In May of 1963, Life Magazine published several remarkable photographic images of Elijah Muhammed, Malcolm X, and other Nation of Islam members. Some of those images, especially those of Malcolm X, have achieved iconic status in the history of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement. One full-page image is particularly memorable in its depiction of a paralyzed William Rogers, seated in a wheelchair and apparently leaning in to listen to someone outside the frame, with Malcolm standing and orating behind. Both men are holding up Muslim newspapers with the clearly visible headline, “SEVEN UNARMED NEGROES SHOT IN COLD BLOOD BY LOS ANGELES POLICE” (Parks 24). Rogers himself, one learns from the caption on the opposite page, had been shot by police bullets in Los Angeles. These images appeared on the heels of Life's coverage, earlier in the month, of riots in Birmingham, Alabama, and a growing impatience nationwide with the country's continuing racial injustices.

Accompanying the images, which were taken by the veteran Life photographer Gordon Parks, was a report by Parks on the Nation of Islam, written from his own perspective. The article was introduced in the Editor’s Note by George P. Hunt, who wrote an entrée to Parks as a man who had grown up in a largely hopeless situation in rural Kansas where racism forced a black man to fight for basic dignity (3). As one who turned the “violence and bitterness” inside into hard work, Parks is portrayed as a man whose varied talents as photographer, music composer, poet, and novelist developed due to his own considerable efforts (Hunt 3). Parks's autobiographical novel, The Learning Tree, published later in 1963, and his several later memoirs, including A Choice of Weapons, narrate in detail his own versions of his development as an artist.

Here I’d like to consider Parks’s reportorial photographs and accompanying personal essay, “What Their Cry Means to Me,” as an act of publishing with implications for the teaching of written composition. To consider his published text is to note how its fixity stands at an intersection of complex racial, commercial, and artistic forces, a nexus that both creates and closes off spaces for meaningful expression. By stepping into this particular writing space, Parks asserted a power afforded by painful news events in the country that had reached the pages of the popular magazines of the time. His background as a first-rate Life news photographer—a profession that involved
documenting, but ostensibly not participating in such events—became all the more powerful in this instance when he joined his photography with a self-authored text. Parks-as-writer reflected a larger reality of increased opportunity for authorship in general, a development that might be connected to the progression of modernity. According to Walter Benjamin,

At any moment the reader is ready to turn into a writer. As expert, which he had to become willy-nilly in an extremely specialized work process, even if only in some minor respect, the reader gains access to authorship. . . . Thus, the distinction between author and public is about to lose its basic character. (232)

Parks-the-commercial-photographer (or “reader” of events) in this vein became Parks-the-writer, an author operating in a world of texts that immediately involved him in ways that he had only partial control over, as with us all.

I take note of Parks's rare foray into journalistic writing in order to highlight his courage, but especially its relevance. In a moment when the Civil Rights movement was being pulled in different directions, especially with the powerful public speaking of Malcolm X that now drew interviews with him and articles about him in the popular media, Parks's writing in *Life* was tantamount to stepping onto a stage in which the drama had already reached such a pitch that his words might sway the millions of magazine readers in a particular direction. What impact he had, however, is difficult to ascertain, at least in part because of the ways his essay mapped onto the wider net of mass-publishing interests. A closer look at Parks's act of publishing in *Life* in May 1963 demonstrates how mass-market publishing at this time pushed and pulled important social texts such as Parks's article through the net of commercial interests, with the significant result of diluting or negating their meaning. In 1963, the immediate context of periodical publishing was changing, as smaller publications of the alternative and underground press would in the next few years gain appeal for disenchanted writers, artists, and activist readers seeking relevant, passionate outlets for their work.

This changing publication scene stood in sharp contrast to courses in college composition. Writers in these courses read published texts in textbooks, but students were seldom encouraged to approach their own writing with the idea that it might be serious enough to publish or even place into dialogue with already published work. Robert Connors argues that the field's attention to writing process issues in the 60's, especially in the work of James McCrimmon, belied an underlying resistance to change at the level of composition textbooks (104-05). College students themselves, Connors points out, started to look beyond the easy formulas of textbooks in this “time of Relevance” (105). Donald Stewart, in studying the textbooks of this period, notices how new rhetorical theories of the time do not find
their way into 6O's textbooks, which remained stubbornly resistant to the “assaults” on the then-dominant current-traditional notion of rhetoric (Stewart 172). No textbooks seem to have incorporated D. Gordon Rohman and Alfred Wlecke's work on invention, for example, which suggested that the reading of good-prose models would not accomplish anything other than an ability to evaluate the relative quality of a finished work. Rohman and Wlecke's aim, teaching students how to write such a text through a process of imitating the “creative principle of discovery itself” (qtd. in Stewart 172), was notably absent from student textbooks (Stewart 172). In a similar vein, Kathleen E. Welch argues that textbooks hold a power based in a “felt naturalness” which is really a shared ideology (shared by teachers and students alike) that assumes the ability of textbooks to instruct with models of prose and rhetorical rules that govern that prose. One strategy to counter this ideology, Welch argues, is to reduce the importance that textbooks hold in composition courses in favor of the activity of students producing texts in order to improve their own writing (271).

My interest, then, is to begin to recover a sense of textual production that has as its purpose a sharing with a public. I don’t go so far as to describe how to go about producing these texts; rather, my goal here is the more modest, but perhaps more difficult, one of starting to re-imagine the possibilities at the point of thinking about how student text production fits into a wider scene of publication, including popular and artistic/literary venues. These venues hold out the possibility of relevance in a way that connects Composition to a world of working writers who compose in situations that overlap with issues, concerns, and artistic developments that intersect with student lives. Thinking with students about the published work of the journalist, the artist, the writer, as text that has been entered into the criss-crossing lines of interests, passions, and attempts to enact justice (or injustice) offers writing instruction a richer notion of what it means to publish one’s work. Students should consider these texts in their scenes of construction, those difficult, messy venues in which writing enters conversations—that bear all the difficulties of communication encountered in a world of interested participants—in order to gain a more sophisticated understanding of publication.

While for most student writers, splashy picture magazines were not available in 1963 as outlets for publishing their own work, they nonetheless offered one window on events that shaped lives. Highly polished photographic images, writing that reported but did not often recognize the need—let alone advocate—for change, and an assumption of life as endless consumption of goods steered the attention of many young people. Smaller publications offered the possibility of more intellectually challenging publication, but were not without their own complications. Some little magazines faced crises of audience and purpose, partly from a perhaps inevitable drift away from engaging the compelling ideas and issues on which they were founded.
Most composition classes, however, stood stubbornly outside of the range of publishing outlets that might have afforded opportunity for students to learn how texts exist in social and commercial contexts that play a role in determining meaning and participation.

1. The Picture Magazines

Occupying the role set out by Hunt, Parks approaches his assignment with an announced skepticism of the Nation of Islam’s (NOI) separatist beliefs and their insistence on immediate change. He also wonders if his own success in the “white world” had cost him some objectivity (22). Nevertheless, as he gets to know Malcolm X, he finds himself agreeing with the premises of stubborn racism and injustice and the proper response by blacks. For example, in response to X’s characterization of black leaders who advocated for slow change—as having sat on the “hot stove” for too long with “burned behinds”—Parks reflects that the news of “interminable suffering” from the South made X’s words “take on more meaning, more truth” (22). For Parks, however, every move closer to Muslim belief and passion makes him re-examine his own experience that led him to this moment. So, a mere two paragraphs after the hot stove insight, Parks calls a halt to his “corrosive thoughts” (22), his growing agreement with Malcolm’s words, and asks, “Was I becoming too receptive to the Muslim doctrine? I began prodding myself into a more argumentative mood, re-examining my feelings so that I might honestly assess the moral convictions I had developed so painfully through the years” (22). He then offers a litany of white figures—a photographer, a Southerner, a Spanish painter, a Jew, and a Dutchman from Colorado—who had helped him become a successful photographer and artist. He concludes that his experience around the world with all types of people have convinced him of the “universality of man” (23). Toward the end of the piece, Parks announces that he will not join the Muslims, but, in the event of violence, he acknowledges that his blackness will position him beside them in the fight (79).

As a public statement, Parks’s words, along with his photographs, offer Life’s many white readers, numbered in the millions, a powerful alternative position that is presumably easier to accept than the views of the NOI. As in the photograph, the confrontational words of Elijah Muhammed (the newspaper was called Muhammed Speaks) and of Malcolm X are captured inside a frame that is not their own; it is instead the frame of the narrative of a black man who has white friends and a belief in integration. Such a tactic does not, however, settle the way that this text, fixed in publication, projects meaning. It is worth tracing some of the paths in order to begin to examine how textual meaning locates itself within a web of contexts, or what Jeff Rice has recently called “networks” in relation to new media (131).
Parks's written text and photographs gain a different sense of urgency, for example, when viewed as following other reports on the Civil Rights Movement published by *Life* earlier in the month, including pictures of blacks being blasted by water cannons and attacked by dogs. Just how the text changes is uncertain, however, and raises possibilities for interpretation. Does Parks's writing gain further persuasiveness as a rational response to what seems to be a heightening of violence by whites? Or is it possible that readers dismiss Parks because of the overwhelming evidence of brutality by whites?

Meaning becomes more uncertain yet when one places the advertisements for cameras from the same *Life* issue within the same frame of study as Parks's text. In one full-page advertisement, Kodak playfully directs readers with the slogan, “Don’t spend your summer weekends—save them with an easy-to-use Kodak camera!” Illustrations of leisure activities at the beach and in the trout stream show just how to go about this. Do readers make sense of Parks's photographs, and of Parks himself, differently when photography itself has become part of enjoyable middle-class existence? Richard Ohmann has shown that one of the main tasks of editors of mass-market magazines was to establish an enduring audience by presenting repeated and predictable pictures of life (151). In this instance, the negation of Parks’s photographs gains support through the assurance that everyday life for the well-off will continue to frame a reality apart from any difficult issues and the long hot summer to come.

Moving from inside *Life Magazine* to a wider field, Parks's text inflects differently again when placed beside other “like” texts in picture magazines of 1963. Malcolm X's famous *Playboy Magazine* interview came out the same month as the *Life* piece, and featured Malcolm answering questions at length. The interview itself, conducted by Alex Haley, presented a thoughtful, argumentative, and well-informed X. At one point, in response to the charge of race hatred, X responds by talking of how blacks are learning for the first time in 400 years the real truth of how the white man “brainwashed the black man, kept him ignorant of his true history, robbed him of his self-confidence. . . . In fact, Mr. Muhammed teaches that if the present generation of whites would study their own race in the light of their true history, they would be anti-white themselves” (54). Malcolm X himself pushes the outer edges of *Playboy*'s own apparent nod to relevance in granting him the interview. When asked what motives he ascribed to *Playboy* in giving him the opportunity to speak, he answers, “I think you want to sell magazines. I’ve never seen a sincere white man, not when it comes to helping black people. Usually, things like this are done by white people to benefit themselves” (57). Attenuating the *Playboy* interview, which had promised to publish Malcolm’s responses verbatim (Haley 365), was the 500-word lead-in that pairs Muslims with “white supremacists” as “two inimical exponents of racism and segregation” (53). The interview
itself is announced by Playboy editors as "both an eloquent statement and a damning self-indictment of one noxious facet of rampant racism" (53). Overall, the lead to the interview, as with Parks's more humane text in Life, serves as foil to the radical Malcolm X.

Earlier in the year, a third report on the NOI published in the Saturday Evening Post, "The Black Merchants of Hate," also pushed Malcolm X's activism into a space construed as, first and foremost, dangerous. Written by Alex Haley and Alfred Balk, a self-announced "biracial team" (68) with an apparent claim to objectivity, the piece features a militant Malcolm X with a narrative that invokes fear of the NOI. They characterize NOI as "fanatical" at least three times in the article, and the NOI's training of its members is said to be carried out through a "tabloid newspaper, Muhammed Speaks, and hate-filled magazines and pamphlets" (70). Complicating present-day understanding of this article, historian Manning Marable has suggested in a 2004 interview with Amy Goodman of Democracy Now! that Balk had collaborated with the FBI, probably with Haley's knowledge, to get information that would paint X as dangerous and have the hoped-for effect of isolating him from other leaders in the Civil Rights Movement. The Autobiography of Malcolm X: As Told to Alex Haley emerged the next year—the result of a publisher reading the Playboy interview, according to Haley's Epilogue (385).

Haley also writes in the Epilogue that Malcolm X had come to see the power of the periodical media and how he encouraged articles about him for the sake of the NOI (385). X was hot press in '63, a newsmaker with a message to spread to the public, but this also meant that he was considered a commodity sure to sell magazines. Predictably, perhaps, his powerful message was mediated by the mass publications that sold his words and image. In the case of Life in '63, Parks and X became the same text, one asserting change, the other undoing that assertion, and the pattern was readable across the large magazines that covered the NOI. In a sort of publishing battle royal, as in Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man, this fight was full of confusion, deceit, and interests that turn out to reify white privilege by neutralizing change. As a study in purpose, what a wonderful assignment the politics of publishing in predominantly white-owned magazines might have made for a composition class thinking about what moves people to write and publish, and with what consequences.

2. From Little Magazines to the Underground Press

If the relevance of content was difficult to assert through the various filters of large circulation magazines, then the less commercial world of small magazines faced a challenge of staying close to their founding principles as the world changed around them. In '63, Reed Whittemore, Professor of English at Carleton College and devoted scholar of what were known in the
literary world as the Little Magazines, published a pamphlet in the University of Minnesota Press series, an extended essay that sounded a note of doubt about the possibilities of such magazines continuing to publish, on the one hand, and remaining relevant even if they were able to continue. Financing such magazines had always been a chancy venture, but Whittemore was more concerned with their fading relevance. He begins his study by noting the appealing simplicity of the little magazine: "It takes very little to start a little magazine. As a minimum a secondhand typewriter, some paper, and access to a mimeograph machine will do. The new editor can write the thing himself and send it out to his friends" (5). With the '63 invention of the first desktop copy machine, the Xerox 813, publishing on a small scale held even greater possibility.

Conceptually, though, what distinguishes the little magazine for Whittemore is its "seriousness" (5), a term meant in opposition to the commercial magazines whose seriousness applies mainly to selling magazines for profit. To demonstrate his point, Whittemore highlights the enduring exemplar for little magazines, Poetry, founded by Harriet Monroe in 1912 and publisher of many of the most important poets of the early 20th Century. T. S. Eliot, H. D., and Ezra Pound had all published there, and all loosely held to no less of an ideal than to save the best of a collapsed civilization. As Pound, an avid supporter of the journal, stated,

My problem is to keep alive a certain group of advancing poets, to set the arts in their rightful place as the acknowledged guide and lamp of civilization. The arts must be supported in preference to the church and scholarship. Artists first, then, if necessary, professors and parsons. (qtd. in Whittemore 10)

In Whittemore's view, Poetry's high purpose gradually but steadily narrowed into an enterprise of publishing poets who believed in poetry exclusively as self-referential art and/or as a technically demanding exercise of language. Pound's award of the Bollingen Prize for poetry in 1949 signaled to Whittemore that little magazines had taken a wrong turn. In an era of increasing social and cultural change, he argued that little magazines such as Poetry had lost their way by maintaining an allegiance to literature that did not engage immediate issues in the world. Pound himself had engaged social issues by embracing fascism toward the end of WWII, a fact that Whittemore suggests might have given pause to those awarding the Bollingen. In his view, the award was given to Pound's Pisan Cantos based on technical merit and formal features of the poetry, criteria that operated with personal allegiances among the judges. Seriousness for Poetry, Whittemore suggests, rested on a commitment to an ahistorical notion of culture; good poetry was good poetry no matter the subject matter. In their own ways, other little magazines that appeared to engage politics, even the Partisan Review,
which was founded on communist principles, also asserted independence from an engaged political program in Whittemore’s analysis (18).

Whittemore conjectures that the founding impetus of little magazines—to take responsibility for something important, whether that was civilization, historical process, or language itself—was a moment whose time may have passed, if it was ever real at all. The result was isolation of the small literary magazines and perhaps of literature itself. In 1965, at a gathering of magazine editors sponsored by the Library of Congress, Whittemore went so far as suggesting a merger of little magazines with distinctly different kinds of magazines, a marriage of his own Carleton Miscellany, for example, with the Public Administration Review, in order to re-capture some of the relevance that overly technical and highly specialized magazines now had. He proposed implementation of his idea on a small scale, “Two-by-Two,” as his talk was called, with the goal of dialogue between highly specialized publications. These “[e]xperiments in synthesis” (52), as he termed the proposal, would not proceed with the idea of immediate cross-venue publication: “it would be a mistake to think of the proposed dialogues as primarily, or at least at first, publishing ventures. They would have to begin as educational ventures” (52).

Whittemore’s call for relevant and engaged publishing based on crossing lines of specialization did not catch on with his peers, and it is unclear whether anything came of his proposal. His passion for small presses addressing relevant issues was taken up, however, in the underground press, which was about to explode in interest level and numbers of publications. In August of 1965, Max Scherr published the first issue of the Berkeley Barb, a paper that he put together out of his living room. Its first issue announced that it hoped to “nettle that amorphous but thick-headed establishment that so often nettles us—and to spur into action some of our own” (qtd. in Peck 30). Addressing dissent regarding the Vietnam War, local social issues, racial injustice, and, in subsequent issues, everything countercultural associated with UC Berkeley, the Barb and other underground papers engaged young people and moved them to act. Although the politics and reporting of underground presses have often been characterized as naïve, their sense of commitment, energy, and attention to the local captured student attention in ways that large presses could not.

**Conclusion**

According to Connors, one of the major textbooks of the era, McCrimmon’s *Writing with a Purpose*, introduced a new section in the 1963 edition that heralded the process movement in composition instruction. Composition in ’63 might have looked not only at the world of student texts as constructed, historical objects, but also at how that process was
part of the larger world of published texts. While textbooks of the time contained model readings for study, assignments rarely considered those models—in terms of content, form, and the process that produced them, in relation to what might have been found in periodicals. An exception of sorts, *Rhetoric and Reading: Order and Idea*, by T. J. Kallsen and D. E. McCoy, emphasized the idea of purpose, as with McCrimmon, but also included several reading selections taken from popular and academic magazines. Generally, these articles appeared without context, and assignments were written for ideas that students drew from the articles. In the case of Edmund S. Morgan's "What Every Yale Freshman Should Know," first published in 1960 in *Saturday Review* and reprinted in the textbook, however, the authors directed students to treat Morgan's ideas about "curiosity" as the basis for a "light essay" to be written for "assumed publication" in *This Week Magazine* (123-24). Leaving aside the artificiality of the assignment, one might imagine that teachers would emphasize the importance of developing a fit purpose for this assignment. Placing the original text under study for its purpose—as well as for how it fit the magazine's look, advertising, and audience expectations—would have added to students' knowledge about what it means to publish in this kind of venue, and in this particular venue. Such knowledge could have added to the intent of the student authors to produce a piece, with some meaning, that might have actually been published.

Going to the periodicals themselves also could have afforded students an opportunity to join education in writing to events that mattered to them, and that might have helped them navigate a contentious, ideologically conflicted time. Seeing that the newspaper *Muhammed Speaks*, for example, was read by hundreds of thousands of readers might have shown how impassioned writing moved people to change their lives. Seeing that new, grassroots papers like the *Berkeley Barb* offered opportunity to write and read in new ways that challenged so much of what was observable in the mainstream press could have offered students a way to move their writing to a local press that filled a need for the time. Barry Miles, a writer for the *East Village Other* (*EVO*) in the mid-Sixties, recalls its start-up as an attempt to "fill the cultural gap between the increasingly staid old-left Greenwich Village, and the edgy, radical East Village" (6). Seeing how the dominant news press swallowed challenging ideas—such as those of Malcolm X, in rhetoric that ranged from almost unseemly opposition from within the black community to outright mischaracterizations—might have educated students in the various perils of publication.

Today, self-publishing opportunities through blogs, 'zines, and other formats hold enormous possibilities, as well as complexities, for writing instruction. Recent work such as the book *Public Works: Student Writing as Public Text*, edited by Emily Isaacs and Phoebe Jackson, has begun to
look more closely at the politics and history of student texts considered as published texts. Charles Moran, for example, in writing of the tradition of student publishing in the writing program at the University of Massachusetts, finds enormous value in finding “safe spaces” for students to take risks with their writing and publish it for others in the class (43). He also recognizes how “risk” is not evenly distributed among students who publish personal writing (43), as power imbalances extend along a line through history and into our classes. Following, with our students, this line outside of the classroom to include the larger universe of published periodicals in the study of writing can help us imagine opportunities for students to join their writing to projects of their own making—and to consider, and possibly influence, how their ideas will enter the network of meaning constituted through publication.

Teaching publication, and about publication, to writing students involves understanding a process of constantly shifting representation. Anne Frances Wysocki and Johndan Johnson-Eilola have encouraged new understandings of our relationships with communication technologies, asserting an understanding of literacy “as not a skill but a process of situating and resituating representation in social spaces” (367). Publication, as I have discussed it here, involves a similar awareness of how production technologies—but also the interests that make them possible and powerful—are part of the network of texts that make up our own. As Parks’s experience demonstrates, a text entered into a public arena already holds meaning and reverberates further meaning. As with mass-market magazine texts, so with more current digital texts. Blog entries, Facebook representations, ‘zines posted to a web site—all these hook into different technologies, audiences, and written and visual formats. Helping students understand how texts convey meaning for different audiences with different purposes helps to make publication in a digital world a more informed, and possibly more relevant, act.

Relevance for writing studies is only partly about the possibility of dealing with immediately pressing social issues. However precisely a piece of writing finds social relevance, it has already found its relevance in the choices, material advantages, and personal relationships a writer brings to the moment (or that created the moment for the possible publication of that piece). While it is true that both Parks and Whittemore embraced a sense of social relevance, they also demonstrated relevance in the way that they acted in their separate spheres of publishing. Writing an honest appraisal of what he found in the NOI and the compelling Malcolm X, Parks pushed the public conversation on racial justice by writing a journalistic text. But his act is also relevant for the way that he found his way into print. Parks created an opportunity to share his writing by extending his work as a photojournalist into a venue already offering the possibility of published writing. This opportunity was all the more powerful as he
joined his own photographs to his writing and furthered his interests as a writer/artist. Whittemore's attempt to re-engage journal editors in more immediately relevant, and not overly specialized, publication is also an act of relevance in the way that it shows us how to pay attention to what our texts signify and support, and to the limits of control over texts. As we teach our students to think and act as writers/publishers in an increasingly digital world, we would do well to remember Whittemore and Parks for their thoughtful actions in their own networks of publishing interests.

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