



What DEI Means in Black Diaspora Digital Humanities: Reflections on Digital Equity, Inclusion, and Knowledge Production 20 Years Later

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Anniversaries can be a very precarious occasion regardless of what is being celebrated, and by whom. On the one hand, they are (or rather can be) an opportunity to celebrate accomplishments and exercise some self-reflection, a chance to take stock, as it were, of where we are and how we got here. On the other hand, anniversaries are as much an aspirational celebration of where (and what) we hope to be (or become) in the future. If we are lucky, looking back we can see how the paths we took have helped us to position ourselves comfortably on the road to our next destination.

With all of this in mind, and at the risk of being premature in our celebrations, we are indeed proud to say that this issue marks the 20-year anniversary of *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal*. In the world of journal publishing, twenty years is a very long time, but in the world of academic publishing, years are not simply counted in numerical time, the dedication to this enterprise is far too complex to be confined by this notion of time. *Anthurium* emerged during a period when publishing online was looked upon as a “risk” because it implied that writing published online had, somehow, avoided the usual rigorous channels of peer review. As a result, many scholars were encouraged to steer clear of online publications, print and hard copy was (and to a degree still is) the preferred modus operandi for scholars in tenure track positions.

When I reflected on this several years ago while celebrating *Small Axe*’s publication of its 50th issue, my thoughts about the pragmatic necessity of online, open access, peer reviewed journals are as relevant now as they were then:

Pouchet Paquet understood that academic journals are a crucial vehicle for concretizing institutional spaces for new fields of study, and she utilized this opportunity to begin several institution-building ventures. In the long run, *Anthurium* would be instrumental for positioning Caribbean literary studies as a field of scholarly inquiry capable of standing on its own, while engaging in critical dialogues with the larger area of black diaspora literary studies. An academic journal seemed, at the time, to be the next logical step after the Caribbean Writers Summer Institute, the growing digital archive amassed between 1991 and 1996, and an ongoing partnership between the three campuses of the University of the West Indies and the University of Miami. In short, each of these stages of developing the “field” of Caribbean literary studies focused on transforming the location and dissemination of knowledge in the United States about the Caribbean

EDITORIAL NOTE



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region, but in such a way as to ensure a mutually beneficial (and equitable) exchange of ideas, scholarship, and creative writing.¹ The flow of scholarship from North to South has historically been a slow, but purposeful, trickle simply because of the sheer number of academic publishers in the United States and the cost of books, journals, and subscriptions to databases.²

I'm citing at length to make two critical points about why these last 20 years have been so critically important. First, *Anthurium* began as an open access, peer-reviewed journal during a period in the academy when there was nothing called "Digital Humanities" in institutions of higher learning. In fact, in hindsight, I wonder if this was not by design rather than default. The world of academic publishing is very lucrative, particularly for publishing conglomerates like Elsevier, but not for the researchers and scholars whose academic papers and research findings fuel the entire industry. The emergence of digital humanities and open access academic journals could prove to be an existential crisis for large publishing houses, particularly in the sciences. The cracks are showing, but there is a long way still to go in the humanities where we continue to worship the god of print publications. When large ivy league institutions fell in line behind the university librarians, a clarion call went out to those of us who were paying attention to the vast sums of money changing hands in board rooms while scholars toiled in their labs and archive collections; there needed to be an alternative to the Elsevier model of publication.³

This last observation brings me to my second point about *Digital Equity and Inclusion* (DEI) in the production and dissemination of knowledge. I am being very intentional in my repurposing of this well-known acronym because apart from it being the proverbial boogeyman for politicians in the state where I live (Florida), my use of it is intended to activate the practice, policies, and ambitions of its close cousin (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion). At a time when, across the Caribbean region, and arguably across the globe, budgets in education are being slashed, library budgets in particular, the need for equitable access to information and more purposeful knowledge dissemination is critical. And here, the "I" (in DEI) is activated in the truest sense of the word – Inclusion in the context of digital equity means access, simply put.⁴ I have written extensively about the problem of the pay wall and who can afford access, but what about those who are not part of the academy? The lover of calypso, who listens to Sparrow's "Jean and Dinah" (1956) and wonders what conditions inspired this song about post-War Trinidad and Tobago, should have the same access to essays by Gordon Rohlehr, Hope Munro Smith, Jocelyne Guilbault as ethnomusicologist and cultural critics.⁵ Inclusion means that academia should not be the only domain for knowledge production and consumption, it should be one of the (many) locations where this occurs. And here I give kudos to our collaborative partners at *Small Axe* which began its enterprise as an academic journal but has gone on to create an entire platform dedicated to open debate and discussion. The *Small Axe* Project is completely open access and includes a range of materials that "participate both in the

1 Paquet, S P. "Editor's Note". *Anthurium*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2003, p. 1. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.33596/anth.1>. Accessed on March 5, 2023.

2 Saunders, Patricia Joan. "Journal Work and the "Public Good": Undocumented Academic Labor in Emerging Fields." *Small Axe* 20 (2016): 58–75.

3 "APLU Statement on Resignation of *Lingua's* Editors and Editorial Board Members in Protest of Elsevier's Pricing Policies," Association of Public and Land Grant Universities, 2 November 2015, www.aplu.org/news-and-media/News/aplu-statement-on-resignation-of-linguas-editors--editorial-board-members-in-protest-of-elseviers-pricing-policies. See also: Carl Straumsheim, "Leveraging *Lingua*," *Inside Higher Ed*, 11 November 2015, www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/11/11/open-access-advocates-see-opportunity-lingua-editorial-mutiny; Ingram, Stefan Matthew, "Elsevier Mutiny: Cracks Are Widening in the Fortress of Academic Publishing," *Fortune*, 2 November 2015, www.fortune.com/2015/11/02/elsevier-mutiny.

4 Many thanks to Ronald Cummings for his salient comments about how Caribbean intellectuals have always understood *inclusion*. The practice of "self-publishing" in the Caribbean region is a direct intervention aimed at minimizing the distance (and cost) of Caribbean scholarship in relation to the wider population of interested readers. Access is intimately connected to what books published in the US and the UK costs readers in the Caribbean region.

5 See, for example, Smith, Hope Munro. "Performing Gender in the Trinidad Calypso." *Latin American Music Review / Revista de Música Latinoamericana*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2004, pp. 32–56. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3598700>. Accessed 10 Mar. 2023. I am using this example because this is an excellent essay that would be of interest to anyone who is interested in calypso, military history, or U.S. and Caribbean cultural confluences in the post-War period. The article, however, is behind a paywall which limits both access by the general public and opportunities for the researcher whose work could have a much larger impact were it available to everyone.

renewal of practices of intellectual and cultural criticism in the Caribbean and in the expansion and revision of the scope and horizons of such criticism.”⁶

Drawing on the work of Hart and Negri, I highlighted something that is becoming a reality in a truly terrifying way recently in the state of Florida. The attacks on the education system and the very tools of communicating ideas and giving the imagination free spaces to roam are designed to entrench the inequities already thriving in other systems by controlling the dissemination and production of knowledge.

One site where we should locate the biopolitical production of order is in the immaterial nexuses of the production of language, communication, and the symbolic that are developed by the communications industries. The development of communications networks has an organic relationship to the emergence of a new world order—it is, in other words effect and cause, product and producer. Communication not only expresses but also organizes the movement of globalization... It expresses the movement and *controls the sense and direction of the imaginary* that runs throughout these communicative connections; in other words, the imaginary is guided and channeled within the communicative machine.⁷

As this passage suggests, the concern about the organization, dissemination, and partiality of knowledge is as much a political concern as an intellectual one. The explicit linking of legitimating power to the colonizing of the imagination is of singular importance for segments of the globe attempting to craft what George Lamming refers to as the “sovereignty of the imagination.” In this worldview, critical reflection is not simply an intellectual exercise; it also carries with it the *public* function of inducing *thought*. For this critical engagement to be of value, it must, more than anything else, be free to speak to the critical concerns of what Martin Carter in a 1974 public lecture called a “free community of valid persons.” Naturally, this speech needs to reach a wide range of audiences to shape the critical discourse and thus be effective. As access to public education is being increasingly guided by legislation designed to limit access to information and representations of history that include hard truths, public access to information that reflects and engages in the practice of critique and critical inquiry is even more vital to our democratic institutions.

Anthurium began as an experiment aimed at leveling the proverbial playing field between those producing and disseminating knowledge about the Caribbean region and those with little access to this knowledge because of limited resources. North American and European scholars have, for decades, spent their summers in archives across the Caribbean region, and a good amount of the scholarship that grew out of these research excursions was published in peer-reviewed journals in the United Kingdom and the United States. To be sure, Caribbean scholars have always traveled to archives across the globe to carry out their research, research that was critical to the development of the field of Caribbean studies globally. As an unwritten rule, this research was not published in peer reviewed journals or university presses in the U.S., UK, or Canada. Instead, it appeared in newspapers, journals, and books within the region; self-published in collaboration with small local presses (as with many prominent intellectuals and artists, such as C. L. R. James, Gordon Rohlehr, and Willi Chen); or published in edited collections. These options were utilized by scholars who were invested in ensuring that their work would be easily accessible to faculty and students in the region. But there were also the foreign-based scholars who, while on their research trips, scoured local bookshops and the University of the West Indies bookstore to purchase books that rarely ever showed up in the earliest internet search engines.

Anthurium effectively bridged the nexus of the two intellectual communities described above. What was needed then, as now, was a way to couple both the desire to speak to the public at large about literature and culture in a language that was unapologetically “political” on a platform that could transcend the limitations of the publishing industry’s control over who had authority to

6 These platforms include: <http://smallaxe.net/sxsalon>; <http://smallaxe.net/sxvisualities>; and <http://smallaxe.net/sxarchipelagos/>. The last of these platforms (sx archipelagos) is now a foundational journal in Caribbean digital studies, <http://archipelagosjournal.org/>.

7 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 32–33.

speak about the region and in what medium. In her inaugural editorial note, Paquet notes that the journal's arrival was a natural progression of the growth of the emerging field of Caribbean Studies. Over the last 20 years *Anthurium* has continued to provide a space for new critical perspectives on Caribbean literature and culture, and this is best captured in our inaugural issue which was based on Caribbean Currents: Navigating the Web and the Word, the 22nd Annual West Indian Literature Conference. The first issue featured new work by poet, Kamau Brathwaite, that included a challenging font and form in his new poem, "Namsetoura & the Companion Stranger."

Publishing Brathwaite and editing essays on his work presented a particular challenge to the editors of *Anthurium* who wished to preserve the visual integrity of Brathwaite's work on the page. In one sense, reproducing "Namsetoura & the Companion Stranger" was easily accomplished because, despite the countless variations of Brathwaite's Sycorax video style, the technology required was readily available through the use of Adobe Acrobat (*.pdf). Since the rest of the journal is produced in HTML, the task of synchronizing the variety of fonts used to reproduce and approximate Brathwaite's work in the critical essays presented yet another challenge. After careful thought and consultation, it was decided that the journal would use only variations of its standard fonts in bold, italics, and capitals. It was argued that since all attempts to approximate Brathwaite's Sycorax video style would be a misrepresentation of the original, this approach at least gave us the advantage of uniformity and coherence and eliminated the risk of manipulating Brathwaite's original texts beyond the parameters stated here.⁸

From its inception, *Anthurium* committed itself to being an experimental space, particularly for Caribbean writers and thinkers who were seeking to expand the parameters for critical dialogue. This experimentation included form as well as digital content and though it was not always easy to do, it was essential to all involved that every effort was made. Kelly Baker Josephs and Loretta Collins, both conference participants, contributed essays to the inaugural issue that expanded the frameworks for engaging Brathwaite's everchanging fragmented discourses and (radio) frequencies.

That Sandra chose to take on this task late in her career speaks volumes about her dedication to the field and its future. By the time she retired in 2010, the journal was in its seventh year, and she had left me with a blueprint for success. However, if it hasn't been said publicly before, I will say it now, for the record: journal work is taxing and, as such, not realistically feasible with only one faculty member and one graduate fellow producing a biannual, peer reviewed journal. The enormous amount of time and intellectual labor involved in producing a journal was evident in all the discussions during the *Small Axe* symposium, "What is Journal Work?" This reality led me to scale the publication back to one issue a year until my colleague Donette Francis joined the faculty at the University of Miami in 2013, just in time for the 10th Anniversary of *Anthurium*. In her introduction, Francis frames the gravitas of occasion succinctly:

This special tenth-year anniversary issue of *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal* on "Intellectual Formations: Locating a Caribbean Critical Tradition" was inspired by the 31st West Indian Literature Conference held at the University of Miami in Coral Gables, October 11–13, 2012. The 50th anniversary reflection on Independence and Federation provided an occasion to take stock of the field of West Indian Criticism: assessing old "quarrels," highlighting key interventions, and pointing to new directions. For the final session of the conference, we convened six critics in attendance, and whose scholarship and intellectual formation represent the intersection of generations, geographies and intellectual queries that comprise a tradition of West Indian Literary Criticism: Edward Baugh, Sandra Pouchet Paquet, Evelyn O'Callaghan, Carolyn Cooper, Faith Smith and Michael Bucknor.⁹

8 Paquet, Sandra Pouchet (2003) "Editor's Note," *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 1, Article 1. Available at: <http://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/anthurium/vol1/iss1/1>. In conversation with Pouchet Paquet about publishing "Namsetoura" she stressed that Braithwaite was consulted and eventually agreed to publish it in the PDF format.

9 Francis, Donette A. (2013) "Intellectual Formations: Locating a Caribbean Critical Tradition," *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal*: Vol. 10: Iss. 2, Article 1 (p.1). Available at: <http://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/anthurium/vol10/iss2/1>.

For those of us gathered for this occasion, the “quarrel” as proposed by Eddie Baugh in his 1976 essay, “The West Indian Writer and His Quarrel with History,” was a presupposition that many of my generation inherited, as Francis notes it was “a *condition* rather than a singular historical event.”¹⁰ And each of us, in our own way, from our different exposures as scholars in the field, not to mention the wide array of disciplinary perspectives, came to join this dialog with a generation of intellectuals that fed, and sometimes frustrated, our imaginations.

The interventions came in the form of Caribbean autobiography, women’s (and white women’s) writings, popular cultural and reggae studies, sexuality, citizenship and masculinity studies... From the US: Laurence Breiner, Rhonda Cobham-Sander, Carole Boyce Davies, Supriya Nair and Patricia Powell; from the UK: Jeremy Poynting and Alison Donnell; from Canada: Ann-Marie Lee-Loy; from UWI St. Augustine: Paula Morgan; and from Miami—the crossroads of the Americas and the North Atlantic—my colleagues at University of Miami: Gerard Aching and Patricia Saunders. The essays follow a call and response pattern, picking up themes, figures, and/or historical moments addressed by the preceding writer. While certainly not comprehensive, these essays, nonetheless, represent the vibrant spirit of quarrel that characterizes our arguably established West Indian Literary Critical Tradition.¹¹

If you peruse the introductions of the issues of *Anthurium*, it should be clear that the scholarship represented in the journal is not simply the research essay submitted by a scholar and peer reviewed by another scholar in the field. At its most basic, pared down level it is that, yes, but it is also part of a larger fabric of debates, and yes, quarrels, with interlocutors during conferences and symposiums that provided fertile ground for ideas to take shape, be given sustenance, and grow. I concur, the West Indian Literary Tradition is vibrant in its tradition of quarrel, and it stands to reason that the next generation will push the dialog into new and even broader terrains than those imagined by the post-independence generation of scholars.

The exercise of reflection shines bright lights on areas of oversight, traces the lingering scars for the memories of experiences long since passed. But loitering in the past is not a privilege that “emerging fields” have the luxury of enjoying. The work, although substantive, is still reaching in the aspirational ways that anniversaries encourage, if not demand. It is in this spirit of ambition that we offer this 20th Anniversary editor which works diligently to honor those who have labored in (and for) the field who are no longer on this side, and for those who are still here, continuing to labor, be it in big or small ways, that have always been substantial. Twenty years on, it is easy to say that Sandra Pouchet Paquet was a visionary because she founded *Anthurium*, but I would be remiss if I didn’t highlight (again) what she states in her inaugural introduction. *Anthurium* was part of a natural progression that grew out of the Caribbean Writers Institute, the over twenty-year relationship with the University of the West Indies campuses and the numerous symposiums and conferences hosted by the University of Miami, most important of which is West Indian Literature Conference.¹² It is critical, therefore, that we understand the work that has gone before us, and the work that is still ahead.

In the spirit of remembrance, this 20th Anniversary issue honors the memory of several Caribbean intellectuals whose contributions to the field, and to *Anthurium*, are immeasurable. In honor of those who have transitioned, we are republishing tributes, interviews, and essays. But we are also publishing new essays, reviews and poems that expands on some of the new directions in Caribbean and postcolonial writing that *Anthurium* continues to support. This issue includes the republication of Kelly Baker Josephs’ tribute to Paule Marshall, a writer whose literary vision was so far ahead of its time. Her novel, *Brown Girl, Brownstone*, is one instance of Marshall’s insightful interpretation of the Caribbean immigrant experience in the United States. Twenty years after she contributed to the inaugural issue of *Anthurium*, Kelly Baker Josephs, recently joined the faculty here at the

10 Ibid., 1.

11 Ibid., 3.

12 Typically, the University of Miami hosts the conference once every seven to eight years. The 37th Annual West Indian Literature Conference was last held at the University of Miami in 2018.

University of Miami and her arrival ushers in a new area of critical and technical engagement with the Digital Caribbean. The issue also includes memorial tributes to George Lamming (1927–2022), and Gordon Rohlehr (1942–2023), two intellectuals whose contributions, like Walcott’s, cannot easily be measured. Nearly thirty years ago, I made my way to the University of Miami (as a graduate student at the University of Pittsburgh) to attend the Caribbean Writers Summer Institute (CWSI) where I signed up to take George Lamming’s six-week seminar on Caribbean Literature and Nationalism. The dream of returning to the University of Miami as a faculty member took root that summer, and the unlikely probability that the CWSI would be the place where so many writers, scholars, and artists of my generation cut their teeth animates my tribute to George Lamming. He is known for his literary contributions and his keen intellect, particularly with regards to Caribbean politics, but the CWSI was a space where he could bring these things together in a classroom.

As I approach my twentieth year at UM, the news of Gordon Rohlehr’s passing brought home the reality that we are experiencing a seismic shift in Caribbean arts and letters. But the singing of praise songs will be sung in the tradition of the chantwells and accompanied by a chorus singing the lawways that remind them, and us, that the circle is not broken. We have republished an interview with Gordon Rohlehr, conducted by his former UWI postgraduate student, Paula Morgan entitled, “The Generation of 1968” and Rohlehr’s essay, “Calypso, Literature and West Indian Cricket: Era of Dominance,” both of which were appeared in our 10th Anniversary issue.

There are several pieces of new scholarship that includes an essay by Tohru Nakamura that explores the gaze and madness in Derek Walcott’s *Dream on Monkey Mountain*. Laurie Lambert’s review essay on Anjuli Raza Kolb’s recent book, *Epidemic Empire: Colonialism, Contagion, and Terror, 1817–2020* (Chicago, 2020), reminds us that discourses of contagion and sickness are continuously mobilized across different colonial locations to control and confine people in developing countries. One of our graduate students, Jovante Anderson, interviews Jamaican visual artist, Leasho Johnson, about his practice and the personal / political perspectives that inform his wide array of visual practices. Johnson’s art garners a good deal of critical attention because of the wide spectrum of influences that animate his artistic vision. Miami poet, and CWSI alumnus, Geoffrey Philp’s suite of haikus is an offering that gestures toward the restorative nature of the world (and the word) outside, particularly during the pandemic. His daily explorations of the Miami landscape and its intersections with landscapes of his youth provided him, and many of us who follow him on social media, a respite from the impending death that surrounded all of us during the pandemic.

Finally, as we look forward to what the next decade might look like for *Anthurium*, there is a sense of great comfort on the one hand, and a fear of not knowing what the minute, let alone the next year might bring. We have done a lot in these last twenty years, but there is a good deal more yet to be done, and this is where aspirations ought to inform how we imagine our better selves. Over the last twenty years, our critical focus has been steadily focused on critical discourses on Caribbean literature and culture, but always in English, even when the scholarship examined the works of Latin American, Francophone, Hispanic and Dutch Caribbean writers and artists. By my estimation, this is the most visible shortcoming in our twenty-year history. At no point in its history has the Caribbean region been a monolingual space, a close look and listen to the creolized English spoken in all Anglophone Caribbean countries reveals this mythology. The same is true for Dutch, French and Spanish speaking countries. As we look forward to the coming years, *Anthurium* has set a goal of publishing at least half of each journal’s issue in, at least, two languages.

Our modest offering with this 20th Anniversary issue is the translation into Spanish of the tributes to Paule Marshall, George Lamming and Gordon Rohlehr. This small step in this ambitious direction is made possible through a collaboration with the Michelle Bowman Underwood Department of Modern Languages and Literatures at the University of Miami. Maytte Hernandez Lorenzo is the first *Anthurium* graduate fellow from MLL and she has been working on translating the tributes into Spanish. This is a large undertaking since all our submissions have primarily been in English. However, this is a moment of opportunity both for *Anthurium* and scholars working on Francophone and Hispanophone Caribbean literatures. We would welcome the opportunity to collaborate with scholars who work in languages other than English so that we might consider special issues that feature works submitted in languages other than English. We do not anticipate this change

occurring all at once, but the aspiration that drives this desire forward is the need to be far more linguistically diverse in the critical and creative voices we present in this journal of Caribbean Studies.

Along these same lines, we are searching for a new digital publishing platform, one that can (hopefully) put *Anthurium* on a more equitable footing with many of the print journals. We do not know who our new publishing partners will be just yet, but we will continue to exist in our current format so that researchers and scholars can continue to submit their work for consideration by *Anthurium*. Your continued support means the world to us, and in the coming months we will be sure to communicate with our readers and contributors as we move into this next phase of exploring what the next stages of digital equity and inclusion might look like and aspire to be.

Patricia Joan Saunders

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COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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