

Elaine Richardson Interview

I (Shelby): Yes its nice to meet you. I feel like maybe we could introduce ourselves first and then maybe you can tell us a little bit about yourself and then obviously get into the interview questions, but--So my name is Shelby Henderson. I am a second year MA in the Rhetoric and Composition Program. I don't know if there is anything else you need to know. I have some research interests right now its kind of the history of writing. Its changed a lot over being in my MA. But that's kind of where I am landing right now. So we're really excited for you to be here and I am excited to hear about you. So yeah, Keelan to you want to introduce yourself?

I (Keelan): Sure, I am Keelan Hawkins. I am a first year PhD student here at FSU in the Rhetoric and Composition program. I just actually finished up my MFA from Bowling Green State.

P Ohio!

Interviewer: Yep, yep. I actually--That's why I thought it was so cool whenever I realized that you were from--Or that you're teaching at OSU it 'cause I actually toured at OSU.

P: Wow!

I: When I was applying to programs so I was just like "Oh that's so neat!"

P: So where are you from?

I: OK

P: So neither of the places that I am at or have been. But I'm really pumped for this interview especially because I am working as a research assistant for Dr. Fleckenstein right now and her new--her class that she's teaching in Spring and then a manuscript she is working on is about nineteenth century black citizen rhetoric. Like the rhetoric surrounding the fight for emancipation and so I've been like delving deep into the archives for black stories and histories and stuff. So, whenever I started--Whenever it kind of like hit me who it was that we were interviewing I was like this is perfect.

P: Wow! Well great.

I: Very excited! Yes.

P: Awesome! Awesome! Awesome! Yes, so I am a native of Ohio. I'm from Cleveland. Cleveland rocks. Cleveland rocks. Cleveland rocks. [chanting] And...

I (Keelan): [laughter]

P: [laughter] Let me see. Oh, okay I got my undergraduate at Cleveland State. And my master's at Cleveland State. And then I went to Michigan State and--yeah, my first job was at the University of Minnesota. I taught there for two years. You know, I was so naïve back then. I was so naïve. But it was a good--it was good for me. It was really--Minnesota was really good for me. I was like WOW are there black people in Minnesota? I'd never heard of this! [laughter] But I had a really good experience there. Taught there for two years in a college they call the general college. I guess the community college wing of the University of Minnesota for people who didn't have the right GRE or ACT or whatever. So it was like the remedial college of the University of Minnesota. But it was such a great experience for me 'cause that's like the population that I come from. And, so--'cause I was in a similar program at Cleveland State so I felt right at home teaching there and the students were wonderful. And at that time I was at the University of Minnesota they were doing a lot of push--the state was doing a lot of big push for multicultural education and diversity and inclusion in education. You know like--I guess they were mainstreaming people with disabilities. And there was a lot of people there from Cambodia and just--it was just big diversity in that college. And a lot of support from the state for--well, I guess the support kinda went up and down; had periods of going up and down. But while I was there it was going-- it was up. It was on the up. And so, they supported my research on African American language and literacy really well. I did my first Ebonics conference there and people like just--people just came out in droves to learn about Ebonics! And it was wonderful because I was able to invite--you know they funded people at the University of Minnesota. I don't know if they still do. But they let me do everything I wanted to do as a brand new assistant professor. And they were happy to have me. And I had a great experience here. Then, my friend Keith Gilyard--I'm giving ya'll a whole load. [laughter] But my friend Keith Gilyard--told me to--after about two years he was like "You know, these people from Penn State called me and they're trying to start an African American language and rhetoric emphasis in the English department. And they want to be able to recruit black students to their program. And so they're trying to recruit me! And I don't want to go!" He said, "But I recommended you!" [laughter] 'Cause at that time he was like you know the head of whatever--I think his writing department at Syracuse. He had his own thing going. And so he said "Why don't you go to Penn State and give a talk about your research?" And so, I did. And I was just, you know, I was speaking Ebonics. I was singing. I was, you know, doing my presentation. [laughter] I was like "Imma just do me!" If they like me, they like me. If they don't, erm, I don't want to go. And so, it was so funny, this gentleman came up to me--this black guy came up to me at the end of my talk and he gave me his card. He said, "Sister," he said, "that was a really interesting talk and here's my card, you know, and I hope I see you again." I was like "Well, okay, thank you so much!" And so after they hired me one day I was walking across the quad. And he said, "Sister, they hired you?" [laughter] I was like "They liked a sista up in here. They wanted somebody to do, you know--" So, from then on I figured I'm just gonna do me! And so, I was at Penn State for nine years living in state college and then, opportunity opened up for me to come back home to Ohio! So that's where I've been for the last 13 years.

I (Shelby): Very cool! Yeah, that's really interesting to hear, you know, where you've come from and what you've done and all those opportunities you got with your interests which is awesome!

(Keelan): I gotta say I was surprised to hear that you went to Michigan State because most people that I met who like live in Ohio and love Ohio wouldn't be drug into Michigan kicking and screaming. And so whenever I saw--I read that on your CV and I was like "Interesting..."

P: Well, you know what. I'm not a big sports person so a lot of stuff goes over my head with sports. I've never been to a Big 10 football game or basketball game. I'm just not a sports person. I mean, I like sports but I just, I just don't, I just haven't gone. And I should put that on my bucket list. Hopefully COVID will go away and I can experience these things that--'cause when I went, when I went to college I was you know coming out of the street life and stuff so I didn't really get into a lot of the university culture. I was trying, you know, get myself together. So, I never really got into the sports thing. Even though my parents were sports people, they went to the Cleveland Browns games and the Cavaliers. And stuff like that but--and I went to some games as a kid 'cause my mom took my brother and I had to go. And I liked it, you know, but I just never got into it. So, yeah, but I went to Michigan State because of Geneva Smitherman who is especially at that time was one of the foremost black linguists in the country. And she had this program called African American language and literacy program. And she had come to Cleveland State and given a talk and by the time I heard her talk I had read almost every article with her name on it. Every book that I could find with her name on it because it gave me academic identity. I was like "Oh, wow, you mean to tell me I'm not stupid, I'm not dumb, my community's not ignorant?" You know, she was saying things about black language that I had never heard before and so I was like "Ooh, I love this"--I just, just devoured everything I could read, you know? And so, anyway, yeah. So, I wound up getting to work with her at Michigan State, so. I'd do it all over again if I could." [laughter] It was great.

I (Shelby): That's awesome. Yeah that's cool to hear your--the people that kinda have influenced you. That's awesome. Well, that's kind of leading us into some of the questions we have, so maybe I'll start off with the first one. So, the first question is "How did you get into rhetoric and composition studies?" And that's it, sorry. It ended there. [laughter]

P: [laughter] Ok, I got in because I didn't know how to write. I didn't know how to write academic writing. When I went back to Cleveland State--you know, they were--there was no culturally relevant pedagogy. [laughter] There was no--I mean there was the Student's Right to Their Own Language, but the professors I had--they were just like slashers. You know circlers and slashers with red ink. And, so I was like really desperate to not fail by the time I went back to school the second time 'cause I got kicked out the first time 'cause I wasn't ready. And, but by the second time that I went back to Cleveland State I was desperate to be there. And I knew I

didn't want to go back to where I came from in the street life. And I was going to every tutoring opportunity, every--every opportunity for help and, you know, be able to get something better than a "D." 'Cause they were giving me "D's" and C-minuses like they were going out of style. And I finally got this tutor who said "You know what? You're smart. She was just like you just don't know like the academic conventions and you have a voice and they're cutting out your voice too with some of the stuff they're telling you to do." 'Cause I would take her these papers that were all marked up and stuff. And, she was like this middle-class black girl who had gone to private school and, you know, had the academic training and what not that I didn't have. But anyway, she was like a cheerleader for me, you know, she would say "Get in there champ and-- No! Keep that! Don't let them tell you to get rid of that! You got a good thought." You know she was like really coaching me and making me feel like I could do it and--so I just kept running into people like her, thank God, that kept encouraging me. And eventually I went from like D's to C's to B's to A's. And--but on my way I remember this one professor--is the one who told me about Geneva Smitherman. And he said "You know what it is? Is that you speak Black dialect and you write Black dialect." And I was like "Is that what you call it? 'Cause nobody ever, you know, told us the name of it except that's what the wineheads speaking. You gonna be ignorant and you not gonna be anything. And that's what our teachers told us even they spoke the same thing. But anyway, when I read Geneva Simtherman's book its kinds--that's how I started gettin' into making all of my papers and all of my work geared toward African American literacy, African American oral traditions, African American writing, or African American writers, African American rhetoric, and that just became my major 'cause it was something I was passionate about. 'Cause I didn't have a major. I was just goin' to school. And then that gave me a major. I didn't realize I could major in English and I was getting good at English, you know? And, that's how I kinda got into it. I became a tutor in the writing center and I found out that there were a whole lot fo Puerto Ricans and different Asians and Black people who were have the same kind of experiences that I had with their writing getting, you know, crossed up. And some people just want to get by, you know, I--you know, ok cross it up and teach me--and I was like that too! You know, if you can help me get something higher than D, you know, help me out. Whether they crossed my voice out or not until I got that one tutor who said "Nope don't let them cross your voice out. You need your voice. You need you mind. You need your perspective." And, yeah, so I really enjoyed being a tutor and learning about, you know, things I was being introduced to in composition theory, you know, Student's Right to Their Own Language. Just--oh God, Tom Fox was a big influence in my theoretical growth and understanding about advocating for--they--I don't think-- were they calling it culturally relevant? I don't think they were calling it culturally relevant pedagogy. But they--he was calling it something that attracted me to it and understanding issues of language diversity in composition and people having agency and authenticity and yeah so I--that's how I got into rhetoric. [laughter]

I (Keelan): So sorry I'm gonna interject for just a second. I knew Geneva Smitherman sounded familiar and I finally looked it up. *Talkin' and Testifyin'*; had that already come out by the time that you went and stud--

P: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. 'Cause that book came out in I think '77--'77. I was in high school when that came out and--

I (Keelan): I was just fangirling.

P: Say that again.

I: I said I was just fangirling over here. I was like "Oh my god."

P: Yeah! I know. I know.

I: I didn't know that's who you were working with. That's so cool.

P: And this professor told me that I should read her book *Talkin' and Testifyin'* and that's what started me on my Geneva Smitherman. "Oh man. Oh man. You know. I didn't know this. I didn't know that." It was great, yeah. And then she finally came to--she came to Cleveland State by the time I was--I think I might have been a senior. I think--well maybe I was already in the master's program. I can't remember, but I know she--I talked to her at the end of her talk and she asked me if I was interested in getting a PhD. And I didn't even know what a PhD *was*. You know what I mean? Like I knew people had em' but I didn't know--you know what I mean? It wasn't something that I thought I could get or do. And, she told me to take the GRE and to stay in touch with her 'cause askin' all these really good questions about stuff that I had read in her books and her writing. And so I wound up--that's how I wound up you know hookin' up with the Michigan State--and hooking up with her after then.

I (Shelby): Very cool. Well yeah I mean I can definitely relate to that. I feel like my--I, I was a tutor in the writing center when I was in undergrad as well and that really got me into wanting to be in rhet/comp and I don't even work in the writing center anymore but I'd always go back because it's such a fun job and--and it is people that are there for you and that want you to succeed--at least you know the best type of tutor is right?

P: Right.

I (Shelby): So, yeah that's awesome to hear that. But as a follow up to that what kind of experiences or ideas prompted you to focus on your areas of interests? So, like your specific areas of interest?

P: I think it's because everything that I felt bad about myself about like that people had told me was wrong with me. When I started really gettin' an education about myself, you know, I started--and I'm still on that journey. I'm still on the *same* journey. 'Cause even right now, the book that I'm writing now, *Reading the World with Black Girls*, it's about self-literacy. You know, it's like, you have to know who you are. You have to know who you are. And you can't accept other people's definitions of who you are. You can, you know, you know--it gives you a barometer of "Well let me check out what they sayin" You know, but, I definitely think because growin' up in my neighborhood in Cleveland, everybody's parents were from down South except mine. And, my mother--well my dad was from Newport News, Virginia and my mother was a Jamaican immigrant. And, so there were words that I pronounced differently than some people in my, you know, neighborhood and people were correcting me. Like my friends would--would say "It's not it, it's ain't," you know? "What you sayin' you it?" You know people--people always correctin', you know, these language police out here. And, it's so funny because they all spoke different forms of Ebonics but--but they, you know, everybody's version is the right version and your version is always the wrong version. [laughter] But anyways, so that, you know, like people--I already had like low self esteem. And, so you know, not feeling like I was desired. Not feeling like I was beautiful. Not feeling like--well I knew I lived in the ghetto, you know. And I always felt like people looked at me and they could tell that I was from the ghetto you know like, even though my mother always told us that we were as good as anybody else people didn't treat you like that. People, you know, always got some kind of examination of you in this black body and some black bodies are more desired than others and mine wasn't that, you know, I wasn't that one. I was *it*. Even thought, you know looking back on it, I can see that I was a beautiful little black girl. [laughter] But I don't know it! And that's what I'm sayin', you know, its like you gotta be--you have to know who you are. You have to really value who you are. And, it's not helpful when you, you know like, all the media and even, you know like, in your community people are judging you based on that, that, that--my friend, oh my God, his name is escaping me right now--Cedric Burrows. Cedric Burrows has a new book out, can't think of the name of it right now. But anyway, he talks about the yard stick of whiteness and that is the yard stick that people are using to judge you, even people in your own community because white supremacy is in, you know, we internalize it. And, so, the more that I learned about like what happened to me, how I got into sex trafficking at a young age. The spiritual wounds that I had that allowing me to be vulnerable to that. but not only just my own internal spiritual wounds-- I think they're structural structures in society that if you have any weakness, any weakness, and any kind of vulnerability you are susceptible to exploi--sexual exploitation and some of the things are just because you, you know, a black person and a black women in an environment that is not conducive to black life. It's conduc--the ghetto is conducive to death, suffering, addiction, not saying that everybody there suffers those things but they definitely see it 'cause it's not--it's there for a reason. [laughter] The ghetto is there for a reason. Poverty is here for a reason. We could do something about it if we wanted to but we have chosen, you know, we're choosing the type of society that we want. But

anyway, all of those things that affected me when I got in college and when I started really thinking about all the things that happened to me. And, reading literature that spoke to my experience and--taking, you know, devouring classes that were speaking to my life. Those things really set me on a path to becomin' the kind of teacher that I wanted to be, the kind of person I want to be, the kind of woman I want to be. All those things--scholar I want to be, community advocate that I want to be. And I'm--like I said I'm still, I'm still learning. It's like a lifelong journey. Did I answer your question?

I (Shelby): Yeah, yeah. And I love how you began--you began the answer like you were talking about self literacy and I think that's so important. And you just showed like through your own story understanding yourself, especially coming into college, and like what your experiences were and what your identity is even if you don't have it figured out yet. Taking those things into consideration.

P: I still--I still don't have it all the way figured out. [laughter]

I (Shelby): Yeah, I definitely don't either and I'm realizing I may never. [laughter] But, I think that's so important especially like as we are teaching literacy in college--like we, we tend to think like "Oh, we just need to teach them how to write." But, like, actually--and like the freshman composition classroom we need to like have them think about like all of their identities. Like their gender, and their race, and their sexuality and all of these things. And, I'm taking Critical Race Theory--I'm taking that class this semester with Dr. Lathan that's making me realize that those things are important too because that influences their literacy. It's coming up against this academic literacy and they're just really confused as to why and I think like having real explicit talk--like conversation about that is important. So I like that idea of self literacy. It's really interesting.

P: You know, I was asking some colleagues yesterday about--I was writing and I kept--I kept coming up with these words that you know, you learn as you're learning academic discourse like "seminal." Oh, I had a whole bunch of em'. "Exploratory." "Groundbreaking." What were some other ones? I can't think of em' right now but they're all like colonialist-type words that we use in academic discourse, right? "Interrogation." "Examination." All of those things are ways of thinking about the world. Ways of being and interacting in the world that are not--what would I say--conducive to I guess--what's the word I'm looking for? Freedom? Maybe? Liberation? "Discovery." You know? All those words are colonialist-type discourses and they're tied to certain ways of being in the world and thinking about ideas and people and life. And, I was asking my friends yesterday "Give me some other words 'cause I keep wanting to say, you know, interrogation, you know--why am I? You know. And just so insidious." And so people were giving me all these other words that they use to not use those words becau--it's hard to unlearn white supremacy. It's very hard. And, and it's subtle 'cause you don't even really connect it to

that. But, this, those are things that, you know, your students and myself and us, we think we have to have these words because they are everywhere. They're in the things that we read that make us smart. Or that make us conversant. Or that make us critical. Or, you know, all these things that we are taught is giving us critical tools when we're freshman writers and, you know, expository writers and all those, you know, things that we've learned in the academy. And, some of those things perpetuate white supremacist thinking in us. That's one thing that keeps coming back to me as I write my book. It's like "wow," I'm thinking about--so I had this after school club for five years. This middle school black girls literacy club. And I kept watching those tapes and I said "damn." Wow, I just, I made so many mistakes with the girls. And, I was able to go back and look at myself and look at some things, you know, it's like, okay yeah you see those things that you did wrong but it's not like somebody can give you now a manual, you know, you take an inventory of all these things you've done wrong and that you're never going to them again 'cause they're in there. And it's like unlearning and just trying to be aware of ways that we perpetuate white supremacy and how do you--how do you live against it? How do you try to get free in yourself so that you can be a better, you know, person on the planet to help other people and yourself? Wow. My computer. [laughter] I didn't have my computer plugged in. Sorry about that.

I (Shelby): No problem. Cool, that's really interesting. Well I'll move on to our next question and kind of have already answered but if there's anything you want to add on. So, which scholars in the field have influenced your thinking the most?

P: Woo. Right now, I'm reading a lot of intersectional feminist work. I would say Eric Pritchard. I've learned so much from him about African American literacies. Because he had the expertise to bring in that aspect of LGBTQ and how that whole part of the black community has been suppressed in our scholarship. Especially in--I think black literacy studies, I think he's one of the "groundbreaking," see there I got again! [laughter] But foundational scholar in that way and I've learned so much from his work about--and it came, it came, it came right on time for me, anyway, because of Black Lives Matter and the work of the queer black feminists who started Black Lives Matter and the way that they are doing movement work which focuses on the most vulnerable. So, you know, one of the slogans is "It's all of us or none of us." And, so, thinking again about how white supremacy is so insidious that we in the black community also use these ways of patriarchal white supremacist thinking against each other. And, how we've been indoctrinated to erase LGBTQ life, black lives, black trans people, black disabled people, black felons, just black humanity other people that are not like you but are black and how we have anti blackness against each other. So, I was very, you know, I've learned a lot from reading Eric Pritchard's work. I like the way that April Baker-Bell in her new book on linguistic justice has just remixed and brought, you know, movement discourse into, you know, it's been there but she brought it in in a fresher way to keep us right on the pulse of what is happening in our world. And, you know, people have been doing this work a long time. Student's right for their own language, I mean, just, the old, the seventies movement it--you know, Geneva Smitherman and

other people were pushing for, you know, equal education or relevant education, liberatory education, critical education, critical linguistic education. I like, you know, how April's work is pushing us forward. Karmen Kynard--you know, I'm in black literacy and language studies so I read a lot of that work. And, you know, a lot of, you know, the movement in that work--the movement is in that work. And, so, that's been influencing my thinking a lot. But also reading outside of our field per se. I've been doing a lot of work in--reading in reproductive justice work because it focuses on bodily autonomy in a larger way than just thinking about, you know, language as though that is just something that is decontextualized or writing is something neutral. It--like, how can I have bodily autonomy in my community? In my environment? What--How can, you know, not just--my language is a part of who I am. It's a part of my history. It's a part of my culture. It's a part of my reproductive justice if we think about being anti-oppressive like all the way that I can either live or be restricted, restrained from having the fullest life and potential I can have. And, depending on who I am and where socially situated I have unique needs you know that's what intersectional feminists work is teaching me and helping me to grow out of just, you know--I mean not just, I don't wanna belittle the work in our field like when I was a graduate student and new assistant professor I was reading like mostly right in our field per se, you know rhetoric. And, I remember being assistant professor at Penn State and they talked about *the* rhetorical tradition. And, so when people say *the* rhetorical tradition you--they're thinking about Aristotle and, you know, that work. And it, and it makes you, you know like think that this is it 'cause this is what they're teaching, right? But, there's so much more and, you know, that has been kept out of the field and I think that it is continually broadening and intersecting and being cross disciplinary And, trying to learn and be in coalition with other groups who are working for liberation in our field I think is opening up my mind more and helping me to be a better critical analyst and a better community advocate and better thinker.

I (Shelby): Yeah, we talked about intersectionality in Critical Race Theory and it was a fun conversation and I think it's, it's so interesting and it just reminds that yeah the work that we do here is important but it's also intersecting with other things. Yeah, I think that's really important. And it's cool to hear you talk about it and how you think on it. So, the next question is how have your life experiences shaped your thinking?

P: Oh. [laughter] They shape it. [laughter] All the way. Right now I'm sixty years old so I'm starting to feel even more not anxious but, I wanna make sure that I'm not writing and working in a silo or in ways that, you know, when I'm dead my articles will be somewhere and they haven't been read, you know what I mean? Like I wanna make sure that the work that I do is accessible to my community. So, being you know a black middle-aged--I might be even past middle age now. I'm sixty what does that count for? Old age? [laughter] Gerontology? Elderly? Nursing home bound? I don't know what it is but I hope I'm not nursing home bound. But I really think about those things a lot now and it's like, you know, how much game do I wanna play you know with these journals? I know it's important to keep pushing, you know theory and analyses and

people need those, you know. I need reproductive justice scholarship. I need intersectional feminist scholarship. I need, you know, social justice movement, you know. All those things. Critical discourse studies. Rhetoric. I need that. But I need it--I need to be able to translate it and think about it in ways that is useful to people in the community and that is...It takes uh, like the book I'm writing right now, um, I'm really trying to write it so that the people in the community that the school, that the after-school club was in, that they can pick that book up and get something out of it, that they can take, that it, that it [sic] is worth their time to read. I remember when I was a new assistant professor and I used to tell my daughters about my life before I got clean and sober and out of the streets and out of the, you know, the sex trafficking and drug addiction and being with abusive men and almost getting killed every day. But anyway, after I got myself um, on track, and my kids were little, I used to always tell them, you know cause we still lived in the same neighborhood, um, that I turned tricks in, um so we would see women out there, and we would see people out there, and I would always tell my kids don't, you know, don't make fun of those people, or, you know don't look down on those people, cause you don't know how they got out there. And, you know they didn't really understand what I was saying when they were younger, but when my oldest daughter got, eh, to be about thirteen or fourteen you know, I would tell her stories about things that happened to me out there, and she would always say, you know I'm always sittin' there with my laptop ever since they were little, and she would always say "mom are you writin' about your life?" and I would be like "I need to, I'm gonna do it one day," and um, sometimes her friends would come over, and she would say "hey ma, can you tell us one of your hoe stories?" Oh! [laughs] And so her friends thought I was the coolest person on the planet because you know I would tell them stuff that was, that I could tell them that was, um, you know, adventurous, funny, uh, but thank god I made it out, cautionary, you know, all of that kind of stuff. But anyway, uh, my daughter encouraged me, I remember when I was an assistant professor and I wrote *African American Literacies*, which was like a revision of my dissertation, but, you know, I pushed it further into literacies, you know, because there was nothing out there on African American literacies, so I learned a lot from social literacies and critical literacies and you know, merged that with African American studies and anyway, my daughter, uh, she was so happy that I was, that I finished my book. She was like "Oh ma, I wanna read your book, I wanna read--" she's like, "you got some of your stuff in there about your life right?" I was like "A little bit," and she read like the first couple of pages and she was like "agh, this book sucks, this is horrible, I thought you were gonna write about your life, this is trash! Garbage! I thought you were gonna write about some of the stories you told about." So that's how, you know, I waited until I felt like I could, and I waited a long time, cause I waited until I was a full professor before I wrote *From PHD to PhD: How Education Saved My Life*. And, that, to me, is uh, the best thing I've ever written, even though it's not uh, you know, it should be made into a movie. Y'all hear that Lifetime people? But anyway [laughs] but anyway, um, but that book got me in front of so many different people, you know. That book got me around the country, you know, in conversations with people, it even helped me learn about sex trafficking, um, from a more critical perspective than I had when I first started writing about my

life, which was you know, I made bad choices and I had low self-esteem, it's a lot deeper than that, right, um, but anyway. I want to, you know, write uh, you know at this stage of my life in ways that I can converse with anybody, from, you know, somebody who only went to the sixth grade, some--you know, anybody who's interested in what I have to say, I want--and it's hard to write like that, it's really hard, because, you know I'm trying to actually get a trade craft now, not studies in writing and rhetoric, not, um, you know, Southern Illinois University Press and those presses that, Routledge, and not those presses, those are not the presses that people are gonna read in the community. But at the same time, um, you know, uh, you know it's hard, it's hard to when people ask you "who is your audience?" Well, I want the people from the community that I worked in to be able to read this book. Well, the publisher is like "Are they gonna be able to buy it? Who else is gonna want to read it?" You know? So, it, it, it [sic] effects how you approach, you know, what you're saying, you know, I'm trying to use my lanugage, I'm talking just like I'm talking to you right now, this is how I'm talkin' in the--I'm trying to talk in the book, I'm trying to write like I'm talking, you know what I mean? Which is something they told me is something I shouldn't do when I first started writing in undergraduate, but yeah, my thi--my life experience at this point is, uh, you know making su--trying to just, grapple with making sure that the legacy I leave is not one that's a old dusty book sittin' somewhere, old dusty article with all this fancy analysis in it that nobody, it's not gonna help my community.

I (Shelby): Yeah I--

P: That was a long answer wasn't it?

I (Shelby): [laughs]

P: I'm sorry.

I (Shelby): No, no problem. Yeah, I think that's something, you know, that's similar that we, I feel like every grad class I'm in, we're like "How do we get other people to read about this or to care about this?" Because yeah, we're privileged, being in grad school, and we get to sit around and talk about this, but how are other people going to talk about this? If we think it's important, how do we get other people to think it's important? So, yeah, I totally agree with that. Um, so,

the next question is, and this is a little bit of a lighter one, so what classes do you teach, and which are your favorite and why?

P: Which are my favorite? Hm. Well definitely my African American Language and Literacies class, I love that class. Um, I haven't gotten to teach it as much as I would like to. Um, hopefully that is a, you know, a past trend, but, um it's really um, uh, what's the word? It brings me a lot of joy to, to [sic] see people learn about African American Language, and and [sic] not just as these structural analyses of um, you know, uh, um reiterative be, or zero copula, or third person singular, you know? Not in that way, um, structural linguistics dissects the language and says you know "black dialect does this, and has these syntactical patterns and these phonological patterns," and you know, just really seeing how people understand how important identity and culture and history and, um, you know, community is important is to language. To me, that's so much more fascinating, and um, enjoyable than, you know--and, y--and, it's okay to learn, you know, structural analyses, you know. I use it. But, I wouldn't want to use that at the expense of understanding um, you know, discourse and race and culture and class and gender and identity. Like, all those parts of language that are layered and you know, about huma--humanity and how we think and communicate with each other. Um, when I get to explore that with my students--oh, explore. See, I told you these colonialist discourses, they're down in there [laughs] but anyway [laughs]. But I get to to [sic] experience studying and thinking about these things with my, my, [sic] with my students, and it helped me grow, and it helps them grow, and they come back to me, and they say "This was the bomb-ass class. Damn. You know, I wish I would have known this then." And I was like "I felt the same way" but I'm still learnin' stuff you know? So that class, I really love it. I really love teaching my Hip-Hop Literacies class. Hip-Hop Literacies keeps me, uh, informed, you know, with younger people, and um, the younger generations and how they are, um, you know, transforming and flipping some of the same issues but, um, the ways that they you know, bring their particular experience of being black at this time into the language, and you know, there's just that, the aesthetics of Hip-Hop and how it relates to other, um, prior black, um, idioms, and musics, and um, culture, uh. I think it, it's a way to keep myself current, and to help me grow, because you can get stuck. Especially when you start hitting six--fifty/sixty, you can get stuck in "well that's not how we did it" you know? And you can't get stuck if you want to be a part of, I think of, you know I'm proud of a lot of the things that the hip-hop generation and the black lives matter, I see those two as you know, being intersectionally related, because um, this this [sic] movement is is [sic] the culture, you know? And hip-hop has always been about people who been disenfranchised having a voice. And even though, you know, this commercial thing is so seductive and so hard to not be um, you know, entangled in and seduced by, you can still see I think, that struggle for liberation in, um, overwhelmingly, in hip-hop, in black lives matter, um generations, so I really love teaching that class, so. I learn from my students, you know? I'm sittin' at their feet, I I [sic] can bring them you know scholarship and you know, historical you know, tracings and things of that nature but, they are

creating you know, what hip-hop studies is. They're pushing it forward. And I learn from them and they learn from me. And it's very exciting to teach those classes. And I love when my little white folks that's in my class, you know I have my good white folks in my class [laughs] it's so funny because I always get a lot of times, uh, well I get all kinds of white people, but I love my white people who always say you know "I al--I was always the white person who hung around black people and they called me White Mary, or they called me White Mike," or whatever [laughs] you know and that's a thing we do in black language right? [laughs] But it's a term of endearment, right? So don't get--and they knew that, but it, I just, I just [sic] always--I always have a person like that, in uh, in my--one or more people like that in my Hip-Hop Literacies class and I just, I just [sic] you know, it's just it's beautiful. So yeah, I like teaching that class. Uh, I love teaching my Critical Discourse Analysis class, uh, I love teaching Critical Discourse Analysis from Interdisciplinary perspective. I, I [sic] learned it from a strictly applied linguistics perspective, but I grew from teaching that class because really Critical Discourse Analysis *is* interdisciplinary at its core. And so it's helped me to get out of some boxes, you know, and ways of doing Critical Discourse Analysis, and so I teach that class in a way where my students are finding models or kinds of Critical Discourse Analysis that *they* want to do. A lot of people, critical race theory people, you know cause I'm in the college of education, so we do a lot of, uh, Critical Race Theory stuff, I get a lot of people from Women's Gender and Sexuality Studies who, you know, uh, the different ways that they do critical discourse analysis in WGSS and uh, this last time that I taught the class there was some people in there from, oh, what was it, urban uh, not urban, Urban Studies maybe? Was it Urban Studies? But the people who plan cities, and it was, I learned from, uh, from, I had never had anybody in my class who was from that major, but every time I teach these classes, I learn from my students, because the way that I teach is like, you find the model for your particular area of interest, and then, you know I can teach them what I know and we can see what fits and what doesn't fit, and help them you know, advance their project. So, I love those classes. I've been made to teach some stuff that I didn't want to teach, and I won't talk about that right now, but those are the classes that uh, mostly that I've been teaching, uh, is African American Language and Literacies, Hip-Hop Literacies, and Critical. Those are my three, you know uh, main classes. I wish that I could teach them all the time. Cause that is, that's how you, you know, stay on top of your game is when you can teach what your research is about, when you can teach in those areas on a regular basis, you can get more work done.

I (Shelby): Oh, go ahead Keelan.

I (Keelan): Well, I just, I really like what you said about learning from your students because I tell my students that all the time, um, cause sometimes they act almost like "What do you want me to say?"

P: [Laughs]

I (Keelan): And I'm like "What do *you* want to say?" And it's--li--so I always try to encourage them to speak their mind by telling them like "Listen guys, I've learned, I learn so much from you--"

P: Mhm.

I (Keelan): "--so just like, hit me with it. Help me, keep--"

P: Yes

I (Keelan): "keep me current also."

P: Yes. Yeah, cause we're, you know, we're facilitators more than, you know, being didactic, you know, all the time. It's I like dialogism you know, that's um. That's what's happening.

I (Keelan): Mhm. Alright, um, so. For our next kind of, set of questions, a little bit more, just, I don't know, picking your brain about what you're kind of into and looking into and reading and stuff, so the first question is, um, what books are on your night stand?

P: Oh, boy! Sesh. They're right here. They right here. Um. *Race: A Condition or Process?* I need to read this, right, this just came ou--I have a chapter in here, but I want to read, so this came out

of an ARA project that one of my colleagues in Critical Race Theory Adrienne Dixon and Lauria Laxon Billings and some other folks spearheaded this project out of ARA years ago. We had this conference that they got funded for, about you know, race and education, and um, you know how these book projects are sometimes, they drag on for years, and you've forgotten that you were even a part of the project until they come back around and say "Oh now we, now we need you to revise your chapter" and da da da. But anyway, um so I just got this book the other day, and so I want to you know, read it to see what other people I--to remind myself of what other people um, wrote about race and education, is race a process or condition? Um, I have, oh, and I'm ashamed to say this. *The Lauren Hill Reader* that some of my friends, Batina Love and some other people, I just got this. I have an--a, a [sic] Venus Evan, Evans Winters, Billy Sent Coal for Waters. These, you know, I need to teach my Hip-Hop Literacies class so I can assign this book, *The Lauren Hill Reader*, my friend David um, David Green is in here, there're a lot of people in here. I need to read this book so I can get current on my hip-hop literacies. This is the stuff I want to read, you know like, I skim, I skim to get stuff, you know, but but [sic] really read, I wanna sit back [sighs] but this is the stuff that's on my night stand. Uh, I love Brittany Cooper, I've read her book more than once, um, *Eloquent Rage*, I, I [sic] taught uh Joan Morgan, she beget this, uh, twenty years of, uh, the mis-education of Lauren Hill, the last time I taught my Hip-Hop Literacies class I read that. Uh, gosh. Um, I have not--I haven't started this book, I keep leafing through it, Mickey Kindel's Hood Feminism. I wanna read this book. I keep, you know, I I [sic] kee--I I I [sic] skim but I haven't had time to just really get comfortable and you know, co--I need a sabbatical. [Laughs} I need a sabbatical so I can read the stuff that I want to read. Now, so I just did my--now I had, I *just* read this book, but I listened to the audio version. This is the mother of black Hollywood, Jennifer Lweis. Jennifer Lewis is the mother on Blackish, she plays the mother on Blackish, and Jennifer Lewis is from a place called Kenlock Missouri, which is close to Ferguson MI. Very poor, when she grew up, you know, ve--it's probably still real poor. Poor area in Missouri. Anyway, I read this book because I love Jennifer Lewis, you know I'm a performance artist as well, right? So, Jennifer Lewis is, she's a great actress. She--they call her the mother of black Hollywood because she has played, she played Tina Turner's mother in What's Love Got to Do With It, she's played the mother of--uh--she, I think she was, what was she on the Fresh Prince? But she's just been so many mother characters in in [sic] a lot of the black um, films and sitcoms and stuff like that, but I love her because, uh, she went through bipolar mental, and me being a former--I shouldn't even say a former addict, I will say an addict, even though I've been sober now for forty-three years, you still an addict because the one the one [sic] thing that I um, learned when I really started listening to the people when I went to the AA meeting, you know I would listen when I was in jail um, because I had to listen, but I still was in the back of my mind saying "I will still shoot me a bag of dope when I get outta here, I don't know what y'all are talking about I'm not an alcoholic." You know? But it [laughs] but that's a form of mental illness, addiction is a formal mental ill--it took me a long time to get that, it took me a long time to get the first step, don't take the first one, you're like, you are powerless, you are powerless in the face of alcohol and drugs and you life has become unmanageable, but anyway. I

could identify with so much of Jennifer Lewis's story. She talked about having this drive to want to be a star, and she knew it ever since she was three years old. Now I knew that I had talent when I was very young, uh, but I didn't know, you know, how important it was. I sang, I played the violin, I was always in the choir, I was always in music and stuff like that, but I didn't have the confidence and the drive that she had and she said that she had it because she had the mania of bipolarism and it helped her in a way, even though it got out of control as she grew up. But she had six other siblings and her mother was twenty-six years old with seven children and her husband left. So her mother didn't have time to, you know, be uh, Mrs. Rebekah on Sunny Brook Farm, she had seven mouths to feed, and she was the baby, so she thought "If I become a star my mother will pay attention to me." But anyway she talked about all these different things that she used to, uh, medicate her want of this attention from her mother, even though her mother was doing the best she could being a young poor black woman in Kenlock Missouri. But I could identify with a lot of that wanting that love, even though I knew my parents loved me, uh, there was just an emptiness, there was a soul--a spiritual wound in me. And then it doesn't help when you live in poverty, wh--eh--an--you know, and you know maybe if you lived in poverty and you didn't know that people were living better than you somewhere else you might feel different [laughs] you know but when you know that you livin in poverty, you know it's, it's [sic] not good. But anyway I could identify with so much of her story and just looking at how much she was able to become this great actress. Her one--I I [sic] do a one woman show based on PHD to PhD, she's done many many [sic] one woman shows and she talks about how she knew that she had to keep pushing, and keep pushing. And it was part of the bipolar but it was also part of her drive for attention and her drive to be a star was tangled up in the bipolar, and just to read her story and think about how she had to go to therapy for seventeen years, um, she had sexual addictions, she had othe--she wasn't a drug addict like me, she didn't become an alcoholic or drug addict but she used sex to medicate her feeling of, you know, emptiness, even though you gettin this love while you on stage, you know, uh, but anyway. That's, that book right there man, I listened to the audio version and I listened to it over and over again because it was so inspirational to me, her being an actress, and her being a well school--I mean, she studied all these people. Betty Davis, Tallulah Bankhead, um, what's my, what's my [sic] lady's name, Bette Midler. Um, you know, all these different actresses and actors that she studied, she really knows her craft. And it really just encouraged me to uh, and inspired me to you know just keep pushing for things that make me who I am that make myself a better me and to, uh, you know her story of getting therapy if you need it, getting on medication if you need it, it's just, it's inspirational, I I [sic] I would recommend that book to you, just to, so--it's entertaining cause if you listen to the audio version it's *her* and it's like she's acting almost, reading the book. It made me say "Damn I should do *PHD to Ph.D* over again as an audio version so you can hear that one woman show read in the book" you know [laughs].

I (Keelan): That's so--wow, that's a lot that we were just given. I wrote down all of those titles because I currently have five Audible credits and so I know how I'm going to use them. I was also pumped to hear you mention--oh, and before I forget, congratulations on the thirty years, that's fantastic. Um--

P: Yeah, yeah [sic] thank you.

I (Keelan): And uh, yeah, hard fought I'm sure, um.

P: Yeah.

I (Keelan): I was pumped to hear you mention *Eloquent Rage* because I listened to that over the summer. I listened to like, *Eloquent Rage* and then I listened to *White Fragility*, and then--

P: I read that too--

I (Keelan): I was like "I'm going to go back to *Eloquent Rage*" because it was so good.

P: I know.

I (Keelan): And that's awesome. Um--

P: Yeah I read *White Fragility* too, I should say that, I have read that.

I (Keelan): Yeah, it's uh, very fun to kind of, get that idea of you know, how to passionately approach your--or, in my, uh, you know, my case, my peers, and be like "Um, maybe don't do that?" It's--yeah, that was cool. And I feel like, I really feel like you've kind of answered our next question too, because I feel a very strong overlap in your reading you know, it seems like you really enjoy your work so much that the the [sic] work that you, or that, um, the texts that you read for pleasure or leisure time are also the ones that you seem to bring into your work. Which I really admire--

P: Yeah, that's the only way I get to read [laughs]

I (Keelan): Same, same, that's why I'm just like determined to study exactly what I want to do, cause I'm like "listen, I'm already devoting my life to this--

P: Yeah.

I (Keelan): "I cannot like--"

P: I know, oh God.

I (Keelan): Yeah, um, so I'm gonna skip down to, if you don't mind, um, to asking you a question that I am now, like hearing your responses to some other questions, really really [sic] curious about how you're going to answer with, um, you know, what do you think the most important question is for those of us who are you know, starting Rhet/Comp *now*, what do you think the most important question for us to be asking is?

P: Mm. Mmm. [Sighs] The same one I'm struggling with [laughs]. I'm not going to ask you to do nothing I wouldn't do [laughs]. Um, yeah, um, I think it's definitely about human rights and how, how [sic] we can move forward together. You know, I used to not care about--I wouldn't say I did not care about the environment but I didn't realize those interlocking, you know, ways of domination, that, you know, affect the environment, wh--you know, and, and [sic] you know it

made me, you know, since I've been reading more reproductive justice work, it ma--yo--it's, you know, it makes you think about the whole, like it was it, uh, the *Lion King*, the circle of life, it's like we're part of the Earth, you know, and we're part of each other's well-being. And we've gotta figure out how to move forward together, and care about all of it, and you know, how do we get out of this way that we're in, you know, consuming and throwing stuff away. My grand--not my granddaughter, my daughter, my middle daughter, that's the one I can keep up with how long I've been sober is because I stopped getting high when I had her. Uh, but I remember when my middle daughter learned about recycling when she was in elementary school, and she would catch me throwing a can in the garbage, and she would go dig it out, and she would start crying, like "Mom you have to stop! You have to stop throwin" you know, she really made me pay attention, you know, and my--she was the same one who one day said "Mom please don't put any more meat on my plate. You don't have to cook any meat for me." You know, she was always the one who--you know, and there's something about young people, they haven't been tainted with all the crap that we have, and we gotta get that spirit of, um, you know, what is it? Altruism, is it altruism? I don't know, but just, you know, not having all these shackles in our brain about where we belong and what belongs to who and who has control of this and who, who [sic] I get to be, or who you can't be, you know? All these things, ways of being in the world that we have internalized and learned, um, how we can move forward together. That's, to me, it's so important, and it's been--I mean other people have been thinking about it for centuries, I'm late, I'm late [sic] to the game, you know, like the way that it all works together, and we gotta figure it out, we gotta figure it out [sic] because if we don't, it's just gon keep getting worse, it's gonna keep getting worse. To me, like, that's the biggie, you know

I (Keelan): I agree

P: In some way--in some ways I feel like, you know, I was so glad when I saw all the young white people and all the young people of different diverse groups out there, you know, this past summer in Columbus, uh, to see the protests and to see just all kinds of people coming together around black life, and Black Lives Matter, and uh--you know, we we [sic] more of that, we need more education and consciousness about how to stop killing the earth, how to stop killing each other, and there's so many ways that I, you know, I feel so helpless sometimes, you know, um. And I, and I [sic] hi--and I catch myself like I said, I catch myself saying white supremacist thinking white supremacist thought so you know white people think it [laughs] [inaudible 1:14:09] that's what I tell my students. You can talk sweetheart, because I, it--it's in all of us to different degrees of it, in different ways, you know what I mean? So we gotta become more aware, and make a commitment to, you know, being humble, and not feeling we know something cause we got a little ragedy PhD, or--I don't wanna say little ragedy, but, you know

what I mean? Whatever it is we have that we were taught makes us somebody, it's really not what it's about at the end of the day, cause if you're not using it to save the earth and save people and, um... you know try to make the world that we know it can be, we have to keep feeling like we know we can make the world better.

I (Keelan): Yeah.

P: And we gotta do stuff, take whatever steps we can take to make it hap--

I (Keelan): That reminds me of uh, there's some, I can't remember who it was that first, like, um made this statement but they were talking about the idea of liberation and they were like "If you feel liberated if you feel free, then your job, because you feel free, is to turn around and liberate someone else."

P: That's right.

I (Keelan): Whatever that--

P: I love it--

I (Keelan): looks like.

P: [inaudible 1:15:26]

I (Keelan): I also really liked your, talking about how--because I feel like as a human race we've been continually perpetuating a culture of destruction, of each other, of the earth, of everything, so I really liked when you were talking about how this kind of like, um, whatever domination

you're talking about, even in our language, it's also reflected on the earth. It reminds me of one of my favorite quotes, which is uh, "Women and the earth have a lot to bear."

P: Wow.

I (Keelan): Which I think is really cool. Um, that's awesome, I really enjoyed that answer. Um, and I guess, I don't know, very relatedly, um... the next question that we kind of have is, really just, where do you see the field of rhetoric and composition as a whole going?

P: Hm... Where do I see it going? [Laughs] I do--I'm stumped, I don't know. I just hope that we can be at the forefront of, you know, the question that you just asked, like what we should be, you know... um, wh-what's im--this is like right in our lap, you know, this is, this, what we are going through, the pandemics, and all of that, it's right in our lap. And I think, um, you know, making... you know, w--it's not an ivory tower thing, you know, it's not an ivory tower thing. We gotta be on the ground, you know, we have to be using, like you said, all this, the stuff that we have the leisure and we've been privileged to read and learn and grow with each other, we gotta keep s--replicating that, and making it translate into action on the ground.

I (Keelan): Yeah, we need to handle our knowledge with grace. I, I [sic] like uh approaching the idea of scholarship as, um, an act of grace and servitude. Whatever it is you're privileged enough to get--

P: Yep

I (Keelan): It's then your job to--

P: Yeah--

I (Keelan): to turn that back on people who maybe don't have that opportunity, so I think that's...

P: You're so right, you're so right [sic].

I (Keelan): Awesome.

P: Now I see a guitar back there. Do you play it?

I (Keelan): [Laughs] Yes ma'am. Badly

P: Ooh.

I (Keelan): Badly, badly [sic] but yes [laughs].

P: [Laughs]

I (Keelan): Yeah, my roommate is uh, helping me be better. He has a very musical ear, so, he and I play.

P: That's awesome.

I (Keelan): Yeah. So, um, this has been the coolest interview ever, if I may say so myself. Um. Our last question is really just like, is there anything else you would like to mention or share or bring up today, anything that we missed, that we didn't address?

P: Mm... No, I think we said what the spirit lead us to say. Um, I just want to tell you how important it is to me that you wanted to interview me, and I really appreciated the hard questions that you asked, and the, uh, I feel really good vibrations from both of you, and I really appreciate it.

I (Keelan): Awesome. I'm so, so [sic] pumped for your talk later, cause I have like, more questions for then--like you haven't even given your talk--

P: And they'll probably help my thinking too, cause it's a fresh talk. [Laughs]

I (Keelan): Oh, nice. Nice, awesome. Um. I unfortunately am going to have to jump off. Technically my Research Methods class has already started, but it's been so lovely to talk to you--

P: Thank you

I (Keelan): --and interview you, and I'm so looking forward to the talk later, and I have also been spamming all of my friends, I'm like "Everybody has to come to this, she's great."

P: [Laughs]

I (Keelan): So, have a--

P: Thank you so much.

I (Keelan): have a wonderful rest of your day, and I will see you later.

P: Okay.

I (Shelby): Yes, thank you so much, I really--

P: Thank you.

I (Shelby): --enjoyed it as well. Um, I think just hearing your passion about it has renewed my passion about Rhet/Comp but not only that, it makes me think that like, you know, Rhet/Comp, we can go beyond it, right? Um, cause I think that's a big, a big [sic] sometimes just a big philosophical thing in my mind, like, can we--do we have something more important for our students and for us to be thinking about? Um, and it just makes me think about like, cause one--a big thing that I want to bring into my teaching is obviously, um, anti-racist pedagogy, but even like talking about the environment and other things like that, we don't realize how big of a world we have, especially as TA's who are teaching first year composition, this is their first ever college class. So.

P: Mhm.

I (Shelby): Yeah, it's been really refreshing to hear we have more than just, to talk about Rhet/Comp we have other things to talk about too. Rhet/Comp is really important too, but--

P: Yeah.

I (Shelby): Um.

P: Yeah.

I (Shelby): Yeah. So thank you so much.

P: You're welcome, thank you so much.

I (Shelby): Yeah, and I'm excited for your talk today. So I'll see you then [laughs].

P: Okay, see you Shelby. Thanks.

I (Shelby): Bye.

P: Bye bye.