

**"CUNY will be Free: Movement Composition, Literatures, and Pedagogies  
at the City College of New York, 1960-1980"**

Building upon years of research, presentations, publications, and social movement work in CUNY and New York City, my dissertation project explores how City College of New York students, faculty, and neighborhood residents enacted “Third World Studies,” “basic writing” composition, and Open Admissions through radical pedagogies, journalism, and literatures from 1960 to 1980. I primarily focus on the writings and experiences of City College teachers Toni Cade Bambara, David Henderson, June Jordan, Audre Lorde, Adrienne Rich, and Mina Shaughnessy; as well as students Francee Covington, Guillermo Morales, Louis Reyes Rivera, Assata Shakur, and Sekou Sundiata. Reading across various print archives – mass-market literary anthologies, government commissions on urban and campus “disorders,” student newspapers, personal testimonies, poetry, fiction, and political pamphlets – the project measures the symbiotic transformations of community education and social justice efforts between City College, Harlem, and the entire city that became a freedom school during this period. While similar freedom school traditions in the U.S. south and Latin America are better known, this history at City College remains an understudied experiment in liberatory praxis led by people of color in an urban U.S. northeast context, one which would develop far-reaching implications for educational policies and social struggles nationwide. Access to the Schlesinger Library’s Paper Collections of June Jordan and Adrienne Rich will be indispensable to this project’s success.

These two decades under review bookend the last major apex of U.S. social and educational movements. In a highlight of CUNY and Harlem history, these City College student/faculty/neighborhood collaborations catalyzed an April 1969 campus strike and creation of Harlem University, which confronted the college’s entrenched inequalities, and forged a more vibrant relationship with New York City for decades to come. More widely, this period is

punctuated by the 1960 wave of student desegregation sit-ins, the 1965 formation of SEEK, the 1968 Columbia University and Ocean Hill-Brownsville community control struggles, the 1970 inauguration of Open Admissions and 1976 implementation of tuition at CUNY amidst a New York fiscal crisis, the 1979 escapes by Guillermo Morales and Assata Shakur to exile in Cuba, and the 1980 election of Ronald Reagan and simultaneous closure of several radical left U.S. organizations. This periodization amplifies how CUNY's 1960s-1970's desegregation, neoliberal restructuring, and racialized attack on Open Admissions presciently define the battle lines of higher education that persist today, while also chronicling the rise and repression of a city-wide justice movement.

A review across various archives illustrates how diverse constituencies reinforced discriminatory higher education walls or eroded them to create classrooms that spanned an entire city (the records of which have now been mostly reabsorbed back into academic walls). My main research sources are the archival centers and libraries at the Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños at Hunter College, the Cohen Library at the City College of New York, the Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Columbia University, Interference Archive, the Schlesinger Library at the Radcliffe Institute at Harvard University, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, the Sophia Smith Collection at Smith College, the Spelman College Archives, and the Tamiment Library at New York University.

With attention to individual narratives inside a larger epoch of tumult, one major component of my research is to re-appraise how City College educators and students' anthologies, essays, fiction, journalism, memoirs, poetry, and teaching archives contain a nuanced record of people undergoing a collective metamorphosis both inside and outside of an academic institution. For example, I recover the role of June Jordan as a strategic educator of

“Black Studies as Life Studies” – who (1) interacted with student activism pre-/post-1969 campus strike, (2) produced open curricula, and (3) contributed to an emerging pedagogy of composition and ethnic studies through a locally decolonial framework. I have presented on this research at the October 2015 American Studies Association Conference, and am co-coordinating the April 2016 event “Living Room: A Gathering on June Jordan’s Life and Work” at the CUNY Graduate Center. By closely reviewing the Schlesinger Library’s collections of Jordan’s books, speeches, teaching, and professional work, I can more acutely inter-trace how her pedagogies, poetics, and social justice work aligned during this period in City College and New York City. In particular, Series V, Subseries T and W, on Books 1967-2001, will offer a glimpse of how her anthological and community education practices in *Soulscript* and *The Voice of the Children* could widely circulate classroom resources and learning methods at an early stage of her teaching career. Series VI, Subseries A and B, on Addresses and Speeches, can also demonstrate how Jordan’s public orations allowed her to workshop rhetorical forms of classroom and social movement dialogues while she was in City College and Harlem. Series XV, Subseries A and B, on Professional Work, can map the intricate personal and organizational affiliations that Jordan fostered during the period of my study. Most important to my research will be access to Series XII, Subseries A, on Teaching and Academic Work, which contains records of her teaching, student papers, lesson plans, syllabi, and department memos while she was at City College.

As well, Adrienne Rich’s turbulent 1968-1975 years at City College present an immersive teaching record in Harlem, New York, while offering alternative readings of the poems and essays she wrote in this period. In 2013, I co-edited and wrote a contextual essay for the publication of Rich’s City College teaching archives, entitled, “*What We Are Part Of*”: *Adrienne Rich Teaching at CUNY, 1968-1974* (Lost & Found: A CUNY Poetics Document

Initiative), which I recently expanded for the 2016 book publication, *Jayne Cortez, Adrienne Rich, and the Feminist Superhero: Voice, Vision, Politics, and Performance in U.S.*

*Contemporary Women's Poetics* (Lexington Books), edited by Laura Hinton. In these essays, one focal point I explore is how one of Rich's most lauded poems, "Diving into the Wreck" (written in 1972), considered alongside her City College archives and her essay "Teaching Language in Open Admissions (1972)," may provide a view of her experiences in SEEK classrooms, hidden in plain sight, while Rich's writing composition methods were more widely popularized by Mina Shaughnessy in post-Open Admissions universities nationwide. By diving into Rich's archives more extensively at the Schlesinger Library, I can assess how Rich's time at City College marked a heightened radicalization that allowed her to enmesh projects for radical feminism, anti-racism, and popular education that would shape her own life and concurrent social movements during this period. By reading across much of Series IV, on Readings, Speeches, Teaching, and Workshops—and in particular the records of Rich's teaching and workshops from City College, and her speeches and readings in New York City—I can measure how Rich's ideas moved in dynamic argumentative forms through multiple venues on and off campus. I can also assess the wider implications of Rich's student/teacher/community empowerment work in the City College SEEK Program, which flowed outwards with her family's collaborations in the Elizabeth Street Cleaners School (an autonomous high school in the Upper West Side about which Rich wrote in a 1972 *New York Review of Books* article, "The Case for a Drop-Out School"), as well as in her later writings and activism on lesbian radical feminism, multi-ethnic coalitions, and international solidarity campaigns.

With this Dissertation Grant, I endeavor to uplift June Jordan and Adrienne Rich's legacies of study and emancipation. Thank you for considering an investment in this vision.