

# Collaborative Complexities: Co-Authorship, Voice, and African American Rhetoric in Oral History Community Literacy Projects

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“Between the oral interview and the written manuscript is a long, meandering journey in which a narrative is crafted.”

Rebecca Jones

This co-authored article describes a community literacy oral history project involving 14 undergraduate students. It is intellectually situated at the intersection of writing studies, oral history, and African American rhetoric and distinguished by two features: 1) we were a combined team of 20 collaborators, and 2) our narrator, Frank Gilyard, the founder and former director of the Central Pennsylvania African American Museum (CPAAM), was deceased. Because oral history is narrator-driven, Gilyard’s death required us to remain especially attentive to the epistemic value of his voice.

Keywords: African American rhetoric; oral history; voice; collaboration; co-authorship; narrative

## Introduction (Laurie)

This article is based on the multiple levels of collaboration involved in the written life history narrative of the late Frank L. Gilyard, the founder and former director of the Central Pennsylvania African American Museum (CPAAM) in Reading, Pennsylvania. CPAAM houses art, artifacts, documents, court records, newspapers, and books that focus on local African American history (<http://www.cpaam.net/>). A collector-based museum, CPAAM opened in October 1998 with approximately 200 pieces from Gilyard’s personal collection.

Gilyard passed away on January 24, 2013, prompting me to create this oral history assignment with 14 undergraduates who wrote the narrative as part of a class I taught in spring 2013. The 12 hours of recordings from 2010 were in my possession and in the CPAAM collections. Gilyard and I had been involved in six community-based research

and service learning partnerships since 2005. Before his passing, we had planned on two projects for the spring 2013 semester, including this cross-listed upper division English and American Studies special topics course designed around a thorough local African American historical research and writing project centered on videotapes of Gilyard reciting local African American history. His knowledge was encyclopedic, but he always said most of it was in his head, not written down. Gilyard, his wife, CPAAM colleagues, and many African American community leaders had been talking for years about the need to videotape and preserve the undocumented information in Gilyard's memory. These video recording sessions were scheduled for February 6 and 7, 2013, less than two weeks after Gilyard's passing. Students were to use Gilyard's oral historical stories as a foundation for in-depth research; at the same time, the course was focused on rhetorical history, and students would study and produce historical discourse through the lens of rhetoric.

After Gilyard's sudden death, I decided after a great deal of contemplation that the students would write a collaborative oral history narrative based on the existing first person recordings of Gilyard's life (not of local African American history). I had done several previous class projects with local oral histories and was familiar with scholarship and pedagogical practices in the disciplines of both oral history and community literacy projects. Most of the oral histories were conducted by a former student of mine, Jessica Didow, for a graduate school capstone project at a local university in 2010.

Although I knew these were preliminary, not final, recordings, I was certain Gilyard wanted these recordings of his lived experiences publicly shared. That we were 12 days away from videotaping six hours of local African American history was tragic; Gilyard had also spoken many times about having an autobiography written about his life to share with the Berks County community. I felt that creating this assignment for the students would be both a tribute to Gilyard and a gift to his family and the community, and most important given my obligation to my students, an excellent learning experience for them. Further, as Linda Shopes argues, the oral histories of "nonelites" is recognized for their

potential for restoring to the record the voices of the historiographically—if not the historically—silent ... few people leave self-conscious records of their lives for the benefit of future historians. Some are illiterate; others, too busy. Yet others don't think of it, and some simply don't know how. And many think—erroneously, to be sure—that they have little to say that would be of historical value. By recording the firsthand accounts of an enormous variety of narrators, oral history has, over the past half-century, helped democratize the historical record.

Gilyard knew he had a great deal to say, and he said some of it during the interviews in 2010. In my view, it was important to his legacy and the work to which he committed the final two decades of his life—recovering and preserving local African American history—to share these recordings with a wider public. In this sense, Gilyard was like

Goldie Baker and Shirley Wise, African American activists whose oral histories were documented by Rhonda Williams; Wise and Baker seemed keenly aware of their role and responsibility as speakers of their life histories, family details, and community histories—and the interconnectedness between them all (59). I did not consult with Gilyard's widow, Mildred Gilyard, at the time because she was grieving. However, I knew the written narrative would not be put into the CPAAM collection without her review and consent.

This community-engaged oral history project involving 14 undergraduate students is intellectually situated at the intersection of writing studies, oral history, and African American studies. In this article, I, three students from the class (Meeghan, Chris, and Jonathan), and a staff assistant (and former student of mine), Cassandra, who served as an editor, write about the many complexities of this multilayered oral history.<sup>1</sup> Two features of this oral history project make it distinct and, therefore, offer important insights about collaboration, voice, and African American vernacular in oral history and community literacy projects: 1) that we were a combined team (including the late Gilyard) of 20 collaborators, and 2) that our narrator, Gilyard, was deceased. Because oral history is narrator-driven, Gilyard's death required us to remain especially attentive to the epistemic value of his voice. This article begins with my discussion of context and pedagogy. Next, Meeghan, Chris, and Jonathan focus on the issue of voice in two ways: through the collaboration of the 14 students and in trying to capture and preserve Gilyard's voice. Cassandra, who had known Gilyard and spoken with him one-on-one several times, analyzes her role as an insider and outsider editor. Ultimately, we argue that this collaborative oral history project informs theory and practice of collaboration in oral histories, in community literacy projects, and in undergraduate writing instruction.

## Pedagogical Approach (Laurie)

Teaching this course in the immediate aftermath of Gilyard's death inevitably brought many pedagogical challenges. I was relatively experienced with teaching oral histories in both first year composition and introductory literature classes, although in these courses, students conducted the interviews themselves. I was also experienced with community-based undergraduate research projects. Since 2005, students and I have worked closely with the African American community, through and with the local NAACP branch and the Central Pennsylvania African American Museum (CPAAM) in Reading; the Hispanic/Latino community(ies), through and with Centro Hispano Daniel Torres, Inc.; and the Jewish community, through and with Jewish Federation of Reading and Jewish Cultural Center of Reading. Furthermore, my scholarly work had by then been informed by rhetorical performance and blackness. As students were conducting their work, I was simultaneously writing a now-published article about Gilyard's rhetorical performances of blackness in the founding of CPAAM (Grobman).

First, I had to help students transition from a "doing history with a foundation of oral history" to a "doing oral history" mindset. By the time of Gilyard's passing,

students had read Leon F. Litwack's *How Free is Free?: The Long Death of Jim Crow* (2009) for its revisionist history through deeply felt oral performance and storytelling. Litwack argues that economic inequalities are less visible but "far more intractable" (120) than legalized segregation had been, but whites' resistance to economic equality has perpetuated and reinforced racial injustice. I assigned *How Free is Free?* as a way to provide students with a foundation for the local African American historical work they would be doing, beginning with videotaped recordings of Gilyard that were to take place. Litwack employs a collage of many black voices—including excerpts from journalism, novels, poems, songs—and many oral histories of everyday, "ordinary" people, such as porters, maids, and military personnel. He pieced together many excerpts from oral histories and interviews (most that had been published elsewhere) as well as used other secondary and primary sources to create a larger historical narrative covering more than a century. For many students, Litwack's book was their first exposure to oral history and to African Americans' fundamental contributions to a revised, expanded version of the American history master narrative.

Students in my class would now be using existing audio recordings to write a narrative of one man's life. Oral history interviewing is "first and foremost a historical endeavor" (Noriega and Bennett 2), a "genre specifically designed to discover what individual experience means in historical terms" (2). We were seeking to understand, and to convey, how Gilyard's lived experiences fit within the larger historical context, both contextualized and localized. By then, I was familiar with much of the scholarly work on African American oral histories in the disciplines of both oral history (Rose; Williams)<sup>2</sup> and composition and rhetoric (Carter and Conrad; Carter and Dent; Coogan). But I wanted to find something closer to the complicated work we were to embark on regarding collaboration, co-authorship, and voice. As Gregory Zieren asserts, oral history pedagogy typically involves a "triangular relationship between instructor and student, between student and interview subject, and even between instructor and subject" (158). But these students did not conduct the interview they would collectively transcribe and use as the basis for a narrative. Furthermore, students would work in several reconfigured pairs and small groups from transcription through revision.

Rebecca Jones's article in *Oral History Review* was an excellent departure point for these students. Jones claims that "The oral history interview is the starting point in the process of creating the narrative, but the journey continues through transcribing and editing to publication" (23-24). Jones discusses her work as writer/editor of *Blended Voices: Kingston Residents Tell Their Stories of Migration* (City of Melbourne), a book based on oral history interviews with migrants living in the Kingston area of Melbourne, Australia. The book is largely a group of first person narratives, mainly in English, except for ten of the stories, which are reproduced both in English and in the narrator's native language. Jones, who was historian, interviewer, editor, and writer, turned the transcripts into a written narrative, what she calls the "edited story" (27). Changes were made after narrators reviewed the stories, and a professional copy editor "corrected punctuation and typing mistakes, and made minor changes in phraseology" (27).

Jones's analysis focuses on transforming a verbatim transcript into a narrative, arguing that "editing, extracting, refining, and rearranging the transcript" is "part of the joint construction of a narrative by both the narrator and the writer/oral historian in which a public text is created from a private one-to-one conversation" (24). "Joint construction," Jones asserts, is "influenced by the power relationships inherent in oral history and governed by ethical responsibilities" to the narrator, audience, content and context of the stories, and the project's purpose (24). "Editing *Blended Voices*," according to Jones, "involved extensive condensing and manipulation of the text" (27); among the more substantive changes she made include removing passages that did not relate directly to the issue of migration and settlement, reordering phrases so that the same themes appeared together and cut repetitions, and creating paragraphs. Most importantly regarding the issue of voice, or "blended voice," the term Jones uses in the titles of both the book and the scholarly article about the book, was that Jones "rendered the resulting stories in something close to Standard English" (27) by altering grammar, syntax, and punctuation. Jones states that she attempted to "retain idiosyncrasies of speech" and "reproduce[e] the lilt and cadence of the participants' speech" (27). Jones provides the following example of Ahmed, who migrated to Australia in 1992 from spending his youth in Harar, Ethiopia. His first language is Amharic. Jones first reprints this passage verbatim from the transcript and then the edited version:

#### Unedited

I'm going to drop out and work in a factory because I have no choice, no I didn't. I know I'm going to go through with it, and if I don't go through with it I keep questioning myself, how did he make it? I'm not stupid. I can think. I can communicate. There's nothing wrong with me, I could do it, I could just keep pushing myself. I never gave up in anything because life is experience, it is a test whether you pass or fail. (33)

#### Edited

Sometimes I found things so difficult that I thought I would just drop out of school. But I didn't. I kept questioning myself and pushing myself. I knew I wasn't stupid and so I never gave up. Life is an experience and a test. (33).

Jones acknowledges that "Ahmed's phrasing has been considerably altered" but also claims that "we have remained true to the meaning of his story and communicated it in a way that is accessible to the intended audience" (33). She asserts that it "illustrates the barriers to understanding created by faithful reproduction of the spoken word" (33). My reaction was that Jones had gone too far in the direction of erasing her narrators' voices (the vast majority of the students agreed with my reaction). That was my starting point for the oral history narrative project. How would 20 collaborators, including 14 students who had never met Gilyard and did not conduct the interviews with him,

create and maintain his voice while writing a third person narrative from more than 12 hours of recordings?

I assigned readings that would inform students' work with principles of collaboration, co-authorship, and voice in the disciplines of writing and rhetoric, oral history, and African American studies. In addition to Jones's notions of "joint construction" and "blended voice," students read about collaboration and narrator-centric oral histories through "Principles for Oral History and Best Practices for Oral History" (Oral History Association) and "Transcribing Oral History" (De Blasio). "What They Do: How the Co-Authors View their Collaborative Writing Process," a chapter from *(First Person)2: A Study of Co-authoring in the Academy* (Day and Eodice), offered perspectives on students working in teams as well as on collaborative concepts such as negotiation, compromise, shared voice, and shared vision. I selected "African American Orality: Expanding Rhetoric" (Garner and Calloway-Thomas) because it is an accessible and good overview of some of the most salient features of African American rhetoric. Students were journaling throughout the process, connecting the readings and their work collaborating with one another and with Gilyard and Didow through the interviews. Alessandro Portelli asserts, "Oral history ... refers [to] what the source [i.e., the narrator] and the historian [i.e. the interviewer] do together at the moment of their encounter in the interview" (qtd. in Shopes). In the Frank Gilyard oral history narrative, there were many moments of encounter. The process and timeline of the project with its many layers of collaborators were as follows:

**Stage 1:** Recordings: Frank L. Gilyard, Narrator, and Jessica Didow, (Interviewer Summer 2010). Didow visited and spoke to the class on February 7, 2013.

**Stage 2:** Transcription of recordings, students (February 7-20, 2013)

**Stage 3:** Deciding how to craft and organize the narrative, students and Laurie (February 21, 2013)

**Stage 4:** Drafting the narrative, students (February 22-March 16, 2013)

**Stage 5:** Revising the narrative, including initial review and question and answer session with Van and Mildred Gilyard, students (March 17-March 26, 2013)

**Stage 6:** Editing the narrative: Cassandra and Laurie (March 27-April 27, 2013)

**Stage 7:** Second review by Van and Mildred Gilyard (April 27-May

**Stage 8:** Final editing (Laurie) and transfer of narrative, transcripts, and recordings to Mildred Gilyard, CPAAM .

The interviews were the foundation of the collaboration that was to come. I was a co-interviewer for one of these sessions for the project I was doing. When Didow and I conducted the interviews, we were committed to the Oral History Association's "Principles and Best Practices for Oral History" that "include commitments to the narrators, to standards of scholarship for history and related disciplines, and to the preservation of the interviews and related materials for current and future users" (1).

Didow visited my class in early February 2013 to discuss some of the more relevant issues that students needed to know to transcribe and write the narrative oral history.

Two primary issues stuck out as challenges for the students' work. First, Didow stressed to students that the interviewing "felt unfinished." She explained, "I was going to send [Gilyard] the transcriptions, and he was going to look over them, and then we were going to continue interviewing." In my interview with Didow, she developed this point:

There never was an end. Like each time that I interviewed him, the end was decided by the clock, so we talked for the duration of time that we had set aside ... we never really had an ending where he got to say, 'I said everything that I wanted to say,' or, 'I wish I hadn't said that. Please don't include that.' Or anything like that because I was going to go back to him.

Chon Noriega and Teresa Barnett suggest that oral historians usually seek "a narrative, not just discrete answers to a set of questions" (3); Didow explained to the students that she gave Gilyard free reign to tell her what he wanted, and then she was going to go back to him for further questioning: "He mostly talked and I listened. If there was something that I felt that I knew at the time that I would need clarification on I asked, but mostly he was talking and I was listening." They ended each interview "knowing that they weren't really over."

I was aware that the interviews were not completed, and the decision to use the existing recordings was not made lightly. Being unable to follow through with Gilyard to fill in the gaps and clarify what we may have misinterpreted presented an ethical as well as practical dilemma. Was it fair to Gilyard that he would not be able to review the narrative? Review by the narrator is "standard practice" for oral history (Jones 34); through review and revision, the narrator "continue[s] to construct the narrative" (36). Furthermore, even though I knew Gilyard had wanted his story shared, "it is only at the time of the review, when the narrator sees a manuscript that might be published, that he or she considers the story as a public text" and seriously considers revision (Jones 35). In her discussion of the editor's responsibility, Jones cites Alistair Thomson's comment that "oral histories 'from below' which have been written by researchers 'from above' can be disempowering for the objects of research" (qtd. in Jones 37); the unequal power dynamic was made extraordinarily sensitive due to Gilyard's passing. His voice was limited to the transcript and our interpretation of the transcript. In Jones's book, six out of 39 participants amended their stories because they realized the repercussions of public voicing (36).

Ultimately, because I was confident Gilyard wanted his life history shared, I was comfortable with the decision to go forward. As Shannon Carter and James Conrad assert, "People exist amid a constant flow of competing narratives, places, time constraints, and obligations. We capture what we can, always aware that we can never capture everything; thus, our records are always partial, inadequate interpretations rather than reliable, complete, unbiased and unfiltered historical records" (98). Carter

and Conrad's oral history project involved interviews with dozens of local African American citizens across three generations in the Norris community, a rural town in northeastern Texas, to have archives available for future research. They are aware that in so doing, the narrators may be deceased, but their recordings will live on, despite being partial. And these recordings are critical to a comprehensive and inclusive historical record.

The second primary concern for students raised during Didow's visit to the class was that she conveyed to them that even hearing Gilyard's voice did not fully capture the conversations or the person behind the voice. Rhonda Williams's article in *Oral History Review* focuses on the performative aspects of oral histories, emphasizing interviews she conducted with Shirley Wise and Goldie Baker, two black female public housing residents who have been tenant activists in Baltimore since the 1960s. Interestingly, Williams never explicitly discusses the use of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) in the interviews, but Meeghan, Chris, and Jonathan will raise this issue as it pertains to the Gilyard oral history in their analysis. Rather, Williams cites Elizabeth Tonkin's concept of "Voice," emphasizing the significance of performance in oral history: "Gesture, intonation, bodily stance and facial expression are all cues, in the oral ambience, to topic orientation as well as to the speakers' claim to authority" (qtd. in Williams 44). Williams further develops this notion: "Voice, then, not only represents the spoken words in narrative, but also how those words are performed" (44), and Voice "can unveil layers of knowing" (45). I quote Didow at length on this point:

I'm not sure if his humility comes across in the transcripts ... When he talked about other people in the museum and other people in the community he was very proud of them and really animated and excited to know this information and found this information and share it with someone else. And when he spoke about himself, he never seemed to put himself in the same category of a community leader or community hero or someone that was making a contribution or going above and beyond that he thought that these other people were. He just spoke about himself very matter-of-factly...You're missing like the essence of his being, kind of, like in the physical way. Like his calm presence and his mannerisms and the amount of respect that he had for humanity in general and people ... I think that not getting to see his face when he talks about the things that he's talking about, while I said that he was less animated, you could definitely read on his face there were times that brought him a lot of joy or other times that were harder for him that I'm not sure if that would come across in his tone of voice as much as it did in his body language and facial expressions.

Like Williams, Susan D. Rose omits all discussion of AAVE in her chapter describing an undergraduate project at Dickinson University to conduct and preserve oral histories of the local African American community. The first stage of interviewing took place in 1989-1990; the second phase in 2001 was a broader historical study on the African American community in Carlisle, PA and included a diverse group of students



from Dickinson, Dillard, and Xavier universities. Students used the 1989-1990 oral histories and conducted new interviews as part of this project. Rose's article emphasizes the interaction between students and narrator. She argues that the project fostered in students more complex understandings of race and other categories of difference. However, there is no discussion of AAVE or voice.

However, I was also committed to acknowledging and honoring AAVE as an explicit feature of Gilyard's voice. As a writing scholar-teacher, I have long been concerned with teaching students about the complexities involved with language, race, and power.<sup>3</sup> I have written elsewhere about the African American oral tradition's influence on Gilyard's speech (Grobman). Like E. Patrick Johnson's grandmother, whom he describes in *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity*, Gilyard "draws on [his] cultural and experiential knowledge" of black vernacular traditions and "internally dialogizes them" (Johnson 153). Gilyard, a deeply religious man who was integrally involved in his church on local, state, and national levels, was influenced, like Johnson's grandmother, by the "repetition and rhythm [that] are integral to the preacher's performance style" (153). These upper-division students in the American Studies major and Professional Writing major were already familiar with the consensus among linguists that AAVE involves a set of rules that are distinct from, but not inferior to, those of Standard Written English. A "subsystem of English" (Bailey 287), AAVE developed concurrently with the early 20th century "great migration" of African Americans from the rural South to the urban North (Wolfram 111). As Meeghan, Chris, and Jonathan write about in the next section, Gilyard's African American voice was one of many challenges they and their classmates confronted while writing the narrative.

## Collaboration, African American Rhetoric, and Voice (Meeghan, Chris, and Jonathan)

We—Meeghan, Chris, and Jonathan—are three students from the course in which 14 students co-wrote the written narrative history of Gilyard. None of us had ever been involved in oral history until this experience, but when Gilyard died, we felt that doing this project would be an important contribution to this man's life history and work. We never met him, but by that time in the semester, we knew enough about him and felt Laurie's sense of loss to know writing this oral history would be a tribute to his memory.

As three of the 14 undergraduate collaborators, we faced several challenges. Our focus in this article is on the concept of voice from two perspectives: 1) how 14 student collaborators achieved what rhetoricians Kami Day and Michele Eodice call "joint voices" (129); and 2) how 14 student collaborators worked to preserve Gilyard's voice, according to what oral historian Jones refers to as "blended voice."

In rhetoric and composition, the issue of voice in writing has been studied by many scholars. Tom Romano states that "voice is the writer's presence on the page... Voice is the human quality of written language that is directly related to its sibling, the spoken word" (50). This human quality was to be found in the merged voices of

Gilyard, the interviewer, 14 students, and two editors. According to Peter Elbow, “the voice lens highlights how language issues from individual persons and physical bodies and how the same words differ, depending on who says them and how” (175). Students had to convey Gilyard’s voice lens—Gilyard’s “language as sounded, heard, and exiting in time” (175)—through our individual and collective voice lenses without having ever seen his physical body. Thus we had to find a way to convey the sound of Gilyard’s voice through writing.

## Joint Voices: Collaboration with 14 Students

Kami Day and Michele Eodice’s book, *(First Person)2: A Study of Co-authoring in the Academy*, discusses several concepts related to the collaborative work in Gilyard’s written oral history narrative. They define co-authoring as “working together—topic and idea generation, research, talk, possible co-writing, decisions about how the final product will look, etc. on a writing project” (121-22). Chris and Jonathan had co-authored before, but Meeghan had not. When we read Day and Eodice, Chris and Jonathan agreed that their past experiences in co-authoring were developed well through practice in previous writing classes. Meeghan had concerns about her lack of experience co-authoring and her writing ability in a group of students majoring in writing. She was uncomfortable with the process, but working with her peers who had more experience was essential to the success of her writing. We knew from Day and Eodice that “more planning goes into a co-authored piece” than when writing alone (127) and that “a great deal of talk, which involves negotiation and invention that leads to decision-making” would be required of all of us (127). After each stage of transcription, writing and editing, the class had come together to decide as a group how the narrative should be structured, framed, revised, and edited. We had several decisions to make: which elements of Gilyard’s life were important enough to keep, how to structure the narrative, and finally, who was going to write the sections before we could then take on the challenge of Gilyard’s voice. From transcribing and deciphering Gilyard’s words to the final edit of the narrative, every step of the process was carefully chosen and directed by the students.

The class split into groups for our first drafts. By working with others on this narrative, multiple interpretations, ideas, and opinions were necessary to consider before moving forward with any writing. After transcription, our job was to decide how to craft and organize the narrative (referred to earlier as Stage 3). Laurie’s instructions for us were to collaborate, negotiate, and make decisions about the following:

1. “In ranked order, at least three proposed ways of structuring and organizing the narrative.
2. The rationale for each structure/organization.
3. The assigned sections for each pair or small group (no more than 3) writers.
4. Any large chunks of material you think should be omitted from the narrative.”

Day and Eodice interviewed co-authors who described their talk and realized it had brought them rewards. For them, “their talk was epistemic in that they learned more about each other and about what they do, and what’s more, they had fun” (130). While our groups may have had fun, it certainly wasn’t without its conflicts. In this stage of our narrative, some of the decisions Laurie required us to make were very difficult. For instance, we argued over the sections of the narrative and whether chronological order was important. We also struggled with assigning groups as there were some students who did not articulate what sections they wanted to work with. Chris and Meeghan finally spoke up, however, and told our classmates that the decisions needed to be made; we presented our vision of the structure, and the groups finally agreed. In the end, it was an “epistemic,” or knowledge-making, experience as the group negotiated through several iterations and agreed on a plan that made the most sense at the time: four sections including Race, Racism, and Race Relations; Military; Early Childhood; and Work Life. Kara was the designated spokesperson for the class. She told Laurie our chosen topics along with our chosen groups. In a response later that day, Laurie wrote the following email to students.

Great job! I agree with your “theme” structure but am adding both “Religion” and “Race, Racism, and Race Relations.” Religion is so important to the Gilyards that I think it must be included as a separate theme. Race, Racism, and Race Relations are so important to Frank’s life that I want to begin by separating this out as a separate theme. As the narrative takes shape, we will decide whether to leave it as interwoven into other ideas or to separate it out as its own chapter/theme.

As we recall it, none of the students, ourselves included, were upset by this decision since Laurie knew far more about Gilyard and his life than we did.

It was time to begin Stage 4, which was Drafting the Narrative. During class on February 26 we divided the first draft of the narrative into these groups and topics:

- Childhood: Kara and Erin
- Military Life: Chris and Jeff
- Museum: Bianca and Seth
- Race: Meeghan, Liz and John
- Religion: Ed and Nate
- Work Life: Lauren and Brittany

These groups made their own decisions about what should or should not be included in the section. Each group interpreted the transcriptions and chose the ways in which they wanted to write a section of the narrative and what parts of the interview to include and exclude.

Collaborating on a narrative by writing independently and in small and changing groups may seem disjointed, as students Ed and Nate point out in their co-authored essay: “Of course there was no blueprint to follow, no guidelines to structure our process, the nebulous quality of this process is described by Jones when she wrote that, ‘There is no definitive formula for creating a written manuscript from oral interviews; a different project may require different decisions to be made’” (25). Ed and Nate also summarize some of the most challenging issues for us as we worked together to write the narrative: “Indeed, each [narrative] is its own. In fact, ours was more greatly complicated by the following factors: first, that Gilyard was not with us to help us; second, that Jessie’s interviews, though good, had a different goal than we did; and third, that there were so many student writers with different ideas and backgrounds and opinions.” In our view, Didow’s interviews, while conducted for a different purpose, provided enough material to gather a good, although incomplete, narrative of this man’s life. Also, while there were obvious difficulties in dealing with the opinions of 14 students, it was to be expected and all decisions were handled in a professional manner with all parties being satisfied. Gilyard’s death, however, left many unanswered questions and gaping holes in the narratives that were inevitably filled with the authors’ interpretation of his reality.

Meeghan, Jonathan, and another student, Elizabeth, worked together on the section about race and race relations. We worked, as Day and Eodice claim, using the “partial collaboration” method (131). We never sat down and wrote face-to-face, but instead each took a small section and wrote individually. We then tried to blend our sections together. While this seemed like a good idea at the time, due to the timing of each of our writings, we were left scrambling to blend our sections together. This part of the process did not lead to our best writing. Chris and Jeff, however, worked face-to-face, what Day and Eodice call “full collaboration” (131). Chris and Jeff’s process was closer to that described by co-authors Emily Hui and Roja Grant in Day and Eodice’s study: one writes a draft (for us, a section of a draft), then the other works on it, and so forth, and we also sit and work together (131). For example, Jeff would write a section, and Chris would reword, or even rewrite, that same section.

After about two weeks, we merged all subgroup sections into a full narrative and began Stage 5, Revising the Narrative. Laurie posed the following questions for us to think about as we approached this phase of revision:

- Are there overarching themes, issues, motifs?
- How should we shape and structure?
- Where are there overlaps and repetitions?
- Should race, race relations, and racism be interwoven in pertinent sections or its own section (or both)?
- Are there inconsistencies to address, and if so, how?
- What specific tasks do you see yourself doing at this step?

These posed questions were intended for us to decide what the narrative needed and how to make it more concise and direct. For example, our primary decision was to integrate religion and race/racism into the four other sections. At this point, everyone, including Laurie, agreed that the structure would change from six to four topics, leaving only Childhood, Military Life, Work Life, and the Museum, which would each be written chronologically. Because race/racism and religion were so integral in everything Gilyard did and said, to make these into separate categories would be to separate the very core of Gilyard himself. We also determined that Gilyard's voice needed to be more prominent in the narrative. Each group of writers then had to incorporate more quotes from Gilyard. We needed some clarification and additional information, so two students, Lauren and Nate, went to CPAAM to meet with Mildred and Van Gilyard

As we began this stage of revision, Meeghan, Chris, and Jonathan felt a sense of disconnection. By that point, each group had become "author-ities" of its section, but Laurie reconfigured our groups to try to give us a different perspective on how the narrative was being written. We felt that the narrative read like a mish mash of fourteen students' writing rather than a cohesive piece. As Romano explains:

There are many kinds of written voices. I've read those that were raucous and spirited, like a roaring fire. I've read voices subdued and sincere, like a coffee shop after morning rush. I've read voices so aloof and distant, so abstractly intellectual and fraught with jargon that the writing was impenetrable, like an unyielding, brick wall. I've read voices that are windy and cluttered with wordiness and qualifications. And I've read student voices riddled with spelling aberrations, nonstandard usage, and incorrect punctuation, yet the meaning of the words was unmistakable, the presence of the writer undeniable. (51)

The written voices in our narrative at this point were as diverse as Romano describes. In particular, some writers in the class struggled at this point in the narrative to establish their own presence among the stronger writers. Often, the stronger writers would rewrite sections written by classmates.

But soon we began to collectively work on the narrative to establish the "joint voices" we were so desperately after. In order to ensure that every author understood the direction of the narrative at all times, in depth discussions were necessary during class time. It was at these moments when the students came together to blend their voices that the narrative was formed. Kara felt that the narrative was co-authored in its entirety. She states in her essay, "Many of our class periods were devoted to in-depth discussions of how different elements would be combined to create the final narrative. While every member of the class wrote a different part of the narrative... we constantly had to come back together as a class to make sure all elements of the document worked in tandem with each other." While we worked in small groups much of the time, collaborative group work as a whole was essential to the blending of the narrative. These larger group conversations were epistemic in that each idea elicited further and different ideas. By the time we handed over the narrative to Laurie and

Cassandra, some of the students, including Meeghan and Chris, were not fully satisfied that we had achieved the joint voice we were seeking. However, Laurie felt that it was time for an editor, Cassandra, to bring the voices further together, and that the students had to move on to reflective and analytical work on the narrative project.

## Blended Voices: Gilyard's Voice

Simultaneously with joining the voices of 14 students, we were mindful at all times of blending this joint voice with Gilyard's voice. Jones uses the term "blended voices" in both the title of her book and her article analyzing her book. Although she never explicitly defines the term, she implies how as a writer and editor, she must blend her voice with that of her narrators.

The principle that motivated these choices is an understanding of editing as part of the joint construction of a narrative by both the narrator and the writer/oral historian in which a public text is created from a private one-to-one conversation. The joint construction is, in effect, a relationship between narrator and writer influenced by the power relationships inherent in oral history and governed by ethical responsibilities. In editing oral history, we, as authors, have to balance responsibilities to the narrator, to the audience, and to the content of the stories. The decisions we make in balancing these responsibilities are dependent on the purpose of the project. (24)

Our goal, indeed our obligation, was to share Gilyard's story rather than our interpretation of his life. But the issue of Gilyard's voice was a constant tension. We and our classmates were attentive to the issue of erasing the oral history narrator's voice after reading Jones's article. As Laurie wrote earlier in this article, almost every student in the class felt that Jones erased too much of the narrator's voice in her article. Rather than blending voices, we felt she had erased voices.

Shopes asserts that during the interview, "the voice of the narrator literally contends with that of the historian for control of the story." At this point in the collaboration, we viewed our work to retain Gilyard's voice as cooperation, not control. We struggled to keep the group's voice cohesive and readable while attempting to blend it with Gilyard's to ensure that his voice was the dominant presence.

Among the most significant issues was that Gilyard's African American Vernacular English was at times challenging for us to follow. 13 students were white, and one was mixed race Hispanic and black; more importantly, we were college-level juniors and seniors and well versed in standard written English. We agreed with Jones's point that "when publishing for a general audience, extensive editing is necessary to create a document that is not only readable and accessible, but also conveys the flavor of the experiences" (26). But what did "extensive editing" mean? How much was too much? Donna DeBlasio states that a narrative should "reflect the speaker's character and preserve as much of the quality of interview as possible yet still be readable" (108).

Several students expressed our common concern. Lauren states, “as Jones says, I don’t want to “increase the distance between the reader and narrator by removing too much.” Scott struggled with keeping Gilyard’s voice as unfiltered as possible. He explains, “a lot of phrases and concepts have been awkwardly translated, including my own. I feel that a lot of the narrative’s integrity has been lost simply due to Gilyard’s unique way of speaking, a way that can’t be replicated well in written form.” What transpired was a melding between Gilyard’s spoken African American Vernacular English with the students’ carefully crafted, written academic vernacular, leaving not much of either. So we continued to seek a better balance.

Very little research exists explicitly discussing AAVE in oral histories. David Coogan’s article describing a service learning project during which students conducted oral histories of residents in Bronzeville, an African American neighborhood in Chicago, is primarily focused on the notion of civic dialogue. The article references AAVE only once, when an African American student in the class, Danielle, was criticized by one of the narrators, Deborah, for what Deborah believed was a misrepresentation of the Bronzeville residents that would perpetuate negative stereotypes. Danielle had transcribed the interview literally, and many of the stories in the publication were uncensored; she had also “intended on speaking with her” before the journal went to publication (105). Deborah told Danielle that although she and her husband are educated, the printed oral history makes them “look ignorant” (105). Danielle reflects on the experience, realizing that she and her classmates unwittingly conveyed the impression “that all blacks speak a certain way” (105). Coogan asserts that what bothered Danielle the most was that she “failed to deliberate meaningfully with Deborah about representing her side” (105). Quite obviously, we would never have that opportunity with Gilyard, although the final reviews and decisions were made by his widow and son. But Gilyard signed consent forms in the many projects Laurie did with him giving his permission to quote him directly. Yet how would we remain faithful to his voice?

Williams, an oral historian, never explicitly discusses the use of AAVE (African American vernacular English) in the interviews she conducted with African American women, even though AAVE is apparent in their transcripts. For example, in the following excerpt from Goldie Baker’s interview, Williams discusses Baker’s laughter as a way to convey irony:

Honey, that’s when I went to see the commissioner. And I told him, I don’t know who he [Newton] think he’s talking to. I am not nobody’s slave. I AM NOT no-BODY’s SLAVE, and he AIN’T talking to no slave, slavery’s over ... I said he don’t have no respect for me, he don’t need to be over there. He don’t need to be no manager.

And then the rest of the residents start telling me about (voice lowers), “Oooh, girl, how you talked to him like that?! Don’t you know you’ll get put out!”... And that’s what got me concerned. ‘Cause I said, oh, no, unh-unh, nobody is supposed to talk to you, talk down to you like, who they think they are? They

work for you! [...] You pay his salary. Girl, people thought I was...I thought like they was going to hog tie me out of there ... I did not know that our people were so afraid to talk to white people [referencing the commissioner] until I really got involved. But now, then, I understood why my mother and them was fighting for rights, for so-called human rights for poor people. (55-56).

Williams indicates that in the excerpt, bold represents louder; she does not mention capital letters (53); furthermore, the insertions about lowering of voice and laughter are hers. In our view, some of the power in Baker's story comes through her very powerful voice as Williams transcribes it verbatim and with clues to intonation and syntax. We could picture this woman speaking, her body movements and facial expressions, and we are confident that some features of AAVE are part of the power of Baker's voice.

Two readings in our course assisted our efforts to retain Gilyard's voice. Litwack's *How Free is Free?: The Long Death of Jim Crow* is African American history from an African American perspective using African American voices. Litwack's academic voice controls the narrative to an extent, but the book is filled with examples of famous and ordinary African Americans telling their stories. Litwack made certain that their voices were seen, heard, and understood, providing for readers interpretations of those who experienced firsthand the events. For hundreds of years, whites have been providing their interpretation of historical events. We learned from Litwack that African Americans have used oral history throughout the centuries to intervene in discourses that have marginalized and erased them; therefore, oral history is of critical value to documenting and preserving African American history. From Garner and Calloway-Thomas's "African American Orality: Expanding Rhetoric" we learned "the space between the rhetorical practices of African Americans and the landscape of African American orality" (44) is critical to understanding Gilyard's narratives. We were able to link many of the features and characteristics of an African American oral tradition to Gilyard's voice, in particular, the "unrehearsed" quality of Gilyard's storytelling (50), such as when Gilyard abruptly changed the topic from boot camp, to a dispute he'd had with a fellow soldier, to a discussion of running in the heat. Sometimes we lost track of where he was going with his stories, but we came to realize why this "improvisation" (50) was such a profound feature of the recordings. In the end, we are confident that we honored Gilyard's voice to the extent possible under the circumstances.

### Insider/Outsider: My Role as the Editor (Cassandra)

My role, like the others in this project, does not fit neatly into the categories of oral histories. As an editor, my job was to edit the narrative for an unfamiliar reader while also unifying the voice of the narrative. In addition to issues raised by Jones, I turn to Deborah A. Gershenowitz's "Negotiating Voices: Biography and the Curious Triangle Between Subject, Author, and Editor" and her role as editor of two oral history-based



biographies, Catherine Fosl's *Subversive Southerner: Anne Braden and the Struggle for Racial Justice in the Cold War South* (2002), and Sandy Polishuk's *Sticking to the Union: An Oral History of the Life and Times of Julia Ruuttila* (2003). Gershenowitz's situation and role were quite different from mine in many ways. She is a professional editor for Palgrave Macmillan, and she is writing about the "curious triangle" (71)—subject, author, editor—of published oral history-based biographies. Gershenowitz's focus is on her role as a "detached outsider that intrudes on a very intimate relationship" that has been established between writer and subject (72), and her main argument is that the editor's outsider role is what enables her to effectively fulfill her role as editor, negotiating that "rocky terrain that oral history-based biographers navigate with their editors, subjects, and perhaps most importantly, their own voices and agendas" (72).

My role as editor was somewhere between outsider and insider. That is, I had not interviewed Gilyard for this project and therefore, like other editors, did not have what Gershenowitz refers to as "an intimate relationship" between author and subject (72). Yet, I was not an outsider, nor did I feel like an "intruder" (72). I knew Gilyard; I had spoken to him and worked with him one-on-one several times in the few months before his death, as recently as mid-December, a month before he passed away. Thus, it was both my insider and outsider status that guided my editorial decisions to unify the voice of the writers, maintain both Gilyard's voice and readability for a general public, and make Gilyard's life meaningful in a local historical context.

At the time of this oral history narrative project, I was the program assistant for the Center for Service Learning and Community-Based Research at Penn State Berks; Laurie is coordinator of the Center. Among my primary duties was to assist faculty and students conducting service learning and community-based research. But Laurie also wanted me on this project because I had known Gilyard and had spoken with him and listened to him tell personal and historical stories. I had first met Gilyard in spring of 2009, when he spoke to my general education Alternative Voices in American Literature course, taught by Laurie. Recently, as the program assistant for the Center, I had the opportunity to work with him closely and speak to him directly. For a Fall 2012 Honors first year writing class, the students conducted research on local history subjects suggested by Gilyard. He provided a folder literally bursting with newspaper articles and photographs that he had found in the local libraries' archives and at the Bethel AME Church and that people had given to him over the years. For a few hours, Gilyard and I discussed which people or events he thought the students should research, such as people who had interesting stories or significant events in local and national history that he believed should be remembered. We also went through photographs from the church where he identified every person he could remember, which was a surprising number of people. I had visited the museum three or four times, sometimes with Laurie and sometimes alone. But I had known him a much shorter time than Laurie, and while I developed a relationship with him within those four months, it was not the kind of emotional bond Laurie had with him. Therefore, I had a level of distance she did not have; I also had a level of familiarity the writers did not have.

Laurie sent me the narrative with the students' separate sections combined into one piece. By then, I had listened carefully to the recordings and read through the full transcript several times. The students who wrote the narrative could hear Gilyard's voice in the recordings but not see the gestures or facial expressions he used when telling stories. Every time Gilyard and I had met, he had a new story or fact to share with us about local history. Because I had seen him tell stories quite a few times, I could visualize his hand gestures and facial expressions in the recordings, which became more animated when he told a story. Gilyard would hunch his back and lean forward when telling a story, and I would find myself leaning in to listen and hear every word.

My simultaneous tasks were to unify the third person voice, maintain or make Gilyard's voice prominent, and establish Gilyard's life as significant both personally and historically. As Gershenowitz writes, editors and writers work together to "convince readers—many of whom have never heard of the subject—that the life ... *is history*" (73, emphasis in original). I consulted the writers for information and clarification, but I was given the authority from Laurie to make the changes I thought should be made and to track all changes for her review and consideration. I also made comments for writers and Laurie throughout the narrative.

The students transcribed the recordings verbatim, but for the narrative, we would not use first person (as Jones did), and therefore the third person narration would need to be balanced with direct quotations from Gilyard. Our goal was to stress "the orality of the source" (Jones 32). I had briefly studied AAVE and the oral tradition in an American literature class in college. Presently, I found Jacqueline Jones Royster's article, "When the First Voice You Hear Is Not Your Own," helpful in understanding why it was so important that we retain Gilyard's storytelling voice in the narrative, given the historical reality of slavery, Jim Crow, and racial discrimination. Oral history and storytelling are vitally important to African-based cultures, which we wanted to honor in our narrative. For far too long, Royster argues, African American voices have been "muted" (36). About her own role as a negotiator across cultures, Royster writes that at times,

I speak, but I can not be heard. Worse, I am heard but I am not believed. Worse yet, I speak but I am not deemed believable. These moments of deep disbelief have helped me to understand much more clearly the wisdom of Audre Lorde when she said: "I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood" ... Lorde teaches me that, despite whatever frustration and vulnerability I might feel, despite my fear that no one is listening to me or is curious enough to try to understand my voice, it is still better to speak. (36)

Royster argues that the "challenge is to teach, to engage in research, to write, and to speak with Others with the determination to operate not only with professional and personal integrity, but also with the specific knowledge that communities and their ancestors are watching" (33). It was incumbent on us to speak *with* Gilyard, not for

or about him. Within academia and society, we need to “articulate codes of behavior that can sustain more concretely notions of honor, respect, and good manners across boundaries, with cultural boundaries embodying the need most vividly” (33). Stories are vehicles for theory and lessons, and through the manipulation of storytelling, one becomes “a performer” (35). As storytellers, we needed to enact Gilyard’s performance, to evoke emotion and memories and tell his stories his way. Royster makes it very clear that neither she nor other African Americans speak in only one “authentic” voice (37). We were striving for the voice he uses in the interviews, without denying Gilyard’s multiple voices. Laurie had made it very clear that in the time she had known him, Gilyard took control of his voice and performance depending on circumstance and situation. As an African American man living through Jim Crow, segregation, and subtle and overt racism, Gilyard had to use false voices that were not his own. Yet, as Royster says about herself, “when the subject matter is me and the voice is not mine, my sense of order and rightness is disrupted” (31). Our job was to adhere to Gilyard’s storytelling voice in the interviews to honor him and to affirm his lived experience both personally and historically.

Most of the third person voice in the narrative was consistent; however, in the section titled “Childhood,” the style was distinctly different from the other chapters. Although in third person, the narrative read like this:

When his brother got out of the Second World War, he put a light up there in the stairwell above the door. Up the stairwell was one room in the back filled with big trunks and a closet. This was the first room. The front room was the bedroom. It had an old bed with springs and under each mattress and springs was an old Sunday school quarter. It was a bible and it was turned open under the bed, face down. This was because it would keep the witched and haunts away. They would go away because they didn’t like scriptures. This was an old custom of the South.

I think the students were attempting to recreate Gilyard’s voice in third person, but that did not work as far as readability, clarity, or authenticity. I re-read the transcript, and revised the passage to read this way:

When Frank’s brother came home from fighting in World War II, he put a light in the stairwell above the door. Up the stairwell, there was one room in the back filled with big trunks and a closet. The front room was the bedroom fitted with an old bed with springs. Under the mattress, they placed an open Bible face down, which is a Southern superstition that was supposed to keep witches and ghosts away.

I removed the words that Gilyard used in speech or words one would use if speaking in person, such as “there.” I could imagine Gilyard using his hands to demonstrate where the light used to hang, but that does not have the same impact when reading the

narrative or if a reader never met Gilyard. When explaining a fact of a story or setting the scene, Gilyard would use short sentences because he would ask the person if they understood what he was saying. It reads, “Up the stairwell was one room in the back filled with big trunks and a closet. This was the first room. The front room was the bedroom.” Gilyard spoke like this, but for a reader, it is a bit jarring and confusing, so I changed it to read, “When Frank’s brother came home from fighting in World War II, he put a light in the stairwell above the door. Up the stairwell, there was one room in the back filled with big trunks and a closet.” It lacks the flavor of Frank, but it is more concise and clear. This was more the student speaking like Gilyard, than an actual quote, so it did not feel as if I were removing Gilyard.

Throughout the editing process, I attempted to keep the meaning of Gilyard’s stories. When editing certain sections, I tried to read it to myself with Gilyard’s enthusiasm and expressions in mind, and then to sound like him without taking on a false AAVE. For example, I wrote, “Although Frank’s family was not wealthy, he said they “‘weren’t *poor* poor,’” and he was able to save money from his shoe shining job to travel with Mr. Farmer and his boys’ club.” In the transcript, he said these exact words “‘we weren’t poor poor’” with an emphasis on the first “poor.” The tone on the first “poor” implies a meaning that his family did not have money to waste but they weren’t destitute. Their basic needs were met. I inserted quotations when I wanted to reference his tone of speech within the narrative or if he stated an opinion or personal judgment. I never intentionally changed the meaning of his words and stories, and if I had a question, I asked the students or Laurie if they knew what he was trying to say.

I also reorganized some paragraphs and stories to improve the flow of the narrative. Gilyard was a gifted storyteller, and I tried to show that in the structure of the narrative. Gilyard’s interviews were like the one-on-one conversations we’d had; he starts off and goes off in tangents of other stories or ideas. As a class, we discussed arranging the narrative like one of Gilyard’s stories, but the students decided that ordering each section chronologically would be the clearest way of telling his story. The content within the chapters starts out being chronological in most of them, but sometimes branches off to tell small stories and then comes back to the main subject. One change I made in several places was to move pieces to other paragraphs because they complete a story or explain what Gilyard may have been referencing in another.

During the final edit, Laurie asked me to carefully consider whether the narrative was missing any stories I thought should be included, and I suggested the story about his father’s ghost because it adds “the flavor of [his] experiences” to the overall narrative (Jones 26). I had known Gilyard briefly and heard him tell stories; now I appreciated the opportunity to listen to his interviews and to learn about his personal life and a deeper glimpse into his past. It was also important to me to share Gilyard’s stories with the public.

## Conclusion: “our own very personal marks”

**Meeghan and Chris:** Through several revisions and a lot of group work and consultation, we are confident that the final version of the written narrative captures Gilyard’s voice. Of course, we missed out on knowing Gilyard personally and on being able to talk with him about the written narrative. We didn’t have the luxury of knowing what Gilyard would prioritize; we had to decide for ourselves. In doing so we formed a man’s history for him and without him, leaving our own very personal marks in the writing. We did this, of course as Anna Hirsch and Claire Dixon assert, because we were writing creatively and out of necessity, and we were seeking to “represent truth” (189). This is not necessarily a bad thing. As writers of this narrative we had to work “creatively and systematically to construct or invent an imprint of life that is as lifelike as possible” (189). Our goal was to depict Gilyard’s life, his struggles, as accurately, authentically, and vividly as possible; we had to invent a way to retell his story as best we could.

**Laurie:** Meeghan and Chris’s paragraph above speaks to me on several levels. It reminds me that they and their classmates never had the privilege of meeting Frank Gilyard, yet he was able to accomplish what he had done so many times before: provide students with a substantial learning experience while simultaneously recovering, preserving, and disseminating local African American history. It reminds me of the creativity, intelligence, courage, and integrity of Meeghan, Chris, their classmates, and the many students who embark with their faculty and their communities on community literacy projects. And it reminds me of why we must continue to reach across boundaries to implement community literacy projects, despite all of their challenges, leaving all of “our very own personal marks” in our communities. In “Life Changing Assignment,” a poem she wrote for her final writing project in the class, Elizabeth Boulanger captures the power of Frank Gilyard’s life and students’ collaboration with him:

Walking into a new class,  
Not knowing what to expect,  
Seeing old and new faces.  
We hear of a man,  
A man of inspiration,  
Who impacted our city greatly,  
And changed lives.  
Setting up interviews with him,  
The worst news fell upon us.  
We hear of his departure,  
And of his family’s despair.  
Unable to fully understand,  
We became intrigued by his life,

Discovering his voice from the past,  
We were able to hear his tale.  
For the first time he came to life.  
We were able to understand,  
And see our town from a new point of view.  
He spoke of two wars,  
A war of the nations,  
And a war back home.  
He made the pain feel real,  
And the struggle came off the pages,  
As we jotted down every spoken word.  
In class we spoke of what we heard,  
And put the puzzle together,  
Creating a memorial for him.  
After knowing his story,  
His wish became our desire.  
We wanted the community to remember,  
Remember what he did for them,  
And made a change in the city.  
Writing his story was an experience,  
We grew as a class,  
As writers, and as friends,  
But not just academically.  
We got to know Frank,  
His story, his family, and his town,  
Having a story come to life,  
About the struggles  
Faced by the Afro-Americans,<sup>4</sup>  
And altered our world for the better.

## Endnotes

1. We received Institutional Review Board approval to conduct this study. All students who remained in the class gave permission to use their real names and to quote from their written materials. I have used pseudonyms for the two students who participated in transcription but then dropped the course. Jessica Didow gave permission to quote from her interview.

2. Susan D. Rose describes an undergraduate project at Dickinson University to conduct and preserve oral histories of the local African American community. The first stage of interviewing took place in 1989-1990; the second phase in 2001 was a broader historical study on the African American community in Carlisle, PA and included a diverse group of students from Dickinson, Dillard, and Xavier universities. Students used the 1989-1990 oral histories and conducted new interviews as part of this project. Rose's article emphasizes the *interaction* between students and narrator. She argues that the project fostered in students more complex understandings of race and other categories of difference. However, there is no discussion of AAVE or voices.

3. I am always cognizant—and open with students and the Gilyards—about the implications of white academics writing about black individuals. In the many partnerships between the Gilyards, me, and my students, the Gilyards have authorized us to speak.

4. Gilyard regularly and intentionally used the term “Afro-Americans.”

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## Author Bios

**Laurie Grobman** is a Professor of English and Women's Studies at Penn State Berks. She is the 2014 Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching Outstanding Baccalaureate Colleges Professor of the Year. Grobman's teaching, research, and service interests center on community-based research and multicultural education in writing and literary studies. Grobman has published two single-authored books, three co-edited collections, including the recent *Service Learning and Literary Studies in English* (MLA 2015) and several articles in journals such as *College English*, *College Composition and Communication*, and *Reflections*. She also has one forthcoming co-edited collection: *Pedagogies of Public Memory: Teaching Writing and Rhetoric at Museums, Archives, and Memorials* (Routledge 2015). Grobman is a co-founder of *Young Scholars in Writing: Undergraduate Research in Writing and Rhetoric* and the founder of Undergraduate Journal of Service Learning and Community-Based Research.

**Meeghan Orr** graduated from Penn State University, Berks in December 2013 with a BA in American Studies. Meeghan and her co-authors presented this research to the Penn State University, Berks Advisory Board on March 20, 2014 and at Northeastern Modern Language Association's annual conference in Harrisburg on April 3, 2014. Meeghan has followed her passion for herbalism and started her own business, Wise Oak Herbs, where she crafts herbal medicines for her local community.

**Chris Meagher** is currently a student in the professional writing major at Penn State Berks.

**Cassandra Yatron** graduated from Penn State University in 2012; she is scheduled to teach English in Korea beginning in August 2015.

**Jonathan Shelton** graduated from Penn State Berks in 2013 with a B.A. in professional writing. He is currently attending law school.