

Writing Democracy: A Rhetoric of (T)here



*Arthur's Bus Stop"
East Texas State
Teacher's College
Commerce, Texas
A&M-Commerce
circa 1940*

Call for Program Proposals from Shannon Carter, Deborah Mutnick, and Susan Stewart, Conference Organizers,

Increasingly, humanities scholars and educators are attending to the local, the everyday, the public, and the “ordinary.” Trends like these in rhetoric and composition suggest the field has taken what Paula Matthieu has called “the public turn” (*Tactics of Hope*, 2005) and foreground the real-world implications of and applications for our work. Such trends also illuminate tensions and stark contrasts between constructs like public and private (Welch, *Living Room*, 2008), local and global (Gold, *Rhetoric at the Margins*, 2008), here and there, us and them (Duffy, *Writing From These Roots*, 2007).

It is in this sense that local rhetoric both connects--at times *literally*--and separates us from the rest of the world. Thus, March 9-11, at Texas A&M-Commerce, we bring together scholars, researchers, historians, students, journalists, archivists, artists, and teachers to examine our various and expanding notions of (t)here [\[read more\]](http://writingdemocracy.weebly.com/cfp.html)
<<http://writingdemocracy.weebly.com/cfp.html>>

Featured Presentations

John Duffy, University of Notre Dame, “After Arizona: First Year Writing and a Rhetoric of Ethical Practice”

David Gold, University of Tennessee, “Beyond Recovery: Contemporary Challenges in Rhetoric and Composition Historiography”

Jerrold Hirsch, Truman State University (Title TBA)

David Jolliffe, University of Arkansas, “Writing Democracies: Community Arts and Community Learning as Anecdote for Co-Curricular Poverty”

Michelle Hall Kells, University of New Mexico, “Writing Democracies: What the Mexican-American Civil Rights Movement Can Teach Us About Civic Literacy in the 21st Century”

Elenore Long, Arizona State University, “The Politics of Performance: Gambian-American College Writers Flip the Script on Aid to Africa”

Nancy Welch, University of Vermont, “What We Teach When We Teach (Only) Moderation and Civility”

For speaker profiles and presentation abstracts, [go here](http://writingdemocracy.weebly.com/cfp.html) ➡
<<http://writingdemocracy.weebly.com/cfp.html>>

Conference Overview

Kick off event Wednesday, March 9, 2011, at 6:00, with opening reception and an address from one of our Featured Speakers. Thursday, March 10, 2011, conference continues with light breakfast and next featured speaker, followed by some wonderful, (interdisciplinary) concurrent sessions and alternating throughout the day and into Friday morning between Featured Speakers and concurrent sessions. Conference officially ends after lunch, but we invite participants to stick around for a planning workshop to follow Friday afternoon.

For schedule details, [go here](http://writingdemocracy.weebly.com/schedule.html) ➡
<<http://writingdemocracy.weebly.com/schedule.html>>

Workshop

We invite you to join us at the close of the conference from 2-5 p.m., Friday, March 11, for a program development workshop on next steps. The primary workshop goal is to consider the possibilities for creating a national network or

institute with both electronic and face-to-face meetings that could link existing local projects and give rise to new ones. Just as the Federal Writers Project debated its purpose, methods, and goals during the Great Depression, we anticipate that any new formation will require a great deal of deliberation and debate to define its mission. We will propose the creation of a national consortium to affiliate local projects as a concrete step toward “the cultural rediscovery of America” (Hirsch, *Portrait of America*) But it will be up to you first to determine the feasibility of a consortium and then, if there is interest, to help us flesh out the idea and begin to move forward. [\[read more\]](#)

<<http://writingdemocracy.weebly.com/workshop.html>>

Call for Submissions

Conference proceedings will be published in the Fall 2012 issue of the *Community Literacy Journal* (Volume 7, Issue 1). We invite submissions for an edited collection of scholarly essays drawn from presentations addressing the theme of the 2011 conference, Writing Democracy: A Rhetoric of (T)Here (see CFP). We seek essays that explore tensions between rhetorical constructs like public and private (Welch, *Living Room*, 2008), local and global (Gold, *Rhetoric at the Margins*, 2008), here and there, us and them (Duffy, *Writing From These Roots*, 2007). We are especially interested in drawing together projects that foreground the practical, theoretical, methodological, pedagogical, and/or historical dimensions of our work at local levels--especially with respect to the shifting dimensions of the local rhetorical landscape in an increasingly global world.

Submissions should be sent to special issue co-editors, Shannon Carter and Deborah Mutnick no later than September 15, 2011. The co-editors will respond by January 15, 2012 to all submissions, with revised versions of those essays selected for the collection to be submitted April 15, 2012. Questions and inquiries are also welcome, and should be directed to the co-editors. [\[read more\]](#)


<<http://writingdemocracy.weebly.com/call-for-submissions.html>>

Traveling Exhibits (Humanities Texas)

In addition to the conference and workshop events described above, participants will have regular access to exhibits from Humanities Texas (tentatively scheduled) that highlight aspects of the conference theme, including “Literary East Texas: An Exhibition of Photographs Honoring 25 East Texas Writers,” “Jasper, Texas: The Healing of a Community in Crisis,” and “Behold the People: R. C. Hickman’s Photographs of Black Dallas, 1949-1961,” and “Border Studies.” [\[read more\]](#) <<http://writingdemocracy.weebly.com/call-for-submissions.html>>

Conference Location


Sam Rayburn Student Center
Texas A&M University-Commerce
2200 West Neal Street
Commerce, TX 75428

For interactive map, [go here](#) 

<<http://writingdemocracy.weebly.com/travel.html>>

Housing

Holiday Inn-Express (Commerce, Texas). Conference Rates: \$85+applicable taxes for a standard room (double queen or single king). When making your reservation, ask for the FRS Group Block. Texas state employees, including teachers, should show a tax-exempt form for state tax exemption. For reservations, do not use the website or call a 1-800 number; you must call (903) 886-4777. In order to secure the group room rate, reservations must be made by February 20, 2011. For Reservations made after this date are subject to the prevailing room rate.

For additional options and other travel information, [go here](#) 

<<http://writingdemocracy.weebly.com/travel.html>>

Travel

Commerce is 50 miles NE of Dallas. To reach our campus from either airport, we recommend you rent a car or contact us at writingdemocracy@gmail.com with subject line "travel" for information about ride sharing. [\[more\]](http://writingdemocracy.weebly.com/travel.html)
<<http://writingdemocracy.weebly.com/travel.html>>

Early Registration Fees

Deadline for Early Registration: February 20

Federation* University Students (\$40)
Federation* University Faculty/Staff (\$80)
Non-Federation University Students (\$60)
Non-Federation University Faculty/Staff (\$110)
Non-Affiliated Independent Scholar (\$100)

[Register online or by mail](#). After February 20, late registration fees apply [\[more\]](#)
<<http://writingdemocracy.weebly.com/registration1.html>>

* Federation schools include University of North Texas, Texas Woman's University, and Texas A & M University-Commerce

Conference History

Writing Democracy joins the 38th Federation Rhetoric Symposium, sponsored, in part, by the Federation of North Texas Area Colleges and Universities. The Federation Rhetoric Symposium is part of an annual series, "A Symposium in Rhetoric" that has welcomed many notable speakers since the first meeting in 1973. These keynoters have included Patricia Bizzell, Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, Deborah Brandt (with Julie Lindquist and Bump Halbritter), Kathleen Blake Yancey, Sharon Crowley, Sonja Foss, Richard Enos, Cynthia Selfe, Linda Ferreira-Buckley, James Kinneavy, Hugh Burns, Kenneth Burke, Stephen Toulmin, and many others. Conference hosts alternate among Texas A&M-Commerce, Texas Woman's University, and the University of North Texas.

Program Details

We are currently compiling submissions and expect to publish a complete program online before March, 2011. Published online at conference website (<http://writingdemocracy.weebly.com>) and available on site

Contacts

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Program Inquiries	Sean Ferrier-Watson, Program Chair seanwatson08@yahoo.com
Workshop Inquiries	Dr. Deborah Mutnick, Workshop Organizer Long Island University-Brooklyn deborah.mutnick@liu.edu
Exhibitors	Sarah White, Director of Camps and Events Sarah_White@tamu-commerce.edu
Registration	Sarah White, as above
Additional Information	Dr. Susan Stewart, Conference Organizer and EGAD Faculty Advisor Texas A&M University-Commerce susan_stewart@tamu-commerce.edu Dr. Shannon Carter, Conference Organizer and Chair Texas A&M University-Commerce shannon_carter@tamu-commerce.edu

Beyond March 9-11: Goals and Vision

From Shannon Carter and Deborah Mutnick,

March 2011 we will come together to address the nature of here and there as rhetorical constructs, especially as this rhetoric of here/there, us/them identifies, connects, and changes regions like Northeast Texas: at once rural and increasingly urban (suburban), agricultural and increasingly technological, grounded in the local and shaped by the larger global factors that likewise condition local publics across the nation. Poverty is widespread, wealth increasingly concentrated; local publics such as those across North Texas are (almost simultaneously) fluid and static, homogenous and diverse, integrated and segregated, conservative and staunchly liberal (see O'Donald and Wilkison's *The Texas Left*, 2010).

According to keynote speaker Nancy Welch, when we “rhetorize social class,” we “shift our definition of [working] class from a focus on cultural identity to a focus on one’s available means for exercising decision-making power within and against privatization’s strict limits on public rights and voice, including in the workplace” (Living Room 2008). In North Texas, Sam Rayburn and the US Congressional District this congressman represented between 1913 and 1961 is a case in point. Throughout much of the 20th century, rural conditions and poverty defined North Texas. Forever loyal to the (white) farmers and small business owners who were his constituency, Rayburn was fond of saying: “I want my people out of the mud and I want my people out of the dark.” Rayburn’s advocacy for rural electrification helped bring power to the remote farms (Rural Electrification Act, 1936). His first-hand accounts of the harsh, muddy soils of the region helped justify the paving of multiple farm-to-market roads, vastly improving access and connectivity among farmers in remote areas businesses in town. As Speaker of the House, fiercely local democrat, and mentor to LBJ, Rayburn was instrumental in passing the most significant civil rights legislation since the Reconstruction: the Civil Rights Bill in 1957.

It is in this sense that local rhetoric both connects—at time literally—and separates us to/from one another and the rest of the nation/world. Writing Democracy will bring composition and rhetoric scholars, whose work frequently crosses disciplinary boundaries, together with artists, historians, media specialists, and community members engaged in interdisciplinary research methods. These methods, ranging from ethnography and oral history to qualitative research in sociology and cultural geography, are drawn both from traditional humanities scholarship in literature, language, philosophy, religion, and history and from critical theory’s critique of many of the liberal assumptions informing those traditions. Influenced by critical race theory, gender studies, working class studies, and immigrant studies, the symposium participants will utilize a wide range of methods from oral history and ethnography to rhetorical analysis and memory mapping to engage in community-based projects. Such projects create conditions for college students, community members, and scholars to learn from one another through research designed to preserve local history and give voice to those—past, present, and future—whose stories and contributions to American life might not otherwise be entered into the historical record.

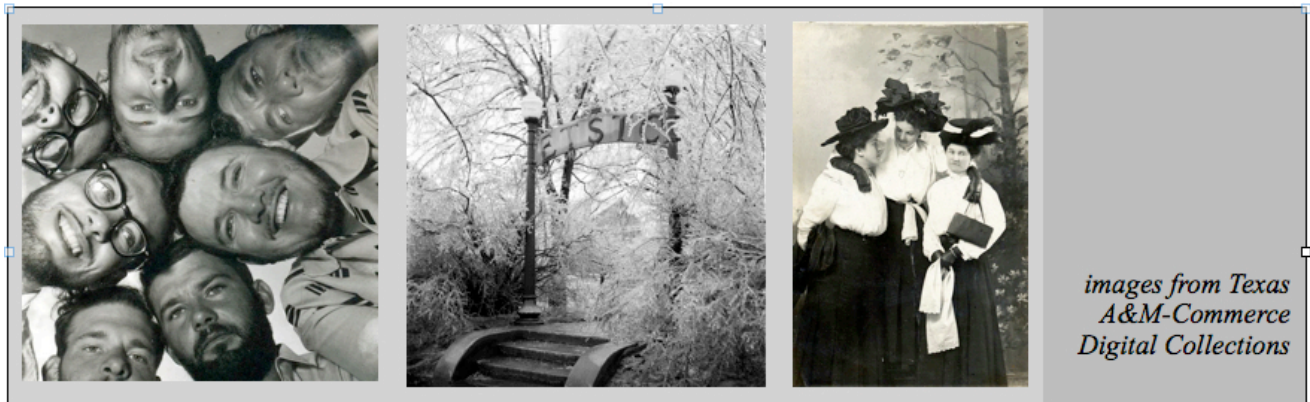
Our vision for Writing Democracy is inspired by the Federal Writers’ Project (FWP), created in 1935 as part of Federal One—the umbrella organization for arts, theater, music, and writing—and Roosevelt’s New Deal. Since the economic crisis in the fall of 2008, numerous calls for the revival of the FWP have been made by journalists, cultural critics, and academics. Whether or not funding for such an ambitious, federally sponsored project becomes available, we believe that we are well positioned through already existing national organizations, college and university writing programs, oral history and neighborhood writing projects, and university-community partnerships to replicate some of the profoundly important work accomplished by the FWP seventy-five years ago. To do so fully would entail not only collecting the publications and artifacts of independent, local projects but also deliberating on the overarching goals a national consortium might achieve. For the Federal Writers, that goal was to redefine American identity and “to introduce America to Americans.” In *Portrait of America: A Cultural History of the Federal Writers’ Project* (2003), keynote speaker Jerrold Hirsch writes:

Not only were American intellectuals in the 1930s trying to rediscover America, as so many commentators then and since have pointed out; they were also trying to redefine it. The studies published by the Writers’ Project tried to broaden the definition of who and what was American. To answer such questions the FWP offered new materials: ex-slave narratives, folklore and folk song, and the life histories of ordinary people.

In the American Guide Series, which included guidebooks to every state in the union and to numerous cities, counties, and geographic areas, the FWP tried to provide the nation with a “road map for the cultural rediscovery of America.” (19)

While reprising the FWP for 21st century America is beyond the reach of this symposium, our call for participation has demonstrated enthusiastic support for the idea from a wide range of scholars, cultural institutions, and non-profit community organizations. In late 2008, numerous journalists, academics, cultural critics, and arts groups called on President Obama to allocate money from the Stimulus Package to arts funding—specifically for a new Federal One, the umbrella for the arts, music, theatre, and writing projects that made history in the 1930s (see, e.g., Pinsky, Hoekstra, Cebula, Goldbard). The idea gained momentum so swiftly in large part because of the emergence of highly publicized story projects like StoryCorps and The Center for Digital Storytelling, and smaller, local non-profit writing organizations like the Hub City Writers Project in Spartan, South Carolina, and New River Writers Project in the New River Valley of Southwest Virginia, all of which cite the Federal Writers’ Project as a model. At the same time, the increasing influence of history from the bottom up (see, e.g., Zinn, E.P. Thompson) and the popularization of oral history have contributed to heightened interest in first voice narratives and everyday life in academia, community-based theater, site-specific performance art, and community writing projects. These grassroots, arts, and academic initiatives have in turn galvanized college writing program faculty to utilize what Mary Louise Pratt famously called “the arts of the contact zone” to reach beyond university walls and engage in community writing inspired, consciously or not, by the pluralist ethos the FWP helped define. [\[more\]](#)

<<http://writingdemocracy.weebly.com/overview.html>>



*images from Texas
A&M-Commerce
Digital Collections*

*“Ugly Man Contest”
Commerce, TX (1959)*

*“Campus Ice Storm”
Commerce, TX (c 1950)*

*“ETSU Students”
Commerce (1907)*