THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF INTELLECTUALISM IN THE U.S.: LITERACY, LYCEUMS, AND LABOR COLLEGES

DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

Since Richard Hofstadter’s 1963 historical examination of anti-intellectualism in American life, academics and cultural commentators have used that term in their calls of crisis and decline in American culture. While these critiques sometimes offer useful commentary on American culture, most are based on and reinforce narrow views of intellectualism that assume the term designates only a “life of the mind,” a high level of intelligence, or the study of old, abstract, or highbrow ideas. My dissertation intervenes in this critical discussion by moving the focus from listing examples of and laying blame for Americans’ anti-intellectualism to reconsidering past and present views of intellectualism. My objective is to review and revise how we think about learning and its value and to challenge problematic assumptions about intellectualism that privilege certain types of knowledge, measures of intelligence, and locations of learning. I propose a view of intellectualism that is based primarily on people’s desire to learn and think critically and that is more concerned with attitudes toward learning and engagement with ideas than with privileging the texts, ideas, and institutions associated with academic and cultural elites.

It is important to reconsider views of intellectualism because they influence the knowledge and learning environments valued and privileged in the U.S., what and how we teach in American schools, and, ultimately, many Americans’ beliefs about and
interest in education. These issues are particularly relevant for scholars of rhetoric, composition, and literacy studies because they affect what literacy practices get valued and they contribute to hierarchies within the discipline of English Studies that privilege the work of literature scholars. This research also reveals the complex relationship between literacy and intellectualism in the United States.

Focusing on three case studies, my dissertation shows why activities and institutions often understood to be non-intellectual may be considered differently. Following an introductory chapter that surveys relevant literature and introduces my case studies, Chapter 2 reconsiders the nineteenth-century lyceum and challenges the assumption that “useful knowledge” cannot foster intellectualism. I argue that the lyceum cultivated an interest in learning among participants and provided the opportunity to engage the knowledge disseminated. In Chapter 3, I demonstrate how the curriculum and pedagogy of Brookwood Labor College stimulated workers to become active, analytical learners and motivated them to educate others through their activist work.

I discuss in Chapter 4 how the reading and writing assignments used in contemporary GED classes can foster students’ critical thinking and interest in education. My examination challenges the notion that basic or remedial education programs—and their participants—cannot be intellectual. In Chapter 5, I show how my interpretations of these case studies complicate accepted views of intellectualism and suggest the benefits of expanding those views. Together, these three sites of learning demonstrate there are multiple ways to foster intellectualism. They also contest social and institutional hierarchies, challenge the literacy myth, and shed new light on scholarship and teaching.
in the fields of rhetoric, composition, and literacy studies. I conclude the chapter with personal reflections on the teaching of intellectualism.
I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, John and Carol Bradbury, for their unconditional love and support.
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CHAPTER 1

RECONSIDERING PAST AND PRESENT VIEWS OF INTELLECTUALISM IN THE UNITED STATES

Since Richard Hofstadter’s 1963 historical examination of anti-intellectualism in American life, academics and cultural commentators have used the term in their calls of crisis and decline in American culture, and more specifically, in American education. In addition, American popular culture reflects (and perpetuates) the widespread perception that Americans are ignorant, anti-intellectual, or lack reason. This flood of criticism is extensive in volume and location, reaching the American public via books, blogs, radio programs, tv shows like Are You Smarter Than a Fifth Grader?, films like Idiocracy, and late night talk shows, demonstrated well by the recurring “Jaywalking” segment of The Tonight Show. Even American politics has not escaped such criticism. Both George W. Bush, the President of the United States from 2000-2008, and Governor Sarah Palin, a candidate for Vice President in 2008, have been criticized for their lack of knowledge and malapropisms, and their popularity has been cited as evidence of contemporary American anti-intellectualism.

While accusations of American anti-intellectualism, both popular and academic, sometimes offer useful commentary on American culture, most are based on or reinforce narrow views of intellectualism that assume the term designates only a “life of the mind,”
a high level of intelligence, or the study of old, abstract, or highbrow ideas. My dissertation intervenes in this critical discussion by moving the focus from listing examples of and laying blame for Americans’ anti-intellectualism to reconsidering past and present views of intellectualism. My objective is to review and revise how we think about learning and its value and to challenge problematic assumptions about intellectualism that privilege certain types of knowledge, measures of intelligence, and locations of learning. I argue we need to expand traditional views of intellectualism to include a desire to learn, critical thinking, and the study of practical and useful knowledge.

It is important to reconsider views of intellectualism because they influence the knowledge and learning environments valued and privileged in the U.S., what and how we teach in American schools, and ultimately, Americans’ beliefs about and interest in education. These issues are particularly relevant for scholars of rhetoric, composition, and literacy studies because they affect what literacy practices get valued and they contribute to hierarchies within the discipline of English Studies that privilege the work of literature scholars. Rhetoric and composition scholars have attempted to address and dismantle these hierarchies. In Textual Carnivals: The Politics of Composition (1991) Susan Miller pointed out the deliberate and sustained “marginalization” of teachers and students of writing and attempted to disrupt it. In 2004, Lisa Ede drew on her personal experience as literary scholar and then rhetoric and composition scholar to demonstrate and question composition’s troubled “location” in the academy in Situating Composition: Composition Studies and the Politics of Location.
Despite these attempts, the hierarchies of knowledge and disciplines supported by traditional views of intellectualism devalue or undervalue scholarship and teaching practices in rhetoric, composition, and literacy studies that focus on the uses and consequences of “everyday” rhetorical and literacy practices, nontraditional sites of education where such practices are taught and learned, and the social, cultural, political, and economic forces affecting these practices. In addition, past and present views of intellectualism that assume basic or remedial education programs and their participants cannot be intellectual relegate rhetoric and composition scholars’ research on and teaching of basic writing “marginal to the intellectual community” (Rose, *An Open Language* 296).

Keeping these issues in mind, the questions guiding my research include the following: What’s at stake for American culture, academics, and the fields of rhetoric, composition, and literacy studies in how we define intellectualism and anti-intellectualism? What do those who define the terms lose and gain from narrow views of intellectualism? What are the benefits of a broader, more democratic, view of intellectualism—for American society writ large and for the field of rhetoric, composition, and literacy studies? To what extent is intellectualism a political issue? To what extent is it influenced by race, class, gender, and/or ethnicity?

To address these questions, I reexamine three sites of adult education in the United States that demonstrate how narrow views of intellectualism exclude a host of learners and sites of learning that can be recognized as intellectual. I argue that because they provided knowledge to a voluntary, interested audience of adults and encouraged participants to engage with and think critically about the information provided, they
fostered intellectualism among participants. In this chapter, I introduce my three case studies, situate my research in historical and contemporary conversations about education, learning, and knowledge in the U.S., and conclude with my revised definition of intellectualism.

INTRODUCTION TO CASE STUDIES

The sites of my case studies are nontraditional adult education institutions in the U.S.: the nineteenth-century lyceum, early to mid-twentieth-century labor colleges, and early-twenty-first-century GED writing workshops. I focused my research on institutions of adult education because as voluntary, non-traditional sites of education, they reveal motives for and beliefs about education beyond that of getting a college degree. In addition, academics and cultural critics have by and large overlooked institutions of adult education in their discussions about intellectualism because they tend to associate them with vocational and recreational learning (Grattan, *In Quest*)—characteristics viewed as opposed to intellectualism.1

I selected these three institutions of adult education for several reasons. First, they all have provided access to education to those whose education has been limited because of personal or cultural circumstances, such as lack of personal or financial

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1 In his history of non-formal adult education in the U.S., Joseph Kett argues the connection between adult education and “useful knowledge” originated in the eighteenth century and continued in the nineteenth century with the development of education institutions like literary clubs, mutual improvement societies, and the lyceum. Under the influence of progressive education and the rise of what Kett calls “efficiency educators,” adult education became increasingly associated with preparation for work and “job improvement.” During the period 1870-1930, technical institutes experienced growth and higher education distanced itself from job training (228-31). According to Kett, in the twentieth century adult education became more formal and tied to institutions of higher learning. Despite its connection to universities through extension and correspondence programs, adult education maintained its focus on practical knowledge aimed at increasing academic and job credentials rather than intellectual development. Adult education’s connection to useful and practical knowledge and job improvement have contributed to it being overlooked in discussions of intellectualism. My case studies, however, re-examine the intellectual nature and possibilities of adult education.
resources. I also chose them because they represent well adult education in the U.S. across time and place. For example, the lyceum represents certain nineteenth-century characteristics: the motivation for self-improvement through acquiring knowledge; the popularity of lecturing and group discussion as forms of learning; and the desire to open access to adult education to “all classes”. The labor colleges’ focus on educating workers and the more formal structure of these schools represent well adult education in the twentieth-century. Finally, GED writing workshops are consistent with the more contemporary trend of pursuing education for job and life improvement.²

The site of my first case study is the nineteenth-century American lyceum. Educator and science enthusiast Josiah Holbrook established the first American lyceum in the U.S. in 1826 “to diffuse the greatest quantity of useful information among the various classes of the community” (Holbrook, “Associations” 596). Early lyceums were community organizations that met weekly to hear local experts speak on a variety of subjects or to discuss and debate contemporary topics. Eventually, the lyceum became a traveling public lecture circuit with famous speakers lecturing to large audiences. While many scholars have credited the American lyceum with making knowledge accessible to the public, the lyceum’s emphasis on disseminating “useful knowledge” and the increase in entertainment on the lyceum stage have complicated considerations of it as a site or sponsor of intellectualism. In Chapter Two, “The Nineteenth-Century American Lyceum and the ‘Diffusion of Useful Knowledge,’” I show how the lyceum’s dissemination of “useful knowledge” opened access to knowledge, encouraged and promoted a thirst for

knowledge among participants, and provided opportunities for active deliberation of the knowledge disseminated. I also challenge the dichotomy of knowledge that does not consider useful knowledge intellectual.

The site of my second case study is the American labor college. Created in the midst of the American workers’ education and labor movements, labor colleges began early in the twentieth century and closed by the early 1940s. Founded and supported by workers, labor leaders, and labor sympathizers, labor colleges were full-time, one-to-three-year schools designed 1) to educate adult workers about the social, cultural, political, and economic factors affecting labor, and 2) to train them to be successful labor movement leaders and activists. These institutions have been criticized for promoting doctrinaire thinking about issues relevant to the labor movement and for providing limited education for a practical purpose. In Chapter Three, “The Twentieth-Century Labor College and Education for Activism,” I show how the curriculum and pedagogy of American labor colleges inspired workers to be active, analytical learners and motivated them to educate others through their activist work.

For my third case study, I observed and interviewed students, teachers, and an administrator participating in a series of GED-preparation writing workshops at an adult education facility in a large Midwestern town. Despite criticisms that a curriculum based on basic skills cannot be intellectual, I argue that the reading and writing exercises used in these workshops, along with the teaching methods and classroom environment, encourage and support various forms of intellectualism, including a desire to learn, personal investment in education, and critical thinking. This case study is the focus of
Chapter Four, titled “Twenty-First-Century GED Writing Workshops and Remedial Education.”

In Chapter Five, the conclusion, I compare and contrast these three case studies, noting patterns, consistencies, and inconsistencies in how intellectualism is defined, in the factors affecting views of intellectualism, and in the relationship between literacy and intellectualism over time and place in U.S. history. I connect my interpretations of these sites to complicate accepted views of intellectualism and demonstrate the benefits of expanding those views. I conclude the chapter by discussing the application of this research to teaching in the field of rhetoric, composition, and literacy studies.

UNDERSTANDING PAST AND PRESENT VIEWS OF INTELLECTUALISM

In order to challenge past and present views of intellectualism that I argue are narrow and problematic, I begin with a summary of the origins of these views. American views of intellectualism have developed alongside and have been greatly influenced by Americans’ beliefs about education, learning, knowledge, and intelligence. The debates and issues that have most significantly shaped these views of intellectualism include longstanding accusations of American anti-intellectualism, recent accusations of American ignorance, and the development of hierarchies of knowledge and educational institutions. In what follows, I provide a brief history of the development of Americans’ views of intellectualism in the context of these issues and debates.

Accusations of American Anti-intellectualism

Americans’ views of intellectualism are inextricably linked to the widespread and longstanding belief that collectively Americans are anti-intellectual. Central to accusations of anti-intellectualism are the criteria assumed necessary for someone or
something to be considered intellectual. Because these criteria have significantly shaped beliefs about intellectualism, in this section I provide some of the most prominent accusations of American anti-intellectualism and the views of intellectualism they impose.

Published in 1963, historian Richard Hofstadter’s Pulitzer Prize-winning *Anti-intellectualism in American Life* remains the foundational statement on anti-intellectualism in the United States from which contemporary accusations of American anti-intellectualism, ignorance, and unreason have continued to flow. Hofstadter defined anti-intellectualism as “a resentment and suspicion of the life of the mind and of those who are considered to represent it; and a disposition constantly to minimize the value of that life” (7). He defined an intellectual as someone who lives for ideas, not off them and someone who lives for ideas, not an idea. He qualified this further, saying an intellectual has “a sense of dedication to the life of the mind” and a desire to keep asking questions. Hofstadter also claimed practicality is not the basis of the intellectual’s interest in ideas, even if the ideas have practical applications or consequences (27-31).

The equation of intellectualism with “the life of the mind” and its opposition to practical application are criteria central to Hofstadter’s and many others’ notions of intellectualism. Yet, these criteria significantly narrow views of intellectualism. Associating intellectualism with a “life of the mind” implies that to be intellectual, a person must dedicate his or her whole life to the pursuit of ideas. Consequently, even though Hofstadter insisted intellectualism is not directly tied to a profession, he recognized that people often do associate particular professions (such as law, medicine, engineering, and teaching) with intellectualism because the work they do is considered
“vitally dependent upon ideas” (26). In addition, Hofstadter’s insistence that intellectuals cannot pursue ideas for practical reasons has contributed to widespread beliefs that practical knowledge or knowledge pursued for a practical purpose cannot be intellectual. This is, in fact, one of the reasons lyceums, labor colleges, and GED classes have not been recognized as sites of intellectualism.

How Hofstadter defined intellect is also important. Distinguishing it from intelligence, he said intellect is “the critical, creative, and contemplative side of mind.” Intelligence, however, is an “excellence of mind” with a practical quality that limits the wandering of the mind from an original goal (25). Hofstadter developed this distinction, stating “Whereas intelligence seeks to grasp, manipulate, re-order, adjust, intellect examines, ponders, wonders, theorizes, criticizes, imagines. Intelligence will seize the immediate meaning in a situation and evaluate it. Intellect evaluates evaluations, and looks for the meanings of situations as a whole” (25). This distinction between intellect and intelligence, repeated in contemporary discussions of intellectualism, is not so clear. How do you distinguish between evaluating and evaluating evaluations, or between manipulating and examining? What is clear in Hofstadter’s definitions is that intellect is more than intelligence. Consequently, intellectualism sometimes gets conflated with extreme intelligence, or those who are highly educated.

Another consequence of Hofstadter’s interpretation is his promotion of a dichotomy that pits anti-intellectualism against intellectualism and fails to acknowledge a larger spectrum of attitudes and ideas about learning. Hofstadter did mention briefly the term non-intellectual in his book. In fact, he said that most people are not simply intellectual or anti-intellectual, but are more likely non-intellectual, or “infused with
enough ambivalence about intellect and intellectuals to be swayed now this way and now that on current cultural issues” (19). Despite recognizing this, Hofstadter did not focus on non-intellectualism in his book and he did not address the nuances of intellectualism. Instead, he emphasized the more damning characteristic, anti-intellectualism.

One of Hofstadter’s most influential arguments about anti-intellectualism has been his insistence that it has been part of American culture since its birth. He argued that anti-intellectualism is rooted in American religion, business, politics, and education because intellectualism is seen as hostile to much of what Americans value in those areas, including the wisdom of the heart, experience, practical knowledge, and an egalitarian educational system (34). The image of anti-intellectualism supposedly so deeply ingrained in the United States’ cultural ethos has propelled the search for more examples of its existence and persistence. In fact, accusations of Americans’ anti-intellectualism after Hofstadter have typically reiterated or extended Hofstadter’s argument by pointing out more contemporary manifestations of or contributors to American anti-intellectualism. These accusations have continued to influence Americans’ understanding of intellectualism and attitudes toward learning.

One of the most prominent declarations about intellectualism after Hofstadter’s was historian Russell Jacoby’s 1987 *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age*

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3 In “Anti-intellectualism as Romantic Discourse,” historian Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen called Hofstadter’s critique a “romantic longing for an America not yet achieved.” And, she argued that though the term anti-intellectualism only came into vogue in the decade before Hofstadter published his book, “the image of American culture as uniquely hostile to critical intellect” has had a long history (42). According to Ratner-Rosenhagen, despite romantic notions that America was a place unburdened by memories of the past and fertile for the development of a youthful, organic intellectual culture, America failed to develop its own intellectual culture and remained dependent on European culture. Further, she said, when interest in developing an independent “intellectual infrastructure” developed after World War Two, the simultaneous rise of anti-intellectualism dampened those efforts (43-51).
of Academe. Jacoby argued that beginning in the 1960s, young public intellectuals who wrote for the public retreated to the security of university campuses for economic reasons, and, as academics, stopped writing for the public. In 2001, law professor and judge Richard A. Posner reiterated Jacoby’s concern that academics do not adequately play the role of “critical commentator addressing a nonspecialist audience on matters of broad public concern.” In *Public Intellectuals: A Study of Decline*, Posner blamed this, in part, on the “academization” and specialization of knowledge at the modern university (5). While the sentiment that intellectual deliberation should take place in the public (outside the walls of academe) is a productive one, Jacoby’s and Posner’s criticisms of academics portray them as the primary arbiters of intellectualism, contributing to the conflation of intellectual and academic that narrows Americans’ views of intellectualism. Allan Bloom’s and E.D. Hirsch’s censures of American education in the 1980s also conflated intellectualism and academia. I discuss their work in my examination of the influence of educational hierarchies on perceptions of intellectualism.

Contemporary critics have also reiterated Hofstadter’s argument that American anti-intellectualism is manifested in the public’s skepticism about political candidates considered to be or appearing intellectual.⁴ In “The Renaissance of Anti-Intellectualism,” sociologist Todd Gitlin argued that during the 2000 presidential election the public was skeptical of Vice President Al Gore because of his image as a “preachy” intellectual. George W. Bush’s image as a “common man” built on his display of anti-intellectualism, however, appealed to his audience’s “resentment of brains.” According to Gitlin, Bush’s

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⁴ Richard Hofstadter and Susan Jacoby both cite the 1952 presidential campaign as an example of a candidate’s ability to speak well, or perceived intellectualism, serving as a liability. Known as a “politician of uncommon mind and style,” Adlai Stevenson lost the election to Dwight D. Eisenhower who was seen as “conventional in mind” and “relatively inarticulate” (Hofstadter 3).
anti-intellectualism was demonstrated by his many speaking gaffes, his inability to answer questions to which he had not rehearsed an answer, and his lack of curiosity about the world (B7-8). In this critique, Gitlin extends Hofstadter’s argument and equates intellectualism with speaking well—another criteria for intellectualism.

In *The Anti-intellectual Presidency: The Decline of Presidential Rhetoric from George Washington to George W. Bush* (2008), political science professor Elvin T. Lim also noted a decline in the quality of presidential rhetoric, evidenced by an intentional and calculated “rejection of rhetorical or linguistic complexity” (22). Lim, however, does not put all the blame on George W. Bush. According to Lim, the quality of presidential rhetoric has been in decline for a while, even if it has become more obvious in recent years. Asked in a radio interview what he means by intellectual, Lim, like Hofstadter, distinguishes between intelligence and the intellect: "intelligence is practical knowledge; intellect is that which ponders on the pondering." Therefore, he says, he is not calling Presidents anti-intelligent: “I do not mean that Presidents are stupid. I mean that the President simplifies his rhetoric in a way that suggests...insinuates his sincerity but very often at the cost of the substance of rhetoric of his speeches” (“The State of the Presidential Speech”).

The problem, Lim claims, is that while Presidents say a lot, they actually say very little that “contributes constructively to public deliberation” (x). Similar to Gitlin, Lim makes speaking well a criteria for intellectualism. In this case, speaking well means employing sophisticated, substantive rhetoric that informs and engages the American

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5 Lim’s quantitative analysis of the rhetoric of the U.S. presidents and his interviews with 42 former and present political speechwriters document a general decline in presidential rhetoric, revealing the prevalence of shortened sentences and simplified diction, the ubiquity of platitudes, and a reliance on emotive human-interest appeal at the expense of argument.
public. Considering the effect beliefs about intellectualism have on American education and Americans’ interest in learning, this isn’t much of a test for intellectualism.

A self-proclaimed sequel to Richard Hofstadter’s examination of American anti-intellectualism, cultural critic Susan Jacoby’s 2008 best-seller *The Age of American Unreason* calls America “ill with a mutant strain of intertwined ignorance, anti-intellectualism, and anti-rationalism” (xx). In her historical examination, Jacoby argues that despite Hofstadter’s “guarded optimism” about the future of American intellectualism, in the four decades since his account, America’s “endemic anti-intellectual tendencies” have been “grievously exacerbated” by a new species of semiconscious anti-rationalism. This anti-rationalism, she says, is the result of, among other things, popular culture’s unremitting stream of images and noises that leave no room for contemplation.\(^6\) It is manifested in the resurgence of fundamentalist religion, a media that gives credence to nonsense, an increasingly a-literate society, and the tendency of people to dismiss facts and expert opinion that challenge their beliefs.

Jacoby re-inscribes Hofstadter’s view of intellectualism as “living for ideas” and anti-intellectualism as the belief that “devotion to ideas, reason, logic...” is sinister. In addition, like Gitlin and Lim, Jacoby lists a lack of devotion to “precise language” among the characteristics of anti-intellectualism.

What Jacoby’s contemporary history adds to the accusations of anti-intellectualism already presented is an explicit linking of anti-intellectualism with

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\(^6\) In contrast to Jacoby’s and others’ arguments about the anti-intellectual nature of television, a few critics have pointed out the positive effects of television on the American mind. In 1997, Mark Kingwell published an article in the Dec. 12 issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* titled “The Intellectual Possibilities of Television.” In 2005, Steve Johnson published an article in the April 24 issue of the *New York Times Magazine* titled “Watching TV Makes You Smarter.”
ignorance and anti-rationalism. In fact, she blames “an overarching crisis of memory and knowledge” for Americans’ inability to reason. Consequently, while Hofstadter’s history was one of the causes and consequences of America’s hostility and ambivalence toward the “life of the mind,” Jacoby’s is more of a documentation of the “dumbing down” of American culture. The effect of Jacoby’s argument on contemporary views of intellectualism is a conflation of anti-intellectualism, ignorance, and anti-rationalism. This conflation results in the belief that to be intellectual, a person must possess certain knowledge. What knowledge a person must possess is dictated by the person (such as Jacoby) labeling American society ignorant or anti-intellectual. My assessment of the curriculum wars involving E.D. Hirsch Jr., Allan Bloom, and Lawrence Levine also raises this issue.

As this review of prominent accusations of anti-intellectualism in America reveals, Americans’ beliefs about anti-intellectualism shape their understanding of intellectualism. Consequently, views of intellectualism are narrow and exclusionary because of intellectualism’s link to the purpose of education, to the “life of the mind,” to academics and academia, and to ignorance and anti-rationalism. In addition, beliefs about anti-intellectualism reinforce binary thinking about intellectualism and the perception that anti-intellectualism is widespread in American culture. Because of their effect on American education and Americans’ attitudes toward learning, we must reconsider these narrow views of intellectualism.

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7 Presidential historian Douglas Brinkley said in a review of Susan Jacoby’s *The Age of American Unreason*, “With analytic verve and deep historical knowledge, Susan Jacoby documents the dumbing down of our culture like a maestro” (www.susanjacoby.com).

8 Susan Jacoby says, in fact, “Indeed, popular anti-rationalism and anti-intellectualism are now synonymous” (xii).
Accusations of American Ignorance

The popular U.S. social critic Henry Louis Mencken once said “No one ever went broke underestimating the intelligence of the American public.” In 2008, English professor William Pannapacker⁹ wrote in a *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, “Several generations later, one might speculate that no publisher has ever lost money with a book accusing Americans — particularly young ones — of being stupid” (1). One thing is for sure: the cacophony of recent criticism of American culture sends the message that the average American is ignorant and unable to reason. In this context, intellectualism gets confused with measures of intelligence and anti-intellectualism with ignorance. In addition, more attention is paid to evidence of idiocy or ignorance than to evidence of an interest in and engagement with ideas. In this section, I introduce a few of the most relevant and recent accusations of American ignorance.

In 2008, history professor Richard Shenkman called the American voter ignorant, uninformed, inattentive, shortsighted, and a passive absorber of information. In *Just How Stupid Are We?: Facing the Truth About the American Voter*, Shenkman supported his argument with statistics of Americans’ lack of understanding of the mechanics of government, world affairs, political events, and political history, highlighting the public’s misunderstandings of 9/11 and the Iraq war in particular. Instead of blaming the media for reporting false information or the Bush Administration for misleading the public and playing on the public’s fears, Shenkman puts the blame back on Americans, asking “Why were so many people deceivable?” (8).

⁹ William Pannapacker published this article under the pseudonym Thomas H. Benton.
In *The Assault on Reason* (2007), former Vice President Al Gore didn’t call the American voter ignorant; he did, however, say public discourse is “less focused and clear, less reasoned” (x). In this lament for the display of reason in the U.S., Gore reminded his audience that a central premise of American democracy is a belief in the public’s ability to reason through “logical debate” based on the access to and the possession of the best knowledge available. This premise, Gore argued, is under assault by fear of terrorism, the abuse of faith, the media, and corrupt politics. Gore proposed the Internet as a platform for combating this assault on reason because it has the potential to connect people, build community, and make information accessible.

In contrast to Gore, English professor Mark Bauerlein blamed technology for producing unprepared, apathetic college students. In *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future* (2008), Bauerlein argued “digital technologies” have furthered young people’s immersion in entertainment, fashion, and “access to each other,” distracting them from more mature and sustained contemplation about politics, education, foreign affairs, the arts, and science. As he said in a TV interview about his book, there’s a “disconnect between access to information and accretion of knowledge.” Despite an increase in access to information via the Internet, he said, the average twenty-year-old is abysmally ignorant. 10 Nicholas Carr shares Bauerlein’s sentiments, adding his concern for the “rewiring” of brains to skim data rather than read it with concentration. He published his concerns in the cover story of the July/August 2008 issue of *The Atlantic* (“Is Google Making US Stoopid?”) and his book *The Big Switch: Rewiring the World, From Edison to Google* (2008). These

10 “Everyday with Marcus and Lisa” on FamilyNet.
accusations are part of a larger debate about technology’s effect on American ignorance and intellectualism and are reminiscent of similar concerns about television and radio.

Together, these contemporary accusations of ignorance (along with Susan Jacoby and Elvin T. Lim’s recent arguments) confuse Americans’ understanding of what Americans do and don’t know and the social, cultural, and political forces affecting what Americans know. They also reiterate a view that the average American may not be “smarter than a fifth grader.” Using inflammatory titles like *Just How Stupid Are We?*, “Is Google Making Us Stoopid?,” and *The Dumbest Generation*, these sources reinforce the perception that Americans are collectively anti-intellectual and conflate ignorance with anti-intellectualism and intellectualism with IQ. Amidst the great attention being paid to American ignorance, unreason, and anti-intellectualism, we need to reconsider accepted views of intellectualism and focus greater attention on its presence in American culture.

**The Development of Hierarchies of Knowledge and Educational Institutions**

American views of intellectualism have also developed alongside and been affected by the formation of hierarchies of knowledge, culture, and educational institutions in the United States. Consequently, intellectualism has been associated with the ideas, texts, and institutions of learning privileged by those hierarchies and disassociated from those that are not. In this section, I provide a sketch of the

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11 The main question here is to what extent the access to information, collaboration, and interaction that the Internet provides breeds or cultivates intellectualism in the American public and to what extent it impedes or stifles it. While many scholars and critics acknowledge the possible negative consequences of digital technologies on the American mind, some do recognize the positive influences and potential of this significant part of American culture.
development of these hierarchies and their effect on past and present views of intellectualism.

Historian Richard D. Brown has noted that the information abundance in the mid-nineteenth century amplified by printing presses led to the formation of two distinct information markets. The first, the traditional information market that focused on information for the sake of knowledge, remained under the control of the social elite. The elite maintained control by writing the texts that dominated American education and by dictating the standards of “respectable knowledge.” The second, a new information market that formed mid-century, focused on information for entertainment. It was controlled by “popular” audiences and included publications like the penny press (*Knowledge is Power* 270-77).

Related to this hierarchy of information is what historian Lawrence Levine has called a hierarchy of culture. According to Levine, in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, public life was becoming more fragmented and the concept of culture became hierarchical: “highbrow” was used to describe intellectual or aesthetic superiority, while “lowlbrow” was used to indicate someone or something not “highly intelligent” or “aesthetically refined” (*Highbrow/Lowbrow* 223). The outcome of this developing hierarchy of culture was that while classical music, art, and literature enjoyed both “high cultural status and mass popularity” throughout most of the nineteenth century, by the end of the century they were considered “highbrow” and were intended for socially elite audiences only.

As the definitions of lowbrow and highbrow indicate, highbrow culture and knowledge are typically considered intellectual, while lowbrow culture and knowledge
are often equated with anti-intellectual or non-intellectual.\footnote{The \textit{Oxford English Dictionary Online} defines highbrow as “a person of superior intellectual attainments or interests” and “intellectually superior.” Lowbrow is defined as “one who is not, or does not claim to be, highly intellectual or aesthetically refined.” \textit{Oxford English Dictionary Online}. Second Edition. 1989. \url{http://dictionary.oed.com}. Accessed July 5, 2009. The \textit{Wikipedia} entry for highbrow begins by equating highbrow with intellectual: “Used colloquially as a noun or adjective, highbrow is synonymous with intellectual” (www.wikipedia.com). Accessed 6 June 2009.} These associations have led to the privileging of knowledge and culture deemed highbrow, especially in American schools. They also create boundaries that limit what and who fall under the rubric of intellectualism. In addition, as Levine points out, the categories of “highbrow” and “lowlbrow” are not fixed and have changed over time. For example, while Shakespeare’s work was considered popular entertainment for many diverse audiences in nineteenth-century America, in the twentieth-century, Shakespeare’s work was seen as “highbrow” entertainment for “polite” culture (4, 31). The oscillation of what gets defined as highbrow (or intellectual) and lowbrow (or anti-intellectual) reveals the importance of who gets to define the terms. Consequently, hierarchies of knowledge—and views of intellectualism—are significantly tied to a social hierarchy in which the dominant class controls what gets valued and rewarded.

We can understand better the development of hierarchies of knowledge and their influence on views of intellectualism by looking at a few recent examples, including the “curriculum wars” of the 1970s and 1980s and recent accusations of a “reading crisis.” I focus on these two examples because they also clarify the effect views of intellectualism have on the field of rhetoric, composition, and literacy studies.

\textit{The Curriculum Wars}

Following concerns about the state of American education propagated by \textit{Time’s} 1955 “Why Johnny Can’t Read” cover story, the Soviet Union’s 1957 launching of
Sputnik, and *Newsweek*’s 1975 declaration that “Johnny Can’t Write,” the “curriculum wars” of the 1970s and 1980s sparked attention. This curriculum debate greatly influenced Americans’ views of education because it received much attention outside academia, with Allan Bloom and E.D. Hirsch’s critiques becoming national best-sellers. Because the literary canon was part of the debates, they demonstrate how reading practices have been tied to ideas of intellectualism.

An early participant in the debate, historian Christopher Lasch, in *The Culture of Narcissism* (1979), criticized American educational institutions for a decline in students’ knowledge of foreign languages, historical information, and literary classics. In his 1987 bestseller *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*, E.D. Hirsch Jr. similarly blamed the poor state of American education on the absence of a common core of knowledge among American students. Like Lasch, Hirsch cited examples of students unable to define basic terms, identify important names and dates, or recognize basic facts. Hirsch, however, proceeded to list (and eventually publish a series of cultural literacy dictionaries defining) the knowledge Americans need to possess to be culturally literate.¹³

In his 1987 bestseller *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today’s Students*, Allan Bloom declared the problem in education was that students’ minds were being “closed” by modernist sentiments of egalitarianism (fueled by 1960s counter cultures) that demanded “openness” to everyone’s ideas. The solution for Bloom was to ensure that students at

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top-tier universities read “The Great Books” because, to him, they grapple with the “important questions of life” that “open” students’ minds. Bloom also believed there was a right way to read these books.

Each of these critics claimed that what was ailing the American education system was the absence of particular knowledge—a core or canon of knowledge that includes particular historical and literary knowledge. For Hirsch, it is sufficient for Americans to have read about, but not necessarily read many of the ideas of the greats of philosophy and literature, including those of Proust, Machiavelli, Hemingway, Keats, and Kafka. For Bloom, however, students needed to read and engage these works. The assertions made by these professors impose a hierarchy of knowledge that designates some ideas, thinkers, and books more important than others and reinforced the social hierarchies that grant them the power to say what knowledge is most important.

Historian Lawrence Levine, in The Opening of the American Mind: Canons, Culture, and History (1996) responded to these attacks on American higher education by tracing the history of the American university. His history showed that changes in the curriculum/canon have fluctuated in response to the social and cultural forces of the times. For example, the classical curriculum that included Latin, Greek, math, natural and moral philosophy, and logic was attacked in the nineteenth century and by the early twentieth century had been replaced by the canon that included Shakespeare, Milton, Rousseau, Kant, and Marx (37-47). Similarly, he said, the modern canon has evolved to become more “open” as a response to a changing society, one with a growing sense of nationalism and multiculturalism. Once again, Levine underscores the power of those who are in charge of the curriculum over what ideas get valued and disseminated.
Another consequence of these “curriculum wars” was the addition of yet another problematic dichotomy—“the opening” of the American mind verses “the closing” of the American mind. Similar to the lowbrow/highbrow designation of culture, this debate over opening and closing the American mind reinforces dichotomous thinking about learning and education: a mind is either open or closed. (It also assumes a singular American mind.) Like the lowbrow/highbrow distinction, this dichotomy gets linked to intellectualism. To be intellectual is to have an “open mind”; to be anti-intellectual is to have a “closed mind.” In this way, for example, Bloom’s censure of American higher education implies that to be intellectual, Americans need to read and engage with “The Great Books.” This implication continues to affect the discipline of English Studies, as I will discuss later.

Attached to the hierarchical beliefs about knowledge and intellectualism expressed in these debates is an assumed hierarchy of educational institutions. This is most evident when Bloom argues the “lower and professional schools” should prepare the general population to be good citizens while elite universities (the twenty to thirty top universities) should produce intellectuals. In “Intelligence, Knowledge, and the Hand/Brain Divide,” Mike Rose helps us understand this institutional divide when he traces the history of the academic/vocational education split. According to Rose, the 1917 Smith-Hughes Act gave national legitimacy to the vocational education movement by mandating separate governing boards, funding sources, and instructional programs for vocational schools. The result was the institutionalizing of cultural and educational biases about intelligence. Because those who work with their hands are assumed to be less intelligent than those who work with their minds, the institutions that prepare
students for those respective jobs are judged similarly. In other words, academic programs manifest intelligence, while vocational programs prepare students for work. This is the type of problematic distinction of “higher learning” Thorstein Veblen decried in 1918. This distinction is also one of the reasons lyceums, labor colleges, and GED programs have been overlooked as sites of intellectualism.

**Reading Crisis**

A second contemporary example of how hierarchies of knowledge influence views of intellectualism centers on recent reports of a “reading crisis” in the United States. The reports make claims about the intellectual consequences of reading practices and impose a “hierarchy of literature.” In this section, I survey some of these reports and address the effect they have on views of intellectualism.

In the past six years, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) has released several reports on reading. In the same vein as earlier reports that “Johnny Can’t” read or write, these reports send the message “Johnny Won’t” read or doesn’t read well. The NEA’s 2004 report entitled *Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America* claimed their survey of over 17,000 Americans age eighteen or over revealed that for the first time, “less than half the adult population now reads literature” (vii). They claimed, more specifically, that the rate of decline in literary reading was accelerating, that it paralleled a decline in book reading at large (meaning the reading of all types of books), and that it was declining across gender, race, ethnicity, age, education level, and income divisions. In 2007, The NEA released another report, titled *To Read or Not To Read: A Question of National Consequence*. Based on statistics from more than forty studies on the reading habits and skills of children, teenagers, and adults, the NEA again claimed
that 1) Americans are reading less, 2) Americans are reading less well (evidenced by test scores), and 3) the declines in reading have civic, social, and economic implications.

The NEA’s concentration on literary reading (defined as novels, short stories, plays, or poetry), to the exclusion of non-literary reading (including essays, memoirs, cultural criticism, and political commentary)\(^{14}\) implies that literary reading is more valuable than non-literary reading.\(^{15}\) In addition, because the NEA argues a decline in literary reading has intellectual consequences, these reports influence contemporary understandings of intellectualism. For example, the NEA concludes in the Executive Summary of the 2004 *Reading at Risk* report that “If one believes that active and engaged readers lead richer intellectual lives than non-readers and that a well-read citizenry is essential to a vibrant democracy, the decline of literary reading calls for serious action” (ix). The authors of the report imply that reading necessarily produces well-informed and intellectual citizens and not reading produces ill-informed citizens who are not intellectual. The relationship between literary reading and intellectualism is expressed more explicitly in the Preface of the same report, when the NEA claims “print culture affords irreplaceable forms of focused attention and contemplation that make complex communications and insights possible. To lose such intellectual capability […] would

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\(^{14}\) Faulted for its focus on literary texts in the 2004 report, the NEA did include in its 2007 survey (reported in *To Read or Not To Read*) the reading of fiction and nonfiction in various forms, including books, magazines, newspapers, and online materials. The NEA returned to its concentration on literary texts, though, in their 2009 report titled *Reading on the Rise: A New Chapter in American Literacy*. Though the organization had a more positive diagnosis this time—literary reading is on the rise among adult Americans—it once again assumed some reading is better than other reading.

\(^{15}\) English professor Janice Radway pointed out a similar “hierarchy of literature” in her research on “The Book-of-the-Month Club.” Such a hierarchy, she claimed, ranks literature as follows: the “best works of contemporary literature,” “the worst examples of mindless trash,” and the “amorphous middle ground of the unremarkable but respectable” (what has come to be known as “middlebrow” literature). This categorization, similar to the one the NEA appears to be applying, assumes a single set of criteria for measuring the value of a text and consequently dismisses the value of literature that with different criteria are valuable to others (260-2).
constitute a vast cultural impoverishment” and our nation will become “less informed, active, and independent-minded” (vii).

By linking their report of a decline in literary reading with a nation of ill-informed, passive thinkers, the NEA implies there is one path to active, independent thinking and consequently to intellectualism, and it goes through reading novels, short stories, plays, or poetry. To what extent the readers of these texts are interested in or engage the ideas presented in these texts is irrelevant to the NEA. Such beliefs are based on what historian Harvey J. Graff called “the literacy myth”—the belief that literacy and education by themselves are necessary for economic and social development and mobility, individual cognitive advancement, and the establishment and maintenance of democratic institutions (xxxvi-xxxviii). Graff’s study of quantitative data from three Canadian cities from 1861 to 1871 reveals, counter to these beliefs, that ascribed characteristics (including ethnicity, race, class, and gender) are important variables that may have more influence on someone’s economic, social, or cognitive status or advancement than his or her literacy (The Literacy Myth). It is equally important to recognize there are multiple paths to intellectualism and that many variables besides reading literature can affect the development of critical, independent thinking.

With the publication of The Knowledge Deficit: Closing the Shocking Education Gap for American Children (2006), E.D. Hirsch, Jr. added to perceptions of a “reading crisis.” Once again, Hirsch points out what he sees as a knowledge gap between American children from different economic classes and a knowledge deficit between a majority of American students compared to students from other countries. The problem, he asserted, is the result of Americans’ failure to teach reading from a knowledge-
oriented approach rather than a process-oriented approach. In other words, he says
teachers and parents should spend more time introducing American children to what he
calls content-rich books and less time on teaching them formalistic reading “skills.”
Hirsch defines “content-rich” books as the classics (much like Bloom did) and he again
proposes making this content consistent across the nation’s schools to ensure equal
opportunities to all children regardless of class or race. Like the NEA, Hirsch reasserts a
hierarchy of literature that privileges the classics. He also re-inscribes the literacy myth
by arguing the reading of certain texts can negate barriers constructed along race and
class divides.

Evidenced by the development of a hierarchy of knowledge in early America, by
the curriculum war of the 1970s and 1980s, and by contemporary reports of a reading
crisis, Americans’ views of intellectualism typically equate the term with “texts” and
ideas deemed highbrow, theoretical, or abstract, and with the institutions associated with
those texts and ideas. This division of knowledge and texts and its relation to
intellectualism has had severe consequences, including what knowledge gets valued and
disseminated by educational institutions and, within those institutions, what disciplines
and fields get valued, including the fields of rhetoric, composition, and literacy studies.

A NEW DEFINITION OF INTELLECTUALISM

As my review of the origins and development of views of intellectualism in the
United States has shown, intellectualism is narrowly conceived, privileging certain types
of knowledge, measures of intelligence, reasons for pursuing knowledge, and locations of
learning. It is the purpose of this dissertation to challenge the problematic assumptions
about intellectualism that impose these privileges and make intellectualism exclusive. It
is important to revisit traditional views of intellectualism and the consequences of those views at this time—a time when accusations of American ignorance, unreason, and anti-intellectualism are widespread and dominate Americans’ beliefs about American education and culture. In this section, I offer my revised view of intellectualism.

Running through the history of the development of Americans’ views of intellectualism is a series of problematic dichotomies about learning, education, and knowledge, including intellectual/anti-intellectual, practical/intellectual, open mind/closed mind, hand/mind, highbrow/lowbrow, intelligent/ignorant, academic/vocational. Imposing and reifying these dichotomies severely limits what knowledge, activities, educational institutions, and people fall under the rubric of intellectual. For example, if only knowledge considered highbrow is considered intellectual, then knowledge considered practical, useful, or experiential is devalued or classified non-intellectual, contributing to the marginalization of those who acquire and possess such knowledge (often including non-white, non-highly-educated Americans of the lower, middle, and working classes). Or, if only higher-ranking academic institutions are thought to foster intellectualism, then all the learning that takes place at vocational, technical, or non-traditional sites of learning is dismissed as non-intellectual. The result of this dichotomous view of learning and intellectualism is the promotion of hierarchies that place higher value on the ideas, beliefs, and knowledge of the gatekeepers of intellectualism—academics.

Consequently, I argue, we need to expand traditional views of intellectualism so they no longer depend upon or promote dichotomous or hierarchical views of education and learning. In other words, we need a definition of intellectualism that challenges the
view that there is only one path to intellectualism, and that it is through attending elite universities, acquiring “highbrow” knowledge, and pursuing education only for the sake of learning (not for practical purposes or application). Because this one path is accessible only to an elite few whose personal, economic, and social circumstances allow it, this view of intellectualism re-inscribes problematic institutional and social hierarchies.

I propose, then, a view of intellectualism that is based primarily on a person’s desire to learn and think critically, that is more concerned with attitudes toward learning and engagement with ideas than with drawing hierarchical boundaries based on the texts, ideas, and institutions associated with the elite. Under this definition, intellectualism includes education for a practical purpose; the study of useful, practical, and experiential knowledge; and non-traditional and vocational sites of learning. Because this definition does not privilege particular educational institutions, it also opens the rubric of intellectualism to the middle, lower, and working classes, to men and women, and to people of varying races and ethnicities. Finally, this more democratic view does not exclude the research and teaching of rhetoric, composition, and literacy studies scholars.

By placing the emphasis on a person’s attitude toward learning and his or her engagement with ideas, we can expand the learners and sites of learners we recognize as intellectual—challenging the assumed notion that a majority of Americans are ignorant and anti-intellectual and that the United States is void of intellectuals and intellectualism outside its elite universities. In the chapters that follow, I use my examination of three very important non-traditional sites of learning to demonstrate the benefits of reconsidering and expanding views of intellectualism.
CHAPTER 2
THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN LYCEUM AND THE
“DIFFUSION OF USEFUL KNOWLEDGE”

Nineteenth-century Americans valued the acquisition of knowledge because they believed it had the potential to improve an individual’s morality, taste, character, and mind. In response to the public’s interest in self-improvement and the acquisition of knowledge, the United States experienced a significant increase in the founding of adult education societies focused on spreading “useful knowledge” from the late eighteenth century to the mid nineteenth century\(^\text{16}\) (Brown, “The Emergence” 64-5). In fact, by the early 1830s there were hundreds of subscription reading rooms and libraries, debating clubs, and associations that sponsored lectures (Grattan 154). In this context, the American lyceum\(^\text{17}\) was created to diffuse and make accessible to the public\(^\text{18}\) “practical

\(^{16}\) Historian Richard D. Brown ties the increase of these types of societies to a change in the perception of citizenship after the American Revolution: “the new American citizenship idealized political participation and initiative. Public institutions promised responsiveness, flexibility, and improvement as incentives to citizen involvement, while republican ideology warned against apathy as the path toward tyranny” (“The Emergence” 68). Historian Joseph Kett has called the three decades before the Civil War a period “marked by the democratization of knowledge.” He calls it primarily a local movement and effort, supported by the transportation revolution, Jacksonian democracy, the lower cost of printed material, the upheaval of the Revolution, and the desire for personal advancement (38-9).

\(^{17}\) The word lyceum has been used to mean “an institution through which lectures, dramatic performances, debates, and the like are presented to a community,” “the association which sponsors such an institution,” and “the building in which such lectures, etc., are given” (Bode x-xi). The term originated much earlier and referred to the building or grove near the temple of Apollo Lyceus where Aristotle taught (Hayes viii). In this chapter, I use the word lyceum to refer to nineteenth-century adult education organizations that called themselves lyceums and participated in the lyceum movement begun by Dr. Josiah Holbrook in 1826. These organizations included both the lyceum public lecture circuit and local lyceums that held meetings and engaged in discussions and debates. Though town meetings and public lectures were not new
sciences, instruction” and other “useful knowledge.” The lyceum would become one of the most popular nineteenth-century venues for adult public education. I have selected the lyceum as my first case study because, in both philosophy and form, it represents well adult education in the nineteenth century.

In this chapter I reevaluate the lyceum’s contributions to intellectualism in the nineteenth century by reexamining the purpose of the lyceum, the knowledge disseminated by the lyceum, the learning and thinking practices nurtured by the lyceum, the transformation of the lyceum, and access to the lyceum. Based on my reevaluation, I argue that the lyceum cultivated an interest in learning among participants by making knowledge accessible and by sending the message that knowledge and education are valuable. Also, by providing for many the opportunity to participate in thoughtful discussions and debates about the information provided, the lyceum fostered critical thinking. These characteristics, I argue, make the lyceum a significant sponsor and site of intellectualism in the nineteenth century.

THE AMERICAN LYCEUM

In 1826, educator and science enthusiast Josiah Holbrook established the first lyceum in Millbury, Massachusetts because he saw as important “the general diffusion of knowledge” and the “raising [of] the moral and intellectual taste of our countrymen […]”

activities at the time, lyceum organizations were distinctive in that they were started with the same general plan (designed by Holbrook) and spread significantly. 

Historian Donald M. Scott distinguished between the nineteenth-century “public” (including all members of the community) and the “public” that made up the audience for nineteenth-century lectures (almost exclusively middle-class residents of the northern U.S. consisting of primarily white Anglo-Saxon Protestants). According to Scott, this group used the public lecture system to create the image that the lecture audience represented the “real American public” (808-09).
He modeled the lyceum after British and American mechanics’ institutes that used a lecture-demonstration method and the creation of local libraries of technical books to teach skilled workingmen geometry, mechanics, astronomy, hydrostatics and chemistry.

Early lyceums were small associations that met weekly to hear local experts speak on subjects like biology, travel, history, and biography, or to engage in discussions and debates of topics proposed by the group. By 1845, the lyceum had become a “public lecture system” still organized by local associations but including nationally-known lecturers. Though the lyceum all but disappeared during the Civil War, it gained popularity after the war with high-paid national celebrities participating in traveling groups organized, advertised, and produced by lyceum bureaus. These traveling groups consisted of lectures, but also dramatic and musical performances and other entertainment (Scott 792; Bode vii-viii). From its inception, the American lyceum quickly spread, especially in New England, with lyceum branches numbering around one hundred in 1828 and three thousand by 1834 (Noffsinger 101).

While scholars have credited the American lyceum with improving common schools and teaching, disseminating knowledge to a wide audience, and providing an

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19 In 1799, George Birkbeck (a young medical school graduate from the University of Edinburgh) started offering free lectures on chemistry to Glasgow mechanics. In 1823, the Glasgow Mechanics’ Institute was officially established, and in 1824 the London Mechanics’ Institute started. Timothy Claxton, a mechanic from England, moved to Boston in 1826 and established the Boston Mechanics’ Institution. He met Josiah Holbrook in 1829 and together they founded the Boston Lyceum. A few years later, they formed the Boston Mechanics’ Lyceum (Kett 111-13).

20 According to communication studies professor John Tapia, the lyceum never flourished in the South because “Southern financial leaders were antagonistic to anything that might upset the slave-based economy, and that included educating blacks and poor whites through lyceum” (13). Carl Bode explained it similarly: “The fundamental fact about the lyceum in the South is that it ran counter to the massive economic and social trends—in which slavery became central—of the region, and to their cultural accompaniment” (Bode 75). He also cites fewer towns, smaller population, and less transportation as reasons for the lyceum’s relative absence in the South (76-9).
opportunity to engage in speech, debate, and discussion, the narrow views of intellectualism I summarized in Chapter 1 have hindered its recognition as a site and supporter of intellectualism. Because the purpose of education in this context was practical application to daily life (rather than learning for its own sake), the lyceum has not been recognized as a cultivator of intellectualism. The lyceum’s association with “useful, practical knowledge” (and not abstract, theoretical, or highbrow knowledge), has also interfered with its being viewed as intellectual. In addition, the lyceum lecture system has been criticized for only transmitting facts from the learned to the less learned, serving more as a “consensus builder” than a facilitator of independent, critical thinking (Ray 185-88). Finally, the most consistent criticism of the American lyceum, both in the nineteenth century and today, is its transformation after the Civil War into a more commercial, business-like organization that added to the lyceum stage (and according to some critics, gave preference to) a variety of forms of entertainment.

Because these critiques are based on problematic assumptions about the purpose and content of the lyceum, the audience’s engagement with the information dispersed to them, and the transformation of the lyceum, I focus my analysis of the lyceum on these issues. I argue that if we reconsider the lyceum with a broadened definition of intellectualism, not based on hierarchical dichotomies, then we can recognize the lyceum as a site of intellectualism in nineteenth-century America. I support my argument by examining nineteenth-century lyceum documents, including early writings about the lyceum, lyceum lectures, lyceum meeting minutes, lyceum periodicals, newspaper reports
and advertisements of lyceums, lecturer promotional materials, and nineteenth-century periodicals discussing lyceums.\textsuperscript{21}

\textbf{THE PURPOSE OF THE LYCEUM}

Because the lyceum’s purpose for disseminating knowledge has hindered its being recognized as a site of intellectualism, I begin my re-examination of the lyceum by looking closely at Josiah Holbrook’s original vision for these associations. Josiah Holbrook was a teacher and lecturer who studied science at Yale and dedicated himself to popularizing and making accessible to non-specialists scientific knowledge and technical procedure.\textsuperscript{22} In an effort to realize his goal of spreading knowledge, he not only started the first lyceum in 1826, he also manufactured scientific apparatus for common schools, started two lyceum journals, and in 1837 worked with others to establish a lyceum village.\textsuperscript{23}

Holbrook published his vision for the lyceum in an 1826 article in the \textit{American Journal of Education} (\textit{AJE}) titled “Associations of Adults for Mutual Education”\textsuperscript{24}. “The first object of this society is to procure for youths an economical and practical education, and to diffuse rational and useful information through the community generally. The second object is to apply the sciences and the various branches of education to the

\textsuperscript{21} I obtained these archival documents from The Ohio Historical Society in Columbus, Ohio and through online archival databases including the Library of Congress \textit{American Memory} site, the \textit{American Libraries Internet Archive}, and \textit{Google Books}.

\textsuperscript{22} Holbrook began his career as a keeper of a private school that combined study and farm labor. Before starting the lyceum, he was an itinerant lecturer on scientific subjects.

\textsuperscript{23} In 1837, Josiah Holbrook, along with John Baldwin, James Gilruth, and Henry O. Sheldon, started America’s first lyceum village—Berea, Ohio. Created to combine manual labor and study, to spread knowledge and interest in science, and to prepare youth to become missionaries of the lyceum, Berea lasted only a few years (until 1842) and failed to lead to the spread of lyceum villages across the country, as the founders had hoped.

\textsuperscript{24} Though the word \textit{lyceum} is never mentioned in this document, the lyceum Holbrook started in the same year is the outcome of his plan for “associations for mutual education” described here.
domestic and useful arts, and to all the common purposes of life” (595). As these objectives indicate, Holbrook designed the lyceum to spread useful, practical knowledge to the public to improve education for the youth and for application by individuals in their daily lives.

As I noted in Chapter 1, Richard Hofstadter and many critics following him who view intellectualism as a “life of the mind” dissociate intellectualism from learning for practical purposes or practical application. Because of Holbrook’s emphasis on the practical application of the knowledge disseminated, the lyceum does not fit Hofstadter’s and others’ ideas of an intellectual institution. I argue, however, that intellectualism should not be defined primarily by the official purpose of education, but rather by an individual’s interest in learning and engaging with ideas—issues I take up in later sections.

**The Lyceum’s Intellectual Purpose**

Holbrook also believed, like the nineteenth-century public (or, the lyceum audience) that the acquisition of knowledge could improve an individual’s character, morality, taste, and mind:

> It seems to me that if associations for mutual instruction in the sciences and other branches of useful knowledge, could once be started in our villages, and upon a general plan, they would increase with great rapidity, and do more for the general diffusion of knowledge, and for raising the moral and intellectual taste of our countrymen, than any other expedient which can possibly be devised. And it may be questioned if there is any other way, to check the progress of that monster, intemperance, which is
making such havoc with talents, morals, and every thing that raises man above the brute, but by presenting some object of sufficient interest to divert the attention of the young from places and practices which lead to dissipation and to ruin. (594-5)

It is clear from this passage that, motivated in part by a desire to address intemperance, Holbrook believed the lyceum could have intellectual benefits for the audience. To understand what Holbrook believed were the intellectual benefits of the lyceum, I examine his use of the word intellectual in the context of the nineteenth century.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*), *intellect* was commonly used in the nineteenth century to refer to someone possessing understanding or intelligence, and to refer to “That faculty, or sum of faculties, of the mind or soul by which one knows and reasons (excluding sensation, and sometimes imagination; distinguished from *feeling* and *will*); power of thought; understanding.” The *OED* notes that *intellectual* was used in the nineteenth century to mean “possessing a high degree of understanding; given to pursuits that exercise the intellect” and “that appeals to or engages the intellect; requiring the exercise of understanding.”

Holbrook’s use of the word *intellectual* in his 1826 proclamation is consistent with the *OED*’s description of nineteenth-century use of the term. In the passage quoted above, Holbrook expresses his hope that the lyceum could help raise *intellectual taste*. He uses the word again when he lists what scientific subjects lyceums should discuss and then adds “or any political, intellectual, or moral subject” (595). Later in the article Holbrook writes that the associations he’s proposing may help in establishing institutions “for giving to youths a thorough education, intellectual, moral and physical” (595). And
finally, he proposes having general or state boards for these associations for the purpose of devising and recommending a system of education “to secure to the rising generation the best intellectual, moral, and physical education” (596). In every case, Holbrook used *intellectual* as an adjective, modifying education, taste, or subject matter.

Consistent with common usage of the term in the nineteenth century, Holbrook appears to be using *intellectual* as a synonym for intelligence or mental faculties. Consequently, for Holbrook, the intellectual purpose of the lyceum was improvement of the mental faculties. I argue, however, that the lyceum fostered intellectualism among participants not only by improving mental faculties, but also by promoting an interest in learning and encouraging critical engagement with ideas.

**“USEFUL KNOWLEDGE”**

In addition to its practical purpose, the lyceum’s emphasis on “useful knowledge” has hindered its being recognized as an intellectual institution. In my effort to demonstrate the intellectual nature of the lyceum, I reexamine what knowledge was considered “useful” by Holbrook and other lyceum leaders in the nineteenth century and also what knowledge was actually disseminated by nineteenth-century lyceums. My conclusions challenge the assumption that “useful knowledge” is not intellectual.

According to nineteenth-century lyceum documents, lyceum leaders conceived of “useful knowledge” broadly, evidenced by their descriptions of useful knowledge and by the variety of subjects considered appropriate for lyceums. For example, Cincinnati Law
School professor Timothy Walker, in an 1830 address at the opening of the Charlestown (Ohio) Lyceum, described “useful knowledge” this way: “Useful knowledge is what we look for in Lyceums; not brilliancy, not wit. Sparkling genius will avail us far less than unpolished common sense. Practical information is what the many want, such information as they can turn to useful account in the daily concerns of life. To furnish this, at the cheapest possible rate, is what I understand to be the design of this, and all similar associations” (5-6). In his inaugural address for the Mount Vernon (Ohio) Lyceum, Henry Barnes Curtis (a lawyer and president of this lyceum branch) added that in the dissemination of useful knowledge, lyceums “are not limited to books, and scholastic researches, in the useful operations of our society; but they extend to all the common transactions of life” (4-5). Useful knowledge, as described by Walker and Curtis, is broadly conceived, with the main criteria being its applicability or utility.

We get a clearer picture of what knowledge was considered useful from the specific topics lyceums dealt with. In his 1826 proclamation for the establishment of lyceums, Holbrook lists the following subjects as the types of knowledge lyceums should disseminate: “[t]he several branches of Natural Philosophy, viz: Mechanics, Hydrostatics, Pneumatics, Chemistry, Mineralogy, Botany, any branch of the Mathematics, History, Political Economy, or any political, intellectual, or moral subject” (“Associations” 595). Curtis listed as important for lyceums philosophy, chemistry, botany, literature, and

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25 Timothy Walker was a law professor at the Cincinnati Law School in Ohio. With Edward King and Judge John C. Wright, Timothy Walker founded the Cincinnati Law School. This school is now part of the University of Cincinnati (www.law.uc.edu/175/history/timeline.shtml).

26 Timothy Walker and Henry Barnes Curtis’ use of the term “useful knowledge” is consistent with the nineteenth-century definition of useful: “Having the character or quality to be of use or utility; suitable for use; advantageous, profitable, beneficial” (Oxford English Dictionary).
belles letters. With an emphasis on scientific subjects, a wide array of topics was considered suitable for lyceums.

My examination of lyceum records and documents reveals that the subjects covered by lyceums were broad not only in theory, but in practice. This is true for both local lyceum meetings and lyceum public lectures, and also for lyceum periodicals published in the 1830s to disseminate “useful knowledge” in written form. The following is a partial list of topics discussed and debated at the meetings of local lyceum organizations in Ohio between 1842 and 1871. This list demonstrates that “useful knowledge” included social, cultural, and political issues of the time.

- Ought a member of our state or national legislature to obey the will of his constituents so far as to vote contrary to his own judgment?
- Would it be good policy by legal enactment to prevent any of the two proffessions [sic] Law or Medicine from practicing without a diploma?
- Would it be expedient for the Legislature of Ohio to establish a school library at each school district in the state?
- Resolved that oratory has done more to secure the votes of the people than Arms.
- Resolved that the northern part of these United States would be justifiable in separating from the southern part.
- Resolved that lawers [sic] are more useful to community than Doctors.

27 These subjects come from the annals and minutes of the Williams Lyceum Society of Greenfield Academy (1844-46), the Allen Missionary Lyceum of the Ohio Wesleyan University (1846), the Martinsburg Lyceum of Ohio (1842-45), and the South Charleston Lyceum, Ohio (1867-71). I accessed them at the Ohio Historical Society in Columbus, Ohio.
Resolved that the female should have equal privileges with the male in the exercise of the elective franchise and governmental affairs.

Resolved that capital punishment should be abolished.

Lyceum lectures also covered a range of subjects. According to historian Carl Bode, a lyceum lecture series in Salem, Massachusetts in 1838-39 included general informative speeches about the sun, the honey bee, and instinct but also more complex topics like the causes of the American Revolution, the rights of women, and education (48). Similarly, historian Donald Scott notes that during its 1851-52 season, the lyceum in Belfast, Maine had lectures on astronomy, biology, and physiology, but also the equality of the human condition and the true mission of women (792).

Holbrook’s two lyceum publications intended for use by families, schools, and lyceum organizations also encompassed a variety of topics. Started in 1831, Scientific Tracts28 focused on scientific subjects, including the atmosphere, geology, heat, entomology, weather, the eye, sound, meteors, and electricity. Each edition consisted of a general description of the topic, definitions of important terms and concepts, and sometimes included drawings and diagrams to ease understanding. Family Lyceum29 was a 4-page weekly general-knowledge journal started by Holbrook that lasted from mid-1832 to late 1833. Like Scientific Tracts, Family Lyceum included scientific subjects such as biology, chemistry, geology, forestry, and meteorology. It covered them in less

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28 Scientific Tracts was produced by Josiah Holbrook and others and published by Carter, Hendee, and Babcock. Each issue, about 20-25 pages in length, educated its readers about a scientific concept or subject. The periodical was published every two weeks for three years under its original name. In 1834, it became Scientific Tracts and Family Lyceum.

29 Family Lyceum was started by Josiah Holbrook in 1832. It was published in Boston by G.W. Light & Co. Its subtitle demonstrated the commitment to instructing and entertaining the public: “Designed for Instruction and Entertainment, and adapted to Families, Schools, and Lyceums.”
...depth, though (usually only a few paragraphs), and also dealt with subjects like intellects, morals, and the different types and locations of lyceums.

These lists of questions, topics, and issues covered by lyceum meetings, lyceum lectures, and lyceum periodicals show the wide range of knowledge recognized as useful and practical in the nineteenth century. The only criterion seems to be usefulness in daily life; the actual topics and issues could vary widely. In fact, historian Donald Scott has claimed that Americans who attended public lectures in the nineteenth century believed “almost all knowledge was potentially useful” (801). Lyceums, then, did not impose a highbrow/lowlbrow rubric for the subjects they considered useful and therefore fostered intellectualism through a wide array of information, including useful, practical information.

The inclusion of such a wide range of subjects also demonstrates that the nineteenth-century concept of useful was not just useful in the form of daily physical activities, but also in the form of social and civic actions and in the development of ideas and opinions. In other words, the information the lyceum disseminated could be useful in the operation of the hand and in the operation of the mind. For example, the description of forest trees in the 8th edition of Scientific Tracts would be useful for identifying, using, and appreciating a variety of trees, while Theodore Sedgwick’s 1831 lyceum lecture titled “The Practicability of the Abolition of Slavery” would have been useful in participants’ understanding of the issue of slavery and would most likely have influenced their opinions about the issue. In addition, the Williams Lyceum Society of Greenfield Academy’s discussion about whether or not the North should secede from the Union (Minute Book) would have been useful in forming opinions, and possibly in participants’
social and political actions. Sometimes these subjects of various “uses” were even
located side-by-side. For example, The July 28, 1832 edition of *Family Lyceum*
contained both short descriptions of heat, combustion, and oxygen alongside a discussion
of schools in the United States that raised the question of whether or not teachers are
qualified and whether or not schools are well taught.

The authors of these sources themselves recognized the “usefulness” of the
information they were disseminating. For example, the author of the 8th edition of
*Scientific Tracts* introduced the edition by acknowledging the information was useful for
the imagination, for understanding, and for the heart:

> When it is known that our earth is adorned and enriched by sixty thousand
different species of plants, rendered attractive by an endless variety, the
most delicate shades of beauty, and frequently by their lofty and majestic
appearance, as well as their various uses, it cannot be denied or doubted
that the vegetable kingdom, no less than the animal and mineral, contains
a vast store-house of materials, well fitted to enliven the imagination,
invigorate the understanding, and warm and purify the hearts of the
thousands of the sprightly intelligences constantly blooming into youth, or
ripening into manhood. (186)

Sedgwick began his lecture by calling the subject of his talk “perhaps, the most
momentous [question] that concerns the human race” (2). The question his lecture was
answering was, in his words, “*Is it possible to abolish African Slavery in this country; or,
in other words, is the perpetual subjugation of the African race the necessary result of the
condition of human nature?”* [italics in original] (2).
Relevant to this examination of the content of lyceums is who controlled the lyceums—and consequently, the knowledge disseminated by it. In *The Lyceum and Public Culture in the Nineteenth-Century United States*, communications professor Angela G. Ray argued white, male, New England Protestants were in charge of most of the lyceums (17). Donald Scott has asserted that the audience had some control over the content of lectures because “lecturers who could not attract a large enough audience did not remain popular lecturers for very long, and societies that failed to provide a course of sufficient popularity also had trouble surviving” (807). However, according to Scott, the “public” the lyceum lectures served was also primarily white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants in the north. Consequently, this group remained the gatekeepers of lyceum content. In this way, the lyceum perpetuated the traditional notion that intellectuals are prominent white males with the power to decide who and what get defined as intellectual.

Another issue relevant to the intellectual quality of the content of lyceums is the extent to which each subject was covered. Because the lyceum’s goal was to spread knowledge about many subjects, the emphasis for lyceum lectures, discussions, and articles was on breadth, not depth. For example, *Family Lyceum* articles were only a few paragraphs in length. Although *Scientific Tracts*’ articles were more extensive (devoting 20-25 pages for each topic), they were still relatively brief. In addition, lyceum meeting discussions were typically contained to one meeting. And, lyceum lectures were usually less than an hour long. Ray referred to the lyceum’s emphasis on breadth over depth as an effort to make Americans “generalists,” not “specialists” (181), which was, of course, the lyceum’s mission. According to Scott, though, no matter what the subject, nineteenth-century audiences expected lecturers to do more than describe a subject; they
were expected to place the topic in “a broad, interpretive context” and leave them feeling they had an “enlarged understanding” rather than merely basic comprehension of a subject (803-06). Intellectualism, as I define it, is more concerned with the audience’s interest in and critical engagement with the knowledge disseminated than with the breadth or depth of coverage.

This examination of the content of lyceums challenges the assumption that the lyceum’s emphasis on “useful knowledge” negated intellectualism. Because knowledge was seen as useful in a broad sense, lyceums disseminated a wide variety of knowledge useful both abstractly and concretely. By spreading “useful knowledge,” lyceums also could have interested people in subjects they had known little or nothing about, given people foundational knowledge they could build on, and stimulated their minds and their curiosity. These achievements, along with the activities lyceums promoted and fostered (as I discuss in the next section), make the lyceum not only a “disseminator of useful knowledge,” but also a supporter of multiple forms of intellectualism.

LEARNING AND THINKING PRACTICES PROMOTED BY LYCEUMS

In his 1826 proclamation of his vision for the lyceum, Holbrook made clear that he did not intend lyceums to disseminate useful knowledge to a passive, unengaged audience. Rather, Holbrook intended participants to share their expertise with each other and to discuss, examine, debate, and investigate further the information they gained. In Holbrook’s words, “The society will hold meetings, as often as they think it expedient, for the purpose of mutual instruction in the sciences, by investigating and discussing them or any other branch of useful knowledge” (595). Though it is difficult to know
whether audiences engaged the ideas they received from lectures, lyceum meeting minutes and periodicals show that lyceums did, in fact, encourage, model, and in some cases provide opportunities for critically engaging the information they dispersed. By creating an environment supportive of discussing and exchanging knowledge, the lyceum fostered and supported intellectualism among its participants.

The speeches of local lyceum leaders Timothy Walker and Henry Barnes Curtis show that, like Holbrook, they believed lyceums should do more than disseminate knowledge. Walker stated that the knowledge spread by lyceums should not be received passively by the audience but should be under the command of the receiver (8). He argued that lectures provide “the materials for your own minds to act upon: but the benefit will only be completed when you have actually brought your own minds thus to act” (11-12). By the end of his speech, Curtis pushed lyceums to do more than diffuse knowledge: “It is therefore among the objects of our society, to rouse the human mind from its slumberings and indolence, to which like our bodies it is so prone, and awaken in it an energy, that shall enable it to rise, to that rank, to which it so preeminently belongs in the scale of intellect” (6-7). Like Walker, Curtis believed the lyceum should interest and engage participants’ minds.

According to the annals and meeting minutes of four Ohio lyceum associations, lyceum meetings followed the interactive vision Holbrook described in his early writings. These annals and minutes indicate the purpose of these gatherings was mutual.

Angela G. Ray, in The Lyceum and Public Culture in the Nineteenth-Century United States, raised the question of whether or not the lyceum lecture functioned as a “consensus builder, promoting "consent to the norms and values of the professional class of white Protestant New England" (185-88). Depending on the participant, lyceum lectures could function as “transmitters of knowledge” or they could incite audience members to think about or discuss and debate the topics after hearing the lectures. The lectures could also have inspired participants to seek out more knowledge about such subjects.
improvement of its members through investigation, discussion, and debate of a variety of issues. For example, the minute book of the Ohio Williams Lyceum Society of Greenfield Academy (1844-46) noted, “The object of this Society shall be the mutual improvement of all its members in the investigation and communication of truth by means of public speaking.” The Constitution of the Martinsburg Lyceum of Ohio states “This society shall be known by the name of the Martinsburg Lyceum, its meetings to be holden weekly, and its exercises to consist chiefly of debates lectures composition and declamation.” These minutes make evident that lyceum meetings did indeed consist of speeches followed by debates and sometimes a tallying of votes at the end.

Lyceum periodicals also fostered intellectualism by encouraging learning by asking questions and engaging in conversation. For example, some issues of *Scientific Tracts* contained questions at the end of the issue to support reflection on the material covered by the journal. The first issue of *Scientific Tracts*, an issue on the atmosphere, included nineteen pages of informational text followed by fifty-six questions that tested the reader’s understanding of the material. In addition, an Ohio lyceum periodical titled *Youth’s Lyceum*[^1] used its presentation of information to promote active learning. In fact, the first issue of the journal contained a dialogue between mother and son about lyceums, questions and answers about the Earth, a dialogue between two kids about going to the lyceum to learn about things, a dialogue between a brother and sister about the arrival of

[^1]: *Youth’s Lyceum*, published monthly by the Columbiana County Lyceum Association in 1837, covered a variety of issues including the earth, the lyceum, sugar, the lever, natural philosophy, gardening, aphorisms, astronomy, history, electricity, and education. It also contained some short stories and poems and juvenile writings. The original text comes from correspondents for the periodical and student prose, while excerpts from periodicals such as *Youth’s Magazine* and *American Annals of Education* are also included. The publication cost 50 cents a year in advance and was intended to be readable to a wide, general audience. I had access to Vol. 1, No. 1-Vol. 1-No. 6, 1837.
the new *Youth’s Lyceum*, a dialogue about what the word “lyceum” means, and a
dialogue about geography. In the dialogue on geography, one boy asks another a series
of questions about hemispheres, oceans, state capitals, and states and the other boy
answers the questions. By presenting information through dialogue, conversation, and
question and answer, these journals promoted engagement in the learning process.

In addition to encouraging discussions and debates about the content
disseminated, lyceum lectures, meetings, and periodicals also promoted reading, writing,
and speaking as activities for disseminating and processing knowledge. For both lyceum
lectures and lyceum meetings, speakers wrote, read, and delivered their lectures. For
lyceum periodicals, contributors wrote and the audience read the information being
dispersed. Lyceums also promoted reading as part of the learning process. In fact,
Holbrook listed the increased need for and popularity of libraries as one of the benefits of
lyceums (*American Lyceum* 7).32 Holbrook, in the articles of the lyceum constitution,
also listed books among the things lyceums should obtain (“Associations” 595-6). The
Martinsburg (Ohio) Lyceum constitution mentions motivating participants to read as one
of the benefits of lyceums: “whereas one of the best means of developing the native
powers of the mind is by combinations in the form of societies the advantages of which
are to cause reading reflection and discrimination.” In multiple ways, then, reading,
writing, and speaking were central to the intellectual work of lyceums—helping to spread
knowledge and stimulate interest in ideas.

32 As Harvey J. Graff notes in *The Literacy Myth*, access to books and libraries does not mean people read
or understood what they read (270-1).
This examination of lyceum activities strongly suggests lyceums encouraged participants to think about, engage in discussions about, and read, write, and speak about a variety of subjects—and consequently would have made learning collaborative, engaging, and desirable. In conjunction with a re-examination of the ‘useful knowledge’ disseminated by nineteenth-century lyceums, my research demonstrates lyceums both provided an array of knowledge and created an atmosphere that could have supported the nineteenth-century desire not only to seek knowledge, but also to discuss and share it with others. As I argue, these are characteristics we should recognize as forms of intellectualism.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE LYCEUM

The arrival of the Civil War in 1861 resulted in the relative disappearance of the lyceum. All remaining lectures addressed the war (both in the North and the South) and served more as propaganda than as education or entertainment (Bode 247). To help revive the lyceum after the Civil War, scholar and journalist James Redpath started the first lyceum bureau in 1868. Lyceum bureaus organized and promoted traveling groups that, like the antebellum lyceum, included lectures. These bureaus, however, added to the lyceum stage dramatic and musical performances and other forms entertainment. In addition, lecturers at this time became more famous, travelled more, and made more money than previously. This new form of the lyceum reached its peak in popularity between 1875 and 1900, with approximately five million people a year attending (Brigance 122). According to critics, under the control of lyceum bureaus, the post-

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33 The Boston Lyceum Bureau was the first lyceum bureau started by James Redpath.
34 According to Brigance, the lyceum was popular during this period because of a number of favorable conditions: increased prosperity, the spread of the temperance and women’s suffrage movements, the growth of cities, improvement in transportation, and effective advertising by the lyceum bureaus (122).
bellum lyceum transformed into a commercial venture focused more on entertaining than instructing the audience. In this section, I reexamine the post-bellum lyceum and demonstrate that despite these changes, the lyceum continued to foster intellectualism.

Criticisms of changes in the lyceum after the Civil War are based on concerns over an increase in entertainment, a loss of education, and commercialization. For example, John S. Noffsinger has claimed that under the influence of lyceum bureaus the modern lyceum became “a purely commercial venture” that focused more on entertainment and light lectures. In his words, “the popular lyceum is as the popular magazine—it gives the public what the public wants or is conventionally supposed to want […..]” (115-18). In *The American Lyceum: Town Meeting of the Mind*, literary historian Carl Bode has said the post-bellum lyceum was “far more commercialized and much more an entertainment than it had ever been […..] Education had pretty well deserted the lecture platform” (248-49). Most recently, Angela G. Ray has argued that by the 1870s and 1880s the lyceum was seen as a platform for comics, humorists, singers, and impersonators (5).

Archival documents support critics’ accusations that lyceums became more commercial and focused more on entertainment than education after the Civil War. For example, the community annals for Sandy Spring, Maryland (1863-1883) document a change in the community’s lyceum. In the entry for 1876-77, the annals stated, “A proper mixture of instruction and entertainment is what this Lyceum was built for; and if your historian is not mistaken in apprehending that a disproportionate place is being given to the comic and the droll, this is the right time and place to sound the alarm” (169). An 1895 article in *The New England Magazine* also documents a change in the
American lyceum. In this article, professor and Unitarian minister E.P. Powell wrote that the lyceum had become more about money and entertainment in its later years. He described the 1890s lyceum as follows: “The lyceum as it exists to-day is a starring exhibition approaching very nearly to theatricals” (736). He also said the costs rose and only the biggest cities could secure the most popular speakers (736).

Promotional materials for lyceum performers in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century also confirm the emphasis on and addition of entertaining performances. An 1890s flier for Dr. Georgia Merriman\(^{35}\) promotes “her ability to interest and instruct an audience” and describes her lectures as an “instructive and attractive evening’s entertainment.” Comments on promotional fliers for Viola D. Romans\(^{36}\) that appeared in the early 1900s included “While she instructs as well as entertains, her manner and diction hold attention from the first,” and “[Romans] is able to present her thoughts in such a way as to command the interest and enthusiasm of any intelligent audience.” One late nineteenth-century flier for “The Lyceum Entertainers,” contained pictures of the women performers and described the program they provide as follows: “These young ladies give a program of excellent music, some serious readings, and a proper part of delightful entertainment.”

\(^{35}\) Advertisement Brochure for the Lectures of Dr. Georgia Merriman, titled “Dr. Georgia Merriman Gives Food for Thought in Lectures on Food Analysis.” Published by Central Lyceum Bureau. No date on advertisement, but the testimonials are dated 1897. \\
\(^{36}\) Viola Doudna Romans was a lyceum bureau speaker for the Mutual Lyceum Bureau and for the Central Lyceum Bureau. An Ohio native, she was born in 1863, attended Olney and Muskingham Colleges, and taught elocution and physical culture at Muskingham College and Wesleyan College for Women. She was also involved in the temperance and women’s movements and held public offices, including serving as an Ohio House Representative. She was the first woman to represent Franklin County in the Ohio General Assembly. The fliers are not dated. However, they contain quotes from reviews printed in 1902 and 1904.
Despite the changes in the lyceum late in the nineteenth century recorded in both contemporary and nineteenth-century sources, the lyceum continued to include lectures that informed and engaged audiences. In fact, after the Civil War, the lyceum opened its stage to a greater variety of speakers\(^{37}\) (including white and black women and black men) who used the lyceum stage as a platform for political and social reform (Ray 42). Some of these speakers, like Elizabeth Cady Stanton,\(^{38}\) made their cases for reform through the use of “entertaining anecdotes and stories” (Hogan and Hogan 426). Others’ speeches, like those of Frederick Douglass, were “unabashedly political and partisan” (Ray 137).

Communications professor William N. Brigance has argued that despite its transition into a more commercial business and its eventual decline, the lyceum from 1865 to 1930 served an important function in the post-bellum United States: “From it came the main stimulus to American adult education, reading courses, book clubs, correspondence schools, the immense business-book publishing business. It has been the firing line of our anti-slavery, temperance, woman’s rights, and anti-narcotics crusades” (129). In other words, though they had to share the stage with jugglers, musicians, comedians, and actors, many post-Civil War lyceum speakers informed, entertained, and intellectually stimulated their audiences.

It is worth noting that though the inclusion of musical, dramatic, and comedic performances was new to the lyceum stage after the Civil War, the lyceum, from the beginning, sought to both entertain and educate its audience. In an 1829 promotional leaflet entitled *American Lyceum, or Society for the Improvement of Schools and...*  

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\(^{37}\) Some of the most famous lecturers at this time were Wendell Phillips, William Lloyd Garrison, Charles Sumner, Henry Ward Beecher, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Julia Ward Howe.  
\(^{38}\) Elizabeth Cady Stanton joined James Redpath’s Lyceum Bureau in 1859 (Hogan and Hogan 415).
Josiah Holbrook lists as one of the advantages of existing lyceums the production of education and entertainment at a relatively low cost (5-10). The Sandy Spring annals referred to earlier also mentioned the lyceum was designed to provide a “proper mixture of instruction and entertainment” (169).

In her work on the history of the American lyceum, Ray described the lyceum’s blending of entertainment and instruction as a complicated one from the beginning, with entertainment present in early lyceums and an emphasis on learning present in the later lyceums (3-6). In fact, she said “The word lyceum embodied the paradoxes of playful learning and serious fun” (6). Recognizing the lyceum’s life-long effort to instruct and entertain, it seems that critics were troubled by the inclusion of and emphasis on performances designed solely for entertainment and not by lectures that both instructed and entertained the audience. In light of the late nineteenth-century development of a cultural hierarchy that ranked some art highbrow and some lowbrow, it is also possible that criticism followed the inclusion of entertainment considered lowbrow, like juggling, acting, impersonations, and performances by those rhetoric scholar Frederick Antezak has described as “‘table-thumping’ spiritualists, ‘hack’ politicians, phrenologists, and ‘buffoon-style comedians’” (73-4).

For some critics, the transformation of the lyceum into a more commercial and entertainment-driven venue was a symbol of the “intellectual deterioration” of the American public. E.P. Powell, in his 1895 article, however, responded to such a critique. He argued against the idea that the decline of the lyceum translated into a decline in

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39 According to Carl Bode, Holbrook’s leaflet had been printed earlier and went through several editions. However, he said the 1829 version was the most widely circulated and “most influential form of the catalogue of advantages and aims” (23). It was written by Josiah Holbrook, with contributions by Theophilus Rogers Marvin.
intellectual interests or pursuits by Americans. Rather, he argued, these interests were transferred into other organizations and forums such as reading rooms, libraries, museums, the Chautauqua,\(^{40}\) and university extension: “The change does not mean intellectual decadence or a failing interest in great social or political questions. It does mean that forms of education are constantly changing, and that the American temperament has plasticity to adapt itself to the modifications that occur” (736-7). My examination of twentieth-century labor colleges (in Chapter 3) supports Powell’s assessment.

My reexamination of what has been called the transformation of the American lyceum after the Civil War suggests that though more forms of entertainment were included on the lyceum stage, so too were some of the most influential lectures of the nineteenth century. In addition, while the change in investment on the part of lyceum organizers from making knowledge accessible to the public to making a profit affected the reputation of lyceums and the message they were sending about knowledge, the lyceum continued to inform its audience and foster interest in and engagement with ideas—characteristics of intellectualism as I define it.

\(^{40}\) The Chautauqua movement arose in the mid-1870s and, like the lyceum, offered a traveling circuit of education and entertainment for a low cost; however, it maintained a religious element and tried to disassociate from the lyceum because it felt the lyceum was too commercial and secular and revolved around spectacle and showmanship. The Chautauqua began as a religious camp meeting with religious speakers held every summer at Chautauqua Lake (New York), and developed into small groups of people all over the country (mostly in small towns) reading and discussing books and studying history, music, natural sciences, and classical and modern languages. It prospered, becoming a full-fledged summer school and eventually an organized traveling circuit (Noffsinger 107-11). The Chautauqua circuit eventually became dependent upon bureaus, like the lyceum circuit had. By 1920, the battle between the lyceum circuit and the Chautauqua circuit had nearly disappeared—each one took its place, separate from the other: the Chautauqua was known for its aesthetic quality and drew the suburban-like middle class, while the lyceum drew the middlebrow culture (Rieser 103-4). Eventually, both suffered from the influx of modern entertainment media.
ACCESS AND THE LYCEUM

As stated earlier, I chose the American lyceum as one of my sites of investigation because it made knowledge accessible to many in the nineteenth-century who may not have had the time, money, or ability to access education in other forms. According to William Brigance, at its peak the lyceum was attended by approximately five million people a year between 1875 and 1900 (122). Lyceums also provided for many the opportunity to participate in discussions and debates about the information provided. Because I argue that the lyceum fostered intellectualism by providing access to information and to opportunities to engage ideas critically, I end my examination of lyceums with an examination of the factors that influenced access to the lyceum and the ways in which the lyceum made information accessible to its audience.

Josiah Holbrook’s 1826 article and 1829 leaflet contain specific reference to his desire for lyceums to be widely accessible. For example, one of the articles Holbrook proposed for lyceum constitutions read “Any person may be a member of the society, by paying to the Treasurer, annually, one dollar. And ten dollars paid at any one time, will constitute a person a member for life” (“Associations” 595). In addition, one of the duties he lists for state lyceum boards is “to diffuse the greatest quantity of useful information among the various classes of the community” (596). The nineteenth-century announcements for lyceum meetings and lectures I reviewed support the argument that the lyceum invited a general public to attend lectures and meetings. Below are two examples of such announcements.

41 Not only did Holbrook envision the lyceum as an educational institution open to all, but he also wanted it to be far-reaching. Holbrook’s 1826 and 1829 documents reveal Holbrook’s full vision of the lyceum as a national movement and force—one that begins with local associations, but includes county, state, and national organizations.
Figure 1: Announcement for a Medford (Massachusetts) lyceum lecture.

Figure 2: Announcement for a meeting of the Upper Alton (Illinois) Lyceum.
Despite Holbrook’s declaration of his intentions for a widely-accessible American lyceum, most evidence shows that, in practice, access was limited, often dictated by cost, gender, race, and affiliation. First, the cost of attending lyceum lectures or participating in town lyceum organizations would have prevented access for some. According to Ray, the fees were comparatively low for the wealthy, merchants, and skilled workers, but would most likely have been too much for the poorest of the community (24). Also, though the cost was quite low at first, it increased over the years. In fact, by 1828 Holbrook suggested charging two dollars for a one-year membership and twenty dollars for a lifetime membership—doubling the cost from two years before (Ray 22).

In addition to cost, participation in lyceum organizations often depended upon an invitation and/or membership in a religious or other organization. For example, according to meeting minutes, participation in the Allen Missionary Lyceum was based on religious affiliation and student status at Ohio Wesleyan University. The Williams Lyceum was open only to students at the Academy, and participants had to take part in the regular exercises at least once every two weeks to maintain their membership. Members of the Martinsburg Lyceum had to be voted in by two-thirds of the existing members, pay twenty-five cents, and sign a constitution. These restrictions on participation mean that not all persons could participate in the discussions and debates—or in the cultivation of intellectualism—taking place at these meetings.

Gender and race were also factors that influenced access to lyceums. Though the nineteenth-century meeting minutes, announcements, and promotional material I accessed did not provide evidence that people were explicitly excluded from lyceums based on gender or race, I did find evidence that white males were most likely the typical
audience in the early years of the lyceum, especially at local lyceum meetings. For example, in his 1829 leaflet advertising lyceums, Holbrook mentions women meeting separately from men: “females have conducted a course of mutual exercises among themselves, by spending together, during the summer, one afternoon in a week for reading, composition, and improvement in the various branches of an accomplished and enlightened education.” In addition, while an 1841 newspaper report about the Cleveland Lyceum in the Cleveland Herald mentioned the attendance of women, it stated, “Our young men will find this Society worthy of their attention.” I also located a list of participants in the meeting minutes for The Williams Lyceum that appears to contain only male names. Finally, my review of the Cleveland Herald revealed the development of a colored men’s lyceum in Cleveland in 1842.

While this handful of references to race and gender from my archival research does not conclusively demonstrate the inclusion or exclusion of lyceum participants based on race and gender, it is consistent with historians’ assessments of the lyceum audience. Angela G. Ray has argued that though public lectures included a more wide-ranging audience, the members of town or village lyceum organizations were primarily “elite or upwardly mobile men in the community” (Ray 25). According to Donald Scott, while audiences for the public lyceum did vary by age and occupation (including men and women from their mid-teens to early 60s working as artisans, mechanics, farmers, lawyers, teachers, professors, doctors, clergymen, shopkeepers, merchants), the primary audience for the lectures was “almost exclusively a northern public,” composed of what could be called the middle class and overwhelmingly white Anglo-Saxon Protestants (Scott 800-809). David Mead described a similar audience in Ohio for lyceum lectures:
“Lecture audiences were composed of a few intellectuals and a large body of plain citizens—farmers, mechanics, and shopkeepers to whom ‘culture’ meant useful knowledge and practical, provocative ideas” (20). According to these scholars, though not accessible to all, lyceums were attended by a fairly wide range of people.

In some cases, opportunities for participation in lyceums—both as audience members and lyceum speakers—increased after the Civil War. According to historian Joseph Kett, while women did participate in knowledge societies before the Civil War, they had more opportunities for participating in and even speaking before lyceum organizations after the War (40). And, as noted earlier, several notable women and African Americans began speaking on the lyceum stage after the Civil War.

Once again, it is important to recognize that because access to lyceums was, for some, limited based on cost and social and cultural affiliations, the lyceum on some level perpetuated the traditional notion that intellectuals are prominent white males in the middle and upper classes. Despite these limitations, the lyceum’s primary mission was to make “useful knowledge” accessible to participants. In this way, the lyceum did increase access to knowledge—and to opportunities for engaging with ideas.

In his 1829 leaflet Holbrook said, “The instruction given by lectures or dissertations, like that in a more mutual form, is intended to be of a familiar and practical character, that it may be brought within the comprehension of the most untutored mind” (American Lyceum 4). Lyceum lectures made education accessible to those who had less schooling or lacked access to reading materials or formal education because they

42 He claims Western lyceum audiences different than those in the East. “Westerners were a practical, mercantaile people who stoutly resisted the efforts of learned lecturers to instill in them a taste for philosophy….Western listeners were critical and independent, and, if a lecture was dull or otherwise unpleasing, they were not averse to stamping out of the lecture hall” (Mead 20).
presented information in an oral and sometimes visual form. Significantly, then, as long as people could afford the entrance fee or organization dues, lyceum lectures opened to them the knowledge and messages about education contained in the speeches. Similarly, participation in local lyceum discussions and debates would also have been accessible to those with little schooling.

Holbrook’s goal of making the knowledge spread by lyceums accessible is evident in his lyceum periodicals. In the first issue of the *Family Lyceum*, Holbrook noted that the publication was designed to disseminate information: “to the parent and child, to the teacher and the taught, to the man of business and the man of leisure, to the student and the mechanic, the philosopher and farmer, to both sexes, and all classes and ages” (1). In the first issue of *Scientific Tracts*, the editor’s remarks state explicitly that the journal will “present things, properties, principles, applications, in the simplicity of nature, and not through labyrinths of terms, and mazes of declarations.” In a later issue on entomology, the author wrote that his article was “prepared for the general reader” (184). Making information accessible in this way increased the influence lyceums could have on the nineteenth-century “public”—especially the “public” that had less schooling or little access to information in other forms.

Though the nineteenth-century American lyceum was not accessible to all Americans, the lyceum did open access to knowledge to some who may not have otherwise had access. In addition, the lyceum also made knowledge accessible by presenting information orally, visually, and at a level designed to be understood by “an

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43 In *Youth’s Lyceum*, the editors speak directly to children as the target audience, stating, “We intend to have the articles on the sciences as plain and easy to be understood as we can make them, and we hope you will not read them hastily and without understanding” (1.1).
untutored mind.” While critics may argue that making knowledge accessible to wide audiences means “dumbing it down,” or reducing its intellectual content, my examination of the nineteenth-century lyceum (its content, activities, and transformation) weighs heavily against such an argument.

CONCLUSION

The American lyceum dissolved in the early 1900s, giving way to other forms of adult education (including early twentieth-century labor colleges, which I discuss in Chapter 3). My reevaluation of this significant site of learning in the nineteenth-century helps demonstrate how a revised view of intellectualism not based on a dichotomous or hierarchical view of learning and education, but rather focused on an interest in learning and thinking critically, can help us recognize the lyceum as a cultivator of intellectualism.

My examination of the lyceum makes clear that the lyceum sent the message that knowledge and education are valuable, that it made a wide-array of knowledge accessible to participants, and that it encouraged and provided opportunities for participants to develop their minds. Even the transformation of the lyceum to a stage including many forms of entertainment—the characteristic of the lyceum scholars have most consistently criticized—did not end the lyceum’s dissemination of knowledge nor its ability to incite an interest in learning. These characteristics, I argue, make the lyceum a significant site of intellectualism in the nineteenth century.

According to my analysis of American lyceums, literacy activities (including reading, writing, and speaking) were central to the lyceum’s dissemination of knowledge and they were activities the lyceum promoted as tools for processing and sharing knowledge. In these ways, literacy was integral to the lyceum’s sponsorship of
intellectualism in the nineteenth century. My evaluations of Brookwood Labor College in Chapter 3 and GED writing workshops in Chapter 4 show a similar relationship between literacy and intellectualism. They also reveal the complexity of this relationship.

One of the most important implications of my reevaluation of the American lyceum is its demonstration that “useful knowledge” and institutions associated with or disseminating “useful knowledge” are not intrinsically non-intellectual. This is one of Hofstadter’s central points about intellectualism, and one of the most significant criteria for intellectualism imposed by contemporary scholars. This criteria is also one of the main reasons why many sites of learning (including the lyceum, labor colleges, and adult GED writing workshops) are relegated non-intellectual. Contesting this criteria can have a significant effect on Americans’ views of and valuing of the education that takes place at institutions like these.
CHAPTER 3
THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY LABOR COLLEGE AND
EDUCATION FOR ACTIVISM

In the wake of the lyceum movement and in the midst of the American workers’
education and labor movements, labor colleges were established in the United States
early in the twentieth century. I chose labor colleges as my second case study because,
like the lyceum, labor colleges have been overlooked as a site of intellectualism in
American history. I also selected labor colleges because in several ways they represent
well adult education in the twentieth century. According to historian Joseph Kett, in
contrast to the nineteenth-century approach to popularizing knowledge by promoting the
mastery of a body of information (illustrated by the lyceum), twentieth-century adult
education institutions like the labor college employed the educational philosophy of
progressive reformers that emphasized experiential and dialogic education (224).
Additionally, labor colleges’ interest in educating laborers and the institutional structure
of these institutions represent twentieth-century changes in adult education (293–4).

Similar to the American lyceum, the American labor college has not been
recognized as a site of intellectualism because its focus on activism is associated with a
“practical” purpose and because the knowledge disseminated by labor colleges is
considered ideological and “useful” in workers’ everyday lives. In addition, according to
education historian Richard J. Altenbaugh, working people are often portrayed as
“accommodating or acquiescent” (Education 11). Inherent in these criticisms are a series of misguided assumptions, including education for a “practical” purpose cannot be intellectual, the dissemination of ideological information interferes with a person’s ability to think critically about that information, labor colleges did not teach or support critical thinking, and students did not enter the programs prepared to be analytical, independent thinkers. If we accept these assumptions, then we fail to recognize the different forms of intellectualism found and nurtured at labor colleges and we overlook the value of the education and experience students received there—reinforcing our contemporary restrictive beliefs about intellectualism.

In this chapter I reexamine, with a broadened view of intellectualism, one of the premier American labor colleges of the twentieth century, Brookwood Labor College. I reevaluate the students’ attitudes, the institutional organization and structure, the knowledge the school promoted and disseminated, the learning and thinking practices it required and nurtured, and the role activism, literacy, and access played in Brookwood’s effect on intellectualism. Based on my examination of Brookwood, I argue there is much evidence that labor colleges like Brookwood fostered and supported various forms of intellectualism, including the desire to learn; the questioning, deliberating, analyzing, debating, and contemplating of ideas; and the valuing of knowledge, education, and critical thinking.

LABOR COLLEGES AND WORKERS’ EDUCATION

Founded and supported by workers, labor leaders, and labor sympathizers, labor colleges were full-time, one-to-three-year schools designed 1) to educate adult workers about the social, cultural, political, and economic factors affecting labor, and 2) to train
them to be successful labor movement leaders and activists. To accomplish this, labor colleges implemented a curriculum with a balance of “informational” courses on subjects like labor history, economics, law, foreign labor, and modern industry, and “tool” courses teaching students skills like report writing, journalism, public speaking, organizing methods, and drama. The mission of labor colleges was, in fact, “NOT to educate workers out of their class,” but to provide workers with the knowledge and tools to help enact social change, specifically to create a reconstructed social order under the control of workers (Report to the Second International Conf. 8).

For American workers, labor colleges were a response to what they felt was a harmful public education system and an ineffective labor organization, the American Federation of Labor (AFL). According to critics, the AFL (formed in 1886) did not work for broad social reform or serve workers. Rather, it aligned itself with business groups, endorsing public education and voting as the appropriate means to liberate the American worker intellectually and politically44 (Kett 352). However, for many workers, public education was inadequate, unfair, and sometimes inaccessible.45 Workers felt public schools deceived them in an effort to “keep them docile and submissive,” and reinforce

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41 Joseph Kett wrote, more specifically, “Under the leadership of Samuel Gompers, the American Federation of Labor evinced little interest in workers’ education before 1900….Gompers’s well-publicized hostility to intellectuals in the union movement rested on his belief that socialism, anarchism, and other ideologies threatened to subordinate trade unionism to abstract and doomed causes…He endorsed workers’ education only to ensure a directing role for the AFL” (352). Richard J. Altenbaugh also wrote about the failure of the AFL to address workers’ issues: “Put briefly, the policies and actions of the AFL failed to relieve, and in some cases may have intensified, the social and economic plight of American workers by supporting the existing economic system, by aligning itself with a business group whose outlook was anathema to working-class interests, and by ignoring the plight of the majority of workers” (Altenbaugh, “Children” 397).

45 Phillips Thompson argued in 1895 in The Politics of Labor that the educational system was biased against workingmen and their families, saying “Education, for instance, while immensely increasing the power of the working-class for effective combination, if perverted by the inculcation of the untruths and half-truths of bourgeois political economy, is a hindrance rather than a help” (17). For a related discussion of nineteenth-century education and its effect on workers in Canada, see Harvey J. Graff’s The Literacy Myth, Chapter 5.
the existing social system (qtd. in Altenbaugh, *Education* 20). In 1896, Eugene V. Debs\(^46\) called the formal educational system in the U.S. at best “not equipped to solve labor problems,” and at worst “arrogantly hostile to labor” (qtd. in Altenbaugh, *Education* 22). James H. Maurer, President of the Brookwood Labor College Board of Directors, described the public schools this way:

> The individuality of the student is suppressed. The attempt is made to mold all minds by the same pattern and independence, originality, and self-reliance are discouraged. Our children are being trained like dogs and ponies, not developed as individuals. Such methods, together with the vicious propaganda on social and economic questions to which the children are subjected, produce just the results that the conservative and reactionary elements of the country want, namely, uniformity of thought and conduct, no originality or self-reliance except for money-making schemes, a worshipful attitude toward those who have wealth and power, intolerance for anything that the business element condemns, and ignorance of the great social and economic forces that are shaping the destinies of all of us. (qtd. in Altenbaugh, *Education* 77)

These comments make clear why workers believed that to achieve social change, they must educate themselves. They also make evident what the creators of labor colleges were working for as they planned and implemented their educational programs: awareness, critical thinking, and independence.

\(^{46}\) Eugene V. Debs was a union leader, a founding member of the International Labor Union and the Industrial Workers of the World, and was the Socialist Party presidential nominee five times.
We can understand better the theory and practice of labor colleges if we understand them in comparison to other forms of workers’ education at the time. In *Education for Struggle: The American Labor Colleges of the 1920s and 1930s*, educational historian Richard J. Altenbaugh, argues workers’ education in the early twentieth century was widespread and existed in a variety of forms, including union-sponsored, university-sponsored, and independent programs.

According to Altenbaugh, though early union-sponsored workers’ education (which included courses and lectures) strove for social reform, by the mid-1930s its objectives had become mostly utilitarian, focused on training union bureaucrats who would perform the desires of the union without question (*Education* 44-5). Consequently, union-sponsored programs have been criticized for being “almost exclusively trade schools” with “very little education and a sizable chunk of training

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47 According to Richard J. Altenbaugh, around ten thousand or so workers were involved in workers’ education by the 1920s (*Education* 25). Jonathan Bloom has said that “During the 1920s, a nationwide workers’ education movement flourished in the United States. In nearly every U.S. city, some form of labor college or ‘workers’ university’ sprang up after WWI” (71).

48 Richard Dwyer, in “Workers’ Education, Labor Education, Labor Studies: An Historical Delineation,” argues there were three distinctive historical periods of workers education in the U.S., reflected by changes in curriculum, student body, financial support, general objectives, duration, and administration. He labels the period from 1900-1935 *workers’ education* with a focus on social change and a social science curriculum. The students were recruited as individuals and trade unionists. During this period, institutions had independence from the AFL, were long-term schools and programs, and were supported predominantly by liberal sympathizers. He labels the period from 1935-1965 *labor education*, saying it focused on “tool” courses for the purpose of labor organization. The student body during this period was trade unionists who attended short-term courses and conferences. Institutions received trade union funds or government support and were tied to CIO unions or universities. Dwyer labeled the period from the 1960s on *labor studies*, claiming education was liberal arts based in the social sciences designed to educate the “whole” man. The programs were either extension programs or rather long degree programs supported by state governments.

49 One example of union-sponsored workers’ education is the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union (ILGWU)’s education programs including “Unity Centers” that provided basic courses in English; a series of lectures on psychology, literature, American history, trade unionism, music appreciation, etc.; and an extension program (Altenbaugh, *Education* 33-5).

and information”51 (qtd. in Carlson 117). Altenbaugh has claimed cooptation of these programs by the AFL, declining trade union membership, and internal political disputes contributed to these problems (Education 44-46).

While union-sponsored workers’ education focused on social reform and eventually union training, university or college-sponsored workers’ education tended to emphasize the “cultural growth of the individual and a deeper sense of the beauty of life,” rather than social-class consciousness (47). The challenge for school-sponsored programs was that they were bound by the philosophies and policies of the institution, and “functioned within a political framework acceptable to industry and business.” For example, the University of Wisconsin School for Women Workers (started in 1923) trained workers to negotiate and work with employers rather than to be labor activists working for “radical social change” (53-54). Consequently, labor groups were skeptical of university-sponsored programs52 and workers were not given much power in the development of the programs. In Altenbaugh’s opinion, “In the end, institutions of higher education, despite their self-proclaimed liberalism, did not create an environment of intellectual and political freedom for working-class students” (48).

In contrast to union and university-sponsored programs, American labor colleges were what Altenbaugh has called independent workers’ education programs, funded through individual donations and trade-union scholarships. Because of their

51 John McCollum, in “Labor Education: Education, Training, or Information?” claimed union-sponsored programs had “very little education and a sizable chunk of training and information” (42). McCollum was director of the Union Research and Education Project at the University of Chicago in 1960.

52 Other examples of university-sponsored workers’ education programs include the Bryn Mawr Summer School for Women Workers in Industry and an extension service offered by the University of California. Both programs were started in 1921 and were followed shortly by similar extension programs at Syracuse, Harvard, MIT, Tufts, Amherst, University of Cincinnati, and University of Oklahoma (Altenbaugh, Education 46-7).
independence, they had more political autonomy and the freedom to enact a more radical curriculum and innovative pedagogical practices. Not bound by the philosophy or policies of unions, business, or universities, labor colleges worked to empower workers by educating them in theory and in practice about social change, economics, politics, and other social issues. According to Altenbaugh, labor colleges’ commitment to social change distinguished them most from union- and university-sponsored workers’ education.

Altenbaugh’s categorization of early twentieth-century workers’ education shows us that labor colleges were not the only form of workers’ education at the time. However, because they were not controlled by unions or universities, they had the freedom to be radical in their organization and pedagogy. In addition, Joseph Kett has called Brookwood Labor College “the only postwar labor college unaffiliated with a union, college, or university” (360).

**BROOKWOOD LABOR COLLEGE**

While many labor colleges were started in the early twentieth century, Brookwood Labor College attracted the most students, helped set the tone for workers’ education, and graduated more well-known labor leaders than any other labor college (Kates 76). For these reasons, I focus my examination of labor colleges on this particular

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53 According to Joseph Kett, although Brookwood Labor College administrators cooperated with labor groups and local colleges and schools in designing and executing its program, the institution was unaffiliated with a particular union, college, or university (Kett 360) and thus had independent reign on the design and implementation of its program. Brookwood’s funding came mostly from independent contributions and union scholarship. In 1928, Brookwood received over $12,000 in contributions and $37,000 in pledges by unions (Altenbaugh, “Children” 405). It also received $50,000 from the American Fund for Public Service ($25,000 in 1927 and the rest over time) to help meet growing expenses (Howlett 55).

54 Among the graduates of Brookwood Labor College were Walter Reuther, an organizer of the United Auto Workers; Joseph Ozanic, president of the Progressive Mine Workers of America; and Len De Caux, publicity director of the AFL-CIO (Kates 76; Altenbaugh 249-68).
institution, drawing upon archival documents from the school, including course syllabi and materials, student writings, institution publications, promotional materials, reports, memos, and correspondence.\(^{55}\) A look at what we know about the design, structure, and philosophy of Brookwood together with first-person accounts of the Brookwood experience can tell us about the potential for intellectualism at the school and can reveal what forms of intellectualism were practiced and cultivated there. It can also add to our larger understanding of the theory and practice of intellectualism in U.S. history.

**Brookwood’s Purpose**

As I argue in Chapter 1, American views of intellectualism are linked to beliefs about the purpose of education. For this reason, I begin with the purpose of American labor colleges in the twentieth century and its relation to the intellectual nature of these institutions.

In March, 1921, labor leaders, union radicals, socialist leaders, and educators met in New York City for the first national conference on workers’ education. The result of the meeting was the opening of Brookwood Labor College in Katonah, New York later that year.\(^{56}\) The design of Brookwood was based on the following plan drawn up by conference participants and published in an April 1, 1921 *New York Times* article titled “Plan Workers’ College”:

First—That a new social order is needed and is coming—in fact, that is already on the way.

\(^{55}\) The archival documents I examined came from The Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs at Wayne State University’s The Walter P. Reuther Library in Detroit, Michigan and New York University (NYU)’s Tamiment Library Labor Archives.

\(^{56}\) In 1921, the Workers’ Education Bureau (WEB) and the Bryn Mawr Summer School for Women Workers in Industry in Pennsylvania were also formed.
Second—That education will not only hasten its coming, but will reduce to a minimum and perhaps do away entirely with a resort to violent methods.

Third—That the workers are the ones who will usher in the new social order.

Fourth—That there is immediate need for a workers’ college with a broad curriculum, located amid healthy country surroundings, where the students can completely apply themselves to the task at hand. (8)

This document makes clear that the purpose of Brookwood was to educate workers to aid the labor movement in establishing a new social order.

This purpose went beyond what was announced to the public. A paragraph on the student application to Brookwood states the purpose of Brookwood this way:

In determining on courses, teaching methods, and all matters of educational policy, Brookwood asks one question: What can a resident school do to enable American workers to work more effectively in the American labor movement? …. Brookwood is interested in the ultimate and spiritual aims of the labor movement, as well as in its immediate, material aims….Finally, Brookwood is an integral part of the American labor movement and exists only to serve it. Its graduates go back to mine, mill and shop, and to their unions, not to get something out of the movement, but to put something into it, not to get jobs but to do work. This spirit of complete, practical devotion to the movement is the spirit of Brookwood. (Questionnaire)
As indicated in this passage, students were expected to use their training at Brookwood to address labor problems, not (like lyceum participants) for the goal of social mobility or personal advancement.

In her explanation for why students came to Brookwood, labor journalism teacher Helen Norton said students came for knowledge “about their own unions, about the history of the labor movement in this and other countries” and training in how to use that knowledge “to express their ideals so the crowd will get them and be moved to action by them” (qtd. in Altenbaugh, Education 93). Sarah Cleghorn (one of the earliest teachers at Brookwood) said the students had a “single-minded” purpose: “They wanted literary feeling, personal expression, not for life in general, but for the labor movement alone”57 (qtd. in Altenbaugh, Education 137). Stated another way, in the December 1, 1923 issue of The Brookwood Review (the school newspaper), education at Brookwood was not “education just for education’s sake, leading nowhere save to individual advancement” (1); education at Brookwood was education for activism.

Some critics, including Richard Hofstadter, may dismiss labor colleges at this point, arguing that intellectualism is based on education for education’s sake, not for the sake of a social movement. I argue, however, that Brookwood’s goal of serving the labor movement did not result in the absence or stifling of intellectualism because the students’ motivation, the institutional structure and organization, the curriculum, the classroom, and the activism at Brookwood all promoted and supported the desire to learn and engage critically with ideas.

57 Sarah Cleghorn was unique among faculty for finding students’ “single-minded” purpose troubling. This is not surprising, however, because she was merely kept on as a teacher when Brookwood, having been a preparatory school originally, became a labor college in 1921. She left the school after a short time (Altenbaugh, Education 148-9).
Brookwood Students

When students started the program at Brookwood, they wrote autobiographical essays in which they summarized their past experiences and articulated their interest in attending the school. These autobiographies reveal students entered the program for the same reason the institution existed: service to the labor movement. They also reveal students came to Brookwood with significant experience as workers, union members, and members of political organizations. Based on students’ comments in the essays, these experiences and their interests in political and social issues fueled their interest in their education and motivated them to engage in the learning and thinking practices that were part of the Brookwood experience. Students’ attitudes toward learning helped make Brookwood an intellectual institution.

In her autobiography, Rhoda Pearson of New Hampshire wrote that she was interested in the “radical movement” and had been the head of a Progressive Club before entering Brookwood. To Pearson, Brookwood was her “final opportunity to find out what [she could] do in the work of building a classless society.” She wrote, also, of her genuine interest in learning: “All through high school and college I had taken courses purely from my interest in them and not from a desire to pick a vocation or trade, feeling (perhaps as all young people feel) that there was some big thing that I wanted to have a hand in some day if I could only keep following my interests long enough.”

Another student, George Nordstrom, went to high school in Wisconsin, had some vocational training, joined the Wisconsin Socialist Party, and was a leader in fighting

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58 Many of the autobiographical essays I accessed through The Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs at Wayne State University did not have dates recorded on them. Some of them did not have names. I note above any names and dates recorded on these documents. If I do not mention the date a document was written, it is unknown.
against poor working conditions. He wrote “That’s why I’m here heart and soul in the work, hopeful that my six months here will give me the necessary knowledge to become most effective in the movement.” Similarly, Alvom Rosenfield wrote in his autobiographical essay, titled “Success Story,” that he came to Brookwood to prepare to play a part in the struggle to “overthrow the system.”

Paul W. Fehnel from Pennsylvania, the son of working-class parents, left school at age fifteen to apprentice as a printer. He was a member of the Young People’s Socialist League and the Unemployed Citizens’ League. In his essay, he confesses, “I feel that I made some mistakes in the past, so here I am at Brookwood to learn more about the labor movement, tactics to pursue, etc. that I may avoid the pitfalls in future organizing work.” An unnamed woman from a farm in Indiana who had worked in a hosiery mill and had previously attended the summer school for workers in Madison, Wisconsin, wrote “At present I’m very interested in learning enough about the labor problems to become an organizer or to help teach in workers’ schools. I feel it is my duty to go out and help workers with their problems.”

In addition, a student named Ben who had not been a laborer but who was seeking such work and an atmosphere for studying wrote, “So finally I am here to study and work hard and to conduct some sort of activity….and to meet with and grapple with the problem of understanding the ways and thinking of the American workers and farmers…” He also stated, “I was very much impressed and feel that at Brookwood I could study diligently in an atmosphere well suited and most conducive to studying…” John Strobel wrote, “An opportunity to attend the Brookwood Labor College was something that I wanted for a long time, and when it knocked on my door I assure you I
was not long in taking advantage of it. I intend to do my best and I am sure that the results will bear out the reputation that Brookwood has established.”

In addition to sharing their work experiences and reasons for coming to Brookwood, two students reflected in their essays on the quality of education they received prior to coming to Brookwood. Sophie R. Dornbusch wrote in 1934, “I went through the local grammar and high schools, and received the most biased, prejudiced, and conservative anti-everything ground work of education that could possibly have been anyone’s misfortune.” Similarly, an unidentified student wrote “I was disgusted with the mid-class teaching and atmosphere of the college I attended. Now I am happy to be with my own class of people again.” Such comments reveal students’ awareness of the importance of education and their desire for an education relevant to their own experiences.

Additional sources further our understanding of students’ attitudes toward and interest in learning at Brookwood. A 1923 issue of the student paper, *The Brookwood Review*, stated “It is inspiring to observe a group of workers assembled from all parts of the United States and some parts of Europe, eager to absorb every bit of knowledge that is offered to them.” Nine years later, an article in the school paper declared “In place of grades, examinations, and diplomas as incentives to study, Brookwooders have an interest and devotion to labor, which immensely simplifies the teaching problem here.” In addition, after visiting Brookwood, President Farrell of the Kansas State College of Agriculture and Applied Science claimed “[Brookwood] contains only people who are eager to learn….The little group of students at Brookwood exhibit the eager desire to learn that would be a dominant feature of an ideal college…” (qtd. in Clark 402).
As these comments from students and outside observers reveal, students at Brookwood came of their own accord, and they came ready and willing to learn. The interest in learning students brought with them helped create an intellectual environment at Brookwood. And, while their previous work experiences and participation in social and political organizations would have influenced greatly the opinions about politics, economics, and labor they brought with them, Brookwood’s program was designed to expand their understanding of these issues and provide the opportunity to think critically about them.

**Brookwood’s Institutional Organization and Structure**

Student interest in learning and motivation to learn was supported by the organization and structure of Brookwood. The school was designed to eliminate traditional authoritarian relationships between students and teachers. It also provided students multiple opportunities to participate in the organization and operation of the school.

Institutional reports and memos reveal that students held positions on every governing body of the institution\(^59\) and they had their own committees to deal with student problems and arrange social functions. They were also involved in the hiring and firing of teachers (Altenbaugh, *Education* 157-8). Even outside their service on governing bodies, students and teachers were treated as equals. Students were encouraged to call teachers by their first names, teachers and students participated in extracurricular activities together, and they shared equally in the manual work (including

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\(^{59}\) For example, according to Altenbaugh, in 1925 a formalized board of directors was formed and students held two of the nineteen positions on the board (*Education*, 158).
construction, farming, cooking, and maintenance) required for Brookwood to run
(Altenbaugh 131-2). By creating a more equal relationship between students and
teachers, Brookwood avoided imposing intellectual hierarchies that could have stifled
students’ intellectual development.

A document titled “Agenda for Student-Faculty Review of the Year’s Life and
Work at Brookwood” confirms the school’s (and teachers’) interest in student
involvement in curriculum and pedagogy. The agenda contains a list of questions for
students, including the following: “Is Brookwood offering the right courses of study?,”
“Are there specific suggestions as to teaching methods in any of the courses?,” “Is there
too much or too little written work?,” “Is there too much or too little participation in
outside activities?,” “How can we have a more cooperative and harmonious community
at Brookwood—among students, faculty and staff?,” and “Did we have the right kind and
number of outside speakers this year?” The document ends with a statement telling
students to “Come prepared to express your ideas freely and frankly.” As this document
shows, Brookwood faculty solicited students’ honest opinions, and consequently
encouraged students to participate in the design and execution of their education and not
just the acquisition of it (as most schools do). Brookwood faculty sought student
feedback because they shared with students experience as laborers and a dedication to the
labor movement.

Several Brookwood documents illustrate students did, in fact, exercise the power
and freedom the faculty and administration gave them. One example comes from a 1931-
32 memorandum students wrote claiming that they were dissatisfied with the
opportunities they were being given in some classes to express their opinions.
It is our opinion that Brookwood classes should be a place in which the students, and not the teachers, do the greater part of the talking. When facts are necessary, however, of course, the teacher must present them.

We have felt that in some courses, however, such as the class in Marx, not enough opportunity is given for the expression [sic] of student thought. Instructors sometimes use class time for the purpose of clarifying their own individual point of view.

Though these comments show that instructors did not always provide students the opportunity to express their ideas, they also demonstrate students spoke up when they wanted change, they valued their own opinions, and they demanded they be able to express them.

Students also critiqued their own performance and participation in the program. In a report to faculty and administrators, students wrote that “during the year there has developed a general laxness among the student body as a whole, particularly in regard to studies….We believe that to a degree this relaxation is valuable and necessary, but also that much time has been wasted.” The solutions students offered included more faculty control, more effective student organization, and student self-discipline (Student Memorandum). In another instance, when concerned teachers and administrators told a student he must leave Brookwood because his English language skills were so poor they impeded his participation in coursework, students responded with a petition. Students wrote to teachers and administrators in defense of the student, Bill Barash, saying “Whereas Bill Barash has not mustered the mechanics of writing and reading, he has a keen intellect, independence, and originality in thinking, and reads with understanding.”
The students offered to tutor Barash so he could stay at Brookwood, and the faculty replied by allowing Barash to continue.

Brookwood reports and memos also show evidence that students didn’t always think alike in their critiques and comments on the administration of Brookwood. A series of documents titled “Statement of the Minority of the Students to the Board of Directors” and “Statement of the Majority of the Students to the Board of Directors” show how students expressed their opinions in smaller groups if they didn’t all agree.

As these documents indicate, Brookwood was designed to encourage the expression of ideas even if they were contrary to teachers’ or others’ ideas. They also show students were invested in their education, showed independent thought, and had ample opportunity to shape the program. The fact that students’ voices were solicited, heard, and respected outside the classroom (and not just inside it, as I address later) sent students the message that their ideas and opinions were valuable—contributing to Brookwood’s ability to create an environment conducive to the practice and fostering of intellectualism.

**The Knowledge Valued and Disseminated: The Brookwood Curriculum**

The curriculum at Brookwood complemented students’ personal experiences by providing them access to historical and theoretical information about the social, political, and economic issues surrounding American labor alongside technical training for work in the labor movement. The foundational understanding of labor issues this curriculum provided empowered students to think through these issues, to understand their personal experiences in a larger context, and to become more confident leaders and communicators. These skills would have influenced students’ participation in intellectual
activities and their investment in learning. Like the knowledge disseminated by lyceums, however, the Brookwood curriculum has not been recognized as intellectual because of its focus on labor issues and because it was intended to be “useful” and “practical” in students’ lives as workers.

In a 1924 Report to the Second International Conference on Workers’ Education, administrators note that in order to achieve their purpose of preparing men and women for leadership in the labor movement, students first need “a point of view” and a “method of approach to their problems,” including the ability to find information, interpret the information, and problem-solve based on that information (7). In other words, students cannot serve the larger purpose without the skills that encourage them to be critical thinkers and activists. The curriculum was designed, then, to prepare students for such work.

As stated in a 1925 pamphlet advertising the school, “informational” courses were typically taken in the first year of the two-year program and were designed “to train the minds of the students as instruments for acquiring knowledge and thinking through problems, and to lay sound foundations in the study of the social sciences.” Courses in this category included Economics, Advanced Economics, American History, History of the American Labor Movement, Foreign Labor History, History of Civilization, Trade Union Organization Work, Modern Industry, Labor Organization Problems, and Current Events. Rhetoric, composition, and literacy scholar Susan Kates described the goal of these courses as helping workers “understand how history, economics, literature, and language in the public system of education perpetuated the status quo in the United States and resulted in the exploitation of the American worker” (76). For example, in Trade
Union Organization Work, students studied the labor movement alongside issues like political action, economic strikes, collective bargaining, and employers’ associations. In addition, with the objective of exposing students to an alternative social system, Advanced Economics provided a Marxist interpretation of contemporary history and compared American capitalist society with Soviet society (Altenbaugh, *Education* 95).

The second type of course Brookwood required of its students (typically taken in the second year) was “tool” courses—courses focused on enabling students to put their knowledge into action. These courses included Trade Union Administration Technique, Parliamentary Law, English/Grammar, Report Making, Labor Journalism, Public Speaking, Labor Drama, and Preparation for Fieldwork. These classes, more specifically, prepared students for and gave them practice in public speaking and debating; facilitating meetings; managing a union; writing labor news, editorials, and feature stories; composing union reports; analyzing and producing plays as a vehicle for informing audiences about labor issues and problems; evaluating strike situations and union organizing campaigns; implementing publicity methods; and facilitating strikes and food and clothing drives.

To complement the material covered by teachers in Brookwood courses, a number of outside speakers were brought in every year to lecture on “real life” knowledge and experience with labor. A 1927 Executive Committee Report states the purpose of these actions as “to give the students the benefit not only of theoretical knowledge but the practical day to day work of the labor movement” (3). According to a 1933-34 Brookwood annual report, the lectures of outside speakers fell into roughly four categories: “practical labor tactics, workers’ education, political tendencies, and foreign
affairs” (7). A 1930-31 annual report listed the following speakers for that year along with the topics they covered: a professor from Amherst College (Russia), a former editor of The American Miner (the industrial depression), an author and lecturer (the situation in India), a professor from the University of Oslo Norway (the labor movement of Norway), a playwright (labor drama), the director of the Workers Education Association in New Zealand (the Australian labor movement), a member of the Socialist Party (the role of the negro in the labor movement), and a traveler and writer (Russia).

Similar to the knowledge disseminated by lyceums, the curriculum at Brookwood covered a broad range of topics. Different from the lyceums, though, Brookwood taught the content in relation to the labor movement, considered the content in depth, and taught students how to apply what they learned.

Learning to situate their actions and experiences in a larger context likely helped students understand better their experiences, the causes and consequences of them, and alternative ways of thinking and acting based on them. As one student put it, “Before going to Brookwood, I could see only my own industry and state, but now I can see the whole labor movement—all unions, the unemployed, organized farmers, the whole country, the wider scope of labor’s struggles” (“Brookwood’s Contribution”).

The curriculum is also likely to have helped students become more confident communicators and leaders, evidenced by their reflections on their Brookwood education. One student wrote that “Brookwood training gave me more guts—more confidence on how to talk and not be bluffed or fooled by the bosses.” Another student wrote “After Brookwood I have been able to stand on two feet, answer questions and attacks. I didn’t realize how helpful this would be until I got back into the thick of the fight”
“Brookwood’s Contribution”). In addition, student Bessie Friedman wrote in the April 15, 1923 issue of *The Brookwood Review*: “My two years in Brookwood had made me be self-confident; I had the knowledge of the background of the labor movement which my fellow workers lacked” (1).

The Brookwood curriculum was multifaceted, blending theory and practice and addressing issues in both historical and contemporary contexts. The result was a more informed, more confident, and more experienced student body—a student body interested in and better-equipped for engaging in intellectual activities, including those practiced in the Brookwood classroom.

**Teaching and Learning Practices: The Brookwood Classroom and Beyond**

Influenced by John Dewey’s educational philosophy of “learning by doing” and the progressive education movement, the founders of Brookwood intentionally avoided traditional, authoritative teaching practices, and instead focused on a progressive, democratic pedagogy. The belief was that teacher-student relations in the classroom reflected the political world outside: if students were passive and subservient in the classroom, they would also be so outside the classroom (Altenbaugh, *Education* 130). Brookwood’s teaching philosophy, then, situated students as active participants in a non-competitive learning environment. It situated teachers as encouragers and facilitators of critical thinking and the expression of ideas—forms of intellectualism. Faculty enacted

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60 Started in the late nineteenth century, the progressive education movement emphasized experiential and dialogic education. William Mann Fincke was one of the primary founders of Brookwood Labor College. He and his wife Helen intended to create a progressive labor college that would put into practice the ideas of Dewey and other progressive reformers (Kates 80; Altenbaugh, *Education* 70). For a detailed look at the role of progressivism in American education during this period, see Lawrence A. Cremin’s *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957*. 81
this philosophy by using learning activities like discussion, debate, critical inquiry, collaboration, reading, writing, and speaking in their pedagogical practices.

On paper, Brookwood leaders made explicit the school’s emphasis on open-minded inquiry and analysis. For example, in a document titled “Suggested Brief Statement of Purpose,” printed in 1929, the authors stated “We want militant, radical workers, young people with vision and enthusiasm to come to Brookwood as well as more conservative trade unionists who are willing to study and analyze in an open-minded fashion the problems of life and of the labor movement in the modern world” (3). Later in the document is a description of the educational policy of Brookwood: “encouraging the full, free and critical discussion of all problems confronting the labor movement, the presentation of all points of view, including presentation of their viewpoints by spokesmen for various tendencies and parties in the movement, and encouragement in the students of a realistic attitude toward facts” (3). Not surprisingly, then, students were asked as part of their application to Brookwood to write a response to the description of Brookwood’s point of view as printed on the application.

Brookwood course descriptions provide evidence that faculty designed their courses to encourage critical thinking about course material. For example, Mark Starr’s syllabus for his British Labor Movement course describes the aim of the course as “To understand the main developments of the organized workers’ movement in Great Britain and to analyze its present structure and ideals in comparison with the American movement.” In the 1933-34 Annual Report for Brookwood, the teachers described their classes that year, citing a heavy emphasis on analysis and critical discussion. David J. Saposs described History of the American Labor Movement this way: “an analysis and
description of the social and economic conditions that brought forth a working class and a labor movement, followed by a critical discussion by periods of all divisions, phases, ideas, and activities…The course closes with an analysis of the most recent developments and an attempt to indicate possible future developments” (4).

Susan Shephard’s Dramatics course description stated “Students read labor plays, analyzing purposes, structure and effectiveness preparatory to creating their own labor plays” (6). Later in that report, in a section commenting on the quality and direction of the training, it stated, “In all our work this year Brookwood has tried to maintain and to encourage in the students a progressive, critical, and analytic approach to political, economic, and trade union policies…” (9). Clearly, the goal in these courses was to increase student understanding, but also to help develop students’ ability to analyze and assess information.

Course assignments reveal some of the strategies teachers used to accomplish these goals. For example, a Labor Journalism assignment in Helen Norton’s class asked students to read local labor papers and analyze the commercial advertisements. In a Modern Industry course, each lesson ended with “For Thought and Discussion” questions asking students what they think about what the text claims, what they noticed, etc. In the British Labor Movement course, Mark Starr asked students multiple questions, including “Is the general strike an effective weapon and under what circumstances? Examine the tactics and the lack of agreement among the leaders” and “In ‘Men and Machines’…Stuart Chase lists some of the causes of why the Industrial Revolution came first in England. Supplement these if you can and weigh their relative importance giving reasons for your placing.” One assignment in Josephine Colby’s Report Making course was to
read convention proceedings, compare the arrangement and editing of the proceedings with the proceedings of the AFL, and then argue for what you prefer, what you think works, and why. Such assignments reveal the institution’s emphasis on active engagement with course material.

Brookwood students were also assigned reading in every course and were encouraged to read the texts available at the school’s library. Suggested reading for Modern Industry included Stuart Chase’s *The Challenge of Waste and the Tragedy of Waste*, Atkins and Lasswell’s *Labor Attitudes and Labor Problems*, and Fitch’s *Causes of Industrial Unrest*. The assigned readings for David J. Saposs’ *Trade Union Organization Work* included Perlman’s *A Theory of the Labor Movement* and Soule’s *The Intellectuals and the Wage Workers*. Lawrence Rogin’s *American History* course includes Huberman’s *We the People*, Simmons’s *Social Forces in American History*, and Callender’s *Economic History of the United States* among the readings. Many of the readings were challenging texts, especially when we consider that many Brookwood students had little educational background and few had read such texts before. Harry Nilsson, a 1931 graduate of Brookwood, wrote in an essay titled “The Grads Come Through,” “It is hard, at first, to get used to reading the books and magazines which are so new to most of the students” (27). To facilitate the understanding, interpreting, and

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61 According to the 1924 Report on Brookwood Labor College to the Second International Conference on Workers’ Education, Brookwood’s library “contains several thousand volumes and is a very good working library in the social sciences” (1).
62 According to a 1927 census of Brookwood students, students’ previous education ranged from college trained to very little public schooling: four students had no public school education, a little over one-half went no further than grade school, and only half of these completed the full eight years.
questioning of difficult material, teachers encouraged students to collaborate on their work\textsuperscript{63} (Howlett 66).

As the above assignments demonstrate, literacy activities were some of the most important learning tools used at Brookwood to encourage students’ active engagement with ideas. (Reading, writing, and speaking were also skills taught at Brookwood as forms of activism, which I discuss in the next section.) English professor Susan Kates, in her research on Brookwood Labor College, argued that those instructors at Brookwood teaching “rhetorical study”\textsuperscript{64} intentionally used reading, writing, and speaking assignments to help students understand and interrogate their marginalized standing (1). They also taught students to consider the way language gets used in different contexts (78). In her words, “Reading, writing, and speaking about their employment experiences gave Brookwood students the opportunity to gain a critical perspective on the forces that threatened their lives and well-being” (96). According to Kates, these features of writing and speaking instruction did not typically appear in the curricula of more traditional institutions of the time (77, 86).

The result of such “activist education” (as Kates termed it) was students who could not only serve the labor movement as good speakers and writers (as I discuss in the next section on activism), but students who could think critically about language, rhetoric, and communication. Students put these skills to use outside the classroom when

\textsuperscript{63} Director of Brookwood A.J. Muste wrote about how students were often separated into “research communities” that paired them based on their experience and strengths in terms of reading, researching, organizing, and public speaking (qtd. in Altenbaugh, “Children” 404).

\textsuperscript{64} The teachers whose teaching practices Kates examined included public speaking instructor Josephine Colby, labor journalism instructor Helen Norton, and fieldwork instructor Louis Budenz.
they wrote memoranda to Brookwood teachers and administrators and when they participated in the meetings and discussions about the program mentioned earlier.

Reinforcing claims that Brookwood taught students how to think critically are student and observers’ accounts of the Brookwood experience. Former student Mary Goff said in 1924 that in history classes students were not trained to memorize facts but to analyze critically and openly the forces and conditions behind historical events. “We do not feel that great barrier between the instructor and the students. We ask questions freely and when we have opinions we express them. We are stimulated to ask, to find out, to dig ourselves….” (qtd. in Howlett 65). One student wrote in the Feb. 1932 issue of *The Brookwood Review*, that classes were “conducted an [sic] a discussion basis with reading assignments and written reports to amplify and crystallize the classroom work” (4). Henry Harap, a professor of education at Case Western, observed at Brookwood in 1923,

The class recitations are friendly and informal. The students discussed and asked questions with a view to getting information rather than to show up their intelligence….The class meets as a Seminar rather than as a lecture or recitation group. The students coming out of industry or Trade Unions bring to the discussion information out of their practical experience….The students do not appear to take what the instructors say as Gospel. They have a wholesome, constructive, critical attitude. (qtd. in Howlett 64)

Similarly, President Farrell of the Kansas State College of Agriculture and Applied Science commented in 1930 on Brookwood’s students’ interactions with guest speakers,
noting they asked “numerous, pertinent, and well worded” questions, subjecting the speaker to “a critical examination” (qtd. in Clark 402).

The learning and thinking activities utilized in the Brookwood classroom (including discussion, debate, analysis, collaboration, reading, writing, and speaking) increased students’ engagement with ideas and nurtured a desire to engage in critical discussions not just in the classroom, but also outside it. One example of this is students’ participation as writers and editors of the school paper (started by labor journalism teacher Helen Norton) and their creation of other student publications. As described in a 1924 Brookwood report, the school paper, *The Brookwood Review*, was not necessarily seen as only a place to practice the art of labor journalism (as I discuss in the next section), but as a discussion forum: “The paper will aim to provide an opportunity for the discussion of problems of workers’ education, including particularly problems of teaching method.” (7).

Demonstrating their desire to engage with others in writing and their sense of initiative or motivation, students started and maintained a number of other student-run publications over the years. One of them, the *Brookwood Fellowship Review*, was written and published by alumni of Brookwood and contained book reviews, quotes, reports, updates, articles by graduates, and faculty news. The purpose of the

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65 Other student publications included *The Brookwood Scroll, The Brookwood Wildcat*, and *The Line*. *The Brookwood Scroll* (published by students of the 1936 summer session) contained news flashes from the students’ labor organizations, Brookwood sports reports, and a list of the students. *The Line*, subtitled “Student News at Brookwood” was a 1-page student publication containing poetry, general announcements, and student gossip in a section titled “Dirt.” The tone was sarcastic and humorous. Faculty at Brookwood published (at least once) a page titled *The Firing Line*, a faculty version of *The Line* with the same humor and sarcasm. *The Brookwood Wildcat* was also published by students, was published weekly, and was described this way: “This paper will be noted for its incompetence, carefree punctuation, and its admirable articulation.”
publication was recorded in the first edition: “The first and most important function of the Fellowship Review is to be a medium for shop talk among Brookwood graduates….It should never get to looking so presentable that our real problems and sincere opinions do not get an airing. Within the Fellowship we should seek to build up a community of understanding and a free critical spirit” (10). The fact that this publication existed is evidence of students’ ongoing (post graduation) desire for critical engagement and expression of opinions. This work demonstrates students’ desire to engage with others in writing, their ability to think independently, and their sense of initiative and motivation.

The atmosphere of open, critical inquiry and debate in the Brookwood classroom was supported by the absence of grades, exams, and diplomas as incentives for education, creating an environment of “sharing knowledge” rather than “monopolizing it” (Altenbaugh, Education 130). Getting students to share their knowledge was facilitated by “lively discussions and heated debates” both inside and outside the classroom and “classroom situations that encouraged them to articulate their experiences, to raise their level of social consciousness, and to give them practice in speaking before groups” (134). This atmosphere, along with the teaching and learning practices Brookwood utilized and encouraged, helped students become active, critical learners both inside and outside the classroom.

Education for Activism

Brookwood’s organizational structure, curriculum, and classroom practices were designed for an overarching purpose: to make students effective activists for the labor movement. Based on what we know about the students at Brookwood, they already were or were at least interested in being labor activists. What difference, then, did the
Brookwood program make in students’ activism? I argue that the program helped students see and perform fieldwork in the context of social, cultural, political, and economic issues and taught them different forms of activism (including labor journalism and labor drama) that were new to most of them. The program also made students more effective activists by teaching them how to communicate and analyze information. I argue, further, that, as activists, students became sponsors of intellectualism themselves, spreading knowledge, class-consciousness, an interest in learning, and the desire to engage in activism. Literacy was central to the activism performed by Brookwooders and other labor college students, evidenced in the two most popular and successful forms of activism performed by students and graduates: labor journalism and labor drama.

**Labor Journalism**

As mentioned earlier, some Brookwood courses were designed to help students improve their writing for the purpose of communicating with and persuading an audience. In the 1933-34 Annual Report, Susan M. Shepherd notes that in her Grammar and Writing course the focus was on getting students to “express themselves effectively on paper” by reviewing elements of grammar, punctuation, etc. and working on various types of writing. Students in Josephine Colby’s English class learned how to write pamphlets after studying existing pamphlets. Helen Norton taught her Labor Journalism students about the power of writing and how to use it to communicate effectively and persuade an audience, including using illustrations and vernacular familiar to the target audience (Syllabus). Her course notes reveal she told them the purpose of labor journalism is threefold: “To spread labor news,” “To put into simple, readable form such material as research findings or complicated labor agreements and measures,” and “To
influence opinion and feeling, both among workers and the general public.” Combined, these courses taught students to use literacy skills in their activist work.

Part of what made Brookwood so effective was that students received more than just training in writing to communicate and persuade; they were given the opportunity to practice it. Labor Journalism instructor Helen Norton started *The Brookwood Review* in 1922 to provide a real space for students and teachers to practice their journalism skills. Written, edited, and published by teachers and students, *The Brookwood Review* was typically published monthly and contained reports on labor issues, strikes, and problems; short reports of speakers visiting Brookwood; descriptions of institutes held at Brookwood; reports on incoming, current, or past students and teachers; book reviews of books about labor issues; student activity in strikes and drama performances; changes in curriculum and classes; and creative stories about the lives of workers.

Writing for this publication helped students understand the use of writing for activism purposes. In the Jan. 1, 1924 issue of *The Brookwood Review*, student Charles Moore wrote “It seems impossible to set bounds to the influence of the press….The newspaper is a social benefit or a social menace according to the motive of the people who control it.” In the same issue, student Ben Thomas wrote “The study of Journalism makes its importance apparent, in view of the fact that the press is one of the powerful propaganda [sic] agents of the employing class.” Students’ recognition of the power of writing to educate and persuade an audience made writing more than a tool for their own learning; it became a tool they could use to educate others.
Labor Drama

One of the most significant developments in the labor college curriculum was the addition of labor drama. Representative of an early twentieth-century movement by Progressive reformers to use theater as a form of mass education (Kett 321), drama was introduced experimentally at Brookwood in Fall 1925. Labor Drama was added to the Brookwood curriculum to teach students to analyze and produce plays in an effort to educate and raise the consciousness of audiences about labor through entertainment.

By 1934, theatre was thoroughly integrated into the activities of Brookwood, with yearly Labor Chautauqua tours funded by the school. According to a 1934 press release, in two months the program had 90 performances in 8 states, reaching more than 22,000 people. Performances were financed by ticket sales, collections, contributions from individuals and groups, and were sometimes underwritten by union or labor organizations (Brookwood Labor Players brochure).

The 1931-32 Brookwood Bulletin and Announcement of Labor Courses described Labor Drama as “Analysis and production of plays as a vehicle of labor expression.” Students received training in writing, acting, and directing plays, and in the construction of simple stage settings. Students were also taught the history of labor drama. A handout from Elizabeth English’s 1935-6 Dramatics class, titled “On Reading and Writing Plays,” says that though students were not expected to produce masterpieces, they would learn how to use their labor and union experiences and their own opinions about war and fascism to write effective plays. Once again, literacy practices were central to the Brookwood curriculum, and in this case to students’ expression of ideas for activism purposes.
Because labor plays written by students and teachers were fashioned after their own personal experiences and presented the challenges and problems most present in their lives, these courses also used reading, writing, and speech to help students process and present their own labor experiences. The topics of students’ and teachers’ labor plays included a textile strike, a tragedy in the coal fields, the campaign to unionize sweatshops in the garment industry, the story of a union leader who remained true to the cause despite losing his wife on the picket line, the GM auto strike, the positive results of workers protesting collectively, an anti-war drama about young textile workers striking instead of making gun cotton, an account of a union who got the boss who avoided paying his workers, and issues of racism, sexism, and poor job conditions. The labor plays written and performed by Brookwood students reflect a national trend beginning in the 1930s: the politicization of theatre (Altenbaugh, *Proletarian Drama* 197).

Brookwood documents indicate labor drama was a successful tool for educating the audience about labor conditions and problems and got the audience interested in labor issues and in joining the cause for social change. According to the 1931-32 Brookwood Annual Report, “After every performance [of the play “Mill Shadows”] people hung around asking questions about working conditions as typified in the play and about Brookwood.” Audiences were often stirred to do more than join the cause. A Brookwood Labor Players brochure claims that after seeing one of the labor plays, the audience members often sought advice on how to create their own drama group. In these ways, student performers fostered intellectualism among the audience members. Their work as activists interested and motivated others to engage with the social, cultural, and political issues affecting laborers.
These plays educated the participants as well. An Annual Report claimed students and staff considered the time and energy they devoted to their labor drama work worthwhile. A press release from Brookwood in 1934 argued the trips gave students valuable experience with workers outside the school that they could take back to their local situations. In her book *Staging Strikes: Workers’ Theatre and the American Labor Movement*, Colette A. Hyman argues that “In participating in such projects, students could develop self-confidence and public-speaking skills while they explored problems of labor relations and labor organizing” (22).

Experience with labor journalism and labor drama educated students, taught them analytical and rhetorical skills, and educated their audiences. Additionally, they both made knowledge more accessible to their audiences. This is where the Brookwood experience seems to come full circle. Brookwood worked to make education accessible to workers; in turn, it trained workers to make education accessible to the public. Like the entertaining and instructive performances on the lyceum stage, the labor drama labor colleges provided made education pleasurable and entertaining. It is not surprising that (as Altenbaugh claimed) labor drama was the most successful and profitable part of Brookwood (228).

While some may argue that making knowledge entertaining and accessible is a form of “dumbing down,” I argue that making knowledge accessible and engaging serves a greater purpose—getting people interested. In the end, the activism Brookwood prepared students for and created opportunity for them to engage in placed students in the role of educator and in the role of cultivating intellectualism in others. Through their activism work (based heavily on their reading, writing, and oral performance of texts),
students had the opportunity to motivate their audiences to learn, to think critically, and to take action.

Access to Brookwood

As stated in a 1927 Memorandum on Entrance Requirements, to be accepted into Brookwood’s program students had to have worked in industry and held membership in a labor union for a minimum of one year. They also had to have three references, two of whom could speak to their loyalty to organized labor. No particular prior education was required of students. In fact, we know from a 1927 census of Brookwood students that students’ previous education ranged from college trained to very little public schooling: four students had no public school education, a little over one-half went no further than grade school, and only half of these completed the full eight years. Like lyceums, labor colleges prided themselves on being highly accessible, claiming they did not discriminate based on age, race, or gender. Also like the lyceums, though, access to labor colleges was complicated by issues of cost, affiliation, race, and gender.

According to Altenbaugh, some critics have called labor colleges “elitist” and “expensive” (Education 4) because the cost affected who was able to attend. In a 1934 acceptance letter from Brookwood to Leon A. Cousens, the cost per student for a year was listed as $200 for board, room, and laundry. Rarely did (or could) students afford to pay this cost themselves. Most often, students were funded by a labor organization or they were funded by individual donations to the school. Some, however, could not find

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66 Student occupations varied, but included agricultural and industrial workers, cap makers, cab drivers, hosiery knitters, railway carmen, sailors, cooks, migrant workers, and farmers (Altenbaugh, “Children” 402).

67 Lack of education was largely due to dependence on working at a young age. A little over 1/5 of the students went to work before they were fourteen years old, 38% went between ages 14-16, and 31% went between 16-18.
the money or sponsorship to attend. Others could not afford to spend two years away from work or from their families. In addition to cost, the work experience and loyalty to organized labor required of students limited who could attend. Combined, this means that despite a relatively open admissions policy, Brookwood really only educated students who could afford to leave their family and jobs and who were already dedicated to the labor movement.

A survey of current and past students from 1921-1931 conducted by Helen G. Norton’s students in 1931 provides further details about who actually attended Brookwood. According to the survey, 186 students attended Brookwood. Of them, 25.8% were native whites; 39.7% were native whites of foreign parentage, 31.7% were foreign-born whites, and 3.2% were of other races. Sixty-one percent were men; 39% were women. Students came from 27 states and 7 foreign countries and from 35 different labor unions. The median age was 26. These data show that though Brookwood was designed to be accessible, very few non-whites attended. In fact, only five African American students attended Brookwood in these ten years. This is due, in part, to black students only beginning to be admitted in 1925, and to the NAACP being one of the only organizations offering black students financial support (Altenbaugh, Education 142). In addition, though women were clearly admitted to Brookwood’s program and made up about 40 percent of attendees, very few women became prominent leaders in the labor movement (Kates 93). This could reflect gender issues in Brookwood’s program, or in American culture at large. Consequently, like lyceums, labor colleges were complicit in perpetuating traditional notions that intellectualism is something for white men who could “afford” to engage in learning activities.
Despite access to labor colleges being complicated by cost, affiliation, race, and gender, Brookwood worked to make knowledge accessible to those who could not participate in the full two-year program. In 1931, Brookwood began to offer a 1-year program for those unable to attend for the full two years.\footnote{Brookwood announced in a 1931 report of the Brookwood Executive Committee to the Annual Meeting of Brookwood Board of Directors and Brookwood Inc. (April 18, 1931, pg. 2) that it would become a 1-year program. The rationale was worded this way: “We have desired to get more graduates out into the movement, after a shorter separation from their unions and from industry, with a more intensive though less extended course in the subjects chiefly required by men and women who are to be useful in the difficult and perplexing American labor scene of this present period.”} Also, beginning in 1924, Brookwood started offering Summer School Short Courses. These courses consisted of twelve days of intensive training on subjects like Your Job and Your Pay, Principles of Unionism, Public Speaking and Parliamentary Law, Labor Publicity, Economics, Labor Problems, and English/Labor Journalism.

In 1928, Brookwood established an Extension Department. The Extension Department offered Correspondence Courses consisting of course materials on various topics including Modern Industrial Problems, Public Speaking, Labor History, and Trade Union Problems and Policies. The Extension Program also supplied speakers and educational assistance to trade unions, labor colleges and classes, cooperative societies, Y.W.C.A., industrial clubs, discussion groups and other groups and individuals (ctd. in Altenbaugh 126). The program was indeed extensive, reaching workers in Philadelphia, Harrisburg, Lancaster, and York, Pennsylvania; Newark and Paterson, New Jersey; Durham and Greensboro, North Carolina; and Baltimore, Maryland (127).

Another way Brookwood attempted to make education accessible to others was through the composition of Brookwood Pamphlets. According to a press release about the pamphlet series, these inexpensive pamphlets were “designed to present important ideas
and facts about the labor movement in a clear and simple manner in terms of workers’ experience.” They were intentionally written with a simple sentence structure and vocabulary for “rank and file workers who find most reading on economics and labor problems difficult work.” Fitting Brookwood’s educational philosophy and design, the pamphlets not only disseminated information but spurred discussion with a series of questions and reading suggestions at the end. The questions often included both larger critical questions and more specific personal ones.

Like lyceums, American labor colleges were not accessible to all. Labor colleges, however, were designed to serve a specific, limited population: adult laborers. Participation in labor colleges was limited, though, to those who could get funding, time away from jobs and family, and to those with the required amount of work and labor union experience. Despite these limitations, Brookwood broadened education for laborers in the twentieth century. And, those who did gain access to Brookwood’s program experienced a curriculum and environment that encouraged an interest in learning, critical thinking, and the valuing of education—supporting and fostering intellectualism in students.

CONCLUSION

Labor colleges like Brookwood succeeded at educating workers and at training workers to become labor leaders, journalists, and educators. Despite this success, they closed early in the 1940s and failed to accomplish their central goal: to build a new social order. A number of factors led to Brookwood’s closing in 1937: fragmentation of the political left (including a majority of the participants and supporters), financial problems
stemming from the Great Depression, and Brookwood’s independence (and consequent lack of an outside funding source).

While the dream of a new social order was never realized for Brookwood and other labor colleges, many students from the program made a difference in the labor movement. The *Fifteenth Anniversary Review* program listed the following about Brookwood graduates:

Eighty-four of us have recently participated in strikes or organization campaigns; 54 have held full time positions in unions; 49 have been arrested for labor activity; 65 have written for or edited labor papers; 76 have taught workers’ classes and organized workers’ education centers; 74 have been active in labor political organizations; 41 have helped in the organization of the unemployed; 17 have taken part in the consumers’ cooperative movement; and the same number have worked in farm organizations. (28)

This evidence that students continued to engage and participate in the labor movement after leaving the program helps demonstrate the desire, motivation, and dedication students had not only to the movement but to educating and helping others. Consequently, the influence labor colleges had on the intellectualism of those who participated, I argue, was significant. Despite criticisms of education for a practical, social purpose, acquiescent workers, and the spread of useful knowledge, my examination of the students, the institutional structure, the curriculum, the classroom, and the activism at Brookwood Labor College reveals that intellectualism was practiced at Brookwood in a variety of forms and was supported by an atmosphere conducive to the
desire for and pursuit of knowledge. This research also illustrates the significant role literacy played in the development of students’ intellectualism and in the students’ sponsoring of intellectualism through their activism.
CHAPTER 4
TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY GED WRITING WORKSHOPS 
AND REMEDIAL EDUCATION

For my final—and most contemporary—case study, I focus on GED writing workshops taught at a community education facility in a large Midwestern town. Like lyceums and labor colleges, these workshops provide access to education to adults who, due to their personal or economic circumstances, have not completed or had access to other forms of secondary or higher education. They also, like lyceums and labor colleges, represent a trend in adult education. In this case, they exemplify the contemporary trend of pursuing education for job and life improvement (Kett).

Unfortunately, these workshops do not meet the criteria for intellectualism imposed by traditional views. Based on my revised definition of intellectualism, however, these workshops constitute an important site and sponsor of intellectualism in the twenty-first century.

I selected these workshops as the focus of my third case study for several reasons. First, because the workshops are taught by graduate students at a nearby university they represent a unique connection between university and community education—two learning environments often polarized in terms of their perceived intellectual import. Second, I concentrate my research on the writing workshops in particular because they focus on literacy skills, allowing me to observe more closely the relationship between
literacy and intellectualism. And finally, because these workshops are considered a form of remedial or basic education, my examination of them allows us to understand better the relationship between intellectualism and remedial education—an issue particularly relevant to rhetoric and composition scholars because of their work with basic reading and writing courses.

One of the consequences of traditional views of intellectualism that assume intellectuals live a “life of the mind,” are highly educated, or study highbrow ideas is the conflation of intellectualism and academic markers of intelligence. This conflation results in the assumption that remedial or basic education cannot be intellectual. Starting with Mina Shaughnessy in 1977, rhetoric and composition scholars have worked to expose and challenge the social construction of remedial writers as cognitively deficient and remedial programs as “marginal to the intellectual community” (Rose, *An Open Language* 296). In *Errors and Expectations*, Shaughnessy argued basic writing students are not cognitively deficient or incapable of academic excellence, but they are beginners who “learn by making mistakes” (5). Several years after *Errors and Expectations*, David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky furthered the argument that remedial writers are not cognitively deficient with their basic writing curriculum designed to teach students academic discourse and critical thinking through challenging reading and writing assignments, rather than through grammar exercises and drills (*Facts, Artifacts and Counterfacts*).

Min-Zhan Lu and Deborah Mutnick have pointed out the political and social consequences of basic writing pedagogy. Lu has argued teachers need to recognize and make clear to students that learning academic discourse affects students’ perspectives and
consciousness (“Conflict and Struggle”). Mutnick noted in Writing in an Alien World that the view of basic writing as a skills course “reinforced linguistic prejudices and masked the underlying problems of racism, class discrimination, and other forms of social inequality” (9). Thus, she called for a writing pedagogy that would give agency and authority to basic writing students who have typically been silenced by prejudice and inequality. Mike Rose’s work, exemplified by his argument in “Narrowing the Mind and Page: Remedial Writers and Cognitive Reductionism,” represents well scholars’ efforts to confront assumptions about the cognitive abilities of basic writing students: “We must be vigilant that the systems of intellect we develop or adapt do not ground our students’ difficulties in sweeping, essentially one-dimensional perceptual, neurophysiological, psychological, or linguistic processes, systems that drive broad cognitive wedges between those who do well in our schools and those who don’t” (An Open Language 234). The assumption that remedial or basic education cannot be intellectual presumes such a wedge and reinforces cultural, social, and institutional hierarchies. My examination of the Lindberg Center’s writing workshops contributes to composition scholarship by challenging the notion that basic or remedial education programs—and their participants—cannot be intellectual.

Based on my classroom observations and interviews with participants, I argue that the students in the writing workshops at the Lindberg Center value education, are motivated learners, and engage in intellectual activities. In addition, the reading and writing activities used in these workshops, along with the teaching methods and

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69 Lindberg Center is a pseudonym. I have changed the name of the educational institution, the students, and the program supervisor to respect the confidentiality of their identities and their stories.
classroom environment, encourage and support students’ intellectualism by furthering their interest in education and fostering their critical engagement with ideas. In what follows, I introduce more thoroughly the Lindberg Center and the writing workshops. I also examine closely the students, the curriculum, and the learning and teaching practices employed by workshop instructors to demonstrate the presence and practice of intellectualism at this site.

THE LINDBERG CENTER

The Lindberg Center is a neighborhood-focused organization with a 111-year history of providing programs designed to promote economic advancement, self-sufficiency, and leadership among youth and adults. One of the programs the Lindberg Center offers is a combined GED and Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE) class with the goal of “empower[ing] students to become more self-sufficient through reducing barriers to and increasing education, employment, and life skills” (2008 Fast Facts Reference Sheet). The GED/ABLE program at the Lindberg Center started in 1995 with an enrollment of 46 students that year. Because of increased enrollments, the program began to offer two GED/ABLE classes (one day class and one night class) in 2004. In 2003, the Center formed a partnership with an outreach program at a nearby university. Since then, the university’s Outreach Consultants (graduate students from different departments on campus) have worked with the Center’s instructors to design and teach a sequence of six writing workshops four times a year to help students prepare for the writing portion of the GED exam.

According to Cate, the GED/ABLE program supervisor, Lindberg Center students are typically 25-40 years old, unemployed or making low wages, and on some form of
public assistance. A majority of the students are African American and female, and most have tried to get their GED at other programs or at other times in their lives. Most dropped out of school somewhere between 8th and 11th grade and start the program at the Center testing at a 4th or 5th-grade level. The students I interviewed reflect a similar profile. They range in age from 19 to 60. Six were men and eight were women, and all but one identified his or her race as black. One female identified as Somalian.

To understand the intellectual nature of the Lindberg Center workshops, I observed the sequence of six workshops taught in both the day class and night class between January and March of 2009 and interviewed the workshop teachers and the program supervisor. I asked them about the goals and objectives for the workshops, their perceptions of the students’ work and motivations for learning, and their reading of the educational environment of the workshops. In addition, I surveyed students about their educational experiences and beliefs, their opinions about the workshops, and their literacy practices. Students completed the surveys on a volunteer basis. Between the two classes I received fifteen completed surveys.  

Following the surveys, I interviewed (again on a volunteer basis) thirteen current students and one former student. During the interviews, I asked students more detailed questions about their past and present education experiences, their attitudes toward and interest in learning, their assessment of the writing workshops, and their beliefs about intelligence and intellectualism. Students’ responses to these questions, I hoped, would shed light on their attitudes toward learning and education and their involvement in the

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70 Though attendance varied each week in both classes, there were approximately 30-40 students total (between the two classes) participating in the workshops during the six weeks I observed, surveyed, and interviewed them.
workshop curriculum and activities—characteristics central to my definition of
telestialism as primarily a desire to learn and engage with ideas. (See Appendices B-
E for copies of the survey and interview questions.)

My work with the Lindberg Center did not originate with this research. As an
Outreach Consultant for the partnering university from Fall 2006 to Spring 2008, I was
one of the graduate students teaching the writing workshops. One year I taught the
evening workshops; the other year I taught the day workshops. Because I had recently
taught at the Center, some of the students knew me. This provided a level of comfort and
familiarity between the students and me that made some of them more willing to be
interviewed and more candid during their interviews.

THE STUDENTS

I begin my analysis of the Lindberg Center as a site of intellectualism with a close
look at the students’ beliefs about education, motivations for furthering their education,
and their views of intelligence and intellectualism. My interviews with students revealed
they come to the workshops interested, motivated learners who value education—
characteristics of intellectualism as I define it. Most of the students also see themselves
as intelligent because they value their own common sense, life experiences, and “real-
world” knowledge. In addition, they do not appear to perceive a “cognitive wedge”
between themselves and those with more education or school success than them. These
beliefs accord with the view of intellectualism I am proposing.

Teresa is an African-American single mother in her late twenties with a full-time
clerical job at a doctor’s office. She has two sons (ages 6 and 4) and has been working on
her GED at the Lindberg Center for two years now. Like most of the students at the
Lindberg Center, Teresa attends the workshops voluntarily and the nine hours a week she commits to the GED program compete for her attention alongside her responsibilities as a full-time employee and a single mother of two. I highlight Teresa’s story and her responses because she represents well the group of students I interviewed in terms of demographics, life circumstances, beliefs about education, and motivations for learning. See Table 1 below for a brief look at the demographics and experiences of the fourteen students I interviewed.

### Table 1: Writing Workshop Student Interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>When Dropped Out of School</th>
<th>Why Dropped Out of School</th>
<th>Why Working on GED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>10th grade</td>
<td>Had a couple children; couldn’t read</td>
<td>For pride</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carin</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>9th grade</td>
<td>Dysfunctional family; racism in school</td>
<td>To handle things better; because she believes knowledge is power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carl</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>early 20s</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>10th or 11th grade</td>
<td>Behavior issues</td>
<td>For better job opportunities; to improve living situation; to be a role model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dina</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>12th grade</td>
<td>Low self-esteem; had a baby</td>
<td>To gain self-esteem; to demonstrate to children and grandchildren she can do it</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While most students are participating in the GED/ABLE program voluntarily, a few of the students are required by the government to attend these classes to fulfill requirements for receiving government aid. Students required to attend these classes have a different set of motivations. They were not the ones who volunteered to be interviewed.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jackie</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>30s</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>at age 17</th>
<th>Had daughter at 14; pregnant again at 17</th>
<th>For a better life</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jerome</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>11&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; grade</td>
<td>Skipping school; lack of interest</td>
<td>For a better life via a better job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>10&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; grade</td>
<td>Needed to work to take care of himself because his family couldn’t</td>
<td>To go to college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>at age 17</td>
<td>Became pregnant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LaShonda</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>9&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;/10&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; grade</td>
<td>Didn’t get much help from teachers so lost interest</td>
<td>Wants better life; employment; help nieces and nephews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malcom</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>after completed 8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; grade</td>
<td>Always struggled with school; a lot of depression and insecurity</td>
<td>Self-confidence; because education is a tool; because it’s a burden on his back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>Somalian</td>
<td>18/19</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Didn’t drop out</td>
<td>Completed h.s. but couldn’t pass the science portion of the state’s required graduation test</td>
<td>To go to college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teresa</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>29/30</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>10&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; grade</td>
<td>Hanging out with a bad crowd</td>
<td>To better herself and her kids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wendell</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>7&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; grade</td>
<td>Racism; no motivational help from home; back and forth to jail at age 13; doctor labeled him retarded</td>
<td>To prove something to self and others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>2 weeks before h.s. graduation</td>
<td>Got in trouble; economic problems</td>
<td>To go to college and self-respect</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Beliefs About Education and Motivations for Learning**

Thinking back on her education history, Teresa talked about getting good grades and being a good student in elementary school (and even being a “teacher’s pet”). She
recalls liking middle school as well, though her grade point average was then too low to allow her to play on the school’s basketball team. When she moved to a different school for high school, Teresa says she ended up hanging with the wrong crowds, skipping school, and dropping out of school in the tenth grade. The reason she dropped out, she says, was not that the school or the teachers weren’t good, but that she chose the wrong path. In her words, “I just wanted to go have fun. I just left the important stuff alone to go have fun. And now the fun has caught up with me.”

When I asked Teresa the question “Why are you working towards your GED?” she gave the following response:

Well, the reason why I’m working towards my GED is to better myself and also try to better my kids. Ya know, I have two young sons and I don’t want them coming to me asking me questions I can’t answer cause I don’t know. And then to better the money as far as my employment. And also I think it’s most important that we all should get it. Because you know when you go to interviews and you don’t know this word and you don’t know the definition of it, ya know you need to know that just so you could give a better answer to the question. So I, I feel like everybody should have it. Cause it’s always been a burden on my shoulders, ya know, since I had dropped out of high school hangin with a bad crowd and … I feel like hey, it’s time to make a change in life. I’m like hey, I gotta be this parent. I wanna be this good parent and good role model for my sons.
As this response indicates, Teresa values education and is committed to furthering hers. She associates a GED (and implicitly, education) with being a better parent and with access to a better job and better life. She also associates it with access to more education, evidenced by her comments later in the interview that getting her GED will allow her to go to cosmetology school and possibly get a nursing degree. Teresa’s answer further reveals her feelings of inadequacy because of her lack of knowledge and her concerns about the influence her lack of education has on her boys’ education. In one anecdote, for example, she explained how she felt during a meeting she had with one of her son’s teachers:

I have went to a school meetin’ for my son, and the teacher was talking to me like a one-on-one situation and I’m like okay, what is you saying. Tell me, explain to me a little more so I know what you’re talking bout cause I didn’t know the definition of the word that came out of her mouth. And I felt kinda stupid like okay, you’re a parent now, Why don’t you know what this means. So I feel like education should be the most important thing in everybody’s life.

In this instance, the value of education for Teresa is tied to feelings of inadequacy.

The importance Teresa now assigns education is further demonstrated in her pursuit of education under difficult circumstances and her interest in motivating young people to concentrate on their education when they are young, instead of postponing it like she did. Pursuing her education at this point in her life is not easy for Teresa. In her words, “I shoulda had my education first before I had kids, and, ya know, I look at it like, do education, then kids…Cause I have a lot of stress on my plate right now. Ya know,
tryin to do school, be a parent, and do work.” Based on her own experiences, and because of the value she accords education, Teresa urges young people to stay in school. For example, she told me the story of a young girl she met at the doctor’s office where she works. When the girl’s mother told her her daughter wanted to quit school, Teresa told the daughter not to. “I shouted out in front of all the patients in the doctor’s office. I said you don’t wanna do that cause right now it’s hard. I said you don’t want this type of life I have right now, cause it’s hard.” According to Teresa, she preaches this message all the time when people bring their kids to the doctor’s office. “I’d rather them not be in my shoes,” she said.

Like Teresa, the other thirteen students I interviewed and observed at the Lindberg Center are interested, motivated learners. Understanding their motivations helps us understand better their beliefs about education and learning, and consequently what fuels their intellectualism. The three main forces motivating students that surfaced in the interviews were the belief that education increases a person’s access to things they want, the need to prove to themselves they can get their GED, and an awareness of the effect their lack of education has on others.

All of the students I interviewed value education because they assume it leads to a better life. Kim’s statement about why she values education is indicative of many of the students’ responses: “Like you need [education] to do anything that you wanna do…it’s like I have all these goals I wanna do but I have to get my GED first before I do that.” Cate, the GED/ABLE supervisor (and an instructor in the program) said students make this connection because of their “real-world” experiences in which their lack of education has limited access to things they have wanted. What students mean by “a better life”
varies, of course. For some, a better life means a better job, more money, a nice home, or the opportunity for more education for themselves or their children. For others, a better life means a nice life for their children, having the respect of others, or believing in themselves. For Kim, a career as a surgical tech and owning a house are among the things she wants but believes she can’t get without a GED.

Students’ belief that education will necessarily improve their lives is based on a conviction similar to the literacy myth—the belief that literacy by itself is necessary for economic, social, and cognitive advancement (Graff xxxvi-xxxviii). In this case, students assume their lack of education has been a barrier (or, in Teresa’s words, “a burden”) holding them back from a good life or from being the person they want to be. Students’ interest in and commitment to furthering their education, then, is significantly tied to their belief (fostered by culture and educational institutions) that education can open access to the things in life they desire. In one student’s words, “knowledge is power” (Carin).

On paper, the Lindberg Center perpetuates this belief, evidenced by its vision statement claiming the mission is to empower students by “reducing barriers to and increasing education, employment, and life skills.” Because “reducing barriers” is synonymous with increasing access, what this vision implies is that, at least in theory, increasing access to education, employment, and life skills empowers students and makes them more self-sufficient. In the classroom, though, students experience a curriculum and teaching practices that recognize the influence other forces in their lives have on access. (See my examination of the workshops later in this chapter.)

The Lindberg Center students’ belief that education equals access is consistent with other scholars’ research on adult learners. For example, Mike Rose, in Lives on the
Boundary, wrote about the strong belief the veterans he worked with had that “Education held the power to equalize things” (137). In addition, Janet Carey Eldred and Peter Mortensen have written about adult learners’ subscription to the “progress plot”—the belief that literacy is a necessary tool to achieve success. This “traditional literacy narrative,” as Kirk Branch calls it in “From the Margins at the Center: Literacy, Authority, and the Great Divide,” is a symptom of society’s belief in the literacy myth.

While such beliefs can help motivate learners, they can also be dangerous. As Harvey J. Graff demonstrated in The Literacy Myth, the belief that literacy and/or education can by themselves “equalize things” and “reduce barriers” overlooks the influence of a host of other complicating factors that affect equality and access, including race, class, gender, and ethnicity. In fact, people use such myths to argue against social programs like welfare and Affirmative Action, claiming that if people have access to education and/or literacy, it’s their own fault if they don’t have what they need. If students themselves buy in to the myth that education can “equalize things,” they may blame themselves or their lack of education for their economic and social circumstances and overlook other social and cultural factors that have affected their educational experiences or have created barriers in their lives. They may also assume that once they get their GED, some or all of the barriers may be removed.

In addition to associating education with access, Lindberg Center students’ interests in and motivations for furthering their education are rooted in their attachment of education to self-respect. For instance, when I asked Dina, a 45-year-old woman who currently works part-time at McDonald’s, why she’s working on her GED now, she said, “I hope to gain self-esteem, definitely, number one.” Likewise, Wendell, the oldest
person currently in the program (aged 60), said “I just wanna say to myself, and I got brothers and sisters I can say to, I did get this.” And Anna, a 54-year-old mother of ten, said “The hat and gown is basically what I’m here for. I wanna walk around with the little tassels at the store, butt naked with the hat on…ya know, just be proud of it.” From students like Anna, Wendell, and Dina whose motivation comes first from a desire to prove something to themselves to students like William, Kim, and Malcom who see self-esteem as one benefit (and perhaps not the main benefit) of getting their GED, the connection to feeling better about themselves was evident in my meetings with all fourteen students. In her observation, Cate (the GED/ABLE supervisor) said at this point for many of the students their self-esteem is attached to proving to themselves they can earn the diploma, rather than have it handed to them.

Based on students’ comments, many of them are also motivated by their understanding of the relationship between their education and the lives of others. This is seen, for example, in Kim’s concern about not being smarter than her 5th-grade daughter, LaShonda’s desire to help her nieces and nephews with their school work, Carl’s desire to be a role model for his brother and his race, and Dina’s aspiration to be a role model for her grandkids. One of the most striking comments in response to the question of why they were working to attain their GED came on the anonymous survey. One student wrote “I wanna give my family a better man.” This comment demonstrates well students’ beliefs that improving themselves can benefit others. This sentiment, for many, relates back to their belief that education equals access. Many of the students spoke about wanting to further their education so they could provide better for their families.
My interviews with students and teachers also revealed that for most students, their interest in education increased with age. When I asked Matt (the Outreach Consultant teaching the evening workshops) about the students’ motivation during the workshops, he said that most of the older students are extremely focused—they write and write and write and repeatedly ask for feedback. It’s the younger ones, he said, who sometimes struggle to stay focused and who write a paragraph and then stop. The connection between age and appreciation for education is evident in a number of the students’ stories, also. Like Teresa, many spoke of not really caring about their education when they were younger, but age and experience changed that. When I asked Dina what’s different about then from now, she said, “I’m older. I’m a little wiser. I know I need that education to go further. And, I’d say my self-esteem is much better.” Kim said when she was younger she didn’t think that as she got older her education would be so important.

Even though Carl is only 20, he’s an example of a student whose devotion and focus changed recently. When I told Carl he seems to really like learning, he said “Well, if you had seen me five years ago. I mean, as you mature and get older you start to think and look at the finer things in life and not the faster things in life.” What these comments reveal is that students’ interest in education and their willingness to engage in intellectual activities came with the awareness that they needed it to get some of the things they desire, and this awareness came with experience and maturity.

Just as important as what students believe about education that motivates them is what they don’t believe about it or what doesn’t motivate them. Based on their comments in the surveys and interviews, the workshop participants do not associate
education with a “life of the mind” or with the study of highbrow or sophisticated ideas. In fact, none of them ever mentioned what specific content they want to learn or thought they should learn. They also never mentioned any specific mental skills (like critical thinking) they want to develop. Their assumption is that their lack of education has been a barrier (or “burden”) holding them back from a good life or from being the person they want to be, and the solution is education. That education, however, seems general, or at least not clearly defined. This is strikingly different from traditional views of intellectualism that put heavy emphasis on content and mental skills. In this way, then, the Lindberg Center students’ desire to learn is not tied to a hierarchy of knowledge and consequently accords with the view of intellectualism I am proposing.

Views of Intelligence and Intellectualism

In addition to asking students about their interest in education and their educational experiences, I asked them how they define intelligence, what characteristics they associate with someone they consider intelligent, and whether or not they consider themselves intelligent. I asked only a few students about intellectualism because after the first few interviews I realized that most of them did not know the term or were unsure of their understanding of the term. 72 My asking them seemed to serve only to interrupt the flow of the interview and make them self-conscious about not knowing what I was talking about. Nevertheless, students’ responses to questions about intelligence and intellectualism expand our understanding of their views of education and learning.

72 Some of the initial responses I got to questions about the term intellectual were “I don’t know. What do it mean?” (Kim), “No, I don’t know what that is. Is it intellecture?” (Sara), “Okay, now, I know intelligent, but what’s intellectual? You have to tell me. I’m not familiar with that term” (Carin), and “I know what intelligent means but we never talked about intellectual in high school so I wouldn’t know the definition” (William).
Carin’s description of someone who is intelligent entails many of the characteristics that most of the students associated with an intelligent person:

The way they carry theirself, their mannerisms, how they always have the, they know what they’re talkin’ about. They’re not gullible. Pronunciation has a lot to do with it. That’s what I think of an intelligent person. Not book smart, cause there’s people who are very intelligent, but they don’t have the book smarts…I don’t think I’m smart in the way of higher education cause I don’t have a PhD, a master, a bachelor. I don’t even have a GED, so I don’t view myself as smart in that area, but I do use common sense when it comes to everyday life.

Like Carin, many of the students associated intelligence with “how you carry yourself,” speaking well, and common sense. In fact, these were the three most popular characteristics students associated with an intelligent person.

In addition, most students dissociated intelligence from book smarts, education level, and measures of academic success. For example, when I asked Wendell what it means to be intelligent, he said “It’s not always bein’ educated bookwise that will make you intelligent. You can take a college bookworm out of college and put him in the ghetto and he will be dumbfounded and vice versa. You could take an uneducated person out of the ghetto and put him in college and he’d be dumbfounded. It depends on the individual.” Carl made a similar distinction:

73 Other characteristics students associated with being intelligent include not being gullible, being a good person, being good at what you do, having respect for yourself and others, doing the right thing, not being “ghetto,” being able to understand life, and having knowledge to give to others.
A person that is intelligent is not always book smart. A person that gets straight As may be smart at the books or ya know or the bigger picture of life and be able to analyze the bigger things in life like ya know at the blink of an eye, but when it comes to the everyday situation lifestyle, sometimes they try and analyze too much and miss the big picture. To be intelligent you don’t have to be book smart, but you do have to have a feel for the world…it takes more to be smart than getting good grades and studyin’ cause sometimes you just gotta be able to use common sense and they don’t teach you stuff like that in the books.

When I asked Wendell if he considers himself intelligent he said “Even though I don’t have a high school diploma or anything, and I’m lacking in some areas, I consider myself agewise intelligent. I’m 60 years old and I’ve been around for awhile, and so I know a lot about life in general…so I’d consider myself intelligent, not schoolwise intelligent, but yes.” Kim said she didn’t know if she considers herself smart, but she considers herself intelligent: “I’m not no dummy or no fool. I got, like, common sense, but I’m not smart, smart.” She continued, saying someone who is smart is someone who knows everything. That’s why she doesn’t consider herself smart. She says it takes her a long time to catch on to things. William said he considers himself a little intelligent because, he said, “I have some knowledge that people may not think I have even though I did not graduate from high school. Like as far as like I know some laws…I know about

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74 Students’ distinction between common sense and book smarts is consistent with adult education and literacy scholar Arlene Fingeret’s research. Her interviews in the 1980s with “illiterate adults” revealed they associated literate people with a lack of common sense.
some of the economy situations that’s goin’ on. I worked, like, two political things. I worked the Hilary Clinton campaign and I learned about stuff through that.”

Based on their comments, students recognize that intelligence is traditionally associated with book smarts and with academic success (in the form of degrees). Yet, these students employ a different definition of intelligence, one that includes them. They define it in non-academic terms, associating it with some of what they already possess, including common sense, life experience, and “real-world” knowledge (none of which are valued by Bloom, Hirsch, and Hofstadter in their views of intellectualism). Although they recognize that academic success increases access to things they desire, they don’t equate that success with intelligence. Students’ non-academic views of intelligence accord with my call to move away from views of intellectualism that associate it with a particular type of knowledge or with narrowly-construed academic markers of intelligence. In addition, their ability to see intelligence in more than the culturally-scripted view demonstrates a type of intellectualism.

While I did not ask many of the students about intellectualism, two of the students I asked did make some telling claims. I highlight their responses because they show that, in contrast to their views of intelligence, these two students associate intellectuals with academics and high levels of education, and do not identify themselves as intellectuals.

When I asked Carl if there is anyone he would call an intellectual he said yes, a friend of his who attends college. He said he considers his friend an intellectual person “because he knows everything. I don’t know if he knows everything, but he thinks he

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75 Malcolm was the only student who didn’t call himself intelligent. He said “Some people look at me like, Malcolm, you are very intelligent, but I can’t see it myself. I can’t see it inside me. And I think that’s just something holdin’ me back.”
knows.” When I asked him what an intellectual knows or does that someone he wouldn’t consider an intellectual knows or does, he said “he attains his confidence through academics, so he’s real aggressive toward his academics, but I think a smart person, he balances them out as far as his intelligence and his common sense. An intellectual person, they just grasp like education to be their way to freedom…An intellectual person is an aggressive learner, but with a smaller picture.” When I asked him if he considers himself an intellectual, Carl said “No, no, no, not at all. Because just for the simple fact that an intellectual person is just a person that sees school from one perspective, and you gotta look at it from multiple perspectives, multiple angles. An intellectual has fewer perspectives.”

Wendell is the only person who immediately said “yes,” when I asked if he’d heard of the term intellectual. When I asked him what it is, he said the following:

To me an intellectual is a bookworm. I mean they pretty much know the whole dictionary…or, you can try and talk to an intellectual and they’ll use words to a common person instead of being able to come down to that common person’s level so that they can understand what they’re sayin’. They’ll use words they know because they don’t know how to come back down anymore….I mean a big time intellectual. You don’t have to be like all that to be an intellectual. Attorneys have to be an intellectual to do their job. Supervisors, bosses, CEOs, all those would be intellectuals cause they have to be.

Based on their responses, these two students ascribe to the narrow and stereotypical views of intellectualism this research challenges. It is interesting in this
case that students espouse a definition of intellectualism aligned with the one perpetuated by the dominant culture (especially traditional academic institutions), even though it does not include them. This contradiction in Carl and Wendell’s responses (defining intelligent in a way that includes them while subscribing to the traditional view of intellectualism), along with other students’ desire to be considered intelligent and their unfamiliarity with the term intellectual, is not surprising. These students have never been a part of a community considered intellectual. They have also been educated by institutions that value intelligence but were not preparing them to become intellectuals in the traditional sense.

Particularly striking about Carl and Wendell’s statements are their criticisms of intellectuals. While they imply intellectuals are motivated by the desire for “more freedom,” confidence, and good jobs—motivations the Lindberg Center students share with them—Carl and Wendell consider intellectuals’ views of education narrow because they only value academic education and intelligence and fail to recognize other forms of education or intelligence. Once again, their broader views of education align with my definition of intellectualism. They also exemplify a type of intellectualism—a type of critical thinking that accepts ascribed views but is critical of them.

Combined, students’ comments about education, their motivations for working on a GED, and their views of intelligence and intellectualism demonstrate students enter the writing workshops valuing education, believing in multiple forms of education, and motivated to learn—forms of intellectualism as I define it. Their comments also suggest students come to the workshops influenced by views of the dominant culture that affect their beliefs about education (including the literacy myth and views of intellectualism).
The workshop teachers and program supervisor have added that students come with much experience thinking critically about their environment. Cate said “I think a majority of our students have had to be very creative problem solvers their entire lives. But I don’t think they always recognize what that skill is and how to apply it in another environment that they’re not sure that they’re comfortable in.” A close look at the writing workshops indicates they foster students’ intellectualism by supporting their interest in learning and by providing opportunities for engaging critically with ideas.

**THE WORKSHOP**

In what follows, I describe and evaluate the activities and content of the writing workshops as I observed them and from the perspective of the teachers, students, and administrator. My analysis demonstrates that despite perceptions of remedial programs as “marginal to the intellectual community,” these workshops present students with content that helps them critique social and cultural issues central to their lives and assignments and activities that challenge them and encourage critical thinking—characteristics central to my view of intellectualism. It also shows that reading and writing are central to the workshops’ fostering of intellectualism among students. I begin by describing in some detail one workshop that represents well many of the attributes of the twelve workshops I observed. I follow the description with my analysis of the intellectual import of the workshops.

It’s 4:45 p.m. on an ordinary winter day and the students are settling in at the three large tables that take up most of the workshop room. Matt (the Outreach Consultant teaching the evening workshops) gets the two and a half-hour-long workshop started by
handing out a poem by Paul Laurence Dunbar76 entitled “Sympathy.” A student volunteers to read the poem aloud to the class. Matt starts the discussion of the poem by asking students why they think the poem is called “Sympathy.” A young man answers: “cause he feels for the bird.” Another student adds, “cause the bird’s caged and wants to be free.” Matt then asks what the bird is doing in the poem, and a female student says “singing!”. Matt moves the discussion forward by pointing to a passage from the poem, “It is not a carol of joy or glee, But a prayer that he sends from his heart's deep core.” Matt asks why the sound of the bird singing might not sound beautiful, and a student replies “cause it’s hurtin’ itself.” “Sure,” Matt says, “the speaker is thinking about the bird beating its wings on the cage and the pain for the bird.” Matt asks, then, why the author would want to write about this—about a caged bird beating its wings and crying in pain. A young man says “cause the author might feel pain hisself.” “Like a metaphor,” another student adds.

Matt then asks the class what a metaphor is. A student says “the pain the bird’s having is same as the pain of the author.” “Right,” Matt says, “like the caged bird is a metaphor for a lack of freedom.” Matt points out that the author, Dunbar, was an African-American poet and asks “Why might he want to use a poem to talk about a lack of freedom?” A student replies, “maybe cause he was caged in.” Matt pushes their reading of the poem a bit further by adding that the poem was written after the Civil War, so African-Americans technically had freedom by then. The poem, he says, is an

76 Paul Laurence Dunbar was the first African-American to gain national eminence as a poet. He was born in 1872 in Dayton, Ohio.
example of taking a seemingly-simple image (a bird singing in a cage) and using it to show complexity.

Matt instructs the students, then, to write their own poem with the same title. He asks them to think about how they define sympathy. He tells them they can use metaphor in their poem, like Dunbar does, but they don’t have to. He tells the students this activity is “to get the gears goin…to get us thinkin’.” In the time they have to write, some students sit quietly writing, while others ask Matt questions or ask him or one of the assistants to look at and comment on their poems. After about twenty minutes, Matt collects the students’ poems and promises to return them next week, along with a Group Poem he will assemble containing a line or two from each student’s individual poem.

Before moving on to the more formal writing work Matt has planned for the workshop, he takes a few minutes (while he’s collecting their poems) to ask students what their own ideas and thoughts about writing poetry are. One student says “It’s alright. I’m not really into poetry like that. I can write raps and stuff like that.” Matt asks, then, what the difference is between poetry and rap. The student says “Rap has more umph” and another student says “I don’t think they’re different. They’re all about expression.” After a few more comments about rap and poetry, Matt concludes by telling the students it’s important to find some writing that they like to do because the more writing they do, the more their writing will improve.

Next on the agenda for this workshop is a worksheet on commas that the class completes together. Matt encourages the students to use the worksheet as a tool—something to refer back to when they have questions about how and when to use commas in their writing. Then, to prepare students to write a practice 5-paragraph essay in the
second half of the workshop, Matt reviews with students their writing assignment from the previous workshop. During the last workshop students wrote individual letters to Barack Obama voicing two or three concerns they have and what they’d like Obama to do to address them. They revisit the parts of the letter: a salutation, introduction, two to three body paragraphs each dealing with one issue, and a conclusion. Matt transitions the students from the structure of the letters they wrote into the structure of the 5-paragraph, the type of essay students must write for the GED writing exam. Just before their fifteen-minute break, Matt hands out a sample 5-paragraph essay that models for students the essay parts and structure they need in their essays.

When students return from their short break, they are given a writing prompt and the rest of the time (about an hour) to write and revise a practice 5-paragraph essay. The writing prompt this evening is “Our opinions change. Identify an opinion you once held but that you had given up or changed. Write an essay explaining how and why the change occurred.” As students write, they take turns asking for help from Matt or one of the assistants in the room. Based on the feedback they receive, they revise, develop, and/or rewrite their essays several times. The purpose of this time, it is clear, is individual, hands-on instruction for students, geared toward helping them with their individual writing challenges, especially as they relate to preparing them for the GED exam.

**Workshop Activities**

As my description of this workshop shows, the type and sequencing of learning and thinking activities used by teachers are integral to the intellectual work of the workshops. Like this workshop, each workshop begins with an engaging and exploratory
creative activity followed by more formal writing exercises and assignments aimed at preparing students for the GED test. The creative activities introduce students to the writing and experiences of others and give them the freedom to explore and communicate (both in their writing and in class discussions) their own ideas about a variety of issues. Matt explained his use of these creative activities as a way to get students thinking critically.

In the workshop in this example, the creative activity involves reading and discussing a poem and then writing one that allows students to explore how the theme of the poem relates to their own lives and experiences. Another creative activity Matt used was having students read and discuss a funny article from the mock news source, *The Onion.* He said that because he knew students were not familiar with *The Onion,* he used an article from it to introduce them to the “upper-middle class highly-educated white irony” indicative of the publication. For Matt, “just sort of bringing the concept of irony and thinking about the kind of cultural divisions that make that kind of irony inaccessible to students at the Lindberg Center workshop is one way that they can kind of engage critically with this material.”

Blanche, the teacher of the afternoon workshops, used the following creative activities in her class: reading and discussing short writings by Malcolm X, Terry Tempest Williams, Henry Louis Gates Jr., and Alice Walker; reading and discussing poems by George Ella Lyon and Nikki Giovanni; writing individual poems or group poems; and a “picture prompt” exercise for which students looked at a painting and wrote

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The article Matt had students read and discuss was “Obama Debuts Annoying Catchphrase.” It appeared in the Politics section of the Feb. 10, 2009 online issue of *The Onion* (Issue 45.07).
a poem to accompany it. Though Matt didn’t make clear to students that he was introducing them to *The Onion* article as a piece of “upper-middle class highly-educated white irony” and though Matt’s discussion of “Sympathy” with students and some of the discussions in Blanche’s class were brief, these activities still give students experience critiquing texts.

The more formal writing exercises and assignments Matt and Blanche use are also designed and sequenced to, in Matt’s words, “exercise students’ mental muscles.” These “mental muscles” include skills like brainstorming, organizing, comparing, analyzing, describing, summarizing, revising, and storytelling. For example, in her first workshop of the series, Blanche used a “words, sentences, and paragraphs” activity that asked students to practice writing paragraphs in three steps, by beginning with words, then composing sentences from those words, then using those sentences as topic sentences for full paragraphs. The following week students wrote about their own experiences with literacy. In the third workshop, Blanche went over the scoring guide and checklist for the GED writing test and worked with students as they wrote 5-paragraph essays. The following week students worked on outlining and then writing a 5-paragraph essay with a new prompt. In the final workshop of the series, Blanche let students choose from creative writing activities and grammar/sentence-level worksheets.

In the first workshop of the six-week series, Matt asked students to write an essay about themselves and their interest in reading and writing. He introduced the assignment, saying “For now, don’t worry about writing a formal essay. Just tell a story about yourself and use lots of details.” The following week he had students write the letters to President Obama I described earlier. He used this assignment to discuss with students the
function of audience, style, and purpose along with the parts of a letter, giving them a bit more structure with this assignment. The next week he reviewed the structure of the letter and then tied it to the structure of the 5-paragraph essay they must master for the GED test. The assignment that night was to write a 5-paragraph essay about an opinion they’ve change and how and why the change occurred. In the fifth workshop, Matt had students write seven paragraphs in which they practiced the skills of summarizing, describing, analyzing, and comparing two famous paintings. During the final workshop, students worked again on writing the formal 5-paragraph essay, this time about specific ways the economy is affecting the students (a topic students communally created). This combination and sequencing of assignments exercised students’ “mental muscles”—engaging them in critical thinking (a form of intellectualism).

When I asked students about the workshops, their comments were overwhelmingly positive. A characteristic of the workshops students found most helpful was the “breaking down” of the material into smaller pieces they can understand (something many of them said they didn’t get in elementary or high school). William said “I like how it gets broke down to where I can understand it better. In high school they just told us to write an essay and that was it. They didn’t give you the chance to break it down and understand.” Breaking the material down for students makes it more accessible, useful, and perhaps more interesting to them. It also can help them engage with the material in ways they weren’t able to in other educational contexts.

78 The paintings were “The Persistence of Memory” by Salvador Dali (1931) and Vincent Van Gogh’s “The Starry Night” (1889).
When I asked students about the creative activities, a majority of the students said they enjoy the creative writing, though they differed on seeing a connection between the creative and more formal writing. For example, Wendell said “I can’t see no purpose in it rather than just getting the students relaxed and comfortable and ready for the next phase.” In contrast, LaShonda saw a direct connection: “[The creative activities] work on me because I got loosened up, because before I wasn’t used to writin’ for a long time, so I had to get back into the writin’ and usin’ my imagination. She help you stimulate your imagination and try to get you to thinking, ya know what I’m sayin’ cause you’re gonna have to open up your mind to get through that essay because you’re gonna have to write five paragraphs.”

Another student spoke about the creative writing activities allowing her to break through the stress on her mind when she arrives at workshop: “I like them cause I think it releases a lot that you have on your mind.” Kim described how an activity they did that afternoon prompted her to write about how she feels like she’s in a box because of all the things she has to do for her mother and her girls when she leaves workshop. While comments like Wendell’s demonstrate students don’t necessarily see the skill-level connection between the two types of writing, the sequencing of these activities certainly encourages students to apply and transfer the critical thinking they more easily engage in for the creative activities to the more structured writing of the 5-paragraph essay.

In addition to using the creative activities to get students “warmed-up” for the more formal writing, Matt said he attempts to connect the two activities by helping students recognize these writing activities as different rhetorical situations. In one situation, students are being asked to respond to and critically analyze a poem; in another
they’re taking a test. Matt says he talks to students about the “machinery” surrounding
them in the different situations and how to respond appropriately in each. What he’s
trying to do, he says, is develop in the students “a sort of switch [they] can flip” when
they go into the test-taking situation. “If you get them to that sort of intellectual place
where they’re able to critically analyze the writing situation they’re being put in for the
purpose of this exam, then you’re not just putting them through a kind of GED writing
boot camp, right; you’re actually stressing critical analysis even if you’re having them
produce writing [for the test] that is not very critical or analytical.”

Matt’s assistant Megan compared the thinking the workshop activities required
with the thinking required of college students: “The ways in which [the Lindberg Center
students] are trying to stretch their minds to perform a task, to learn a skill or a skill set,
to develop strategies, to obtain a certain result—to pass the GED—is just the same as me
trying to pass a theory class at [the university].” She stressed that even though students
have to submit to the 5-paragraph essay style and structure, that “doesn’t eliminate
critical thinking.” In other words, the goal of preparing students to write a 5-paragraph
essay for the GED exam does not mean the workshops do not foster and support
intellectualism.

Workshop Content

In addition to teaching students to be critically aware of different writing
situations and preparing them to write well in those different situations, both workshop
teachers bring in content that is culturally relevant and thought-provoking. Cate said in
her interview that while the goal of the workshops is really to help students “build
concrete skills in order to pass the writing part of the GED test,” every Outreach
Consultant who has taught the workshops has made an effort to meet this goal with a curriculum that is creative and contemporary, “getting students to think about the world around them.” In this way, too, workshop instructors foster students’ intellectual engagement.

Because a majority of the students are African Americans from low-income or working-class backgrounds, both teachers often use the writings of authors (often African-American themselves) writing about issues relevant to race and class. For example, Henry Louis Gates’ “In the Kitchen” is an essay about the spot of kinky hair at the base of a black person’s neck (“the kitchen”) that was the one part of the body that undeniably “resisted assimilation” into white culture. Alice Walker’s “The Place Where I Was Born” is about having to leave her home because of racist oppression and economic impoverishment. Malcolm X’s “Prison Studies” explores his struggle to learn to read and the power he felt when he did. In her poem “Where I’m From,” George Ella Lyon paints a picture of the type of life and family she came from through details like “the dirt under the back porch” and “fried corn and strong coffee.” And, Paul Dunbar’s “Sympathy” explores the feeling of being caged in. Having students read and write about experiences specific to their lives, like race and class, gives students the opportunity to explore and critically consider these issues central to their lives.

While the instructors designed some of the more formal writing prompts to be particularly relevant to students lives (for example, how the economy affects them and what President Obama can change for them), many of the prompts they used are actual GED essay exam prompts. These topics include the following: “Explain why you do or do not vote,” “What are the essential characteristics of a good parent?,” and “Name
someone you consider to be a modern hero or heroin. Explain why.” While students weren’t always excited to write about these topics, the teachers encouraged them to see the prompts as the opportunity to write about their own personal opinions and experiences related to the topic.

What my analysis of the activities and content used in the GED-preparation workshops reveals is that despite the restrictive and formulaic nature of the 5-paragraph essay students must learn for the GED test, the workshops challenge students with content and a series of reading, thinking, and writing activities that exercise students’ “mental muscles” and support their exploration of ideas. Even though the primary goal of the workshops is to prepare students for the GED written exam, the combination of creative and formal writing activities helps students see writing as more than a rote exercise for the exam. In this context, writing becomes a tool both for communicating to an audience (in the test situation), and a tool for exploring and sharing ideas. In these ways, the workshops not only satisfy students’ incoming general interest in learning and help them work toward their goal of getting their GED, they also foster students’ critical thinking and engagement with ideas—characteristics of intellectualism as I define it.

Despite these positive qualities, it is important to note that because the workshop instructors do not discuss with students the intellectual nature or import of the work they do in the classroom, instructors are perpetuating critics’ and students’ own beliefs that people of their educational and cultural backgrounds are not intellectuals. Perhaps if instructors framed the work being done in the workshops as intellectual, students’ would be more familiar with the term and would be more willing to identify as intellectuals.
LITERACY PRACTICES AND INTELLECTUALISM

What my analysis of workshop students and the workshops themselves indicates is a complicated relationship between literacy and intellectualism. On one hand, literacy activities can help foster intellectualism by serving as a tool for critical thinking and the expression, development, and communication of ideas. On the other hand, under traditional views of intellectualism, literacy activities, practices, and abilities are used to distinguish the intellectual from the non-intellectual. Past and present views of intellectualism also re-inscribe the literacy myth, sending the message that the acquisition of literacy can by itself lead to “cognitive advancement.”

Demonstrated in my description and analysis of the GED writing workshops, reading and writing are activities that are central to the curriculum, and consequently central to the activities that help develop and foster intellectualism for these learners. As an observer of the workshops for the past three years (with a variety of workshop instructors), Cate said this about the opportunities for critical thinking the workshops provide: “Well, I think writing by nature is something you have to create, something you can’t just regurgitate.” In other words, while students can “memorize” or “master” the formula for the 5-paragraph essay, they still must generate ideas and think about how to execute them clearly when writing.

It is interesting to note, though, that the reading and writing practices associated with GED programs are actually what prevent some academics from seeing the work being done in this context as intellectual. First, the 5-paragraph essay (the product students are ultimately being trained to write) has typically been seen as rigid, stifling, and oversimplified—and composition scholarship reflects compositionists’ interest in less
restrictive and more exploratory forms of writing. Second, though the texts students are reading in the workshops are also taught in university classrooms, because the readings are short and are not read and analyzed in conjunction with literary theory or with another academic lens, this “reading” practice is not viewed by all academics as intellectual. For example, because the discussion of Dunbar’s poem “Sympathy” in Matt’s workshop centered on students’ opinions and experiences, some scholars would not consider it an “intellectual activity.” However, a discussion of the same poem in a graduate or undergraduate class that was lengthier and included the application of literary theory to the text may be considered intellectual by those same critics. I would argue, however, that similar to college instructors, the workshop instructors use reading and writing as tools for nurturing intellectualism in the students, even if the reading and writing assignments are different.

In addition to the reading and writing done in the workshops, some students read and write outside of class. These literacy practices would also most likely not be recognized as intellectual by traditional views of intellectualism. Though many of the students I interviewed admitted they do not do much reading or writing outside of class, some said they do. For example, Carl said he likes to read and that he’s been reading a book called *Ghost Soldiers* about World War Two and he recently read *Unveiling Islam* because he wanted to know what other people thought of the religion. Sara, the student from Somalia, is in the process of writing a book about her country. “The book is not about me because I didn’t get the chance to grow up there. It’s mostly about what I know, so I go to my dad, ask him questions about it, about the old president of Somalia.” Joseph said he used to write movie scripts, music, poems, and still loves to write.
For some, like LaShonda, writing has been a tool for dealing with tough things or an outlet for their feelings. LaShonda said she used to write a lot, mostly “to pass everything I was going through. It was wonderful for me—a healing process.” William, as a youth minister, spends a good amount of time outside of class reading the Bible and writing sermons. He also talked about spending time writing grant proposals for people he knows who are trying to get help starting their own businesses.\(^79\) Again, because these activities are being performed outside the context of a university classroom, and because students in a remedial education program are assumed to be marginal to the intellectual community, traditional views of intellectualism would not include these literacy activities under the rubric of intellectualism.

Whether or not students’ literacy practices are considered intellectual by current definitions, these workshops have, for some students, fostered (or rekindled) an interest in and engagement in literacy activities—activities that can, under my definition of intellectualism, foster intellectualism. For instance, Teresa said she never was much of a writer, but since she’s been at the Lindberg Center, she’s been getting more into it. “Cause I felt like I was a failure, like I don’t know nothing about writing, but when I got here, it changed everything.” Carl said he’s always read, but he’s been starting to write more since coming back to school: “Goin’ back to school and getting my mind goin’, it’s getting me to a place where I do more writin’.” Jerome said, “By me bein’ here I have a

\(^79\) Only one student mentioned using or needing reading or writing skills at work, and that was Teresa who writes lots of letters for her job at the medical clinic. My search for scholarship on adult literacy and community literacy revealed to me a large body of research focused on workplace literacy (Belfiore, Hull, Lankshear, Belanger & Strom, Beaufort, Gowan). However, because the Lindberg Center students never spoke about wanting to improve their reading and writing skills for the performance of those skills at work, and because the writing workshop instructors don’t frame the curriculum as designed for direct application to workplace writing, my own research didn’t seem to fit into this body of scholarship.
little more passion for like pickin’ up a book as opposed to like you should me a book and I think I’m not gonna do nothing with this book. But now I’ll actually open it and go through it, so I’ve come a long way.” And Dina said, “a lot of times when I go home, like if I feel depressed or I don’t have anything to do or am tired of the television, I go get some notebook paper and pen and I can just be sitting and writing…I wrote a moon poem so well to where I was like What is this? It just came straight outta me. I was surprised Kelly. And it all came from Lindberg Center because I hadn’t wrote in so long.”

It is also interesting to note that while students’ motivation to learn comes, in part, from their subscription to the literacy myth, they do not ascribe to the “Great Divide”—the belief that low-level literacy skills are indicative of a cognitive deficiency. This cultural myth, however, does relegate these students to the intellectual margins. My definition of intellectualism that focuses on a desire to learn and engagement with ideas does not impose or re-inscribe either the literacy myth or the “Great Divide,” leaving room for the work being done at the Center to be seen as intellectual.

INDIVIDUAL ATTENTION, CONFIDENCE, AND COMMUNITY

In addition to the curriculum and teaching methods, three other aspects of the workshops were notable for students: individual attention, confidence-building, and a sense of community. These three factors facilitate students’ engagement in intellectual activities by increasing their interest in learning and keeping them motivated.

Many students spoke about how helpful the individual attention they receive in the second-half of the workshops is. Teresa said she appreciates how the instructors “come around to you and give you that full attention of how this should be done, and try to break it down to where you understand instead of usin’ the big words.” Anna also
appreciates the attention she gets from Blanche, and described it as not just the individual
time she gives her, but the feeling that she really knows her: “She knows where I’m
comin’ from. She always looks over at me like Miss Anna, I know you…and she knows
my pattern.”

When I asked Matt about the amount of the workshop he devotes to time for
students to write in class he said that time allows for “real-time diagnosis of their writing
errors and gives them feedback while they’re working. And then the document sort of
becomes a little more alive.” The students produce something, the teachers respond, and
students produce something in response. “I think then just based on muscle memory they
end up retaining that stuff more.” The value of that exchange, Matt says is that it
demonstrates to students that the instructor cares about what they’re saying and that what
they write generates a response from someone. Megan made a similar comment: “I think
the individual attention on whatever the assignment is is the thing that pays off because
they just need someone to say this is the pattern I’m seeing or do you understand why this
is working and getting someone to read their writing and affirm that yes, I understand
what you’re saying.”

The individual attention helps, also, with students’ confidence. Many arrive at the
workshops with little confidence in their writing skills and as Matt noted “that initial lack
of confidence can be totally kind of disastrous for the writing process.” Any
breakthrough in their confidence, Matt said, can really help their writing. When I asked
Dina if there’s anything unique about the learning environment at the Lindberg Center
that is helpful, she said “Yeah, they bring out your self-esteem cause when I first came I
was just quiet, I would sit there. They would bring it out in you. That’s the good thing
about this class. They ask you questions. And someone’s listening to you. I just feel
good coming to class.” Teresa also spoke about how having the teacher tell you you’ve
done something well makes you feel good and motivates you to keep writing. According
to Cate, the confidence transforms into students being able to see themselves as writers:
“I feel like through the course of the workshops with the students it really transforms
their writing. They actually come to see themselves as writers. And, having the chance
to just express themselves in writing, I think, I know for several of our students, they
don’t’ have strong support networks at home. They don’t have people asking them every
day How was your day? And the chance to share that is really important.” The
bolstering of self-confidence, of course, ties into one of students’ strongest motivations
for getting their GED—feeling better about themselves.

A third characteristic of the Lindberg Center workshops that both students and
instructors mentioned as unique and helpful is the sense of community that forms among
most students. Though some of the new students didn’t talk about this community, those
who had been participating in the workshops for awhile cited this as a key part to the
experience—keeping them motivated and focused. As Dina said, “We want to do this
together as a team. Teamwork is better, ya know. And I wanna walk across the stage
with them.” Carin spoke about how she and the students she came in with have gotten to
know each other on a personal basis. “We’re strivin’ for the same thing, and each of the
students here I’ve gotten to know has a unique situation and just think we’re all brought
together under one roof for a GED.” She talked about “goals and awards” day when
students set and share whether or not they’ve met their short term and long term goals
and students get acknowledged for good attendance. Everyone’s so happy for each other
when they achieve something, Carin said. Carl called it “a community bond…it’s a family, a big family….If we all bond together to get our education, ya know, 15 minds are better than 1.”

The collaborative nature of the creative activities teachers use with the students most likely fuels the sense of community among the students. The Group Poems in particular join students’ individual thoughts and experiences into one final product that contains the many voices that make up the class. Cate added that the sense of community students feel in the classroom is fueled by the fact that the Lindberg Center is a neighborhood-based organization that serves several of the neighborhood’s needs and is not an organization that focuses on one need for an entire community. Based on her observations, Megan said “they’re all learning together and they are not competing with each other. And they in some way see it as something that they all could gain.” This also relates back to students’ motivations for working on their GED. The willingness to see their education as collaborative and community-driven connects with students’ comments about how increasing their education will make others’ lives better.

I point out the individual attention, confidence-building, and sense of community as characteristics of the Lindberg Center program and the workshops not because they guarantee intellectualism among the students or in the classroom. I point them out, instead, because they foster students’ interest in the program, the workshops, and in their education. Megan made an interesting point, too, about how the community nature of the workshops may affect outsiders’ perceptions of the intellectual work that takes place at a place like the Lindberg Center. She noted that because the typical image of an intellectual is someone sitting alone at a desk coming up with and studying brilliant ideas,
we tend to overlook collaborative learning and engagement with ideas as intellectual. In addition, the image of intellectuals as white, middle- and upper-class, highly-educated males would further the tendency to overlook this organization as a site of intellectualism. These images of intellectuals would also affect views of the lyceum and labor colleges.

CONCLUSION

Because traditional views of intellectualism are based on problematic dichotomies that assume basic or remedial education is opposed to intellectual education, non-traditional sites of learning like the Lindberg Center’s GED writing workshops are overlooked in considerations of American intellectualism. Building on the work of scholars like Mina Shaughnessy and Mike Rose that challenges the social construction of remedial writers and blue collar workers as cognitively deficient, my research challenges the assumption that adults participating in a GED program—and the program itself—cannot be intellectual. As my examination of these workshops reveals, students participating in the workshops are motivated, interested learners whose life experiences have made them critical thinkers about their environment. The workshops foster students’ interest in learning and critical engagement through culturally-relevant content and purposefully designed and sequenced assignments and activities. Literacy practices are central to the workshop curriculum, and consequently are integral to the workshops’ sponsoring of intellectualism.

It is important to recognize the intellectual import of sites of learning like the Lindberg Center workshops because such programs provide valuable education to learners whose socioeconomic positions have impeded their more traditional educational
pursuits. Because traditional views of intellectualism privilege the experiences and educational paths of those in power and devalue the experiences and educational paths of lower and working classes, American views of education and learning perpetuate problematic and consequential cultural beliefs like the literacy myth. My revised definition of intellectualism recognizes there are multiple paths to and multiple forms of intellectualism. The Lindberg Center writing workshops demonstrate well the benefits of expanding our views of intellectualism to include non-traditional sites of learning.

In Chapter 5, I draw together my examinations of the intellectual contributions of American lyceums, labor colleges, and the Lindberg Center writing workshops. Together, these three case studies focused on non-traditional adult education in the U.S. over time and place challenge accepted views of intellectualism that privilege certain types of knowledge, measures of intelligence, social and cultural experiences, and locations of learning. Connecting my interpretations of these sites expands our understanding of intellectualism in the U.S. and the forces that shape our views of learning and its value.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

At a time when accusations of American ignorance, “unreason,” and anti-intellectualism are widespread and inform Americans’ views of intellectualism and attitudes toward education, in this dissertation I argue that we need to reconsider both past and present views of intellectualism. As my review in Chapter 1 makes clear, traditional views of intellectualism are narrow and based on problematic assumptions and dichotomies that privilege certain types of knowledge, measures of intelligence, reasons for pursuing knowledge, and locations of learning. My reevaluation of the American lyceum, Brookwood Labor College, and GED writing workshops challenges these traditional views by 1) revealing the valuable sites of learning these views overlook and undervalue, and 2) showing there can be multiple paths to intellectualism and multiple forms of intellectualism.

Together, these three case studies demonstrate that if we revise our views of intellectualism so they are based primarily on a person’s desire to learn and their interest in critical thinking, then we can recognize the intellectual import of these and other nontraditional sites of learning. In this chapter, I summarize my findings and discuss the implications of this research for American culture, educational institutions, and the fields of rhetoric, composition, and literacy studies. I conclude with some reflections on teaching the subject of intellectualism in the classroom.
In Chapter 2, I argue that with the goal of “disseminating useful knowledge” to the “public,” nineteenth-century lyceums supported and sponsored intellectualism by increasing access to knowledge, cultivating an interest in learning, and providing opportunities to actively deliberate the knowledge they spread. My reevaluation of the lyceum suggests that lyceum leaders and the nineteenth-century public conceived of “useful knowledge” broadly. Lyceums disseminated a wide array of knowledge, including scientific subjects; topics like mathematics, history, philosophy, and geology; and social, cultural, and political issues of the time. “Useful knowledge” in this context was not only broad in content but broad in its uses. Given the array of subjects covered by lyceums, the knowledge they disseminated was not just information participants could apply in routine daily activities (like gardening or cooking), but information that would influence their opinions and actions. For example, a lecture on capital punishment or a debate about whether it is better to use oratory or “Arms” to fight political battles could influence the audience’s opinions about these issues. This examination of lyceum content contests the assumption that “useful knowledge” cannot be intellectual or foster intellectualism.

My review of nineteenth-century lyceum documents also shows that in its different forms, the lyceum encouraged and, in some cases, provided opportunities for critically engaging the information they dispersed. Lyceum meetings were organized to facilitate discussion and debate. Lyceum periodicals typically provided questions or presented material in a dialogue format, promoting active, collaborative learning. Lyceum lectures were less interactive, but encouraged engagement with ideas. In addition, I argue that despite changes in the public lecture circuit, the lyceum continued
to interest and engage its audience with a variety of performances, including some of the most influential reform lectures of the time such as Frederick Douglass’ speeches on slavery and race and Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s famous speeches on women’s rights and equality.

My examination of Brookwood Labor College in Chapter 3 shows that in addition to educating workers to serve the labor movement, Brookwood fostered and supported various forms of intellectualism including the desire to learn; questioning, deliberating, analyzing, debating, and contemplating ideas; and valuing knowledge, education, and critical thinking. According to students’ autobiographies, their work experiences and their investment in political and social issues fueled their interest in education and motivated them to participate in Brookwood’s program. Brookwood documents show the institution’s organizational structure, curriculum, and pedagogy, each in different ways, were designed to aid students in becoming analytical thinkers and to inspire and prepare them to educate others through their activist work. For example, Brookwood students collaboratively read about, wrote about, and debated such issues as the history of the American labor movement, trade union organization, modern industry, and parliamentary law. They also received training in labor journalism and labor drama, two forms of activism that fostered their own and their audience’s critical thinking and interest in learning.

In addition, students served on administrative and organizing committees that accorded them the power to help structure and facilitate the Brookwood curriculum and demonstrated Brookwood teachers and organizers valued their opinions. Though Brookwood was accessible only to experienced workers who could attain sponsorship or
funding from unions or philanthropists, the institution nurtured participants’ interest in ideas, helped them understand and question their marginalized status, and put them in the position of sponsor of intellectualism.

The Lindberg Center GED writing workshops I analyze in Chapter 4 provide an example of a contemporary adult educational institution that promotes and cultivates various forms of intellectualism including a desire to learn, personal investment in education, and critical thinking. My interviews and observations reveal the workshops encourage and support intellectualism by presenting students with content that helps them critique social and cultural issues central to their lives and assignments and activities that challenge them and encourage critical thinking. For example, workshop instructors often begin the workshops with a creative reading and writing activity focused on issues relevant to students and follow this with more formal reading and writing activities designed to prepare them to write a five-paragraph essay for the GED exam.

My interviews with students showed many of them value education, are motivated learners, and have complicated views about intelligence and intellectualism that reflect their education and life experiences as working-class African Americans. Their motivation to learn comes, for most of them, from their subscription to the literacy myth, believing that education will provide them and their loved ones with a better life. This research shows the complex relationship between literacy and intellectualism and helps disrupt the assumption remedial education cannot be intellectual.

As I noted briefly in my examination of these three educational institutions, while they do foster intellectualism, each one of them is in some way complicit in perpetuating traditional notions of intellectualism and intellectuals. For example, despite their
missions to be accessible, both the lyceum and labor colleges served a primarily white, middle-to-upper-class population, contributing to the perception that intellectualism is reserved for this particular population. In addition, though the GED workshops at the Lindberg Center served a primarily black, lower and working-class population, because the Center and the workshop instructors do not refer to or frame the work being done in the workshops as intellectual, the students fail to see themselves as engaging in intellectual activities and consequently themselves perpetuate traditional notions of intellectualism. Despite these criticisms, my re-reading of the content, activities, and learning taking place at these sites of learning demonstrates they cultivated intellectualism in their respective times and places. I highlight now the most significant implications of this re-examination.

IMPLICATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH

Recognizing Multiple Ways to Foster Intellectualism

Looking across these three sites of learning, it becomes clear that while they were started for different purposes, targeted different audiences, and disseminated different information at different times and places in the U.S., what they have in common is a mission to make education, an interest in learning, and opportunities for critical thinking accessible to a population whose education has been limited. They also share a pool of participants who come voluntarily and are eager to learn (though for different reasons), and a “curriculum” that combines the dissemination of useful (sometimes basic) knowledge with learning activities that promote critical thinking. Together, these case studies challenge common views of intellectualism that assume intellectualism is only achieved when a person “pursues knowledge solely for the sake of knowledge” (and not a
practical purpose) or when someone studies or has acquired “highbrow,” abstract, or theoretical knowledge.

Combined, these three sites of learning demonstrate that the desire to learn and engage with ideas (intellectualism more broadly defined) can be fostered in many ways—whether it be through the acquisition of knowledge about labor issues for the purpose of serving the labor movement, or through debates about nineteenth-century issues at a lyceum meeting for the purpose of self-improvement, or through the acquisition of knowledge from a series of public lectures, or through a combination of creative and formal writing activities designed to prepare students to pass the GED exam. In other words, these case studies show that if intellectualism is assessed primarily by the desire to learn and critical engagement with ideas, then we can recognize the valuable learning taking place in sites not typically recognized as intellectual.

Also consistent across these sites is the use of reading, writing, and speaking as tools for disseminating knowledge and for fostering critical thinking and engagement with ideas. Teachers at both Brookwood Labor College and the Lindberg Center employed a variety of reading and writing assignments that address and help students look critically at some of the social, cultural, and political issues significant to their lives, including those involving inequality based on race, class, gender, and ethnicity. They also both facilitated discussions and debates about course material. At Brookwood, reading, writing, and speaking also became tools for students’ activism for the labor movement.

Although lyceums did not use reading and writing in the same way Brookwood and the Lindberg Center did, reading and writing were central to the lyceum’s
dissemination of knowledge. Lyceum speakers wrote and read their lectures. Lyceum meeting participants wrote and read their talks and participants discussed speakers’ comments. In addition, lyceum periodicals, like *Scientific Tracts*, *Family Lyceum*, and *Youth’s Lyceum* disseminated a variety of information in writing and encouraged discussion of the material. Collectively, these sites of learning demonstrate that literacy activities can be a tool, or one way to foster intellectualism. Literacy itself, however, does not necessarily lead to “cognitive advancement,” as the literacy myth promotes.

Another learning method these three educational institutions share is collaborative/communal learning. Lyceum lectures brought together large groups of people for the purpose of acquiring knowledge and lyceum meetings gathered small groups of people for the purpose of sharing and discussing a variety of topics. Brookwood joined a particular community of people (workers involved in the labor movement) and encouraged collaborative learning. Students at Brookwood studied together, wrote and performed plays together, created and composed several labor publications, and even collaborated with teachers and administrators in the design of the curriculum and the administration of the institution. For many of the Lindberg Center students, they are motivated to learn and to continue in the program by the sense of community they feel in the classroom, a sense of community facilitated by the organization’s mission and workshop activities like class discussion and the Group Poem that joins the words of all class members into one poem expressing their collective thoughts. Combined with the absence of grades that can sometimes create competition among students, the collaborative learning that took place at these three sites helped
create a learning environment that motivates participants and helps facilitate engagement in intellectual activities.

Though the collaborative learning activities used by lyceums, labor colleges, and GED writing workshops are used by teachers in more traditional sites of learning like primary and secondary schools and college classrooms, the sense of community among students at these three sites is unique. The idea of a community of learners engaging in intellectual activities is also counter to the more traditional image of the intellectual sitting by himself or herself reading a book.

Another characteristic of these sites of learning that seems to have motivated students to engage in intellectual activities is increasing students’ confidence. As I noted in Chapter 3, some students at Brookwood wrote about how the knowledge and experience they acquired at Brookwood increased their confidence. One student remarked, “Brookwood training gave me more guts—more confidence on how to talk and not be bluffed or fooled by the bosses.” The Lindberg Center students spoke about how the individual attention they received with their writing improved their self-confidence and served as a motivating force for continuing to pursue their education. Though I didn’t encounter any primary or secondary sources on the lyceum that noted an explicit connection between confidence and participation in the lyceums, the acquisition of knowledge for lyceum participants may have, like it did for the Brookwood and Lindberg Center students, increased participants’ confidence.

**Contesting Social and Institutional Hierarchies**

As my review of the history of Americans’ beliefs about education, learning, knowledge, and intelligence suggested, past and present views of intellectualism are
significantly tied to social and institutional hierarchies that grant the dominant class control over what knowledge, learning practices, and sites of learning get valued. The consequence, of course, is not just that some educational institutions are considered intellectual and others are not, but the institutionalization of social hierarchies that promote and perpetuate inequality in American education. In other words, because educational institutions reinforce social hierarchies, certain ideas, beliefs, and motivations are considered more valuable. And because social hierarchies often cross race, class, and gender lines, educational institutions perpetuate inequality. Paulo Freire recognized this inequality, stating, in *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*, “Only those who have power can decide what constitutes intellectualism. Once the intellectual parameters are set, those who want to be considered intellectuals must meet the requirements of the profile dictated by the elite class. To be intellectual one must do exactly what those with the power to define intellectualism do. The intellectual activity of those without power is always characterized as nonintellectual” (122). The Lindberg Center students’ critical views of intellectuals or unfamiliarity with the term intellectual demonstrates this divide.

My analysis of the American lyceum, Brookwood Labor College, and the GED workshops helps disconnect views of intellectualism from social and institutional hierarchies by showing the intellectual import and highlighting the intellectual activities taking place at these sites which have not been recognized as intellectual because they are considered vocational or remedial and not high-ranking academic institutions. For example, because the lyceum represents sites of learning devalued because they disseminate “useful” or “practical” knowledge, my reevaluation of the lyceum as a site and sponsor of intellectualism supports the view that educational institutions promoting
useful or practical knowledge can be considered intellectual and can foster intellectualism.

In addition, my argument that Brookwood Labor College fostered intellectualism in the early twentieth century helps challenge the “hand/brain” dichotomy that assumes those who work with their hands and the schools that prepare them for this work are not—and cannot be—intellectual. Finally, recognizing the intellectual activities students engage in at the Lindberg Center writing workshops disputes the assumption that remedial programs are “marginal to the intellectual community” and that their participants are cognitively deficient. Together, these three case studies make clear that traditional views of intellectualism promote and reinforce social and institutional inequality. Recognizing them as sites of intellectualism, however, helps separate intellectualism from these problematic hierarchies.

**Challenging the Literacy Myth**

My review of past and present views of intellectualism suggests that the hierarchy of knowledge imposed by these views re-inscribes a form of the literacy myth, sending the message that performing certain literacy practices can by itself lead to “cognitive advancement.” For instance, the National Endowment for the Arts’ claims that a decline in literary reading produces a nation of ill-informed, passive thinkers implies there is one path to active, independent thinking and consequently to intellectualism, and it goes through reading novels, short stories, plays, or poetry. Allan Bloom, in his censure of American higher education, argued students at elite universities must read “The Great Books” (and must read them in a particular way) to be intellectual. This designation and stratification of knowledge and texts and its relation to intellectualism has had severe
consequences, including designating some ideas, thinkers, and books more important than others (resulting in hierarchies within the discipline of English Studies, as I discuss in the next section). Subscription to the literacy myth also leads to the assumption that literacy and/or education are the sole factors affecting inequality and access.

My examination of the American lyceum, Brookwood Labor College, and the Lindberg Center writing workshops challenges the literacy myth, particularly the belief that certain reading practices necessarily lead to cognitive advancement or to intellectualism. Together, they demonstrate there are a number of variables that can affect the development of critical, independent thinking and a desire to learn. For example, the lyceum nurtured the desire to learn by making knowledge accessible and sending the message education is important. Brookwood Labor College fostered critical thinking by having students write plays depicting the harsh working conditions laborers experience. And, the Lindberg Center workshops facilitated independent thinking by having students write letters to Obama expressing their concerns about life in America. Recognizing that literacy activities functioned as tools for intellectual development at these three sites, my research shows they do not by themselves ensure intellectual development.

**Shedding New Light on Rhetoric, Composition, and Literacy Studies Scholarship and Teaching**

Traditional views of intellectualism that assume intellectuals must pursue knowledge without regard for the practical uses or application of that knowledge, that conflate intellectualism with a high level of intelligence or academic success, and that promote and reinforce hierarchies of knowledge impede and devalue the work of rhetoric,
composition, and literacy studies scholars. For example, because college composition courses are often considered “service” courses designed to disseminate useful knowledge for a practical purpose, the teaching of these courses and the valuable work that happens in them are dismissed as non-intellectual. Also, because basic writing (and basic writers) are assumed to be “marginal to the intellectual community,” the critical thinking that takes place in these courses gets devalued. In addition, because the hierarchy of knowledge imposed by narrow views of intellectualism values literary texts and the “Great Books” over the non-literary texts rhetoric and composition scholars have their students analyze and create and the non-literary-focused scholarship they produce. Consequently, the academic community perceives rhetoric and compositionists’ efforts to recognize and value in their research and teaching multiple literacies, varied composing practices and abilities, nontraditional sites of learning, and everyday “texts” as non-intellectual work. The digital media movement in rhetoric and composition that values multiple literacies and the production of non-alphabetic (and sometimes non-academic) texts also falls victim to academics’ views of intellectualism.\(^{80}\)

The definition of intellectualism I propose and the three case studies central to this research can have a profound effect on the way rhetoric, composition, and literacy studies scholarship and teaching are perceived by the academic community. For example, if we recognize educational institutions (even those that disseminate useful or practical knowledge) can foster intellectualism in multiple ways, then the research and

\(^{80}\) See the work of rhetoric and composition scholars Cynthia Selfe, Gail Hawisher, Gunther Kress, Anne Wysocki, and Doug Hesse for a look at efforts to incorporate into the field the analysis and production of digital media texts. See also Mark Bauerlein’s *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future*, Nicholas Carr’s *The Big Switch: Rewiring the World, From Edison to Google*, and Al Gore’s *The Assault on Reason* for the larger debate about the relationship between technology and intellectualism.
teaching done by rhetoric, composition, and literacy studies scholars considered useful and practical can be recognized as intellectual work. In addition, if we recognize the intellectual possibilities of remedial programs like the Lindberg Center writing workshops, then the research on and teaching of basic writing will not be automatically assumed intellectually inferior or marginal.

Finally, if our views of intellectualism are not tied to a hierarchy of literature or literacy practices, then the “texts” rhetoric, composition, and literacy studies scholars produce and teach will not be assumed to be less valuable than those of literary scholars. Expanding views of intellectualism to include the work of rhetoric, composition, and literacy studies scholars can help fight the disciplinary hierarchy scholars like Susan Miller and Lisa Ede have sought to disrupt.

INTELLECTUALISM IN THE CLASSROOM: A Personal Reflection by Way of Conclusion

My interest in anti-intellectualism and its influence on Americans’ attitudes toward learning developed during my early experiences as a master’s student at South Dakota State University. Troubled by students’ overwhelming lack of interest and engagement in course material, I devoted my thesis to an exploration of the presence and influence of anti-intellectualism in American culture and to ways to address it in the college composition classroom. My research led me to design a unit for my first-year composition classes that challenged students to look critically at the role of anti-intellectualism in their lives and in American culture at large. This dissertation is the result of my own intellectual journey since I first began teaching the unit on anti-intellectualism. I conclude now with a personal reflection on my teaching of anti-
intellectualism and intellectualism—past, present, and future—because it demonstrates how and why my views have changed, and consequently why a reconsideration of past and present views of intellectualism became the focus of my doctoral research.

My main goals for the unit on anti-intellectualism that I created as a master’s student and taught for several years included the following: 1) to discover and discuss students’ understanding of intellectualism and their attitudes toward it; 2) to introduce them to Richard Hofstadter’s historical look at anti-intellectualism in American culture; 3) to help them recognize and understand the presence and influence of anti-intellectualism in their lives, especially through popular culture media; 4) to have them analyze in writing an artifact of popular culture to discover the message(s) sent regarding intellectualism; and 5) to present them with materials and assignments that challenged them intellectually.

Though I did not teach this unit the same way every semester, I used several readings consistently. I selected them because they were relatively accessible to students and because they introduced students to Hofstadter’s historical look at anti-intellectualism in American culture alongside contemporary accusations of anti-intellectualism. I always began the unit by having students read and discuss a 1953 article by Richard Hofstadter titled “Democracy and Anti-intellectualism in America.” This article contains Hofstadter’s definitions of intellectual and anti-intellectual and provides a good summary of his argument. I have also had students read and discuss Todd Gitlin’s article “The Renaissance of Anti-intellectualism,” along with a piece titled “Lisa and Anti-intellectualism” that argues The Simpsons sends an anti-intellectual message, especially with its portrayal of Lisa.
I often used English professor Mark Edmundson’s 1997 *Harper’s* article, “On the Uses of a Liberal Education: I. As Lite Entertainment for Bored College Students,” because students have such a strong reaction to it. Edmundson calls American college students apathetic and passive, though he does not blame students for this. He attributes students’ passivity to the culture’s consumerist attitudes about education—placing the importance on acquiring a degree, not attaining knowledge or pursuing intellectual development. Another piece students responded well to is professor Thomas de Zengotita’s 2002 *Harper’s* article titled “The Numbing of the American Mind: Culture as Anesthetic.” In this piece, de Zengotita blames our mediated culture and an incessant stream of images and entertainment for numbing the American mind. Together, these contemporary readings represented accusations of anti-intellectualism in relation to politics, popular culture, and education, which is another reason why I selected them.

After reading and discussing these articles as a class, I had students write an essay in which they analyze a popular culture artifact (like a movie, television show, magazine, or advertisement), focusing on the messages it sends about learning, education, and intellectualism. For this assignment, I asked them to use Hofstadter’s definitions for their analysis. Obvious from this description, my original unit focused on getting students to recognize the presence of anti-intellectualism in American culture and to consider how it may influence their own attitudes and actions. Though the assignment allowed students to analyze an artifact of their choice, and I assured them they could argue an artifact did not send an anti-intellectual message, I see now how limiting students to Hofstadter’s definitions and introducing them only to sources that point to evidence of anti-
intellectualism in American culture reinforced the narrow, traditional views of intellectualism this research challenges.

When I first developed the unit, I was new to the academy and was uncritical of it. I unwittingly accepted the arguments of Richard Hofstadter and his contemporaries and joined them in their search for evidence and causes of American anti-intellectualism. In fact, there was a time I envisioned writing a dissertation much like Susan Jacoby’s *The Age of American Unreason*, a type of documentation of the “dumbing down” of American culture post-Hofstadter.

A few years ago upon rereading Hofstadter and in light of my greater understanding of the social, cultural, political, and economic forces affecting issues of learning and literacy in American culture, past and present, I realized I needed to expand and further complicate my own understanding of American intellectualism and I needed to alter how I was teaching anti-intellectualism in the classroom. This dissertation is the product of that effort.

For the few courses I taught while working on this project the past few years, though I taught some of the same readings I had before, I taught them differently and blended them with other readings that tied education and learning to issues of race, class, and gender; access to information and education; and literacy. Some of the new readings I incorporated included an encyclopedia entry on the literacy myth written by Harvey J. Graff, Deborah Brandt’s *Literacy in American Lives*, Azar Nifisi’s *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, and *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*. With this curriculum, I dropped the anti-intellectualism unit as it was, and instead made the themes of my courses “Reading and Writing Critically about Thinking, Learning, Education, and
Intellectualism.” This curriculum showed intellectualism to be more complex than Hofstadter makes it and allowed students more freedom to explore these complexities.

As I prepare to teach this material again, in light of my research findings from my three case studies, my two main goals are 1) to incorporate reading and writing assignments that engage students in explorations of their own and others’ views of learning and intellectualism, and 2) to encourage students to consider for themselves what intellectualism is; what it looks like in practice; and its presence, location, or absence in contemporary American culture. One way I envision doing this is to introduce students to past and present accusations of Americans’ anti-intellectualism alongside readings that show the intellectual value of nontraditional learning sites. I can foresee teaching an article on Brookwood Labor College by Richard J. Altenbaugh or an excerpt from Susan Kates’ Activist Rhetorics, or Donald Scott’s “The Popular Lecture and the Creation of a Public in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America.” My written assignments would be designed to invite students to reconsider rather than accept traditional views of intellectualism, to consider the consequences of widely-accepted views of intellectualism, to think about the ways in which intellectualism can be fostered, and to examine the intellectual significance of other sites of learning—past or present.

Carl’s description of an intellectual as “a person that sees school from one perspective” and “attains his confidence through academics” struck a chord with me during my interview with him. This research has helped me to recognize my own academic perspective, one that originally accepted and re-inscribed the narrow
problematic views of intellectualism this research challenges. This experience has helped me to expand my views of education, intellectualism, and academia and has increased my understanding of the complicated relationship between rhetoric, composition, and literacy studies and intellectualism. The implications of my research have and will continue to shape my teaching practices and also my scholarship.
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Print.


Dear Students, Teachers, and Administrator,

As many of you know, I am a graduate student at [a nearby university]. I study composition, rhetoric, and literacy and have taught writing classes at [the university] and taught [these] writing workshops at the Lindberg Center last year and the year before.

As a teacher, I am concerned that many teachers, researchers, and journalists define intellectuals as people who are exceptionally smart, people who have studied certain authors, ideas, or texts (like Shakespeare) that are considered scholarly, or people whose lives are devoted to education. I want to change what we think of as intellectual to include people who are interested in learning and who are studying useful, basic information. This change is important because what our society believes about intellectualism greatly affects what and how people teach. It also affects what ideas, knowledge, or texts our society considers more important than others.

So, what does this have to do with you? I am currently researching this topic for my Ph.D. dissertation and I want to include your voices, your opinions, and your experiences with education and learning in my research. I want to know how you (adults teaching and participating in GED writing workshops) feel about education, school, and learning.

In order to include your opinions and voices, I would like to survey, interview, and observe the class and collect some of what you write during these workshops. You may participate in any of these activities, all of these activities, or none of them. Your participation is voluntary. Here is a list and description of the research activities you can participate in if you wish:

- **Survey**: I will be handing out a short survey (6-9 questions) asking students, teachers, and an administrator about their education experiences and their ideas and opinions about the workshops.
- **Interview**: I will interview students, teachers, and an administrator for 40-50 minutes during class time. I will be asking more questions about education, learning, and reading and writing.
- **Observations**: I will also be sitting in and observing this series of writing workshops (from January to April, 2009). When I observe the class, I will be making note of teachers’ and students’ comments about education, learning, and reading and writing practices.
- **Student Writing and Assignments**: I will also collect any assignments and writing students do during these workshops that may contain information about learning, education, reading, or writing.

Please note that your name will not be used during the collection or reporting of the research and you are not required to participate in this project.
I will be doing this research with the support and guidance of […] Professor Beverly Moss. The survey and interviews will be conducted as soon as I receive permission from [my university] and from you. If you choose to participate, I will ask you to sign a consent form. You are free to withdraw your consent at any time and to discontinue participation in this project without prejudice.

I will be happy to answer any questions you may have, and I look forward to working with you on this project if you choose to participate!

Thank you,
Kelly Bradbury
Survey Questions for Students

The GED Program

1. Why are you working toward your GED? What do you hope to gain from getting your GED?

2. What encourages you to stay in the program and do the work?

The Writing Workshops

3. What kinds of things do you do in the writing workshops?
4. What do you learn from these workshops? Please give some examples.

5. What do you like or not like about these workshops? Please be specific.
Personal Opinions and Experience

6. What do you think school should prepare people to do? In other words, what do you think is the purpose of school/education?

7. Based on your answer to Question #6, what did your elementary, middle, and/or high schools do well? What didn’t they do well?

8. Why didn’t you finish high school?
Please provide the following information about yourself:
Age: ___
Gender: ___ M ___ F
Race: ________________
Ethnicity: ______________
APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR LINDBERG CENTER STUDENTS
EXPERIENCES WITH EDUCATION/SCHOOL

Past—elementary and secondary education
- What were you like as a student in elementary, middle, and high school? Did you study a lot? Did you attend school regularly? Did you enjoy school? How did you act in school?
- How did you feel about school when you were younger? Why?
- What were some of your best experiences in school? Can you describe them in detail?
- What were some of your worst experiences in school? Can you describe them in detail?
- What were your favorite subjects? Why?
- Were you a good reader? Can you explain why you think you were or were not?
- What types of things did you read in school? What did you read outside of school?
- Were you a good writer? Why do you think you were or were not a good writer?
- What writing assignments do you remember from school?
- Did you write on your own outside of school? Why? What did you write?
- Can you give me an example of a good teacher you had? Why do you think he or she was a good teacher?
- Can you give me an example of a bad teacher you had? Why do you think he or she was a bad teacher?
- What do you remember about your schools? Did you think they were good schools? Why or why not?
- What do you think your teachers wanted students to be like?
- What do you think your schools wanted students to be like?
- When did you stop going to school?
- Why did you stop going to school?

Present—Lindberg Center (Building off students’ answers in their written survey)
- In the survey you wrote about why you are working toward your GED. Can you explain your answer in more detail?
- Can you talk more about what you like or don’t like about the writing workshops? What specifically do you like or not like about them? What do you learn from them?

FUTURE EDUCATIONAL GOALS
- When do you plan to finish your GED?
- Do you plan to pursue more education or attend any more schools when you have completed your GED? Why or why not?

READING AND WRITING PRACTICES
- Do you feel like you are a good writer? Why or why not?
- What have teachers told you about how good or bad your writing is?
What kind of writing do you do in your everyday life?
What kind of reading do you do in your everyday life?
Do you ever write creatively for fun? If you do, why and what?
Do you feel you are a good reader? Why or why not?
Do you like the writing workshops at the Lindberg Center? What about them do you like?
Have your reading and writing practices changed since starting the GED program at the Lindberg Center?

PERSONAL INVESTMENT AND INTEREST IN LEARNING/EDUCATION
- How valuable do you think education is? Why?
- What (if anything) did you value about your primary and secondary education?
- What didn’t you find valuable about your primary and secondary education?
- What do you value about the Lindberg Center’s GED/ABLE Preparation program?
- What motivates you to learn? What makes you want to pursue your GED?

UNDERSTANDING OF INTELLIGENCE, INTELLECTUALISM, AND EDUCATION
- What does it mean to be intelligent or smart?
- Do you consider yourself smart? Why or why not?
- Can you give me an example of someone you think is intellectual? Why do you think he or she is an intellectual? What does an intellectual know that other people don’t know?
- Do you consider yourself an intellectual? Why or why not?
- Do you think most Americans are intellectual? Why or why not?
- Can you give me an example of someone you think is anti-intellectual? Why do you think he or she is anti-intellectual?
- Do you consider yourself anti-intellectual? Why or why not?
- Do you think most Americans are anti-intellectual? Why or why not?
- Why do you think Americans pursue education? Why do people attend college?
APPENDIX D
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR LINDBERG CENTER
WORKSHOP TEACHERS
Interview Questions for Teachers

- What are your goals/objectives for the writing workshops?
- Tell me about the activities and assignments you use during these workshops and why.
- What activities and assignments do students seem to engage most with and why?
- What activities and assignments seem to help the students most with their reading and writing skills and why?
- Can you describe the students’ reading and writing strengths and weaknesses?
- Why do you teach these writing workshops at the Lindberg Center?
- What do you think school should prepare people to do?
- What do you think is the purpose of education?
- Can you describe your own experience with elementary, middle, and/or high school?
APPENDIX E
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR LINDBERG CENTER
GED/ABLE PROGRAM SUPERVISOR
Protocol # 2008E0819

Interview Questions for the Supervisor

- What are the goals/objectives for the writing workshops?
- Why does the Lindberg Center want [the university] to lead these writing workshops?
- What do you hope students get out of these writing workshops?
- Can you describe the writing level of the majority of students participating in these workshops? Can you describe students’ general writing strengths and weaknesses?
- Can you describe the reading level of the majority of students participating in these workshops? Can you describe their general reading strengths and weaknesses?
- Why do you work at the Lindberg Center? What’s your interest or investment in the Lindberg Center’s GED program or in the students?
- What do you think school should prepare people to do? What is the purpose of school/education?
STUDENT CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

I consent to participating in the research project entitled “Individual Intellectualism and Twenty-First Century Literacy Classes.” Kelly Bradbury has explained the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed, and the expected duration of my participation. Possible benefits of the study have been described, as have alternative procedures, if such procedures are applicable and available.

I understand that in order to report on
1) the intellectual effects of the Lindberg Center’s [university]-sponsored writing workshops, and
2) students’ interest and investment in education,
Kelly Bradbury will be conducting (on a volunteer basis) a survey, interviews, and classroom observations, and will be collecting course assignments and writings for this research. She agrees to keep my identity confidential by not recording my name, social security number, or other personal information that will expose my identity.

I understand I may consent to participate in this research in a number of ways, indicated below. I give my permission for Kelly Bradbury to use the following in her dissertation, publication of her research, and conference presentations:

____ my written survey  ____ the audio of my interview
____ written transcriptions of my interview  ____ a description of my actions in class
____ written transcriptions of my comments in class  ____ a description of my actions in class
during announced observation during announced observation times  ____ times
____ my course writings during the research period

I acknowledge that I have had the opportunity to obtain additional information from Kelly Bradbury regarding the study and that any questions I have raised have been answered to my full satisfaction. Kelly has also provided a letter explaining the study.

I understand that I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form and I am free to withdraw consent at any time and to discontinue participation in the study without prejudice to me.

Finally, I acknowledge that I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Date: ____________________________  Signed: ____________________________

(Principal Investigator or his/her authorized representative)

Signed: ____________________________  Witness: ____________________________

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APPENDIX G
TEACHER CONSENT FORM
TEACHER CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

I consent to participating in the research project entitled “Individual Intellectualism and Twenty-First Century Literacy Classes.” Kelly Bradbury has explained the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed, and the expected duration of my participation. Possible benefits of the study have been described, as have alternative procedures, if such procedures are applicable and available.

I understand that in order to report on
1) the intellectual effects of the Lindberg Center’s [university]-sponsored writing workshops, and
2) students’ interest and investment in education,
Kelly Bradbury will be conducting (on a volunteer basis) a survey, interviews, and classroom observations, and will be collecting course assignments and writings for this research. She agrees to keep my identity confidential by not recording my name, social security number, or other personal information that will expose my identity.

I understand I may consent to participate in this research in a number of ways, indicated below. I give my permission for Kelly Bradbury to use the following in her dissertation, publication of her research, and conference presentations:

____ my written survey
____ written transcriptions of my interview
____ written transcriptions of my comments in class during announced observation during announced observation times
____ the audio of my interview
____ a description of my actions in class during times
____ course materials handed out to students

I acknowledge that I have had the opportunity to obtain additional information from Kelly Bradbury regarding the study and that any questions I have raised have been answered to my full satisfaction. Kelly has also provided a letter explaining the study.

I understand that I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form and I am free to withdraw consent at any time and to discontinue participation in the study without prejudice to me.

Finally, I acknowledge that I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Date: ____________________________  Signed: ____________________________

(Participant)

Signed: ____________________________  Witness: ____________________________

(Principal Investigator or his/her authorized representative)
SUPERVISOR CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

I consent to participating in the research project entitled “Individual Intellectualism and Twenty-First Century Literacy Classes.” Kelly Bradbury has explained the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed, and the expected duration of my participation. Possible benefits of the study have been described, as have alternative procedures, if such procedures are applicable and available.

I understand that in order to report on
1) the intellectual effects of the Lindber Center’s [university]-sponsored writing workshops, and
2) students’ interest and investment in education, Kelly Bradbury will be conducting (on a volunteer basis) a survey, interviews, and classroom observations, and will be collecting course assignments and writings for this research. She agrees to keep my identity confidential by not recording my name, social security number, or other personal information that will expose my identity.

I understand I may consent to participate in this research in a number of ways, indicated below. I give my permission for Kelly Bradbury to use the following in her dissertation, publication of her research, and conference presentations:

____ my written survey
____ written transcriptions of my interview
____ the audio of my interview

I acknowledge that I have had the opportunity to obtain additional information from Kelly Bradbury regarding the study and that any questions I have raised have been answered to my full satisfaction. Kelly has also provided a letter explaining the study.

I understand that I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form and I am free to withdraw consent at any time and to discontinue participation in the study without prejudice to me.

Finally, I acknowledge that I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Date: ____________________________________________________________
Signed: ____________________________________________________________ (Participant)

Signed: ____________________________________________________________ (Principal Investigator or his/her authorized representative)
Witness: ____________________________________________________________

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