

Counterstatement

Responses to Maxine Hairston, "Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching Writing,"
CCC 43 (May 1992), 179–93.

John Trimbur, Worcester Polytechnic Institute

As one of those "names [of radical compositionists] you might look for" (181), I'd like to respond to Maxine Hairston's article "Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching Writing." Maxine and I find ourselves on different sides of the fence regarding the freshman composition course at the University of Texas at Austin. Maxine opposed the course on the grounds it was about racism and sexism instead of about writing. I supported it and, with Patricia Bizzell, wrote a letter to a number of colleagues calling on them to protest its cancellation by the University of Texas administration as a violation of academic freedom and a politically motivated attack, orchestrated by the conservative National Association of Scholars, on the course goals of fostering critical thinking and open debate about the status of social justice in contemporary America.

Anyone who reviews the course syllabus will see, despite Maxine's description, that it is not devoted to racism and sexism per se but rather to how arguments—forensic and deliberative—are framed to adjudicate problematical situations of social and cultural discrimination. Far from being outside the competence of writing teachers or novice teachers in training, the course is resolutely rhetorical in its design because it asks students to consider—and it offers them some tools to do so, such as Toulmin's notion of warrants and claims—how people argue public issues of central importance to our society. I think we all owe a debt of gratitude to Linda Brodkey for developing the course and for taking the political heat that came out of it. I urge colleagues to study the syllabus Brodkey designed and, as the writing program at the University of Rhode Island has done, teach the course in order to identify experientially its strengths and weaknesses.

Of course, it's not just the freshman writing class at Texas that is bothering Maxine. She doesn't like what radical teachers are doing in the classroom. So she argues, if that's the word, that teachers shouldn't be dogmatic, authoritarian, manipulative, or contemptuous of their students, as though there is a range of opinion. What I think is really going on is that rhetoric, that ancient trickster, once again is resurfacing in the teaching of writing and raising hell by calling on students and teachers alike to look at how the language we use constitutes the world we live in, the differences that separate us, and what we praise and blame in our hopes for a better future. Maxine's program for a freshman course is actually a retreat from rhetoric toward what I would call "sharing time in the metropolis," a pedagogy that appears to celebrate diversity in the classroom but refuses to ask students where their differences come from, what consequences their differences might have, and whether they can imagine ways to live and work together with these differences. The crux of the matter here concerns the relationship between rhetoric and composing in curricular design. There is, as Maxine is aware, a move to reconceive (or perhaps restore is a better word) first-year composition as rhetorical education for citizenship and to place public discourse, as well as students' composing processes, squarely at the center of the curricu-

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lum. This infusion of rhetoric into the writing classroom indeed will change the comfort zone of the “low-risk” process classroom Maxine recommends (189)—and properly so.

What comes across quite strikingly in Maxine’s article is not only her defense of a “pure” and “low-risk” classroom devoted to students’ composing processes but, more tellingly, fear of differences. When Lester Faigley analyzes the subjectivity of a job application letter or James A. Berlin critiques Linda Flower, they are, according to Maxine, not doing thoughtful scholarly work to understand how we differ and why, but instead are being “contemptuous of other teachers’ approaches” (182). By the same token, teachers such as Dale Bauer, Patricia Bizzell, David Bleich, and C.H. Knoblauch “show open contempt for their students’ values, preferences, or interests” (181). I worry that Maxine’s program for a “low risk” classroom reveals a predilection to look at differences as threatening, confrontational, and potentially violent. In many respects, this view of differences is widely held, and it’s worthwhile asking why this is so.

This view of differences as hostile and adversarial is in part a product of the media; in part, of the forensic rhetoric students learn in high-school debates. The polarized, pro/con format of television programs such as *Firing Line*, *Crossfire*, and *Nighiline* teaches, in the name of equal time and ostensible balance, that public discourse is always a matter of two (and only two) positions—liberal or conservative, pro-life or pro-choice—and that the point is to be for one or the other. That people rush to premature closure on complex issues, fail to consider alternatives, and ratify common sense should not be surprising. They have had little opportunity to participate meaningfully in public discourse or to be more than spectators when public discussion is framed as a spectacle of celebrities arguing for and against. But it is precisely for this reason that the freshman course can be useful to students. In a course devoted to rhetorical education, students can learn an ethos of collaborative disagreement that casts differences as matters of negotiation instead of as fearfully violent.

Finally, what I find most troublesome about Maxine’s line of reasoning is that she doesn’t trust her students’ ability to handle the social and cultural differences that organize the realities of contemporary America. The implicit message is that they can share their differences, but they shouldn’t have to engage in the rhetorical art of negotiation. For Maxine, students are too “unsophisticated” and “uninformed,” and besides the teacher has “all the power” (188). This representation of students as potential dupes “ripe for intellectual intimidation” (188) can only have the effect of reproducing students as spectators, perpetually on the verge of being overwhelmed by the experts who have the credentials to speak. My guess is that Maxine’s “low-risk” classroom is just that: a serious underestimation of the social and intellectual resources students bring with them into the freshman course and a refusal to ask students to mobilize these resources in order to find out how and why they differ with their peers.

Robert G. Wood, Michigan Technological University

As a veteran instructor who espouses liberatory pedagogical practices, I would like to take issue with Maxine Hairston’s characterization of the radical pedagogue. According to Hairston’s article, any teacher who feels strongly enough about issues like women’s rights, ethnic oppression, or poverty in America, and who foregrounds such issues in class discussion and writing assignments, is guilty of forcing ideology on students. Undoubtedly, there are composition instructors on the political left, just as there are composition instructors on the political right, who practice dogmatic pedagogy. But to suggest that those who teach from a liberatory perspective are the only ones teaching ideology, while those who teach expressionism are ideologically neutral, is to risk the further mystification of our students.

Over the past few years, I have worked closely with a number of composition scholars and teachers who are unquestionably committed to social issues and change—teachers Hairston would call “radical leftists.” But never have I heard even one of these instructors so much as suggest that as teachers we should coerce our students into adopting our political views or that we should use the classroom to proselytize. Doing this would conflict with the most fundamental premise of liberatory pedagogy, which is to empower students and give them genuine voices of resistance to the very same “banking concept” of teaching of which Hairston appears to be so critical.

Without a doubt, Paulo Freire’s seminal work in radical pedagogy has had major influences on a number of leftist composition scholars. Freire, however, is far from the dogmatic indoctrinator that Hairston fears. The following is from Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Continuum Press, 1990) where he explicitly warns teachers not to engage in ideological dogmatism with their students:

It is not our role to speak to the people about our own view of the world, nor to attempt to impose that view on them, but rather to dialogue with people about their view and ours. We must realize that their view of the world, manifested variously in their action, reflects their *situation* in the world. Educational and political action which is not critically aware of this situation runs the risk either of “banking” or of preaching in the desert. (85)

Henry Giroux is another influential theorist of radical pedagogy who, like Freire, also sees the role of the teacher as one who values and focuses on the experiences students bring to the classroom. In *Border Crossing* (Routledge, 1990), he writes that:

We also need to consider how knowledge is understood within the contexts of the experiences students bring to our classes. We are there not merely to produce knowledge so that it can be debated but also to be self-critical ourselves and learn from the forms of knowledge produced as they come from the class, from our students, from the community, and from their texts. (157)

Are there ideological differences between liberatory theorists like Freire and Giroux and expressionists like Hairston? Of course there are. Even though both approaches seek ultimately to empower their students by improving their literacy, there are complex ideological differences which separate them, differences too involved to discuss here. My point, though, is that the best way to avoid the trappings of the ideological dogmatism that can manifest itself in either the political left or the political right is to foreground our ideologies, to make them known first to ourselves, then to our students.

Ron Strickland, Illinois State University

Maxine Hairston’s attack on composition teachers who “put ideology and radical politics at the center of their teaching” (180) is framed as an extension of the neoconservative reaction to critical theory, feminism, and multiculturalism in literary studies since the early 1980s. But the terms of the debate on literary studies are only unevenly applicable to composition studies, as Hairston’s essay (inadvertently) reveals. The concept of “canon” doesn’t apply in composition studies in the same way that it does in literary studies, and composition scholars have long been concerned with extending social power through literacy in ways that are frequently at odds with literary studies’ traditional emphasis on the preservation of elite culture. Further, Hairston’s criticisms

of radicalism and theory are ill-informed and undeveloped. She confuses deconstruction, for instance, with vulgar Marxism: “deconstructionists claim that the privileged texts of the canon are only reflections of power relations and the dominant class structures of their eras” (183). She sets up radical theory as a “straw man,” misrepresenting the positions of myself and other writers and then dismissing the caricatured positions without bothering to address the arguments of the writers she attacks. “All these claims [of radical theorists] strike me as silly, simplistic, and quite undemonstrable,” she writes.

Nevertheless, if one endorses these intellectual positions—and sympathizes with the politics behind them—it’s easy to go to the next step and equate conventional writing instruction with conventional literary studies. Then one can say that because standard English is the dialect of the dominant class, writing instruction that tries to help students master that dialect merely reinforces the status quo and serves the interest of the dominant class. An instructor who wants to teach students to write clearly becomes part of a capitalist plot to control the workforce. What nonsense! (184)

Well, she’s right about one thing; what she describes is nonsense. The problem is, however, no one is advancing such simplistic analyses and conspiracy theories except Hairston herself.

What, then, is the real issue at stake in Hairston’s article? Under the cover of the currently fashionable neoconservative attack against politicization of the academy, what she is really opposing is the critique of individualism and of the ways the human sciences have been complicit in the maintenance of the ideology of individualism. The crucial limitations of Hairston’s individualist agenda can be seen in the ideal course she proposes at the end of her essay. She wants, she states, to “create a culturally inclusive curriculum in our writing classes by focusing on the experiences of our students” (190). To this end, she describes a sort of model writing class made up of several individual students she has had in the last few years. The class would include students from exotic places like Malawi, Vietnam, Greece, and the Texas panhandle. The students in the class represent, she asserts, an “organic” multiculturalism—they produce a multicultural classroom simply by being themselves, and by expressing themselves in essays. Thus, the student from Malawi is reduced to a *National Geographic*-style tableau of exotic social customs, and other students provide similar “insights” into their native cultures. The strength of these topics, Hairston asserts, “is that they’re both individual and communal, giving students the opportunity to write something unique to them as individuals yet something that will resonate with others in their writing community” (191).

Yet, in Hairston’s account, the communal interest of the topics is never specified or demonstrated—it is always subsumed under or overwhelmed by the taken-for-granted, self-evident value of the personal experience of the writer. The rich variety of life experiences among these writers somehow gets reduced to the stereotypes of other cultures which circulate in the dominant American culture. The emphasis upon individual self-validation shelters students from the challenge to show how and why their concerns and experiences relate to the concerns and experiences of readers from other social groups. Why is it that in this ostensibly “individualistic” classroom students write about such stereotypical elements of their sociocultural experiences (the black student who writes about basketball or the panhandle student who writes about barbed wire fences and cowboy boots)? These topics are interesting precisely because they are important to the social groups whose experiences they represent (however incompletely), and, potentially, to other people for whom the topics are more or less unfamiliar. But the importance has to be articulated and demonstrated, and the meanings of these experiences has to be negotiated across a range of discursive contexts. As long as the value of the topics is taken as self-evident—gwaran-

teed, as Hairston would have it, by the “organic” authority of the “individual” experience of the writers—there is no clear reason why the writers or their readers should care about the topics, and students’ development of critical thinking and rhetorical skills will be limited.

William H. Thelin, Indiana University of Pennsylvania

The violence of Maxine Hairston’s rhetorical strategy shows her unwillingness to engage in a productive, critical dialogue concerning the issue at hand. Rather than analyzing the arguments of Bauer, Strickland, Berlin, and the others she so liberally cites, she dismisses them with condescending remarks such as, “What a facile non-logical leap!” Such sweeping condemnation refutes none of the sound arguments posed by the cultural left and appeals only to emotion, not intellect. Hairston adds nothing worthwhile to the argument, and as a field, we’ve moved, I think, beyond the naive belief that classrooms can be depoliticized. However, Hairston’s perceptions of her students, her “new possibilities” for freshmen courses, and her opinions on the growth of the field do deserve comment.

Hairston characterizes students as apprehensive and timid, nervously testing their teachers and freezing in high-risk situations. I reject this portrayal outright as it demonstrates little respect for novice writers and as it reduces them all to a stereotype that simply does not match my experience with students. Moreover, characterizations such as Hairston’s make it seem that students are incapable of discussing political and ideological stances that threaten their own ideas. When taught in an environment where they are treated as equals, students can be very assertive and will take risks when their beliefs are challenged. This understanding of equality can be brought about by the overt politicization of the classroom, by instructors discussing the ideological foundations and the conflicts within their own fields and then by asserting their positions. Some individual students, of course, will be apprehensive, but this timidity is not a natural by-product of being a student nor of instructors dealing honestly with political topics, as Hairston would make it seem. It is learned behavior, taught by authoritarianism, taught by the educational games teachers play, and finally, taught by condescension. As educators, we need to unteach this timidity if we see it, not pander to it by reproducing the same pedagogies that caused it. In fact, Hairston’s patronizing predisposition towards students will forever keep them in the role of the timid student, and the self-fulfilling prophecy of students freezing in high-risk situations will be complete.

As vague as Hairston’s section is on “new possibilities” in freshman English, one thing I can guarantee is that her proposed alternative is anything but depoliticized. It is a hodgepodge of conservative, liberal, and perhaps even leftist ideas that she masks as an apolitical pedagogy. Although she might want to ignore these ideological foundations of her classroom practices, Hairston is promoting both a feminist and a social-constructionist agenda through her use of student-centered classrooms and collaboration. Furthermore, her stance on multiculturalism is an embrace of pluralistic values while her opinions on religion in the classroom can either be seen as a denunciation of Western metaphysics, where logic is given pre-eminence over emotion and faith, or a call to renounce this country’s stance on the separation of church and state, much like the neoconservatives in our government have been trying to do for the past decade. Depoliticized? Hardly. As most classrooms are, hers is merely one where the politics are kept covert and where the criteria for assignments and assessment are maintained as the unquestioned norm.

Despite Hairston’s claim that the cultural left is undermining the growth of composition as a field, I feel it is really the politically covert classrooms, such as the one that she proposes, that are preventing freshman English from being the solid intellectual enterprise

she envisions. Through the overt politicization of freshman English, leftist instructors are not taking a step backwards from Hairston's beloved "last fifteen years" of composition scholarship. Rather, we are moving forward, exploring new ideas and extending the theory and research of our profession. We do not want to be dogmatic or regressive any more than Hairston wants us to. Mistakes have been made as we've pushed the boundaries of our field in search of more inclusive and equitable methods of teaching, but those mistakes should not negate the goals nor the achievements of leftist educators.

Hairston would better serve our profession by foregoing the pretense that any classroom can be apolitical and concentrating on ethical ways to negotiate race, class, and gender in a politically overt classroom.

William J. Rouster, Wayne State University

While Maxine Hairston makes a number of good points concerning cultural criticism, a number of her arguments against cultural-criticism pedagogies are somewhat misleading. One misleading element of her attack is her use of a few narrow examples of approaches to teaching cultural-criticism to represent all cultural-criticism pedagogies. I believe that cultural criticism pedagogies actually represent the kind of diversity in teaching methods that Hairston appears to be calling for in her article. For example, Donald Lazere, author of "Teaching the Political Conflicts" (*CCC*, May, 1992), and I both teach cultural criticism, yet our methods and approaches are quite different. Still, we agree that we should not attempt to force our ideologies on our students, but, instead, we attempt to create a kind of cultural awareness in students that they may not have had before entering our classrooms. Hairston's attack on a diverse pedagogy using a few narrow examples is frighteningly reminiscent of the recent political correctness dispute.

As misleading as this is, Hairston's most questionable argument is her claim that compositionists should avoid teaching cultural criticism because this is an area in which they have "no scholarly base from which to operate" (186). Interestingly, in making this argument, Hairston, herself, points to the reason why our training in English departments is ideal for engaging in cultural criticism: "they immerse themselves in currently fashionable critical theories . . . then look for ways those theories can be incorporated into their own specialty, teaching writing" (184). Indeed, many of us do receive an education in literary criticism which does teach us how to examine literary texts using the heuristic of a literary theory. We learn how to read texts, read critical theory, and apply theory to texts in order to ferret out meanings of texts. In addition, an education in rhetorical theory gives many of us the basis for examining texts for their rhetorical elements.

This literary-theory training has equipped us to examine many different kinds of texts, and as Robert Scholes, Edward P.J. Corbett, and others point out, literary texts are now not the only acceptable ones in English departments. Other texts have become appropriate objects of study such as, among others, student writing. Cultural critics have recognized that another type of text has become a legitimate object of their examination in English departments—that of culture.

Most writing instructors who teach cultural criticism have been taught how to teach writing and examine texts, including the cultural text, critically. A person educated in Marxist theory would likely examine culture through a Marxist perspective. My dissertation is on social constructionism, and I examine society by using elements of social-constructionist thought as heuristics. Lazere approaches his cultural criticism from a rhetorical perspective in his examination of the media. Many who engage in cultural criticism have been trained to closely examine texts from a theoretical perspective—it is a reasonable leap to examining culture as a text from a theoretical perspective.

Furthermore, a cultural critic does not need to know everything there is to know about the cultural text, or even an element of it, in order to examine it. Instead, what is most often required for informative cultural criticism is that the cultural critic be able to recognize and explain manifestations that reflect his or her theoretical perspective in the specific elements of the cultural text that he or she is examining. In this way, cultural criticism functions much like literary criticism, but the text being examined is the much larger cultural text.

Interestingly, while calling for pedagogical diversity, Hairston is trying to eliminate choices, such as cultural criticism, and put forth her own pedagogy as the ideal choice. Indeed, I'm certain that Hairston's is an interesting and valuable class, but I have no inclination to adopt her pedagogy, nor have I received any *specific* training to teach it. However, I do have an inclination, no, a passion, for teaching cultural criticism, and I know that I have been trained in composition, literature, literary theory, and rhetorical theory. In addition to learning how to teach writing, I have been trained how to use theory to examine texts, including culture as a text. This most invaluable part of my education, something which has resulted in my having acquired a certain cultural awareness, is something that I wish to pass on to my students—a part which would, I fear, leave their educations incomplete if neglected.

Toni Mester, City College of San Francisco

Since Maxine Hairston has got a list, I've revised Koko's song for her. Koko, as you remember, was The Lord High Executioner in Gilbert and Sullivan's operetta *The Mikado*. The Chorus announces his arrival on the stage with a triumphal march, "Behold the Lord High Executioner! A personage of noble rank and title, a dignified and potent officer whose functions are particularly vital." Koko assures them that he is ready to carry out his duties in the song, "They'll None of 'Em Be Missed." Here's a version Professor Hairston and a chorus of employed composition teachers might enjoy.

As someday it may happen that a victim must be found,
I've got a little list, I've got a little list
Of professional offenders who might well be underground
And who never would be missed, they never would be missed.
There's Marxist intellectuals who pen monographs,
All feminists with leftist views that irritate the haves.
All anti-racist graduates with ideology,
All writers who when writing show a sense of history,
And all the English teachers who on literature insist,
They'd none of them be missed, they'd none of them be missed!

Chorus:

She's got us on the list, she's got us on the list
And none of us be missed, no, none of us be missed!

The literary critic, and the others of his taste
And the deconstructionist, I've got her on the list!
And the people who preach politics to puff in students' face,
They never would be missed, they never would be missed.
Then the idiot who praises in enthusiastic tone
All rhetoric but mine or discipline but our own,
And the grunts of the academy who papers must correct,
And the basic skills providers who have nothing to protect,

And that singular anomaly, the part-time activist
I don't think they'll be missed, I'm sure they'll not be missed!

Chorus:

She's got us on the list, she's got us on the list
And she don't think we'll be missed, she's sure we won't be missed!

Reply by Maxine Hairston

It strikes me as a healthy sign for our profession to be having such a spirited discussion about what and how we should teach in writing courses, particularly in required first-year English courses. What an encouraging change from those days when English 101 was dismissed as a service course, not important enough to argue about. The issue of what goes on in freshman English has always been primary for me; in fact, my first professional article, published more than 20 years ago, was titled "What's a Freshman Theme For?" It seems appropriate that "Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching Writing," which will almost certainly be my last major professional article, focuses on the same topic. Today, however, the context for the discussion is more complex, given a changing student population and a changing world. The tone is also far more emotional. That's unfortunate—some good professional friendships have dissolved in the heat of the argument.

I've reread my article and, with the exception of one egregious misquote that I will acknowledge shortly, find nothing in it I would change. I still believe that bringing ideology into the classroom stifles diversity and hampers students' development as writers. However, I see little point in trying to rebut the criticisms of those who disagree with me so sharply because I am not in a rhetorical situation with them. We differ so radically about basic premises—about teaching, about our society, about the purpose of education—that we have little foundation on which to base a useful discussion that is likely to change any of our minds.

Nevertheless, I had to enter this conversation about the political classroom. Once I looked at *Racism and Sexism*, the Rothenberg text proposed for required freshman English at the University of Texas, I could not walk away and say "I don't want to get involved in this conflict," even though I knew my speaking out would stir up controversy. I had no idea how much! I think I've said some things that needed to be said, and I hope I've convinced some people with my arguments. Now, however, I'm out of the classroom, and ready to exit the conversation. At this point in my life I find it more rewarding to focus my energy in my own community, particularly on projects that directly help disadvantaged women and children. There's much important work to be done, and I want to contribute what I can.

I will not, however, leave without offering C.H. Knoblauch my apology. He was justified in complaining to the editor that I was not quoting him correctly when I said that he was setting up a straw man by attacking a mechanistic, structuralist model of composition I feel has already been discredited in the literature and calling it "conservative, repressive, deterministic, and elitist." With the help of my colleague John Ruzskiewicz, I have tracked down the source of my quotation. It came from a not-yet-published talk Ruzskiewicz himself gave at the University of South Carolina on February 7, 1991. The talk was titled "Critical Literacy and the New Forcers of Conscience," and in it John says, "Social theorists, however, have more completely repudiated current-traditional rhetoric, labeling it as conservative, repressive, deterministic, and elitist." He cites as his source Knoblauch's "Rhetorical Constructions: Dialogue and Commitment," a *College English* article listed in the Works Cited page of my article. I regret my misattribution; it was careless.

I believe, nevertheless, that the adjectives that John used and I repeated accurately describe Knoblauch's view of what he calls "ontological rhetoric," the classically-based model that, in "Rhetorical Constructions," he says "expressed the most successfully maintained view of language and language teaching that the West has so far produced," but one that I feel has been largely discredited in current composition theory. In the first and second paragraphs on p. 129 of that article, Knoblauch used the terms "conservative" and "elitist" to characterize ontological rhetoric and says one of its negative tendencies is to validate "determinism." And he certainly seems to be calling that model of rhetoric "repressive" in this sentence: "Plainly, the ontological view articulates and defends a conservative reality, emphasizing permanence, certainty, and tradition, the maintenance of a status quo, politically as well as intellectually, which no defiant utterance, no provocative metaphor, no discovery of 'new' knowledge is entitled to reconceive."

So although my quotation was literally inaccurate, I do not think it misrepresented Knoblauch's views. I'm also sorry that Cy feels that I distorted a longer quotation from his work by leaving out what he saw as important qualifying phrases. I didn't feel that I altered the essential content; certainly I didn't do so deliberately. Nevertheless, if the author is dissatisfied with the deletions I made, I bow to his judgment and apologize.

Responses to Richard Gebhardt, "Theme Issue Feedback and Fallout," *CCC* 43 (Oct. 1992), 295-96.

Ralph F. Voss, University of Alabama

I write in response to the Editor's Column in the October 1992 *CCC* regarding reactions to Maxine Hairston's "Personal Perspective" article, "Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching Writing." It appears that most of those who called and wrote disagree with Hairston, and while that of course is their right, I would not like for my silence to contribute to any impression that most writing teachers "out there" also disagree with Maxine Hairston. I for one was pleased to see someone of such stature say so many things I have been thinking for some time, but only recently gave quieter voice to myself in a paper at the 1992 CCCC convention. Moreover, I think Hairston gave expression to what most writing teachers think if they give any thought to these matters at all. (I have no proof of it, but I suspect that all college-level writing professionals who consider themselves informed would be surprised and a bit humbled if they could somehow find out how few writing teachers nationwide read *any* professional scholarship and commentary, let alone *CCC*.)

My point here is not only that I agree with Hairston's general assessment of the situation, but I also think more teachers agree (or would agree) with her than do not (or would not). Further, I am glad *CCC* published her piece. Richard Gebhardt's editorship of *CCC* has been excellent in part because of his willingness to maintain the journal as a reflector of what is actually happening in the relatively small but important community of publishing scholars/teachers of writing. Within that community a lively debate is going on, one that I think is evidence of general health and—in a more philosophical sense—a vital and necessary dialectical exchange among the best and brightest. But it has also given rise to an unfortunate and growing polarity that I think threatens us all.

In this debate, I suppose the level of zeal that at least partially blinds accounts for the sort of viciousness that has too often emerged, such as the notion of Hairston—and Gebhardt, by extension, since he published her ideas—as "McCarthyite"; and accounts for the failure of many readers to see that included in the same issue are other articles that clearly came from viewpoints *other* than Hairston's. I guess I'm just old enough to miss the

civility that marked even the sharpest disagreements in the earlier days of CCCC and CCC. The price of a maturing field seems to include a loss of respect for differing views. I regret that.

C. H. Knoblauch is apparently right that Hairston misrepresented a quotation from him, and he is right to point this out. But his insistence on finding “darker motives” beyond human error illustrates what I mean by the polarizing price of lost civility we are paying now. Hairston may have misrepresented his quotation, but unless I am badly misreading Knoblauch’s work, she did not misrepresent his views. Thus one might as readily see “darker motives” in Knoblauch’s rather indignant tone in bringing Hairston’s error to the attention of CCC readers. To my mind, Holier than Thou is bound always to sound, well, Holier than Thou. And what about those who criticized the Editor for publishing Hairston’s article? In polarized conditions, can’t they be seen also to have “darker motives,” since they apparently want him to publish only articles that jibe with their views?

I’m not sure there is a solution to this growing and potentially nasty polarity. And the fear I have of our *not* solving it is rather formless and exasperatingly vague, having to do with powerful forces beyond the schoolhouse doors that already show no patience with even the most honest and sincere debates about “the politics of composition.” It’s not exactly paranoia, and it’s not exactly some replay of Bogart and Bergman on the airport runway at Casablanca (“The problems of a few writing teachers don’t amount to a hill of beans . . .”), but it’s *something* like that.

There is much more I could say, but it would more properly belong, I think, in an article of my own. I just wanted to add my reaction to Maxine Hairston’s article and the “fallout” CCC has been experiencing from it.

Laurence Behrens, University of California, Santa Barbara

Although I don’t agree with all of Maxine Hairston’s pedagogical assumptions, I found “Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching” (May 1992) both refreshing and persuasive. What has happened in the profession of composition is like what happens when political parties are taken over by radical ideologues on the left or fundamentalist ideologues on the right. The doctrinaire rhetoric and pedagogical methods of the new ideologues alienate not only adversaries but also potential supporters. (It goes without saying that such rhetoric and methods are hardly calculated to impress our colleagues in other disciplines—those who sit on the committees that often decide the status and fate of writing programs within campus academic communities.) Predictably, the ideologues dismiss all objections—either by their hapless students or their professional colleagues—as additional evidence of the repressive and reactionary forces conspiring against them. In other words, (to adopt the recycled Marxist parlance) there can be no legitimate counterhegemonic vision to the dominant power structure in composition: the only responsible way to teach writing is to focus on the injustices of the social order.

In the same May 1992 issue, Donald Lazere offers an appealing approach to enhancing students’ political awareness without forcing particular agendas down their throats. Such balanced approaches, I fear, are scarce among those who deal with political and social issues in the writing classroom. Significantly, some of the new ideologues, while professing to embrace diversity, draw the line at diversity of professional opinion. As Richard C. Gebhardt notes in his “Editor’s Column” in the October 1992 issue, not only did most people responding to Hairston’s article critique it, “some also criticized me for publishing it and (as one person said) ‘publicizing McCarthyist views.’” In such sentiments the correspondents reveal their true political inclinations.