



Rhetoric at the Margins: Revising the History of Writing Instruction in American Colleges, 1873-1947

David Gold

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Rhetoric at the Margins: Revising the History of Writing Instruction in American Colleges, 1873-1947 examines the rhetorical education of African American, female, and working-class college students in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The rich case studies in this work encourage a reconceptualization of both the history of rhetoric and composition and the ways we make use of it.

Author David Gold uses archival materials to study three types of institutions historically underrepresented in disciplinary histories: a black liberal arts college in rural East Texas (Wiley College); a public women's college (Texas Woman's University); and an independent teacher training school (East Texas Normal College). The case studies complement and challenge previous disciplinary histories and suggest that the epistemological schema that have long applied to pedagogical practices may actually limit our understanding of those practices.

Gold argues that each of these schools championed intellectual and pedagogical traditions that differed from the Eastern liberal arts model—a model that often serves as the standard bearer for rhetorical education. He demonstrates that by emphasizing community uplift and civic participation and attending to local needs, these schools created contexts in which otherwise moribund curricular features of the era—such as strict classroom discipline and an emphasis on prescription—took on new possibilities.

Rhetoric at the Margins describes the recent revisionist turn in rhetoric and composition historiography, argues for the importance of diverse institutional microhistories, and argues that the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries offer rich lessons for contemporary classroom practice. The study brings alive the voices of black, female, rural, Southern, and first-generation college students and their instructors, effectively linking these histories to the history of rhetoric and writing. Appendices include excerpts of important and rarely seen primary source material, allowing readers to experience in fuller detail the voices captured in this work.

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