



Putting Both Fists in the Air: The Addition of Women's Voices to the Black Power Era, 1960s-70s

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by Sydney Hunt Coffin

Introduction

They were women then *My mama's generation* *Husky of voice - Stout of step* *With fists as well as Hands* *How they battered down doors* (from Alice Walker's "Women," in Norton, p.2378) Behind every woman is herself Patricia Hunt (my mom)

Many of my students' lives are led by women; for some, their leadership is personal, showing by example how to overcome challenges, how to be emotionally strong and how to be personally resourceful. For others, women's leadership stems from political activism, in how they have led the fight against injustice within our society. Many of my students, nagged by a sense that their lives are distinct from others' in some very specific ways, have only to explore the basics of history to see quite clearly that their experiences are significantly influenced by being black, and for about half of them because they are female as well. They are not the slaves that more than likely their ancestors were, but their personal condition is affected by those historical facts, and the personal is for them fundamentally political.

How can writing merge the personal and the political? My focus in this curriculum unit is on my students: young, black, and more often than not, female as well. This description does not intend to oversimplify the individual experiences of any of my past, current, or future students, but most of them are seniors when I see them, and at this moment there are more young, black women of college ready age now than at any time in the history of the world. Each is poised to enter the adult world and eager to learn the ways in which she can assume leadership of her own life and of the world in which she is becoming a citizen. In Angela Davis's words, the opportunity for young women can determine a tremendous amount. She says, "The success or failure of a revolution can almost always be gauged by the degree to which the status of women is altered in a radical, progressive direction." (Marable & Mullings, p.461) Put more personally by the poet Alice Walker in 1979:

My struggle was always against *an inner darkness: I carry within myself the only known key to my death-to unlock life, or close it shut forever.* (Walker, in Norton, p.2379)

According to Davis, this struggle is built and reinforced by "anachronistic bourgeois family structures and also the oppressive character of women's role in American society in general." (Marable & Mullings, p.461) I

believe in order to overcome the political we must look deep into the personal, and work from the inside out. As writer Toni Cade Bambara puts it: "if your house ain't in order, you ain't in order" (<http://radfag.wordpress.com/2012/04/15/getting-our-houses-in-order-learning-from-political-contradiction/>).

This unit will weave the history of the African American experience during the Black Power era into its poetic heritage through primary texts, films, and poetry in order to understand the period preceding the commercial development of hip hop, and paralleling the youth of my students' own parents. In other words, I will not attempt to teach something my students are still living, that is their own story to tell. Instead, this curriculum unit will teach what came before, in their parents' era, and through the historical thread from the 1960's to 70's, as in this haiku poem by Sonia Sanchez:

summer has sped a/ cross this philadelphia land/ scape warrior style. (Sanchez, p.84)

Just as Sanchez describes, many other black people have gazed upon the city and their own lives, looking at the war in our society in speech, poetry, and memoir, as well as activism. The 1960's-70's were a particularly turbulent time in our country's history in that many cities exploded in rioting and urban violence, and yet both the arts and activism of the time became unified. We will explore women and men's reflective work in the Black Power era. This period included the Black Arts Movement, The Black Panthers, the rise and demise of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and lead up to the current era characterized by Hip Hop.

Background Information

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, my students' home, was only one center of the African American experience. While many slaves began their lives in America here, or later escaped to the city to find life as freedmen and women, without too many gaps throughout Philadelphia's history, its large population of black Americans has had a significant national role in the freedom movement. Currently the fifth largest city in America, Philadelphia has shaped American culture, in its roots as the nation's political capital, as an industrial center after Emancipation and into the 20th century, and through the Civil Rights and Black Power eras. Along with Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, Newark, Detroit, Atlanta, Charleston, and other cities, Philadelphia established a strong and influential branch of the Black Panther Party in the 1960s-70's. Of that last period, Philadelphia's current poet laureate Sonia Sanchez wrote:

who's gonna *make all* that beautiful blk/rhetoric mean something. like i mean who's gonna take the words blk/is/beautiful and make more of it than blk/capitalism. u dig? who's gonna give our young *blk/people new heroes* (Sonia Sanchez in "blk/rhetoric," from *Generations*, p.14)

So we find ourselves in the present day looking back for heroes and heroines even as we inevitably inch forward looking for the leaders of tomorrow. A new flock of birds is ready to sing, whether in West Philadelphia where I work, or documented in the collected pages of every writer seeking to make her voice heard. Writing has been a balm to my students in Philadelphia just as it has been a cathartic vehicle for black women of the past, and they have not felt limited to poetry, autobiography, or prose. May they all find guidance from poets such as G.C. Oden in her poem "Carousel":

This is the way of grief: *spinning in the rhythm of memories that will not let you up or down, but keeps you grinding through a granite air.* (Haydn, p.181)

A course of this kind can help to inform the writing of young Americans, both male and female, and give them a sense of how black men and women, despite their oppression, have used writing to respond personally and in so doing improve the political lives of everyone.

Like the writing course it serves, this unit is comprehensive. Not only does my course meet as frequently as any other class, we accomplish all the goals expressed in the Common Core Standards for English Language Arts. A day does not go by that we do not produce some form of poetry, and yet there is plenty of time for reflection and gathering our thoughts to improve upon the work being done. We read poems as well as poetics, memoir as well as drama, and encourage visits from the vast network of connections in Philadelphia's local professional writing world. I believe in order to be a good poet, one must be a good writer in all genres, and to be a good writer one must be a good thinker. The course is a chance to get "one's house in order". More than anything, students' good writing leans towards creating meaning out of life and what we see around us, be it funny, scary, nerve-wracking, intense, demanding, heavy or light. In Maya Angelou's 1978 anthem "Still I Rise" she begins

You may write me down in history *With your bitter, twisted lies*
You may tread me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise . . . (Maya Angelou, "I'll Rise" in Norton Anthology, p.2039)

May my students rise as well: in ability to write, read, speak, think, and feel.

The most remarkable part of our experience in a writing class is that we find we are not alone. A unit of this kind can be used to create a similar community: How, out of the chaos of their times, did black Americans find words could give voice to their personal emotions, and simultaneously focus the goals of a movement on political change? Words are acts, and the actions of writers during the Black Arts Movement and the Black Power era changed the way we all live in the world today.

Demographics

University City High School is situated on 36th street in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, between Drexel University and the University of Pennsylvania. "Uni" was built forty years ago in 1971 on top of an inner city neighborhood affectionately called "The Bottom", that was demolished by eminent domain in order to build the campus that also includes Drew Elementary School (slated for closure next year). At one time Uni enrolled almost 2400 students and at another, more recent time, ranked as one of the lowest performing schools in the state on the Pennsylvania State Standard Assessments. Nonetheless, its primary neighborhood of Mantua is becoming gentrified, the catchment population has decreased in size and scope due to the closing of several middle schools, and an increase in charter school opportunities around the city has meant that enrollment now hovers around 650 students.

Most of the students at University City High School qualify for federally funded school lunch vouchers, and all receive one. While the student population is approximately 95% African American, with 5% an international mix of recent immigrants from Bangladesh, the Dominican Republic, Egypt, Haiti, Saudi Arabia and parts of

West Africa, 25% of all students are special education students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs). Of the remaining 75%, close to another 25% are students from outside the catchment area of University City, often because of individual issues within other comprehensive or discipline high schools, including "Community Education Partners" (a residential jail for students under the age of 18).

In the past three years the school has benefited significantly from a generous Department of Labor grant of about \$1.2 million per year, as well as a Federal School Improvement grant and adoption as one of (now former) Superintendent Arlene Ackerman's "Renaissance Initiative," making it the largest "Promise Academy" in the School District of Philadelphia. The Promise Academy model has meant that fifty-five of seventy-eight original staff members were reassigned to other schools and the remaining twenty-three who were rehired had had to reapply for employment within the very same school where they had worked, including the principal. All remaining positions were filled with teachers new to the school. When budget cuts occurred on the state level at the end of the first year, all new teachers were laid off and replaced with veteran teachers from around the district. Now, at the end of the second year, budget cuts at the city level have meant that twenty-six staff positions have been cut permanently, including one of the four counselors for the 650 returning students, the only music teacher, an art teacher, and more.

The larger context of so much change is Philadelphia, where in 2012 the homicide rate is close to the highest in the country for all big cities, earning the city the nickname Kiladelphia, and according to a comparison made by the *Philadelphia Daily News*, one was more likely to be the victim of gun violence in West Philadelphia than in Iraq. Ultimately, the violence on the outside can translate to incidents within the school, where fights have frequently put Uni on the city's list of "persistently dangerous" schools over the past decade. Gangs from 60th street and 38th street, historically called "The Tops" and "The Bottoms" have tussled so long there is no longer any knowledge of why, except that any kid can rattle off the recent drama as if they were reporting from a war zone for CNN.

Despite such an alarming description, I am delighted to go to work every day, in large part because of the poetry elective and the "Enrichment," or extra-curricular hour-long period which next year will follow each school day. I adore my students, and we share a lot of love. One senior, Davontay Boseman, wrote a poem last year that made the "Wall of Fame" in our classroom, and marks the wisdom many young people find in working with words:

Love is not how you forget but how you forgive
Not how you listen but how you understand
Not what you see but what you feel +
Not how you let go but how you hold on.
—Davontay Boseman, 2012

Many people say the old should step aside and make room for the future, but I believe history has shown that if you forget the past you are doomed to repeat it. Oppression, starting well before the age of my high school students, has been a historical constant, and recalling one's ancestors and forebears is an important thread in the lessons we can learn from the Black Power era. I remember seeing Black Arts leader Sonia Sanchez recite almost 100 historic names before even beginning any poetry at the Germantown Poetry Festival in 2009. Through specific black women's and men's writing during the period addressed in this unit we attempt to reconnect with the long tradition of voices by women and men of color, of content both personal and political, and for the purpose of personal and political transformation. In the words of Assata Shakur in "Women in Prison: How We Are" (1978), "While most women contend that whitey is responsible for their oppression they do not examine the cause or source of that oppression." (Marable & Mullings, p.509) We can, through the study of the historical record of this period, find ways to a kind of freedom that cannot be restrained by any

prison, whether a physical, a personal, or a political one. Just as I do not want to tyrannize my students, and instead desire to have them learn self-determination in the classroom, neither should our government at large dictate laws that prohibit the greater goal of freedom for its people. Again, Assata Shakur: "Women can never be free in a country that is not free. We can never be liberated in a country where the institutions that control our lives are oppressive." (Marable & Mullings, p.512) Here we study that oppression and seek to disarm it.

Perhaps all of our liberation lies in the strong verse of poets, the enduring stories of writers, and the loud voices of conscience. Angela Davis, in a stirring 1970 speech, announced: "Before anything else I am a black woman." (Marable & Mulling, p.460) Made by an outsider, this identification could be an aggressive characterization limiting her potential; for Davis, this was a declaration of her strength. In many of the readings we will address in this unit of study, black women have found strength from a long line of outspoken individuals with the courage to self identify for the purpose of achieving Black Power, and these leaders are the constellations who stand out against the backdrop of the American sky, they are the shooting stars in the universal course of time. Finally, liberation from oppression and the freedom that comes with Black Power may come down to, in Assata Shakur's words, an unavoidable imperative:

it is imperative to our struggle that we build a strong black women's movement. It is imperative that we, as black women, talk about the experiences that shaped us; that we assess our strengths and weaknesses and define our own history . . . Let us rebuild the culture of giving and carry on the tradition of fierce determination to move on closer to freedom. (Marable & Mullings, p.512)

Objectives

My objectives are to develop writers who know their own history, and can carry on a tradition of fierce self-determination, freeing themselves and others. They will appreciate the complexity of the Black Power era and the Black Arts Movement along with it, and see how hip-hop evolved from the movement through reading literature and film, as well as by doing various exercises to build their reading and writing skills. More specifically, my students will be creating a "choreopoem" modeled on the dynamic work of Ntozake Shange in *for colored girls who have considered suicide when the rainbow is enuf*. Each writer will be directed to examine a personal or political event from her or his own life and develop a poetic play that explores the multiple viewpoints of the characters involved.

Students will also create a biographical power point presentation of a literary or political figure based upon research gathered from reading one of the memoirs in groups during the semester. In these groups, students will choose from a host of memoirs in the classroom library or elsewhere, including Alex Haley's *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965), Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul On Ice* (1974), Assata Shakur's *Assata* (1987), Earl Anthony's *Spitting In The Wind* (1990), Elaine Brown's *A Taste of Power* (1992), David Hilliard's *This Side of Glory* (1993), Evelyn Williams's *Inadmissible Evidence* (1993), George Jackson's *Soledad Brother* (1994), Huey Newton's *Revolutionary Suicide* (reprinted 1995) and William Brent's *Long Time Gone* (1996). Additional books will include autobiographies by Angela Davis, Audre Lorde, and Kathleen Cleaver. While reading, students will be creating their power point presentations with partners, groups, or even independently, though with an emphasis on collaborative work.

While students are at work reading independently out of class, in class we will read and discuss poems by

Amiri Baraka, such as "Preface to a Twenty-Volume Suicide Note," "SOS," and "Black Art"; Sonia Sanchez's "blk/rhetoric," "to all brothers," "we a baddddd people" (1970), and "homegirls & hand grenades" (1985); as many selections as possible from *The Black Poets*, Edited by Dudley Randall.

Additionally, classes will be supplemented by readings from Marable & Mullings textual anthology *Let Nobody Turn Us Around*, including excerpts about SNCC, Black Panthers, CORE and —. According to the Common Core Standards students are expected to read and respond to non-fiction in at least 70% of their reading load; one day a week will be spent writing constructed responses to these primary sources, following my school district's mandate.

Rationale

With Pennsylvania's new Common Core Standards still in draft form it's admittedly a little difficult to attach learning to any specific words unquestioningly, but with where they stand as of my writing, these lessons meet them all directly. In particular the unit and overall course satisfy the Common Core's emphasis upon non-fiction texts, as well as the interest in text complexity. Reading and writing in balance is another key to the unit, as well as synthesizing multiple texts within a historical and thematic approach to literature.

1.2 Reading Informational Text

Students read, understand, and respond to informational text – with emphasis on comprehension, making connections among ideas and between texts with focus on textual evidence.

CC.1.2.11-12.A

Determine and analyze the relationship between two or more central ideas of a text, including the development and interaction of the central ideas; provide an objective summary of the text

CC.1.2.11-12.B

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences and conclusions based on and related to an author's implicit and explicit assumptions and beliefs.

CC.1.2.11-12.C

Analyze the interaction and development of a complex set of ideas, sequence of events, or specific individuals over the course of the text.

CC.1.2.11-12.D

Evaluate how an author's point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

CC.1.2.11-12.E

Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging.

CC.1.2.11-12.F

Evaluate how words and phrases shape meaning and tone in texts.

CC.1.2.11-12.G

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g. visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

CC.1.2.11-12.H

Analyze seminal texts based upon reasoning, premises, purposes, and arguments.

CC.1.2.11-12.I

Analyze foundational U.S. and world documents of historical, political, and literary significance for their themes, purposes, and rhetorical features.

CC.1.2.11-12.J

Acquire and use accurately general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.

CC.1.2.11-12.K

Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade level reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies and tools.

CC.1.2.11-12.L

Read and comprehend literary non-fiction and informational text on grade level, reading independently and proficiently.

1.3 Reading Literature

Students read and respond to works of literature - with emphasis on comprehension, making connections among ideas and between texts with focus on textual evidence.

CC.1.3.11-12.A

Determine and analyze the relationship between two or more themes or central ideas of a text, including the development and interaction of the themes; provide an objective summary of the text.

CC.1.3.11-12.B

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences and conclusions based on and related to an author's implicit and explicit assumptions and beliefs.

CC.1.3.11-12.C

Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama.

CC.1.3.11-12.D

Evaluate how an author's point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

CC.1.3.11-12.E

Evaluate the structure of texts including how specific sentences, paragraphs and larger portions of the texts relate to each other and the whole.

Strategies

Students participating in this unit of study will read a variety of texts, including poetry, prose and film.

Suggested Prerequisites:

include *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, an autobiography with Alex Haley; "Letter From Birmingham Jail," a letter to clergy by Martin Luther King, Jr.; and "Sing it Loud-I'm Black and I'm Proud," a song by James Brown.

Required Sources:

is a short list with which everyone participates, including listening to Nina Simone's "Mississippi Goddamn", and discussing its contrast to "We Shall Overcome" the anthem of the earlier civil rights period; reading "Poetry is not a Luxury," an essay by Audre Lorde which communicates, among other things, the philosophy "I feel, therefore I can be free"; the main source of creative reading we will do is with "for colored girls who have considered suicide when the rainbow is enuf," a choreopoem by Ntozake Shange, with which we will compare and contrast Tyler Perry's film "For Colored Girls"; in addition, for background we will view and discuss the documentary "Black Power Mixtape, 1967-75", a film by Goran Olsson and how we, as historical "outsiders" see the period visually; as well as "read" a fictional drama called "Night Catches Us", a film by Tanya Hamilton.

Independent Reading:

is necessary for raising the reading levels of students, as well as a lifelong practice I encourage in my room. Furthermore, reading meets the expectations of the School District of Philadelphia's Reading Across the Curriculum program agenda. Suggestions the students may choose from include but are not limited to *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, with Alex Haley, *Soul On Ice*, a memoir by Eldridge Cleaver, and *Soledad Brother*, a memoir by George Jackson. The core of womanist texts include *A Taste of Power*, a memoir by Elaine Brown, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography*, an autobiography by Angela Davis, *Blues Book for a Black Magic Woman*, a poetic memoir by Sonia Sanchez, *Revolutionary Petunias*, a travelogue by Alice Walker, *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings*, a memoir by Maya Angelou, and *Assata: An Autobiography*, an autobiography by Assata Shakur. A few directly autobiographical poetry books include *Nappy Edges*, a collection of poems by Ntozake Shange, *Good News About the Earth*, a collection of poetry by Lucille Clifton, and of course *Black Magic Woman*, by Sonia Sanchez.

Other Suggested Texts:

represent a selection of key works from or on the period. They provide background information and a certain amount of contrast to the female voices that are the focus of the unit. They include: chapter six of "Black Power and American Culture: Literary and Performing Arts" in *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-75* by William L. Van Deburg, and "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised" or "Whitey on the Moon," music by Gil Scott Heron. These last two songs by Gil Scott can open students to the period and its mentality: each symbolized at the time the antagonism towards mainstream white and pop cultures.

Group Discussions and Literature Circles:

are essential to creating a sense of the community of the period for this specific unit, as well as for the new community being established within my room. We generally sit in a tight circle to facilitate this sense of collaboration.

Personal Interviews:

with women in the neighborhood who lived through the period beginning with the mid-1960s. I have received a grant to use video cameras in my classroom, but interviews can be recorded in notes with a simple template if there is no technology available. These are crucial to understanding the unit's theme of "the personal is political," and should be geared towards exploring experiences with discrimination and popular culture at the time.

Written Film Critiques:

are modeled on actual film reviews from the Internet Movie Data Base, and represent real world writing skills, as well as the possibility of publishing finished critiques in the school newspaper or elsewhere, such as "Teen Voices" magazine, TheBlacktop.org, and through other opportunities in the Philadelphia area. There are bound to be opportunities for teens to publish in every major city, and there are national sites as well for those who do not find them locally.

Creative Writing:

in poetry encompasses a lot of strategies in my room, on an almost daily basis, and is therefore more of an individual process over an extended period of time than any one strategy I would promote here. That said, I recommend several books in the appendix for teaching creative writing, but most especially *Hip Hop Poetry and the Classics*, by Alan Lawrence Sitomer and Michael Cirelli and *The Poet's Companion* by Kim Addonizio and Dorianne Laux.

Timelines:

are terrific! I recommend a double timeline, with historical events in the greater society (such as Malcolm X and Martin Luther King's murders) and poetic events below (such as the dates of publication for each poem or book of poetry).

Graphic Organizers:

for describing the stakeholders during the period, as well as for communicating their relationships with each

other will help to connect the material with more visual learners. I recommend a double entry journal for the films, poems and memoirs, in which one side has an event, incident, idea or quotation, the other side a response or reaction.

Collage:

Can be a lot of fun for more visual associations with the time. Images of Angela Davis' (and others') iconic afros can be combined with photos of the black power fist, the black panther mascot, and collaged with excerpts of poems for fun and pedagogical learning.

Historical Content Information

The Black Power era of the 1960's and 70's had its inspiration in the rise of Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam, whose ideology bred many of the movement's most immediate leaders. Malcolm X's speeches are certainly the wellspring from which writer Amiri Baraka derived his motivation for the Black Arts Movement (BAM) and from which Stokely Carmichael developed a new direction for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.

In this unit, really a course of study, the largest umbrella covering each individual domain is the task of understanding the more personal writing coming out of the ideas, and most importantly the methods of the period, in all the myriad forms and styles its individual people created them.

In keeping with the theme of "the personal is political," this unit is focused upon three specific domains of interest: political and ideological writing by leading political personalities, poetic writing by multiple competing poetic personalities, and political and organizational manifestos, developed out of a group process. The period seemed to be tumultuous, even chaotic, but out of its leaders came a distinct and original fusion of voices unified by their common experience of injustice at the hands of the American government, most directly by the police. Furthermore, they were unified by their demand for justice under the anthem "Black Power!"

According to Stokely Carmichael in "What We Want", "the concept of 'black power' is not a recent or isolated phenomenon: it has grown out of the ferment of agitation and activity by different people and organizations from many black communities over the years." (Marable & Mullings, p.421) If Stokely Carmichael had the respect to credit his forebears, Cynthia Griggs Fleming in "Black Women and Black Power" is more willing to give a lot of the credit to Carmichael himself. In a seminal moment during June 1966, she relates in the book *Sisters in the Struggle* "'This is the twenty-seventh time I have been arrested. I ain't going to jail no more...What we gonna start saying now,' he cried, 'is black power'. The crowd roared back, 'BLACK POWER.'" (Collier-Thomas & Franklin, p.198) Carmichael elaborated in his own writings that it was a call for black people "to begin to define their own goals, to lead their own organizations, and to support those organizations. It is a call to reject the racist institutions and values of this society." (Toure & Hamilton, p.44)

Collaborating through their willingness to borrow from Malcolm X his belief that justice must come "by any means necessary," Elaine Brown, Eldridge and Kathleen Cleaver, Angela Davis, David Hilliard, Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, and Assata Shakur made up the tight band of most vocal leaders in the Black Panthers. On the Black Arts side of the movement, Maya Angelou (to some extent), Amiri Baraka (formerly LeRoi Jones), the elder stateswoman Gwendolyn Brooks, Lucille Clifton, Audre Lorde, June Jordan, Nikki Giovanni, Mari Evans, Sonia Sanchez, and even some poetic work by Alice Walker, among others, contributed to a renaissance of

writing during the period that continues to this day unabated. Four national organizations called the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (BPP), the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers commandeered the political scene. While maintaining separate identities, these individuals and organizations functioned by definition as a whole entity, coalescing into the Black Power Movement.

One of the challenges in writing about the Black Power era is that the movement was small enough that virtually every participant can be known, and yet large enough that a list takes up too much space. Suffice it to say, the historical background for this unit will be limited to a few specific anecdotes that make teaching high school students to write well about the experiences of a few others, as well as about their own experiences. If there is an activist component to this course of study it is in how we deal with issues of oppression and how we can learn to address them positively.

If the movement had its roots in the words of men like Stokely Carmichael and poet Amiri Baraka, it inspired many women to action as well. Women in the movement were poets as well as activists; many are remembered now more by their verse than their lives of resistance, so this unit is all about understanding the time period and context of their work in the Black Power era. In Kathleen Neal Cleaver's recollections from October 16, 1998, "someone would ask, 'What is the role of women in the Black Panther Party?' I disliked that question. I'd give a short answer: It's the same as men." (Zinn, p.477 top) Author Cynthia Griggs goes on to examine the subtleties of the question's implications for a larger vision of feminism: "The assumption held that being a part of a revolutionary movement was in conflict with what the questioner had been socialized to believe was appropriate conduct for a woman." (ibid, p.477) This concept of equal roles appears most dramatically in two poems of the period by Nikki Giovanni. One, called "The True Import of the Present Dialogue, Black vs. Negro", where she asks of the reader "*Nigger / Can you kill / Can you kill*" (Clarke, p.60) suggests that all get on the movement's side, and a second, "Woman Poem", where she says

Its [sic] having a job They won't let you work Or no work at all Castrating me
Yes, it happens to women too. (Clarke, p.54)

Both men and women are today reevaluating the actual power dynamics of the movement on a personal level. In *Sisters in the Struggle*, author Cynthia Griggs summarizes her research by saying that she "was particularly frustrated by the males refusal to respect her ideas." (Griggs, p.208) At one point a woman speaker was trying to voice her opinions at a BPP meeting and was shouted down with cries of "Castrator!" (ibid, p.208)

Based upon Kathleen Cleaver's experience, it may come as no surprise that in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, much of the gender bias against women was equally represented. Specifically, Mumia Abu Jamal, made famous by his own role during the Black Power era and afterwards, said quite frankly "No women helped found the Philadelphia branch [of the Black Panthers] and none held office." (quoted in Countryman, p.258) Author and historian Matthew J. Countryman, whose recent book *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia* indicates "in recent years, there has been a great deal of scholarly attention paid to gender practices and the role of women in the Black Power movement" articulates how "all the trends discussed in the literature on the gender politics of Black Power were evident in the Philadelphia movement." (ibid, p.258-9) Contraindicatively, it can also be said that gender politics appeared in much of the poetry of the time as well, even if in surprisingly positive ways, as evidenced by poet Amiri Baraka in "Beautiful Black Women":

Help us. women. Where are you, women, where, and who, and where, and who, and will
you help us, will you open your bodysouls, will you lift me up mother, will you let
me help you, daughter, wife/lover, will you (Randall, p.214)

There was a "fear of contributing to the oppression of the black male" by women at the time, according to Angela Davis in "I Am a Revolutionary Black Woman." "As black women," she said "we must liberate ourselves and provide the impetus for the liberation of black men from this whole network of lies around the oppression of black women, which serve only to divide us, thus impeding the advance of our entire liberation struggle" (Marable & Mullings, p.462) She continues to be a leader in the ever-evolving movement toward justice, and I will hearken back to her example as one of the main "sheroes" of the time, because she continues to write, teach, and act to this day. Without her prose and speeches as a guide, both men and women's writing stemming from this time period would not have been as informed as it was. In many ways, leaders of the black power movement comprised an intellectual group of activists, a true writers community. For instance, in a poem by Sonia Sanchez called "life poem"

Shall I die . . . A sweet/death A sweet/blk/death move in
to killing hood. for my people. for my beautiful/ blk/ people.

Much of the language of the Black Power era did not come from scholarly work, and even less so from the Christian church and preaching tradition. Its poetry and the rhetoric of its leaders often used slang, and when written down in poetry by Amiri Baraka and Sonia Sanchez in particular, used abbreviations, lack of capitals, and slang to signify its identification with the movement and the times. According to an iconic poem by Carolyn Rodgers, "Now Ain't That Love?"

me. i am a bitch. hot. . . now I know that this whole scene is not cool, but it's
real! so a-live-dig it! sometimes we be so close i can cop his pulse and think it's
my heart that i hear in my ears. Uh. Now ain't that love? (Randall, p.260)

or "badman of the guestprofessor", by Ishmael Reed

& by d way did you hear abt grammar? cut to ribbons in a photo finish by stevie
wonder, a blindboy who dances on a heel. he just came out of d slang & broke it
down before millions. it was bloody murder (Randall, 286)

Reinventing the ways we use language is nothing new to the art of poetry, or even to philosophical writing, but in this period new uses of language ran rampant, so much so that it became revolutionary.

In SNCC, Stokely Carmichael was one of these verbal, political, and revolutionary forces with which to be reckoned. His position was towards engaging all areas of society, shown through his own definition in "What We Want" (1966): "Where negroes lack a majority, black power means proper representation and sharing of control." (Marable & Mullings, p.421) If there is anything my students can learn most directly from SNCC it is in the element of open rebellion in their "Position Paper on Black Power". In it, he says "the whole myth of 'negro citizenship,' perpetuated by the white elite, has confused the thinking of radical and progressive blacks and whites in this country. The broad masses of black people react to American society as . . . that of the colonized toward the colonizer." (ibid, p.429) In fact, according to William L. Van Deburg in *New Day in Babylon*, "the movement was fueled by a psychological antidote to despair that spread a positive, empowering sense of pride throughout black America . . . and served to ease feelings of discouragement and personal failure." (Van Deburg, p.51) My own community in West Philadelphia has suffered so much despair and loss that we are in need of great healing.

In Philadelphia specifically, the need for empowerment translated into training under an organization led by Charyn Sutton and Fred Meely called the Philadelphia Freedom Organization (PFO). Sutton, a powerful Black

Nationalist organizer who began as "a high school Gandhian" (Countryman, p.210) interested in peaceful resistance, to "one believing in the necessity of revolutionary change." (ibid, p.213-14) According to Countryman, SNCC's enduring impact was upon the ability of local movements to enable power bases within the Philadelphia political process. Thanks to training by SNCC, young African Americans would later assume the very positions of power by which they had been oppressed. Since the departure of Police Chief and then Mayor Frank L. Rizzo, in my opinion a major reason for black people's anger here against the police, and an inspiration for the hostile mentality of many white and now even black policemen, women like Marian Tasco and Roxanne Jones have achieved higher offices. Rizzo is such a big topic in Philadelphia he deserves his own unit, let alone the many books featuring him as the protagonist, or in the eyes of Black Power leaders, the antagonist. During one campaign appearance of the time, Rizzo was quoted as saying "I'm going to make Attila the Hun look like a faggot!" (<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,915671,00.html>)

Artists and writers were quick to jump into the fray with the police as well. In one poem by James Emanuel called "Panther Man" he raises the call to action directly:

Hey, Mister Panther! Get up And fight that cracker-back, Back m gainst the wall Of YOUR room Where YOU sleep With YOUR dreams And take down his goddam name Take down his goddam number Give him a motel napkin To hold the blood Where YOUR bullet Grabbed m," (Randall, p.192)

Furthermore, writer Amiri Baraka, who may have been the impetus for the Black Arts Movement's name, wrote just as vehemently

We are black magicians Black arts we make In black labs of the heart . . . Poems are bullshit unless they are teeth . . .

and he goes on to write

We want poems like fists We want poems Like fists beating niggers out of Jocks Or dagger poems in the slimy bellies . . . We want a black poem. And a Black World. Let the world be a Black Poem And let All Black People Speak This Poem Silently Or Loud (Neal, p.31-2)

Baraka's demand gave James Brown the opportunity to add his famous anthemic cry to the period, "Sing it loud / I'm black and I'm proud!", which continues to be an inspirational song to this day.

While SNCC advocated separation from white support, the Black Panther Party, "a grassroots organization founded in Oakland, California, in 1966, by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, grew from the needs of local African American and poor communities." (Huggins & LeBlanc-Ernest, p.161) According to the maxims of the leaders themselves in their "Ten Point Platform", they wanted (#10) "land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace" (Marable & Mullings, p.447) among nine other equally honorable requests. Of their leaders, female standouts included the subsequently imprisoned Assata Shakur (no relation to Tupac). According to Joy James in *Framing the Panther*, "Only Assata Shakur stands alone as an iconic figure" (Gore, Theoharis & Woodard, p. 140). Every other major woman figure was associated with a male partner, among them Angela Davis (George Jackson), Elaine Brown (Huey Newton), and Kathleen Cleaver (Eldridge). While Angela Davis was acquitted of her crime, Shakur was convicted in 1973 of shooting a police officer; after escaping from prison she hides in Cuba to this day, despite elaborate efforts to have her extradited or even

kidnapped back to the US for trial (in particular by former Governor of New Jersey Christine Todd Whitman). In James's account, she is "not only a rebel but also a militarist" (James, p.145) and even an unrepentant revolutionary due to her connection with the underground Black Liberation Army (BLA). Nonetheless, she is a fascinating character, and merited an autobiography where she shares how despite interrogation and torture by the police, after having been shot, medical staff "gave me the poetry of our people, the tradition of our women, the relationship of human beings to nature and the search of human beings for freedom, for justice, for a world that isn't a brutal world." (Shakur, p. 242-3 in Gore, Theoharis, & Woodard, p.147) Shakur played a part in the imagination of woman poets during the Black Power era, and continues to be a feature of women's scholarship today. While the current era is intrigued by the charge that she was a government operative, there seems no substantive evidence to support this claim.

Many conspiracies abound surrounding the movement, even suggestions that one of the shooters at Malcolm X's assassination was an FBI agent. In "black power poem, by Ishmael Reed, he alludes to the ghosts of the past and a subtle aura of mystery around the arts of the period:

a spectre is haunting America - the spectre of hoodooism all the powes of older America have entered into a holy alli ance to exorcise this spectre . . . (Randall, p.288)

Following on Shakur, Angela Davis, another outspoken supporter of Black Power in America and throughout the world, had also been a prisoner. However, in addition to Shakur, "Angela Davis' relationship with prison theorist George Jackson . . . serves as markers promoting the image of black female militants as sexual and political associates, as beautiful consorts rather than political comrades. The American public as spectator would recognize in these personal if not political lives familiar heterosexual dramas of desire, betrayal, abandonment, and battery." (James in Gore, Theoharis, & Woodard, p. 140-1) In Angela Davis's own words, of which she had plenty of remarkable writing, she defended some women and spoke to the growing movement towards a feminist agenda. In one statement on behalf of Joanne Little (a victim of rape and a cause célèbre in the largely white women's movement as well), she expressed how "The oppression of women is a vital and integral component of a larger network of oppression . . . It is in the interest of the ruling class to cultivate the patriarchal domination of women." (Collier-Thomas & Franklin, p.274) In actuality, Davis's analysis of the Joanne Little case began with a philosophical statement that served as a foundation for the Black Power movement theory: "If justice is to prevail, there must be a struggle." (ibid., p.274) This reminds me of Frederick Douglass's famous aphorism, "There will be no progress without struggle" (paraphrased by Jonathan Holloway, in class discussion 7/2012).

The problem of male/female relationships in the Black Power movement directly concerned Angela Davis in her effort to speak for a new vision of womanhood, while at the same time, work in groups that included vulnerable male allies. "All the myths about black women surfaced", she said. "(We) were too domineering; we were trying to control everything . . . By playing such a leadership role in the organization, some of them insisted, we were aiding and abetting the enemy" (Davis in Collier-Thomas & Franklin, p.208). In her description of Davis's challenges, I can't ignore how Davis appears in personal accounts by others, as well as in video. Her hunger strike while imprisoned for murder (of which she was later acquitted) caused her to appear physically drained but remarkably committed to social justice. Her celebrity status as one of America's ten most wanted criminals, and her dramatic appearance (not the least of which her iconic natural hairdo) further helped her to promote the cause. According to Maya Angelou, who visited her in jail under the cover of being a legal advisor, asked what it was like in prison, she said plainly, "Girl, the joint is the joint" (Elliot, p.196-7). Prison is a reality all too well known in my own community of West Philadelphia, signifying the entire experience of bondage that African Americans have lived in perpetuity, as second class citizens in the United

States of America. In the words of critic and poet Larry Neal, "It is this natural reaction to an alien sensibility that informs the cultural attitudes of the Black Arts and the Black Power movement. It is a profound ethical sense that makes a Black artist question a society in which art is one thing and the actions of men another. The Black Arts Movement believes that your ethics and your aesthetics are one. That the contradictions between ethics and aesthetics in western society is symptomatic of a dying culture." (Neal, p.30-1) For Neal and others, the personal becomes the political. There is no separation: they are one and the same.

Kathleen Cleaver and Elaine Brown were yet two more activists in the struggle who as parents experienced firsthand the challenges of negotiating their personal lives during the struggle to change the world. While both have extensive stories to tell, these stories are best explored by students through the process of reading the memoirs they wrote, as with most of the historical record. Unfortunately, students will most likely find that Browne and Cleaver's experiences are of being discriminated against by men in and outside of the movement's organizations, despite their untiring service. In chapter nineteen of Howard Zinn's tome "A People's History of the United States", Cleaver relates that "When women suffered hostility, abuse, neglect, and assault-this was not something arising from the policies or structure of the Black Panther Party, something absent from the world - that's what's going on in the world." (Zinn, p.480)

Nonetheless, Cleaver and Brown have written quite eloquently about how there were opportunities for women to speak their minds. Brown, who became leader of the BPP at one point, said she thought it was important "to place the women who fought oppression as Black Panthers within the longer tradition of freedom fighters like Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Ida Wells-Barnett, who took an entirely oppressive situation and insisted that their race, their gender, and their humanity be respected at the same time." I am reminded of one small story of how eighteen year-old Ruby Doris Smith was helping other young people to "sit in" at a hospital in Atlanta that had separate entrances and services for black and white patients. Senior mover and shaker Julian Bond witnessed how when she entered the whites only area (to the shock and then anger of whites within) they were told by the white receptionist on duty that they were not welcome at that entrance and that they were "not sick anyway". The angry treatment led most students to step back and retreat, however Ruby Doris Smith walked forward to the receptionist's desk, "looked her in the eye, bent over and vomited all over the desk, straightened up and demanded to know, 'is that sick enough for you?'" (Collier-Thomas & Franklin, p.202) I believe it took a tremendous amount of courage to transform the disgust Ruby Doris Smith must have felt towards the receptionist and her racism into such a physical response; I believe young people today must transform their own emotional responses to life into direct action as well. Often young people have experienced a similar offense as she, but I also believe they will find their own unique challenges, whatever they are, and can learn from the examples of these great leaders to empower themselves to improve the world, because the personal is political. What they learn to do today will be written down and told to their descendents, just as I have told these stories to you.

I am reminded of the lyrical poem by Naomi Madgett, "Midway", as an example of how far black women, and black people in general, have come, yet also how far they have to go. It is not time to give up.

I've come this far to freedom and I won't turn back. I'm climbing to the highway from my old dirt track. I'm coming and I'm going And I'm stretching and I'm growing And I'll reap what I've been sowing or my skin's not black . . . (Randall, p.197)

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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=th2qraO0-P4&feature=endscreen&NR=1>

(3) James Brown - Say it Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=23eosgpDib0>

(4) Aretha Franklin - Think

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hsl9UL9qbv8&feature=related>

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