louisiana.

My one regret is that space and time permitted me to answer only one of the questions I began with: Why do we comply with language inequality? I’ve concluded that Cajuns’ compliance is largely due to socioeconomic pressures that filter down into our families, but I’ve only just begun to think toward my other questions: How do we resist? How do we change the hegemonic language myths that our families believe and push on us? And, maybe more pressing, how do we change the socioeconomic circumstances that require us to sort ourselves and each other by language into distinct social classes? I hope *Good God but You Smart!* creates productive conversations in academic and Cajun contexts that invite people to think with me toward solutions.