In August of 2017, attorneys for the State of Michigan, which has had control over Detroit Public Schools (DPS) since 1999, urged the Federal Court in Detroit to dismiss a lawsuit filed by seven DPS students that claims that the State has failed to provide these students with an adequate opportunity to read and write. In the end, the court has ruled that the State is not obliged to provide students access to literacy under the 14th amendment of the US Constitution, noting that literacy is not necessary for citizens’ access to liberty and justice. I take up this litigation in order to think about how the notion of literacy gets framed in the courts and by our government and how the interdisciplinary field of literacy studies might respond to these legal conversations. Moreover, I also take this issue in order to consider Wayne State’s responsibilities as an urban research institution in the heart of Detroit to intervene in the literacy education of its local community.

Dr. Clay Walker is a Senior Lecturer in the English Department where he routinely teaches courses general education writing courses, including Basic Writing, Intermediate Writing, and Technical Writing. Dr Walker also works a number of summer programs, including APEX’s Foundations of Writing course and TRIO’s Upward Bound program for 11th and 12th grade students. Dr. Walker’s research is influenced by recent cognitive studies related to reading and writing and focuses on literacy studies and social justice issues.