

Cross-Examining Bigotry: Using Toulmin's Argument Model and Huckin's CDA to Interrogate Overt and Covert Racist Arguments

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“Why is it that a Black person can call me ‘cracker,’ but I can’t call him the ‘N-word?’” my composition student wanted to know. He had come by my office following our second class discussion of *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, Anne Moody’s 1968 autobiography in which she traces her life from her childhood in segregated Mississippi through her time as an activist in the Civil Rights Movement. Taken aback by such a question, the first words I uttered were, “why in the world would you *want* to call someone that?” and my second, “The racism you have a problem with in the book is against *Whites*?” I then realized that rather than feeling a uniting compassion for Moody as a person struggling against systemic racism, Travis had become defensive, perceiving Moody’s condemnation of “crackers” as a condemnation of all White people. Thus, despite my and Moody’s effort to decenter whiteness, this White, male student had found a way to center it again. Travis’ parting words to me that day were “When am *I* going to be a protected minority?”

After this experience, I considered abandoning my social justice agenda. After all, I am supposed to be teaching students how to write, not how to be more humane and open-minded individuals. Perhaps it was time to take Stanley Fish’s advice and “save the world on my own time.” However, Travis’ comments were not only immoral, they were illogical, and logic *is* a

writing teacher's business. Even Fish says so. He writes that politics, ethics, civics, and economics have a place in the classroom if they are "dissected and assessed as arguments," as "objects of analysis, comparison, historical placement, etc." (25-6).

Whether bigoted students will engage with us in a dissection of racist arguments, however, is another matter. Not only was Travis resistant, he was aggressive. He wished to dish out to others the disrespect that he felt had been shown him. Thomas Rickert predicts this type of pushback, arguing that "the disruption and politicization of hierarchies of power and privilege, especially in terms of race, class, and gender" may produce "new forms of power and privilege" and "new resistances" (165). I did not want to make matters worse.

Despite such obstacles, I feel strongly that we should not allow even covert racist beliefs to go unchallenged simply because some students feel threatened. As recent events make abundantly clear, stakes are too high. But neither should we proceed without a strategy. To that end, I have developed the plan that I detail in this article. My three main tactics to support the goal of interrogating overt and covert racist arguments include

1. Tuck the discussion of bigotry into a larger unit on analyzing arguments using frameworks established by Stephen Toulmin (the Toulmin Argument Model) and Thomas Huckin (Critical Discourse Analysis or CDA). By focusing on argumentation and analysis, racist texts simply serve as evidence of flawed logic in action. As a result, students are less likely to perceive and therefore resent the unit as yet another accusation that they and their generation are bigots.
2. Begin the unit with *overt* examples of bigotry, thereby playing to the students' egos by allowing them to feel superior to "old-school" racists. Specifically, we apply Toulmin's

methodology to overtly racist claims such as “Whites are superior” and “Blacks are poorer because they don’t work as hard” as they surface in Anne Moody’s 1968 *Coming of Age in Mississippi*. Students will (in general) dismiss these “old-school” racists’ beliefs, thereby minimizing emotional responses such as guilt and anger that may derail our analyses. Similarly, because I do not (yet) challenge the belief that racial discrimination no longer exists, pushback is minimized.

3. Follow with texts, such as *Shrek 2*, that exemplify how overt bigotry has become covert.

At this point, I add Huckin’s Critical Discourse Analysis framework in order to help students interrogate texts on their own. Assigning excerpts from Pimentel and Velásquez’s “*Shrek 2: An Appraisal of Mainstream Animation’s Influence on Identity*” provides students with a useful example of how contemporary artifacts replicate covert racist beliefs. We also apply CDA to the seemingly innocuous U.S. National Park Service materials used to educate the public about the Magnolia Plantation in Louisiana.

Discussions of less overt examples of racism and white privilege, of course, generate more resistance, especially since I seek out textual examples that challenge what Tim Wise and Kim A. Case label the “exaggeration of racial progress among White Americans” (19). However, unlike my experience with Travis when I had done no strategizing prior to our discussion of Moody’s text, by frontloading the analysis protocol, I have had better luck circumventing student pushback. Table 1 below captures the scaffolding in this unit:

Table 1: Overview of Cross-Examining Bigotry Unit.

	Overt Racism	Covert Racism	Covert Racism
	Text #1: <i>Coming of Age in Mississippi</i>	Text #2: <i>Shrek 2</i>	Text #3: NPS Materials for Magnolia Plantation
Toulmin Argument	a	a	
Huckin's CDA		a	a

Obviously I cannot guarantee that students will not resist the lessons in this unit; in fact, quite often mine do, most often by declaring that I read too much into things. Nonetheless, as the excerpts I am including from my students' work reveal, teaching our students to think carefully about the logic (or lack thereof) behind various arguments helps them become more critical thinkers and therefore better writers. The added bonus is that logical and critical thinkers tend not to be able to abide racist claims, whether overt or covert.

Text #1: *Coming of Age in Mississippi* by Anne Moody, 1968

Set in mid-twentieth-century Mississippi, *Coming of Age in Mississippi* is a *bildungsroman* that captures in graphic detail the experiences of author Anne Moody, from childhood through her involvement in the Civil Rights Movement as a Tougaloo College student. One of Moody's early epiphanies occurs in the local theater when her mother tells her that as a Black family, they must sit upstairs whereas Moody's White friends must sit downstairs. Moody writes,

Now all of a sudden they were white, and their whiteness made them better than me. I now realized that not only were they better than me because they were white, but everything they owned and everything connected with them was better than what was available to me. I hadn't realized that downstairs in the movies was any better than upstairs. But now I saw that it was. Their whiteness provided them with a pass to downstairs in that nice section and my blackness sent me to the balcony. Now that I was thinking about it, their schools, their homes, and streets were better than mine. (34)

In other words, in the Jim Crow South, Blacks had to endure separate and unequal treatment, unlike White people who were given privileges solely because they are White. It is a bitter lesson for Moody.

Given that the system clearly privileges White people, it is not surprising that Moody was initially enamored with the Carters, the White owners of the plantation on which her parents farm. Moody writes that the White Carter family lives in a "big white house," and the Blacks live in "rotten wood two-room shacks"—probably former slave quarters. Whereas at night the shacks "began to fade with the darkness," "the lights in Mr. Carter's house looked even brighter, like a big lighted castle. It seemed like the only house on the whole plantation." The whiteness of the house and of the Carter family thus function for Moody as a marker of White people's superiority to Blacks, a claim that is allegedly proven by the evidence, namely Whites' financial success and Blacks' poverty.

However, when interrogating arguments, Stephen Toulmin¹ suggests that we ask, "What does the arguer have to go on?" (the evidence) and "How did the author get there?" (the

warrant/warrants) (90). The chart below from *everything's an argument* is useful when teaching this methodology:

Claim:	the argument you wish to prove
Qualifiers:	any limits you place on your claim
Reason(s)/Evidence:	support for your claim
Warrants:	underlying assumptions that support your claim
Backing:	evidence for warrant (132)

To help students understand this process, Brunk-Chavez suggests using cartoons because the unstated punchline is the warrant, the answer to the question, “how did the author get there?”

Similarly, a graduate student tells me that when individuals tell her racist jokes, she asks, “*why* is that funny?” In stating the assumption/warrant behind the joke, the individual must articulate his or her argument, and in the process may realize that something is amiss with the argument itself.

Together my students and I cast the racist claims in *Coming of Age in Mississippi* as a Toulmin argument:

Claim:	White people are superior to non-White people.
Evidence:	Whites have greater financial success than non-Whites.
Evidence:	Whites are better educated.
Warrant:	Wealth is an indicator of a person’s worth (e.g. work ethic, intelligence, even morals).
Warrant:	One’s achievements are a reflection of one’s effort, not privileges bestowed upon some to the detriment of others.
Warrant:	White and Black are discrete racial categories.

Moody helps us to dismantle this argument by providing evidence that challenges the claim that White people are superior to black people. For example, Moody describes Miss Ola, a wealthy White woman who allows mucus to run into the soup as she is cooking, and an “old white lady” who allows cats to drink from the dish holding milk that she gives to Moody in payment for Moody’s work. Moreover, the Carters have achieved their wealth and status, and that big white house, via the despicable act of profiting from abusing their workers. Finally, although Moody notes that Whites had better food, she realizes that Black women like her mother were cooking it. Moody writes, “If Mama only had a kitchen like this of her own . . . she would cook better food for us.” Thus, the major premise is that Whites are superior to Blacks and the minor premise is White people have more affluent lifestyles, but this deductive argument breaks down because the deciding variable is money, not race.

The claim and warrants are also flawed because other factors, such as systemic and long-standing racism, influence an individual’s acquisition of wealth and education. For example, noting that in the United States today “racial disparities in wealth are vast” (1177), Killewald cites “differences in childhood neighborhoods and school quality resulting from racial segregation” as a likely cause (1192). Arestis, Charles, and Fontana cite U.S. social norms that make it “socially acceptable to consider some jobs (and pay offers) appropriate for white individuals and other jobs (and pay offers) suitable for, say, black or Asian individuals” (1479). These master norms, they argue, help to explain why “amongst all demographic groups, black men recorded the largest below-trend growth in earnings in these high-status occupations” (1489). As the saying goes, White people have careers, and Black people have jobs. Finally, Oliver and Shapiro reference the fact that “race remains a significant factor even for those with

high work stability, as whites control \$40,000 more net worth than blacks and over \$7,000 more in net financial assets” (120). Contrast the assets of Wayne Burke who lives in a large house and whose wealthy mother can afford to hire a tutor to help him versus Anne Moody who works as Mrs. Burke’s maid, and who moves from rent house to rent house as a child.

Oliver and Shapiro conclude that “a multiple set of factors—education, income, occupation, and so on—working together” explain racial inequality. This is precisely what Moody discovers, and why she fights so hard not to follow her mother’s path. Clearly it is illogical to attribute poverty solely to an individual’s (much less an entire group’s) inherent worth. In fact, bell hooks clarifies the issue well, writing that “class structure in American society has been shaped by the racial politic of white supremacy,” and therefore “class struggle is inextricably bound to the struggle to end racism” (3).

Despite the obvious racism by Whites towards Blacks in the book, my students, specifically my White students, often also wish to tackle Moody’s comments against White people. I have not again had a student suggest that “cracker” and “nigger” are equally offensive slurs as Travis did, but these students do criticize Moody for speaking of hating White people and for using the racial slur “cracker.”

In response, I note that when analyzing Moody’s arguments about racism, we must again take into consideration the historical context. Moody’s warrants for her claims are informed by her experience as an African American woman in the Jim Crow South and specifically as a witness to White-on-Black violence. She writes, for example, “Before Emmett Till’s murder, I had known the fear of hunger, hell, and the Devil. But now there was a new fear known to me—the fear of being killed just because I was black. This was the worst of all my fears.” The people

who were trying to kill her were White people, and *those* White people she does, in fact, denigrate, as would most people.

Similarly, although at times Moody's anger against systemic racism may lead her and other African Americans in the book to use the term "cracker," they are referring to a specific type of White person, one who "shoots you to death or throws a few sticks of dynamite on your" or "them goddamn white crackers" whom they suspect shot and killed Clift. Thus, "cracker" is not a generic racial slur, but a signifier used to designate (and denigrate) the White individual motivated by hatred of African Americans to commit violence and disrespect. Rather than offended by this word, it is possible to side with Moody that such a person warrants distrust and resentment. Many students eventually do side with Moody.

Moreover, joining Moody at the Woolworth's sit-in were Joan Trumpauer, a "white nigger" as she is called by a man in the crowd; Lois Chaffee and John Salter, White Tougaloo faculty members; and Ed King, the White Tougaloo chaplain. Moody clearly admires these and other White civil rights workers who were fighting for racial equality while resenting the White males who physically attack the Woolworth's protesters. In actuality, out of frustration with racism, Moody expresses hatred for White *and* Black people for failing to uproot racism.

However, to make the jump that White people were discriminated against in a similar degree as Blacks is to perpetuate a false analogy. William L. Andrews makes this mistake in his essay "In Search of a Common Identity: The Self and the South in Four Mississippi Autobiographies," excerpts of which I share with my students. Writing about Moody's *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, Andrews argues that Whites and African Americans felt "fear and distrust of the racial other, into which each caste could project its fantasies and/or its repressed negative

imagery of itself (49). I agree that both groups did feel fear and distrust, but African Americans were being hunted by Whites (the murders of Emmett Till and Medgar Evers are specifically mentioned in the book), and Moody also recounts how Whites sexually and economically abused their African American employees with impunity. In contrast, although the wealthy and White Mrs. Burke and her guild comprised of wealthy and White women distrust the NAACP and fear African Americans, they fear a loss of economic and political power. Thus Andrews needed to emphasize that it's one thing to fear a racial minority and another to be the racial minority that is feared, just as Travis should have recognized that "nigger" was used by the master and "cracker" by the slave. As Thomas Huckin observes, context matters (79).

One scene in *Coming of Age in Mississippi* captures particularly well the difference between the life experiences of the two groups. A crowd is gathered for the high school's homecoming. When the band begins playing "Swanee," "old whites" began singing along. Moody observes that "the faces of the whites had written on them some strange yearning" whereas "the negroes looked sad." It is then that Moody begins to realize the marked difference in the material realities of Whites and African Americans. One group is the beneficiary of an apartheid system and the other group, the victims.

Interestingly, Moody represents a third option: a person who, as Ted Ownby observes, "sensed, though vaguely, her own apartness, her own estrangement not only from whites, but also from other blacks who had shared the history of southern apartheid, and had been, she came to feel, complicit in it" (86). Ultimately, Moody's hatred is for a caste *system* that denied Black people opportunities and agency and that enabled some White people to abuse their power without repercussions. Given the severity of the abuses that Moody experienced personally and

witnessed, her occasionally faulty inductive reasoning is understandable.

And in general, my students *are* sympathetic. When discussing *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, students have no trouble condemning Mrs. Burke's suspicions and mistreatment of Anne Moody and recognizing that Mrs. Burke and the other women in her guild are motivated out of fear that they are losing their White leverage. By processing *Coming of Age in Mississippi* as a historical document that reflects the overtly racist and therefore overtly illogical beliefs of the time, my students now tend to say, "How could people ever have been so racist?!" Or, "This sounds just like my grandparents!" Framed in this way, students interrogate racism and white privilege gladly, feeling the satisfaction of addressing a wrong, just as Moody did. These observations become trickier as we move into discussing covert racism.

Text #2: *Shrek 2*, 2004

It is clear that for my most of my students the racism in *Coming of Age in Mississippi* is "historical," as in people no longer behave this way, and many clearly enjoy feeling superior to both the Whites and the African Americans of this time who "allowed" such overt racism to occur. It is therefore important that in this unit we analyze covert racism as it exists today. We continue to use Toulmin's model to analyze claims, evidence, and warrants, but we add Huckin's Critical Discourse Analysis protocol in order to explore *how* contemporary texts perpetuate racist ideas, even if covertly.

Several compositionists have provided examples of using the tools of argument analysis in order to expose contemporary bigotry. Fallacious argumentative tactics clearly relevant to

racist arguments include false analogies, *post hoc* fallacies, *either . . . or* fallacies, *non sequiturs*, faulty deductive reasoning, and unfair emotional appeals. In *everything's an argument*, for example, Lunsford, Ruszkiewicz, and Walters include Jen Sorensen's "The Hoodie: Apparel of Peril," (533) a cartoon that spoofs Geraldo Rivera's 2012 comment that Trayvon Martin's hoodie makes him as responsible for his own death as George Zimmerman. By depicting a Viking, a member of the Taliban, and a bear, as well as hipsters, hip-hop fans, and college students wearing hoodies, Sorensen is satirizing Rivera's comment as a false generalization that feeds and feeds into a racial stereotype. Hacker and Sommers similarly note in *The Bedford Handbook* that stereotyping "is common because of our human tendency to perceive selectively. We tend to see what we want to see; we notice evidence confirming our already formed opinions and fail to notice evidence to the contrary" (144). Stereotyping is therefore a logical fallacy, and a damaging one at that.

The hazards of contemporary racial stereotyping is made evident by Octavio Pimentel and Paul Velásquez in "*Shrek 2: An Appraisal of Mainstream Animation's Influence on Identity*," excerpts of which I assign. As the authors point out, the character of Donkey, for whom Eddy Murphy does the voice-over, aligns with a negative stereotype of African Americans:

Throughout the film, [Donkey] is a grayish brown color, but when he drinks the magic potion they have stolen from the Fairy Godmother he turns into a "white Stallion" and begins to feel beautiful and strong and carries a commanding posture quite the opposite of when he is just a donkey. It is inferred that when a donkey he is impure, dirty, working class, and not allowed in the king's court.

When he morphs into a “white Stallion” for a brief time he is pure, clean, noble, and worthy of entering the king’s court. More significantly, Donkey’s opinion of himself alters based upon what color and animal he is. He laments having to return to his original body. (17)

Using this same scene from *Shrek 2* that Pimentel and Velásquez reference, my students clarify the claim, the evidence, and the warrants.

Claim:	Donkey’s value increases when he switches from being a grayish brown donkey to being a white stallion.
Evidence:	Donkey is now welcome at the king’s court; Donkey feels better about himself.
Warrants:	Being welcome at the king’s court means one has value, and not being welcome means one does not; feeling better about oneself means one’s value has increased.

Once we begin pursuing the scene as an argument, students quickly dismantle the warrants. For instance, my students observe that those in charge of who is or isn’t accepted at the king’s court are not necessarily fair arbiters of an individual’s value. After all, the king is the villain of the film whereas Shrek and Donkey are the heroes. Students also note that although by transforming into a stallion, Donkey’s status is increased, there is no indicator that he might be losing anything by no longer being a donkey. In actuality, losing one’s identity/culture can be devastating. Finally, although we presume that Donkey does not wish to return to being a donkey because being a stallion is inherently better, Donkey could be making this choice because donkeys are unfairly devalued by society.

I draw a parallel between the way in which Donkey's life is improved when he becomes a white stallion and the remarkably (and disturbingly) similar stories I was told growing up. Specifically, I was taught that White people (the king) were fair arbiters of the value of non-White people (Donkey and Shrek), and that Non-White people's value would increase if they could become more "White." And, rather than complaining about systemic racism, non-White people should want to be White; after all, White people are more successful.

At this juncture, I want my students to begin interrogating contemporary artifacts, and I have found that Huckin's CDA provides a useful methodology as it moves students beyond merely pointing out logical fallacies and warrants to recognizing the strategies individuals employ, sometimes unconsciously, to hide their biases. Some of these strategies include

- omitting facts
- foregrounding particular points that support your cause
- placing in the background those points that don't support your cause
- relying upon insinuation, presupposition, and connotations to sway people to your side.

(Huckin, Andrus, and Clary-Lemon 123)

In order to introduce students to CDA, we return to "*Shrek 2: An Appraisal of Mainstream Animation's Influence on Identity*." Pimentel and Velásquez explain that they employ CDA in order "to help show how language is often used within films as a manipulative tool to reproduce negative discourse on Latinos and Blacks" (6). Specifically, Shrek, Donkey, and Puss-in-Boots are **framed** as outsiders and objects, and there is an **omission** in the film of any discussion of the inequities in the system. As an illustration, Pimentel and Velásquez cite the scene in which Puss-in-Boots, an outsider, is caught by the Knights (i.e. cops) with a bag of

catnip, to which he replies, “Dat’s not mine.” There is no trial, and this omission, the authors assert, “builds on the belief that Donkey (African American) and Puss-in-Boots (Latino) are considered guilty until proved innocent” (15).

Many students will resist this reading of *Shrek 2*. After all, many grew up watching the film, and they may suspect that I am accusing them of being complicit in its racism. I am not, of course. Even though a film is informed by racial prejudice and White privilege, it is not the audience’s fault for failing to notice. In that respect, I agree wholeheartedly with Peggy McIntosh who observes that “students should not be blamed for being good students of what they have been taught—that there are no systems in place that would create inequity and that the playing field is level” (xiv). On the other hand, once students have been shown evidence that the playing field is not level and provided a framework that enables them to see the many ways in which this fact is made manifest, if they continue to believe that systemic bigotry does not exist, they are choosing to be illogical. In a composition class, not to mention in society at large, that is a significant problem.

Text #3: The National Park Service Magnolia Plantation Website (2012)

I begin this unit with Moody’s text, which includes her description of life on a plantation, and I conclude the unit with two contemporary texts created by the National Park Service (NPS) to educate the public about Magnolia Plantation in Derry, Louisiana:

1. the NPS Magnolia Plantation website itself (Figure 1)

2. a “Civil War to Civil Rights”² trading card that features the Magnolia Plantation (Figure 2)

We are thus positioned to follow Huckin’s advice regarding how to interrogate a text: he advocates “raising questions about it, imagining how it could have been constructed differently, mentally comparing it to related texts, etc.” (81). What my students discover is that even though the overt racism that Moody describes is absent from the NPS website, White bias nonetheless persists.



Figure 1: National Park Service “Magnolia Plantation” Website.

Prior to examining the Magnolia Plantation website, my students and I review Anne Moody’s depiction of Mr. Carter’s plantation where her parents farmed:

I’m still haunted by dreams of the time we lived on Mr. Carter’s plantation. Lots of Negroes lived on his place. Like Mama and Daddy they were all farmers. We

all lived in rotten wood two-room shacks. But ours stood out from the others because it was up on the hill with Mr. Carter's big white house, overlooking the farms and the other shacks below. . . . Since we had only one big room and a kitchen, we all slept in the same room. It was like three rooms in one. . . . This big room had a plain, dull-colored wallpaper tacked loosely to the walls with large thumbtacks. Under each tack was a piece of cardboard which had been taken from shoeboxes and cut into little squares to hold the paper and keep the tacks from tearing through.

We then read the NPS description of the Magnolia Plantation:

During its prime, it is likely that at least 75 people lived at Magnolia. All of the slave cabins at Magnolia were placed in rows, creating a structured village atmosphere. It was common among large plantations for a sense of community and culture to develop inside these slave villages. African Americans created separate lives here, enjoying unofficial rights that were denied to them by the state. It was very common for them to marry and start families. As with many other plantations in the area, Magnolia's slave cabins were turned into sharecropper cabins after Emancipation.

Like Mr. Carter's plantation on which Anne Moody's family lived and farmed, the Magnolia Plantation included a "big house" and "slave quarters." After emancipation, both Mr. Carter's and the Magnolia plantations housed landless laborers and sharecroppers. Despite these similarities, there is a marked difference in the tone the NPS uses to describe the Magnolia

Plantation and Moody's description of Mr. Carter's Plantation, a difference owing to the very different arguments each is making.

For example, Moody wishes to **foreground** the economic disparity between the Carter family living in the big house and her parents who worked the Carters' land. Moody writes, "there were a lot of Negroes" living in "shacks" on Mr. Carter's plantation. She also notes that she is "haunted by dreams" of when her family lived on Mr. Carter's plantation.

The NPS, on the other hand, mitigates slavery by placing it in the **background**. We learn that "75 people lived at Magnolia," not "75 slaves," and the NPS **omits** altogether the fact that the slave "village," located some distance from the "big house," was "exclusively black, except for one intermarried couple" (Crespi), even after Emancipation. As Huckin observes, "it is difficult to raise questions about something that is not even 'there'" (82).

Even more egregiously, the NPS **frames** slave life at the Magnolia Plantation as not only preferable to life outside of the plantation (the Magnolia Plantation slaves enjoyed "unofficial rights that were denied to them by the state"), but idyllic, referring to the period in which the Lecomte family owned slaves as the Magnolia Plantation's "prime," a choice of words that illustrates whose point of view is being privileged here.

Why take such effort to defend the slave owners? Since Muriel (Mike) Crespi's 2004 *A Brief Ethnography of Magnolia Plantation: Planning for Cane River Creole Historical Park* informed the NPS documents, it offers some answers. Crespi observes that "embarrassment about participating in a system that is vilified by some others or discomfort about defending what some still see simply as a pragmatic labor system may have troubled White interviewees (3). Consequently, "there was concern about how outsiders, such as visitors who represented

other regions and views, would perceive local peoples and cultures if slavery was interpreted” (3). Crespi’s White respondents **foregrounded** the “the occupational diversity among slaves” and “the hierarchical relationships within the slave community” that “could lead to greater advantages for some slaves” (70) and **omitted** details that would emphasize the inhumanity of slavery. In fact, as Crespi notes, “one white person wondered about the race of the future park interpreters and mentioned his own discomfort—a feeling of being targeted—when he visited colonial Williamsburg and a black interpreter told the story of plantation slavery. The respondent was not suggesting limiting the staff to white people but raising the relationship between ethnicity and interpretive roles as a discussion point” (70).

When my students analyze a 2012 NPS “Civil War to Civil Rights” trading card (see fig. 2) that focuses on the Magnolia Plantation, they find a similar pattern of framing slavery as an innocuous institution. In fact, one student suggested that the card’s title should read, “Thank You for Your Slavery.”

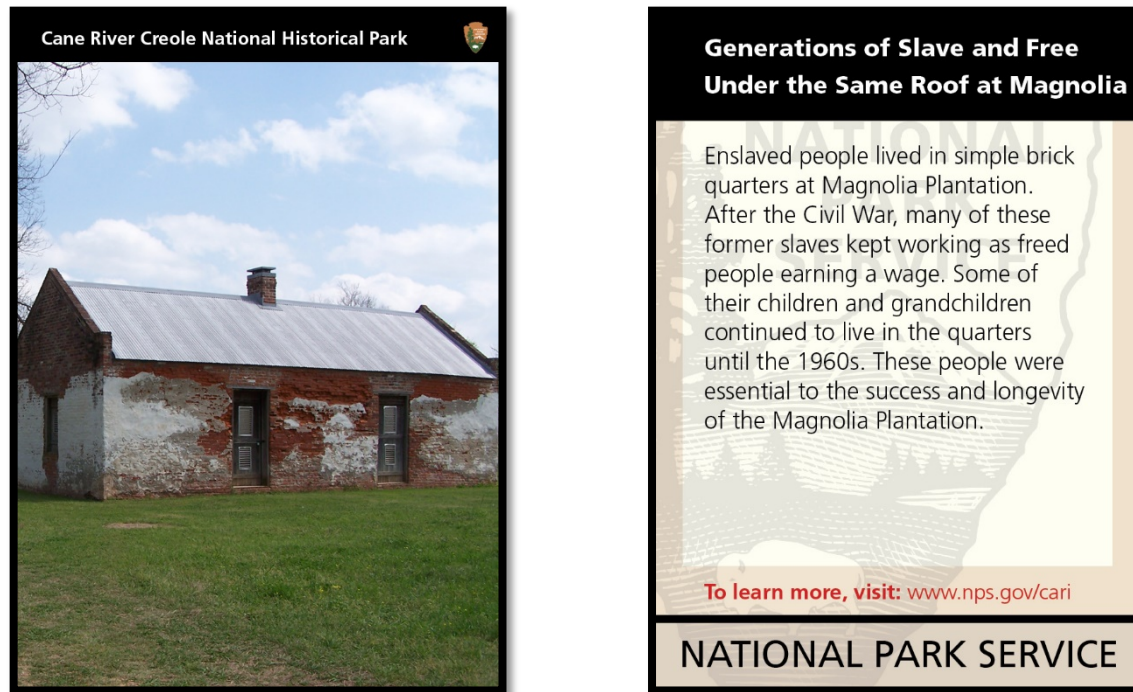


Figure 2: National Park Service “From Civil War to Civil Rights” Trading Card

On the other hand, another student noted that the featured building was the size of her own family’s home, and quite a few argued that the National Park Service “meant well” by showcasing the contributions of the slaves and indentured servants who worked at the plantation.

Once we began using Huckin’s CDA protocol, however, the students began to question the NPS’s particular wording. The title “Generations of Slave and Free under the Same Roof at Magnolia,” for instance, suggests that slaves and free people—maybe even the slave owners—lived together. In actuality, White and Creole people never lived in these quarters, even after Emancipation. More egregiously, the folksy sound of the phrase “under the same roof” **foregrounds** a “community” feeling that is also asserted on the NPS website, and by **omitting** discussion of the abuse and oppression the residents, free and enslaved, would have experienced,

the NPS **frames** the Magnolia Plantation slave quarters as a home, a place where “children and grandchildren continued to live” up until the 1960s. In other words, although enslaved, the people led normal lives, which, as my students have pointed out, is oxymoronic.

Crespi’s report, however, reveals that African American respondents were also concerned about focusing exclusively on slavery at the Magnolia Plantation and neglecting their families’ history as sharecroppers there. Their responses complicate what might otherwise appear to be a clear-cut case of racism on the part of the White respondents. Crespi writes, “blacks expressed anger at the inhumanity of slavery and some perhaps a victim’s shame at being stigmatized by a system that prevailed through no fault of their own” (3). As one woman explained, people “don’t want to remember a past that robbed them of their humanity” (69).

This feedback may have led the NPS to include the statement, “These people were essential to the success and longevity of the Magnolia Plantation,” implicitly a panegyric to the Magnolia Plantation slaves, especially those individuals who, once freed, remained at the plantation. Unfortunately, in the process of foregrounding the contributions of the freed workers, which is important, slavery is placed into the background or effaced altogether. Moreover, the warrant here is that people remained because they *chose* to work at the Magnolia Plantation, clearly not the case for slaves. Even those free people who remained might not have done so had they been afforded better opportunities.

This is not to say that the slaves did not feel a “sense of community and culture”—of course they did—but they did so *despite* the fact that they were enslaved and subjected to systemic racism. And the fact that slaves at Magnolia were able to “unofficially” marry and then

start families may have been an indicator of comparatively greater humanity at the Magnolia plantation, but this does not exempt the Magnolia Plantation *slave owners* from culpability.

In order to provide a contrast to secondary historical documents such as the NPS materials, I share Lecomte's journal (see fig. 3), an original historical document associated with the Magnolia Plantation that is included on the NPS website.

Ambrose Lecomte's Account Ledger (1852-1856): Adult Males

	NAMES	MALE SLAVES	AGE	ESTIMATION IN 1845	DEATH	NOTES
<i>A</i>	Ambroise	Mulatto boy	36	750		
	Adams	Negro boy	28	650		
	Auguste	Negro boy	38	400	1847	
	August	Negro boy	23	750	1847	Drowned
	Azinos	Mulatto boy	27	500		
	Azinor	Negro boy	22	450		
	Albert	Negro boy	29	700		
<i>B</i>	Baptiste	Negro boy	47	900		
	Barthelemy	Mulatto boy	17	250	July 1851	Cholera

Figure 3: Slave listings from page thirty-seven in Ambrose Lecomte's account journal found in folder 164 Series 3.1.2 of the Prudhomme Collection at UNC Wilson Library. The entire ledger at <http://www.nps.gov/cari/historyculture/upload/lecomteslaveledger.pdf>.

Once students examine the ledger, they become more aware of how the NPS has interpreted and, to a certain extent, ameliorated slavery. Reading the valuations of human beings as if they were livestock, in contrast, enables students to see how slavery dehumanized slave and slave owner alike.

The texts I have discussed here represent a variety of genres—a published book, a website, a film, a scholarly article, and a ledger—a fact that itself could be a source of discussion and analysis since a text's genre can influence how it is read. As Huckin explains, “why certain

kinds of statements appear in the text and how they might serve the purposes of the text-producer” are “encoded in that genre” (81-2). For example, Moody’s *Coming of Age in Mississippi* is a book, the length of which allows for and delivers details. In contrast, the information on a trading card is by necessity brief and cursory. Moreover, you collect trading cards for fun. By using this genre, the NPS, perhaps without even thinking, casts the Magnolia Plantation as a “fun” place to visit; a slave dwelling becomes an image to collect. The genre thus enables the NPS, and the visitor, to diminish the harsh reality of slavery and in the process eliminate the “discomfort” and the “feeling of being targeted” that one of Crespi’s White respondents recounted feeling when he visited “colonial Williamsburg and a black interpreter told the story of plantation slavery.” Perhaps my students would have felt this way, too, but if they opt to employ it, Huckin’s CDA provides a protocol for analyzing texts as opposed to reacting to them.

Thus far I have described two types of analyses that I teach my composition students: Toulmin’s Argument Model and Huckin’s Critical Discourse Analysis. I have also provided examples of texts that lend themselves to these types of analyses. I will now present this unit’s writing assignment that requires students to apply these theories to texts they believe reflect stereotypical thinking.

The Writing Assignment

Hacker and Sommers suggest in *The Bedford Handbook* that students keep a log of stereotypes they notice in the media such as “ads, TV commercials, TV shows, new coverage

and films” (145). For the class writing assignment, I ask my students to likewise find a text they wish to analyze—a stereotype that is being perpetuated in our society—and to consider the following questions: 1) What logical fallacies are being perpetuated (Hacker and Sommers 142-53)? 2) What are the unspoken assumptions/warrants (Lunsford, Ruskiewicz, and Walters 131-51)? 3) Which (if any) “textual manipulations” are being employed to obscure the illogical nature of the argument (Huckin 81)?

In response to this prompt, Joe wrote about the absence of non-Whites in the *Texas Performing Arts Bulletin*, writing that even if this oversight was done “subconsciously, without the deliberate idea of targeting the document to any specific audience, it remains clear that the creators’ idea of a ‘normal’ person is a Caucasian one, which is clearly a false assumption.”

Victoria wrote about a local club called Bikinis, noting that everything, from the bar stools to the “menu” of women in the foyer, is framed to objectify the women.

Here are two other essays written in response to this prompt:

Sample Essay #1: “Black Republicans: It’s Not a Punchline” by Nicole

On June 25, 2014, Stephen Colbert of *The Colbert Report* reported on the victory of Thad Cochran in a Mississippi primary race against Tea Party challenger Chris McDaniel. Colbert showed video clips that captured the media’s stereotype that Black people do not vote Republican. For example, Rush Limbaugh said, “It’s unreal the level of Black turnout in a Republican primary!” And Laura Ingraham, Fox News contributor, asked, “Is this the future of the Republican Party? You brag about your big spending ways to the voters and you rely on the support of black liberal Democrats to get you elected?”

I think there is still a stereotype that Blacks are poor and uneducated, and therefore do not vote, or if they do vote, they vote Democratic. On *The Fresh Prince of Bellaire*, it was a running joke that Carlton was weird and uncool, in part because he was politically conservative, while Will, his hip cousin, couldn't be bothered with anything as boring as politics. Smith also came from a poor, urban neighborhood, which fits the stereotype of how most Blacks live. The fact that Will went to live with a wealthy Black family was part of the joke, as in "let's watch this cool Black guy live among these hilarious African Americans who are trying to act like rich (that is White) people." For Carlton, that meant being a Republican, but he was a buffoon, the butt of Will's jokes.

Even though according to Gallup Politics, 22% of Democrats and only 2% of Republicans are non-Hispanic Black, this fact does not validate these pundits' unspoken warrant that Blacks are not Republicans because they are not smart and civilized enough to participate in politics and don't make enough money (because they are not smart and civilized) to have their interests served by the Republicans. People do not automatically assume that Whites are Democrats because they are uneducated or criminals.

I don't think Rush Limbaugh thinks he is doing anything wrong by expressing such surprise that Blacks voted in a Republican primary. I'm sure he believes that he is just expressing a statistical fact. But Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton who was on *The Colbert Report* to talk about the fiftieth anniversary of Freedom Summer in Mississippi had a different reaction to this high Black voter turnout. In response to Colbert's question "Would you like to take a moment to apologize to Chris McDaniel?" Holmes Norton replied, "I'd like to take a moment to

say to those who went to the polls--those African Americans-- you sure knew what to do with the vote that we went to get for you in 1964. Thank you!”

Sample #2: Asian Nerds by Michelle

What do Dr. Cristina Yang from *Grey's Anatomy*, Rajesh Koothrapalli from *The Big Bang Theory*, and Abed Nadir from *Community* all have in common? They are all smart, they're all nerds, and they're also all Asian. The last fact wouldn't matter so much if you could find lots of other Asians on TV. who aren't nerdy and smart, but you can't.

Fundamentally, it is a logical fallacy to look at someone of a particular race and assume you understand their strengths and weaknesses with no evidence at all. Such arguments are worthless since they cannot be proven true, but can easily be disproven simply by actually meeting or talking to the people who are being lumped together.

Sure, the Asian stereotype may not seem harmful, but it is still a judgment based only upon ethnicity and appearance. In other words, just because people hold positive opinions of others does not make those opinions somehow not a stereotype.

Why do Americans stereotype Asians? Hacker and Sommers write that “stereotyping is common because of our human tendency to perceive selectively. We tend to see what we want to see; we notice evidence confirming our already formed opinions and fail to notice evidence to the contrary” (144). I agree, and specifically it is non-Asians who are perpetuating this stereotype. Since non-Asians are in the majority, they will probably not even think twice about the Asian stereotype. And even if Asians do complain, they're in the minority, so who really cares?

Thomas Huckin writes in “Critical Discourse Analysis” that it is difficult to raise questions about something that is not even there (82). Now that Asians such as Mindy Kaling of *The Mindy Project* and comedian Margaret Cho are creating their own scripts, the omission of well-rounded Asian characters on TV are becoming more apparent. It’s as if what was omitted is now visible. This new “evidence” of a different type of Asian will go a long way to challenging a faulty argument.

Given the pushback that I received from Travis, among others, my students’ enthusiasm for analyzing racist arguments has been a pleasant surprise. In fact, the more fallacies and manipulations the students discover, the more they seem to want to write about them, corroborating Donald Murray’s finding that “increasing information about the subject,” “increasing concern for the subject,” and an awareness of “a waiting audience, potential readers who want or need to know what the writer has to say” (376) will compel a writer to write that first draft.

Conclusion

Some compositionists believe that a focus on social justice is misguided—we need to focus on writing skills, not changing the world. For example, Irvin Peckham in the 2010 *Going North, Thinking West: The Intersections of Social Class, Critical Thinking, and Politicized Writing Instruction* expresses concern that compositionists are imposing their middle-class worldviews on their students, as opposed to teaching writing. Peckham cites as an example Amy

Lee's *Composing Critical Pedagogies* in which she discusses a student's arguments that homosexuals make bad parents. In her analysis, Lee observes that the student's "interpretation and judgment of gay men and lesbians is sanctioned by the discourse he evokes, thus not requiring him to interrogate or demystify his own thought processes or evaluations" (170).

However, Peckham argues that Lee's "description of the situation does not address problems with Jay's [the student's] writing" (150). Instead, in reference to the student's assertion that children of homosexual children will be embarrassed when their parents kiss in public, Peckham believes that Lee should have *praised* the student's effort to support his claim with evidence. Peckham adds, "Lee might have even introduced him to the notion of an enthymeme here and requirements for readers and writers to share assumptions if an enthymeme is to work" (150). I share Peckham's (and Fish's and Rickert's) concern that composition classes should not function as soapboxes for faculty's personal causes. But by emphasizing logic in this unit, I am actually heeding Lee's recommendation that we interrogate illogical biases, including those "sanctioned" by racists, homophobes, sexists, and so on.

Importantly, the Toulmin argument also facilitates an interrogation of argumentation itself, and specifically the strategy of targeting one's audience. Although as composition instructors we teach that one should shape one's argument in order to appeal to a particular audience, the downside is that one can create a feedback loop in which like-minded people confirm, without evidence or valid warrants, arguments that support their own perspectives and sometimes self-serving motivations. For example, the rule of hypodescent, also known as the "one-drop rule," was specifically created to discourage miscegenation and therefore racial ambiguity; that is, anyone with even "one drop" of "Black blood" was racially Black. In fact, in

Coming of Age in Mississippi, despite their White appearance, Moody's cousins Sam and Walter aren't considered White because, as Moody's mother explains, "us daddy ain't that color!" But Sam and Walter are born of a Black mother and a White father, so they are White *and* Black, and it is illogical to say otherwise. Maintaining an illogical belief in order to benefit one race over another *is* racism.

Unfortunately, prior to developing the unit I have described here, in my desire to be respectful to my White students, I was reluctant to discuss race so openly. I did not clarify that White and Black people did not and do not have equal opportunities. I had presented Anne Moody as a brave and *generic* woman of conscience, ignoring the fact that being Black, female, and poor had not only contributed to the unique form of discrimination leveled against Moody, but also limited the ways in which she could respond. I had left uncontested the belief that, even though "back in the day" "nigger" was used by a master and "cracker" used by a slave, *now* both are equally offensive.

Fortunately, students seem genuinely interested in unearthing and then testing societal assumptions. As one of my students noted on her/his end-of-the-semester evaluation, "I am walking away with a new mental tool. Now, I constantly analyze and question. I find it hard to admit I was ever so close-minded." Ironically, owing to the scaffolding of this unit, students quite often acquire these analytical skills before they even know what is happening.

Moreover, because I establish the analysis protocol first, if a student does say something along the lines of "you're making too much of that" or "but African Americans discriminate against Whites, too," I can require that he/she conduct an interrogation of the evidence and warrants that support such a claim. For example, recently a student noted that it is unfair that

White people cannot join some organizations that are designated Black, but when she had to find evidence to support her claim, she discovered that the sorority that she was referencing does accept White members.

Importantly, I have also found that class discussions and the resulting papers have a depth of analysis that my previous approach did not yield. This is not surprising given the analysis protocols I have selected: generating critical thought is a stated goal of both Toulmin and CDA theorists. According to Toulmin, interrogating the arguer's claim, evidence, warrants, and backing may "lead on to challenging, more generally, the legitimacy of a whole range of arguments" (95). And Huckin, Andrus, and Clary-Lemon observe that the CDA framework "enables writing researchers to move beyond traditional analytic modes of interpretation and criticism into examining the impact that contexts, power dynamics, and social interaction have on written texts and processes" (110-11). Given that racism continues to exist and to negatively affect all of our students' lives, it seems not only valid but essential that we interrogate racism, be it overt or covert, as the illogical argument that it is.

Appendix: Monday, Wednesday, Friday Syllabus

Day One: *The Bedford Handbook*, pp. 142-53 (logical fallacies); *everything's an argument*, pp. 131-51 (Toulmin argument) and 533 (Jen Sorensen's "The Hoodie: Apparel of Peril")

Day Two: Anne Moody's *Coming of Age in Mississippi*

Day Four: *Coming of Age in Mississippi* (continued)

Day Five: *Coming of Age in Mississippi* (continued); Thomas Huckin's "Critical Discourse Analysis"

Day Six: Octavio Pimentel and Paul Velásquez's "*Shrek 2*: An Appraisal of Mainstream Animation's Influence on Identity"; view scenes from *Shrek 2*

Day Seven: The NPS Magnolia Plantation website, a "Civil War to Civil Rights" trading card (the Magnolia Plantation), and Ambrose Lecomte's ledger

Day Eight: Drafting workshop for Essay #3

Day Nine: Peer review for Essay #3; paper due before next class

Notes

¹ In *everything's an argument*, Andrea Lunsford, John J. Ruszkiewicz, and Keith Walters provide an excellent discussion of the Toulmin Argument (131-51).

² The entire "Civil War to Civil Rights" collection can be viewed at

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/tradingcardsnpsyahoocom/sets/72157629788194008>

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