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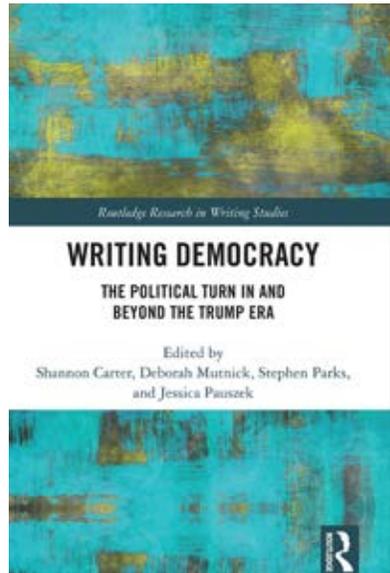
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Writing Democracy: The Political Turn in and Beyond the Trump Era

Shannon Carter, Deborah Mutnick, Stephen Parks, and Jessica Pauszek, Eds.
Routledge, 2019, pp. 320

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While *Writing Democracy: The Political Turn in and Beyond the Trump Era* has been assembled in direct response to Trump's America, it obviously predates the more severe democratic crisis that has flared since the spread of COVID-19 and the wave of protests in the wake of George Floyd's death. But the way our nation has responded to both of these events only heightens the urgency of the "political turn" in rhetoric and composition for which the authors call. The editors define "political turn" as they use it as "informed by Marx's theory of historical materialism and his critique of capitalism as inherently exploitative and unequal" and raise the question of whether "previous academic 'turns,' despite their acuity in some respects, have often obscured rather than clarified the historical tasks of achieving true democracy" (2–3). They write that their overarching goal is "to contribute to efforts to reclaim (or redefine) democracy as an egalitarian, inclusive, political economic system that supports human and all planetary life and well-being," while recognizing the seeming impossibility of this reclamation in the face of "climate change, unprecedented economic inequality, deeply rooted racist, sexist, and homophobic ideologies, and resurgent fascist movements and world leaders like Donald Trump and Jay Bolsonaro" (3). A list like this is enough to deflate anyone seeking to make change through their work, but the editors of this collection inspire us to try. These authors ask us to be accountable for the fact that the political commitment we exhibit as academics often "ends at the classroom door" and to commit to change that (7). Paul Feigenbaum's chapter, in this collection, focuses on inspiring progressive students to engage in activism, but one could say that *Writing Democracy* as a whole works to inspire progressive writing instructors—who are not yet doing so—to take the political turn in their classrooms. The collection, in sum, is asking teachers of writing who are already politically aligned with these authors to be brave in acting on their beliefs in their own pedagogy.



Important to those working in community literacy, the authors offer that “community engagement work—despite the best of intentions—too often underscores the problem of supporting social justice movements absent a critique of systemic inequality, escalating state repression and surveillance, and a rapacious market indifferent to human suffering” (13). The authors are clear in stressing the importance of rooting our political action in the theoretical “model of critique offered by an inclusive, consciously feminist, anti-racist Marxism” (13). Whether or not one identifies one’s scholarship or teaching with a Marxist philosophy, their argument for doing so is compelling and there is much to be gained from the variety of material approaches to politically motivated teaching described in the chapters here. *Writing Democracy* is broken up into three sections: “Mapping the Political Turn,” “Variations on the Political Turn,” and “Taking the Political Turn.”

Part I, “Mapping the Political Turn,” offers primarily historical and theoretical reflections that reflect on our discipline’s history of being political and helps support the Writing Democracy project’s mission of troubling “democracy.” The first chapter in Part I, “Composition’s Left and the Struggle for Revolutionary Consciousness” by John Trimbur, serves as a powerful foundational text by debunking rhetoric and composition’s supposed “progressive” legacy. In it, Trimbur disabuses compositionists of the perception of a progressive disciplinary legacy and stresses, instead, a legacy of being used by and complying with the neoliberal university while sometimes being influenced by leftist interventions (35). Trimbur notes, specifically, the controversy around University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign cancelling Steven Salaita’s appointment to associate professor because of lobbying by alumni and donors who did not approve of Salaita’s public criticism of Israel. NCTE, CCCC, and WPA did not choose to join other major professional associations to protest what was perceived as a political move by the university. Trimbur argues that NCTE/CCCC’s lack of support for Salaita felt like a betrayal of what *had* seemed to many as a longstanding commitment to progressive ideals. This is one striking example that supports Trimbur’s argument “that composition is and probably always has been not so much on a special mission” but, instead, has served as “a normal bureaucratic unit in higher education, with assets that can be leveraged for institutional aims” (35). Trimbur argues that we should understand composition to be a moderate and compliant discipline that has sometimes been influenced by “radical interventions from the left” (35).

Trimbur’s next section looks at some of the results of these interventions, such as Students’ Right to Their Own Language (SRTOL) in 1974 and the National Language Policy (NLP) Statement of 1988. Trimbur calls the CCCC SRTOL resolution “a historical though partial victory” and, in practice, not more than a “qualified tactical gain in the language wars” (42). He explains that the NLP statement was in part a reaction to California being the first state in the nation to make English their official language. Trimbur writes that while the NLP took an “internationalist perspective,” it was “cosmopolitan rather than revolutionary in outlook” (43).

Trimbur finds greater hope in the work of Neville Alexander in South Africa who worked to “*re-represent* [languages] translingually as democratic channels of reciprocal exchange in the formation of a new body politic” (44). Trimbur’s piece works to

set a tone of honesty about the gap between who we have been as a discipline and who many of us would like to be. He knocks us down a bit so that we might be more open to the necessity of the chapters in this book.

In chapter three, “Organize as If It Were Possible to Create a Movement That Will Change the World’ An Interview with Angela Davis conducted by LaToya Lydia Snyder and Ben Kuebrich,” we receive wise guidance and inspiration from longtime political activist and Marxist feminist Angela Davis regarding how to think about activism. The authors write that Davis “calls on us as writing teachers to help create a radical collective political imagination” (51). Davis provides useful insights about the role of social media in activism, saying, “I would caution us not to assume that these new social media can actually do the work . . . of organizing. I think that’s the mistake to basically subordinate ourselves to the means of communication and assume that that is about organizing a radical, progressive community of struggle” (53). Davis asserts that “A movement consists of far more than the capacity to be organized” (53–54). This something “more” is a kind of political and emotional connectedness that she doubts social media allows us to cultivate (54).

In response to organizing failures, Davis discusses how it is important to “preserve moments of promise” (54). For example, Davis notes that Occupy Wall Street “created the conditions for us to speak publicly and critically about capitalism in a way that perhaps had not been possible since the 1930s” (54). Davis seems to want to reach everyday people who are struggling to keep working for change in the face of difficulty and hopelessness. She also stresses that rather than privilege any one movement, “I would say that what is most important is the recognition of the interconnectedness of all those movements” (56). An important message was spurred by an audience member of the public interview who inquired how we can create the next Bayard Rustin. Davis replied that while it is important to know the names of great leaders of the past, holding onto those names can send a false message that “the only way you can make a difference is to be an extraordinary individual. And for people who don’t see themselves as extraordinary individuals, it’s kind of a message that you don’t really matter” (58). Instead, Davis asserts, we need to ask, “how can we create situations so that people recognize that everybody matters, everybody can help bring about change” (58). Davis’s final message speaks directly to composition instructors: “What is needed, I think, is a greater reliance on creativity, a greater reliance on the imagination and, of course, writing teachers have to really emphasize the power of the imagination” (59). Davis’s inspiring exhortation to emphasize the power of the imagination is taken up later in the collection by Steven Alvarez.

In “Marxist Ethics for Uncertain Times,” Nancy Welch offers a thoughtful exploration of the ethics behind the impulse to act in solidarity with social justice and union struggles such as the 2018 West Virginia Teachers’ Strike. To describe her own guide for choosing to take place in activist efforts, Welch uses the term “‘gut sense’ solidarity” (61). Welch writes that she turns to Marxist ethics to better understand this form of motivation. Through questions such as: “*In what world shall we live? And How do we get there? with according to whom? and in whose interests?*,” the Marxist ethical compass provides at any given moment a place to stand, a place from which to

gain one's bearing" (61). Reflecting on the value of Marx in helping guide our political action, Welch writes that the "bedrock to historical materialism is that lived experience sets consciousness' conditions and horizons," but we need rhetoric or "the articulation of a set of counter ideas enabling the exploited and oppressed to move from existing as 'a class of itself' to acting as 'a class for itself'" (64). However, Welch notes that "neoliberal reign has fortified itself against" oppressed people's articulation of their condition "through precarious employment, anti-union legislation, and deportation threats as well as through the solidarity-shredding discourses of white supremacy, misogyny, nativism and bellicose nationalism" (65). Central to Welch's argument is the significance of *standpoint* that Marxist ethics gives us. She explains that you cannot have a universal ethical standpoint within a capitalist system that denies most humans the ability to live in ways that are most attuned to our human nature. Instead, to assess decisions morally, you have to situate yourself either with the privileged or working class. Secondly, she asserts that sectionalism is "a breach of Marx's moral vision" (Welch 71). For an example of this, Welch offers the example of "major labor unions ally[ing] their workers' interests with the capitalist class in pipeline and other extraction projects" (71). Welch notes that "these alliances and agreements reinforce rather than point the way toward overcoming a destructive order" (71). Finally, Welch asserts the importance of "reciprocal fidelity" in working class movements, quoting Lenin that "'working-class consciousness . . . cannot be genuine political consciousness unless the workers are trained to respond to *all* cases of tyranny, oppression, violence and abuse, no matter *what* class is affected" (72).

Welch shares Dana Cloud and Kathleen Feyh's term "affective fidelity" that doesn't treat emotion as "rationality's Other" and defines it as "that gut sense of certainty in an appeal's social justice promise" (73). Welch argues, importantly, that "through a grasp of affective fidelity . . . we can distinguish between one emotional appeal and another without misidentifying the presence of pathos itself as the danger" (73). This is such an important distinction as many of us allow an aversion to emotion to shut us off to the possibility of empathy and, by doing so, we lose the potential of feeling the gut sense solidarity that Welch identifies as so central to determining one's engagement in political action.

In "A Pedagogy for the Political Turn," Deborah Mutnick works to forge a Marxist pedagogy to support the historic task of addressing climate change. Mutnick writes "interrelated environmental, economic, and social problems make clear the need to connect the environmental crisis to unfinished struggles for racial, gender, and wealth equality, in essence demanding a socialist alternative to capitalism" (83). Mutnick argues that education must play a major role in the global effort to end our destructive reliance on fossil fuels and exploitative relationship to nature (84). Countering those who have argued against class focus as erasing issues rooted in racism, Mutnick writes: "rather than a type of identity commensurable with race and gender, class represents the fundamental division between those who control the relations and forces of production and those whose labor is exploited by it in the form of surplus value" (86). Mutnick writes that identity politics is "an understandable but problematic response to the failure of capitalist nations to live up to the promises of democracy" and

argues that because of it, activists and teachers have ended up embroiled in debates that only end up splintering groups that could have instead been united (86). Mutnick then spends time laying out a similar view of the university that Trimbur gave us in chapter two. Mutnick writes that “this managed university works to shape the consciousness of faculty and students alike who, fearful of losing or never attaining job security, submit to anti-union, pro-business regimes” (89). She argues that the present state of society requires a “three-pronged strategy of defending the university, resisting its further corporatization, and rethinking critical pedagogy on multiple fronts beyond its walls” (Mutnick 90). Mutnick concludes by reminding us of her belief that the “failure of world governments to reduce emissions” is the clearest reason for Marxist pedagogy (99). Though as an educator, Mutnick writes that she was always cautious about letting political beliefs come through in her teaching, “this changing zeitgeist and exigency of climate change have convinced me that the time to fight for a socialist world is very possibly now or never” (101–102).

Part II, “Variations on the Political Turn” offers a number of personal takes on doing the work of the political turn as a scholar or teacher. The section begins with Stephen Parks’ interview with Dana Cloud, “I’d Like to Overthrow Capitalism, But Meanwhile I Would Like the Nazis to be Completely Demoralized.” In it, Cloud calls out universities, especially Syracuse, for their conflict of interest and for courting students who can pay exorbitant costs. In response to Parks’ question, “What would a political turn look like if you thought of it as on-campus work?”, Cloud shares her friend Brian McCann’s point that “campus is real life. There are people who are oppressed here,” so one can “get involved in policy making and organizing on campus that would help their labor conditions” (114–115). Cloud notes that the reason this doesn’t happen more is because the academic culture is so invested in civility, the majority of faculty want to avoid antagonism with administration (115). Parks takes this up to ask: “What do you see as the purpose and effect of claims about the need for civility to politics on campus and off campus” (115). Cloud takes the opportunity to share her experience being targeted by “Nazis and white supremacists after calling for reinforcements on Twitter during a protest,” which she calls one example in a “trend of harassing critical and activist scholars” (115). But she notes that the AAUP and National Communication Association “have developed toolkits and model responses” (115). Cloud then notes that though her chancellor had come out in her support, that hasn’t “stopped calls for ‘civility’ in political debates on and off campus” (115). Cloud asserts that “the demand for civility is a form of social control and a threat to academic freedom” (115). To Parks’ question, “What do you think academics who think of themselves as in the political turn should do?”, Cloud responds that academics should focus on “generating ideas, testing them through action, and assessing them with your allies . . . You have to be doing that all the time, assessing yourself, and being humble about it” (120–121). In conclusion, Cloud advocates for joining “a principled socialist organization” and understanding that the common denominator in so many instances of injustice is class (121).

In Seth Kahn’s “Audience Addressed? Audience Invoked? Audience Organized!”, the author shares his experience striking as part of the Association of Pennsylvania

State College and University Faculty in October 2016, emphasizing how striking teachers must know how to speak to students to gain their support. Kahn notes that, “the specific context of our strike offers some illuminating lessons about understanding specific audiences as people, rather than abstractions” (123). Kahn recounts how at an open forum for students, the first few students who spoke up “told them they were being greedy” and that they “obviously ‘don’t care about students’” (125). Kahn says he stood up and asked whether they thought the ones who really cared about them were more likely administrators or teachers who see them in class every other day (125). Kahn writes that once the striking teachers understood students as a real audience rather than an abstraction, their ability to establish a bond of trust with them improved and notes that student support was a huge factor in their ultimate success. He writes, “I hope the examples here show concretely various kinds of communication acts, posed not as *persuasive*, but as *humane* and *trust-building*, helped APSCUF build solidarity with constituencies that have the power to help or hurt their efforts” (Kahn 129). Kahn’s points align with Feigenbaum’s point later in this section that as rhetoricians, we should understand the need to focus most on the audiences who are open to being persuaded and, in Kahn’s case, who have power to affect the outcome of a particular struggle.

In “Taking a Lead from Student Movements in a ‘Political Turn,’” Vani Kannan looks at student organizing and what faculty can learn by supporting these efforts, beginning with her own student organizing experience at Syracuse. The “campus sexual assault advocacy center,” she writes, had recently closed and “students were deeply upset” (Kannan 131). She reports that fifty student groups came together to form a coalition “called THE General Body,” holding “an 18-day sit-in at the university’s administration building,” aiming to address a wide range of grievances (Kannan 131). She was on the media team working with other students on communications to amplify the protest. Kannan pays special attention to militarization on campus, noting that “as local police forces become more heavily militarized, so do campus police” (134). At University of Maryland, she shares, students protested the university’s acquisition of “16 shotguns, two M14 rifles, and 50 M16 rifles,” along with an armored vehicle and two high-mobility, multi-purpose wheeled vehicles,” all claimed by the university to help protect students in the case of a mass shooting (134). As examples of effective student organizing, Vannan reports that students at SUNY Binghamton held a successful sit-in against the school’s multi-million-dollar expenditure “on so-called community ‘safety’ initiatives” (134). She also briefly adds that student organizers worked to oppose Amazon headquarters in Queens, New York, which did not end up being built. Kannan is moved by students’ solidarity with striking teachers and urges that “[a]s faculty, we should show this level of solidarity in student-led struggles too” (135).

In chapter nine, “Nudging Ourselves Toward a Political Turn,” Paul Feigenbaum gives us one of the most actionable directives in the collection: to nudge our progressive students toward acting on their political beliefs. Feigenbaum explains that he’s interested in reaching those students who have learned a kind of “political quietism” that comes with neoliberal values (138). He elaborates on this with the point that “it is

possible to recognize, and even denounce, neoliberalism's individualist ethos of personal responsibility and still live according to this ethos" (138). To help illustrate the potential of students to move from quietism to political activism, Feigenbaum shares his own story of being mobilized in graduate school. He writes how he noticed at the time how few of his professors were actually politically active outside their scholarship. Feigenbaum notes that the "chronic insecurity" of neoliberal society pushes everybody, including students, into a kind of tunnel vision focused almost exclusively on whatever hurdle is next (139). As a result, social change is considered by many to be "the niche endeavors of small, fairly exclusionary groups" (Feigenbaum 139). Feigenbaum explains how "activists" thus become "an Other from which the majority of people disassociate themselves, even many who are otherwise sympathetic to a particular cause or ideology" (139). Feigenbaum was inspired by the 2008 book by Cass Sunstein and Richard Thaler *Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth, and Happiness*. While Thaler and Sunstein call the kind of choice engineering for which they advocate "libertarian paternalism," Feigenbaum sees potential in "severing the concept of nudging from libertarian paternalism and reorienting it toward progressive ends" (142). He explains how his own graduate school professors nudged him toward political action. Notably, he reports how his union work—while in graduate school—demanded he become more comfortable speaking in groups: "I struggled to develop this skill, but had I begun this process earlier in my educational career, I might have struggled less in future roles I took on with various community organizations" (Feigenbaum 143). Though Feigenbaum doesn't state it explicitly, his observation suggests that one way we can help nudge our students toward activist engagement is by giving them opportunities to become more comfortable vocally sharing their ideas in the classroom. Additionally, Feigenbaum writes that writing teachers can help students "reassess their affective relationship to behaviors they would have avoided in the past" (146). He makes an important side note that echoes Angela Davis's response to the Bayard Rustin question that, in addition to perceiving activists as the "Other," another inhibitor to political activism can be the "progressive perfect standard" in which activist leaders are elevated to a status of perfection that students cannot imagine reaching (Feigenbaum 146). Feigenbaum helps us see that we can nudge students toward political action by helping them recognize commonality with activists, rather than transforming activists into positive or negative icons who are difficult to relate to as human beings.

In "Sustainable Audiences/Renewable Products: Penn State's Student Farm, Business Writing, and Community Outreach," Geoffrey Clegg describes teaming his business writing courses up with Penn State's Student Farm as an opportunity to "expose [students] to work that was not bent on pure capitalistic or neoliberal technological profit" (151). He begins by establishing many of the same critiques as Deborah Mutnick of the neoliberal university, and asserts that "hope lies in creating leadership that resists neoliberal imperatives within higher education" (Clegg 150). He acknowledges that this goes against the attitude of many students. Like Feigenbaum, Clegg also understands that they have been taught to think this way: "they are following the case studies, advice and models presented to them within business curriculum or looking

at what mainstream Western media hypes as the newest ideals of profit-oriented decision making” (151). In the partnership between his technical and a business writing course and the Student Farm at Penn State, Clegg asked students to work together with an Agriculture Dept. faculty member to create written documents serving the farm’s needs. Clegg writes that their work fit within “the critical service-learning environment advocated for by Veronica House (2014),” which asks instructors to “[shift] the focus to intellectual rigor, problem solving, critical thinking and higher order reasoning” and argues that a “business writing classroom offers an ideal space for critical service-learning because of the wealth of genres it employs” (Clegg 153). Clegg concludes his chapter by writing eloquently that “[t]he political turn within writing and rhetoric asks both instructors and students to resist neoliberal policies of capitalist assent by reconceiving the classroom as a site of passive learning into an active space for collaboration and direct action” (160). While he acknowledges that business writing might seem like an unlikely space for this; however, “asking business students to think local, act in tandem with local needs, and think beyond profit offers a form of resistance to what we see within the cronyism of the Trump administration” (160).

In “The Political Turn and the Two-Year College: Equity-Centered Partnerships and the Opportunities of Democratic Reform,” Darin L. Jensen, one of the founders of the Teacher-Scholar-Activist blog, brings attention to two-year colleges and the tension in them between democratic and capitalist missions. He notes that graduate programs do not prepare students to teach at two-year institutions (an issue that the Modern Language Association has recognized and just begun to address through their Summer Institute for Teaching Reading and Writing). Jensen argues that our failures to prepare professionals specifically for the community college setting are “political and ethical issues. They speak to our failure as a profession and as a discipline” (163). Jensen provides some historical context for the present state of things, including quoting the Truman Commission Report that discusses scholars and teachers who are invested in “revivify[ing] the ideals of democracy” (164). He comments that its “language, sadly, seems almost quaint in the second decade of the 21st Century when our language surrounding education is usually reduced to mere job preparation” (Jensen 164). Jensen writes, though, that there is a teacher-scholar-activist turn among composition instructors at two-year-colleges and invites their four-year colleagues “to join us and learn from us” (165). Jensen writes that one answer to better connecting the teaching across two-year and four-year institutions is “equity-centered partnerships” which he defines as “reciprocal local agreements and programs wherein two-year college English departments and four-year colleges and universities, especially graduate programs, collaborate in creating meaningful, sustainable reforms that aid in the political turn and teacher-scholar-activist movement” (166). Among other examples of equity-centered partnerships, Jensen notes a collaboration between Salt Lake City Community College (SLCC) and University of Utah which has helped create a writing studies associates degree at SLCC and two upper-level bridge classes for students transferring to the University of Utah (169). In the conclusion of his chapter, Jensen writes that two-year college writing instructors have some great allies in four-

year institutions, but “for the political turn to be a serious movement, it must reckon with how it engages two-year colleges in this labor” (172).

The authors in Part III each write about a specific political turn they or others have taken, some outside and some within the university. The section begins with the powerful “How Does It Feel to Be a Problem at the 9/11 Museum?” in which Tamara Issak provides a stakes-framed rhetorical analysis of the 9/11 Memorial and Museum that opened in May of 2014. Issak shares that she was a Muslim high school student in New Jersey on 9/11 and remembers a classmate saying in class, “We need to kill all Muslims. Wipe them out” (177). She then skips forward to standing in line at the 9/11 Memorial and Museum, wearing a hijab, recognizing the “problem” she poses in her mere presence. Issak reminds us how Trump spouted hateful and false comments about Muslims in his election campaign and that there are real, terrible consequences to this rhetoric: “data shows that there is more of a correlation between anti-Muslim rhetoric and anti-Muslim attacks than there is between terrorist attacks and anti-Muslim incidents” (178). Issak states that “Given the rise of anti-Muslim and anti-Arab racism, it is crucial for composition and rhetoric scholars to examine Islamophobic rhetoric” (179). These life and death consequences of persistent anti-Muslim prejudice frame her argument that the 9/11 Memorial and Museum helps foment Islamophobia (Issak 179). Issak points out that the museum sets up a clear dichotomy between “an American ‘us’” and “an un-American/Muslim ‘them’” (181). Supporting her point, she shares that lesson plans on the museum’s website, which suggest books by Afghani authors *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, pose questions that reinforce “the idea of Muslims as foreign, particularly with [their] focus on the status of women” (Issak 181). On the surface, the lesson plans purport to be about “understanding others” but ultimately work to reassert “the hierarchy of American cultures above other cultures” (Issak 181). Sharing that other scholars have taken issue with the approach of the museum, Issak writes that eleven members of the interfaith panel reviewing the film *The Rise of Al Qaeda*, shown in the historical exhibition section of the museum, wrote a letter outlining their concerns that the video “may well leave viewers with the impression that all Muslims bear some collective guilt or responsibility for the actions of al-Qaeda” and could help spur anti-Muslim “bigotry or even violence” (182). Ultimately, Issak powerfully calls on rhetoric and composition scholars to take a critical approach to any 9/11 materials they incorporate in their classroom and to work to consciously oppose Muslim stereotypes both within and outside the university.

In “Dismantling the Wall: Analyzing the Rhetorics of Shock and Writing Political Transformation,” Steven Alvarez connects the terror of shock politics with a call that echoes Angela Davis’s earlier in the collection for writing teachers to tap into student imagination. Emphasizing walls as metaphors, Alvarez seeks to encourage writing teachers to help students imagine how they can help dismantle conceptual walls. Alvarez writes that Trump’s wall “became a way to disparage the perceptions of Latinx and Latin American immigrant communities and question citizenship status, while using racism as a tactic for pushing through privatizing austerity measures” (192). He wants composition instructors to consider the kinds of projects they can assign that

allow students to “imagine a social field that is inclusive of racial, ethnic, religious, and gender divides” (Alvarez 193) Taking inspiration from Naomi Klein’s *The Shock Doctrine*, Alvarez argues that “the rhetorical analysis of neoliberal ‘shock’ politics is the first step for students to understand the utopian possibilities for political transformation and dissent, possibilities that reveal how the politics of division and separation have alienated collective action” (193). For student reading to introduce the work of breaking down internal walls, Alvarez suggests *Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic* about Donald Duck cartoons that circulated in Latin America “that did propagandist work” (199). Students can, through analysis of this text, “understand how ‘shock’ can become a tool of the state to further a neoliberal agenda by a populace disoriented from disastrous events” (199). Alvarez proposes that writing classrooms be spaces where “students can potentially speak back to shock politics through speculative writing” (201). Students’ fictional counterstories have the potential to counteract the hyper individualism of neoliberal America and, as Alvarez quotes Aja Y. Martínez, the power to “help to strengthen traditions of social, political and cultural survival and resistance” (202). An appendix to Alvarez’s piece provides an assignment description for composing speculative fiction which instructors can adapt to their own classrooms.

In “Pass the Baton: Lessons from Historic Examples of the Political Turn, 1967–68,” Shannon Carter explores the Silent Protest of Tommie Smith and John Carlos raising their fists on the medal platform at the 1968 Olympics with an emphasis on the networks that allow for the circulation of protest messages and images that inspire others. She writes that “the image of the silent protest is still helping “move the needle toward justice . . . today, as that iconic image circulates, gaining momentum in the aftermath of Trump’s election” (221). Carter explains how the Silent Protest was an outgrowth of a proposed Olympic boycott that gained traction after officials stripped Mohammed Ali of his heavyweight title. Tommie Smith was asked by a Japanese reporter at the 1967 World Games in Tokyo about the potential of an Olympic boycott. Carter writes that Smith reports that being asked this question triggered his political engagement. Carter shares that Carlos notes reading a later interview with Smith in *Track and Field News* as activating his own engagement. Media coverage of the Olympic Project for Human Rights (OPHR) at a Western Black Youth Conference meeting over Thanksgiving 1967 further encouraged black political resistance to being used as pawns in the Olympics. Carter quotes Founder Henry Edwards speaking at the Conference: “It is time for the black people to stand up as men and women and refuse to be utilized as performing animals for a little extra dog food” (216). Carter reports how, for a number of reasons, including the death of Martin Luther King Jr., OPHR no longer existed by the time Smith and Carlos raced, but the Silent Protest would not likely have taken place without it. Carter uses the metaphor of passing the baton to stand for the nodes in circulating networks of ideas and images that serve as flash-points to inspire new activists. She asks us to pay particular attention to the role the circulation of texts plays in mobilizing political action. Carter’s piece stands out in the collection in its offer of an area rich with potential for further scholarship.

In “The Visa Border Labyrinths: 310 Colombian and U.S. Artists and Scholars Write Their Way Through,” Tamera Marko helps readers consider with greater importance the process of composing a visa application. Marko’s perspective on the significance of the visa-writing process is informed by her eleven years teaching “a transnational First-Year Writing class in which students in the United States and students in Colombia write U.S. visa applications together” (235). The project is called PBM “Proyecto Boston Medellín” (235). Marko explains that in this program Emerson students of writing and art students from Universidad Nacional de Colombia in Medellín collaborate across two semesters “to do the research and writing necessary for the Colombian students to come to the United States and exhibit their art” (236). Marko writes, “I believe that navigating visa labyrinths should be listed on a curriculum vitae and discussed in cover letters and job interviews” (258). She makes a compelling argument for writing teachers and students to understand the depth and complexity of the visa writing process that many of our colleagues must undergo to study and teach with us.

In their conclusion, Shannon Carter, Deborah Mutnick, Stephen Parks, and Jessica Pauszek return to the primary exigency for *Writing Democracy*: that Trump’s election “emboldened” racism and race-related violence across the nation (262). The editors articulate that it is “imperative that we forge solidarity based on anti-racist, feminist, pro-labor, internationalist principles” if we hope to build a movement to oppose the current power structure that “persists even in the face of catastrophe in placing profit above human need” (Carter et al. 262). The collection editors concur on building from a foundation of Marxist ethics, which they stress alongside of the importance of intersectionality: “[t]he political turn we advocate will not work without a deep understanding of how racism and sexism and other specific forms of oppression are both interlocking and interwoven into the history and logic of capitalism” (Carter et al. 269). As pedagogues of the political turn, they view rhetoric and composition’s work as two-pronged: first, encouraging a critical consciousness of neoliberal capitalism and second, spurring action to join activist struggles. A third bridging-prong that emerges in the interview with Angela Davis and Steven Alvarez’s piece is inspiring students’ imaginative faculties to compose visions of alternative futures. The editors end by reminding us of “Davis’s invocation ‘to act as if it were possible’ and Welch’s description of a “Marxist moral compass” toward envisioning a society designed to “meet human need rather than reap private profits” (Carter et al. 271). The editors leave readers then with a hanging question that serves as its own generative entry point for pedagogues whose sense of purpose aligns with the authors in this collection: What *are* human needs? If the answer is not taken as manifest, this question could spur a powerful prelude to the kind of critical investigation which many of these authors encourage us to lead in our classrooms. In answering this question with our guidance and through consideration of additional resources, students can generate and perhaps debated their own lists of human needs, informed by each individual’s distinct perspective and illustrating the places where perspectives overlap. We can then begin critique from a classroom-generated and openly discussed point of view in which everyone feels represented. In 2020, the U.S. is in dire need of the critical con-

sciousness and activist intervention for which the authors in this collection call. The urgency for teaching toward a reclamation of democracy has not in our lifetimes been greater. The chapters in this collection provide reality checks, an ethical foundation, inspiration, and practical routes to action that can help us each be brave in taking our own political turn.