5-2013

"Anyone Can Hurt You": Elaine's Attack and Defense in Writing About Race

Irene Lietz
Carlow University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/lajm>

Recommended Citation

Lietz, Irene (2013) "'Anyone Can Hurt You': Elaine's Attack and Defense in Writing About Race," *Language Arts Journal of Michigan*: Vol. 28: Iss. 2, Article 10.
Available at: <https://doi.org/10.9707/2168-149X.1959>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Language Arts Journal of Michigan by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gvsu.edu.

THEORY

“Anyone Can Hurt You”: Elaine’s Attack and Defense in Writing About Race

IRENE LIETZ

The fear in Elaine’s eyes seemed to magnify their whites, yet there was a perpetual smile on her lips as she sat in the chair next to my desk in the privacy of my office. She clearly did not want to alienate me with her harsh words, but she seemed oblivious to the presence of an African American administrative assistant sitting just outside the door. But she felt driven to make her point; I wasn’t understanding her life experience.

She conjured pictures of the idyllic farm and small-town high school within an hour of our urban institution. She laughed deprecatingly but also lovingly about “tractor day” just before prom when the boys wore their big buckled belts, jeans, and cowboy shirts while the girls rode at their sides, parading their fathers’ farm machinery around the school parking lot and into town.

She wanted to know, what did any of this talk about racism have to do with the essays we were writing in our first-year composition class? Why couldn’t we all just get along and stop talking about race? It only made things worse between the “colored” people and the rest of us. She also told of the fear she felt on the city bus that she perceived as filled with black people who regarded her and her boyfriend with fear and suspicion as she clutched his arm.

Where does this fear come from? How does it work? What could I understand that would help students respond to this fear in a constructive manner so that they can get past their fear and learn something new—without triggering other fears or defensive reactions in the rest of the students or in me? Fear and its responses, including both attack and defense, are on the continuum of student responses to critical race pedagogy, which teachers need to recognize, understand their sources, and find ways to incorporate their constituent resistance into the learning experience. In this article, I will describe Elaine, one particularly fearful student, and the context for understanding the sources and dynamics of this fear.

The Project: How We Got to this Point

What this project involved was two sets of interviews with five college students that I first met as my students in a race-themed, first-semester writing course. Students were invited, not required, to participate in the interview portion of this research project, to which seven students responded and five actually interviewed. Given her resistance, I was surprised but pleased and curious that Elaine volunteered. The first interview was immediately after their course; the second four years later, when they were seniors. I focused on this course as the impetus because of the kind of thinking, discussion and writing it provoked. Necessarily, the critical race composition course challenged and sought to deconstruct race and class stereotypes, which, for many white students, threatens or at least upends their own racial identity in relation to “Others.” As Ratcliffe and many others have said, students often resist this pedagogy (Banning, 2006; Fine, Weis, Pruitt, & Burns, 2004; Ratcliffe, 2005; Ratcliffe, Flynn, & Wolters, 2006; Rosenberg, 2004; Trainor, 2006).

In Elaine’s case, her response was a complex mixture of desire to be seen as a good person overlaid with a strong fear that her own identity and her understanding of her family, her friends and neighbors—virtually her entire world—might not survive the prospective learning experience. From such a stance, it is no wonder she resisted. The question is, how does a teacher effectively respond? To begin to answer that, let us turn to Elaine’s interviews.

The Interviews

As Elaine spoke, I sat in horror, not wanting to close my office door for fear the venom would only get worse in a situation she might have perceived as even more safe to speak in racist ways, as happens in “backstage” homogenous racial groups (Picca & Feagin, 2007). I had hoped, in the course of over three years of college since our freshman year

"Anyone Can Hurt You": Elaine's Attack and Defense in Writing About Race

interview, she would have modulated her views, nurtured by other mind-opening courses and learning experiences. I had hoped that her first-year resistance was simply a stage. Listening to her in her senior interview, I felt alarm, confusion, and despair. I was afraid of her, of what I might have done in the class to cause this, and whether or not I could ever respond adequately to so much hate and fear.

The odd thing was, Elaine was invariably smiling, very social, always reaching out to classmates to make some kind of connection. When a difference of some sort arose, there was always the quick shrug and another smile with a friendly but dismissive comment meant to show broad tolerance, such as, "To each his own!" or "Isn't that great?" Her mother, who died when Elaine was a young teen, had provided much everyday wisdom that Elaine often invoked. At one point in the interview, she told how she interpreted her mother's teaching in forming her own racial attitudes:

Before [the class] I'd just ignore it [race] because I thought it was stupid. Because I was brought up, like I said before—my mother would tell me, you know—ah—'Whites can do the same thing as Blacks, and it doesn't matter what their color is, they all can do the same things— to you . . . Just don't be scared of someone because of their skin or their color . . . — or their — their facial features and stuff like that. Everyone can act the same . . . '

Whether or not this is what Elaine's mother actually said, Elaine interprets the message with an overlay of fear of difference. Instead of a sense of equality, her choice of words to describe her mother's racially color-blind stance conveys a victim stance for the (White) recipient because people, whether Black or White, "can all do the same things to you." In a strange color-blind twist, if everyone can act the same and Black people are dangerous, there is actually cause to fear everyone. In an interracial encounter, she does not see the potential for hands of equals joined in some shared endeavor, or even in a neutral position, but hands raised against her in racist threat.

While Elaine's mother may have intended the meaning her daughter gleaned from her words, she may also have been expressing an attitude of color-blindness (See Revilla, et al and Bonilla-Silva). Elaine may also be responding to what she thinks her mother's attitude is about "outgroups," a phenomenon other researchers have found in studying the influence of parents' racial attitudes on adolescents (Helms, 193, p. 96). So why does Elaine opt for a fearful interpretation? Some may write off her response as somewhat paranoid,

something the average teacher would tiptoe around, not to irritate the animal. But rather than take an exceptional view of Elaine's response, it seems more useful to the instructor who faces many kinds of fear in her students to consider the specific racial dynamics operating in this fear that might be fruitfully addressed in a classroom setting.

Like the experience of many White people since the early days of this nation, Elaine's racial information has been shaped by institutions—schools, church, government, media—that were "racially hierarchical, white supremacist, and undemocratic. For the most part, they remain so today" (Feagin, 2000, p. 5). For White students, college is often their first encounter with people and environments that include diversity of race, background, social class, sexual orientation, or beliefs. Thus, Elaine appears to be in the "contact" stage of racial identity development, which, in Helms's schema, occurs when Whites first realize "the actuality of Black people," (55) i.e. when they have some direct experience with actual Black people, not just hear about them from others. This stage is marked by "fearfulness and caution" (57) and use of stereotypes in which "the White person uses the Black person to teach him or her about what Black people in general are like and often uses societal stereotypes of Blacks as the standard against which the Black person is evaluated" (57).

In Elaine's case, our class discussion of stereotypes and other topics about race forced her across a White boundary she hadn't known she needed to learn to cross. While more experienced students recognized racial stereotypes as, at least, socially unacceptable and could follow their critique in a video we used in class, *Race: The Power of an Illusion*, Elaine struggled with the cognitive dissonance of having her beliefs labeled as stereotypes, perhaps for the first time. In her first interview with me, she said,

And when we started talking about stereotypes I'd see someone of a particular race and think of their stereotype and like, 'Oh, great, now I'm racist. . . ' Well, I never really thought about it before, and then, when we started to talk about it in class, I'd see someone of a particular race and go, 'Hmm, you know wonder if they're on welfare cause I know most of their race is,' or, 'Hey, I bet he's got a gun.' (Laughs.) You know, just how you're thinking that way. Well, after the stereotype —after you talk about it, you get to realize that kind of person is associated with this, and then you see them, and you go, 'Hmm, I wonder—is that person the same way?' Or . . . an African American'll get on the bus,

a big brother man, and after we talked about, you know, how the stereotype is, I think, 'Oh no.' And then, I go, 'Wait, what am I thinking about? Why has this changed me in this way before...'

What? I thought. Was she saying that our naming stereotypes made her believe in them? Did she really believe that? I kept wanting to shake that off; perhaps I misunderstood. After all, she also talked about how the course opened her, taught her more "just kind of about things—I guess—to open to a greater point of view." But in the next breath, she pulled away, as if her hand was too close to a flame: "And in a way, you almost wish you didn't want to know, cause then you wouldn't have to think about it with the stereotypes, you know," even as she reminded me repeatedly that her mother raised her to "not be scared of someone because of their skin color."

But her comments and choice of words said she was scared, in spite of her mother's admonition. Right after telling about the frightening "big brother man" on the bus, she ranted about how quickly people can 'seem' racist to someone:

Just because, of the—you know, like I said, with the race game earlier, people get sued just for saying something when they might have not have meant it in a certain way, or not. It angers me that people can flip out so easy over something so simple...

She seemed to believe that the Others cause her fear as a kind of deliberate manipulation of her on their part, "the race game," making her aware of their race and, by extension, her fear of them. In her view, when she or other White people say something they may or may not intend as racial, they risk being sued by overly sensitive people of color. This reversal of responsibility for the fear she felt when she was made aware of someone's race (simply by their difference from her) is emblematic of "anxiety or arousal [that] may be present when actual interactions with Blacks are experienced or anticipated" by Whites in the earlier mentioned "contact" stage, according to Helms (1993, p. 57). Anger about this fear seems to be the basis of White resistance to "reverse discrimination" and "political correctness."

In explaining the relationship between fear and anger about it, Banning identifies an aspect of White resistance to anti-racist argument as resentment that is cultivated by the powerful in our society to redirect the anger at injustice "laterally," (2006, p. 80) i.e., against those at the same level rather than, more effectively and appropriately, against those who construct and maintain the power differentials that actually

disadvantage those "lower" in the hierarchy. So, "the culture politic of resentment" is intended "to displace attention from a host of material changes in the U.S. that are eroding the social contract," such as the widening income gap, loss of real earning power and good-paying manufacturing jobs, the distortion of electoral voice by money politics, among other offenses. Banning argues that much of this is played out on the racial stage: "A pivotal way in which this politic has been repeatedly deployed in public discourse appears under the umbrella of identity politics" (81). Although identity politics is not just race but also class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and other identity markers, this dynamic certainly plays out in race-themed composition classes, such as the one in which Elaine and I worked together.

Banning explains that the just accusations and anger of most of the population who are not among the top-tier financially are displaced and redirected among themselves, deflected from their actual targets: the more powerful. In our course this includes the "talk-radio" verbiage about reverse discrimination, welfare, Black-on-Black crime, children having children, absentee fathers, declining morals, hip-hop, disintegration of the family, the crack epidemic, and more.

"My mother would tell me, 'Whites can do the same things as blacks, and it doesn't matter what their color is, they can all do the same things to you.'"

Banning argues that challenges to this dynamic are deemed inappropriate and not proper topics for discussion. Color-blindness actually feeds directly into this mechanism as it admonishes anyone who would challenge identity politics as racist. Thus, those who might rightly complain about their losses are silenced and their resentment smolders, as students like Elaine demonstrate.

Considering her unawareness of the prejudice inherent in her remarks, I was surprised when, at other times, Elaine spoke of imagining herself in the position of the two African American students in the class, one in each of the two first-year writing course sections studied. She worried that the African Americans might be offended, surprisingly not by the prejudice displayed by their classmates, but by the discussion of race itself. She felt it safer to talk about race in homogenous groups for fear of what she might unwittingly reveal, that she might "get scared of being around that person [of color] because they'll think I'm being racist."

Her response recalls the social fears expressed by students that Trainor interviewed in a suburban high school class that was discussing racially themed literature: they

"Anyone Can Hurt You": Elaine's Attack and Defense in Writing About Race

often don't fear *being* racist (because they know they are good people and good people aren't racist); they fear being mistaken for racist because they find it hard to express their rejection of negative emotions about life and people in ways that don't resort to lateral violence, i.e. the displaced resentment that Banning describes.

Trainor maintains that it is the "hidden curriculum" in high schools of positive thinking, individualism, and fairness that confine student fear and other emotion to a narrow

keeping her thoughts from slipping into racism against her will. For example, Elaine noticed (or admitted for the first time that she noticed) a man's dark skin as she rode on the bus with him, which, she said, made her afraid that she would be falsely accused of stereotyping him. Later in the interview, though, her fear was more elemental: "I'm actually scared of the person for their stereotypical thing," i.e. that the person really was more prone to criminality, and that, as a result of becoming more aware of stereotypes, "now I think all these

Photograph by Nomadic Lass

range of acceptable responses and does not allow students to openly examine the dissonance between lived experience of racism or classism and the curriculum intended to manage/control for appropriate feelings and/or to motivate students to positive civic and worklife contributions (2002). Like Trainor's students, Elaine felt it necessary to carefully monitor her thoughts and feelings so that she did not seem racist to others. She felt the need to be cautious in how she spoke about race, particularly around students of color, and was very frank in her description of her difficulty in

racism are going to hurt me or—you know, just things like that, and I never thought that way before, and it makes me angry." She did have some awareness of her own complicity in this thought process because she said shortly after that, "But now from the class I think about people that way, and I'm mad at myself for it."

To her credit, she was trying to reconstruct her White identity without its racist tendencies, but her repeated slides into illogical error and self-contradiction seem to reinforce her resistance to the racial critique, and she talked herself

out of change. Unable to make sense of the continued existence of racism and her own participation in it, Elaine felt she could only deny it and turn away from the opportunity for personal integration of her social identity. She could not imagine a present anti-racist identity for herself that forgave her for her past, so she had to stay the same.

Some contend that an individual (or student) cannot work to develop a positive White identity, one that places her “beyond the role of victimizer” (Tatum, 2003, p. 108) unless she first recognizes her Whiteness and the privilege that this society conveys on that color. If she could take responsibility for the privilege she enjoys, unconsciously or not, she could distance herself from the historical injuries of slavery, Jim Crow, Native American genocide, and other outcomes of racism.

Without that awareness and acknowledgement, she is trapped in the role of victimizer, which is understandably unpleasant and uncomfortable. As mentioned before, Elaine was brought up not to “see” race and found the topic of the course tiresome, as reflected in her sympathy for her friend’s ‘fatigue’:

My friend at Penn State, he gets tired of it too because they—they talked about—um—uh—Asians a lot. And now every time he sees an Asian, and them talking in a different language he gets all ticked off and moves away from whoever it [inaudible]. Simply because he’s tired of the racial—you know—bull—that’s how he calls it. (Laughs)...

Elaine also admitted her own disillusionment, “I got tired of the race stuff, but then I got used to it.” Ratcliffe identifies this attitude of fatigue with the topic and unwillingness to challenge the current thinking as “dismissal,” and “indifferent compliance,” forms of resistance (2005, p. 138).

Eventually in the interviews, Elaine’s resistance became angry, not at me but at the necessity to deal with racism, which she laterally displaced, as Banning says, on those who created the necessity: people of color. At one point, forgetting her own essays that she passionately wrote on injustice against Native Americans, Elaine launched into a diatribe against immigrants, along with African Americans (my question in italics):

And then, a lot of people that I know get upset that certain racial identities get more privileges than—than American Whites do when we’re the ones who live here—and things like that. *Against immigrants?* Yeah, immigrants, and... stuff like that. And then people who play—who play the racial game,

you know? ... [P]eople who don’t choose to go on with their life or do more with it just because of their race or color. Like how we did the African American, um, thing, where there’s more who are on welfare, more who don’t have whole families and stuff like that. And a lot of people blame that’s because of their race, when it’s not, it’s their own decision. And then it turns into an equal opportunity [inaudible] playing the race game. And then someone could say something, and then all of a sudden someone’s freaking mad at you, telling you you’re racist, and you weren’t doing anything of that sort.

Elaine was clearly angry and resentful of others who threaten her privilege as a White person and resisted acknowledgement of others’ rights and her own complicity in denying them their rights. Although I earlier identified Elaine as being in the “contact stage” of racial identity development, the kind of resistance displayed in the above quote is a White supremacist stance, a marker of another stage that Helms describes, the “reintegration stage,” in which

...[T]he person consciously acknowledges a White identity. In the absence of contradictory experiences, to be White in America is to believe that one is superior

to people of color. Consequently the Reintegration person accepts the belief in White racial superiority and Black inferiority. He or she comes to believe that institutional and cultural racism are the White person’s due because he or she has earned such privileges and preferences. Race-related negative conditions are assumed to result from Black people’s inferior social, moral, and intellectual qualities, and thus, it is not unusual to find persons in the Reintegration stage selectively attending to and/or reinterpreting information to conform to societal stereotypes of Black people. (60)

Elaine’s skewed interpretation of her mother’s admonition to accept others regardless of their color and her active resistance to critical examination of racially stereotypical beliefs evidence the emotional and intellectual struggle provoked in her by the class experience. But the particulars of Elaine’s journey belie a simple dismissal of her and other

Elaine was clearly angry and resentful of others who threaten her privilege as a White person and resisted acknowledgement of others’ rights and her own complicity in denying them their rights.

"Anyone Can Hurt You": Elaine's Attack and Defense in Writing About Race

students like her as confirmed, irredeemable racists. She *wanted* to be liked—by *everyone*, including people who are purple, green, or whatever color, as she was so fond of describing her openness to others. And whether it was a desire to please and be pleasing to others that kept her engaged with me and the class, in spite of its threats to her identity, or something else, she worked hard to understand the course and its content, even as she resisted it.

For example, though constrained by her previous (in) experience, Elaine was aware that the race-themed college composition class invited some new thinking and skills development. In the first interview, Elaine took pains to assure me that she had learned things about writing and was proud of her new ability to consider a hot-button topic beyond a surface reaction:

That was basically—it was just delving deeper. You think of one thing, and then you have to—like you want to go on this—on this big, general basis, and then you have to break it down and go into smaller parts because race is a huge issue, and—you have to think about what you really want to get across, and sometimes that's quite difficult . . . Because it's such a huge topic . . . And because it's hotly debated . . .

But awareness is not acceptance. Elaine didn't see the point of doing any border crossing. Elaine felt that talking about race is only important to members of minority groups, and has no particular interest to White people:

Maybe someone of a minority might think—might be grateful of it for the other people in the classroom—to show them, you know, what kind of problems their racial identity has. But for me in particular, or for other classmates—you know, most people in our class um, I don't know if it would have—if it affected us in that kind of way, I guess. But I could see if you're, you know, Asian, or African American, and stuff, and you feel deeply about that, that yes, you would likely—you would likely just affect it, and show the other people in the class who weren't minorities.

To Elaine, the class was about demonstrating the difficulties of being non-White, but, in resistance, she makes a rhetorical move and dismisses race as topic relevant to a White person. Other White students who were less resistant to seeing and talking about race found ways to use compassion, a desire for intercultural competence, or a sense of responsibility for social justice as inroads to talking about race. But Elaine could not. She also found the small size of the

class (18) and the *de jure* segregation (only one African American student in the class who was sometimes absent) comforting, again naming the fear of being seen as a racist:

It would have been harder to talk about it that well . . . simply because you do not want to be seen as racist—at least I know I don't. And if you talk about—like when you start talking about the stereotypes and stuff, like I said, with some people who play the race game, or just get upset about stuff concerning their race, someone might have flipped out there in class, and no one would want to—might have not have wanted to say anything again in front of everybody . . . And I guess that goes with the whole—you know, new group with people of your own race, but it's merely just cause you're scared of what the other race is going to do if you say something wrong that might offend them.

While Elaine's concern for her classmate of color was laudable and showed some awareness of others' positions, she failed to see the causal link between White privilege and the learned awkwardness in discussions about race. She also blamed others for her fear of them and her discomfort at their oppressed status, not seeing her own complicity in reproducing such oppression. She liked an all-White group to avoid guilt, embarrassment, and possible challenge. Again, she was in a different place than the other students in relation to the class and the subject of race, which makes it all the more curious and perhaps hopeful that she volunteered for this study at all. The fact is, she did volunteer, even as she resisted, and as such, she is a living, breathing embodiment of the complexity of student learning and the real challenges of, to use Helen Fox's term, "unteaching racism" (2004 5).

Teaching and Research Implications

The interview with Elaine raises many pedagogical and research concerns for me. Her interviews haunt me because they embody my own insecurities about teaching critical pedagogy, about the accusation that I am bringing my personal ideology inappropriately into the classroom (Hairston, 1992). But I also believe, as Hallstein and others claim, that all teachers bring politics into the classroom by virtue of their own standpoint (Hallstein, 2000). As Hekman summarizes Foucault, "... all visions are 'partial and perverse' in the sense that all knowledge is necessarily from some perspective; we must speak from somewhere and that somewhere is constitutive of our knowledge" (1997, p. 345). In other words,

cultural politics are inherent in the subject matter that all teachers teach, particularly writing. Berlin and Vivion put this eloquently: “[D]iscursive practices are never the mere reflection of economic categories; they are always negotiated in power and politics, and power and politics are always negotiated in discursive practices” (1992, p. ix). Thus Elaine could not help but respond in some way when the issue arose in her writing class because she brought with her all her own political, racial baggage, as we all do, to the task.

Yet, despite her pain and struggle, at no time did she appear to bear any animosity towards me for having structured the class in a way that was obviously very distressing to her. It is this loyalty or perseverance or even perhaps courage that compels me to think and rethink the effects of and best practices in anti-racist pedagogy. I owe that to her and to all the students like her who come through my door.

At the same time, I question my own reasons for continuing to employ anti-racist pedagogy. What if it doesn’t make a difference or worse, does more harm than good with students like Elaine or others in the course who watch her, listen to her and witness my sometimes inadequate response to her? What does it say to the African American students that I tried to encourage her to say the taboos aloud so that we could examine them, knowing that she might still not “get” it and say even more racist things?

And what did that say to the White students who were embarrassed and disgusted by her words, wanting to distance themselves from her, dissatisfied with my tolerance of her confused and fearful discussion? Or worse, wondering if maybe she was right because I let her say it in the classroom and it resonated with their previous beliefs? As mentioned before, I found it incredibly difficult to record Elaine’s interview responses without protest. I sometimes found my role as teacher/interviewer/observer to be in direct conflict with my instincts and impulses as an instructor committed to anti-racism. It is very hard to not respond to students’ muddled thinking and racist comments. Sometimes, my dismay at the depths of the prejudice Elaine and other students have revealed has somewhat incapacitated me: I become angry at what appears to be their ignorance and obstinacy. How dare they treat other human beings with such disregard? My empathy goes out the window, and I become unable to imagine what in their experience or worldview might prompt such hatred, cloaked in trite aphorisms, hearsay, and regurgitation of right-wing talk-radio.

I also become defensive of my course, the decisions I’ve made in structuring it, and of anti-racist pedagogy in

general. How dare they treat *me* that way? Such challenge to my authority as teacher seems bold and rude, at least. Their resistance becomes a personal rejection of me as a person, perhaps even me as a White person. The conventions of classroom decorum fall away in those moments and we are strangers staring across a gulf: I don’t know them and they don’t know me.

There have also been times when I’ve had to look in the mirror and question my own motives. For example, during the latest interview with Elaine, I was half aware but unwilling to take action to protect a dear friend and colleague, an African American woman who, working as the administrative assistant just outside my office door, was an unwitting, unwilling, and silent witness to the interview. Her situation bore uncomfortable similarity to that of students of color in my classes, trapped and voiceless in a racist space. My colleague later rightly questioned my role in that incident, objecting to my silence in the face of Elaine’s cutting remarks. What was my purpose? Why didn’t I confront Elaine’s racism? How was that teaching?

So, if a teacher believes the politics are already in the classroom and is committed to using cultural studies, critical race theory, and/or critical pedagogy to help students learn to negotiate appropriate, perhaps liberating discursive practices, how does she respond to the resistance of students like Elaine, especially when it spills out into hurtful language against the teacher, other students, or innocent bystanders? Are there ways to have more choices than to either suffer the pain and awkwardness of these moments or to silence the offender? And was my defense to my African American friend genuine, that I was doing research and couldn’t stop or correct what Elaine was saying without distorting the interview results? Or was it some kind of cowardice that left me speechless and passive before Elaine’s rant?

I also wonder a lot about student voice: are students wrong until they agree with me? Don’t I have an obligation to show them the flaws in their logic and the errors in their facts? But the lesson they sometimes reveal they have learned in comments on student evaluations is that there is one right way to think and that they should just be quiet until the class is over and they can escape safely with their grade (and beliefs) intact. How do we persuade and engage them in new ideas without silencing them? Do I have the strength to back down and recognize that we may have to agree to disagree, at least for now or am I chickening out, failing to hold them and myself accountable?

"Anyone Can Hurt You": Elaine's Attack and Defense in Writing About Race

It's obvious that I don't have this sorted out. I derive hope from those in the field who have begun to define some avenues of theory and research that appear to begin to address the root causes and compassionate, intelligent response to student (and teacher fear). They seem to be saying that, given understanding of the sources and dynamics of this fear, teachers can and should continue to press against the resistance they encounter from fearful students. They point to the hope and belief that teachers can formulate strategies that will 1) assure fearful students that their experience is understood, 2) help fearful students perceive alternate interpretations of their experience and/or remain open to hearing others' different experiences, and 3) allay the teachers' own defensive responses to students acting out of fear.

It is too easy to say there are no easy answers. Real people like Elaine and real teachers like me need feasible, effective strategies that may not end racism but will help us engage in this struggle together, responsibly, with compassion and fairness to everyone concerned. Acknowledging the multiple meanings in the term, we are all indeed concerned. We need to find more ways to do this work and we need to bring the concerns of all parties into this mix, not simply those who are most receptive.

References

- Banning, M. E. (2006). The politics of resentment. *JAC*, 26.1,2, 65-101.
- Berlin, J., & Vivion, M. (Eds.). (1992). *Cultural studies in the english classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton.
- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2007). Racism without 'racists'. In P. H. C. Margaret Anderson (Ed.), *Race, class & gender: An anthology* (6th ed., pp. 91-97). Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth.
- Carlson, D. (2004). Narrating the multicultural nation: Rosa parks and the white mythology of the civil rights movement. In M. Fine, L. Weis, L. P. Pruitt & A. Burns (Eds.), *Off-white: Readings on power, privilege, and resistance* (pp. 302-311). New York: Routledge.
- Feagin, J. R. (2000). *Racist america: roots, current realities, and future reparations*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Fine, M., Weis, L., Powell Pruitt, L., & Burns, A. (2004). *Off-White: Readings on power, privilege, and resistance* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Fox, H. (2004). "When race breaks out": *Conversations about race and racism in college classrooms* (Vol. 6). New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Hairston, M. (1992). Diversity, ideology, and teaching writing." In V. Villanueva (Ed.), *Cross-Talk in comp theory: A Reader* (2nd ed., pp. 697-713). Urbana, IL: NCTE.
- Hallstein, D. L., O'Brien. (2000). Where standpoint stands now: An introduction and commentary. *Women's studies in communication*, 23.1(Winter), 1-15.
- Hekman, S. (1997). Truth and method: Feminist standpoint theory revisited. *Signs: journal of women in culture & society*, 22.2, 341.
- Helms, J. (Ed.). (1993). *Black and white racial identity: theory, research, and practice*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Picca, L. H., & Feagin, J. R. (2007). *Two-faced racism: Whites in the backstage and the frontstage*. New York: Routledge.
- Ratcliffe, K. (2005). *Rhetorical listening: Identification, gender, whiteness*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Ratcliffe, K., Flynn, E., & Wolters, W. (2006, 23 March 2006). *Negotiating student resistance: identifications within U.S. and international communities*. Paper presented at the Conference on College Composition and Communication, Chicago, IL.
- Revilla, A. T., Wells, A. S., & Holme, J. J. (2004). "We didn't see color": The salience of color blindness in desegregated schools. In M. Fine, L. P. Pruitt & A. Burns (Eds.), *Off-white: Readings on power, privilege and resistance* (Second ed., pp. 284-301). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Rosenberg, P. M. (2004). Color blindness in teacher education: An optical delusion. In M. Fine, L. Weis, L. P. Pruitt & A. Burns (Eds.), *Off-White: Readings on power, privilege, and resistance* (2nd ed., pp. 257-272). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Tatum, B. D. (2003). *"Why are all the black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?" and other conversations about race*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Trainor, J. S. (2002). Teaching to transgress?: (Re)Constructing race, class and gender in school. Unpublished course syllabus. University of Pittsburgh.
- Trainor, J. S. (2006). From identity to emotion: Frameworks for understanding, and teaching against, anticritical sentiments in the classroom. *JAC*, 26.3-4, 643-655.

Irene Lietz is Professor Emerita, English, at Carlow University, Pittsburgh, PA. where she regularly taught first-year composition and professional writing courses. Her special teaching and research interests are racism and privilege, as well as service learning and gender violence.