Stanley, Jane. ***The Rhetoric of Remediation: Negotiating Entitlement and Access to Higher Education*****. University of Pittsburgh, 2010.**

Reviewed by Gretchen Flesher Moon

Jane Stanley contributes an insightful history of the rhetoric surrounding Subject A at the University of California from its inception as "Subject 1: English" in 1869 to 2006. Her astute argument is built on almost one hundred and forty years' worth of committee reports, task force reports, faculty senate minutes, letters and editorials; she also draws on histories of the University of California, notably those of Clark Kerr, J.A. Douglass, W.J. Rorabaugh, and G.R. Stewart. She argues that students labeled "remedial" and admitted on condition that they measure up in English composition serve an "important political–that is to say rhetorical" function for the university and for the state (6). These students, as they are represented, have allowed competing demands for democratic access and elite stature to be (in Stanley's recurring trope) simultaneously embraced and disdained by the university. The chapter titles, each drawn from a phrase characterizing UC students in various documents, chart mainly disdain: "The Unfortunate, the Lazy, and the Feeble-Minded"; "They Can Neither Read nor Write"; "Beautiful but Dumb"; "The Hordes"; "The Semi-Literate"; "The Technically Qualified." Stanley's concluding chapter title, "The Disdainful Embrace," sums up the rhetoric of remediation.

Early on, Californians wanted their university to bring culture, enlightenment, and amenities that would attract more families to settle and civilize the frontier state of prospectors and adventurers. The university's founders were happy to comply, Stanley finds, and advertised a classical curriculum more rigorous than those in eastern states. At the same time, the university depended on taxpayer support, and needed to fill classes. The university, perhaps less happily, again complied by accepting students who filled a class but who were not west coast Ivy

Leaguers. Marked from the outset as second class in the university, yet making up about half of those enrolled in courses, the disdainfully admitted student allowed Professor Charles Mills Gayley, chair of the English Department, to conclude in 1895 that while California students worked heroically, they were still inadequate. On the national stage, through publication in the *Dial* and William Payne's *English in American Universities*, Gayley initiated the rhetorical feat of proving high standards by citing failure. At almost the same time, UC President Horace Davis drew on the English department's record of failures at the entrance exam to convince the legislature that the state of California would never advance if the university wasn't able to raise its low standards–and that a mil tax devoted to it would help California succeed. Thus, Stanley observes, Gayley and Davis made nearly opposite assertions about standards based on the common basis of student deficiency. Deficient students, as they were definitely figured, were both a problem to be solved and a cause for supporting the university.

Stanley proceeds to trace chronologically the continuation of these two basic rhetorical lines into the twenty-first century. She follows three historical narratives: the major state and national events that shape the California economy, the history of the University of California at Berkeley in its quest to be an elite institution and the only UC campus, and the history of Subject A–the reading and writing examination. At times the Subject A story is submerged for long stretches, but when it resurfaces, it functions convincingly in the "disdainful embrace" that Stanley has identified.

The state and national history provides a backdrop for understanding changing attitudes toward students and their writing. In the second half of the nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries, California was still a frontier and so considered inferior to the East Coast. The depression was disastrous for Californians, and labor strikes in the state convinced the legislature that higher education could enhance graduates' job prospects as well as interpret democracy to society, since Californians with jobs would

be less susceptible to Communist influences. World War II brought jobs and money to California and research contracts and enhanced graduate programs to the university. The post-war period brought veteran hordes on the GI Bill to campus and more red-scares to California in general and to the university in particular. The Free Speech movement, the protests against the Viet Nam War, and student activism in the sixties convinced large sectors of the public that universities were responsible for a decay in moral and intellectual standards; the inability to speak and write English "correctly" is ever, it seems, an indicator of moral weakness. In the last three decades of the twentieth century, demographic changes in California meant that the student body was increasingly made up of students whose first language was not English.

At most points in this chronology, political and economic contexts are clearly linked to the rhetoric of remediation and the history of Subject A. But when Stanley turns to an FBI investigation that involved the Subject A exam, her study turns from a study about remediation into a compelling story. Subject A was implicated when J. Edgar Hoover discovered that one of the topics students could choose to write on was: "What are the dangers to a democracy of a national police organization, like the FBI, which operates secretly and is unresponsive to public criticism?" (98). Stanley notes that there are no records of how many students chose to write on this topic, nor on another topic appearing two years later that went unnoticed by the FBI: "Arming to protect peace cannot help but produce war. Discuss and evaluate this statement" (99). As Chapter 7 shows, these topics were followed by less politically provocative questions, with instructions focused more on correctness and coherence rather than evidence of thinking.

But they also provide an example of quiet wit in Stanley's writing. Citing a 2002 *San Francisco Chronicle* special section on the UC Red Scare by S. Rosenfeld, which quotes a report to Hoover on how this topic illustrates the university's decline in morality and patriotism, Stanley recounts the labeling of Professor Everett

Jones of UCLA–mistakenly identified as the author–and his wife as "'fanatical adherents to communism,' Professor Jones, having 'inherited leftist sympathies from his father, a Unitarian minister.'" Stanley continues, "UCLA's Chancellor Knudson took no action against Jones's genes, which is just as well, because the FBI later discovered that it was actually Berkeley's own Professor James Lynch who had authored the offending topic" (98). While the FBI put seventy-two members of the Berkeley faculty on its Security Index of political threats who were to be detained during crisis, "Professor Lynch was never detained on Angel Island. Neither was he dismissed from his post, nor even disbarred from the Subject A Committee" (98).

Like Mary Soliday, whose *The Politics of Remediation* (2002) offers more parallels than the self-consciously parallel title, Stanley situates her institutional history of the *rhetoric* of remediation in the cycles of state economics and university enrollments. UC Presidents take leading roles in much of her analysis of university history because of the ongoing struggle they wage with the legislature for funding and the attendant delicate balance to be achieved between the goals of the university to be a world-class institution of scholarship and research, and to be the vehicle for the practical advancement of the citizenry of California. (Wheeler is the principal actor in Chapter 3, Sproul in Chapters 4-6, sharing the stage with Chancellor Kerr in Chapter 6, who is then President Kerr in Chapter 7; thereafter, presidents are less central to the argument.) Since the Subject A examination continues to provide evidence of student deficiency, it continues to be rhetorically useful. Stanley notes interesting embellishments of the rhetorical trope and new applications tied to historical context, but the notion of the "disdainful embrace" applies throughout.

For example, President Wheeler (1899-1929) faced a growing demand for specialized education in the progressive era–as well as a continued 50% failure rate for the Subject A exam. He predictably reported higher standards and publicized a demand for students to pass Subject A before they could be granted junior

standing. Stanley finds evidence of exactly two students who were held on a "limited status." His real challenge was to continue to assert high standards and high demand and to find permanent budget lines per student.

A particularly interesting complication in California history is the relationship between the university, the junior colleges, and the growing demand for four-year state colleges. Robert Sproul (President 1929-1958) argued vigorously against the proliferation of four-year colleges that would siphon off higher education funding to counties and away from the single University of California. He cultivated an alliance with the junior colleges against additional state colleges, but failed in 1935. World War II brought him an opportunity to again assert the dominance of the Berkeley campus: Sproul successfully tied the university's fortunes to defense contracts and, indeed, the wartime economy brought great prosperity to California generally. Given the significance of the theme of Berkeley's elite status for the first half of her book, it is a bit surprising to read that when Sproul argued for UC Santa Barbara to be the liberal arts "Williams of the West" for California undergraduates, he was trying to preserve prestige for *two* UC campuses, Berkeley and Los Angeles (68). At no earlier point in her narrative has Stanley acknowledged the establishment of UCLA in 1919.This oversight does no harm to her analysis of the rhetoric of remediation; it perhaps suggests the difficulty of maintaining state and national, university, and composition narratives in a slim volume. On the whole, she does so very well.

The coherence of the three histories is clearest in the final four chapters, where Subject A is also most continually in view. Beginning in the late 60s, with not only the enrollment of a large wave of Asian American students but also the establishment of the Asian American Studies Program in the Ethnic Studies Department, Subject A faced new challenges in accommodating second language students and students of color. The eventual solution was a new set of courses, SANSE–Subject A for Non-native Speakers of English–with its own two levels of preparatory courses. Just as the farm kids of the late nineteenth century were

poor students, but our own, the university was found to disdainfully embrace the low-income, minority, and immigrant students who were its responsibility, however underprepared by their high schools to write in college. Drawing on an 1884 diary entry from Professor Cornelius Beach Bradley and a 1984 Report on the Status of Remedial Instruction in the University of California, Stanley's conclusion about their similarity is stunning:

> In 1884, the university practiced "vigilance" in overseeing the efforts of the state's few high schools to prepare students for university-level work, and sighed that it had sometimes to accept "the unfortunate, the lazy, and feeble-minded." In 1984, the university underscored the importance of partnerships with secondary schools to increase the level of students' preparation, and sighed that "until these efforts are successful, the university must continue to provide remedial instruction for inadequately prepared minority students." (124)

In fact, Asian American students constituted a fourth of the admitted Berkeley freshman class in 1984, and the administration's decision to redirect these students to other UC campuses drew scrutiny of more aspects of ethnic, racial, and cultural sensitivity at Berkeley than simply Subject A. But it is clear the Subject A is always directly implicated. Perhaps Stanley's conclusion is not so stunning. Almost thirty years later, the rhetorical "sighs" sound sadly, unremarkably current.

The rhetoric of remediation is deployed in a continuous history of blaming secondary education and proposing to "partner" with high schools by dictating a preparatory curriculum that would finally free the university from the burden of teaching students to write in college. It always presumes a golden age from which we have somehow declined and to which, with the cooperation of secondary schools, we will return. It spawns numerous reports and little action. One action, the visionary Prose Improvement Project led by Josephine Miles and Benjamin Lehman, was an

early 50s predecessor of writing in the disciplines that floundered after a few years because, Stanley concludes, faculty in other departments really didn't want to devote time to working with the English Department TAs who would actually take the primary responsibility for teaching writing in the disciplines, and because the Chancellor wouldn't fund it.

The rhetoric of remediation raises–and dismisses–the same questions repeatedly: Should Subject A be an admissions test or a placement test? Should it be taught on campus or outsourced? Can students who transfer in from the junior colleges be tested? Most notably, it raises the question of how it is that historically, one-third to one-half of admitted students can be called "remedial" in writing, especially when they have met all other entrance requirements and are judged among the top tier of students graduating from high school, since 1960–in fact, in the top 12.5%. This question was partly answered in a 1989 redefinition of Subject A as "an introduction to the language and methods of the university" (129) bearing academic credit and the establishment of the College Writing Programs as its home. But even now, Stanley notes two further instances of the disdainful embrace. Writing courses and faculty are treated as "conditioned"–as accepted into the university as less than worthy or fully privileged citizens. And, at the point in 2002 when her narrative concludes, a new set of complaints about declining skills in the writing of upper-division students seemed poised to repurpose the rhetoric.

In her brief and reflective conclusion, Stanley asks not only what her reading of the archives has meant for her and for Berkeley, but whether it has relevance to other institutions. She suspects that it is relevant, and I think that writing teachers in public institutions and even in private colleges like my own will recognize rhetorical patterns and approve her title, which is, after all, not *A* but *The Rhetoric of Remediation*. I hope that they will also attend to the uses of archival materials that Stanley demonstrates so artfully and persuasively. This book, as a case study, would make an excellent text for a course in research methods for PhD

students in Rhetoric and Composition. It also stands as testimony to the importance of maintaining complete archives. While examples of the student writing that faculty, administrators, legislators, parents, and journalists decry are not necessary for an analysis of the rhetoric about deficient students, Stanley notes at several points that there *are* no examples. We want to hear from the students who are so persistently represented as unfortunate problems. This is a deficiency that we can do something about and, in the era of Blackboard and Sakai, presumably are already remedying. Jane Stanley has written an important history and has made her case compellingly, crafting a cautionary tale for another era of economic crisis.

Work Cited

Soliday, Mary. *The Politics of Remediation*. Pittsburgh: U of P Press, 2002. Print.