

# ACTIVISM AND RHETORIC

ROUTLEDGE

Theories and Contexts for  
Political Engagement

SECOND EDITION



EDITED BY JONGHWA LEE  
AND SETH KAHN



# Activism and Rhetoric

The second edition of this formative collection offers analysis of the work rhetoric plays in the principles and practices of today's culture of democratic activism.

Editors JongHwa Lee and Seth Kahn—and their diverse contributors working in communication and composition studies both within and outside academia—provide explicit articulation of how activist rhetoric differs from the kinds of deliberative models that rhetoric has exalted for centuries, contextualized through and by contributors' everyday lives, work, and interests. New to this edition are attention to Black Lives Matter, the transgender community, social media environments, globalization, and environmental activism.

Simultaneously challenging and accessible, *Activism and Rhetoric: Theories and Contexts for Political Engagement* is a must-read for students and scholars who are interested in or actively engaged in rhetoric, composition, political communication, and social justice.

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# Foreword: Grounding Activism from a Rhetorical Perspective

Raymie E. McKerrow

Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.

Karl Marx, 1845

There are as many senses of what it means to be “active” as an academic professional as there are those who so engage. In this second edition of *Activism and Rhetoric*, the co-editors and contributors seek to explain who and what they are and how they perform as activists without setting boundaries on their roles. The result is a wide-ranging exploration into the many ways individuals who answer the call to utilize their knowledge of rhetoric *and* skills honed in classrooms as educators in making a difference. In different ways, each evinces a strong commitment to action that is avowedly political.

The co-editors’ Introduction outlines in more detail their purpose in putting this collection together and overviews the changes in the new edition and contents of each section. My goal in what follows is to provide a more theoretically nuanced overview of the importance of grounding an activist’s performance in a rhetorical perspective. The first step will be to set the foundation for a relationship between theory and praxis. The second is to offer a concise review of extant approaches to activism within and across the discipline, including references to *participatory critical rhetoric*, *communication activism research*, and *communication activism pedagogy*. This review will assist in assessing the contribution this specific text makes to the intellectual conversation regarding how one marshals expertise and skills in engaging issues that one is called to offer their time, talent, and, at times, treasure.

## Theory and Praxis

Frey and Palmer provide an entry into the position advocated here. In arguing that present scholarship privileges theory over application, they suggest that scholars are “viewed as spectators who look at and contemplate what occurs without trying to affect it. The privileging of theory, thus, has led to a

hands-off approach to community-based research and teaching” (4). Ironically, they follow this claim with a collection of 15 essays that provide evidence to the contrary. Prior to that, Frey and Carragee edited three volumes (2007a, 2007b, 2012) that advance a particular perspective on what should constitute “application” from an activist perspective. Whether hands-off or hands-on, it is clear that activist work is continuing, irrespective of its level of acceptance within the academy.

The point I want to stress is this: theory is only useful to the extent that it actually assists in explaining something. Privileging theory absent its application diminishes its purpose as well as its potential influence. Application sans theory likewise diminishes the possibility that one actually knows why some actions work better than others. Theory grounds rhetorical practice, whether in the classroom, our institutions, the community, or in public spheres beyond the community with a broader potential to influence thought and action. If one adopts, for example, a Foucauldian perspective on power as pervasive within all relationships or a Ranciérian (2010) perspective on “the part that has no part,” makes a difference in how one formulates a response to the situation one encounters.

### Scholactivism

The above phrase is a neologism constructed to identify “scholar activists” across the academy (Ramsey). Whether from communication studies, media, rhetoric and composition, or another discipline, scholars are engaged in conveying what activist performance means to them. In the process, their preferences may appear to privilege one orientation over others as the “preferred” mode of operation. In particular, Carragee and Frey suggest that “engagement” has become what I would call a “wastebasket” word—one which, in their words, “has virtually lost all its substantive denotative meaning” (3975).<sup>1</sup> In the case of *communication activism research* (CAR), while Frey and his co-authors say all the right things about the importance of all forms of activism, it is clear that they prefer only that orientation which serves “social justice,” with a further narrowing to a focus on oppressed communities. To be more precise, this approach “emphasizes *interventions* by researchers that engage and change inequitable and unjust discourses and material conditions to foster social change” (Barge 4001). In responding to essays commenting on CAR, Frey and Carragee (“Seizing the Social Justice Opportunity”) note that while the responses are sympathetic, they “understate the degree to which CAR critiques CCCR [critical-cultural communication research] and ACR [applied communication research] (and other research)” (4028) for a failure to privilege a focus on direct involvement in activism that engages social justice. I am not suggesting this is an invalid or inappropriate focus or critique. I do want to underscore, as I think they would agree, that there are other issues that, while they may not fit this precise area of concern, are nonetheless worthy of attention. Ultimately, there is a tacit assertion—and

likely not their intent—that if you are not following this approach, you are not doing it right.

In their edited collection, *Teaching Communication Activism*, Frey and Palmer solidify their orientation toward achieving social justice by advocating what they term *communication activism pedagogy* (CAP). They note that CAP “teaches students how to use the communication knowledge and resources . . . to work together with community members to interview into and reconstruct unjust discourses in more just ways” (8) and go on to indicate that “CAP, of course, is designed, specifically, to aid oppressed and under-resourced communities, and activist groups and organizations working with those communities to secure social justice” (28). To their credit, they acknowledge the connection between theory and practice more explicitly in listing the advantages that instructors, students, communities, and the institutions represented gain by collaboratively working with those seeking ways to change social structures in ways that improve lives.

*Participatory critical rhetoric* (PCR) (Middleton, Hess, Endres, and Senda-Cook) is an approach that merges critical/rhetorical ethnography (Hess) with rhetorical field methods (Middleton, Senda-Cook, and Endres) in conducting research. PCR is a more open-ended research approach than CAR, as “the critic enters a naturalistic field in which rhetoric occurs in order to observe, participate with, document, and analyze that rhetoric in its embodied and emplaced instantiation” (xv). This form of engagement may be focused on social justice, or on other issues that are of concern within a community. While this approach may on occasion fit within Frey and colleagues’ more narrow definition of CAR, it is not limited to an academic activist’s direct involvement with others to provide assistance in collaboratively resolving a problem or, more precisely, advancing the cause of social justice.

As noted earlier, there are other approaches to activism that are currently underway. For example, Herbig and Hess advanced a more complex perspective they label “convergent critical rhetoric.” They attended Jon Stewart’s “Rally to Restore Sanity” and utilized interviews with participants plus taking their own video equipment to allow people to express their views on camera. They framed their written analysis from a critical rhetoric orientation. Their use of ethnography is derived from Hess’s “critical-rhetorical ethnography” approach. As he points out:

The method is designed to give rhetoricians an insider perspective on the lived advocacy of individuals and organizations that struggle to persuade in public for changes in policy, social life, or other issues that affect them. The method is not mere observation of advocacy but rather an embodiment and enactment of advocacy through direct participation. Critical-rhetorical ethnographers engage in a vernacular organization’s ideals and events, traveling with them to picket, to protest, to petition, or to perform. (128)



A 2016 text edited by McKinnon, Asen, Chávez, and Howard provides essays that focus broadly on theoretical/methodological issues as well as direct participation in the field. The editors note that “Field methods may include interviews, focus groups, observation, personal narrative, ethnography, autoethnography, oral history interviews, performance, thematic analysis, iterative analysis, grounded theory, and many other forms of data collection and analysis” (5). As I’ve noted in a recent review:

this text offers useful critical terminology or conceptual frames for analysis (e.g., imitatio, rhetorical scenes, both/neither, feeling rhetorical critic, phronetic orientation, co-presence, audiencing critic, holographic rhetoric). In addition, the essays, taken individually and as a whole, provide clear and compelling arguments for how different field methods enrich the possible conclusions that a critic might offer. (220)

There is one final consideration in concluding this review of rhetorical field options. One essential imperative is that whatever else we do in theorizing rhetorical activism, we cannot subsume all approaches under one conceptual frame, whether that frame be CAR, CAP, critical rhetoric, or any other potential synthesizing perspective. The primary reason for this caution is that where one comes from, the experiential frame one works from in approaching both theory and practice is a difference that makes a difference. Thus, while activism engaged from a decolonial or postcolonial (and these are discrete frames of reference) perspective might have elements that appear to fit within one of the above frames, placing them there does a disservice to the reasons such work was undertaken, and the insights that are advocated as a result of the work being done. Thus, unless the critic frames field work from within CAR or critical rhetoric, for example, it is injudicious to then assume the work “belongs” in a specific category, irrespective of the similarities.

### **The Rhetorical Perspective**

With the above caution in mind, it is time to consider the final issue: why is activism an important concern, and why is it important to ground it rhetorically? As Bazerman suggests, “If we must resign ourselves to being in history, we have no choice but to be active in it in the ways our own dim and flickering lights dictate” (158). This underscores the primary principle—how one executes this “demand” is up to the individual. Not all individuals will or should be active in the ways suggested in this revised text, nor in any other text cited herein. In my own case, my “activism” is grounded in my primary role as a critical-rhetorical theorist. I am also “active” in promoting potential and opportunities for others (e.g., in serving as a journal editor), as well as serving as the Director of a McNair Scholars program, or as an officer in a professional association. These experiences provide opportunities to share ideas and perhaps influence the lives of others in positive ways. As an academic, I long

ago learned that we actually have no idea when a comment or suggestion to a student or colleague will be mentioned years later as having influenced their thoughts or actions. Activism of any sort is part of being human—engaging others in any way that makes their lives better is beneficial to both activists and collaborators. This is not about “doing for” but about “being with.”

Why rhetoric? Because language matters. A single word change can shift perceptions from a positive to a negative in a heartbeat. For example, Artz (in this volume) uses expressions such as “war on Vietnam” and “war on Afghanistan.” Consider the difference changing “on” to “in” would make in the analysis: engaging a war “in” either country suggests a very different rationale for interpreting an action than the word “on” explicitly indicates. If the goal is to alter the discourse being used by others to express their discontent, one must choose words carefully just in order to be heard, much less choose words that would resonate within their worldview as possible expressions to utilize. If the goal is to employ one’s own expertise to offer remedies to meet identified needs in a community, one must not be seen as the “savior” coming to rescue the unfortunate. The editors of this collection, and the authors they enjoined to contribute essays, live this understanding as they explore their own rhetorical activism. The result is a credit to their innovative strategies as well as their ethical commitment to engaging others in sincere and beneficial ways.

## Note

- 1 This is cited from: Underwood, E. D., & Frey, L. R. (2008). *Communication and community*, 371.

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# Introduction to *Activism and Rhetoric*, Second Edition

*JongHwa Lee and Seth Kahn*

## Reflecting on the First Edition

In 2003, when we began to imagine this project, two questions motivated us. First, how did our training/experiences as both activists and rhetoricians intersect—both to enhance and complicate each other? And second, what did we make of our sense, not clear just yet, that “activist rhetoric” needed theorizing we thought traditional classical rhetoric couldn’t provide? The charge we put to contributors focused more on the first than the second; as a result, we think the book did a better job answering the first. That set of essays maps out an array of [what in retrospect are] kairotic connections between rhetorical training and activist work. And we think several of the essays, if not most, contributed to (we’d like to think helped catalyze) an increasingly clear line of argument in rhetorical theory that *civil discourse* as a god-term had become an empty signifier.

At the time, given that scholarship around “activist rhetoric” (as distinct from social movement-level theory) was still new, and that we both were very early-career, and that many of our contributors were (and are) prominent members of our field, we (perhaps over-) emphasized the exploratory nature of the project. It wouldn’t have occurred to us to put it this way, but to an extent, the essays in the first edition read like extended interview responses as much as academic arguments.

When we decided to pursue a second edition, there were two guiding principles for revisions and new contributions. First, responding to feedback that the book felt too personal and exploratory for some readers, we asked contributors in this edition to be clearer about their key claims and about the rhetorical concepts they’re highlighting. The nature of some chapters makes this more difficult than others, so be forewarned that such emphasis is still a bit uneven—but it should be clearer what each chapter is doing in a book about rhetorical theory and practice. Second, as we’ll discuss in the next section, the sense we had in the mid-2000s that the discursive regime within which we were operating was shifting became much clearer—as the book was in its final stages of production.

Second, a result of that chronology, when the first edition published in September 2010, we were already behind the times. As Nancy Welch puts it in a review essay in *College Composition and Communication*:

The most provocative lessons in this collection might be found, however, in the passages where a conclusion drawn or a course advocated no longer fits with the moment in which we are reading. What a world of change exists, for instance, between the passive media-consuming audience imagined by Shelley DeBlasis and Teresa Grettano... and the abundant examples of the past year as millions of ordinary people used social media ... to organize not only “the struggle in discourse... necessary for the possibility of new hegemonies” (175) but struggle in streets, squares, and statehouses. I had to smile when I read Chaput’s counsel that activists not “demonize Wall Street or Alan Greenspan, which only invites backlash” (88). After all, I have the benefit of reading with the knowledge of the overwhelming popularity of the Occupy Wall Street movement that has produced repression but also ... a startling jump in American class-struggle consciousness (Morin 712)

In short—we understood an update was due almost as soon as the book was published. We’ve taken until now for many reasons, not least that our (editors’ and contributors’) activism has become all the more urgent, often diverting attention and energy from writing about it.

That said, the positive response to the first edition, for which we are grateful, and the changing scenes of activism in a historical moment where Habermas’ public sphere is even more deflated than ten years ago, have brought us to this new edition, featuring some updated chapters, some new chapters from original contributors, and some new chapters from new contributors. We’ve made a point to be more inclusive of voices from marginalized communities/counter-publics; to account for moments in the near-immediate aftermath of the first edition and since; and to anchor the essays more explicitly in rhetorical concepts than the personal narratives of the authors.

Before we say more about the new edition, we want to set the scene for where we are and how we got here.

## **Flashback to Fall 2010**

Our 2010 version of the exigency for the book sounds almost quaint:

“Being political” in the twenty-first century requires a different understanding of democracy, a recognition that civil discourse may have reached the limits of its usefulness. Dana Cloud, in the University of Texas campus newspaper in 2005, argued that the history of radical activism is replete with calls for breaks from civility and tolerance; sometimes politics

requires bellicosity, self-righteousness, rule-breaking ... any number of tactical choices that classical rhetoric abhors. (1)

That problem has obviously become worse since then; nobody had yet decided in 2010 that our historical moment was “post-truth,” for example; Stephen Colbert had come close, coining the word “truthiness” in 2005 (Zimmer). In other words, the assumption that good faith and reason would always—even often ... even sometimes—win the day was already problematic. Our contributors responded to that problem as part of the original call, which asked them how their activist work and training as rhetoricians intersected, so we could begin to see alternatives that classical and Habermasian rhetoric hadn’t offered. We think we did that. And then ...

### **Flash Forward to Later in Fall 2010 and Thereafter**

[Note: Much of this section was in Kevin Mahoney’s new chapter for this edition. His first draft was longer than we had space for. Fortunately, he had already written this section that we were only planning, so he let us use it here.]

The first edition of *Activism and Rhetoric* coincided with the beginning of a near daily assault on the institutions and practices of democracy and the fits and starts of national resistance movements. The Tea Party sweep of the 2010 midterm elections cleared the road for Gov. Scott Walker’s assault on public sector unions and the accompanying mass protests of the Wisconsin Uprising in early 2011. Later that year, Occupy Wall Street activists enacted a radical—if temporary, unruly, and contradictory—vision of a collective future that rejected the radical corporate agenda running roughshod over the commons. A spate of police killings of African Americans in 2013 was met with the birth of #BlackLivesMatter, a muscular civil rights movement for the 21st century. Of course, this short recap would not be complete without Donald Trump’s electoral college win for the US presidency. Trump’s election also provoked the online publishing of the #Indivisible Guide—progressives’ answer to the Tea Party playbook—which has led to renewed, state-based political action.

In those early days of 2011, as Gov. Walker’s attack on organized labor in Wisconsin was being quickly replicated in Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Idaho, and elsewhere, it became clear that the Tea Party electoral wins did more than shift state legislatures and Congress decidedly rightward. Those victories provided the launch codes for a well-orchestrated, radical, billionaire-backed right-wing assault on the political and material gains of the 20th century.

On February 15, 2011, tens of thousands of labor activists, students, and workers converged on the Wisconsin State Capitol Building in Madison, protesting Gov. Walker’s newly announced anti-worker austerity bill, the so-called “budget repair bill.” As protesters were gathering, the Harrisburg,



Pennsylvania-based labor radio talk show host, Rick Smith, posted a warning to his Facebook page:

As I've been saying for years, when things get REALLY bad we finally start to see people mobilizing. We need to make sure the hate stops in Wisconsin or it will soon spread to Indiana, New Jersey, Ohio, and even Pennsylvania.

Smith was right. Within a few days, similar high-profile battles were being waged in Ohio and Indiana, while eyes turned to Oklahoma and Tennessee (Zernike). Other former union strongholds such as Michigan would soon follow the “right to work” path blazed in Wisconsin (Sullivan). In early 2011, networks of billionaire-funded organizations such as the American Legislative Exchange Council, the State Policy Network, and the Mackinac Center for Public Policy in Michigan were still unknown to most activists, let alone most Americans (Eidelson). It became clear pretty quickly both that progressives were in for the fight of our lives and that we were woefully unprepared.

[JongHwa and Seth are back!]

Since Kevin Mahoney drafted that summary of years' worth of sea-change, more has happened. Not only has the 2016 US presidential election confirmed the extent to which truth and good faith are only so valuable, but concrete implications of that election are coming clear via lifetime appointments to the Supreme Court, including confirmation processes that dismiss what should be disqualifying information about nominees; court decisions like *Janus v AFSCME* in 2018 that threaten the rights of workers to unionize—and explicitly invite further such threats ... More positively, through 2016–2019, new kinds of efforts have also emerged: the #MeToo and #NeverAgain movements; and the #NotOneMore campaign led by teenage students from Parkland, FL. While these efforts, like most, are problematic in their own ways, they also signal a heartening energy and commitment to large-scale organizing.

Put another way: every day, we hear people voicing frustration and even despair at the current state of affairs. But we also hear people—sometimes even the same people—finding hope and energy, sometimes fury and provocation—whichever direction it comes from, it's *propulsion* to keep at it.

In that spirit, the contributors to this collection are, in a very real way, an antidote to despair. Not every story represents a victory; some chapters describe failed efforts and continued frustrations. But taken together, we think we've collected hope, and we've collected tactics and strategies, and we've grounded them in rhetorical concepts that help make them meaningful for students of rhetoric *and* effective for activists who want them. What the contributions to this collection do, that is, is to center *rhetorical principles* in the activist work of

the contributors in an effort to synthesize the strengths that we have as both rhetoricians and activists.

### **What's New in the Second Edition**

The new edition is very different; only six of the 17 chapters are obvious updates to their predecessors; seven are brand new; and four expand on what were originally smaller points. The new content brings to the collection several issues that were under- if not unrepresented: trans\* activism; activism in digital spaces; environmental activism; and attention to movements like #blacklivesmatter and #metoo. We needed a new foreword by Raymie McKerrow that updates the state of the field, and we've added an afterword by Michelle Rodino-Colocino, whose article "Getting to 'Not Especially Strange'" was the first to extend our call for more activist energy to communication research problems. Finally, as noted earlier, contributors are more emphatic about the rhetorical concepts in their chapters.

### **Overview of Contents**

Because of substantial changes in the book's contents, we've reorganized the chapters into new sections. While we see the order of the sections as logical, it's also designed to be flexible, understanding that different readers will want to foreground different sets of ideas or projects.

### ***Part I: Activism Where We Work: Academic/Pedagogical***

We open with a set of essays about activism in academic/professional settings: campuses and professional associations; classrooms and curricula. Together, these four chapters articulate both the responsibilities (e.g., obligations to demand labor justice for marginalized colleagues; the responsibility to use our rhetorical skills to respond in real time to political exigencies) and the agencies (e.g., pedagogical and curricular innovations; building solidarity across faculty and student cohorts, and with other members of our campus communities) we take on as professionals, especially professional rhetoricians; they also begin charting the ethical complexities that arise from doing these kinds of activist work. Bryan McCann argues that academics need to resist the urge to assert boundaries for activism that keep our efforts in "the community" instead of attending to our own unjust systems/practices; Rebecca Jones updates her argument from the first edition that academics, especially professional rhetoricians, are uniquely suited to—and thus on the hook for—direct engagement in the political contexts we analyze and teach about; Amy Pason revisits the tensions our students feel regarding the term *activism*, but argues this time that teaching and using the word explicitly is powerful; Christina Moss describes teaching a course about racism and public memory, examining both the power of experiential learning and the complexities of teaching such a course as a

white faculty member. In short, these chapters establish academe as our starting point because it's a location where both our responsibilities and our abilities are clearest—although hardly simple.

### ***Part II: Voices from the Margin(alized)***

A major update to this edition is increased attention to activism in and among marginalized communities. While other chapters certainly address marginalization, the chapters in this section focus directly on relationships between activists, marginalized communities, and rhetorical (if not more broadly academic) work. G Patterson describes their work as a non-binary/trans activist in rural Indiana; although their work wasn't primarily about LGBTQ+ issues, their deep understanding of multiple forms of marginalization was crucial to successfully navigating a very complex environment; Ellen Cushman expands her chapter from the first edition by adding a section describing archival work that helped her document and protect Cherokee language practices critical to the long-term sustainability of her community; JongHwa Lee narrows the focus from his original chapter specifically to his work for justice for Japanese Comfort Women survivors and their legacy; Matthew Abraham describes both Black Lives Matter and Palestinian liberation efforts, articulating their connectedness in an effort to build solidarity among activists and members of those communities. The chapters in this section certainly render difficulties mobilizing with and among marginalized communities, but more importantly offer models of both successful organizing and critical rhetorical stances that activists in marginalized communities can draw from.

### ***Part III: Modalities and Audiences***

As we (via Kevin Mahoney) argue in the Introduction, two of the major shifts in activism/activist rhetoric since 2010 are the proliferation of social media and the large-scale recognition that truth doesn't have much power just because it's true (although Lee Artz's chapter in our first edition made this point quite clearly). The chapters in this section take up those two changes directly. Kevin Mahoney's Raging Chicken Press is an exercise in developing and sustaining a social-media-savvy digital citizen-journalism project; Richard Vatz chronicles shifts in the conservative/liberal media ecology over the course of a decade; Seth Kahn situates his union's successful strike in 2016 in a complex web of physical and virtual organizing spaces; Catherine Chaput focuses explicitly on the problem of "post-truth" in her argument that affective relations are critical to navigating the current moment. As a section, instead of simply recognizing the post-Habermasian political landscape as a problem, these chapters recognize an array of kairotic possibilities for activists to take up.

### **Part IV: Re-Theorizing Activist Rhetoric**

While earlier sections are impelled by more concretely material organizing principles (locations/venues for organizing; audiences, technologies for reaching them; etc.), the chapters in this section tend toward the more explicitly theoretical. Lee Artz updates his original chapter with an even clearer call to “speak power” and increased clarity (with nine years of perspective) on how efforts to do so have looked and felt and worked; Rodrick Schubert and Omar Swartz offer a detailed account of Jane Addams’s New Federalism as a model for organizing local political power into responsive and responsible governing units; Charles Bazerman updates his narrative of discovering *the personal is historical* and understanding the affordances of middle-class-ness as an activist; Madrone Kalil Schutten offers a different alternative to the regime of reason from Lee Artz, articulating a holistic, restorative rhetoric grounded in, but not limited to, environmental activism; and Dana Cloud closes the section by renewing her call to “change it” even (as she adds in a new section) when opponents directly threaten your safety.

### **Ending Points**

The first edition was an early entry in rhetorical scholarship about activism; the exigency for the project has changed, in terms of both the disciplinary and macro-political landscapes. The body of work in activist rhetoric has expanded. We’re happy about this development—more attention to activism and democracy is better than less—although we have some concerns about the extent to which the word *activism* itself has stretched out to include individual acts of advocacy or benevolence, at the risk of setting aside the ethos of democratic mobilization we invoke by using the word. The contributions to this edition, even without explicit calls from us to do so, emphasize that overtly political dimension; we don’t mean to diminish important and helpful work rhetors are doing inside and outside of our campuses and professional associations, but we think sharply pointed calls to organize and mobilize on behalf of democracy against hegemonic power need to be distinguished from more benevolent calls to “make your voice heard” or “do good.”

Finally, throughout this introduction—and the process of revising the book—we’ve focused on the changing terrain of politics and activism, as well as the discipline’s theoretical understanding of activist rhetoric. One goal for this edition that’s different from the first is to provoke more of the kind of democratic organizing and mobilizing our contributors argue for in this book; in the first edition, the goal was less directly provocative. We want readers to feel both authorized and compelled to push back against hegemonic power in our workplaces, our communities, our governing regimes, and our environment. The work is still out there to be done.

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## Part I

# Activism Where We Work

## Academic/Pedagogical

These four chapters describe activist engagements in academic contexts, ranging from individual classrooms to curricula to university-level and professional association-level. We lead with this section as a call to the profession not to underestimate the necessary hard work to achieve justice within our profession, and—more positively—to recognize that it’s entirely appropriate for activists to do what we’re good at.

We begin with Bryan McCann’s “Borders of Engagement: Rethinking Scholarship, Activism, and the Academy,” which challenges the commonplace regarding *engaged scholarship* that “activism is directed toward the community outside the academy and solving their problems,” while the professional space within (the academy) is covered (naturalized) with its “cruelty, harm, exploitation, violation, hazing, harassment, abuse, White supremacy, violence, and injustice.” McCann calls for transgressing this artificial (rhetorical and political) boundary, intervening and denaturalizing its bordering practices, to “make the spaces of academia more humane”(22).

Less focused on specific sites of activism and more with our roles as rhetoricians, Rebecca Jones’ updated chapter, “Rhetorical Activism: Responsibility in the Ivory Tower,” reflects on her experiences as a PhD candidate, junior faculty, and now tenured faculty, navigating through “vigorous and aggressive” terrains within rhetorical studies. Jones notes the discrepancy between “rhetoric we teach/learn” in classrooms and “rhetoric/propaganda that happens” in social media, using this distinction to claim that the Ivory Tower “is not a metaphor that matches the history of western rhetoric and especially not the rhetoric of women and other groups who challenge systems of power. Rhetoric, even if studied and critiqued, was always practiced” (30). In short, our skills as rhetoricians charge us with responsibilities we must take up.

Of course (as Dana Cloud emphasizes in the postscript to the final chapter in this book), activist work by academics is increasingly risky, both personally and professionally, and our classrooms are spaces where the ethical obligations laid out in the first two chapters get complicated by our institutional obligations and systems (e.g., treating students “fairly” despite political “differences”; regimes of evaluation that reinforce discriminatory and anti-democratic

standards). The next two chapters don't invoke those tensions explicitly, but both help answer the charge against "overtly political agendas" by articulating the importance of rhetorical pedagogies grounded in activist principles.

Amy Pason's "Reclaiming (Teaching) the 'A' World (Activism)" navigates a complex, often troubling and limiting, labeling of the "A" word (Activism/Activists) circulated in contexts ranging from college campuses to the news and popular media. Working as a "rhetorical translator," Pason deconstructs/reclaims the binary between classroom and the "real world," academics and "radical activists," and rhetorical theory and activist strategies. By bringing both activism and rhetoric into her teaching, Pason claims that "students have the ability to shape their own stories, define and claim activism for themselves, and change what it means to be engaged in this era" (47).

Christina Moss' "A Time to Remember: Rhetorical Pedagogy, Commemoration, and Activism" describes a course that asks students to experience activism in the form of commemoration, using the experience as a basis from which to argue that students' self-reflection and self-discovery leads to questioning and redefining their values and identities, and eventually to the performative "doing" and "living" of such values (i.e., activism). Along the way, Moss demonstrates how rhetorical constructs (exigence, identification, performance) are utilized pedagogically to support learning, reflective, and transformative processes. Moss claims that "in the end what rhetorical pedagogy gives activism is the ability to communicate that ... [i]t's about humanity and the interconnection of everyone and how we all need each other" (59).

# 1 Borders of Engagement

## Rethinking Scholarship, Activism, and the Academy

*Bryan J. McCann*

During the 2010 National Communication Association (NCA) Convention, I walked down a San Francisco street with a senior colleague/mentor. For the second time in three years, NCA was immersed in a labor dispute. The union UNITE HERE! had called a boycott of one conference hotel and, like the contentious 2008 San Diego convention, several members wished to honor the boycott. Presumably learning from the 2008 fiasco, NCA secured space to hold sessions outside the disputed hotel. Still, several NCA members worked with local labor activists to coordinate media coverage and picketing during the conference. While responses from colleagues opposed to the boycott were not as intense as 2008, some did make clear their frustration. In addition to the usual venues for these debates, for example, the organization's national email list (CRTnet), some members chose more confrontational behaviors: for instance, during the picket at the hotel, a conference attendee seized a stack of leaflets from another NCA member's hands and threw them in the trash.<sup>1</sup>

In this context, I walked with my colleague, who had provided career-related guidance before. As we parted ways—he was entering the boycotted hotel; I was not—he asked if I thought my public participation would impact my job prospects. I was a non-tenure-track faculty member at a small liberal arts school, seeking a tenure-track appointment at an institution with a graduate program. The question took me off guard, not only because of the power imbalance with this colleague, who also wrote me recommendation letters, but also because it was a rare, if subtle, expression of our disagreement regarding the politics of boycotting NCA. I said I hoped not; I never kept my activism a secret relative to my professional identity. I also explained that I hoped my scholarship and teaching spoke for themselves and would be the primary basis on which prospective employers judged me. My colleague agreed, but added that some individuals at institutions where I had applied contacted him with concerns about my conspicuous involvement in the boycotts. He claimed that he advocated for me but wanted me to be aware that such concerns lingered. We concluded the conversation and parted ways.

Even before 2010, I had begun crafting a professional identity as an activist rhetorician, an engaged scholar. During graduate school in Texas, I participated



in anti-death penalty organizing and other struggles that resonated with my scholarly interests in criminality and race. The fact that I did recognizable activist work (meetings, literature tables, demonstrations), occasionally appeared on the news, and even participated in civil disobedience helped me cultivate the image of a scholar who practiced what he preached. Also, to be clear, the cache associated with my activism was largely a function of my occupying a white cismasculine body and agitating around matters that, while controversial in the conservative state of Texas, resonated with the mainstream liberal sensibilities of my colleagues. Numerous people of color, women, LGBTQ+ individuals, religious minorities, and people living at the intersections of these identities and more, as well as outspoken scholars on polarizing matters such as Palestinian liberation, have paid dearly for their activism (e.g., Steven Salaita; also see Cloud, this volume). For me, doing activism outside the academy and contending that my activism, scholarship, and teaching mutually informed each other seemed to help more than it hurt.

What made boycotting a conference hotel different? Why did activism directed away from my campus and professional organization inspire praise from colleagues, while actions that risked disrupting a disciplinary gathering provoked anger and confrontation from strangers, and microaggressive behavior from mentors? My contention is that actions such as the 2008 and 2010 NCA boycotts did not exclusively, or even primarily, ask communication scholars what we could do to *solve a problem*—the domain of increasingly hegemonic modes of “engaged scholarship.” Instead, these boycotts required us to reckon with the ways we—as scholars whose assembly relies on the labor and capital of others—*are part of the problem*. This, I believe, was the primary trigger for the fallout before, during, and after the 2008 and 2010 conventions, and represents a broader anxiety associated with prevailing definitions of engaged scholarship.

The rhetorical norms around scholarly engagement presume that scholars participate in activist work outside their professional spaces. The avatar of the activist-scholar is the energetic graduate student who fulfills their academic responsibilities while also pursuing activist interests in the “community.” Other models of engaged scholarship call for even more explicit connections between traditional professional responsibilities and communities outside the boundaries of the academy. The community, as constituted in most professional discourse regarding engaged scholarship, exists outside the walls of the campus, or our professional organizations and conferences. As Gunn and Lucaites observe, “In general, the call for the academic to engage socially reduces to the mandate that scholars and teachers make their work relevant, informative, or empowering to communities or publics *outside* of the (often erroneously assumed) confines of the college or university” (409). They add that the call to engage presumes a traversal of the boundaries between campus and community.

I want to trouble such boundaries not by calling for more engagement off campus, but instead for a turn inward. Specifically, I argue the presumption that activist rhetoricians and other scholars must traverse the border between academy and community reifies the border between the engaged scholar and

academia itself. Privileging the community as a vulnerable space outside the academy creates an alibi for the structures of higher education themselves. Campuses and academic organizations are sites of cruelty that disproportionately harm underrepresented populations—they are places where labor is exploited (e.g., Birmingham), free speech and academic freedom are violated (e.g., “Academic Freedom and Tenure”), senior scholars haze, harass, and otherwise abuse colleagues and students (e.g., Ortiz), white supremacy inflicts indignities and violence on racialized bodies (e.g., Bauer-Wolf), and many colleagues and administrators cooperate with state and corporate actors engaged in various modes of injustice (e.g., Arkin and O’Brien). Most of us know these problems exist; yet one rarely finds them in our journals or conference sessions when the topic is engaged scholarship. The very scholars who espouse engaged scholarship outside the academy often benefit from the injustices that occur therein. Others—specifically, those to whom this chapter is directed—have never been encouraged to imagine campuses or academic organizations as communities that need attention. One of the most important roles activist rhetoricians can play in addressing the injustices that occur before our eyes—in classrooms, thesis/dissertation defenses, departmental meetings, conference hotel bars, or elsewhere—is denaturalizing the stories we tell about ourselves and our institutions. We should subvert the bordering practices that separate the materiality of academia from its own calls for engagement and social justice. By critiquing the rhetorics of engagement that prevail in communication studies, I proceed in this chapter to identify the bordering practices of engaged scholarship, detail the ways in which such practices protect the cruelty of academic institutions, and conclude by suggesting ways of imagining academic activism that traverse the borders of engagement and activate the spaces in which we labor.

### **Bordering Practices and Engaged Scholarship**

Rhetorical studies, and higher education generally, have always to some degree been invested in traversing the campus–community border. Rhetorical studies, both its communication and composition manifestations, came of age alongside the land grant movement. Our founding charge was to train (white, predominantly cisgender male) poor and working-class populations in the arts of eloquence in the service of crafting ethical and professional citizen-subjects (Gehrke). While not without critics (e.g., Chávez, “Beyond Inclusion”), this ethic provides a historical starting point for mapping the investments that mobilize our prevailing contemporary models of engagement. In short, calls to be engaged almost always entail calls to cross the border, to step down from ivory towers and get our hands dirty in the muck of “real life.”

We can imagine the boundary between academy and community as a border. I draw on a body of rhetorical scholarship that primarily attends to bordering practices at the frontier between Mexico and the United States. However,

as scholars such as Anzaldúa and Chávez (“Queer Migration”) argue, borders manifest in various contexts and condition bodies and communities in consequential ways. At core, borders are constituted and enforced through rhetoric, as well as brute force. As Cisneros writes, “Rhetorics of the border not only define spatial relations but also materialize the boundaries of belonging” (7). Bordering practices police and regulate acts and bodies that do not adhere to norms associated with citizenship, whether national or disciplinary (also see, e.g., Flores, “Constructing Rhetorical Borders”).

The bordering practices occurring vis-à-vis migration between Mexico and the United States are often deadly for racialized bodies who transgress the border. I am not implying a clean homology between those bordering practices and ours in the academy. I am arguing that the critical protocols associated with bordering provide heuristics for interrogating the rhetorical norms regarding engaged scholarship—what we might call normative academic citizenship—and illuminate the ways such practices disproportionately harm already-vulnerable bodies laboring and learning on our campuses and in our organizations.

The most striking rhetorical move associated with hegemonic models of engaged scholarship is the production of borders in order to transgress them. The presumption that academic engagement requires violating the border between academy and community demands a border between academic engagement and the academy itself. For example, commenting on the rationale behind the 2016 NCA annual convention theme, “Communication’s Civic Callings,” then-President Hartnett (“Putting NCA’s”) wrote,

Hoping to empower a generation of scholars who look beyond the traditional ivory tower for their inspirations, collaborators, and community projects, the theme pointed to the intersections of teaching, research, and service, where we utilize our Communication theories and practices to speak to, learn from, and work alongside practitioners who are tackling the urgent needs of local, national, and international communities. (2)

Hartnett, who has dedicated much of his career to engaging communities, especially incarcerated individuals (e.g., Hartnett, “Lincoln and Douglas”), not traditionally represented in academic spaces, added that the conference theme sought to empower scholars “who seek to respond to the desperate needs of communities that are not traditionally represented at the convention or in our scholarship” (2). The articles that follow Hartnett’s opening editorial in the issue of NCA’s newsletter *Spectra* profile a variety of projects spearheaded by communication scholars who engage in research, teaching, and service that address deeply salient needs outside the academy (e.g., Enck). While a contribution from Whitehead explicitly centers the communication classroom (and other contributors address the salience of communication pedagogy vis-à-vis activism) as a site of engagement and consciousness-raising, none address the academy itself as a site requiring intervention from communication scholars. In the same issue, Frey, who is deeply influential in the realm of engaged scholarship,

draws a firm line in the sand when he writes, “Engaged (Communication) scholarship, thus, represents an important tectonic shift from insular disciplinary research and corporate education to the involvement of researchers, educators, and students with nonacademic community” (10). For Frey, such a scholarly move represents a return to the founding principles of US higher education: a commitment to serving communities surrounding campuses, and a rejection of insularity and corporatization.

I do not wish to imply that Hartnett, Frey, or others who call for work that engages with non-academic communities are apathetic to the harms that occur on campuses and within academic organizations. Rather, I see their rhetoric as part of a broader bordering project that explicitly transgresses the border between the academic and the non-academic, while simultaneously affirming the border between engaged scholars and the academy. Neither Frey nor Hartnett minces words when they call on scholars to turn away from the “ivory tower” and toward the non-academic community. Furthermore, in a 2010 *Quarterly Journal of Speech* forum dedicated to the topic of engaged scholarship, all contributors approached the question of engagement as a matter of scholars intervening outside the academy. For example, John McGowan proposes that colleges and universities rethink their evaluation standards for faculty by asking professors to identify the communities who benefit from their work and, when making determinations about promotion and other areas of evaluation, consulting those communities about the scholar’s impact.<sup>2</sup> I wonder, pessimistically, whether such a transformation in evaluative standards would incentivize scholars who hold colleagues accountable for their predatory behaviors, disrupt faculty searches that do not actively seek to create a diverse candidate pool, or promote policy changes at the departmental, college, and university level that threaten the hierarchies atop which many faculty and administrators believe they have spent their careers earning a place. Because borders are in the business of marking and enforcing the norms of citizenship, and because such norms are never neutral in terms of whose interests they serve, it is highly unlikely that such interventions at the level of the academic institution would generate the same kind of enthusiasm—indeed, they are more likely to provoke hostility—as an activist-scholar who works with populations in non-academic communities. The rhetoric of engaged scholarship, in other words, partakes in bordering practices that mobilize scholars’ activist energies toward a pre-figured model of the non-academic community and away from the cruelty of the academy itself.

### **The Academic Politics of Cruelty**

The smile then is a kind of social reflex; we smile in identifying—even if involuntarily or momentarily—with the society which force has brought into being.

Kate Millett

Borders are built to protect ways of life. The Mexico–US border, for example, protects the heteronormative modes of whiteness that constitute US national identity (Chávez, “Queer Migration”). The bordering practices of engaged scholarship protect the politics of cruelty that are the norm in US higher education. Cruelty is capable of intoxicating us, numbing us, and commanding our allegiance (Millet). Bystanders read erotic pleasures into images of cruelty and easily become complicit in cruel acts through acquiescent smiles, as noted in the above epigraph, or “the incentives of increased status, privilege, and rewards” (Millet 304–5). We frequently equate cruelty with rigor, so the suffering associated with academic labor becomes necessary to academe’s prized value. During my faculty career, mostly spent at PhD-granting institutions, I have lost track of how often I hear senior colleagues wax nostalgic about how hard it was to advance, and in so doing, rationalize inaction regarding the difficulties graduate students and junior (much less adjunct) colleagues face. Full professors have told me that graduate school is boot camp or that hierarchy is inevitable in of academic life. A pre-tenure colleague told me that, during their annual review, the department chair claimed that one should never expect the academy to be humane and that expecting a balanced life, at least before tenure, is unrealistic. My colleagues made these comments without explicit irony or regret—this is simply the way it is.

While I do not wish to draw facile homologies between the corporeal acts of torture Millett documents and the indignities of academic labor, I do believe her work illuminates the forms of cruelty the bordering practices of engaged scholarship protect. The academy is a cruel place (Baker) and acts of cruelty give expression to the joys of occupying positions of power and privilege (e.g., Levina). If our operative definitions of engaged scholarship disparage the “ivory tower” as a site of activism, they orient our attention away from the targeting of our colleagues for retaliation and hazing or the ways our curricular, teaching, hiring, and editorial practices exclude historically marginalized groups. Such definitions, and the bordering practices they mobilize, are therefore complicit in cruelty.

The pain permeating every level of academia is well-documented. Virtually all academic units, including those in the critical humanities, rely on the exploitation of contingent faculty and graduate students (e.g., Birmingham). The academic job market is a cruel space where tenure-track positions are increasingly rare, meaning more new graduates and junior scholars must compete for fewer relatively secure academic jobs. Furthermore, despite espoused commitments to hire more people of color and members of other marginalized groups for faculty positions, institutions continue to privilege whiteness through hiring practices. Even tenure-track positions, particularly at universities that prioritize high scholarly output, and especially for members of underrepresented communities, are often agonizing as expectations fluctuate and new analytics enter the evaluative picture. Whereas tenure is nominally designed to protect academic freedom, it has increasingly become a devil’s bargain demanding

six years of physically and psychologically damaging pressure in pursuit of job security. Worse, today's junior faculty are often evaluated by senior colleagues who did not face the same tenure expectations, but demonstrate few qualms about holding others to such standards (see Dutta; Sensoy and DiAngelo). While such experiences do not rise to the standard of torture as chronicled in Millett's work, they are cruel.

Furthermore, Millett's observations about complicity resonate deeply with the culture of cruelty in the academy. Many of us, particularly those with tenure, treat the cruelties of the academy as the price of admission; part of a cycle of cruelty that renews with each new cohort of graduate students and new faculty hire. We often smile knowingly, sometimes out of pity and sometimes nostalgic amusement, at our colleagues' struggles. Furthermore, we are rarely inclined to disrupt a system cruel as it may be, in which we feel we have earned our place. To disrupt the cycle of cruelty may require sacrifice from those of us with the most "status, privilege, and rewards" (Millett 305). As Danielle Allen demonstrates in her studies of citizenship, sacrifice is a precondition of progress, and typically the privileged are least willing to sacrifice.

I want to be clear that these cruelties do not fall evenly upon all bodies and that I am by no means the first scholar in our field to scrutinize such cruelty. People of color, and especially women of color, have published compelling and devastating scholarly works that draw on the racialized and gendered indignities of the academy. For white cisgender masculine scholars such as myself, the needs associated with academic life often do not feel desperate or urgent, and the status quo often benefits us. Furthermore, higher education, particularly state institutions, face staggering crises of legitimacy and fiscal solvency (e.g., Newfield). The prospect of openly critiquing our departments, campuses, and organizations may strike scholars as foolhardy when our vulnerability is so palpable. Where precarity may be a new condition to privileged academics, it is familiar to many others. Thus, we who write on matters of engagement from positions of privilege need to listen to our less-privileged colleagues who challenge the bordering practices of academic engagement.

For example, in her monograph on monstrosity in public culture, Calafell reflexively narrates/describes the ways her white and cisgender male colleagues figure her, a queer Latina feminist, as a monster. Calafell illuminates the ways the racialized and gendered figure of the monster circulates in academia just as surely as in popular horror films. Scholars such as Ahmed, Brenda Allen, Chávez ("Beyond Inclusion"), and Davis have also invoked the concrete practices of the academy to make broader theoretical claims about the cultural politics of race and gender. Furthermore, many colleagues publicly engage in matters of controversy at their institutions—sometimes at considerable cost to their careers and health—or use their leadership positions in academic organizations to advocate for progressive changes in higher education itself (e.g., Hill). Such work, while undeniably working within an activist register, does not accord

with prevailing definitions of engaged scholarship. Rather, the bordering practices of engagement constitute them as non-normative relative to ideal activist scholarship (i.e., work outside the “ivory tower”) and thus marginalize activist work that seeks to improve the lives of vulnerable individuals (i.e., those not traditionally represented at our conferences or in our scholarship) who teach, learn, and labor on our campuses.

Along with explicitly naming the cruelty that permeates our campuses and academic organizations, scholars at the margins of rhetorical studies challenge the border between the prevailing standards of engaged scholarship and accompanying understandings of community. Authors such as Asante, Blair (“Contested Histories”), Campbell, Flores (“Creating Discursive Space”), Houston, Morris and Nakayama, Ono and Sloop, and many others have affirmed the legitimacy of marginalized voices in rhetorical studies, helping to create space for younger scholars who found little resonance with canonical politics that still prevail in rhetoric (see Calafell, “Rhetorics of Possibility”). Thus, the bordering politics of engaged scholarship, by investing in a firm distinction between academic labor that invests in the “ivory tower” on one hand, and the non-academic community on the other, ignore and often denigrate the value of scholarship as such as a mode of activism for marginalized bodies within the academy.

The espoused goal of engaged scholarship, particularly as expressed in communication, is to draw on academic expertise to address the “urgent needs” (Hartnett 2) of specific communities. I hope the last few paragraphs, while barely scratching the surface, suffice to demonstrate the many needs within academia, or what “engaged scholars” often dismiss as “the ivory tower.” We who labor in the academy do so in a space of cruelty—to which all of us, to varying degrees, are both subject and complicit. However, the most hegemonic models of engagement, in their efforts to cross borders between academic and non-academic communities, produce a border between the figure of the engaged academic and academia itself. Such bordering practices normatively define engagement in ways that excuse the politics of cruelty that permeate our workplaces and, by failing to include work that addresses the academy as a site that needs engagement, provides cover for colleagues and administrators who seek to discipline those already-vulnerable scholars who disrupt academia’s status quo. In the following section, I advance ways we might transgress the border politics of engagement and confront the everyday cruelties of the academy.

### **Traversing Borders and Resisting Cruelty through Embedded Activist Rhetoric**

To distance oneself professionally through critique, is this not the most active consent to privatize the social individual?

Stefano Harney and Fred Moten

Engaging with academic spaces is not sexy. Much of the cruelty on our campuses and in our professional organizations operates in ordinary contexts such as department and committee meetings, classrooms, evaluation processes, and other sites of academic labor that many of us regard as distractions from the passions that led us to higher education. The conventional wisdom is that service is a tertiary commitment relative to teaching and writing. However, precarious as it may be, shared governance is one of the most valuable modalities through which we might reimagine our relationships to our institutions and our understandings of engaged scholarship. Just as the factory worker of Marx and Engel's Europe possessed the capacity to halt production and make demands on the boss, so too are many academics equipped to leverage governance and service to transform and, when necessary, disrupt operations in our departments, on our campuses, and at our annual conventions. But before outlining what such work may look like, let us reconceptualize engagement in ways that traverse the current borders between the engaged scholar and the site of cruelty in which they labor.

As I have argued, prevailing understandings of engaged scholarship figure the academy as a depository of activist intellectuals who should orient their talents toward communities-in-need. Those who work within the realm of the academy are often dismissed by engaged scholarship's champions as "producing works about tendential subjects for miniscule audiences engaged in no real-world struggle" (Hartnett, "Communication, Social Justice" 72) or, for those engaged in explicitly critical (but not "engaged") work, positioning themselves as "High Priests of Knowledge who, while not speaking as activists in their own right, transferred the necessary skills, tools, and motivation to other actors" (78). But, as I note earlier, scholarship drawing on theoretical traditions and centering the experiences of traditionally marginalized populations creates space for other scholars, particularly those from historically underrepresented communities in the academy, to do the same (see Flores, "Between Abundance"). And even if a scholar never writes an explicitly political word, that scholar is not precluded from supporting colleagues and students experiencing the cruelties of the academy, engaging in self-advocacy, or working with others to transform the workplace. One need not be a "critical" or "engaged" scholar in rhetoric to perform activist work in the academy. When we operationalize engagement so that scholar-activists' activism must correspond with their other professional work, we further entrench the bordering practices that characterize prevailing models of engaged scholarship.

To disrupt the border between engagement and the academy, we should turn our attention to the embeddedness of the academic laborer as such. This includes rhetoricians, as well as our colleagues in STEM fields and other domains—including non-academic laborers on our campuses. As I argue later, we also must understand that all coalitions are contingent and that colleagues are often the problem, rather than the solution.<sup>3</sup> Such critical orientations toward the academy and the bordering practices that divide it from the practice



of engagement require attention to our embeddedness in the materiality of academic institutions. Jack Bratich argues that academic labor is fundamentally embedded, and that critical or activist intellectuals are charged with re-appropriating such positionality. Many intellectuals are already entrenched in industries that poison the planet, military projects that murder and displace legions, and carceral policies that surveil and confine vulnerable populations. Bratich calls on intellectuals to embed themselves in “collaborative projects of exodus and refusal” (34). Similarly, Stefano Harney and Fred Moten call on us to abuse the academy’s hospitality. They explain that “it cannot be denied that the university is a place of refuge, and it cannot be accepted that the university is a place of enlightenment” (26). For them, academia (I take the liberty of including academic organizations) can never be entrusted to foster modes of critical practice that threaten its own status quo or that of civil society. Harney and Moten, that is, reject the presumption that universities are incubators for social justice (also see Loick). But they do not want to abandon the university wholesale. Rather, Harney and Moten encourage us to take advantage of its resources and privileges in order to constitute networks of affinity that they call the undercommons.

With the caveat (I will elaborate shortly) that some of us can afford these lines of flight more than others, I find Harney and Moten’s work instructive for destabilizing the bordering practices of engaged scholarship. They write, “Certainly, critical academic professionals tend to be regarded today as harmless intellectuals, malleable, perhaps capable of some modest intervention in the so-called public sphere” (32). If we accept Harney and Moten’s claim (I believe we should) that the institutions coalescing as the academy are hopelessly tethered to the state and capital, then we should recognize the limits of leveraging the academy to make transformative interventions in civil society. I am not suggesting that we should immediately cease writing scholarship, developing curriculum, or participating in service that positively impacts communities outside academia’s borders. Rather, I am suggesting that such work will always be limited due to its entrenchment within the academy and that the most potent agency of activist academics is their embeddedness within the academy itself. Making life more livable in our departments, on our campuses, and at our conferences will not revolutionize civil society or higher education. But neither will our prevailing models of engaged scholarship (see Nair). We can achieve, however, a more livable life for our most vulnerable colleagues and students. By occupying the academy in ways that refuse the border between activism and our places of labor, engage in contingent acts of coalition, exploit embeddedness in ways that undermine the cruelty of the academy, and recognize the capacity of academic labor to make campuses and academic organizations more livable spaces, we can engage in modes of critique that complicate our prevailing narratives about engagement and exploit our most potent agency.

To clarify what violating the border between engagement and the academy might entail, I offer the following theses as an incomplete manifesto on embedded activist rhetoric in the academy:

- Those of us in positions to do so should activate our departments, campuses, and disciplines by spending our (earned and unearned) professional capital on others. Impressive professional records and awards, the protection of rank and tenure, as well as the securities of whiteness, cis-masculine bodies, and other privileged positionalities enable many of us to occupy academic space in ways that others cannot safely. Drawing on such capital to help professionalize and promote the work of less-privileged colleagues is one mode of activating academic space, as is leveraging professional capital to promote changes on our campuses and in our organizations. If we can wield such capital in order to receive raises and other perks, then we can also use it to pressure institutions to make changes that create more livable space for all who inhabit it.
- We must not take coalitions for granted. Rather, we should complicate the relations that we constitute at all levels of the academy, including scholar/campus, scholar/organization, and scholar/colleague relationships. We can learn here from the decolonial work of Eve Tuck and her colleagues regarding contingent collaborations. They describe such collaborations as “a counterpoint to how others have theorized solidarity and allies and require an ethic of incommensurables that recognizes what is distinct between various projects of social justice and decolonization” (57). Tuck and her coauthors explain that coalitions may form in response to specific exigencies, but are necessarily temporary due to the contingent positionalities, objectives, and therefore relations that contextualize all forms of collaboration. Thus, while many of us join forces with colleagues against administrators in contexts such as collective bargaining, we may also find ourselves relying on administrative entities such as human resources or Title IX offices to protect ourselves or others from our colleagues. In short, as scholars trained to critique the rhetorical norms of identification, we should take no professional affinity (or antagonism) for granted.<sup>4</sup>
- We can occupy and activate the limited emancipatory spaces of campuses and organizations, especially faculty senates and legislative assemblies (see Cole, Hassel, and Schell). Such spaces, while losing some institutional power, represent spaces of deliberation and democratic decision making that can pressure administrators and other entities. Recall that Harney and Moten ask us not to abandon the university entirely, but to abuse its hospitality. Leveraging sanctioned governance spaces in service of addressing real needs is one way to do this. We can also look to departmental, campus, and organizational diversity initiatives as often deeply flawed modalities for ameliorating real suffering.<sup>5</sup> Faculty unions and advocacy organizations, for example, the American Association of University Professors, as well as academic units dedicated to area studies, can serve as invaluable spaces for

oppositional organizing and promoting the work of historically underrepresented populations—to, in other words, constitute the undercommons.

- All of us should avoid underestimating our ability to take risks or overestimating the ability of others to do so. Understand that thresholds for risk are contingent on ways bodies are situated, but can also be a function of institutional privilege and an always-deferred promise to take more risks in the future (Yates).
- Always keep a paper trail.

The primary goal of this partial and deeply imperfect list is to serve as a heuristic for activating academic space in ways that draw on the embeddedness of the engaged scholar. Such work should always be mindful of power differentials and other variables that constrain and enable activist work on our campuses and in our organizations. Nonetheless, because we are embedded in the academy, our agency is often quite potent therein. While we cannot expect to demolish and rebuild the academy in our lifetimes, we should not underestimate our capacity to intervene and produce real consequences for real bodies.

I have not ceased caring deeply about the city and state where I live, or national and international politics. The world outside the academy still matters deeply to me, and I choose to believe it would regardless of my status as a professional scholar. My purpose in this essay is not to devalue the work of colleagues who forge meaningful relationships with communities of struggle, whether through engaged scholarship or simply because they believe it is the right thing to do. Academics belong to multiple publics that demand their attention and energy. I am arguing that those of us in rhetorical studies who also identify as activists should mobilize our critical and inventional abilities toward denaturalizing the abiding border between prevailing definitions of engagement and the space of academia itself. To claim that engagement can only take place outside the “ivory tower” presumes that our institutions are innocent and do not warrant attention compared with more conspicuously aggrieved publics. Many of our colleagues have been telling us for decades that this simply is not the case. The academy is a space of cruelty and our embeddedness therein leaves us with the choice to err on the side of complicity or resistance. Violating the borders of scholarly engagement is one strategy toward mobilizing our activist energies in ways that make the spaces of academia more humane.

## Notes

1 On the 2008 NCA Convention boycott, see Cloud;Young, Battaglia, and Cloud.

2 Clarification: McGowan proposes that faculty with tenure and the rank of Associate Professor should be evaluated this way. McGowan maintains that for junior faculty, “peer review by other experts would remain crucial to being granted tenure” (417).

- 3 I am indebted to D.L. Stephenson for cogently and powerfully expressing this simple truth at the 2017 NCA convention in a way that informed this chapter.
- 4 As I clarified with my employment of borders and cruelty, I do not draw on the conceptual resources of decoloniality lightly. I agree with Tuck and Yang that “decolonization specifically requires the repatriation of Indigenous land and life. Decolonization is not a metonym for social justice” (21). While academia is undeniably complicit in the colonization of Indigenous peoples (Miranda), the cruelties I describe are not forms of colonization, nor is my intention to employ the vocabularies of colonized scholars as metaphors. Rather, I take Tuck’s work regarding contingent collaborations, a concept firmly rooted in experiences of colonization, as instructive for other spaces of struggle. I am grateful to Darrel Wanzer-Serrano for bringing Tuck’s work to my attention.
- 5 Recently, several NCA members submitted an open letter to the organization’s Executive Committee expressing disappointment regarding the systematic exclusion of people of color from editor positions at NCA journals. While few of the signatories, myself included, have unfettered faith in NCA’s commitment to racial justice or other forms of equity, we nonetheless framed our argument with the organization’s espoused investments in diversity. NCA responded, offering detailed explanations about how they intended to address our concerns.

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## 2 Rhetorical Activism

### Responsibility in the Ivory Tower

*Rebecca Jones*

Other studies are something to know; this is something to do.

John Franklin Genung (1887)

Karlyn Kohrs Campbell opens *Man Cannot Speak for Her* with a description of the rhetorical tradition:

Public persuasion has been a conscious part of the Western male's heritage from ancient Greece to the present. This is not an insignificant matter. For centuries, the ability to persuade others has been a part of the Western man's standard of excellence in many areas, even of citizenship itself.

(Campbell qtd. in *Walking and Talking* 7)

This classic text in feminist rhetorical theory goes on to explain that while women “have no parallel rhetorical history” due to prohibitions against women speaking, Campbell starts the reclamation by examining “women's rights *agitation*” (my emphasis) (7–9).<sup>1</sup>

Agitation is a more vigorous subcategory of persuasion. The women in Campbell's study had to take what many perceived as an aggressive stance because the changes they called for challenged social, communicative and material norms. They hoped to do big and unpopular things like end slavery, give women the vote, and end alcohol consumption through speeches, marches, letters, small gatherings, and consciousness raising. In the preface to *The Journey of Social Activism*, Joshua Atkinson defines activism as “collaborations by people in order to advocate for a position, nurture conflicts in society, or violate or transgress laws or norms in society” (x). This definition offers a scale of possible conceptions of activism from advocacy to transgression. This definition, perhaps, outlines the trouble with “activism.” It can be prefaced by mild adjectives like “community,” which might entail reclaiming blighted public space and building playgrounds, as well as more contentious ones like “radical,” which could refer to major public actions pushing for systemic, social change.

In my graduate program, I was trained in canonical rhetorical studies but was lucky to take several robust courses in feminist rhetoric and American pragmatism. My study ranged from Aristotle's recommendation that political rhetoric is the most important rhetoric, to John Dewey's "Great Community," to Ida B. Wells Barnett's anti-lynching campaign. As such, "agitator" and rhetor are sometimes synonymous for me. I realize that other scholars would disagree. I acknowledge that part of rhetorical study and practice includes mediation, consensus building, civil discourse, and deliberation. I teach these practices and value them highly. However, it is clear that rhetorical history, especially as it converges with a hope for democracy, is populated by activists, both those who want change and those who seek to maintain their perceived status quo.

To study rhetoric, in my experience, has been to study those people and groups who shift discourses. At the same time, I have studied rhetoric and written about it for academic audiences; I have also taught this history, theory, and *techne* to students. I have taught it through freshman writing, as a study in argumentation or propaganda, and as a history to graduate students. I have been an agitator, though not as often, myself. The very different aims of these overlapping activities have caused a personal dilemma I hope to explore and dispel here, a dilemma I think is shared by others in the field.

At the end stages of my dissertation focusing on artistic protest rhetorics (see Jones *Enculturation* for a version of this argument), I panicked. I was writing about citizens who put their bodies and their art on the line in an effort to shift the public conversation on topics from domestic violence to environmental degradation, while I sat, alone, in a quiet room reading and writing. I imagined my final product bound and shelved with other dissertations silently taking up space in the library.

I felt far removed from my undergraduate self who saw activism narrowly through image events (see Deluca). With visions of activism garnered from documentaries on the movements of the 1960s and 1970s, I remember heading off to college and truly thinking there would be a Greenpeace bus near campus waiting to take me to save the whales. I didn't save the whales. I marched, but found getting hit with beer cans during Take Back the Night not as useful as my work at the rape crisis center. Slowly, my work circled to smaller, more intimate spheres. I did not see it as activism. Once I was in my PhD program, I was mostly just writing and reading about activism due to the pressures and time constraints of the program. While I was participating in community outreach through campus, it certainly did not register as anything like charging a whaling ship on a dingy.<sup>2</sup>

In graduate school, I studied rhetorical theory and discourse specifically focused on the ways that communication occurs in public spaces, especially by rhetors with barriers to full and easy participation. I taught freshman writing and started, in a small way, to think about how my rhetorical study might have anything to do with my future work as a professor and a citizen. While I loved the research, some days it felt a bit like circling in an eddy, as I couldn't imagine



the work doing anything more than encouraging more research and writing in the academy. In the late 1990s, early 2000s, we were still in high theory mode and just shifting to broader notions of engagement, especially in rhetoric and composition, as a primary aim of academic work in the humanities.

Stephen Yarbrough in *After Rhetoric: The Study of Discourse Beyond Language and Culture* distinguishes between rhetorical force and discursive power as a way to talk about the limits of persuasion. To have rhetorical force, for Yarbrough, means others believe you have the real force (whether physical, material, or mental) to back up what you are saying. However, to have discursive power means that readers/listeners believe you have the power to convince others to believe in and act on your rhetoric, whether or not a particular listener personally believes your rhetoric (28). For Yarbrough, agreeing with a piece of rhetoric is not enough. To have discursive power, a text/writer must be able to offer the reader/listener the belief that others beyond a particular audience will actually buy into the ideas. I experience this when I read an interesting but clearly partisan article, for example, but know that those outside of the targeted readership would not buy into or take action on the argument (too liberal, too conservative, too dramatic). The rhetorical force is there, but not the discursive power. This simplified description of Yarbrough's theory about the power of rhetoric to make or resist change offers a vocabulary for analyzing some kinds of rhetoric and their effectiveness. Our job as academic writers is to create rhetorical force through clear, substantial arguments, high quality research, and excellent prose. Despite this, my concerns about the value of my own academic prose reside in my unease that the work has little discursive power beyond a small circle of readers. To have discursive power, others reading the work, especially those outside of particular academic circles, would have to grant the work the "credit" or the belief that others will buy into the ideas and act on them. Some academics, though more outside of the humanities, have found discursive power (consider medical researchers, sociologists, or education theorists who impact public policy). Typical academic rhetoric, especially in English Studies, is not required to think about larger publics. We need only think of effective rhetoric for a small, particular audience. To have rhetorical or discursive power, your ideas must first be accessible to an audience. To take the step toward discursive power outside academic circles, for academics, would mean writing in more public spaces than academic journals and finding a way to communicate effectively beyond the ivory towers—beyond the small, particular circles, beyond the jargon and the insider language. We might shift a disciplinary field, but what beyond that?

The dissertation wall I hit has several explanations. I, personally, needed to feel authentic in my work on public discourse. I wanted to be both a scholar and a practitioner and I did not have the time or outlet to practice. This is certainly not a requirement for the work. Don Randel reminds us in "The Myth of the Academic Community" that "The study of the humanities has largely been a solitary activity" (229). This is not a new idea and neither is the

paradox of humanities scholars and their isolation from humans. Even with some changes in tenure and promotion standards and more acceptance of collaborative work, we are largely measured by the quantity and quality of our individual academic prose. In addition to the need to feel more authentic, the rhetorical tradition and my subjects of study were all about public *action*, yet my toil seemed more about jumping through an institutional hoop rather than participating in public discourse. If this kind of writing was to be a large part of my life's work, I wanted it to do some work. The public acts I studied reminded me of this. My own research demonstrated that participation in public discourse is an essential quality of good citizenship, activism, and, perhaps, of good writing itself. I wanted to change the potential consequences of my writing or, more accurately, change my writing so that it might have consequences beyond tenure and promotion. Much of this "dilemma" was not a dilemma at all. In some ways, I was just tired and incredibly naïve to believe my work would impact larger public discourses. I was fulfilling a requirement, not writing a manifesto. At worst, I was wallowing in solipsism brought on by being alone too much.

Looking back, I have sorted out several mixed aims. Academic writing is meant to create a body of knowledge that may or may not influence public discourse, policy, or conversations about a topic. Even if merely description, the work can offer valuable insight through the collection of ideas into cohesive units. This is a valuable aim, it's just not the only one I want to follow. I also realize that while some of this desire to have my writing go out into the world came/comes from my brief experience as journalist. Finally, there has always been an impulse toward public action in university life that ebbs and flows in popularity and value. The impulse is stronger in some fields than in others. In the same year that *Activism and Rhetoric* was first published (2010), *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* published a "Forum on Engaged Scholarship." Editors Joshua Gunn and John Louis Lucaites focus on the notion of "social engagement" and note that universities have been concerned about the relationship between academic study and the larger public since the modern era (406). They move from Immanuel Kant's *The Contest of Faculties*, through the Frankfurt School's admonition that scholarship be expressly public (406). As part of the forum, John McGowan (a former undergraduate professor of mine), offers a vision of post-tenure "engaged scholarship" attuned to community need and critique as opposed to a "service ethos" imposed on faculty out of necessity (413–420). While there is a growing administrative push to "engage," this kind of work does not fit all academics nor should it be mandatory any more than activist work should be prohibited.

As a post-tenure professor, the world looks quite different from the one in which I wrote the first edition of this chapter. While I am more and more convinced that a call to act is embedded in rhetorical study from its roots, being an engaged scholar or even an engaged activist citizen has taken on risk. Public interaction can leave you one tweet away from lost funding, an administrative reprimand, or worse. Academic work and activity no

longer gathers dust on a shelf. It is easily circulated on the web, reframed and reprocessed in a meme, a tweet, or article. I have had colleagues attacked by state senators for their work and campus activities, and I have been targeted on forums merely due to a perception of what I might say in a public space. Academic work and ideas circulate in the world in ways we couldn't imagine even ten years ago. Laurie Gries' *Still Life with Rhetoric* offers an excellent summation of "circulation studies" (xix). Rhetoric is digital, fluid, and dynamic and fast, and we do not always have control of how and where it will be used and repurposed (xix).

The question becomes: what is the work of rhetoric, rhetorical scholarship, rhetorical teaching in a world of fast paced circulation and social media? Is there some larger responsibility to the public beyond university requirements to public service? Or is this chapter simply a personal look at my own call to write and work beyond a set of parameters? In *The Responsibilities of Rhetoric*, the proceedings of the 2006 Rhetoric Society of America Conference, David Zarefsky, in his plenary address, takes up the title as a question. While he argues that rhetoric, as a techne, does not have any particular responsibility, we do have some responsibility for the ways it is perceived and used (Zarefsky 18–19). Ultimately, he warns that "deliberation, consultation, negotiation, and persuasion are widely seen as signs of weakness" and that part of our role is as teachers advocating for a greater appreciation of its value (20–21). Since then, the degradation of public (especially political) discourse has only increased as we are inundated with fake news, false dichotomies, divisive rhetoric as normal political discourse, and all out lies (though, admittedly, there is no golden age where this did not exist). Due to some of the lost faith in traditional political rhetorics, scholars have moved to a study of the rhetorics of activism, the more active, agile, and creative offshoot of traditional Aristotelian persuasion. Since my dissertation on protest rhetoric, completed in 2003, there have been countless books, articles, and studies on protest, activism, and social movements.<sup>3</sup> Everything is faster. The rhetoric itself, the work we do, the call to participate.

And yet, the familiar metaphor, the Ivory Tower, is still in circulation and is useful in considering the shifting relationship between scholarship, activism, and rhetoric, if only as a desperate call for new metaphors. Ivory tower is a metaphor of disconnection that views scholars and students detached from the world in pursuit of knowledge. While this is a metaphor that some groups want to see more firmly in place (see the forthcoming NAS discussion), it is not a metaphor that matches the history of Western rhetoric and especially not the rhetoric of women and other groups who challenge systems of power. Rhetoric, even if studied and critiqued, was always practiced. As writing and rhetoric were being reintroduced to university curricula in the late 1800s-early 1900s, John Franklin Genung at Amherst College explains that while many fields allow students the "possession of certain facts and principles," the "study of rhetoric contemplates presentation ... is set predominantly in the attitude of

construction, creation” (135). “Other studies,” he continues, “are something to know; this [rhetoric] is something to do” (135).

What are other metaphors that would dispel the dissonance I felt between my academic writing, activism, and teaching? We might look to something like universities as a Public Commons, with full awareness of the danger inherent in Garrett Hardin’s “tragedy” narrative (Hardin). The public commons is an ecological term that usually refers to shared public land and natural resources. I think that we should start to think of universities as a material resource rather than a rarified space or, more recently, as a business serving future workers. In the public commons model, the university would take on a more centralized conception as an actual place of common interaction. We are already comfortable with other shared digital spaces like the creative commons and the digital commons. We might look to other labels such as my university’s Carnegie designation as an “engaged metropolitan university” (which calls up McGowan’s “engaged scholarship”) but only if we are willing to hash out the old arguments in terms of real policy.

Richard Rorty and Stanley Fish still offer a useful look at the classic arguments. In *Achieving Our Country*, Rorty worried in 1998 that the “Left” as a political force had become inactive. Rorty establishes, in *Achieving Our Country*, his view of the relationship between academics and activism: “All universities worthy of the name have always been centers of social protest. If American universities ever cease to be such centers, they will lose both their self-respect and the respect of the learned world” (82). This is a call for reforming, or reminding ourselves about, the very nature and purpose of academic work. While Rorty was specifically critiquing what he saw as a turn to theory rather than a push to engage, the larger message is that a university should be both the place and space to hash out public problems. This will necessarily be creative, messy, and require institutional and public support.

Stanley Fish’s 2004 *New York Times* editorial, “Why We Built the Ivory Tower,” his many writings under his regular “Think Again” column on the opinion page of the *NY Times*, and his book *Save the World on Your Own Time* argue that professors are merely the interpreters of culture and ideas, and we are lucky if our thoughts trickle out into the *real* world and *do* anything. Fish’s book first published in 2008 and republished in 2012 specifically reprimands: it is simply not our job to “cure every ill the world has ever known” (1). Our job is to:

(1) introduce students to bodies of knowledge and traditions of inquiry that had not previously been part of their experience; and (2) equip those same students with the analytical skills—of argument, statistical modeling, laboratory procedure—that will enable them to move confidently within those traditions and to engage in independent research after a course is over.

(*Save the World* 12–13)

While this list is a good description of classroom work, it's just that there is more to the job than this, especially when the body of knowledge you introduce is the history of public discourse and its current practices. While Rorty is talking about scholarship and Fish, primarily, about teaching, they outline the boundaries I have come to in my work, even if these boundaries are highly ironic (Rorty, the ultimate academic writer advising less theory and more public action, and Fish, the traditional armchair theorist turned conservative blogger in the *NY Times*).

Dewey sees "school" more holistically than either Rorty or Fish. While Dewey was thinking about secondary education, the idea applies and gets us to closer to what actually happens in public universities:

the school is primarily a social institution. Education being a social process, the school is simply that form of community life in which all those agencies are concentrated that will be most effective in bringing the child to share in the inherited resources of the race, and to use his own powers for social ends.

(Dewey 445)

I agree with Dewey's argument that there is a necessary connection between school and democracy; our work as professors including research, teaching, and service will always serve "social ends." If we recall Atkinson's definition of activism as "collaborations by people in order to advocate for a position, nurture conflicts in society, or violate or transgress laws or norms in society," public university work might "advocate" for a kind of informed community life, but certainly does not have the goal of transgressing norms. As we know, school just as often can serve to support the status quo.

Despite an understanding that much of university work (writing and teaching) is not explicitly activist (at least at the transgressive end of the spectrum) and many in this book would not define their academic work as such, there is a growing current of animosity toward any work that appears to engage with the public beyond the ivory tower. While I grapple with a desire to be more activist oriented in my university work, other forces condemn the very choices in my syllabus as too outwardly focused, too activist. I often teach in the women's studies program and so I am accustomed to the accusation that the primary work of the classroom is to create an army of activists pushing particular values. These kinds of attacks are also familiar to cultural, ethnic, or diversity based programs of study. However, the net is much wider now and includes all disciplines, even those beyond the humanities. In January of 2017, the National Association of Scholars (NAS) published a report titled "Making Citizens: How American Universities Teach Civics." They go after The Campus Compact which is "a national coalition of 1,000+ colleges and universities committed to the public purposes of higher education. We build democracy through civic education and community development"

(<https://compact.org/who-we-are/>). The NAS claims that a “new civics” rooted in the 1960s New Left have worked, insidiously, to replace an “old civics”:

[I]nstead of teaching college students the foundations of law, liberty, and self-government, colleges teach students how to organize protests, occupy buildings, and stage demonstrations. They are indeed forms of “civic engagement,” but they are far from being a genuine substitute for learning how to be a full participant in our republic. (2)

According to NAS, “new civics” teaches “students that a good citizen is a radical activist, and it puts political activism at the center of everything that students do in college, including academic study, extra-curricular pursuits, and off campus ventures” (2). They claim, essentially, that it is “vocational training for community activists” (3). The primary target of this argument is service learning. For NAS authors, the perpetrators of this ideology are Paulo Freire, John Dewey, and, strangely, Mao. Evidently, William Ramsey gave us “service learning” via his work at the Oak Ridge Institute of Nuclear Studies, just down the road from me in Tennessee (5). The group is particularly opposed to offices of “diversity,” “sustainability,” and “social justice” (5). The report posts pictures of professors who run “community engagement” centers and offers case studies of the University of Colorado Boulder, Colorado State University, University of Northern Colorado, and the University of Wyoming. While David Horowitz’s list of dangerous professors seemed ominous, this report is a manifesto that is part of a larger movement to wall up the ivory tower and reverse trends in engagement.

Increasingly, as we see in the NAS report, “activism” and “activist” are meant to be negative labels for a leftist agitator, a person desiring systemic and holistic change, total revolution. Systemic change is pretty scary, especially for those who like things as they are. While many scholars understand the systemic nature of most public problems, not all activism seeks revolution. However, calling it up is an age old fear tactic. I would argue, however, that there are conservative activists who see that changes have taken place and work, using the exact same methods, to reverse the trends.<sup>4</sup> Phyllis Schlafly accomplished this with her STOP ERA movement (Stop Taking Our Privileges) in which she galvanized white women across the United States and successfully stopped ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment (Mansbridge). Schlafly’s Eagle Forum, once a print and now an online publication, is a rhetorically savvy clearing house for “citizen volunteers” (see Eagle Forum and Critchlow). Websites like [www.conservativeusa.org](http://www.conservativeusa.org) have specific pages on how to be an activist and even use the term. Atkinson’s definition of rhetoric does not quite explain the complaint against activism by groups like NAS because it focuses on the degree of change desired (advocate, nurture conflict, violate or transgress norms) and does not clearly account for activism that wants to maintain a perceived norm. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) defines activism more

in terms of the activity itself: “the use of vigorous campaigning to bring about social or political change.” This notion of “vigorous campaigning” marks the aim as significantly different in form and content from deliberation and civic discourse, which still fits easily in the basic obligations of America citizens in a democracy for groups like NAS. The catch here is that if you disagree with a particular position, being presented with it can feel aggressive and “vigorous” when I would argue it is merely part of fairly traditional deliberation. Activism, then, is in the eye of the beholder.

To close, I’ll offer two examples, one public and one teaching, that have helped me work through my responsibilities to my community, myself, and my work. To do this, I’d like to add another term, a reversal of the book title: rhetorical activism.

I’ll define rhetorical activism as *advocating for better public rhetoric*. In its most prosaic form, this is what we do as writing and communication teachers. We demand clarity, attention to audience, ethical research, and the ethical presentation of the words of others. To use NAS terminology, I teach both old and new civics. We can use rhetoric and teach it, as Kenneth Burke hopes in “The Rhetoric of Hitler’s Battle,” to recognize and warn others of impending danger. We can use it to reshape the narratives we tell ourselves about how the world works, we can use it, simply, to let people know that problems exist or point to good work being done that can be taken up by others. Finally, we can help shape the public discourse on discourse. How we engage each other can be as important as what we have to say.

The best example I have as a rhetorical activist is when I was the respondent to Ann Coulter’s campus visit. My colleague and I, Heather Palmer, wrote about this experience for *Writing on the Edge* (“Counter-Coulter: A Story of Craft and Ethos”). On October 5, 2009, Ann Coulter was invited to speak on our campus as part of an annual lecture series. I volunteered to be the respondent. Along with my writing partner, Heather Palmer, I used everything I had ever learned in my graduate courses in rhetoric, in my experience as a writer and writing teacher, to craft a public speech in response to Coulter’s work (five drafts and two peer reviews). In retrospect, this was an attempt to participate in a form of deliberative democracy. We wanted to have a “civil” discussion with Ann Coulter. But, I also wanted to see if all the skills I had learned from reading rhetorically minded texts, from Aristotle to June Jordan, would give me discursive power. When I walked up to the podium, the large Tea Party crowd hissed and grumbled, literally. At the end of my talk, which suggested that Coulter is purposefully divisive rather than participating in democratic engagement, she chose not to respond to my remarks and jumped into questions from the crowd. This included demoralizing a young female student. On a really good day, I like to tell myself that she was rattled for thirty seconds. On other days, I know that she ignored my argument because it was true and she did not care. Certainly, I did not win over the crowd. They did not stand and applaud vowing to forgo angry talk radio and attack politics, but we received a steady trickle of emails that went something like this, “I’m a conservative, but

what you talked about really got to me” (even though our speech had **nothing** to do with being either liberal or conservative and everything to do with the deplorable state of partisan political rhetoric on both sides). Was this activism? I don’t really know anymore. It did however advocate for a change in discourse and, in way, I did hope to transgress the new norms of hateful, racist, misogynist public rhetoric. Ironically, I was the more conservative advocate in the room if we are talking about rhetorical practices in demonstrating an old school argument as a speech. I will say this: my students both those identifying as conservative and liberal found her speech appalling, at least in the reflections they wrote after her 2009 visit and again in 2015 (we declined to be the respondents a second time). By October each year, we had gotten through basic rhetorical principles and some bit of argumentation studies. They recognized, on their own, that some kind of line had been crossed: a rhetorical line, a community line, a democracy line.

Even though our Coulter response did not feel successful, it did represent a moment where the university served as a public commons. The event was free to both the public and to students. The students got to see, firsthand, rhetoric at work in both positive and negative ways. I would argue that they witnessed the end stages of a long propaganda game. There were radio spots and newspaper articles, blog posts, and hate mail targeting both Coulter and us. Many of us hashed out the consequences of the speeches in class, in papers, in creative writing, and eventually in academic publications. Her speech on campus inevitably led students to think about issues beyond the university and, for some, to begin to work to change them.

Where my response to Ann Coulter was a public forum for the whole community, where university, national, and local interests shared the same air for a short time, my Innovation Lab course requires students to engage with the local community in a slower, quieter way. The yearlong course, inspired by a government-sponsored program in the Netherlands, immerses students in rhetorical theory, design thinking strategies, collaboration practices, and ethical research methodologies. The goal of the class is to introduce students to ethical public problem solving through creative thinking in collaboration with a community partner. In some ways, it functions like a service learning course, but it has a very particular research methodology and the students choose the community partners and the community partners get to decide whether or not to accept the help. These partners might be the city government, a local school, a neighborhood, or even a church. The students work to identify a problem and propose a possible solution. In my mind, the course takes ethical philosophy and storytelling from the humanities, on the ground practicality from business and local non-profit theory, empathy from feminist philosophy and ecology studies, and uses rhetorical theory to shape, collaborate, and work in difficult and compelling situations. The course is meant to be a purposeful bridge between the university and the community. At the end of the course, we are all rhetorical activists of a sort arguing that a problem exists, why we should care about, and one possible fix. It is meant to help students see that



their academic study and the skills they garner are, in fact, quite useful in the world. It gives them a chance to practice the difficult things in a safe way: collaboration, active listening, public communication, audience awareness, ethical engagement.

When I am with my students, I feel hopeful about rhetorical activism, hopeful that we can talk again in some useful way about the problems facing local and global communities. I feel hopeful in the process of writing another letter to the editor or a grant for a local group. Somehow, the words on the page become part of a long tradition of movement, shifts, and possible change. When I read the news or look at my social media, that feeling of hope seems incredibly naïve. Recently, though, I was talking with a university administrator who was concerned about the difficulties of teaching Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me* as our Freshman Read. He worried about both the writing style and heavy content. I explained, "If we don't do this hard work on a college campus, who will?"

## Notes

- 1 Women's rhetoric as well as feminist rhetorical theory is now firmly a part of the rhetorical tradition. The biennial conference "Feminism(s) and Rhetoric(s)" hosted by the Coalition of Feminist Scholars in the History of Composition and Rhetoric affirms and maintains this work. See <http://cwshrc.org/>.
- 2 The image of the Greenpeace dingy confronting the whaling ship filled my high school student imagination. For reference and discussion, see the opening of Deluca's *Image Events* or Greenpeace's overview: [www.greenpeace.org/international/en/news/features/movements-memes-and-mindbomb/](http://www.greenpeace.org/international/en/news/features/movements-memes-and-mindbomb/).
- 3 Work on protest and activist rhetorics is prolific and crosses many fields including English, communication, philosophy, gender studies, transnational studies, sociology, etc.
- 4 The notion of *conservative activist* is paradoxical in many respects. To be conservative is to desire stability, not change. However, the term "conservative" serves as an umbrella for groups such as the Alt Right, who have the express purpose of reversing contemporary shifts in social and culture norms such as: general acceptance of the rights and freedoms of the LGBTQ+ community; race equity and equality; and openness to religious and culture freedoms.

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### 3 Reclaiming (Teaching) the “A” Word (Activism)

*Amy Pason*

I analyze and write about social movement rhetoric and advocacy strategies. I'm particularly interested in the meaning-making related to change and the expansive realm of symbolic and material functions message-making can produce. In my activist work, the actions my collectives take are influenced by what we've learned from historic movements and previous activist experience. Recalling the teach-ins against the Vietnam War, as a graduate student in Minnesota, I helped organize teach-ins related to campus labor strikes. More recently, my theoretical understanding of how the meaning of direct action is influenced by surroundings and places (Endres and Senda-Cook) came to life at a march in downtown Reno where our chants of "Bridges Not Walls" against Trump immigration policies were amplified by being on an actual bridge. Considering optics for creating image events (DeLuca), the 2017 Women's and Science Marches in Reno ended at a downtown park in front of a now iconic Burning Man sculpture that spells out BELIEVE. More and more, today's activist efforts are informed by the same rhetorical theories I teach in my classes: understanding framing to influence the evaluation of messages, deconstructing hegemonic narratives to understand how to address social issues, or adapting one's message to best influence the particular person of power you want to sway. As an educator, I take these experiences into the classroom to show my students how activist advocacy utilizing rhetorical theories is no less legitimate than the exemplars of politicians, business leaders, or other "acceptable" change makers. And yet, I am often met by resistance from my less civically engaged students who are skeptical to learning activism as something other than a negative force in our society.

And yet, I know that part of achieving social change is to change the narratives and dominant meanings that challenge activist work. From my experiences in the classroom, I also know it is possible to change students' conceptions about the "A" word through guiding students through the same processes activists use to identify issues and possible courses of action, and strategize messages to advocate for change. Thus, this chapter outlines the lessons I've learned and the approaches I've taken in teaching a course called Rhetoric of Dissent. Just as my research work advocates for the movements I study, in my teaching, I advocate for the legitimacy of those activist strategies and tactics that necessarily work outside "legitimate" channels to achieve equity and justice.

Before I move into how I approach teaching the “A” word, I should be clear *why* I prefer to retain and use “activism” as my defining term. I’m continually surprised when activists (that often identify as a minority group) argue they don’t call themselves activists because it is just something they “do.” Although I support the moves here to normalize activist actions as being something all *should* do, to not use the activism label erases the histories, legacies, and activists whose shoulders we (current activists) stand on and whose work we continue. Further, Smucker recently advocated that activists might drop this label as it “effectively functions as a cognitive roadblock that prevents most people from considering anything we [activists] have to say, while also excusing sympathizers (who don’t consider themselves ‘activists’) from joining us” (38). Although I applaud efforts to overcome negative connotations of “activism” and present activist acts as something most would be *comfortable* in doing, I also don’t think the best course of action is to avoid using the term—we should work to change people’s understanding of what activism means.

For me, there are qualitative differences between actions we take as citizens through “normal” democratic processes (such as voting or petitioning an elected official) and the *activist* actions that necessarily exceed these “normal” systems that work to exclude or oppress particular bodies and particular voices. To not call it “activism” is to deny that power imbalances exist. To not recognize “activist” work is to also not call into question the actions of those in power that deny rights or basic principles of justice—it should not be “normal” to have to take direct action against policies and practices that are harmful to the most vulnerable in society, and yet we *must* because of the actions of a powerful few. Thus, for me, I have never wanted to abandon “activism” *because* of the history and connotations that word carries, and my rhetorical activist mission is to help change the dominant negative narratives of “activism” through my research and my teaching to be something that all would *want* to be called to do as the need arises.

In this chapter, I’ll trace my own journey in becoming and identifying as an activist as this journey shapes my research and teaching. Then, I’ll explain some of the strategies I use in my class to translate traditional rhetorical concepts to activist practices underscoring the legitimacy of activist work. Finally, I’ll show how I’ve learned about rhetoric from activist practices and bring those into my research and teaching. In all, I hope to show how rhetoricians can approach teaching about activism as well as how rhetorical principles can be put to use by activists.

### Changing Narratives of the “A” Word

My own journey to becoming an activist began by wanting to understand the meanings of *activism*. As an undergraduate at the University of Denver (DU), I witnessed 9/11 on residence hall TV screens, and I graduated just in time to see friends deployed to Iraq, thus, discourses of *student* activism were newly relevant to debating war and peace. During the early 2000s, mainstream discourses declared students apathetic if they were not out marching or engaged

in confrontations to oppose the war. For students, the bar for claiming to be an “activist” was high as the common-sense definitions for activism were synonymous with protest drawing from the earlier Vietnam War-era student activism. Anything less than bodies in the streets didn’t “count” as activism. Even though the students at my predominantly white, conservative, middle- to upper-class campus *were* engaged in activities historically linked to social movements and student activism of previous generations (voter registration drives, community education, changing campus policies around serving fair trade coffees only, and volunteerism to name a few), none of these students would identify themselves as activists because they did not go to protests. Even when I would point out the historical connections of their work in voting registration, for example, my fellow students would shy away from the label of “activist” in the same ways that some today shy away from the label of feminist: they believe in the principles and goals, but cannot overcome the negative connotations of the name. Thus, my first work as a rhetorician-activist was to talk about the work of my undergraduate thesis that explored what it meant to be an activist at DU—namely that we needed to change the ways that we talked about activism to expand that definition beyond protest, and to encourage student engagement by recognizing and legitimizing activist advocacy (Pason, “Reclaiming Activism”).

### **Activism/Rhetoric Connection**

The Center for Story-Based Strategy (CSS) advocates “changing the story” through activist advocacy. The first step in changing the story is to identify what dominant narratives are currently at work, and that would prevent the general public from accepting your proposed courses of action. CSS talks about this in terms of *Narrative Power Analysis*. For example, we could take a news story about Black Lives Matter (BLM), and identify different parts of the story: what is the conflict presented? Who is the hero and villain in the story? What are the underlying assumptions to the story that help you to believe the way the narrative is told in the news story? From this, we could identify the way that the news story might portray police as doing heroic deeds against protesters who are pictured in threatening ways. In this analysis, activists can recognize that changing public assumptions of how BLM activists are in the wrong would be in managing how the public understands the “character” of these activists. We can see how the strategy of the 2014 hashtag campaign of “If They Gunned Me Down” works to show positive images of Black individuals (in graduation attire, for example) in contrast to photos that might otherwise be used in news media that portray those individuals in a negative light.

In academic work, the same principles of narrative power analysis were presented by Walter Fisher in the “narrative paradigm.” Fisher argues that people reason and make meaning by applying narrative concepts to messages. Individuals evaluate narrative by thinking in terms of probability (do the characters do what we expect?) and fidelity (does this make sense with my own experiences). By analyzing narratives in terms of probability and fidelity, we can also understand the underlying assumptions of dominant narratives.

Part of changing the negative connotations of “activism” is to understand what discourses constituted those definitions in the first place. Similar to my experiences as an undergraduate, my current undergraduate students are exposed to “activists” as seen on TV. As Gitlin has elaborated from his own experiences as a student activist, news media often frames activists in relation to protest and violence that become part of demonstrations in the street. Although DeLuca and Peebles see some positive implications for getting one’s message on the public screen by exploiting news media’s impulse to frame all protests as confrontation and prioritize negative imagery, most audiences walk away from those stories understanding that the activists are breaking laws, are misguided, or should have found other ways to voice their opinions. My current students at the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR) had a similar reaction when we first started learning about Black Lives Matter (BLM) in the dissent course. Most students initially repeated the same stories dominating mainstream media: BLM hates the police, is violent, and should be advocating that all lives matter. These students, with limited information about the movement, were simply agreeing with what was a coherent narrative—that they were characters engaging in presumably illegal activities (as police were present) and they should find alternative means to voice their opinions if they did not want to encounter police. Continued and repeated news media stories placing activists in the villain role perpetuate negative stereotypes and affirm the common-sense notion that activism is not an acceptable course of action.

However, we can change what courses of action are perceived as legitimate by changing the story. When I teach, I think about how I tell the story of activism, and place activists in the hero position, thus their actions (protest included) become heroic actions. The current post-2016 election moment also has changed public perceptions of activists—more of my students recognize positive connotations with being an activist when the activists they see on TV are countering the typical villains embodied by Neo-Nazis and racists such as was the case in Charlottesville. At UNR, where nearly 45% of students identify as an under-represented group, it is easier for students to see themselves or their classmates in the bodies of the activists on screen. Moreover, in a moment where both conservative and liberal protesters are taking to the streets, more individuals can identify with an “us” side of activism. And, part of the new narrative of activism brought about by citizen engagement initiatives such as Indivisible expands our vocabulary of activist actions to include attending town hall meetings, calling your Senator, *and* joining in the marches that nearly everyone you know is attending.

How we construct and tell narratives of scholarship in our fields when we teach is also important. When I worked on my undergraduate thesis, I was surprised to read psychological studies of student activists in the 1960s that began with the premise that students were protesting irrationally (then researchers being surprised to find students were acting on the values instilled in them by parents) (e.g., see Knott). The empirical evidence disrupted the narrative of “kids acting out” to show the characters of the story as moral actors

(see also Buechler for how other disciplines similarly evolved to see activists as rational actors). Thus, part of the story I tell about *how* scholars reach their conclusions and “objective” truths is to recognize that scholars also frame their arguments for particular purposes and for particular interests. In my own research, my narrative of social movement rhetoric is positively biased, and leans toward how activists have contributed to and expanded our understanding of persuasion (see Pason, Foust, and Zittlow Rogness).

Even the choices of what readings students complete in class can change the narrative about activism, where I often have students read the “objective” scholarly works alongside activist oriented works. For example, students read Del Gandio’s advice to radicals that to be rhetorically effective one needs more than a big heart and needs to channel the yelling and anger for better radical advocacy (23–29) alongside Bitzer’s rhetorical situation model where speakers think about the audience and their own constraints in adapting persuasive messages. If students accept that some speakers might be challenged to be heard in various ways because of the bodies they speak from, then they are more open to understanding why some speakers use alternative advocacy means to get their message across (Palczewski, Ice, and Fritch similarly contextualize Bitzer in this direction with the examples in their textbook). Telling stories about how scholars debate the legitimacy and effectiveness of some rhetorical acts (and change their mind through debate) also helps students see how prevailing ideas of what is “good” speech can change overtime (for example, see Scott and Smith’s argument to rhetoricians to understand confrontational speech in a new light).

In sum, the words “activism” and “activist” carry the baggage of how they have been historically used and understood in popular culture, news media, and scholarship. Thus, to change how students understand the meanings of “activism,” we have to unpack where those meanings originate, think about who gets to tell the stories of activism, and work to show how scholarly rhetorical traditions develop from or are part of activist advocacy.

### **Understanding Disruption as a Legitimate Path for Change**

As I noted in the first edition of this collection, to be an effective educator, I have to meet my students where they are, not assume they hold the same assumptions and ideals about activism as I do, and work from their own experiences to build a shared understanding of rhetorics of dissent together. For those of us that participate in movement actions or teach about them, hearing about a Black Lives Matter protest occupying the Mall of America *makes sense* in a way that confounds non-activists or students who are learning about these movements for the first time. Some of the initial resistance to learning about dissent is how “irrational” the tactics appear on the surface, coupled with some initial skepticism, especially if one might be politically opposed to the issue presented. This is certainly not a new challenge in getting the general public or

even other academics to understand the rationality behind movement action. Writing in 1977, Piven argues some of the criticism and misconception of protest as irrational and anti-democratic stemmed from a lack of analysis of “why insurgency, when it does occur, takes one form and not another” (84), and addressed the institutional and social life factors that would prompt, for example, students to occupy university campus buildings to protest a war even though a university president is not directly in charge of the war. As Piven articulates, occupying a campus building is indeed rational when one understands these students acting within the constraints of their location and exploits the power they do wield as students who can cause a university a public relations nightmare by demonstrating. The strange actions of activists can be made familiar if analyzed through familiar theories and models. Activism is made less confounding the more we can explain it as grounded in experiences our audience (students) can understand.

Just as Piven translates protest through structuration models to have other sociologists understand protest, my role in the classroom is often as a rhetorical translator: showing my students that disruption tactics are similar to and one of the many available means of persuasion Aristotle might include in his list as he analyzed the typical advocacy situations of our present day. Just as I teach about different argument types and organizational patterns to analyze effective public speaking with students in other courses, in my dissent course, I guide my students in unpacking the speech-action of activists through both theories written by academics and models straight from activists’ mouths.

### **Activism/Rhetoric Connection**

Just as CSS can take common-sense ways of understanding stories and do similar narrative analysis to rhetorical scholars, rhetoricians can take our rhetorical models and translate them into useable models for any group.

The “Agitation and Control” model (with a nod to Alinsky’s rules for direct action tactics) is an easy one for students to role play to strategize what tactics might work best or how those in power might respond. After students read newspaper or other accounts of a movement campaign, they are split into the “agitation” and “control” sides. The agitators think about why they might use one tactic (such as petitioning or non-violent resistance) and what outcome they would like to see from that tactic. The “control” group then gets to think about which control strategy might be the most likely response or that would best shut down the agitators. Students start to get a sense of the back and forth of tactics in taking on these roles. For example, student agitators could do a sit in, but university administration could use the control of “banishment” through expulsion. On the other hand, students might risk expulsion if it helps get their message promulgated to the public through news media. The exercise should be debriefed to think about whether those in control are open to collaboration (and not just a “them” to conquer) and to think about the specific situational contexts activists strategize tactics within.



With the prevalence of activism on mainstream and social media channels, finding examples students will generally be familiar with has become much easier. When I teach the “Agitation and Control” model (Bowers, Ochs, Jensen, and Schulz), where tactics of petitioning, gaining public support, or non-violent resistance can be countered by those in power with “control” measures (ranging from avoiding, evading, or even suppression of activists), I have students think through a current event by trying to think of how effective the tactical choices might be. For example, when the University of Missouri football players threatened not to play unless the university president resigned in November 2015, my students better understood why the escalated tactical step by the football players was in response to the avoidance by university administration to the student resistance preceding it. In thinking about figuring out what matters to your opponent (à la Alinsky’s *Rules*), students also quickly identified that the football players had leverage by threatening to lose the university money by not playing. After applying these activist models, it makes perfect sense that football players were the best orators for the situation as they could leverage the power of sports income that impacted the university at large.

Beginning to unpack the strategies and escalation of movement action legitimized through scholarly theory is a start. However, I want to further reframe activist actions for my students through the worldview of actual activists. Activist actions are legitimate because activists say so as well and explaining that some tactics are effective in some circumstances is because they have actually been done. Certainly, Piven’s own activist background influenced her academic work in redefining disruption from being understood as disorderly and noisy to a “power strategy that rests on withdrawing cooperation from social relations” (23). Organizers such as Alinsky give us the *Rules for Radicals* that show how we can withdraw cooperation in productive ways. For example, Alinsky’s story of threatening to use baked bean dinners and flatulence to disrupt a symphony to address race relations in Rochester comically brings his rules to life in a way that students can apply to their own situations. As much as possible, I bring in writings of activists who have the authority of their experience to live alongside academic studies in my courses. Thankfully, I find students are often more receptive to activist writings and find them accessible in linking to their own experiences, regardless of political ideology. My hunch is that students find activist writing more straightforward than some theoretically dense academic works, showing once again that academics have much to learn from their activist counterparts.

Students “legitimate” activist writings, especially when we use these examples to problem-solve contemporary issues. Paying for college and rising tuition issues are perennial ones to tackle with students, but in 2015, these issues became more urgent for UNR students as more student financial aid became tied to credits taken and completion rates. Touted as “15 to Finish”

(later changed to “30 to Complete” due to initial student activist push back on my campus), students were encouraged to take 15 credits per semester to ensure they completed their degree in four years (“it’s simple math!” our Financial Aid Office website notes). Although these programs have catchy slogans and make common sense, it does complicate matters for students who rely on financial aid (some tied to them taking 15 credits per semester) and that can limit students from taking summer or winter courses on their way to 30 credits per year to complete their degree in four years depending on when students are allowed to use Pell Grant funding (see Fain for an overview). More so, instead of helping students complete their degrees, a forced course load of 15 credits could be detrimental for students in even completing or passing a single course if they also are juggling full-time work or other responsibilities. As most of my students were directly affected or had definite opinions about 15 to Finish, this was an easy issue to brainstorm and apply the models we read about to strategize actions.

In class, I had students strategize actions around 15 to Finish by thinking about the systems of cooperation (following Piven) that compel students to follow these credit mandates. I expected the discussion to center on the particular public relations needs and federal funding constraints the university was working within for this degree completion policy and that the tactics students identified would be directed toward our university president and provost. Some students got more radical in their thinking about withholding tuition payments, ensuring faculty would be on-board with keeping students enrolled in courses even for those that didn’t pay, and that ultimately tuition payments would be a trigger for negotiations over this policy (we were brainstorming in class, so students could think big). Just as I was ready to move onto the next topic, one student wanted to expand our points of intervention further, “following the money” to the point of questioning the relationship our campus has with a major national bank, where students can link their ID card to a checking account with that bank to take care of their campus purchases from food to tuition payments. What if, this student asked, we remove our cooperation from this bank/ID card system? Let’s bypass pressuring the provost and have the bank put the pressure on for us! This suggestion came from one of my more conservative leaning students, and definitely got buy in from most of the class. In this exercise, students understood the utility (and excitement) of activist principles to achieve social change.

My intent in the course is not to necessarily “create” activists, but as this example shows, students have the opportunity to “think like activists” (see Pason, “Teaching Protest”), and appreciate activist tactics in new ways. Although students might not walk away from the class admitting to this activist thinking (and merely chalk it up to pragmatic planning for a persuasive message), they do walk away recognizing activist advocacy as a legitimate path for social change. Maybe radical activists have something to teach the general public after all. Maybe the “A” word isn’t so bad after all.

## Rhetorical Criticism in Real-World Practices

I wish I could say that the insight of “thinking like an activist” in having students apply movement models or organizing principles in class came organically and was inspired by my own activist work. After a semester of just teaching the theory and “great works” of social movement scholars, something had to change as the course was no fun for me or my students. For me, it took a while to understand I didn’t need to create stark boundaries between my academic self and my activist self when I was in the classroom. The next semester I taught the course, I reached out to a friend of mine who works for the Center for Story-Based Strategy (CSS) ([www.storybasedstrategy.org/](http://www.storybasedstrategy.org/)) to see if she would talk about the work she did with the organization related to social media campaigns. As we got to talking, she asked if she should do activities she uses to train activist groups, which includes analyzing how news media frames stories for particular purposes, or using narrative power analysis to think through how media portray the heroes, victims, and villains in the story—all in an effort to *change the story* through whatever direct action or social media campaign the activists are working on. In that moment, I both realized that activists were now doing the work I trained in graduate school to do (and in some cases doing it better) and that I needed to embrace real-world activist practices in teaching my own class. Although my friend wasn’t citing scholars in the field, the basic premises of how the world works through language were the same. The original engaged pedagogy came from activists turned scholars; CSS has provided me new tools to continue that tradition.

In some ways, teaching the “A” word has become easier. Today’s activists work through the same language of memes and viral posts that other institutions use to sell us products or political candidates. Thus, for students, learning how activists utilize new media is akin to their other communication courses—except that activists are selling ideas of what it means to have a just world. Activist messaging has become sophisticated, intentionally planned with rhetorical or cultural theory in mind. This is especially apparent in Boyd’s *Beautiful Trouble: A Toolbox for Revolution* (and its easy to navigate website: <http://beautifultrouble.org/>). Tricky theory such as Gramsci’s cultural hegemony is demystified as students click through web links of related areas of culture jamming or case examples such as the 2011 Wisconsin Capitol occupation. The toolbox (and contributing authors to the site) melds academic and activist theory in user-friendly ways. With these tools at our disposal, we can change the narrative of what *activism* means.

In other ways, teaching the “A” word will always be fraught, with new challenges based on the contemporary moment. Most movement examples I teach are related to progressive causes, and I have to check my own biases and assumptions when the same tactics I champion from some groups are used by others that I politically oppose. Most recently, my campus has had to address its own activist legacies when we had an alumnus kneeling during the national anthem, and another student’s image going viral for the Charlottesville protests.

Are these both activists? How wide do we make the definition of activism to not just limit it to protest, but potentially for only certain causes? In this, hopefully through teaching about activism, my students have the ability to shape their own stories, define and claim activism for themselves, and change what it means to be engaged in this era.

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## 4 A Time to Remember

### Rhetorical Pedagogy, Commemoration, and Activism<sup>1</sup>

*Christina L. Moss*

Within the past, which is gone, and the future, which is to come, we human beings must devote our time to the middle moment, which is now, so that we can more properly deal with the endless opportunities for human peace and goodwill.

(Molefi Kete Asante 11)

My story regarding social justice and my consequent decision to be an academic is summarized in an undergraduate experience at a southern state university football game in the late 1980s. It was homecoming. I was sitting in a student section primarily filled with fraternities and sororities. At halftime, the much-anticipated crowning of the homecoming queen began. All candidates were introduced. All were attractive women with high academic and social credentials. Most, if not all, the candidates were affiliated with the Greek system. And all the candidates were white females except for one African American female candidate. When the announcement was made that this accomplished and smart African American candidate had won homecoming queen, hundreds of white students silently opened newspapers in front of their faces and pretended to read. It was a protest, a denial against their new homecoming queen.

In that moment, I sat in those bleachers as an undergraduate full of mixed emotions I had no language or theory to explain: frustrated, stunned, appalled, saddened, angry, and embarrassed. In many ways, these emotions were uncomfortable and awkward. I knew several of those participating in that protest. Some of them were classmates of mine in an American studies course about Southern culture. They sat in the classroom and discussed issues of race and gender in the South. A few made comments during class acknowledging the need for civil rights, rejecting the plantation mentality, examining civil rights protests in Birmingham, Selma, and discussing the need for future change. But on that homecoming Saturday, sitting in those bleachers those same peers protested a homecoming queen because of her race.

At the time, I questioned the cognitive dissonance that allowed for such behavior. This question would follow me through graduate school and my research on the South and civil rights. Later, as a college professor, I remembered that homecoming Saturday—not just because it stimulated the questions

I ask as an academic about the South, race, gender, and identity, but also because it questions the very efficacy of pedagogy, rhetoric, spirituality, and activism in academia.

In the spring of 2015, those questions would come to a crossroads in my own classroom. A colleague in political science and I offered an interdisciplinary course at the University of Memphis, Lambuth, a branch campus of the University of Memphis located in Jackson, TN. The course was titled “Rhetoric, Commemoration, and the Voting Rights Act” and covered the purpose of the Voting Rights Act, activism for the right to vote, and rhetorical analysis of civil rights commemorative narratives. The timing of the course was significant and relevant considering it was the 50th anniversary of the March to Montgomery and that a recent decision in 2013 by the Supreme Court had significantly reduced the power of the Voting Rights Act (Stohr). The course involved a four-day, three-night trip to Birmingham, Selma, and Memphis to study civil rights commemoration and to participate in the 50th anniversary crossing of the Edmund Pettus Bridge honoring the March to Montgomery. The course featured political science texts on the history, need, and process of US voting; scholarly texts on rhetoric, commemoration, and public memory of the Civil Rights Movement; oral histories of activists; and exercises requiring self-reflective journals, rhetorical critiques of commemorative monuments, and actual experience of commemorative and controversial moments. I had not forgotten the questions my undergraduate-self struggled with after that homecoming game. I wanted to encourage students beyond their cognitive comfort zone into positions of questioning and thinking that may result in discomfort, I wanted to place theory and practice in direct relationship and I wanted to ask students to reflect on the issues associated with civil rights and voting rights and how they are present in their lives. I was asking them to feel some possible discomfort in order to actively grow. Getting out of their comfort zone is required for this. And yet this is different from the discomfort I felt as an undergraduate faced watching a display of racism I found myself witnessing. What I asked of my students was to *choose* discomfort in a class (a designated safe place) in order to learn about and feel the pain of others. This class and my attempt to address the earlier-mentioned goals through the use of rhetoric, social justice, and activism is the subject of this essay. I focus on the use of pedagogy and rhetoric as theoretical footholds that spur students toward social justice consciousness and the experience of commemorative activism. Specifically, I address how the use of pedagogy acted as both rhetorical and spiritual; focusing on how the roles of rhetoric and self-reflection lead students to revelations of what is important to them, what they value, and what moves them to change their own, or others’, situations for the better. In turn, students evaluate how social justice and rhetoric work together to direct us to respond and change. The intersections of finding one’s voice through application of one’s knowledge and experience that produces and a renewed focus on value and change; rhetoric, pedagogy, and spirituality.

## Pedagogy, Rhetoric, and Social Justice

Those interested in education philosophy, such as Henry Giroux, Richard Levin, and Parker Palmer, point out the connection between student self-reflection and self-awareness to strong personal values associated with spirituality and social consciousness. The professor provides a safe place for students to link cultivated knowledge with self-awareness, thus encouraging students to figure out who they are and to develop the integrity (or spiritual sense) required to be that person. College is where we ask students to face their fear of failure by opening themselves up to knowledge and experiences outside their comfort zones. Such vulnerability and discomfort can open them up to new and sometimes difficult feelings and emotions while questioning how those feelings better inform who they are and who they want to be. My pedagogical and rhetorical position as a professor of rhetoric is to help students ask the critical questions about how and what things mean and discover answers and consequence to such meaning that directs them to what and who they wish to be.

This pedagogical purpose is rhetorical and participatory. The oft-quoted Aristotelian definition of rhetoric requires the element of discovery: “The discovery (or search) of every available means of persuasion.” It was Aristotle who taught his students to discover the persuasive constructs needed for motivation. Furthermore, Molefi Asante asserts the need for multiple and diverse texts that allow students to see a variety of perspectives, texts that show agency of marginalized groups. By doing so, varieties of reasoning emerge. Asante’s point is well taken. As a white professor, if I utilize only white classical or even contemporary notions of rhetoric in a class devoted to civil rights public memory and experience, it would narrow the understanding for students and alter their understanding to a position of whiteness.

Furthermore, observing and evaluating rhetorical texts and theories of marginalized groups accentuates the activity and participatory characteristics of rhetoric. Here, I am relying upon the concept of participatory critical rhetoric or the understanding of rhetoric *in situ*. Participatory critical rhetoric, defined by Middleton et al., is a way of critiquing rhetoric through a variety of qualitative methods such as interviewing, observations, interactions and oral histories (“Participatory Critical Rhetoric” 9–10). Participatory critical rhetoric allows the critic to examine and be part of rhetoric as it occurs *in situ*, a term used in archeology to mean “original resting place” (Lamp 118). Middleton et al. claim utilizing a participatory transdisciplinary approach allows the critic to look at the rhetoric of the “everyday” where marginalized discourses are more accessible. The critic, then, must at least “be present as the rhetorical practices under examination unfold” (“Participatory Critical Rhetoric” 12). Thus allowing critics “direct engagement with participants at the point of rhetorical intervention” (Middleton et al., “Contemplating” 572). Experiencing the site of activism is one way students can observe, interview, and participate in rhetoric *in situ*.



Approaching rhetoric and pedagogy this way requires stepping into vulnerability—both for students and the professor. Such pedagogical activism for civil rights and voting rights demonstrates my students’ and the studied activists’ agency and their reasoning, pain, and strength through their response to being vulnerable. In addition, a multiplicity of texts by a variety of authors with diverse marginalities allows for a discussion of the risks associated with the intersections of such vulnerabilities. Intersectional voices have often been overlooked in civil rights public memory narratives (see Brooks; Greene; McGuire; Olson; Poirot; Sartain).

For example, oral histories and memoirs of civil rights foot soldiers serve as personalized supplements to academic historical or political science texts, while rhetorical analysis of commemorative civil rights monuments are paired with news articles, blogs, and quotes by local and regional marginalized activists requesting the removal of confederate statues in Memphis, New Orleans, and the University of Mississippi. Using the words of agency by the marginalized groups we study aids in not only making the stories come to life but also creating multiple perspectives. Meanwhile, student journaling prompts throughout the class encouraged self-reflection about how these sources affect theory feelings, thinking, and behaviors. The following provides reflections on how work in the classroom directly links to the rhetorical understanding and performance of activism as an extension of the classroom.

Essentially, the classroom is a rhetorical situation not because it persuades students *what* to think, but because it teaches students *how* to think both critically and reflectively. In his book *The Work of the University*, Richard Levin asserts that liberal education leads students to “question and define values” (14). Rhetorical scholar Barry Brummett asserts that rhetorical critics often see their work as “heuristic and moral” (97–107). In other words, it involves a spiritual sense of self-reflection acting through rhetoric, awareness, and the questioning of beliefs. But this sense of self does not stop with reflection; Levin goes on to say “[to] understand fully what these values mean, we must also test what it means to live by them” (15). Middleton et al. acknowledge this moral function of rhetoric as having a “profoundly pedagogical power” both in and out of the classroom (577). The process of testing living claims and experiences—not just textual or verbal ones—moves the student from rhetorically aware, to rhetorically doing (or participating); the place of activism.

Creating a learning environment with the “promotion of socially conscious and progressive change in the world” (Pyati) requires constant self-reflection, learning, and openness on the part of the professor as well as the students. In a word, it demands vulnerability. It requires embracing the fear that as a professor I don’t have all the answers about marginality and that my position of privilege requires taking some responsibility for others who don’t have such advantages. Vulnerability necessitates openness including acknowledging my privilege as a white, highly educated female and how that affects my own experiences and viewpoints (Taylor). And using my privilege in ways that offer

alternatives such as creating diverse opportunities of different viewpoints and compiling reading lists featuring marginalized voices. Reflecting on my own rhetorical classroom choices aids my own testing of values and beliefs and, therefore, my pedagogical integrity.

What follows are three rhetorical constructs utilized in the course “Rhetoric, Commemoration, and the Voting Rights Act.” These constructs all work pedagogically in at least three ways. First, they work through the classroom rhetoric between teacher and student as students question and define their beliefs. Second, they work in terms of social justice and/or activist rhetoric as students act upon and test those beliefs. And finally, they work to test my own beliefs and values regarding pedagogy. The three constructs I will be discussing are *in situ*, self-reflection and identification, and observation and participation.

### **In Situ**

My classroom in the Spring of 2015 was situated within a broader context. Two issues regarding public memory and commemoration emerged creating exigency in the classroom: 1) in 2013, a Supreme Court decision overturned a portion of the 1965 Voting Rights Act; and 2) the preserved public memory of the modern day civil rights movement is at risk as those who were there are dying out.

In June of 2013, the Supreme Court in a five–four decision struck down a key portion of the Voting Rights Act allowing nine states, predominately southern, to change voting laws without federal approval. The ruling from Chief Justice Roberts stated that the “country has changed,” and therefore new data showing current discrimination must be presented to address current day racial issues (Liptak). However, the dissenting justices noted that the type of racial discrimination associated with voting had changed, not racism itself (Liptak).

The decision caused civil rights activist and Georgia Representative John Lewis to wonder if anyone remembered the sacrifices made for voting rights. “These men that voted to strip the Voting Rights Act of its power, they never stood in unmovable lines, they never had to pass a so-called literacy test,” he said. “It took us almost 100 years to get where we are today. So will it take another 100 years to fix it, to change it?” (Jeltsen).

Representative Lewis illustrates the concerns of many who realize that most of those involved in the protests and marches of the modern day civil rights activism are no longer alive to tell their stories, therefore making it easier for politicians to push back voting rights policies made in the past. The 2013 repeal of Section Five of the Voting Rights Act brought about a flurry of changes in voting requirements, redrawing of districts, and minimization of early voting locations in several states. Section five required specific states and municipalities with a history of voter discrimination to have federal oversight. Decisions by federal court judges in North Carolina, Texas, Georgia, and other states on

the constitutional viability of many of these voting changes met with mixed results. The issue regarding who can vote and changes being made regarding voting procedures and redistricting was in the news and in the classroom. As students became aware of these issues, some in my rhetoric classes asked a range of questions about civil and voting rights. It became apparent that they were not only limited in knowledge regarding the history of voting rights, they were also asking for that knowledge. In a very real sense, two exigencies emerged within the political climate; an exigency for students to learn the history and current relevance of voting rights and an exigency requiring me to effectively rhetorically and pedagogically take care of the students' need. The moment indicated a need to facilitate how students could define their own beliefs regarding the issue.

The 50th anniversary of Bloody Sunday in Selma, AL, the March to Montgomery, and the signing of the Voting Rights Act were once in a lifetime moments for student reflection. It became a way to access experiences related to the issue for students; an opportunity to create awareness. "Bloody Sunday" is the name given March 7, 1965, when Civil Rights protesters in Selma, AL, were protesting the death of a young black man, Jimmie Lee Jackson, and the arrest of civil rights workers earlier in the week. As protesters crossed over the bridge, a large number of local police, many deputized that day, were waiting. Upon approach, the protesters were given two minutes to cross back over the bridge. In less than two minutes, police advanced, some on horseback, with whips, tear gas, Billy clubs, and guns. Protesters were beaten and gassed. Many were left bloody, with concussions and broken bones. The moment was televised, bringing the nation's attention to Selma. A few weeks later, Martin Luther King, Jr. would lead another march all the way to Montgomery. And although the march to Montgomery was considered a success, two volunteers were killed during the planning and final stages. Klansmen killed Reverend James Reeb, a Unitarian minister, and Viola Liuzzo, a housewife and activist from Detroit. The violence associated with Selma and the city's role in the fight for voting and civil rights made Selma a significant place of memory. The 50th anniversary and the memorial crossing of the Edmund Pettus Bridge was going to be a significant commemorative moment. This anniversary and this moment of public remembrance would not happen again. For one weekend, the eyes of the United States would be on Selma and on the bridge crossing. Therefore, the teaching and learning and rhetorical potential of this moment was urgent and the best way to meet the exigency was to visit and participate at the site of memory.

### **Self-Reflection and Identification**

Self-reflection and identification are ways of experiencing the rhetorical situation. An understanding of and relationship with the moment makes the need for response important. In this case, getting students to identify with

the history of 1965, the loss of a right they had always assumed, and the marginal voices at the center of this issue required pedagogy focused on the humanity that we all share. As Kenneth Burke observes, identifying with what makes one like another opens the way for persuasion to take place. This process may take place through direct dialogue or through the intra-personal dialogue of self-reflection. Therefore, identification becomes an excellent choice for both pedagogical technique and for rhetorical critique. To meet the exigencies of my students' need for timely knowledge and my own pedagogical exigency to find a way to teach them I turned to identification. My experience leads me to believe that one of the greatest classroom challenges when discussing the issues and history of race is identification. To identify with the "who" and "what" you are means disassociating with who and what you are not. And yet, "no notion of coherence or transformation can exist without mutual respect and appreciation; this is the lesson of history" (Asante 11). When students rhetorically critique commemorative monuments and sites they ask how public memory works to tell us who and what we are and who and what we are not. Who are these monuments for and where do I fit in, or do I? Who is empowered and who is not? What values are exhibited and why? Whose story is being told and whose is not? In other words, through the participatory critical rhetorical critique, students ask these same questions of their experience upon which they may later self-reflect which, in turn, helps them understand the rhetoricity of the moment. In this way, those personal disassociations (what I am not) are at least considered, questioned, and evaluated. One student recounted crossing the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma and seeing:

representations of various cultures and backgrounds. No one seemed to oppose the march. The water seemed inviting and almost foreign to me in the land locked West Tennessee where I lived. I was at home though with sounds of Gospel that filled the air and the common humanity and culture that transcends regions.

What the student contemplates are the symbols of the bridge crossing; however, in doing so, she simultaneously reflects on what seemed familiar and comfortable and what seemed different, therefore, identifying with what they are and what they are not.

### **Observation and Participation**

Participatory critical rhetoric as pedagogy is an intersection of text, critique, and act. The act of teaching and learning, the act of remembering and commemorating and the act of creating critique. These acts all intersected in the participation of traveling to and walking across the Edmund Pettus Bridge on the 50th anniversary of Bloody Sunday.

Civil rights museums, memorials, and monuments have greatly increased over the last 20 years. Many southern cities and institutions capitalize on the public memory of anniversaries and celebrations associated with these sites. Public memory provides narratives reflecting values and priorities of a culture. These tourist sites work rhetorically to argue for a public memory that works through national and/or regional identity. In doing so, visitors have the opportunity to increase understanding of their own identity in relationship to race, civil rights, and history as they critique and analyze the narratives in terms of national, regional, and racial identities (Gallagher). Much like the visitors and tourists of civil rights tourist sites, the class participated in activism through commemoration. The day we walked across the Edmund Pettus Bridge with approximately 40,000 other people we performed a rhetorical action/activism (Moss and Jackson). Notably, the celebration in Selma was also a reminder of sacrifice, of loss, of determination and commitment. Many in attendance took that performance as a time to remind the public there is much more to do. Signs stating: “#BlackLivesMatter,” “Hands Up Don’t Shoot,” and “We are all Michael Brown” connected the past to the present. The remembrance of history became reflection on the moment. Chants of “Black Lives Matter” and “All Lives Matter” were interspersed between choruses of “*We Shall Overcome*.” Marching, singing, chanting, and posting are rhetorical and are performative.

There is no classroom experience and no textbook or film that could capture the actual lived moments the students felt in the various locations of the trip. In these moments the site of public memory becomes the cumulative pedagogical experience of situation, self-reflection, identification, and participation.

But perhaps the biggest advantage came as students walked across the Edmund Pettus Bridge with thousands of people who were not them and not like them but were acting (participating) with them. According to the projects, papers, and journals, most of them, in that moment, lost at least some cognitive dissonance that separated them from the marginality and the issues of race. One student stated she found herself “trying to put myself in their shoes those 50 years before as they came over the center of the bridge and looked down to the police barrier awaiting them at the bottom. I cannot even imagine the depth of fear ... yet they kept going.” Another student reflected:

It felt surreal to be surrounded by so many who believed in the same cause. It felt as if I stepped out of my shoes to walk in another’s so that for one brief moment I could understand. It was in that moment that I realized no matter how far we have come, we still have a long way to go in the fight for equality.

The performance of the bridge crossing of “walking in another’s shoes” and gathering with others all celebrating a cause made cognitive dissonance less easy to maintain at least in that moment of experience.

## **Rhetorical Pedagogy, Activism, and Spirituality**

So how are these rhetorical constructs of exigence, identification, and participation spiritual? It is because the constructs drive me to reflect upon and teach one the most human of states—vulnerability. In the classroom, I find helping students grapple with issues of public memory—in this case civil and voting rights protests—is one ridden with issues of pain and the vulnerability that comes with pain. So much of commemorative work is about figuring out how to acknowledge and give a rhetorical discourse—whether linguistic, performative, or material—to pain, emotional and physical pain. Pain is uncomfortable; it makes us uneasy, fearful, and resistant. Commemorating pain of others requires one to reflect on that pain. If one is willing to reflect, personally and empathetically, on such pain they put themselves in a position to be vulnerable in the feeling for another. The moment a student or professor turns themselves over to such feeling is the spiritual moment a change in perspective, attitude, or behavior may emerge. Giroux, Asante, and hooks all attest that in order for students to see the need for social justice, a part of them must be pricked or called forth in solidarity with those needing justice. Yet, pain comes with its own set of problems. Admitting pain, feeling pain, ignoring pain, grinding through pain, or coping in whatever way seems to work is not necessarily conducive to empathy or action. Our culture encourages some rather guarded and inaccessible ways of dealing with pain, especially at intersections of gender and class. Nostalgia, ceremony, or sentimentality can take over from pain or discomfort without any real change of attitude or action. The focus may easily shift from understanding someone else's pain to how I can feel better about this discomfort. Public memory and commemoration are susceptible to that cognitive dissonance between making myself feel better about my pain to understanding someone else's pain and sacrifice. Pain is one of the things that makes us as humans most vulnerable and our vulnerability can stir compassion and action.

One student described the impact of the visit to the 16th Avenue Church in Birmingham, where four little girls were killed in 1963 when a Klan-planted bomb exploded in the church. For her, the visit where such tragedy took place was “life changing.”

Going to the actual places where bombings took place—It was like what fellow believers talk about when going to the Holy Land. To know I am a product of their sacrifices [that] the evils of their time gave birth to me and every opportunity I have now. When I think of the places we visited in Alabama, it was more than a trip for me. For me it was spiritual and a place of worship, a sacred place.

My own self-reflection leads me to several questions about the use of pain in rhetorical pedagogy and its connection to public memory. What role does the

significance and variety of pain play in the commemoration of events and how does it affect shape, drive, inspire, and maintain public memory in ways that move beyond and/or motivate public amnesia and sentimentality over action (see Vivian and Wilson)? And how do current hegemonies keep that pain from being heard? While I realize there are some fairly straightforward ways in which this takes place, there seem to be more hidden, distant, and removed agendas associated with pain that refuse to acknowledge the hurt or prioritize the hurt and pain of some over others. How, as a teacher, can I ask my students to attend to their own pain in order to understand that of others while at the same time helping them to realize their pain is sometimes not the same pain as others? Inevitably, issues of privilege and difference arise. As a group, the ability to go on such a trip because administrators believe such a trip is important is a privilege in and of itself. But for students dealing with understanding privilege of various kinds, individual examples and teaching moments arise such as the student who couldn't understand why the store owners who live in this very small rural town would not allow him to use the restroom if he didn't buy something. Yet, the storeowners and clerks knew all too well that the town of Selma would financially, and politically, be mostly forgotten as soon as this weekend was over. That the students who were able to attend could do so without fear of missing out on work to the degree that it would drastically impair them or their family financially was class privilege. Or how after we all walked across the Edmund Pettus Bridge as a unified group, the white students were anxious to debrief and talk about what they felt and saw, while the single African American student in the group when asked how she felt, looked at her classmate with tears in her eyes and said "I don't know. I feel so much. I need to think for a while, alone."

In the end, the spirituality of rhetorical pedagogy helps me to remind my students that whose pain is heard and how it is heard are as much a part of commemorative memory as the absolute refusal to acknowledge pain at all. That very acknowledgement and connection to pain—our own and others—allows us to identify with the problems facing our world. Through rhetorical pedagogy, I struggle with how to create not just "critical thinkers" but "critical self-reflectors" and how to get students to not just deal with their own discomfort but to help and aid those whose pain goes unnoticed. Allowing and providing students a place to sit with pain and actually feel pain is a place of vulnerability. And while it is difficult to create and offer and facilitate—the learning that arises is, at least in my experience, some of the most essential to change.

## **Conclusion**

I'm sure I have much to learn and hope to learn about the use of tourism and public memory to inform activism. Like any class, privileged students and teachers can always pat themselves on the back for "doing a good thing" and return to life without self-reflection or concerns or actions for social justice.

Or as tourists, we can visit a site and honor an event but feel the sentiment as if the feeling alone was the solution. Yet, feeling and self-reflection can lead to spiritual changes of values, behavior, and/or action. Opening oneself and students up to vulnerabilities and pain makes it slightly more difficult to ignore the pain and vulnerabilities of others and do nothing.

As an example, one student's response to the trip was to go back to her home in West Tennessee and visit local grade schools where she gave talks about the Civil Rights Movement and her trip to Birmingham and Selma.

When I think back to myself as an undergraduate, I was just learning how to talk about race, inequity, and gender. I was so stunned at what had happened, I could not put my thoughts or feelings—my discomfort and the pain of others—into words. When I returned to class the Monday after that football game, I had no idea how to even approach the students in my class who had sat in those stands protesting a homecoming queen because of her race. Like the students in the stands I struggled to confront, I knew the history of civil rights, but I didn't quite know how to apply what I knew. I empathized with that history but I couldn't voice what I was feeling. I needed a rhetoric that would allow me to say what I wanted to say. And yet, that experience, the testing of my beliefs, provided an opportunity for self-reflection and evaluation. It gave me a time, a memory on which to spiritually pause and consider my own integrity, my truth, and where I fell short. A part of my response to my own self-reflection as an undergraduate is to make sure students have the opportunity and knowledge available to them to voice their beliefs, sit with the pain of others, work for social justice, and act to relieve people's pain. Because in the end what rhetorical pedagogy gives activism is the ability to communicate that none of this is about any single one of us. It is about all of us all of our pain, our need, our suffering, our hurt, and our action and inaction and our desire to make things better. It's about humanity and the interconnection of everyone and how we all need each other. It's not my individual pain, even though my pain allows me to sympathize and connect with your pain. It is the heavy human soulful pain of the world in which we live.

## Note

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## Part II

# Voices from the Margin(alized)

One of the major changes in the second edition is an explicit attention to activism in/with marginalized communities. Matthew Abraham, Ellen Cushman, and JongHwa Lee dealt with issues related to race/ethnicity/nation/religion in their original chapters, and other chapters attended to forms of marginalization (e.g., sexual orientation), but we realized that we needed first to gather much of that work into a section where its necessities and complexities can get the focus it deserves; and second, to address transgender/non-binary activism that was absent from the first edition. We also realized that we needed to address anti-racist activism much more directly; Christina Moss' chapter in Part I certainly speaks to that, and Matthew Abraham's chapter in this section does as well.

New to the second edition, G Patterson's "Alt-Country Rhetorics: Relearning (Trans) Activism in Rural Indiana" challenges a cultural narrative that frames "rural people as anti-intellectual, apathetic, cruel, and uncritical who prevent dialogues across difference." Patterson powerfully demonstrates, through years of activist experiences, that this narrative is not only untrue but also self-defeating for activists trying to build coalitions; it also provides cover for *cosmopolitan* activists to make rural bogeymen into scapegoats. Instead, Patterson proposes a platform to share "better stories" that rural communities, as much as urban communities, are engaged in political struggles against oppression and that their stories can provide effective models of "surprisingly effective coalitions and tactics of resistance" (75).

Matthew Abraham's "Recognizing and Saving Black Lives, Recognizing and Saving Palestinian Lives: The Power of Transnational Rhetorics in Locating the Commonality of Liberation Struggles" takes on this question: "How might the activist energies that have emerged within these two movements converge to harness the potential within each to resist white supremacy and Zionism?" Abraham sees a powerful commonality, despite their seeming differences, that both seeks to "transcend colonialism, white supremacy, and the oppression of people of color in specific contexts." This awareness of converging interests/concerns on the root problems of racism and neocolonialism can provide rhetorical strategies to "move across and between different audiences" (80) which

will ultimately lead to transnational solidarity between/among populations that are surveilled, targeted, and criminalized by the modern military/police state violence.

Ellen Cushman's "*Gadugi: Where the Fire Burns*" describes the Cherokee spiritual commitment that drives her activism and urges for social justice. She tells stories of *Gadugi*, as "an ethic that weds praxis and belief" (90) and "acting in the spirit and ways that the Creator would appreciate" (92) made possible by rhetorical activism. New to the second edition, Cushman has added a new section in which she explains how her work developing *The Cherokee Syllabary* and her new position at her institution have reinforced her invitation to join her/their trails and sit around the sacred fire, *Gadugi*, in building one fire.

JongHwa Lee's "Memory War: Activist Rhetoric for Historical Justice" is an expansion of one piece from the chapter in the first edition; in this new essay, Lee traces the history of the Japanese Military "Comfort Women" movement by analyzing a *New York Times* editorial, highlighting "the connection between memory politics and historical justice movements where activism and rhetoric can play a critical role" (97). He shows how "banal" clichés enforce a vision that covers up Japan's war crimes and its responsibilities. Against such violent tropes of war crime deniers, Lee proposes activism based on civic "responsibility" that "answers" to the appeals of Others—an ethical politics that pursues a renewed, yet perpetual, quest for civility, humanity, and justice for all.

## 5 Alt-Country Rhetorics

### Relearning (Trans) Activism in Rural Indiana

G Patterson

Tell me if you've heard this story. Against their better judgment, a cash-strapped, multimarginalized queer/trans person accepts a job in a provincial town. Awash in a sea of normies, they lay low and dream about making it back to the city. But faced with a crisis, our queer/trans protagonist allies themselves with the locals, confronts their own prejudgments, and learns a valuable lesson about life. While this plot bears a striking resemblance to *The Adventures of Priscilla Queen of the Desert*, it also narrates how I came to political organizing in Indiana. Drawing from these experiences, I argue that rural areas might not be as politically regressive as we'd imagine—and that engaging in these spaces can teach us a lot about rhetoric and about political organizing. But before I get ahead of myself, I'll explain how I got here in the first place.

#### **How (in the Hell) I Got Here**

I moved to Indiana in 2017 to begin my first tenure-track position, after working five years as a contingent faculty member. Before moving to the state, my knowledge about Indiana came from news reports about their draconian abortion laws, their racist voter ID laws, and their anti-lgbtq religious freedom act—which Governor and then Vice-Presidential candidate Mike Pence had recently signed into law. Given my identity as a queer, working-class, neurodivergent, multiethnic, gender-non-conforming, non-binary trans person with white-skin privilege, I worried how I'd fare in a state that holds one of the country's lowest voter participation rates (Aull np), as well as one of the highest rates of active hate groups (Carter np).

Trying to sell me on Muncie, Indiana, the rural post-industrial town I'd soon call home, my new colleagues shared that Muncie was the inspiration for *Parks and Recreation's* fictional town, Pawnee. They similarly boasted of the town's famed connections to *Garfield* cartoonist Jim Davis and television host David Letterman. Of course, these factoids did little to soften three additional facts about Muncie:

- Muncie is poor. Over 32% of community members live below the poverty line—more than twice the national average.
- Muncie isn't racially diverse. According to the 2010 census, Muncie is 84% white, 10.9% African American 2.3% Latinx, 2.8% multiracial, 1.2% Asian, 0.8% other, 0.1% Pacific Islander, and 0.3% Native American ("Muncie, IN" np). This last number is especially chilling, given that Muncie occupies my Lenape ancestors' tribal land.
- Muncie sits in a gerrymandered district, which has long been a safe haven for rising stars in the GOP. Mike Pence represented IN-6 from 2002–2010. Luke Messer, who plans to give up his seat to run against the state's only Democratic Senator, took up the mantel after Pence. And because the universe is cruel, Mike Pence's brother is poised to replace Messer in 2018 (Bradner np).

Given my new (and alarming) political context, I planned to spend my first year keeping my head down and learning the ropes. After my first year on the job, I bargained, I'd resume my activism when I could move somewhere a bit more progressive, like Indianapolis. Then the election happened, and I quickly abandoned my resolution to warm the bench. Moved by *Indivisible Guide's* (Padilla et al. 5) claim that even a small group of people could effect change, I created a closed Facebook group called Muncie Resists. Equipped with my cursory knowledge of Indiana politics (and my own baggage from growing up in the rural Midwest), I didn't have high hopes for my newest political foray. As it turns out, I've had more success organizing in rural Indiana than I have in my previous work on voting, labor, and lgbt rights in major cosmopolitan cities.

While I'm certainly not interested in romanticizing rural areas or holding up Muncie, Indiana, as some exception to the rule, my experience has highlighted the importance of telling different stories about rural areas. At a time when many of us are still reeling after the 2016 general election, lashing out against a rural bogeyman can provide catharsis, but it's not helpful—for two reasons. First, the rural bogeyman gives us a false sense of where our social justice efforts fail. Second, in framing rural areas as backward, we crowd out powerful stories of coalition and resistance taking place in those spaces—and we miss opportunities to reflect on what these can stories teach us.

In an effort to tell different stories about rural life that open up room for political agency and rhetorical possibility, in this chapter, I recount three of my own "alt-country narratives." Riffing off of a musical genre popular for reading country mores against the grain, the forthcoming *alt-country* narratives challenge preconceived narratives about rural life, which tend to stifle and/or erase progressive activism happening in those spaces. More than challenging these assumptions, I share my alt-country narratives as a form of queer-and-trans-worldmaking, where imagining a more generous Otherwise is understood as foundational to revolutionary life.

## Alt-Country Narrative #1: Rural People Prefer Passionate Leaders over Palatable Ones

Like many multimarg queer and trans people who grew up in rural areas, I sought refuge in cityscapes and institutions of higher education—places I’d understood as bastions of inclusivity, activism, and critical thought. Having spent 14 years organizing and working in these cosmopolitan spaces, I’ve learned that exclusion, apathy, and uncritical thinking do not evaporate—they mutate. As a student and now a faculty member, I’ve encountered the hidden curriculum of higher education, which espouses critical theory in print while *in practice* relying on meritocracy to discount systemic racism, ableism, heterosexism, and transphobia. Similarly, in urban lgbt spaces, my credibility as bi/pan and non-binary trans person has been questioned with surprising regularity. I’ve found the quickest way to be shunned from mainstream lgbt organizing is to insist on centering racial and economic justice. Indeed, I have learned that the stain of “too muchness” stays with multimarginalized people, wherever they go. For example, while I’d always been interested in activist leadership positions, I had been told (more than once) that I didn’t have the look, poise, pronouns, or extroverted disposition to lead. In short, cosmopolitan diversity was okay, so long as it was palatable and didn’t disrupt the status quo.

These assumptions about my inability to lead shaped my assumptions when I created the online closed Facebook group Muncie Resists—whose goal was to inform and mobilize community members around social justice issues happening at the city, county, and state level. Assuming the role of facilitator, my intention was to bring local progressives together in a common space. Eventually, I assumed, a more established and palatable leader would emerge. Imagine my horror, then, when our online community looked to me, their humble group administrator, to lead face-to-face meetings. Aside from my Facebook profile picture and resources I’d shared to our group page, most of these rural community members had no idea who I was. Once they met me, I was convinced they’d eat me alive.

My friend Angela Jackson-Brown, a non-tenure-track creative writing professor and only African American woman in our department, volunteered to co-facilitate the first group meetings, so long as I planned them. As we prepared our first meeting, we noted the irony that two precariously employed multimarginalized people would lead the group. While we were committed to putting forth our best efforts, we worried about whether we’d be safe in front of the crowd; we also wondered whether community members would be too unsettled by our difference to allow us to lead.

As it turns out, we missed the mark when it came to anticipating in-group resistance, which happened to come from other academics. Some pressured us to change the group’s name to something “less political” so they could list it as a service on their vita; still others were put off by our hands-on focus, preferring open-ended discussion over achieving specific initiatives. More



concerning were the repeated warnings that faculty's political activity (on and offline) could and would be surveilled.

Community members not affiliated with the university were surprisingly enthusiastic. However much we might've flouted expectations, our members kept coming back—and they brought friends. Challenging the cosmopolitan lessons I'd internalized about who can(not) be effective leaders, Muncie community members regarded us with respect—staying after meetings to thank us for our work, seeking our counsel in planning other community initiatives, and even urging us to run for public office. While I cannot know all the factors that influenced how warmly our leadership was received, I think that our role as writers, rhetoricians, and educators played a part. I address these factors below:

1. We practiced listening rhetoric, by entering the activist space with a desire to hear community members and let their needs, not our own, shape the agenda (Booth 45). Much like Mathieu, we understood our primary goal as amplifying community voices—rather than assuming we had a better handle on Muncie's political scene vis-a-vis our connection to the university (113). Indeed, mindful of community members' suspicion of campus agents, who only involve themselves in the community when it serves their needs, neither Angela nor I foregrounded our university affiliation in our community work.
2. We drew from our training as educators to create welcoming, accessible environments. In large part, we accomplished this by opening each meeting with a concrete agenda, learning members' strengths, and assigning members to task-based teams according to their interests (Patterson np). Angela and I organized members into five teams: Alt-Fact Avengers researched state and local issues; SJW Writers wrote op-eds and planned social media content; Super Dems worked with local organizations to coordinate voter registration and GOTV efforts; Guardians gathered “know your rights” resources; and Cheerleaders helped make events like phone-banking or letter-writing more fun and social. In short, we took to heart Klein's assertion that people need something concrete to do besides just saying no (209). As one white male Baby Boomer put it: “I'm here because we're doing besides just sitting around and bitching about Trump.”
3. We practiced “radical empathy”—by directly challenging the neoliberal assumption that bystanders are under no obligation to act in solidarity with people different from them (Dutton 16). As Barber points out, neoliberal power-brokers foment fear of difference, because they know that if we talk, we'll discover our overlapping experiences of precarity and organize (12–13). As multimarg leaders, this meant cultivating an ethos grounded in mutual risk and recognition that our lives are in each other's hands (Butler 102).

Both the community support we received *as well* as the academic pushback we encountered leading Muncie Resists challenge common assumptions about

cosmopolitan spaces as welcoming and rural spaces as fearful of difference. Indeed, I argue we should disabuse ourselves of the rural-bogeyman-as-bigoted-specter precisely because it allows cosmopolitan individuals to disavow the ways they may wield institutional power to safeguard systems that benefit them. Moreover, I argue that Democratic leaders have too long relied on the rural bogeyman to justify their preference for championing white, heterosexual, and cisgender candidates—despite the fact that these candidates are often ideologically and demographically out of sync with the Democratic base. Too often, these power-brokers insist that backing more “palatable” leaders has everything to do with protecting the brand and maintaining their moderate supporters, when in fact the decision to exclude multimarg leaders has far more to do with protecting the status quo.

Finally and most importantly, we must challenge the rural bogeyman because it discourages multiply marginalized people from seeking leadership positions. Too often, when we insist leaders must have special qualities, we’re not actually talking about courage, creativity, integrity, humility, or accountability; we’re talking about a palatability rooted in white cis-hetero supremacy. This is a losing strategy. Marginalized community members, who do the lion’s share of volunteering, are unwilling to mobilize for people they don’t trust. To wit, our current cult of leadership has lost the battle for voters’ hearts and minds by continuing to favor business people as leaders—over educators, social workers, janitors, and so on. Indeed, I believe Democrats’ fear of unpalatable authenticity is the very reason a strongman, Donald Trump, sits in the White House. The man is a derisive liar, but he’s learned an important lesson straight out of *All the King’s Men*: your message doesn’t matter if you can’t make people feel it (Warren 108).

### **Alt-Country Narrative #2: The Town Fights Austerity Politics While the Gown Stays Silent**

One of Muncie Resists’ first campaigns was to support the town’s besieged teachers union. As a fellow educator, and a child of a mail carrier and public-school teacher, I support public-sector unions—the last holdouts in a decades-long attack on organized labor (Milkman and Luce 149). Given the perfect storm of what Pulido calls a “politics of abandonment,” I wasn’t hopeful about our ability to mobilize (4–5). Muncie was first abandoned by industry when the town’s biggest businesses relocated; this left a city grappling to fund infrastructure with an ever-shrinking pool of tax dollars. Further, despite the state’s billion-dollar surplus, Indiana intentionally undercuts public schools by supporting voucher programs and modifying poverty calculations so that money flows from needier areas toward wealthier ones. As a consequence of these factors, Muncie Community Schools (MCS) has transitioned from one of the best districts for education to one of the worst.

Muncie has also been abandoned by its most privileged community stakeholders: the university community. The university has allied with developers and landlords who seek lower taxes, and worse still, they have created a university charter school—which pilfers talented students from local schools. Faculty, too, fail to support local schools by perpetuating the narrative that MCS schools are “bad” and by encouraging faculty with families to move to richer school districts or (if they can’t get into the university charter) to send their kids to private schools (funded by vouchers).

In the ultimate form of neoliberal gaslighting, the state, school board, and superintendent have all blamed MCS’ failure on incompetent administrators, ignorant community members, and greedy teachers. The only solution, they claim, is to close more schools, cut benefits, and retroactively cut teachers’ pay. Framing the district’s economic solvency as an emergency, decision-makers intentionally obstruct community feedback by banning retired teachers from school board meetings, misleading the local press about their intentions, and delaying and truncating the public comment portion of school board meetings. These same decision-makers have created a culture of intimidation by stationing over upwards of ten armed officers at school board meetings and by employing an officer to not only control the mic but threaten community members he perceives to be “disrespectful.”

Given Muncie’s dire economic situation and scant university support for local schools, I assumed community members would believe the prevailing narrative about greedy teachers and incompetent management. Again, I was wrong. Muncie community members rallied around their teachers, challenged the school board’s misinformation campaign, and (at least momentarily) successfully pressured a state arbitrator to side with the teachers union.

Muncie Resists’ role in this effort included gathering information from community stakeholders, creating calls-to-action for email and phone-banking campaigns, and mobilizing community participation in MCS-related meetings and protests. While multiple community stakeholders contributed to this effort, Muncie Resists contributed to this success in the following ways:

1. We appealed to the concerns of multiple community stakeholders, including those who might have understood themselves as unaffected bystanders. For example, in addition to talking to union members and concerned families, Muncie Resists also explained the short- and long-term impacts that gutting MCS would have on food shelters, property values, crime rates, and local business. Theoretically speaking, this approach is shaped by Pellegrini and Jakobsen’s critique of rhetorical appeals that frame “the general public” as neutral observer (55–59), as well as Hunter’s critique of activists who too often appeal to unmovable, powerful decision-makers while overlooking the political agency of community members whose support (or lack thereof) can have a substantial impact on policy.

2. We deployed flexible rhetorical tactics to both encourage and equip community members (and those who understood themselves as bystanders) to act. To accomplish this, Muncie Resists crafted a multitiered, internal and external campaign. Externally, we created letter-writing and phone-banking campaigns targeting city council and school board members to speak up in support of local schools. We also created a viral video campaign, #Allin4MCS, which challenged the narrative of MCS as a failing district and called upon state representatives to address the funding disparity for public schools. Internally, we crafted digital newsletters to inform community members on ongoing campaigns; we also used social media to live-tweet/stream city council and school board meetings and to share talking-points in real-time so that community members who got to speak were on message. Informed by Sandoval's understanding of "differential consciousness," our approach allowed community members to not only resist the school board's misinformation campaign but also to cultivate a solidarity that inoculated community members against gaslighting (58).
3. We employed the principles of professional writing to make activist opportunities as accessible as possible. For example, our biweekly newsletter employed document design principles to present information in a scannable, predictable format. Similarly, when developing call-to-action campaigns, we employed the AIDA model to get readers' *attention* by leading with essential information, to garner *interest* by contextualizing the problem, to spur readers' *desire* to get involved, and finally to provide a specific call to *action* (Boveé and Thill 330–31). To illustrate, if the call to action was a protest, we'd offer advice about making handmade signs and where to find parking. If the call was a phone-banking or letter-writing campaign, we'd close with a model script that included the complete contact information of targeted officials.

Muncie Resists' campaign for MCS challenges the prevailing narrative that rural people are apathetic and politically regressive, often duped into supporting policies that hurt their interests. This narrative ought to be challenged for several reasons. Most obvious, when we scapegoat rural communities, we sidestep the inconvenient truth that the neoliberal politics of self-interest crosses both the socio-economic and ideological borders of the rural/cosmopolitan divide. In the anecdote above, university administrators and faculty members supported (and benefited from) an austerity politics, which will eventually harm them. Indeed, those of us in higher education are no less vulnerable than our primary and secondary teacher colleagues; given that all boats rise (and sink) with the tide, activists in higher education should be the first line of defense for our colleagues in public school. In short, while holding onto the rural bogeyman might feel good, it also prevents us from facing our own complicity in oppressive structures.

Moreover, narratives that frame rural communities as politically regressive erase rural activist success stories—which are vital to sustaining community resistance. Indeed, these success stories serve a pedagogical purpose, in the sense that they help similarly situated communities develop their own activist campaigns and forge coalitions with communities facing adjacent issues. Rural success stories also provide a powerful antidote to self-sabotaging narratives that convince bystanders it'd be easier and less embarrassing to remain on the sidelines. Finally, sharing success stories about rural activism galvanizes and fortifies community members for the inevitable struggles ahead.

This last point is a particularly apt lesson for Muncie community members, whose short-term victory for the teachers' union unraveled (months later) after the state appointed an emergency manager to control the school corporation's finances. Since then, the university has attempted to forge a backroom deal with state legislatures that would charterize MCS schools, bust unions, and remove both the school board and community members from future decision-making processes. In times like these, celebrating past successes can remind community members that political losses are tied to systemic issues and not, as neoliberalism asserts, personal failures. More importantly, success stories can keep a community vigilant—reminding them to be as relentless in their resistance as neoliberals are in rolling back the social safety net.

### **Alt-Country Narrative #3: Rural People Go to Church and Listen to a Radical Trans Atheist**

In summer 2017, I was invited by Muncie RACE (Reconciliation Achieved through Community Engagement) to offer a community talk/training on transgender issues. Initially, I was hesitant to accept this invitation because the idea was pitched as a trans ally training. I've done lgbt ally trainings in higher ed, as well as intersectional ally training for lgbtq groups, and to be honest, I hate them—and I'm not alone here. As Fox (500) and Nicolazzo and Marine (271) write, such trainings rarely focus on cisgender privilege or consider the intersectional ways that trans people encounter oppression, and as a result, these trainings traffic in trans people's suffering to grant cisgender people the cultural capital of "official" ally status—a tool many allies use to deflect the complicity in oppression. Moreover, I have encountered numerous occasions where institutions of higher education, as well as non-academic, mainstream lgbt groups, have attempted to pressure me to conform to a sanitized, feel-good ally training in order to protect their branding (Spencer and Patterson 306–309).

Of course, there were other factors that left me apprehensive: Muncie RACE was a large, non-partisan group—and they'd never before discussed queer or trans issues. Muncie RACE an overwhelmingly white, cishet group, but unlike Muncie Resists, RACE was especially popular among older, white, rural retirees. Considering the resistance I'd experienced in ostensibly

open-minded settings, I worried I'd fare even worse with community members in a rural, red state who were unfamiliar with trans issues. While my own hang-ups about rural communities certainly came into play here, it's worth adding that my hang-ups were also influenced by prevailing cultural narratives that frame rural people as anti-intellectual and hostile to unfamiliar ideas. In spite of my apprehensions, however, I agreed to give the talk so long as I could do it on my own terms and resist the neoliberal tropes so common in trans ally trainings.

Once on site for the event, of course, I began to panic. My first wave of butterflies came when I realized the workshop would be held in a church sanctuary. A second wave of nerves hit as I watched more than 60 people file into the church—an overwhelmingly white crowd, including a host of elderly people and a small crowd of children who were barely tweens. I thought I'd be toast. But as it turned out, the audience loved my talk. Instead of the usual defensiveness, performative confusion, and the compulsion to play devil's advocate I usually encounter when facilitating these workshops, the attendees posed thoughtful questions, offered earnest thanks, and invited me to share my workshop with other community stakeholders.

No doubt, many factors were on my side—preparation, a self-selecting audience, and the absence of neoliberal oversight. In retrospect, though, my training in rhetoric and professional writing *also* helped to influence a positive outcome in the following ways:

1. I framed my talk by considering audience needs. For instance, while I opened my workshop much as other ally trainings might—by offering a primer of key concepts like sex, sexuality, gender performance, and gender identity—I framed these key concepts as a toolkit that might give audience members the confidence to navigate conversations about gender difference with others. In this way, I drew from Locker's concept of "you-attitude," which reminds writers to consider how the audience might use the material (36).
2. I shifted the spotlight. Unlike typical trans ally trainings, which focus on trans people as curiosities, the majority of my workshop encouraged cisgender audience members to come to terms with their own epistemic privilege. Specifically, I helped attendees recognize how unquestioned cis-centric narratives shape their belief that trans people are "too different" and "too strange" for cisgender people to understand. For instance, I pointed out that cisgender people regularly use gender-affirming technologies—e.g., makeup, hormones, hair-growth serums, breast/chest augmentation—and yet cis people often view these same technologies as "excessive" and "perverse" when sought out by trans people. In adopting this approach, I drew from Bracher's assertion that ending oppression requires more than new information; it requires an emotional component to stick (465).

3. I acknowledged cognitive dissonance as part of the process. To prevent defensiveness around questions of privilege, I employed two tactics from my training in cultural rhetorics. Drawing from Johnson, I reframed cis privilege as an asset for upending oppression, which helped audiences to move from the guilt of feeling like “bad people” to understanding themselves as agents who have work to do (8). To further establish rapport, I also shared examples of my own feelings of privileged guilt and fears of saying the wrong thing. Butler would describe this as essential to ethical relationships—the practice of extending grace to one another through acknowledging the ways we fall short of our own ideals (63).
4. I ended with a call to action. Drawing from Spade, I wanted audience members to understand that the bulk of the violence trans people face isn’t interpersonal so much as institutional—through voter ID laws, quality-of-life ordinances, zero-tolerance school policies, and so on (193). With this in mind, I fielded small- and large-group discussions, asking audience members to list their areas of influence and share how they could leverage their privilege in various institutional spaces to upend oppression. Among the ideas community members came up with were the following: featuring trans-affirming literature in library displays; using shower curtains to offer more privacy in public showers; and training police officers in trans cultural competency. As a result, participants left the workshop with an understanding that their work as allies had only just begun.

While I’ve discussed the practical, rhetorical implications of this story, I’ve yet to discuss the larger issues at stake when we perpetuate the narrative that rural people are somehow uniquely cruel and uncritical. For one thing, this characterization of rural people prevents dialogues across difference. In the anecdote above, my own instinct to decline Muncie RACE’s invitation stemmed from an assumption that community members would reject my message. Related, the rural bogeyman is an all too convenient scapegoat onto which cosmopolitan people can project their own, unexamined bigotry and bias. Certainly, the institutions that sought to censor my trainings to prioritize a sanitized, feel-good message would balk at the suggestion that check their motives. *Bias doesn’t live in spaces of learning, they rationalize; it lives elsewhere—out there.*

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we must consider how the rural bogeyman becomes a Trojan horse that allows neoliberal decision-makers to explain away discrimination as the behavior of a few bad apples. Consider, for example, the litany of post-election think-pieces that regard *heartland* as some bellwether for the average voter. Such think-pieces argue that if Dems want to win elections, they must stop focusing on boutique issues that might scare “moderates”—like trans rights, universal healthcare, and ending police brutality. I call bullshit. Democrats aren’t losing elections because rural people are too bigoted or dumb to understand complex issues. As a point of fact, there are a host of reasons Dems didn’t win the general election—among

them are Citizens United, gerrymandering, mass incarceration, and depressed voter turnout resulting from a bipartisan politics of abandonment. Indeed, Democratic officials have long been complicit in cannibalizing their base, but when the chickens come home to roost, they rely on the rural bogeyman to get themselves off the hook.

### **A Final Case for Telling Better Stories**

I have argued that we might benefit from retiring the rural bogeyman, a trope that obscures more than it reveals about our pressing political divides. My alt-country narratives suggest that rural people aren't as intolerant of difference, naive about austerity politics, or resistant to critical thinking as prevailing logic suggests. Related, cosmopolitan spaces are just as implicated in fomenting division as other spaces. My intention in interrogating the rural versus cosmopolitan binary isn't to forward a "both sides" argument. Rather, in the tradition of queer rhetorics, I hope my alt-country narratives allow us to consider disconnects in the "thinking about our thinking" (Britzman and Gilbert 92).

As I've indicated, alt-country narratives have quite the ripple-effect. They offer models of resistance for similarly struggling communities. They kick-start coalitions among communities battling overlapping social justice issues. They inspire fence-sitters to get involved. And most importantly, they challenge preconceptions that marginalized community members can't lead. But there's another reason we should forward alt-country narratives: they're the better story. Rorty argues that the stories we tell about ourselves can shape our national destiny (99). Such stories, he claims, not only remind leftists what they're fighting for but serve as a constant reminder of who we can become.

As a multimarg person, I'm suspicious of hopeful stories, because I know how easily they can be co-opted to achieve some neoliberal end. Indeed, the compulsory hopeful story is the high-fructose corn syrup of politics—all saccharine, no substance. But not all hopeful stories need to be so tidy. To be sure, Muncie, Indiana, isn't a perfect place. Community activism is uneven, and we're still waging an uphill battle against apathy and systemic oppression. What's notable about our story is that rural community members, abandoned by industry, the state, and privileged stakeholders, have developed surprisingly effective coalitions and tactics of resistance—many of which shake our fundamental assumptions about what we can expect from engaging in the political process and engaging with each other.

And here's the thing: I'm not convinced Muncie's somehow unique in its level of civic engagement. No doubt, hundreds of communities like it engage in similar work but lack the platform to share their stories. At the same time, it's also possible that hundreds of transformative stories (just waiting to bring new worlds into being) have been foreclosed—simply because we're convinced that we already know the ending. The upside, though, is that the stories we tell can always be rewritten. I hope you'll join me.



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## 6 Recognizing and Saving Black Lives, Recognizing and Saving Palestinian Lives

### The Power of Transnational Rhetorics in Locating the Commonality of Liberation Struggles

*Matthew Abraham*

So that the question of how to bring movements together is also a question of the kind of language one uses and the consciousness one tries to impart. I think it's important to insist on the intersectionality of movements. In the abolition movement, we've been trying to find ways to talk about Palestine so that people who are attracted to a campaign to dismantle prisons in the US also think about the need to end the occupation of Palestine. It can't be an afterthought. It has to be part of the ongoing analysis.

(Angela Davis in *From Ferguson to Palestine*)

#### **From America to Palestine**

In my previous contribution to *Activism and Rhetoric*, I looked at how the charge of anti-Semitism has often been used against critics of Israel to shift attention away from the United States' and Israel's rejection of a comprehensive diplomatic settlement of the Israel-Palestine conflict to a focus on the character attributes of the critics themselves—by accusing the critics of being anti-Semitic. Here, I broaden the field of investigation by looking at the intersections between two seemingly different subject positions, the African American facing the prospect of racial profiling and state violence in the United States and the Palestinian living under Israeli occupation and hence debilitated by the matrix of Zionism.

These two subject positions meet in the common conditions of precariousness, premature death, and in the constant surveillance of their targeted bodies. Activist movements have emerged to address both subject positions—the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement and the Palestinian liberation movement associated with the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement. The question I have is: How might the activist energies that have emerged within these two movements converge to harness the potential within each to resist white supremacy and Zionism?

With the rise of expressions of white nationalism with the election of Donald Trump, we have witnessed that expressions of anti-Semitism and white supremacy by Steve Bannon supporters were tolerable because Bannon and the Breitbart constituency were reflexively pro-Israel. The question foremost on everyone's minds was: how could supporters of Israel be supportive of Bannon in light of the anti-Semitism of those who associated with him? The overwhelming answer was that Bannon met the litmus test of being an ardent supporter of Israel, so he could be forgiven for being in league with racists and anti-Semites. Sources suspected, of course, that Bannon was advising Trump in August 2017 as to how to handle the aftermath of the Charlottesville controversy around the protests for and against the Confederate statutes. In the aftermath of Charlottesville, when Trump claimed that there good and bad people on both sides, he seemed to indicate selective support for white supremacists and Anti-Semites. Trump has enabled a noxious blend of racism to make claims to respectability, and in turn, leads us to consider the plight of African Americans and Palestinians.

In this chapter, I will examine why comparisons between the Black Lives Matter movement and the various international efforts to liberate Palestinians from Israeli occupation are apt and consistent with rhetoric and composition's focus on transnational and intersectional rhetorics. Both efforts represent attempts to find commonalities in the struggles of oppressed peoples seeking to transcend colonialism, white supremacy, and the oppression of people of color in specific contexts. By finding commonalities in these struggles, we can develop rhetorical strategies for resisting various forms of anti-Semitism, terrorism, or even anti-white racism. Such rhetorical strategies would include symbolic protests that would bring attention to dissenting positions about race and colonial power, structural racism and violence in the contexts of the United States and Israel–Palestine, and the specific stories of loss and trauma associated with specific victims of racist and settler-colonial violence.

### **Not-so-Disparate Narratives**

By now, we are familiar with the this all-too-common narrative: police pull over a car during an ordinary traffic stop; after a brief encounter words are exchanged, a scuffle ensues, and then shots are fired; a Black man dies; a riot ensues—the community expresses outrage at how insensitive the police are to the needs of Black subjects in local communities. The community asks, “Why are our young men being racially profiled and denied the due process of law?” This narrative has become firmly part of the American landscape. Equally well known to Americans who follow the international headlines is this narrative: Israeli Defense Forces kill hundreds of Palestinians at the international border with Gaza, claiming to be defending the border even though Israel has never declared its borders. The casualties spark outrage in the Palestinian community and among international observers. What could these two seemingly disparate

events possibly have in common? What are the transnational sentiments contained in these well-worn narratives and how do they contribute to the production of rhetorics of resistance and change? How might such rhetorics help to facilitate resisting populations in their quest for recognition and liberation from oppressive circumstances? Rhetoricians are considering how the oppressive circumstances surrounding minority communities in the United States are connected to and have historical relationships with the suffering of minority communities on other continents.<sup>1</sup> The turn toward considering transnational rhetorics, that is the rhetorical connectivity informing how such communities signify to and communicate with one another, becomes especially important in the context of drawing parallels between the fate of the Palestinian community in Israel–Palestine and the historical suffering of African Americans.

The slow convergence between Black liberation in the United States and Palestinian resistance against Israeli occupation and enclosure seems to come from a felt necessity, a recognition that both movements are working against political forces rooted in racism and neo-colonialism. In this sense, the movements need each other to move across and between different audiences. The circulation in social media and other online outlets of these expressions of solidarity, especially after Ferguson, have assumed a prominence in the public sphere that signals a shift in previous forms of activist engagement. By simply proclaiming that “Black Lives Matter” one works against the discursive and materially constructed reality that Black lives have historically *not* mattered in the United States. Through this performative invocation that affirms the reality, agency, and importance of Black bodies and the significance of those bodies in relation to the civil rights movement and the emerging protest movement in relation to the escalation police violence against African Americans, one affirms the humanity of Black lives. A similar movement is emerging in the United States and globally to affirm the importance and reality of Palestinian lives ruled by Israeli occupation to affirm the humanity of Palestinians living under Israeli occupation. While pockets of support exist in dissident communities, the Palestinian lives matter movement has not achieved anything near the levels of support that the Black Lives Matter movement has. How, then, might the Palestinian lives matter movement draw energy, sustenance, and support from the Black Lives Matter movement? What are the intersections between these two movements that would lead to transnational solidarity? The convergence of interests between the two movements is rhetorically significant and interesting precisely because of the subject positions of Palestinians and African Americans in relation to the US and Israeli governments. Both populations constitute a problem to be managed, surveilled, and kept at bay through police force.

An FBI report published in August 2017 on Black extremist groups represents a moment of recognition by the state. This report shows that the subject positions associated with Black Power and assertions of Black identity represent a discursive target in need of state management and control. The

threat such assertions of Black identity pose to police officers and other government officials led to the publication of a confidential FBI report on “Black identity extremists” (BIEs) and how to handle the growing problem from the standpoint of law enforcement. The exact title of the report, “Black Identity Extremists Likely Motivated to Target Law Enforcement Officers,” indicates the supposed threat associated with these groups.

According to the report, these BIEs have been motivated since the Michael Brown shooting in August 2014 to take revenge on law enforcement for what they perceive as historical racial injustices against African Americans and that the “grand jury’s decision in the shooting death of Michael Brown in Ferguson would likely be exploited by some individuals to justify threats and attacks against law enforcement and critical infrastructure” (3). Furthermore, according to the report:

The FBI defines black identity extremists as individuals who seek, wholly or in part, through unlawful acts of force or violence, in response to perceived racism and injustice in American society and some do so in furtherance of establishing a separate Black homeland or autonomous black social institutions, communities, or governing organizations within the United States.

(footnote b, 2)

The report stipulates that:

[t]he FBI defines sovereign citizen extremists as individuals who openly reject their US citizenship status, believe that most forms of established government, authority, and institutions are illegitimate, and seek, wholly or in part, through unlawful acts of force or violence, to further their claim to be immune from government authority.

(footnote c, 3)

Black identity extremists then are to be vigilantly guarded against because of the potential threat they pose to state authority and those who represent that authority. In the report itself, we see that Dallas, TX, shooter Micah Johnson, who killed five white police officers “during a First Amendment protected protest” is called a “BIE” because of his journal writings. As the report states, “Based on Johnson’s journal writings and statements to police, he appeared to have been influenced by BIE ideology.” In October of 2014, Zale Thompson conducted a hatchet attack against four police officers in Queens, New York, revealing in his writings that he “advocated for armed struggle against the ‘oppressors’ and mass revolt against the US social, economic, and political systems,’ which he perceived to be white dominated.” Johnson and Thompson, who were both African American, were shot and killed in their standoffs with police. The report goes on to state, “The FBI further assesses it is very likely additional controversial police shootings of African Americans and

the associated legal proceedings will continue to serve as drivers for violence against law enforcement.” Furthermore, “The FBI assesses it is likely police officers of minority groups are also targeted by BIEs because they are also representative of a perceived oppressive law enforcement system” (7).

Given what is described in the report, it is difficult not to wonder about the existential condition of Black life in the United States, as the precarious conditions that inform how Black lives are viewed by those who have the biopolitical power to take those lives away with a split-second decision. How police officers come to relate to and with the Black lives they are surveilling and controlling brings together a whole of host of considerations that force one to take account of the history of Black oppression in the United States. In assessing the existential conditions of Black life in the United States, one must take into account how Black life, Black subjectivity, is conditioned in relation to the demands of the police state. How are one’s life prospects diminished by the state’s categorization of a citizen as “Black”? If one’s phenotypical race emerges as a function of how well a policeman’s gaze conforms to historical stereotypes about non-white races that have been generated by state and federal law enforcement agencies, then “driving while Black” or being “pulled over while Black” are seeming precursors to being subjected to state violence when one refuses to adequately genuflect before the state’s authority and its monopoly of violence.

Palestinians living under occupation know all too well the experience of being detained, surveilled, and harassed by the Israeli Defense Forces as they go about their daily activities. “Walking while Palestinian” or “Shopping while Palestinian” are activities subjected to surveillance and evaluation by state authorities. How might the subject position of the Palestinian living under Israeli occupation be theorized in relation to Black subjectivity if we think in transnational terms by creating a line of solidarity between the seemingly disparate histories of Palestinians and African Americans through the history of settler colonialism and the predicaments of both populations in the context of the modern security state? With the rise to prominence of the Black Lives Matter movement and BLM’s successful use of social media to raise public consciousness about police mistreatment of African Americans, even before they are suspects in a crime, a serious challenge to police and state authority has emerged. As a movement committed to documenting the challenges associated with and the precariousness of Black lives, BLM disrupts the discursive hegemony of white supremacy in the context of policing. The discourse of continual suspicion that Black subjects contend with limits their ability to live free and fulfilling lives, leading to acts of desperation when their circumscribed freedom is in danger of being totally taken away.

In April 2015, when the video showing Walter Scott being shot in the back by Columbia, South Carolina police officer Michael Slager, as Scott ran away from his car after being pulled over for a broken taillight and for outstanding child support payments became public, it confirmed what many African Americans have argued for years—that cops plant evidence to solidify their narratives that they are shooting Black citizens in self-defense to cover

up what is in fact cold-blooded murder. Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers have committed similar actions to justify killing defenseless Palestinians in the name of counterterrorism. For example, in March 2015 in the town of Hebron, IDF soldier Elor Azaria killed an incapacitated Palestinian (Abdul Fattah al-Sharif) lying on the ground by shooting him in the head. The killing was caught on video. After one of the most divisive trials in Israeli history, Elor was given a brief jail sentence. He was released from prison in May 2018. The case revolved around whether Elor shot al-Sharif because he perceived a threat or out of malice. Elor claimed that he saw al-Sharif reaching for a knife laying on the ground and shot him in the head to defend his fellow IDF soldiers. However, the knife is not present in the video at the time of the shooting, only afterward, suggesting that it was planted to solidify Elor's story that he acted in the defense of his fellow soldiers.<sup>2</sup> Elor's commanding officer reported that, immediately after the shooting, Elor declared that the "terrorist was alive and needed to die." How might we go about teaching our students about the precarious lives that Scott and al-Sharif lived as subjects targeted for extrajudicial killing by agents of the state because of their race/ethnicity?

Furthermore, how do we teach students about the rhetorical strategies informing the tactics of both the activists seeking to bring attention to the precarious lives of Scott and al-Sharif, as well as those countering the activists? This is an interesting form of rhetorical expression in how it goes about creating lines of solidarity between seemingly disparate movements that are separated by geographical distance, ideological space, and time. Just as Black lives *should* matter, Palestinian lives should matter to those advancing an anti-imperialist frame to understand world conflict. That there has not been more solidarity expressed between the two movements is hard to explain, but that there has been recent convergence in expressions of solidarity between the two movements is deserving of consideration.

### **Convergence of Interests**

The use of military-grade combat equipment in American cities as a form of riot control to intimidate protesters, paralleling riot-control efforts in the Middle East, the United States in Iraq, and Israel in the occupied territories, led to the recognition that domestic and international policing efforts were linked. Much of this US military equipment given to local police resulted from surpluses produced after 2001 up through to the US invasion of Iraq. The American homeland became the place to dump military-grade equipment, eagerly received by local police departments, for surveilling and controlling the public space. What does this transfer of military equipment to police departments reveal about the government's attitude in terms of policing its citizens? The public space is a zone of enforcement that can be militarized in moments of political crisis to contain certain forms of social organization and protest.



## **Identity Extremism?**

The release of the FBI report on Black-identity radical groups that I examined earlier raises questions about how race, and more specifically a specific racial politics that challenges the domination of the state. Racial minorities challenge this domination by exposing the differentialized treatment they experience in various spheres of social life. The criminalization of activism in this way suggests that expressions of a racial or religious identity can be reframed as a form of extremism that challenges state formations. That an identity can be activated in this way because racial politics makes claims of injustice against the state that are radically disruptive. Similarly, the ways in which Israel bans and makes illegal protests by Palestinians seeking to disrupt the occupation. The flashing of a peace or resistance sign can lead to arrest. Throwing rocks can subject one to arrest and humiliation. Such actions can lead to social incapacitation, as Palestinians of all ages can be imprisoned for indefinite periods of time for engaging in political protests. By criminalizing protests against its occupation, Israel can create a deterrence model for those Palestinians contemplating throwing rocks, confronting IDF soldiers, and challenging laws that are differentially applied between Jewish Israelis and Palestinians. The subjectivity of the African American inner-city youth, alienated and underserved, seems to present a distant parallel to the Palestinian who faces the deprivations introduced by the Israeli occupation. However, an examination of the specifics of how alienation is produced by supremacist ideologies (white supremacy and Zionism) that distance Blacks and Palestinians from the respective societies in which they live reveals the dehumanization of Black and Palestinian life. Black and Palestinian subjectivity, then, emerges in relation to white supremacist and Zionist frameworks that position the Black and Palestinian body in a subordinate position requiring continual surveillance.

## **On the Ground**

Last year, Cornell history professor, Russell Rickford, created controversy when he chanted “Free Palestine” at a knee-in protest at Cornell to honor Black athletes who took a knee during the playing the national anthem at National Football League games. Colin Kaepernick has been the most visible example. Rickford was accused of bring in a wholly irrelevant issue to the protest by using this chant. To contextualize his act of protest, Rickford explained that the colonization of Palestine is wholly about white supremacy, suggesting that Zionism is grounded in a racialist supremacist logic that meshes with white supremacy.<sup>3</sup> As an article describing the protest explained, “Rickford said his rhetorical strategy in leading the crowd in the chant ‘Free Palestine’ was precisely aligned with the aim of the protest” (Yoon). Unsurprisingly, Rickford was excoriated for his views by pro-Israel supporters for seemingly expressing taboo sentiments. While these supporters could get behind the message of Black liberation from oppression in a racist America, they seemingly balked

when the analytical lens shifts to Israel's treatment of the Palestinians and seeks to draw a comparison between the treatment of these Palestinians living under occupation and the treatment of African Americans in the years leading up to, throughout, and after the civil rights movement.<sup>4</sup> This cognitive dissonance experienced within the US public sphere is worthy of a full analysis, for it reveals how highlighting certain intersectionalities and expressions of solidarity are intolerable to elite opinion if they highlight and problematize Israel's occupation of the Palestinians. If one draws parallels between Israeli occupation and Jim Crow racism, accusations of anti-Semitism may very well follow. Israel's liberal supporters strongly resist the suggestion that the Israel-Palestine conflict is based in racial discrimination. Anti-Arab sentiment, as the thinking goes, is supposedly grounded in Arab resistance to Israel as a Jewish state. Descriptions of Israel's occupation as being a colonial occupation are denounced as wrong-headed for the simple reason that the occupiers of Palestinian land are Jewish.

The controversy surrounding Black National Football League players who take a knee during the playing of the national anthem at the beginning of games helps to illuminate the place of African Americans in the national imaginary. The felt-sense of betrayal expressed against these players from the White House to Main Street seeks to condemn the symbolic act of protest, revealing how Black dissent from nationalist appeals disrupts the US image as a benevolent empire. We do well to remember how many Americans reacted angrily to the Black Olympic athletes, Tommy Smith and John Carlos, when they raised their fists in solidarity with the Black Panthers at the Olympic ceremonies in Mexico City in 1968. Both Smith and Carlo wore black gloves and black socks with no shoes. How has this expression of American patriotism, standing at rapt attention during the national anthem, become implicated in the oppression of racial minorities? Of course, the controversy that has emerged between President Trump and several NFL teams and players extends back to representations of the Black Lives Matter movement in the media and popular culture in the wake of several high-profile killings of African Americans by the police. The narrative promoted by BLM and others that racial discrimination is so endemic to the national fabric of the United States has taken hold. NFL players such as Colin Kapernick believe it is the responsibility of Black athletes to not acknowledge the national anthem at the beginning of professional sporting events by taking a knee. This of course has led to a showdown between many professional athletes, such as LeBron James and Stephen Curry, and President Trump. Trump has called for the firing of protesting players, insisting that owners should "fire the sons of bitches." As Trump stated on Fox and Friends back in May, "You have to stand proudly for the national anthem or you shouldn't be playing, you shouldn't be there. Maybe you shouldn't be in the country." In response to the controversy, the NFL passed a new policy allowing any player or staff member not wishing to stand during the playing of the national anthem to remain in the locker room, but those players and staff members who do come onto the field must stand when the anthem is played.<sup>5</sup>

The precarity of Black lives and the seeming insensitivity expressed toward those lives when one stands during the national anthem have collided with the narrative of patriotism that insists that not standing during the national anthem disrespects those soldiers who have sacrificed their lives in the defense of the US nation. Displays of solidarity with those who have been racially profiled and harassed by law enforcement are completely understandable in light of all that has happened in the last five years with respect to the development of the BLM. By increasing society's consciousness about the intense surveillance Black and brown bodies face in the United States, and by forcing the realization that Black and brown lives were being cut short by state violence, BLM provided ample reminders that the United States remains a white supremacist society based on a racial supremacist logic that placed people of color in a subordinate status. This awareness has been promoted by writers such as Ta-nahesi Coates and Angela Davis, who have come to assume positions of significant prominence in speaking to the racial problematic in the United States in the post-civil rights era.<sup>6</sup>

## **Conclusion**

By exploring the transnational rhetorical intersections between anti-racist forces behind BLM's promotion of Black liberation in the United States and the push to increase awareness of the Palestinian predicament in the West Bank in Gaza, in the midst of Israeli occupation and enclosure, rhetoricians can view the commonalities of the anti-racist and anti-colonial struggle. This effort is not simply an attempt to compare the possible connections between BLM and organizations and individuals seeking to bring Israel in conformity with international law through the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement. This movement has made significant strides within the US public sphere. One indication of this success comes in forms of resistance to it: the number of legislative attempts to criminalize participation in BDS. It is reminiscent of the attempts to criminalize efforts of those participating in the desegregation movement in the 1950s and 1960s. One of the ironies that has emerged in the contest of the promotion of Palestinian rights in the United States is that aspects of the Civil Rights Act have been deployed to crack down on critics of Israel. That legislation that has historically been associated with the protection of the civil rights of African Americans was being used against those seeking to advance the rights of Palestinians living under occupation and enclosure in the West Bank and Gaza because of their supposed anti-Jewish sentiments demonstrates how discourse can be reoriented to the circumstances of time and place, sometimes in pernicious ways.

In this context, one must note the points of connection and solidarity that have been created and drawn between the focus on the precarity of Black lives and the precarity of Palestinian lives as result of Israel's occupation and enclosure of West Bank and Gaza. While the Black Lives Matter movement has

focused on racial profiling in the context of policing in cities, and how racial minorities are disproportionately stopped for traffic violations and other policing investigations, those who have been involved in the Palestinian liberation movement have focused on the effects of Israel's occupation on the everyday lives of Palestinians, while paying particular attention to specific human rights and international law violations, which have received increasing attention in the public sphere. The coincidence between the rising interest in both states of precarity, of African American populations in the United States and Palestinians in the Middle East, forces a recognition of the convergence and overlapping of various spheres of concern that should be of interest to critical rhetoricians.

The transnational dimensions of the emerging solidarity between Palestinian and BLM activists has been taken on by Angela Davis in her book *From Ferguson to Palestine*, as well as by Ali Abunimah in his *The Battle for Justice in Palestine*. Davis and Abunimah highlight the significance of the Ferguson protests for thinking about transnational connections with Palestine. One of the most poignant moments during the protests in Ferguson was when protesters received tweets of solidarity from activists in the West Bank and Gaza. The tweets from Palestine provided advice about how Ferguson protesters could protect themselves against police tear gas.<sup>7</sup> In such moments, we see the emergence of a sort of conjoined solidarity that combines the civil rights struggle with the anti-colonial resistance movements that have occurred throughout the Middle East—from the Algerian Revolution, the First and Second Intifada, through to the Arab Spring. These movements implicate the United States in a history of domestic segregation, the promotion of CIA-backed coups to overthrow Mossadegh in Iran in 1955 to solidify US oil interests, the support of US-supported dictatorships throughout the Middle East, as well as US military and diplomatic support for Israel's occupation since 1967. The parallels between the US civil rights movement and the Palestinian liberation movement are significant; their common struggles and the historical contexts from which they have emerged should not elude the field. Each movement places the legacy of US imperialism and white supremacy squarely in focus, which is precisely why Israel's supporters have been intent on targeting BLM as an anti-Israel movement, placing defenders of Israel's occupation in a strange position.<sup>8</sup> The irony should not be lost on those who study rhetoric.

## Notes

- 1 See Rebecca Dingo's *Networking Arguments: Rhetoric, Transnational Feminism, and Public Policy Writing*.
- 2 See William Booth and Ruth Eglash's "The military trial that is tearing Israel Apart." Also see Adam Horvitz's "Elor Azaria and Israeli Moral Core," and Yaniv Kubovich and Noa Landau's "Elor Azaria, Israeli Soldier Convicted of Killing a Wounded Palestinian Terrorist, Set Free After Nine Months."
- 3 Yoon, John. "Professor Has No Regrets After Controversial Chant."
- 4 The blog Legal Insurrection accused Rickford of "hijacking other social justice causes." See William Jacobson's "Cornell Take-A-Knee Protest hijacked, Professor leads chant of

‘Free Palestine.’” It bears pointing out that Professor William Jacobson who runs Legal Insurrection played a key role in characterizing Professor Steven Salaita as anti-Semitic in the lead-up to Salaita’s derailed appointment at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign.

5 See P.R. Lockhart’s “Trump praises national anthem rule, say kneeling players ‘maybe shouldn’t be in the country.’”

6 See Coates’ *Between the World and Me*.

7 See Marc Molloy’s “Palestinians Tweet Tear Gas Advice to Protestors in Ferguson.”

8 See Jonathan Greenblatt’s “Anti-Semitism is Creeping into Progressivism.”

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## 7 *Gadugi*

### Where the Fire Burns (Still)

*Ellen Cushman*

My sisters and I designed and began sewing two shawls for Rosie and me to wear at the powwow that's held during the Tsalagi (Cherokee) National Holiday over Labor Day weekend. We started in June and it took about two months to finish. Rosie's shawl will have four horses and lines of ribbon emanating around them all layered onto a cutout of chevrons. Mine is simpler: three circles on either side of the shawl leading to a central circle, in the middle of which, seven flames burn in blue, yellow, and red. Fire felt right to me when we designed it: it's sacred to the tribe, and the seven licks of flame and seven circles are simple representations of the clans (Bird, Blue, Deer, Paint, Long Hair, Wild Potato, and Wolf) and our survival across time. Though I couldn't have told you why fire came to me when we first sat down to design this, I can now begin to tell you what brought me to this image, and it's no coincidence. This event signifies an entry point into a circle of time to which this essay will recursively return as it courses around the topic of rhetoric and activism. Imagine powwow dancers circling an arena in the center of which sit drummers and singers who guide the rhythms of our circulation. This essay is a circle-locution.

Before the Old Settler Cherokees, who were the first families to leave the South before the Trail of Tears forced thousands more to go, before they homesteaded in what was then called Indian Territory (IT), the tribe's sacred fire burned. One legend tells that the fire was brought to Turtle Island by the black river bug, the one with downy hair, who spun a thread from her body into a bowl and returned with a coal from the fire (Mooney 241). This fire burned even as Cherokee homes and farms burned during the forced removal from the hills of Georgia and North Carolina. Traditional Cherokee religious belief holds that the Creator gave the fire to four devout men, who he named Red, Blue, Black, and Yellow. This sacred fire burns today at stomp dances ("The Stomp Dance"). This also fire burned when thousands fled into those hills in the South to hide from their persecutors to become what today is the Eastern Band of the Nation. It was held close and safe through the Trail to find a home in Oklahoma. Though the Cherokee's survival through time is marked

by multiple displacements, distances, and separations, this fire remains constant across time and place.

In his “Inaugural Speech” delivered on August 14, 2003, Chief Chadwick (Corntassel) Smith tells that the elder Bennie Smith reminded him of the importance of *gadugi*, of building one fire.

One Fire is the Image of *Gadugi*

Four years ago, Bennie Smith, at this very courthouse, admonished me to be a student of the Cherokee people. I have diligently done that. He also instructed us to build one fire. To build one fire is the image of *gadugi*, to come together and work for the benefit of our families, communities, and nation. That one fire came across the Trail of Tears and in many ways it still burns today. Four years ago, I began to reflect and speak of the Cherokee legacy with which we have been entrusted. A legacy is a gift from our ancestors. Our legacy is that we are a people who face adversity, survive, adapt, prosper and excel. That legacy was carried across the Trail of Tears with people like Ancie Hogtoter, who led a cow all the way here from the old country at the age of thirteen. It was evident again in the late 1890s, when W.A. Duncan, the Cherokee Advocate newspaper editor, argued against allotment. And again when many of our grandparents left Oklahoma looking for work during the Depression on US Highway 66, the Grapes of Wrath, our second Trail of Tears.

*Gadugi* is an ethic that weds praxis and belief. This civic action taken for social justice enacts a spiritual connection to community and people, to legacies of social action. *Gadugi* lends layers of meaning (semiotic and spiritual meaning) to rhetorical activism. It is ethical action undertaken for and with communities that is done in light of a higher spirit. The fire is key to understanding this action as related to spiritual and civic engagement.

The Eastern and Western tribes have been working together to unify for the common good across the distances imposed by removal. One of many examples: 50 children from each of the Western and Eastern tribes have retraced the Trail of Tears from North Carolina (in 2002) and to Oklahoma (2003) respectively (“Eastern Cherokees Visit Oklahoma”).

The tribe tries to sew together the physical division of our people by bringing youths together to preserve culture, to exchange knowledge, to remember, and to heal. “Bringing together the Cherokee youth from Oklahoma with the Eastern Band Cherokee youth is intended for them to gain perspective on their lives through learning about their history and culture, both common and apart, and to the sacrifices made by their ancestors,” said Marvin Jones, then director of community services for the Cherokee Nation (“Eastern Cherokees Visit Oklahoma”). Traditional games and the history of removal, allotment, and our legacy of survival are taught. Jones continues, “We are especially interested in the Cultural Renewal program exposing Cherokee youth to the idea of Cherokees living and working together in communities for the common good as expressed in the Cherokee concept of *ga-du-gi*.”

Action that is helpful to the common good, which creates citizens who are serving the Cherokee people, which is grounded in place and history and culture, *gadugi* seems central to bringing the tribes together. *Gadugi*, a long-standing Cherokee ethic of community service based on political, ethical action, also folds in the honoring and respect of traditional ways of knowing. It relates closely to language and cultural preservation through storytelling, gathering (where small groups head into the woods with elders who point out what to gather, talk about its medicinal qualities, and relay stories of healing), and gatherings where groups come together, forum like, to discuss issues and topics common across tribal communities (a good example of which can be found in Wilma Mankiller's *Every Day is a Good Day*).

Before I designed my powwow shawl, before I knew the word *gadugi*, I practiced a form of knowledge-making that was in line with a sense of the public intellectual (Cushman "Public," "Specialization"). My research used activist methods centered on invited intervention (*Struggle*) and social reflexivity (*Struggle*, "Specialization"); my teaching, when possible, would unite students and community members, and organizational representatives, in collaborative knowledge-making ("Sustainable," "Contact Zones"); and so my service to communities was braided into my research and teaching to every extent possible. Though I used the notion of a public intellectual to help describe this work, I see this ethic fired by something more. To make knowledge for and with communities around topics important to them, to make knowledge with grace, honor, humility, and discipline, this is to work from the principle of *gadugi*. My mother taught me this in her way. When I was writing my first book, I was homesick in Berkeley. Just out of the PhD program, far from my family, trying to get employment that had stability, I had to write, write, write. This first book was an activist ethnography that took place in an inner city in upstate New York and it included a notion of praxis in the methods (*The Struggle and the Tools*). I called my mother and asked if she would say something I could record into my computer, something I would hear whenever I started my computer. I just missed her voice.

Mary Ellen, you better by God do good work.

It was one of the best things she ever said to me.

Redbird Smith, a Tsalagi leader of the anti-allotment movement is understood to have used the sacred fire to help solidify relations between the Keetowah and assimilationist Cherokee during the allotment era (1893–1914). The fire he used, the elders say, had been brought across the country during the Trail of Tears (1838–9). The Keetowah have kept the sacred fire for the Cherokee since.

Here from *The Cherokee Nation* is a brief description of the importance of this fire:

To the Cherokee, the Sacred Fire is much more than a fire. It is a physical, living manifestation of the Creator. The smoke of the Fire carries prayers



to heaven and it is the smoke that carries spiritual messages from place to place around the world. The fire and its smoke can do good or evil, based on how the fire is built and how it is used. The Keetowah have always used the force for good and peace. Redbird [Smith] taught, “If you are following the White Path, God will give you protection. If you are following the White Path and a man strikes you in the back, do not turn around. If you do, you will be off in the black.”

(Redbird Smith)

If *Gadugi* is represented by fire, then the ethical action for a public, a community, is more than a matter of praxis; it’s a matter of acting in the spirit and ways that the Creator would appreciate. It’s a recognition that we define ourselves by our actions. I’m trying to make sense of something here that has silently informed my work for the last decade, and I would never presume to say that this ethic is something others should take on themselves. By describing the connections between place, people, and spirit that rhetorical activism make possible, I hope only to layer significance to this work, not prescribe it as something others can or should do.

Though the work I’ve done has often been with people who appreciate the help, and though this work has often been with people of color, maybe some would say that it does not count as *gadugi*. This work has not been specifically with the Tsalagi community, Eastern or Western, and that is an important part of *gadugi* as Chief Smith describes it. The community where one comes from, the legacy of one’s cultural heritage, fuels the one fire in the circular way of ashes to ashes.

Yet, *gadugi* also includes a notion of work and place, and taking care of people in one’s community. Historian Wilma Dunaway describes the collective agrarian practices of Tsalagi in the 1820s and finds that another meaning of *gadugi* is found therein: “Men and women alike formed the *gadugi*, a labor gang that tended the fields and gardens of elderly or infirm members of the village” (165). These labor gangs were important because they served those who could not help themselves, gave the tribe coherence, and, as Dunaway argues, were an important equalizing point in gender relations, since both men and women farmed. In these ways, *gadugi* is also about work as this helps define people in relation to others and their physical place.

For as many years as I’ve done this work, I’ve called it variously public intellectualism, activist rhetoric, activist intervention, service-learning, and community literacy, but none of these terms have ever felt right. See, I’ve had this nagging suspicion, this troubled and troubling conversation with myself. I’ve had this sense that place and people do make a difference in the kinds of activism undertaken in knowledge-making, at least for me. The conversation goes something like this:

*Does it count for nothing that I have met and worked with many people who identify themselves as Black and Indian, especially Cherokee mixed bloods over these years?*

But community is about place and social network at once. Where we contribute makes a difference to our communities, to our people. How do you honor a legacy when you've got no elders near you?

*But we've been displaced so often (look at the three displacements Chief Smith describes). There's Tsalagi everywhere. Look, there's one now. Where is our community: North Carolina, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Missouri, Texas, Colorado, California?*

At the 2004 Native American Literature Symposium held at the Mystic Lake Casino Hotel, I met up with Ginny Carney, a Tsalagi elder from the Eastern tribe. She's been solace to many NDNs in the field. I asked her if this kind of service to communities other than my own, well, counted toward the word unspoken between us, *gadugi*. She made it clear to me that, while work with people outside of the community is good, it does not substitute for work with people in the tribe. While not discrediting the work I've done with people in communities in general, she said aloud the words that had nagged at me for years. Knowing my family was from Oklahoma, she gave me the name of Sammy Still, a cultural knowledge and language broker then employed by the Cherokee Nation headquartered in Tahlequah, OK; he traveled the country sharing traditional stories, wisdom, practices such as bow, marble, and blow-gun making. He also administered the online language lessons that the tribe offers to the public free of charge.

The shawl my sisters helped me make represents one of my first steps toward building the one fire. I did attend the Cherokee National Holiday over Labor Day weekend for the first time this year (my sister Rosie's been many times). I tried to find the family's old homestead, Drew Hill, which my family built on their allotment. I looked up a dissertation on John Drew, who we believe was the uncle of my great, great grandfather Charles Drew, a confederate soldier in the Cherokee 12th Mounted Division stationed at Fort Gibson during the Civil War. I never assumed I had much to offer the tribe, though I did try to make connections in the usual ways, trying out the language (I'm about a three-year-old in Cherokee). I was quietly hopeful to see if there's anything I can do for my people, and after months screwing up my courage and sewing, I met with Sammy Still who has been deeply kind and generous with me. He put me in touch with others in the Cherokee Nation. After long talks and letters, my students created two educational websites with and for the nation on the allotment era and discussing the laws and treaties of the Cherokee Nation. Sammy wrote to me that this could be "the beginning of a long and lasting relationship," my hope as well.

And so it has been the start of a long and lasting relationship. Along the path to writing *The Cherokee Syllabary: Writing the People's Perseverance* (Oklahoma 2012), I served as Cherokee Nation Sequoyah Commissioner, led a team of over 100 Cherokee Nation employees to build curricular materials for youths and teens, and in an ongoing project, helped develop and interface design for a digital archive to facilitate the translation of Cherokee manuscripts with the Cherokee Nation. The digital archive for translating Cherokee manuscripts has

been generously supported by an Institute for Museum and Library Services Sparks Ignition grant.

Though my activism of late has continued the **SSV** ethic, it's taken on new dimension as I entered into leadership at Northeastern University working as an Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, Diversity and Inclusion. In this role, the activism is both internally and externally facing. In my workaday life, I oversee faculty affairs for more than 150 tenured and tenure steam faculty and 85 full time non-tenure-track faculty. In 2016–2017, I helped revise hiring practices of college search committees to invite more diverse candidate pools and to ensure consistent review of candidates, co-authored a College review and contributed to planning, and oversaw implementation of Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion grants to promote curricular and pedagogical innovation in university-wide writing program courses. I created and Chair the Dean's Advisory Council on Civic Sustainability, Diversity and Inclusion to run events, host speakers, offer workshops, and profile the work of building a culture of inclusion in the College of Social Sciences and Humanities.

What I've come to learn from working with my people is that working with all people and being an activist where you are also enacts an ethic of **SSV**. We can be the change we want to be no matter who we are or where we are. Sure that might sound naïve, especially in today's divisive, cynical, and increasingly inequitable global society, but this idea is written in the Cherokee language. With the addition of the prefix **oD** /s/ to the beginning of **SSV**, the action forms words such as community, county, district, state, territory, county, district, and federation. **oDSSV** as a concept allows us to visualize how it is that everyday interactions of people working together as a team can create change. People coming together to work as a team around a shared goal, will, over time, become the basis of ever-growing systems of governance—true governance by and for people working together toward a shared goal. But what does **SSV** look like in practice?

During one of my work visits to Oklahoma, I was given a poster. This broadside, titled, "Cherokee Lifeway's," was created during Chad Smith's administration as Chief of the Cherokee Nation from 1999–2011. The language and Sequoyan that informs this poster was offered by Chief Smith's relative, Benny Smith, the brother of a prominent medicine man and former Associate Dean of Students at Haskell Indian Nations University. The poster itself begins with the Cherokee word "**SSV** /gadugi/ people coming together and working" and is followed by 20 phrases written in Sequoyan that offer dozens of instances of precisely what **SSV** looks like in action. And what it looks like, I'm arguing, is a civically sustainable discourse that we can use to create inclusive ecologies and broadened personal networks by humanizing community-based activism.

Civic sustainability relies on the fundamental understanding of the power of words as action. In the Cherokee language, words are deeds. What is said to one another sustains or deters the formation of the relationships that form strong and thriving selves, families, communities, and nations. Let's take a look at three words from the Cherokee lifeways broadside:

ᏌᏊᏊᏆᏂᏗᏞᏆᏂᏗ /detsadawadvhidohesdi/ visit one another with love  
 ᏌᏊᏊᏗᏞᏆᏂᏗᏞᏆᏂᏗᏞᏆᏂᏗ /detsadatlanigohesdodidehesdi/ strengthen  
 one another with encouraging words  
 ᏌᏊᏆᏂᏗᏞᏆᏂᏗ /duyugodv ditla detsadasehehesdi/ direct one  
 another in the right way

What if every tweet visited one another with love? What if a Facebook post strengthened one another with encouraging words? What if we helped each other do their personal best and to find their own right way, that included visiting each other with kind, encouraging, supportive words-as-deeds that build the teamwork of *SSY*? What would public discourse look like? What would classroom, community, and institutional discourse look like? It might look like each one of us creating a set of shared agreements for how we speak and listen to each other at the start of classes, at our workplaces, and within our institutions. It might look like a rhetoric of activism, a building of one fire from the flames and fuel of many fires still burning. *SSY* is a theory and context for political engagement in other words.

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## 8 Memory War

### Activist Rhetoric for Historical Justice

*JongHwa Lee*

On January 6, 2017, the *New York Times* (NYT) published an editorial, titled “No Closure on the ‘Comfort Women,’” urging both Korea and Japan, and the United States, to uphold the 2015 Korea–Japan Comfort Women Agreement—“the deal ... meant to be a ‘final and irreversible resolution’” on the “Comfort Women” issue (“No Closure”). According to the editorial (board), the placement of the “comfort woman” statue in 2016 in Busan (outside the Japanese Consulate) by Korean “activists” violates the spirit of the 2015 Agreement, and it makes “the Japanese” rightfully feel livid, which opens a major rift between the two allies of the United States (against the threats of North Korea and China). With [then] pending impeachment of South Korean President Park and unclear policies on Asia by [then] President-elect Trump, the risks of inaction are clear, says the editorial. The editorial stresses, in its first sentence, “The renewed tensions between South Korea and Japan are a sobering reminder of how historical wrongs can interfere with diplomacy” (“No Closure”).

Let me be clear on this issue: the moral of the story, or “a real sobering reminder” that the writers of the NYT editorial must realize, is rather how political expediency can interfere with righting historical wrongs. Some readers may wonder: What is the 2015 Korea–Japan Comfort Women Agreement? What is (up with) the “comfort woman” statue? Or, more fundamentally, what does this issue (or, of its sort—historical in/justice issues that seem to happen over there/then) have to do with us—people in the United States, and the readers of the NYT? Perhaps, we can only wonder about the true intention of the NYT editorial board, but the effect remains the same: the editorial recycles the same old cliché that the Japanese government has been using, while the Korean and the US governments play along, to cover up its past war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Indeed, there is nothing new here—the Agreement, and the positions of the Japanese, Korean, and US governments (as well as the NYT editorial board)—the “comfort women” issue is a liability “at a most perilous time,” and in order to “calm the water,” the Agreement must be upheld as “a final and irreversible resolution to the matter” (“No Closure”). Please note its insistence on the

“finality and irreversibility,” to which I will come back later. Yet, we saw/heard this logic with the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal, the 1965 Korea–Japan Basic Relations Treaty, the Asian Women’s Fund, and over and over; the voices of “comfort women” were silenced and discredited—there is always a more important and urgent issue than the “comfort women” concern. Either the “comfort women” issue is a non-issue or (always) already resolved. Further, there is an underlying, more fundamental problem: the editorial reflects a sweeping, violent vision—a self-imposed burden/expediency—overruling the appeals of others for justice and commanding to move on for its telos.

Starting with the NYT editorial, this essay reflects on the current state of the “comfort women” movement, as a case to discuss the connection between memory politics and historical justice movements where activism and rhetoric can play a critical role. For this discussion, the NYT editorial provides an entry point to discuss a memory war for “comfort women”: what the issue is with the “comfort women” statue, and, more specifically, with the 2015 Korea–Japan Agreement; and whether the statue is (not) a violation of (the spirit of the) Agreement, and whether the Agreement is (not) a “final and irreversible resolution” on the “comfort women” issue. In short, I first analyze the specifics of the case, only to demonstrate that the moral of the story is buried under strategically muddled clichés and confusing details, which in the end reproduces a violent, inhumane, and unjust status quo. But, before I get to these questions, let me first offer a brief historical overview of the “comfort women” issue for the readers who are not familiar with the problem and a little reflection on how I got involved in the “comfort women” movement.

### **History: Japanese Military Sexual Slavery (aka, “Comfort Women”)**

During World War II (WWII), the imperial Japanese military designed and implemented the “Comfort System,” which functioned as military rape camps, as a solution to the problems they were facing: to provide on-site, institutional, and controlled “sexual comfort services,” as a means of reducing (1) “unnecessary” hostility with natives in the occupied zones, caused by Japanese soldiers’ raping of local girls, and (2) the loss of fighting forces, due to infections from sexually transmitted diseases soldiers caught from having sex with sex workers (Chung 36; Yun 276). Around 160,000–200,000 women and girls (the majority ages 14 to 18) were abducted and taken to the Japanese military rape camps, across most of the colonized/occupied territories in Asia (Coomaraswamy, “Report”; McDougall “Report”). Along with “comfort women,” the women were also called “royal gifts” from the Japanese emperor, “things” with a tag that says “Do not use in the ship,” “sanitary public toilets,” or “Pi” (a derogatory Japanese word for vagina) (Yun 290). The condom distributed to the soldiers was called “Charge Number 1” (Yun 291). In a room of three feet by five, the women/girls had to “serve” and “entertain” as many as 60 to 70 men

per day, according to Coomaraswamy, UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women (“Report”).

The end of WWII did not bring much liberation for the women, however, for several reasons: the Japanese government systematically destroyed relevant documents/evidence; national and international governments did not investigate and prosecute the war crimes of the Japanese military thoroughly; and most victims (and perpetrators) kept silent out of “shame and guilt” (Chung 147). In the post-colonial, patriarchal, and cold-war condition, those women’s existence was erased from the “official” history, and the women’s stories were once again marginalized and silenced. As Coomaraswamy points out, the “official” discourse of “comfort women,” like the naming itself, “does not in the least reflect the suffering, such as multiple rapes on an everyday basis and severe physical abuses, that women victims had to endure during their forced prostitution and sexual subjugation and abuse in wartime” (“Report”).

There were several turning points that broke the cartel of silence. One of the first was Hak-Soon Kim’s public testimony on August 14, 1991, speaking about her traumatic experience, crying out on the unspeakable. From then on, other survivors came forward and started testifying to the horrific existence and experience of the Japanese military “comfort women.” Several women’s/civic organizations started to form as the word spread, in South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, the Philippines, the United States, and elsewhere, in the efforts of fact-finding and assisting survivors. Particularly, the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan started a weekly protest on January 8, 1992 (called the Wednesday Demonstration) in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul; as of January 9, 2019, it has had 1368 demonstrations over 27 years, the longest ongoing civic protest in South Korean, if not world, history. Also, in 2000, frustrated by the lack of official-legal judgment and the failure of the Asian Women’s Fund (for not acknowledging the legal responsibility of the Japanese government, yet primarily relying on private donations), international women’s groups held the Women’s International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan’s Military Sexual Slavery in Tokyo. The Women’s Tribunal found “Japan to be responsible under international law applicable at the time of the events,” “relating to slavery, trafficking, forced labor, and rape, amounting to crimes against humanity” (Chinkin 338).

In 2007, the US Congress unanimously passed a House Resolution (HR 121) on “comfort women,” authored by Japanese-American Congressman Michael Honda, with 167 bi-partisan co-sponsors, demanding an official apology and responsibility from the Japanese government “in a clear and unequivocal manner for its Imperial Armed Forces’ coercion of young women into sexual slavery, known to the world as ‘comfort women,’ during its colonial and wartime occupation of Asia and the Pacific Islands” (United States). Following the United States, similar congressional resolutions were passed in Australia, the Netherlands, Canada, the European Union, Taiwan, and South Korea. When I wrote the chapter for the first edition of this book, I was more optimistic; international communities, including powerful ones, were finally

coming together to recognize that the issue of Japanese Military Sexual Slavery was not a thing of the past, or a problem between Japan and Korea, but an important contemporary global human rights issue. Or, so it seemed.

### **Reflection: How I Became Involved in the Movement**

In Korea, the “comfort women” issue was always there in the cultural memory of WWII (in TV dramas, novels, etc.). Perhaps, next to the issue of Unit 731 (a biological and chemical warfare research and development unit of the Japanese military, conducting human experimentation), “comfort women” were among the most potent symbols of the horror and tragedy of WWII—a family’s daughters were taken away, forced to “serve” the colonial/occupying forces in the military rape camps. So, growing up in Korea, I too kind of knew about the issue. Yet, there were some moments that left me even more disturbing memories, and some of those moments also involved newspaper articles.

One summer night in 1995, I read a news article, titled “Nakasone, former Prime Minister of Japan, ‘made “comfort station” for Japanese soldiers”” (Bu, “Nakasone”). The article was about Nakasone’s memoir, “*Eternal Navy: Stories for the Next Generation*,” where he proudly described his experience as a naval officer during WWII—how he delightedly fulfilled his duty, including his establishment of “comfort stations” to help soldiers who had gambling problems and who sexually assaulted native women in the occupied territories. It was deeply bothering; how could a prominent national leader like him believe, and write, proudly that setting up “comfort stations” was his service to his country—a tradition to be passed down to the next generation, while the victims/survivors were still in the dark, shaken by the horror and trauma?

There was another news article on “comfort women” that pushed me even further. It was when the Japanese government demanded a new ocean treaty with Korea in 1998. Being upset, one Korean government official made an “off the record” comment, suggesting that if the Japanese government were to break the existing ocean treaty, the Korean government would bring up the “comfort women” issue (“Opinions”). There again, “comfort women” was useful only for political expediency—no concern, no sympathy for the victims—no discussion of any moral implications. I had to do something.

Over the first years, I approached the issue as a researcher—to learn more about it, and to write/report to the scholarly community. Critical ethnography seemed like a good choice for my approach/method, especially with its concern for the ethics and politics of representation/voice (Conquergood, “Rethinking” 190). As part of my “participation” and “observation,” I joined as many community meetings and events as I could, particularly the Wednesday Demonstration, whenever I was in Korea. Then, something happened—I realized the change of my gaze and my standpoint; I was no longer looking (observing) at the survivors from outside/distance, but with them, in the same direction—looking (protesting) at the Japanese Embassy. Maybe, it was



what Conquergood predicted: critical/performative ethnographers are often “propelled into the role of advocate,” as they can no longer hold “ideological innocence and axiological purity” (“Performing” 2). Eventually, the experience brought me an awareness that our “stand-point is not a fixed point of identity/identification but a commitment and achievement to engage in political, [moral] and theoretical struggles” (Lee 384).

Yet, I still felt something missing; my effort was not enough. Then in 2007 came Congressman Michael Honda’s House Resolution on “comfort women.” I became a part of the West Coast organizing committee for HR 121 (“comfort women” resolution). We did all the grassroots organizing things—getting signatures and fundraising in front of local supermarkets and churches, putting ads in local and national newspapers, making “cold calls” to representatives to support the resolution, also inviting others to join us, and writing letters to, or calling, or visiting their representatives, and so on. I was particularly happy to accompany *Halmonies* (“Grandmothers” in Korean; read as “survivors”) to the House Hearing and other events organized for their testimonies, from Los Angeles, to San Francisco, to Washington, DC. As I mentioned earlier, the resolution was passed unanimously, with 167 bi-partisan co-sponsors. Let me repeat the title of the resolution:

A resolution expressing the sense of the House of Representatives that the Government of Japan should formally acknowledge, apologize, and accept historical responsibility in a clear and unequivocal manner for its Imperial Armed Forces’ coercion of young women into sexual slavery, known to the world as “comfort women”, during its colonial wartime occupation of Asia and the Pacific Island from the 1930s through the duration of World War II.  
(United States)

The World Conference on Japanese Military Sexual Slavery (the World Conference), for which I served as a chief organizer, came a few months after, with the momentum of the successful passage of HR 121, although it had taken several years for me to organize. The World Conference (held at the UCLA campus) was a global gathering of scholars, NGOs, human rights activists, lawyers, artists, and most importantly, survivors, from 12 countries (Korea, Japan, China, Taiwan, Indonesia, the Philippines, Germany, the Netherlands, the UK, Canada, Australia, and the United States)—“to honor the bravery and struggle of the survivors of Japanese Military Sexual Slavery.” The four-day conference started with a “Wednesday Demonstration” in front of the Los Angeles Japanese Consulate, followed by conferences organized with four themes—“NGO Conference,” “Cultural Conference,” “Academic Conference,” and “Legal Conference.” The World Conference explored a global plan of actions, not only for the issues of Japanese Military Sexual Slavery, but also other forms of contemporary trafficking and gender-based/sexual violence during armed conflicts. Again, all of this activity seemed to suggest more promising signs for the movement’s success. As the following will make clear, that promise has yet to be fulfilled.

## The NYT Article: The Agreement and the Statue

Now, let me go back to the NYT editorial and the initial questions I raised: What is the 2015 Korea–Japan Comfort Women Agreement? What is (the issue with) the “comfort woman” statue? More specifically, how is the “comfort woman” statue (not) a violation of the 2015 Agreement, and how is the Agreement (not) a “final and irreversible resolution” on the “comfort women” problem?

The “comfort woman” statue (its official name is the “Statue of Peace” or the “Girl Statue of Peace”) was first established in Seoul on December 14, 2011, to commemorate the 20th anniversary since the first Wednesday Demonstration (marking the 1,000th); a bronze statue of a girl sitting on a chair, next to an empty chair (symbolizing the absence/passing of other victims, and also inviting others to sit and join), looking in the direction of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul, Korea (Figures 8.1 and 8.2).

However, before we check the actual content of the Agreement and examine how the statue may (not) violate the Agreement, I must ask: why does the statue have to go? If the “final resolution” is reached, shouldn’t we have more, not fewer, of these memorials, so that we can celebrate the achievement and educate future generations? Can we imagine any international accords or agreement on Nazi war crimes, which would involve dismantling Holocaust memorials and the denial of the crimes?



Figure 8.1 The Girl Statue of Peace in Seoul. Photo credit: KoreaKHW/Shutterstock.



Figure 8.2 The Girl Statue of Peace in Busan. Photo credit: flo/Shutterstock.

The Agreement, announced at a joint press conference (December 28, 2015) with Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida and Korean Foreign Minister Byung-Se Yoon, states three items by each government. Let me capture/translate the key ideas of Agreement reported in the Press (Lee “Korea-Japan”):

The Government of Japan (GOJ) (1) acknowledges an involvement of the Japanese military in the problem of “comfort women,” hurting many women’s honor and dignity, and *from this perspective*, it takes responsibility. Prime Minister Abe expresses sincere apologies and remorse to the women suffered [*italic emphasis mine*]. (2) The GOJ has been sincerely dealing with this issue, and it will make a one-time contribution, to support all former comfort women. (3) The GOJ confirms that this issue is resolved finally and irreversibly with this announcement, on the premise that the Government will steadily implement the measures specified in (2) above. In addition, both governments will refrain from accusing or criticizing each other regarding this issue in the international community, including at the United Nations.

The Government of the Republic of Korea (GOK) makes a similar announcement—confirming the Japanese announcement, by and large. A little difference is in its second item:

(2) The GOK acknowledges the fact that the Government of Japan is concerned about the statue built in front of the Embassy of Japan in

Seoul from the viewpoint of preventing any disturbance of the peace of the mission or impairment of its dignity, and will strive to solve this issue in an appropriate manner through taking measures such as consulting with related organizations about possible ways of addressing this issue.

Let's look at the GOJ statement first: (1) obviously, the key phrase here is "*from this perspective*"—what we rhetoricians may call "qualifiers." In other words, the GOJ apologizes, within a specific boundary and responsibility, for the involvement of the Japanese military in "comfort women" practices. What, then, is the nature of their involvement—systematic or accidental, widespread or incidental, planned or collateral, orchestrated from the top or malpractice at local level? What is the best jargon for this type of speech—doublespeak or strategic ambiguity? Or just a dirty old trick to muddy and deny the truth? Or, do I sound too harsh? Actually, the answer can be found much more easily and abundantly by reviewing the GOJ statements.

Prime Minister Abe repeated the government's position before the Japanese Diet (January 18, 2016), a few weeks after the Agreement was announced, that "there is no change of our position, with respect to the Agreement—there is no evidence of the forced mobilization for comfort women. The Korea-Japan Comfort Women Agreement is not to acknowledge the war crime of Japanese Military Comfort Women" (Yoon, "Abe 'No Evidence'"). Even worse, a few days after the Agreement was announced, the GOJ submitted a statement to the UN Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, denying (through the wording of "no evidence found") the "forceful taking away" of comfort women by the military and government authorities" (Cho, "Japanese Government"). Furthermore, right after the Agreement was announced, Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida clarified in a press conference that "the fund is not a reparation" (Cho, "Kishida"). Prime Minister Abe, when asked whether there would be any follow-up action like sending a letter of apology to the survivors, stated before the Japanese Congress, "No. Not even considering as much as a tip of the body hair" (Choi, "Japan").

In short, while the NYT editorial accuses the Korean "activists" (as if the agents were a small radical group) installing of the new "comfort woman" statue in Busan (established on December 30, 2016) of making (1) "the Japanese" (as if there is just one homogenous group) rightfully feel livid; (2) reopening a major rift between two allies (against North Korea and China); and, therefore, (3) jeopardizing the big strategic picture (perhaps, the security in the region, or world peace? HAH!), the whole turmoil is a moot issue. Here is the reason why I suggested my point earlier—that the moral of the story is buried under strategically muddled and confusing details. Despite the Agreement's "sincere apology" or decision to "refrain from criticizing in the UN," the GOJ denied its legal and moral responsibility within a few days and for a month after the

Agreement was signed. Again, whether the new statue in Busan is not mentioned at all (what's mentioned in the Agreement is the "comfort woman" statue in Seoul), or whether the statue in Busan was established not just by some "activists" but by the citizens of Busan, after consulting with their local governments, is beyond the point. Or, that the GOK announcement (#2) only promises "consulting" with civic organizations about the statue, nothing about dismantling it, is also beside the point—the reality is far worse than "keeping up with the integrity of the Agreement."

Who are we kidding? The real problem here is that these governments (Korean, Japanese, and the United States alike) are only interested in political expediency, where "comfort women" is yet a useful card (or a liability) to push their political/strategic agenda—whether there is any truth or justice in the claims and policies of each government slips away. In the end, what is lost in the picture is the dignity and the humanity of the victims; by losing theirs, we lose ours too.

What a terrible *déjà vu* with the Agreement and their demand to honor the Agreement: Japanese colonialism was executed with an international "agreement" (e.g., the Japan–Korea Annexation Treaty of 1910), and the women's experience (of the terror and torture) was yet non-existent or silenced (e.g., the Korea–Japan Basic Relations Treaty of 1965), then and now. At least for the "comfort women," no governments were on board as their "allies." The Korean government? Same difference—the Korean Constitutional Court found (August 30, 2011) that the GOK has been unconstitutional for its lack of effort ("abandoning its duty") to resolve the problem of "comfort women" (Constitutional Court 2011).

Without support from any responsible governments, the women's struggles and fights continue—a hope amidst despair. In South Korea, the Wednesday Demonstration still continues today in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul, demanding an official apology and legal reparation from the GOJ—again, the longest ongoing protest in history since its beginning on January 8, 1992.

More and more "comfort woman" statues are built with the help of "active" citizens and local governments. In the United States, on September 22, 2017, the eighth statue was established in San Francisco, CA (following other cities in New Jersey, New York, California, and Michigan), which includes an inscription of a survivor, Ok-Sun Lee's, will: "What we fear the most is that the history of suffering during the WWII will be forgotten" ("San Francisco").

And another sign of hope: on March 27, 2017, the US Supreme Court rejected a lawsuit, filed by the "Global Alliance for Historical Truth" [what a name!], against the city of Glendale, CA, asking that the "comfort woman" statue be removed—the lawsuit was first rejected by a US District Court in 2014, and by an appellate court in 2016 (Nguyen, "Supreme Court"). Last, I now turn my discussion to the notion of "finality and irreversibility" of the Agreement—a violent trope, for a sweeping solution, that commands "moving on" with a self-imposed *telos* and pace.

## Memory War: The Final (Re)Solution and Activist Rhetoric for Historical Justice

Found both in the Agreement and the NYT article, there is a certain insistence on the “finality and irreversibility” of the (re)solution—that the “comfort women” issue is a non-issue or (always) already resolved, therefore commanding to “move on” (toward its self-imposed destiny), despite the appeals of others. Symptomatically, this kind of insistence is a common response that we find in the discourse of memory politics, particularly one that seeks closure and denial: (1) “*Unbelievable story! I can’t believe it! I don’t believe it!*”; (2) “*What you say may be true, but there are different experiences/facts. It’s just natural to have different views, but it doesn’t mean they are wrong*”; (3) “*Why now? Isn’t it over and done already?*”; (4) “*I am sorry it happened to you – though not that I am admitting that I am guilty. After all, (a) I am just second (or third) generation, (b) I was just a soldier (following orders), or (c) I have done/paid my time*”; (5) “*I said I am sorry, OK? Now, can we move on already?*”

Importantly, these lines of clichés—“cliché” in the sense that the tropes are repeated in mundane and everyday places (as in the NYT editorial)—constitute a “game of truth” (Gauthier 3; McKerrow, “Foucault’s” 258) which establishes a discursive genre of war crime deniers. Yet, these clichés are not banal, harmless, or innocent, but, instead, they reproduce ideological (natural, invisible, and inevitable) justifications to silence the appeals of survivors and to erase the history of war crimes (Arendt 252). Further, this insistence on “moving on” and “break from the past,” without facing the appeals of survivors and without the pursuit of truth and justice, precisely reproduces the nature of trauma and the cycle of violence—the point/moral that the NYT editorial misses. Améry once noted:

In two decades of contemplating what happened to me, I believe to have recognized that a forgiving and forgetting induced by social pressure is immoral. Whoever lazily and cheaply forgives, subjugates himself to the social and biological time-sense, which is also called the “natural” one ... What happened, happened. This sentence is just as true as it is hostile to moral and intellect. The moral power to resist contains the protest, the revolt against reality, which is rational only as long as it is moral. The moral person demands annulment of time...and through a moral turning-back of the clock, the latter can join this victim as a fellow human being. (72)

Améry’s resentment reflects a critical struggle that the victims/survivors face—a struggle against intentional and systematic erasure of dark history—a war of memory, over the memory of war. Suh and Takahashi (35) point out that there are layers of violence against victims and survivors. First, victims were subjected to an inconceivable, unthinkable violence. Such experience of violence, with the lack of discourse to register the shock, in addition to the absence of outside (institutional and social) support, constitutes the very nature of trauma

(Itkin 265). Then, second, victims/survivors are subjected to a demand “to prove” and “to explain” their traumatic (“impossible to represent”) experience on top of (or against) the systematic erasure and intentional destruction (or discrediting) of evidence and witnesses. Last, even when they attempt to do just that, the victims/survivors are blamed, and ridiculed, for “living in the past”—for their “stubborn” and “obsessive” calling for justice and apology. Like the NYT editorial accuses, by not respecting the “agreement,” the survivors appear as unruly, uncontrollable, and uncivil.

Recently, on February 7, 2019, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan wrote a response letter (Osuga, “Wartime Sex Slaves”) to the *New York Times* obituary on the passing of a former “comfort women,” Bok-dong Kim (Choe, “Kim Bok-dong”). The Japanese government’s response letter states that the government of Japan, “has extended its sincere apologies and remorse” to the victims “many times,” recognizing “the issue of comfort women was a grave affront to the honor and dignity of many women.” BUT, the letter also claims, all issues/claims were legally settled through the agreement between Japan and South Korea, including the 1995 Asian Women’s Fund and the 2015 Japan–South Korea Agreement. The letter ends by saying, “This is an undeniable fact.”

Like the NYT editorial, this letter is precisely the kind of rhetoric, a violent cliché, that strategically muddies and confuses, to erase the history of war crimes and to silence the appeals of victims, and to call for closure and “moving on.” Again, just to clarify for anyone who might doubt: try to name one legal judgment by the Japanese court to prosecute anyone responsible for the “Comfort Women” issue, and to order the Japanese government to apologize officially and pay reparations to the victims. Once in a while, we hear the news of capturing and prosecuting war criminals, even today, responsible for Nazi war crimes (with the Convention on the Non-Applicability of Statutory Limitations to War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity). But, never have we heard any legal judgment by the Japanese court of finding anyone responsible. Isn’t this odd? Personally, I do not know what better way to respond to the question, “But didn’t the Japanese Government apologize already, and multiple times?,” than the Prime Minister Abe’s answer before the Japanese Diet: “There is no change of our position, with respect to the Agreement. The Agreement is not to acknowledge the war crime of Japanese Military Comfort Women.” Obviously, as Abe confirms, there is no plan for an official apology either, because, according to him, there is “no crime” (and “no evidence”). But, again, the “comfort women” survivors are blamed for not accepting the apology and re-living with the trauma.

The rhetoric of closure and denial (a violent cliché), and the unresponsiveness to the survivors’ appeals and inability to imagine the victims’ experiences (a banality of violence) are precisely where, I believe, rhetorical activism (activist consciousness/practice of rhetoric) and activist rhetoric (rhetorical understanding/application of activism) are needed to engage. Ten years ago,

with my essay in the first edition, I advocated for an activist scholarship: by accounting “the memory of forgotten voices and persons” (Said 35), we must move beyond text-centric research for an embodied, performative, moral, and self-reflexive experience that is “*located*, not transcendent; ... *engaged*, not abstracted; and ... forged from *solidarity with*, not separation from, the people” (Conquergood, “Performance Studies” 149).

Today, with this essay, I’d like to develop one more point, echoing a question McKerrow once raised: “So, why engage at all?” (“Engaging” 414). My point is similar to what he suggested elsewhere: “Enacting a civil, or at times uncivil discourse ... is not an option to consider, but a fundamental necessity of being actively human” (“Coloring” 281). Inspired also by the notions/ethics of Bakhtinian “answerability” and Levinasian “responsibility” (Murray 136), I want to add that “answerability” and “responsibility” (as responding to an appeal of others) are our duty to other members of the community, without which the “trust in the world” is lost and without which a community cannot be found (Suh and Takahashi 101). Thus, actively responding and answering to appeals of others (i.e., our activism) is an expression of responsibility, a fundamental awareness and commitment that we/humans are after all social beings.

Responding to appeals of Others begins with listening, and therein lies a paradoxical hope/importance of the survivors and their appeals (Suh and Takahashi 176). While the rhetoric of deniers (via skepticism, cynicism, relativism, etc.) leads to the preservation of a violent, inhumane, and unjust status quo, the appeal of survivors emphasizes the importance of restoring moral standards and building of ethical community; while the survivors were the targets/victims of the Universal Plan or the Final Solution (in the name of Civility, Humanity, or Justice), their struggles paradoxically call for re-establishing civility, humanity, and justice for all (Suh and Takahashi 173). A possibility of ethics and ethical politics arises from this point. In other words, Améry’s resentment is equally a struggle over social mechanisms/institutions, for the crime, the violence, and the torture not only wound the individual psyche but also his/her “trust in the world” (28). As Myers claims, “If dignity is the right to live granted by society, then the Third Reich [and the life history of Améry] demonstrates how easily the grant can be revoked” (22–23). Like Itkin stresses, a possibility of ethics/politics from this point: “ethical thought ... directed toward producing an ideal human community,” beyond “individual forgiveness of the victim and the individual repentance of the perpetrator” (265–266). This is the moral of the story that the NYT editorial misses: political expediency, without social justice, reproduces the cycle of violence and only aggravates to the corrosive deterioration of our community.

McDougall, a former UN special *rappporteur* on “systematic rape, sexual slavery, and slavery-like practices during armed conflict,” once said: “Through truth and justice comes reconciliation and healing, and where there is healing for the past, there is hope for the future” (“International” 26). Establishing (or restoring) a system of justice (involving fact-finding and punishing perpetrators)



is not the opposite of forgiveness but a way to end the cycle of violence and vengeance, eventually leading to reconciliation (Suh and Takahashi 68). As of January 9, 2019, there are only 25 “comfort women” survivors living in South Korea today. Like the appeals of Améry, Arendt, Levi, Bok-dong Kim, Gun-Ja Kim (a “comfort woman” survivor who was at the 2007 US Congressional Hearing and who passed away on July 23, 2017), there is a mausoleum in the Majdanek Death Camp memorial site in Lublin, Poland, covering the human ashes of victims, with an engraved sign: “Let our fate be a warning to you.” The appeals are there. What is our response?

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## Part III

# Modalities and Audiences

As we (via Nancy Welch and Kevin Mahoney) argue in the Introduction, the sense we had in 2009/2010 that the Habermasian public sphere was deflating, if not collapsing, turns out to have been understated. The chapters in this section respond to that realization by focusing on discursive/rhetorical shifts enabled by digital spaces; complex relations among social and conventional mass media; and understandings of audience and affect that are responsive to changes in the media ecology, but also prone to manipulation by unethical actors.

Kevin Mahoney's "Raging Media: Investing in an Infrastructure for Resistance" explores sustainable paths for an academic and activist by discussing his experience developing an independent/progressive media outlet as part of building political movements. Mahoney argues that ongoing, often billionaire-backed, efforts to build institutional infrastructure to support right-wing agendas have undermined the democratic process and culture; in response, he calls for the establishment of an infrastructure of counter "places," including progressive media outlets, to practice ("doing") democratic/communicative exchange for "common civic identity" (115).

While Mahoney's chapter focuses on independent media as movement-building, Richard Vatz updates his original chapter, "A Conservative Professional Pundit in Liberal Surroundings: An Uneven Odyssey Projected Through 2020," which discusses his experience of being a conservative academic pundit, in contexts where being "liberal" or "progressive" seem to be the norm. By analyzing the politics of political media—selecting, framing, and censoring what to cover and whom to cite/interview—Vatz examines the role of the media (bias) in political elections. Vatz develops this claim: "The freedom to dissent in print and electronic media is and should be circumscribed only by a pundit's competence and articulateness ... [rather than depending on] a particular medium's accepted political views" (134)—in short, an argument for access to mainstream media based on merit.

While Mahoney and Vatz are focused broadly on access to media and its uses as an organizing space, Seth Kahn's "ON STRIKE! A Rhetorician's Guide to Solidarity-Building" calls for rethinking mainstream and social media as venues among many available to organizers. Reflecting on his faculty union's

successful strike in 2016, he considers from a rhetorician's perspective: organizing effectively, mobilizing mindfully, and preparing carefully. He discusses some "very real concerns" that are important to activist rhetoricians—ethics/ethos of building trust; radically rethinking our understandings of audience; mobilizing/organizing in social media, the visceral experience/power of being bodies on the line; to name a few. Against the threat to public unions and the academy, Kahn calls for "doing every single thing we can" with "everything we know about network building, audience, trusting, radical kindness, putting our bodies on the line." He concludes, "The good news is—we know how. *We've done it*" (148).

The final chapter in this section, Catherine Chaput's "Affect and Activism in the Rhetorical Context of the Post-Truth Era," is perhaps the least personal/experiential in the book, focusing instead on macro-level issues of propaganda/mass mediation, political appropriation of strategy and tactics, and the importance of affect in mobilization. Chaput encourages left activists to learn from their adversaries and their "affective production of this conservative activism" (155)—tactics that right-wing movements once appropriated from leftist activism, particularly their coalition politics (mobilizing "multilayered conservative apparatus"), and language strategy (of "popular culture" to "tap into the 'structures of feeling' among working-class individuals," and of "academic freedom" to "reassert the conservative position for scholarly legitimacy").

## 9 Raging Media

### Investing in an Infrastructure for Resistance

*Kevin Mahoney*

Seth Kahn periodically reminds me of a conversation we had years ago that has continued to frame how to manage the work of a 4-4 teaching load and the demands of political and labor organizing. Here's how Kahn put in a 2014 Facebook post:

One of the smartest choices I ever made was agreeing with Kevin Mahoney, who observed that the only way we'd ever be able to do both our activist and professional work well was to make them the same thing.

(Kahn, Facebook post)

While he gives me too much credit here, the point still holds. If long-term political work is to be sustainable—that is, it does not depend upon running oneself into the ground—it becomes important to have a kind of gravitational center of our work “inside” and “outside” of our official academic work. The crucible of 2011 (See Introduction, “Flash Forward”) foregrounded the importance of merging my activist work and my professional work like never before and the process of doing so has had unexpected effects on how I think about academe, writing, and sustaining political struggle.

#### **Spawn of the Raging Chicken**

DIY publications have long been an important part in both my political education and in my political work. Zines from the 1980s and 1990s were part of the cultural fabric that defined my politicized punk community. During my undergraduate years at Syracuse University, struggles over student media figured prominently. Our group of student activists frequently took issue with the reporting of the student newspaper, *The Daily Orange*. Student activists weren't happy simply criticizing the paper. A few student activists I worked with started an alternative newspaper, *The Alternative Orange*, that was overtly political and covered student activism from the perspective of the activists. The *AO* was eventually taken over by the Syracuse Marxist Collective, turning the alternative newspaper into a hybrid newspaper/

journal engaged in Marxist critique. As a PhD student at Miami University, several fellow graduate student activists and I were frustrated with the lack of a progressive media outlet in the small town of Oxford, OH. Again, instead of remaining frustrated, we started our own publication, *AJAR: An independent forum for social change*. *AJAR* introduced me to desktop publishing, Photoshop, and fundraising to cover printing costs.

My first years at Kutztown University coincided with the explosion of blogs and new media. The “progressive blogosphere” was re-energizing adversarial, muckraking journalism and *Indymedia* was showing the power of decentralized, open source platforms for activist media. I plunged into new media activism first in 2008 as part of my faculty union’s (APSCUF-KU) campaign for a no-confidence vote against our then university president. The *No Confidence in Cevallos* blog was successful in bringing significant pressure on President Cevallos to address our union’s 18-point “Bill of Particulars,” that stood at the heart of the vote of no confidence campaign. My experience with the *No Confidence...* blog led me to start the APSCUF-KU XChange, an “unofficial, member-initiated blog” discussing issues relevant to higher education labor and the PA State System of Higher Education.

Thus, returning to independent publishing only seemed natural, as I tried to figure out how I could contribute to resisting the right-wing assault coming our way in 2011. During the weeks of the Wisconsin Uprising, blogs such as bluecheddar, Dane101, and Uppity Wisconsin<sup>1</sup> had been some of the main sources of information about the protests for people outside the state. In 2012, John Nichols termed the emergent and seemingly chaotic web of new media innovators in Wisconsin, “Next Media”:

The digital innovators of the Next Media system were high school kids, retirees, and stay-at-home moms who turned their Facebook pages into news sites that grabbed the best of old and new media coverage of what was going on and created a mesh of coverage that connected millions of people from Capitol Square in Madison to Tahrir Square in Cairo with the events that were unfolding in Wisconsin.

(Nichols 112)

Nichols suggests that organic linkages between new media and traditional journalism, Tweets and Facebook posts, original YouTube videos and aggregated content, was “more than mere aggregation, more than blogging. It was a new construct.” It was a “Next Media with unprecedented capacity to spread information, to inspire activism, to make real the promise of democracy” (112).

In Pennsylvania, there was, and is, a dearth of progressive publications outside the state’s major metropolitan areas (Philadelphia and Pittsburgh). And, the progressive blogosphere had still not taken root in the state. The only Pennsylvania-based media outlet consistently covering the unfolding events in

Wisconsin and across the country was *The Rick Smith Show*, a labor-oriented talk radio show based in Harrisburg. One week into activists' occupation of the Wisconsin capitol building, Smith and his producer Brett Banditelli drove to Madison and began broadcasting from inside the building (Jaffe). But it became immediately apparent that there was virtually no progressive media infrastructure in the state, and in the absence of such an infrastructure, organizing efforts would be difficult.

So, that was it. I would begin an effort to create a progressive media site that would focus primarily on Pennsylvania and the region, focusing particularly on areas outside the major cities. I wanted a way of branding the effort in a way that would both stand out and would mark the project as regionally focused. The answer to the brand was staring at me from across campus. The clock tower atop Kutztown University's Old Main building looks like an angry chicken. It was one of the first things I learned about the university during New Faculty Orientation. The Angry Chicken? Maybe, but that wasn't quite angry enough. Raging Chicken. Yes, Raging Chicken Press. I spent the months of April, May, and June designing the site on WordPress and officially launched in July 2011.

In eight years, Raging Chicken Press has gone from a small project to a site averaging about 15,000 visits/month. At the end of 2016, I could begin to pay our writers small monthly stipends, and in summer 2017, we began a student fellows program—all thanks to the support of a growing membership base. We've broken several stories that have been picked up and cited by statewide<sup>2</sup> and national news organizations including the *Huffington Post*,<sup>3</sup> *Mother Jones*,<sup>4</sup> *Salon*,<sup>5</sup> *The Intercept*,<sup>6</sup> and *Rachel Maddow Show's* "Maddow Blog."<sup>7</sup> As of this writing, we are on track to reach the 1,000,000 visit mark in late 2019 or early 2020 and we have well over 5,500 Facebook followers. In 2016, we began a weekly podcast, "Out d'Coup," that covers "the good, the bad, and the ugly in state and national politics." Sean Kitchen, a former Kutztown student and one of Raging Chicken's first writers, is now located in the State Capitol as our "Capitol Muckraker-in-Chief." Frankly, as I reread this and the previous paragraph, it's difficult to wrap my head around how much we've done.

## Hollowing Out Democracy

Actually *doing* public writing, working with a team of activist writers, and running a small progressive publication has had significant impacts upon how I think about writing, audience, communication infrastructures, and the significant limits of academic discourse when we are talking about organizing for political change. I want to be clear before I move on from this point: I believe deeply in the mission of higher education as a site—a literal space—to practice what Ian Angus refers to as a "common civic identity" (35). For Angus, a common civic identity



does not mean agreement on all matters of importance. The process of democratic interchange between citizens involves a continuous interplay between what is common, or shared, and what divides them, or in what sense they are different. A common civic identity is crafted through disagreement as much as agreement.

(Angus 35)

A common civic identity requires people who are positively oriented toward the *process of democracy*; that process is a tricky one. The common civic identity to which Angus refers respects and values difference, but still requires decisions that apply to all. We may *agree to disagree*, but that does not eliminate the responsibility of making a decision. Angus calls this the basis for a “political culture” which is a “way of life, not only ... a feature of political institutions” (35).

Higher education institutions are complex and contradictory to be sure, but they are among the only remaining spaces charged with practicing the kind of communication that is the fiber of the kind of democratic culture Angus highlights. This kind of democratic public, “does not refer to all types of social assembly, but to a specific process of interchange and formation of opinion through the giving and taking of reasons which can function as a *norm* in judging the democratic, or nondemocratic, nature of other associations” (33). For democracy to function we must value that common civic identity and nurture spaces to practice democratic interchange. Many of the norms of academic communication are organized around these principles. Academics cite our sources; rely upon peer-review to ensure the quality of our research; criticize uncritical opinion; privilege reason; and, ideally, seek truths. None of those norms eliminate conflict or controversy, of course. They only lay the ground rules for ethical, scholarly communication.

Donald Lazere’s 1997 article, “Ground Rules for Polemicists,” remains one of my favorite articulations of these norms because Lazere argues that we need *both* polemical argumentation *and* a commitment to ethical norms of principled communication. Lazere did not offer his “ground rules” at a high point of American civic identity. Quite the opposite. He was writing amidst the “culture wars” of the 1980s and 1990s, during which political agenda frequently trumped facts. His concerns ring that much more loudly in the post-Trump, “alternative facts” world. Here’s how he begins:

In the overheated rhetoric of the culture wars ... and in an arena where the concept of objectivity itself is a contested issue, is it possible to delineate any objective criteria for judging the relative credibility of opposing arguments? By objective criteria I mean a set of ground rules that both sides would agree to abide by, at least in principle, and to which the extent of a writer’s or speaker’s compliance is demonstrable, to the

satisfaction of those of goodwill on both side. I do believe that following such principles of fair play can make it possible to engage in *polemics*—heated partisan argumentation—without lapsing into the irresponsible, one sided tactics of *invective*, and to persuade to one’s side those on the other or on the fence who maintain an open mind and equal commitment to those principles.

(Lazere 661)

Lazere’s anguished call for ground rules was an attempt to encourage “all sides” to commit to fair play, to commit to a common civic identity. From the vantage point of 2017, Lazere’s call can sound like faint echoes from a distant past. In 20 years, the communicative landscape has been fundamentally altered through well-coordinated efforts by a small group of radical libertarian billionaire families such as the Kochs, the Scaifes, the Mercers, the DeVoses, and the Bradleys.<sup>8</sup> Remarkably, for nearly half-a-century, academics have been virtually unaware of, or inattentive to, sustained efforts to shift the intellectual and cultural power from the universities to privately funded think tanks (Mayer 93) and to, in effect, establish libertarian “beachheads” in academic departments at the most influential universities (126).

Libertarian billionaires have put into practice former Supreme Court Justice Louis Powell’s 1971 confidential memorandum to the US Chamber of Commerce, “Attack on American Free Enterprise System,” aka “The Powell Memo.” Concerned that the effects of the 1960s student movement, the Civil Rights movement, the labor movement, and New Left intellectuals were putting free marking capitalism in jeopardy, Powell encouraged the Chamber of Commerce and corporate leaders to initiate a long-term project of taking over the nation’s intellectual production and media. In no uncertain terms, he wrote:

Reaching the campus and the secondary schools is vital for the long-term. Reaching the public generally may be more important for the shorter term. The first essential is to establish the staffs of eminent scholars, writers and speakers, who will do the thinking, the analysis, the writing and the speaking. It will also be essential to have staff personnel who are thoroughly familiar with the media, and how most effectively communicate with the public

(Powell)

Inspired by the Powell Memo, right-wing conservatives got to work, founding what would become arguably the most influential right-wing think tank, the Heritage Foundation (Phillips-Fein). In 1973, the chemical and ammunition industrialist John M. Olin turned his foundation, the John M. Olin Foundation, into a machine for establishing ideological beachheads at prestigious universities. According to investigative journalist Jane

Mayer, “by the time the ... Foundation spent itself out of existence in 2005 ... it has spent about half of its total assets of \$370 million bankrolling the promotion of free-market ideology and other conservative ideas on the country’s campuses” (114). The now-infamous *Citizens United v. the Federal Election Commission*—which ruled that unlimited corporate and union spending on political campaigns is Constitutionally protected free speech—owes its success in large part to the Federalist Society, a right-wing legal think tank established in 1982 with the help of the Koch brothers, the Scaife Foundation, and the Olin Foundation (134). The list goes on and on and on.

Taken together, this network of radical libertarian think tanks and foundations was able to clothe itself in the norms of democratic communication, while pursuing a deeply ideological agenda. The network has operated, according to historian Nancy MacLean, more like a “fifth column” than a social movement (xxxix).

Pushed by relatively small numbers of radical-right billionaires and millionaires who have become profoundly hostile to America’s modern system of government, an apparatus decades in the making, funded by those same billionaires and millionaires, has been working to undermine the normal governance of our democracy.

Political movements have a long history in this country. However, the stealth campaign to fundamentally change the nation politically, ideologically, and economically “is distinct from social movements that build on the basis of candor about their ultimate aims in order to win over majorities” (xxxii). Therein lies the crux of our current problem.

In his article in the *Columbia Journalism Review*, “What if the right-wing media wins?” MacKay Coppins raises concerns that we may be losing any semblance of objective journalism, due largely to a new breed of right-wing media in the post-Trump era. Coppins argues that in conservative American journalism since the end of World War II, “conservatives maintained a civic-minded rationale for their project. They said they believed in the importance of non-partisan journalism; in the necessity of a strong, independent press that provided the citizenry with an accurate account of the day’s events” (Coppins). But for the new breed of right-wing media activists such as *Breitbart News*’ Washington editor, Matt Boyle, there is no room for such niceties. Speaking to college students at the Heritage Foundation in July 2017, Boyle contended that “journalistic integrity is dead ... there is no such thing anymore. So everything is about weaponizing of information” (Coppins). Boyle was not being simply descriptive. He explicitly argued for the end of objective journalism: “We envision a day when CNN is no longer in business. We envision a day when *The New York Times* closes its doors. I think that day is possible,” he said (Coppins).

Maybe I am belaboring the point, but I think it's virtually impossible to overstate just how significant a political and cultural sea change there has been because of this half-century project of the right. While Lazere, and to a lesser extent Coppins, call for recommitting to basic principles of democratic communication and a common civic identity, a significant faction on the right has been playing by different rules. They are playing to win with or without truth or facts.

My concern here is with a tendency on the political left to equate norms of democratic communication with effective political rhetoric. It's similar to George Lakoff's argument that progressives remain committed to some Enlightenment myths. That they don't work [Editors' note: see also Artz, this volume]. In particular, Lakoff argues, progressives tend to believe "the truth will set us free. If we just tell people the facts, since people are basically rational beings, they'll all reach the right conclusions" (15). Cognitive science is clear on the fact that people don't think like the Enlightenment supposes we should, explains Lakoff. For "facts" to stick with an audience, they must fit their frame, their worldview, or they will bounce off. Not only has the right-wing mastered framing, they have built an institutional infrastructure to support that world view.

The conservative communication infrastructure works something like this: *Fox News* (the most watched news network)<sup>9</sup> interviews an expert from the Heritage Foundation about an inflammatory report in *Breitbart News*. The expert offers a more "reasonable" argument, citing a report just released by the Cato Institute. The host brings on a professor at the Mercator Institute at George Mason University. The professor expands upon the issue, citing the work of an economist from the University of Arizona's Center for the Philosophy of Freedom. With the exception of *Fox News*, every institution mentioned above is funded largely or primarily by the Koch brothers and their donor network. The formal performance structures of the news cycle and "objective" journalism are carried out. The secret is that they are all part of the same radical libertarian infrastructure.

Whether we're talking about norms of academic research, standards of non-partisan journalism, or codes of political civility, the right-wing has masterfully carried out a long-term strategy to undermine them. What concerns me is that much of the liberal and progressive left still operate as if those norms are in place. The broad Left has not invested in our own communicative infrastructures. This gap is especially important when it comes to the Left's lack of investment in a media infrastructure. As Mark Hertsgaard argued in his *Nation* article, "Progressives Need to Build Their Own Media,"

Collectively, the news media wield perhaps the greatest power there is in politics: the power to define reality. The journalistic choices of news organizations send a message, consciously or not, about what is—and isn't—important at any given moment and who should—and shouldn't—be

listened to. Are the Standing Rock pipeline protests being covered by CBS, or ignored? Who gets quoted in *The New York Times*, and how prominently? Which authors are invited on NPR programs, and which are shunned? Such decisions shape the ideological air we breathe and the political actions we take.

(Hertsgaard)

Many progressives saw what was coming when Fox News was first established in 1996 and when right-wing talk radio was asserting its dominance. For example, Bill Moyers, the acclaimed public broadcaster who worked as Lyndon Johnson's Press Secretary, tried to sound the alarm. According to Hertsgaard, Moyers warned a group of wealthy progressive philanthropists that Fox News was positioned to fundamentally reshape the nation's political landscape and if progressives did not want to be left behind, they would need to build an alternative (Hertsgaard). Moyer's appeals failed. In an interview with *The Nation*, Moyers recalled,

I had more in mind, and actually used these examples: a journalism more in the mold of the BBC at its best—unafraid of power and not complicit with it, reporting what conventional journalism overlooked or wouldn't touch, getting its viewers as close as possible to the verifiable truth ... with a strong and independent muckraking mission.

(qtd. in Hertsgaard)

The right-wing's investment in their media infrastructure has certainly borne fruit—and in abundance. Of the top ten cable-tv news shows, as recently as 2017 all ten were Fox News shows. All top five talk-radio shows are right-wing shows. And MSNBC barely commands half of Fox News' 2.5 million prime-time viewers (Hertsgaard). As Hertsgaard argues, “consciously or not, most progressive organizations, donors, and candidates are following a theory of social change that trusts the mainstream media to report progressives' actions and analysis fairly” (Hertsgaard). Progressives have tended to think that progressive media is fine and good, but amounts to little more than “preaching to the choir.” Hertsgaard is right, in my estimation, that building a progressive media infrastructure is more crucial now than ever, but doing so will “require marshalling substantial amounts of money, talent, and resources” (Hertsgaard).

The lack of a progressive media infrastructure also limits the spaces to *practice* the kind of muckraking journalism that on occasion still breaks into the mainstream media. Practicing this kind of journalism, the very kind of journalism that Moyers was calling for, is not limited to the skills in which individual writers need training. It also requires practice in media strategy, especially in the era of digital media. There are, of course, celebrated and award-winning progressive media outlets like *Democracy Now!*, *The Nation*, *Mother Jones*, and *In These Times*, and social media has enabled an informal networking of these sources. However, there is a significant distance between the work being done

on-the-ground everyday by activists and the national focus of most progressive media outlets. Furthermore, the era of increasing media consolidation, especially on the local, state, and regional level reduces opportunities for people interested in progressive journalism and media activism to gain experience. Yes, we hear celebratory stories about how “anyone with a cell phone can be a journalist.” However, capturing a police shooting on a cell phone or livestreaming a protest is not a progressive media strategy, but a long-standing trope that social movements or uprisings “just happen.”

In *This is an Uprising: How Nonviolent Revolt is Shaping the Twenty-First Century*, Mark and Paul Engler explain that mainstream academics and political experts tend to “focus on the social, economic, and geopolitical circumstances surrounding a given event” (Engler and Engler 184). Focusing on social forces instead of the ongoing routine work of activists and organizers, leads to a narrative of social change without people. “When mass uprisings burst forth,” argue Engler and Engler, “commentators tend to describe them as the product of historic conditions rather than the decisions of citizens themselves: the moment was ripe, they argue” (184). Further, when mass uprisings do happen, the mainstream media often misconstrues what the protests are about and resorts to generic narratives about protests in their reporting. For example, following the “Battle in Seattle” protests against the WTO in 1999, Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) showed that much of the mainstream media “treated protesters’ concerns with indifference and often contempt” and very often that “hostility translated into slanted coverage” (FAIR). This dynamic is familiar to activists who have participated in mass protests or strikes and then seen coverage of the action in the newspaper or on television. Establishing a counter-narrative takes time. And it takes practice.

Engler and Engler make the case that effective, non-violent social movements are the result of training, skill-building, and practice as much as they are about social conditions being “ripe.” Effective organizing does not have to simply wait around until the time is right. Engler and Engler make the case that, “organizers can hone their talents for guiding and harnessing disruptive outbreaks that are provoked by external events but also they can develop instincts for how to make their own sparks” (186).<sup>10</sup> In writing about the ways in which democratic activists deploy authorship “*in response to contextual demands and in order to advance their political agendas,*” Seth Kahn and I argued that an important aspect of this activist tactic echoes the rhetorical concept of *kairos* as advanced by John Poulakos (Kahn and Mahoney 89). For Poulakos, *kairos* is not simply crafting the appropriate speech for a given occasion as it is commonly understood, but it is also can be understood as the act of “creating and managing self-consciously opportunities within rhetorical compositions” (qtd. in Kahn and Mahoney 89). The idea is the same: through practice, reflection, and study of activist strategy and tactics, we can better intervene in our world.

Ian Angus explains that if we are to nurture and sustain a democratic culture that relies upon individuals critically discussing and deliberating issues of public

and community concerns, we need actual *places* to practice the “give-and-take of discussion” (25). By “places” Angus means both “literally spaces—such as the marketplace, parks, pubs, street corners, or even living rooms transformed into public places” and “places in a more metaphorical sense which includes any kind of meeting of minds that allow an interchange” (25). For the latter, Angus includes “newspapers, pamphlets, and perhaps television, e-mail and the Internet” (25). I would extend Angus’s argument here, suggesting that those latter “metaphorical” places, are also “literally spaces” for those producing media. The right-wing has understood this for a long time.

### **Investing for the Long-Haul**

In founding Raging Chicken Press, I wanted to create a literal space for practicing progressive media strategically and to provide a space for would-be progressive journalists and media activists to cut their teeth on this work. Doing so for more than seven years has changed me. More accurately, it has changed how I think about much of my academic work and teaching. As much as I have tried to make my political work and my academic research “the same thing,” it took these years of editing and writing in the service of social movements to realize how far my understanding of “effective writing” has shifted.

I wanted Raging Chicken Press to be part of building local and regional political movements, not just a progressive media outlet that commented on national politics. That has meant constructing our audience not as consumers or critics of what we publish, but as part of an assembling community. As Bob Ostertag argues in *People’s Movements, People’s Press: The Journalism of Social Justice Movements*, “assembling” is, in many ways, one of the first strategies activists need to do in building a movement:

If we seek to have a voice in shaping our society beyond our immediate social circle, we have to step outside our daily existence into roles to which we are not accustomed and for which we have little or no institutional support. We have to band together to maximize our very limited time and resources. Before we can do any of that, we have to find each other. (10)

One of the first ways activists have historically done this is to start a newspaper (10). Early in the 21st century, that could easily have been a blog (Clark and Van Slyke 149). “Assembly,” as a political practice, stands in stark relief from charges of “preaching to the choir.” As Jessica Clark and Tracy Van Slyke have convincingly argued in *Beyond the Echo Chamber*, “‘preaching’ is actually a false description of what many progressive projects do.” (148)

It is the *assembling* and activating of the choir that is the critical strategy. Just as churches, temples, or mosques serve as hubs for those seeking to

examine and fortify their beliefs, a number of media outlets have evolved into central meeting places for those looking to join, debate, and strengthen political movements. (148)

Activists know the frustration of reading the local newspaper's account of a particular protest or action. Even when a mainstream journalist does a good story, the story rarely feels like the narrative the activists themselves would tell. While "breaking through" the mainstream media is important, activists also need places that report their work on their terms or in ways that build upon the work they began.

Assembly, I have learned, is as much about voice and language as it is about factual accuracy. Raging Chicken Press would not have been nearly as successful in becoming part of the activist fabric in the state if we reproduced the voice of the neutral observer in our journalism. When I take on new writers now, I need to spend time breaking them of their neutral observer voice—especially if they are current or recent college students. Schooling teaches us to be objective, to listen to "both sides," to exclude the "I" from our writing. I am continuously surprised how deeply embedded those dictates are, despite decades of scholarship in composition and rhetoric problematizing their status as writing dogma. Those school-based skills are not effective for nurturing and sustaining political action. Nor are those skills effective in amplifying the messages of social movements. "If you are a living-breathing human being that cares about the issues that activists are working on, then respond like a living-breathing human being," I say to our writers.

It takes a while for Raging Chicken writers to find their voice on our site and that is precisely the point. Raging Chicken provides a *place* to practice those skills in the world in a sustained way. Raging Chicken has also forced me to deal with building an online space in a very concrete, material way. It's easy enough to find free online hosting for a personal blog or small website, but dealing with traffic in the thousands of readers means paying for web hosting. And, when you do aggressive journalism, plan on being hacked. Raging Chicken has been the target of at least two denial-of-service attacks and we've been hacked at least three times during our first couple of years. That means more security upgrades, thus still more costs. In 2016, I had to hire a tech consultant to help me manage the back-end of our site and to keep our security up-to-date. All that means money.

I've been able to fund most of the site on my own, thanks in large part to tenure and our union contract. But that only shines a light on what Bill Moyers recognized decades ago: building a progressive media infrastructure will require substantial amounts of money, talent, and resources. Like Moyers, I have found that progressives are not generally inclined to invest in building and supporting our infrastructure, especially if that investment does not come with a tax write-off. I am not alone in this perception. In 2015, I organized the "Citizen Media Forum" at Kutztown University. I invited three independent media activists I've met since 2011 for a panel discussion on the role of new media



and independent journalism: Steve Horn, a research fellow for DeSmogBlog; Katie Klabusich, independent media activist and host of *The Katie Speak Show* on Netroots Radio; and, Zach Roberts, an independent photo/video journalist who's worked for investigative journalist, Greg Palast. All three have credits from some of the world's most respected newspapers, have extended resumes of media appearances, and have broken significant stories. Rick Smith from *The Rick Smith Show* was our keynote. After an engaging discussion about their work, I asked about how they sustain it. All struggle to make ends meet.

As much as the rise of new media has been celebrated for democratizing media, it has also helped impoverish it. So, while the right-wing has invested billions of dollars in building out their media and intellectual infrastructure, one pillar of democratic culture is at risk of collapsing. It should go without saying that relying upon a bunch of energetic, passionate, and skilled volunteers to sustain critical media for the coming generation is a losing proposition. The same is doubly true for progressive media which lacked the infrastructure to begin with.

After Trump's election, I put aside several other projects and went all in with Raging Chicken Press. I sought out more writers and began paying them a paltry stipend of \$50/month. I've had to get over my aversion to asking people for money. Turns out my belief that once Raging Chicken Press began breaking stories and building networks throughout the state and region, progressives would be asking us what they could do to support our work, was naive. A core group of supporters has stepped forward to become members or make donations, but they tend to be the same people who step forward for dozens of other projects.

My work with Raging Chicken has underscored for me the unavoidable relationship between progressive media and funding streams. That's probably the most pressing challenge we face in the next five years. But more to the point, building a progressive media infrastructure also has to be a discussion about labor. It is not sustainable for Raging Chicken or any other progressive media outlet to rely upon volunteers, unpaid interns, or underpaid writers. In the absence of a surprise angel investor, it will be part of the struggle going forward. The material conditions of communication had always been part of my academic research, but dealing with funding questions on a regular basis has given my inquiries a new shape. I am not simply "pointing out" the material conditions, I am constructing arguments and appeals to sustain them.

My work with Raging Chicken has put a strain on some of my academic work and union work. There are only so many hours in the day and sometimes you just have to choose. I have continued to remind myself of the conversation that Seth recalled. To make the work the same thing. I don't think there is any other way. If I had my druthers, Raging Chicken Press would be my full-time job—not because I no longer like to teach or I'm that cynical about academe. Rather, I would love to be able to devote my attention to teaching and writing in the service of social movement. For now, I have to keep my day job just to keep it up and running.

## Notes

- 1 For a good list of some key bloggers that emerged during the Wisconsin Uprising, see the “Wisconsin Progressive Blogroll,” at the end of Sagan’s *We Are Wisconsin: The Wisconsin Uprising in the Words of the Activists, Writers, and Everyday Wisconsinites Who Made It Happen*.
- 2 For example, Steve Novak, “Kutztown Rejects White Nationalist Recruitment Posters on Campus,” *Lehigh Valley Live*, February 13, 2017; Will Bunch, “Archie Bunker: Alive and Well, Living in Philly, Voting for Trump,” *Philly.com*, February 25, 2016; and, Daniel Patrick Sheehan, “Kutztown Allows Guns on Campus,” *The Morning Call*, May 9, 2013.
- 3 For example, Janie Valencia, “Pennsylvania’s Only Latina Lawmaker Gets Cut Off Arguing Against English-Only Bill,” *Huffington Post*, September 22, 2015; Ed Mazza, “GOP Rep. Scott Perry Says Chesapeake Bay Pollution is God’s Fault,” March 21, 2017; and Ed Mazza, “GOP-Backed Poll-Watching Measure Sparks Voter Intimidation Fears in Pennsylvania,” *Huffington Post*, September 22, 2016.
- 4 See, Xian Chiang-Waren, “Trailer Park Evicted to Make Room for Fracking,” *Mother Jones*, June 22, 2012.
- 5 See, James Cersonsky, “GOP’s Enron-esque Higher Ed Plan: Fire Tenured Faculty to Fund Student Dorms,” *Salon*, January 14, 2014.
- 6 See, Allen Brown, Will Parrish, and Alice Speri, “Dakota Access-Style Policing Moves to Pennsylvania’s Mariner East 2 Pipeline,” June 21, 2017.
- 7 See, Laura Conaway, “First Same-Sex Couple Gets Marriage License in Pennsylvania,” *Maddow Blog*, July 24, 2013.
- 8 I do not have space to detail these efforts here. Recently, however, journalists and scholars have tracked the influence of these families and radical libertarian thought. Jane Mayer’s, *Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right*; Lee Fang’s, *The Machine: A Field Guide to the Resurgent Right*; Kim Phillips-Fein’s, *Invisible Hands: The Businessmen’s Crusade Against the New Deal*; Nancy MacLean’s, *Democracy in Chains: The Deep History of the Radical Right’s Stealth Plan for America*, and Naomi Klein’s, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, are a good reading list to start this history.
- 9 Fox News has dominated the cable news market since at least 2000 (Steinberg). MSNBC, the more liberal-leaning network, saw a spike in viewers following Donald Trump’s election, outdrawing Fox for this first time in July 2017 (Berg). Only time will tell if MSNBC can maintain its strong showings, especially after the network decided to become whiter and more conservative (Vyse). Beginning in Spring 2016, MSNBC began firing liberal and African American hosts such as Melissa Harris-Perry and Michael Eric Dyson in favor of white conservative hosts such as Nicolle Wallace, Megyn Kelly, and Hugh Hewitt (Grim). To date, the more “conservative” or “centrist” shows are tanking next to the powerhouse liberal-leaning shows hosted by Rachel Maddow, Chris Hayes, and Lawrence O’Donnell (Grim).
- 10 For an excellent example of how the right-wing media has done this, see Joshua Green’s, *Devil’s Bargain: Steve Bannon, Donald Trump, and the Storming of the Presidency*. Green followed Steve Bannon’s work at *Breitbart News* before Bannon worked on Donald Trump’s 2016 presidential campaign. Green unpacks the ideological and trial-and-error processes Bannon and others engaged in to refine their media strategy. For example, Andrew Breitbart, the late founder of *Breitbart News*, realized that “most readers don’t approach the news as a clinical exercise in absorbing facts, but experience it viscerally as an ongoing drama, with distinct story lines, heroes, and villains” (Green 142). *Breitbart’s* editorial policy is to look for the kind of “rolling narratives” that keeps a devoted, hard-right constituency engaged (143).

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# 10 A Conservative Professorial Pundit in Liberal Surroundings

An Uneven Odyssey Projected through 2020<sup>1</sup>

*Richard E. Vatz*

The freedom to dissent is one of the hallmarks of democracy, but access to media is often the measure which separates effective from ineffective dissent and influence. One of my favorite quotations and one of my favorite of Voltaire's quotations is "I may not agree with what you say, but I'll defend to the death your right to say it." Had he been living in a time of ubiquitous and fragmented media, Voltaire might have said, "I will defend to the death your right to have your dissenting opinion broadcast and disseminated if you are a particularly articulate and compelling pundit." Not everyone has access to media: some do not because they are inarticulate, and some do not because their views are offensive to those who control the media in question.

I am an unusual academic political-media pundit, as my views are firmly in the conservative ranks. This makes me even more of a rare bird in the State of Maryland, wherein the Democratic voter registration over Republican voter registration is roughly two to one. Now that may be misleading in a couple of ways. First is that among *academics* in Maryland the ratio may be, and granted this is pure speculation, more like nine to one, and, second, the registration is a little tricky to read as evidence of likely voting patterns as well as political philosophy. The preponderance of Democrats over Republicans has been so consistent that many people in the political middle or even slightly right of center register and identify as "Democrat" because they fear a loss of influence and primary election voting power if they called themselves "Republican," since the Democratic Party often appears to be the only game in town. Further, this state of affairs may make the intensity of party affiliation weak in many cases, with the consequences for political preferences being that they are more unstable than people realize.

Witness the 2014 election of Republican Gov. Larry Hogan, who won that Maryland gubernatorial race in which he prevailed by a solid but not overwhelming 4% or so. He defeated a particularly weak Democrat, Anthony G. Brown.

In 2018, Gov. Hogan won re-election by 13.4%, far less than polls predicted, but an overwhelming victory nonetheless. This should not mislead

anyone into believing that Maryland has moved to the right, as Gov. Hogan's "coattails turned out to be remarkably short."

I have been doing media commentary off and on for, depending how one defines "media," over 40 years. My commentary has been local and nationwide, including local and national radio and television and mostly has been on two topics in this order: (1) political rhetoric and (2) rhetoric and psychiatry. In the six months before and after the 2002, the 2006, 2010, 2014, 2016, and 2018 Maryland elections and through the current year, I have been a frequent media presence on Maryland television channels 2, 11, 13, and 45, as well as several times a month with extended interviews on Baltimore's 50,000 watt WBAL Radio and periodically on Baltimore's WCBM-Radio, conservative and very conservative stations respectively. I also have appeared on Washington, DC television and national CBS radio and ABC Radio several times. Before 2002, I frequented National Public Radio's WYPR Radio, but when the politics at WYPR became more, shall we say, progressive, I was no longer asked to appear there and satisfied my liberal connections with frequent appearances on the left with the Marc Steiner Show on WEAA-Radio in Baltimore (no longer on the airwaves, as of 2018). In addition, I was quoted in the *Washington Post*, *The Baltimore Sun*, *The Washington Times*, *The Jewish Times*, and some other newspapers, local and national, and I wrote op-ed pieces for the *Sun*, *The Washington Times*, *MarylandReporter.com* and had letters to the editor in the *Sun*, the *Post*, and *The New York Times* and elsewhere.

I wish to focus on the politics of academic political commentary in Maryland and the salient conflicts that one commentator has had with the print and electronic media with some dismaying, relevant reflections as well on conservatives, conservatism, and higher education.

In this chapter, I am focusing first on my political commentary experiences during the 2002 gubernatorial campaign in Maryland. In that campaign, now ex-Governor and then-Representative Robert Ehrlich upset Lieutenant Governor Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, winning by almost four percentage points. The media played an incredibly significant role. I personally was on Maryland radio and television probably as much or more than any other academic commentator, and my role as pundit was also featured in my community's newspaper. I wrote a couple of op-ed pieces in the *Baltimore Sun*, the most politically significant newspaper in Maryland (and the only state-wide daily), with *The Washington Post* in a distant second place in terms of influence.

One of the realities of a university professor's providing political commentary for media is that it ebbs and flows over time. You may have months in which no one calls you, or you may have a period in which you have 10 to 15 media appearances in a week, and I experienced both extremes. Appearances breed appearances—producers see or hear you do some commentary on other stations' shows and call you up to do their show. In January 2004, CNN Radio, having read quotes by me in *The Atlanta Constitution*, called me for

two interviews on the then-upcoming presidential inaugural. When one turns down stations, sometimes he or she does not hear from them again, or if they change producers or editors, it can be an opportunity or the end of one. One thing for sure—when you have been on neither radio nor television nor the local newspaper for a week or two, an acquaintance will say to you almost accusatorily, “Hey prof, how come I haven’t seen or heard you on the media lately?”

In the Maryland gubernatorial campaign of 2002, I was on so many media that one letter to my community’s newspaper opined that the writer was sick of turning on his television or reading the paper and seeing me. This was followed by a letter defending my appearances by complimenting their (and my) quality, but my guess is that the complainant’s voice was less singular. I have frequently over the years been greeted by “Dr. Vatz, I heard you again on the radio on your political views.” This has been said with varying inflections implying either congratulations or “Give it a rest, will you, bud?”

With multiple appearances sometimes come carelessness and sloppiness. I do not think that when one appears frequently that all the appearances are of equal value. Sometimes you are precise and articulate, and sometimes you are not. Sometimes you may be inconsistent. Sometimes you get so heady about media appearances that you say “yes” when they ask you to speak on the history of the Whig party even though you don’t remember the history of the Whig party.

## **2002 Election**

One has to be particularly careful when he or she is commenting on a contentious election, and the 2002 gubernatorial election was as contentious—primarily, but not exclusively, on one side, incidentally—as they come in local elections. The fractious national elections of 2016 and 2018 dwarf contentiousness in any election in Maryland with which I am familiar, but let’s look at 2002.

The most hostile and consequential responses to my commentary came from *The Baltimore Sun*.

Let me articulate as clearly as possible what the political-media landscape appeared to be in Maryland at that time. For years, there had been tension between talk radio in Maryland, which was largely decidedly conservative, and *The Baltimore Sun*—then, but not so ugly now 15 years later. That newspaper, for years before 2002, was decidedly not just liberal but anti-conservative—inarguably on its editorial pages, but arguably on its news pages as well. It sported but one conservative columnist and an aggressively left-wing editorial page as well as an op-ed page that was entirely liberal but which printed some good conservative writers and some excellent middle-of-the-road pundits irregularly.

The liberal-conservative hostilities escalated in 2002 due to the close race that year for governor. The perception of the Republican gubernatorial candidate's supporters was that the *Sun's* reporting was simply tilted consistently against them in the news pages and irresponsibly over-the-top on the editorial pages. It is interesting to note that this antagonism continued through election day, 2006, with the Republican Governor's having issued an edict to those working under him not to talk with one specific reporter and one specific columnist, actions that engendered a lawsuit and meetings between the *Sun* and the Governor with no resolution and the lawsuit thrown out by a federal judge. The Gov. [Robert L.] Ehrlich Administration claimed that this did not constitute a shutting out of the *Sun*, only of specific employees who misrepresented the truth in their reporting. By 2006, antagonisms had grown so severe that *in that entire election year, the Baltimore Sun printed not one op-ed piece in favor of Gov. Ehrlich while printing a goodly number in support of his gubernatorial opponent, then-Mayor Martin O'Malley* (the eventual winner of the 2006 gubernatorial race). As just one example, several printed op-ed pieces opined that Mayor O'Malley had won the one gubernatorial debate in the fall of 2006, while no pieces were printed that argued Governor Ehrlich had won or even done well, including one submitted by this author.

Let's look at a sample of the conservative criticisms of the *Sun's* coverage of the 2002 election.

First, the *Sun* endorsed Democratic gubernatorial nominee Lt. Gov. Kathleen Kennedy Townsend with an editorial that included an outrageous racially based and inaccurate slur against the African American conservative Republican candidate for Lieutenant Governor, Michael Steele, to the effect that he "brought nothing to the ticket but the color of his skin." This racial attack reverberates to this day and caused Lt. Gov. Steele, later the chair of the Republican National Committee, to complain on electronic media frequently that the nature of the remark had hit his family and young children particularly hard. In response, the *Sun's* editorial board issued a policy statement many saw as breathtakingly arrogant. According to the *Sun* itself ["Governor says he is open to meeting with Sun editor," November 26, 2004], "The editorial board said it does not apologize for its opinions."

This position was stated without qualification. To critics it appeared not to matter apparently—apparently, because the *Sun* editorial board indicated that it did not ever reexamine its editorials—if the board made an error by even inadvertently stating a racist view, an irresponsible view, or a view based on an errant appraisal of the facts. An ex-editor of the *Sun* stated years later in a speech at Towson University that the "editorial stands in the way of better relations between the *Sun* and the Governor."

Second, there were inaccuracies and selective reporting. This is the criticism of the *Sun* that most rankled the newspaper, because while it can always deny ideologically biased coverage and rationalize one-sided editorial coverage as consistent with its journalistic province, no serious news organ can justify errant coverage or absence of important coverage.



During the 2002 campaign, the Democratic Maryland Senate President called Mr. Steele “the very personification of an Uncle Tom,” but there was literally no mention of it in the paper until weeks later when Mr. Steele referenced it. In late 2004, in the midst of a Governor-legislature controversy on the production of malpractice insurance policy in which Gov. Ehrlich and that senator had met and apparently secured an agreement, the senator was alleged to have reneged on his part of the agreement. He was taped in a broadcast on one of the conservative radio stations to the effect that he makes lots of promises and tries to keep “most” of them. This was literally not mentioned by the *Sun*. In addition, in the 2002 campaign, there was no follow-up of a Democratic operative’s calling candidate Ehrlich, a moderate Howard Baker-type Republican, a “Nazi.” Finally, respecting the one 2002 gubernatorial debate, there was practically no coverage in the state’s leading newspaper of the taunting treatment of then Rep. Ehrlich’s wife and parents. There was also an ugly event (unrelated to the Governor’s race) whose lack of publicity I know personally angered the victim. A Jewish state senator was the object of anti-Semitic attacks during a losing primary campaign, attacks which were covered very little by any local print media.

To this day, anti-Semitic actions by Democrats and liberals are usually not covered or are under-covered by the *Baltimore Sun* and *The Washington Post*. The virulent anti-Semite Rev. Louis Farrakhan has had active support by Baltimore City Democratic politicians and spoke at Morgan State University without any newspaper or television criticism. There was and is criticism of Rev. Farrakhan by talk shows in Baltimore and elsewhere, however.

All of these foregoing matters provided limited grist for coverage and conversation on local television and radio, some by the author of this piece.

### **Effects on the Author**

My conservative punditry did not have the effect on my teaching and reputation at Towson University that some might anticipate. As I indicated in a letter to *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (“Conservative and Liberal Professors in the Academy,” November 5, 2004), contrary to the experiences of my conservative brethren, I had in my long career at Towson University never suffered any unfair treatment consequent to my politically incorrect leanings. This would change, but not overwhelmingly, in the ensuing years.

Why was this the case? It is hard to say, but part of it was a live-and-let-live culture at the university, as well as the unparalleled integrity of a very liberal university president and a sort-of friend, Hoke Smith, who died in March of 2004. He was replaced ultimately by a generally more conservative president. In ensuing years, I was blessed with the short-lived (due to her premature passing) presidency of Maravene Loeschke, the finest and fairest president I have known at Towson or anywhere else.

I had the experience of a media staff member who for ten years never helped me connect to any media due to her overt dislike for conservatives, and the university was remiss in never disciplining her. I attribute this inaction to bureaucratic ineptitude and inertia more than any institutional anti-conservatism. But had the discrimination been done to a progressive professor by a conservative staff member, it would have been stopped.

During the 2002 election campaign, I risked retaliatory action by the *Sun*. I had been doing commentaries that pointed out its unfair coverage.

What about the argument made by the liberal cognoscenti that if significant print media are liberal and unfair in their coverages, conservative electronic media—especially talk radio but also *The Wall Street Journal* and others—are much the same: tilted unmistakably to the right?

The difference between liberal print and electronic media and conservative print and electronic media is that the former generally maintain that they are disinterested parties. The most important and oft-neglected point regarding media bias is that bias on media which claim to be fair is more misleading than admittedly ideological media.

One now-former *Sun* reporter had selectively quoted me following the one gubernatorial debate in 2002. He spoke with me for over 20 minutes following the debate. In his subsequent article on the debate, he quoted me only on the one criticism I had made of Rep. Ehrlich and ignored all of my criticisms of Lt. Gov. Townsend. When I asked him about his selected coverage, he refused to discuss the situation and did not call or cite me again.

The upshot of all of this, I suppose, is best found in two famous slogans: Harry Truman's "if you can't stand the heat, stay out of the kitchen" and Mr. Dooley's (the political sage-Irish bar keep created by Finley Peter Dunne) observation that "politics ain't beanbag."

My conservative punditry during the 2002 campaign, which was particularly hard on the *Sun* and the Democrats, but also from time to time on the Republicans as well, engendered an angry e-mail from a major *Sun* writer, now retired, which called my critiques of the paper "ignorant" and an e-mail months later from another major reporter from that newspaper, saying that editors and reporters were "left with a bad taste in their mouths" after my comments.

A former *Sun* writer e-mailed me following my blistering critique of the above attack on Lt. Gov. aspirant Steele, and I quote, "I couldn't help thinking as I listened to [talk radio] this morning [on your] very interesting take on the Sun's editorial ... and I wonder if we'll ever see [your] work in the Sun op-ed pages again."

I was henceforth quoted much less by the newspaper and was blacklisted from the letters to the editor column, a blacklisting that lasted almost six years with a brief respite when there was an excellent new editor, Tim Franklin, for about a year (he then became the president of The Poynter Institute). Early on in the blacklisting, Dianne Donovan, the editorial page editor, wrote to me that I didn't need to have letters in the *Sun* because I had other "ready forums

for your opinion.” She later hired a liberal professor as op-ed regular who had had even more such “ready forums” as a regular op-ed columnist.

On a local National Public Radio outlet talk show on which a *Sun* editor and I were guests, I told him about my blacklisting, and he said he would look into it. He later said it was beyond his bailiwick. When he became editor, Mr. Franklin’s suspension of the blacklisting was re-invoked by the new editor.

### ***The Sun Reversal***

Finally, in 2009, another editor, Andrew Green, came on-board and ended my blacklisting while saying to me, “I am not saying there was or was not a blacklisting of you, but I am saying that from this point forward you can have your articles and letters evaluated [on a qualitative basis].”

He has been good to his word through the current day, as this is written in 2019. The ability for a conservative to have his work evaluated on merit is not something for which he should feel gratitude, but I do. In addition, my relations with the *Sun* have somewhat improved generally, but not to the extent that they have on the op-ed page. Incidentally, Mr. Green speaks to my class now twice a year, and we and the class have great exchanges on media bias, exchanges which exemplify academic freedom and the marketplace of ideas.

The freedom to dissent in print and electronic media is and should be circumscribed only by a pundit’s competence and articulateness. It should not be restricted because he or she dissents from a particular medium’s accepted political views.

The election of Donald Trump has eviscerated evenhanded punditry throughout major newspapers, as well as reporting on the news pages.

With the exception of writer Marc A. Thiessen, *The Washington Post* has no op-ed writer who often supports the Trump Administration, and *The New York Times* has virtually no op-ed pieces so supportive, not to mention the transformation of most newspapers’ news articles to opinionatedly anti-Trump pieces, as well as segments on CNN and major networks.

Lesley Stahl, longtime CBS journalist on “60 Minutes,” claimed several years ago on CNN’s “Reliable Sources” that she was well familiar with long-time charges that the mainstream media (particularly CBS) were prejudiced against conservatives. Her response was the prototype of the position of virtually all liberal media today: the media simply, in the words of the famous Quaker adage, engage in speaking truth to power. The answer didn’t address the perceived differences in how often and intensely some media speak “truth” to *different* ideological powers.

The major changes in the decade-plus since the 2002 and 2006 Maryland and national elections respecting ideology and media have been both significant and insignificant. One change is that some of the clichés have become outdated, such as “you can’t win a fight with those who buy ink by the barrel.” As Gov. Ehrlich, who won the surprising governor’s race in 2002, supported

by a minority of conservative pundits and one academic conservative pundit, discovered, sometimes you can win utilizing a counter-narrative against the media. To be accurate, however, politically, such united media opposition is never irrelevant. He lost the 2006 race, to a large extent because of media bias. The economic decline of print media, due in small part to liberal ideological bias (and also affected primarily, of course, by competing media and the sometimes lack of charging for online media availability), may be slightly ameliorating, as some, but not all, newspapers and other print media discover the need to keep conservatives as customers as well.

As we approach 2020, the changes in media treatment of conservatives and conservative thought during the Trump presidency have wrought profound change. Major newspapers' adoption of "resistance" to their presidential *bête noire*, Donald Trump, coupled with the presumption accorded to the president by conservative media, has left the country virtually without disinterested news media.

*The Baltimore Sun* has improved—indeed, transformed—its fair coverage of political principals on the right, especially of the current governor, Republican Larry Hogan (full disclosure: Gov. Hogan is a friendly acquaintance to me and has spoken to my Towson University classes several times). Indeed, until he became a presidential candidate, Gov. Ehrlich was a regular columnist (also full disclosure: Gov. Ehrlich has lectured in my class twice a year for about a quarter century).

But the most striking change at the *Sun* is that the news censoring has mostly ended, and most of the blatantly biased editorial hierarchy and reporters have been replaced. Even the letters to the editor page has markedly improved, edited as it is by Mr. Green, who ended my blacklisting. That page in the early 2000s once printed ten letters on one day to evaluate a policy of then-Governor Ehrlich—one favored; nine opposed.

The reporter replacements—so far at least—have so reversed the journalistic conventions there that I wrote a series of blogs in "Red Maryland," a prominent Maryland conservative blog, culminating with one which argued that the *Sun's* journalistic excellence had surpassed that of the *Post* per the following journalistic criteria of political disinterest: fairness in selection of issues to cover, placement of stories, headlines to use, relevance of evidence cited and not cited, sources to interview, pictures to accompany articles, and general tenor of articles.

I also wrote in that blog: "I cannot help but think that the *Sun's* reporters feel better about their recent good journalism than the weak-to-horrendous journalists felt about their one-sided, pseudo-journalism throughout the 2000s and particularly in 2006. There is no evidence yet of serious even-handedness on the *Sun's* editorial page, but they do have some traditional leeway there."

And I also wrote, "It's a new day in Maryland when the more comprehensive and fair coverage of the governor's race is found in the *Sun* and not in the *Post*. Will it continue? Stay tuned."

It has continued, and the paper's editorials are much more evenhanded.

The marketplace is a remarkable vehicle for improving products, and it appears to have a potentially powerful impact even on print and electronic media.

Finally, a personal note regarding my personal treatment as a conservative in academe from my university and my national organization, the National Communication Association (NCA).

Anyone who knows my long four decades-plus history at Towson University (TU), including being on its major legislative body, the University Senate for almost 40 years, would infer correctly that the majority of faculty has not only accepted my conservatism but has been as collegial as any faculty could be. The students, overwhelmingly liberal, or now "progressive," have been even more supportive. Indeed, I can count the administration as well, and, in the fall of 2018, through cooperation of the Democratic Rep. Dutch Ruppersberger and Towson University President Kim Schatzel, former and likely future Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi spoke to my advanced Persuasion class.

Higher education in general and my academic organization, NCA, are different stories, as both have become in the Trump era not just liberally biased, but overtly anti-conservative, as have much of academia generally.

Conservatives in academia find it difficult to get hired and to be accorded promotion and tenured when hired (see recent surveys by the University of California at Los Angeles Higher Education Research Institute [HERI]).

Ann Coulter was denied a contracted speakership at the University of California at Berkeley, as have other conservatives, the site of the birth of the 1960s Free Speech Movement.

As I wrote recently in *The Baltimore Sun*:

For the first time in American colleges and universities there is major consensual disparagement of the ostensible cornerstone values of the academy: "academic freedom" and the "marketplace of ideas."

The National Communication Association (NCA), of which I am a member, oversees communications departments throughout the United States that typically have negligible numbers of self-identified conservatives, though many are presumably afraid to "come out."

Furthermore, top programs at NCA's conventions and major journals in our field rarely support conservative policy or conservative political principles. Our NCA president last year [unembarrassedly] gave a keynote address railing against Donald Trump and exalting globalism to a yelling, appreciative crowd of like-minded, angry left-wingers. It was like being at an anti-Trump rally—in fact, it *was* an anti-Trump rally.

The situation, to be fair, is not completely uncomplicated: our regional associations are often far more even-handed.

The National Communication Association ebbs and flows over the years, with leaders up to 2015 committed to at least some ideological diversity in

its concern regarding academic freedom and the marketplace of ideas. The organization is now at its zenith of anti-conservative, anti-freedom-of speech radicalism. It began with the NCA presidency at the time of President Trump's election, and it will continue through at least 2020, with its ideological principals comprising the presidents, vice-presidents, executive director, and others on their executive committee, which acts perfectly consistently as a Star Chamber of censorship of conservatives and conservative ideas.

There is a paucity of papers reflecting conservative thought at its national meetings, and some of its leaders actively promote open hostility to conservatives and conservative thought. Some of this varies with its president, and the presidents themselves have been over the years tolerant to intolerant, with the years 2016 to present almost uniquely intolerant. The membership, with some clear exceptions, seems to take cues on its treatment of conservatives from the leadership.

I have written on the treatment of conservatives in the academy, and it is difficult to say whether the anti-conservative policies and atmosphere will abate. One thing is clear, and that is that academic freedom and the marketplace of ideas, the ostensible premier values of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), are not flourishing in mainstream media, cable media, or the academy.

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- 1 Revised, August 2019

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# 11 ON STRIKE! A Rhetorician's Guide to Solidarity-Building

*Seth Kahn*

On Wednesday October 19, 2016, the Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculties (APSCUF) went on strike for three days; it was our first strike. While the resulting contract wasn't overwhelmingly popular, the strike proved to be a successful mobilization among more than 5,500 members across 14 State System of Higher Education campuses, along with the staff members employed by the union and thousands of students/alums who supported us.

This essay examines our strike from a rhetorician's perspective, i.e., to answer Jason Del Gandio's charge to value our rhetoric:

Activists always consider rhetoric to some degree. We continually argue over the look and design of demonstrations and direct actions; the wording of manifestos and speeches; and the usefulness of ideologies, philosophies and analyses. But these debates always seem peripheral to our physical actions and material conditions. This is mistaken and debilitating. Undervaluing the rhetoric of our efforts hinders our communication with, and our political efficacy within, the wider public arena.

*(Rhetoric 2–3)*

The analysis doesn't follow the usual trajectory of social movements—our scale is too small for that, and our “wider public arena” isn't very wide—but describes building a network to coordinate efforts in a complex environment (our system, in the context of a politically incoherent media ecology in Pennsylvania). I focus largely but not entirely on our preparations: developing processes and protocols; explaining those to the general membership and encouraging them to participate; and calming fears and responding to outside pressures. I then trace those through the actual strike and end with some considerations for future organizing.

## **APSCUF Background**

Founded in 1937 as a faculty professional organization at Pennsylvania's teacher-colleges, APSCUF is the union for all faculty (tenure-track and



non-tenure-track) across the State System of Higher Education, comprised of the 14 state-owned institutions; current membership is nearly 6,000. Each university has a local chapter, the structure of which roughly parallels the state-wide (in terms of offices and committees); structural links between locals and the state are complex, but they enable both necessary local autonomy for chapters and coordination across the state.

APSCUF has bargained contracts since 1973, but before 2016, had only come close to actual strikes twice (1999 and 2007). In the academic labor grapevine, our contract is recognized as strong, particularly its provisions regarding non-tenure-track faculty (compensation; provisions for converting into tenure-track positions).<sup>1</sup>

That the faculty on all 14 campuses work under, and therefore bargain, the same contract matters. Put simply, thousands of faculty across the system can level a more powerful threat than 900 faculty at West Chester, much less the 90 faculty at Cheyney University, if we bargained separately. The campuses are different enough that it's hard to satisfy everybody (e.g., West Chester is expensive compared with some locations, so our system-wide salary scale isn't as generous for us as for others), but we know writ large we do better together. Of course, there have been tense moments. In 2007, we narrowly ratified a contract we maybe shouldn't have. In 2014, proposed legislation that would allow campuses to separate from the State System could have damaged the system and the union severely.

In the wake of the 2007 contract, we overhauled the process that would lead either to a strike or a ratification vote; also, our Legislative Assembly, the body that makes union-wide policy, decided to stop creating an *ad hoc* Strike Committee every few years for preparations, instead appointing a standing Mobilization Committee charged not only with strike preparations but with maintaining a more active membership on a regular basis. Although actions have been less consistent than I'd have liked over the years, having a standing committee means we don't have to start anew every time we need to mobilize. As a result of those changes, we were much better situated to do the right things that led to a successful outcome in October 2016.

### **Early Stages of Strike Preparation: Some Key Decisions**

As I've detailed elsewhere,<sup>2</sup> one major reason our preparations worked was the time we spent on them. I was appointed co-chair of our chapter's Mobilization Committee in Summer 2014, a year out from the contract expiration and after working on strike preparations in the three previous contract cycles. In January 2015, at a meeting to work on revising the Strike Manual, which describes the timeline, roles, and processes for preparing and engaging in a strike, two important developments happened. First, the complexity of the preparations became starkly visible—just the list of roles we needed to fill, and the responsibilities for each of them, was longer than I had any idea (remember, I'd participated in preparations twice). Second, we decided to restructure some of

the roles in the process. Each campus has a Mobilization Committee, but there are roles/tasks for strike planning that we don't need otherwise: Picket Chair (arranges all the picket locations and schedules), Building Coordinator (finds off-campus office/meeting spaces in the event we can't enter campus), and a handful of others. We also have other committees whose work overlaps with ours during strike planning more than other times (Public Relations; Adjunct Faculty; Membership). We needed a body that convenes specifically for strike planning, which we named the Strike Team.

I also realized we needed a new position within each of our chapters' Representative Councils, comprised of members elected from their academic departments. Department representatives are inconsistent about their engagement: some very committed, others who appear at meetings (maybe) and register their commitment by listing the position on a CV (not so different from other faculty committees). The communication necessary during strike preparation meant that we needed to get department representatives more active in transmitting information both ways between the leadership and departments, and recruiting participants for activities. We created the Coordinator of Department Representatives, whose role is to cajole the reps when strike planners or the chapter president needs the membership to do something, and we need people closer to their department-mates to make it happen.

A final decision, once the Strike Manual was approved and we could build our teams—my chapter committee co-chair, our chapter president, and I agreed that we didn't want members of our chapter's elected leadership (the officers and Executive Committee) in Strike Team positions. They're busy with day-to-day work that continues during negotiations. More strategically, we wanted to recruit new people into positions with genuine decision-making responsibility instead of relying on our usual suspects. We had that choice at West Chester because our chapter has nearly 900 members; smaller chapters may not have that option. But the principle—more people involved more deeply for longer—is important. We didn't establish a Habermasian utopia, but a large team (25 people in positions with titles, plus a Representative Council with over 100 members) became networks reaching across our campus/system, into professional associations in 50 different disciplines, unions, and activist groups all over the region, neighborhoods all over the state/region, and so on—none of which I would have understood particularly well without backgrounds in both rhetoric and activism.

### **Setting the Tone: Specificity, Participation, and Trust**

Another major implication of widespread participation from the outset was that members felt more invited to participate than they would have otherwise, and we avoided burning out the membership with too much communication from the same people. Occasionally, the large number of people sending out messages to the membership led to confusion, especially when those messages

overlapped or asked for slight variations of the same thing (e.g., we maintained two different lists of private email addresses and personal phone numbers; some people were confused about which they were supposed to give to who under what circumstances). But for the most part, hearing from different people asking for different responses clarified the kinds of requests, and generated a sense of participation that encouraged more.

Similarly, we were careful to target our requests for participation by not asking everyone to participate in everything all the time, but instead asking people what kinds of work they wanted to do, and only asking them for those (except for picketing, which we expected pretty much everyone to do). The mechanics were simple: the request for off-campus contact information was a link to a Mobilization Commitment Survey (a Google Form that dumps the results into a searchable spreadsheet) that collected not only the contact information, but also respondents' willingness to commit time (how many hours we might expect them to work in an ordinary week) and preferences for tasks (e.g., sign-making, staffing information or voting tables, shopping for food/supplies for picket lines). Asking interested people to do specific tasks at specific times is more likely to get positive results than asking everyone generally to help with something.<sup>3</sup> It didn't always (ever) work magically, but in large part, our success rate in getting what we needed from people without having to beg too much was strong.

If one element of setting a tone of solidarity is constructing an ethos in which many members were doing lots of work in loosely coordinated but aligned groups, another element is *trust*, which calls for both the membership and the leadership to believe in each other's good will and commitment. The previous two examples are, in this context, one way of building trust: asking for participation, doing so mindfully; expecting and getting participation without having to struggle too much for it. Trust-building also happens when leadership and membership *listen* very carefully to each other. I don't want to overclaim the scope of the argument by locating it within, say, Krista Ratcliffe's work on *rhetorical listening* because the cross-cultural frame she establishes is much bigger than this. But what I'm about to describe is certainly consistent with her (and many other scholars') notion of Burkean *identification*.

Strike preparations can be stressful even if you've been through them before, and even if you're committed to solidarity. A strike can be financially disruptive, especially if you have to purchase COBRA (short-term replacement) health insurance; nobody is paid during a strike, so income is disrupted. For untenured and non-tenure-track faculty, fear of retaliation is real (such retaliation is illegal, but that's only so comforting). Those of us who have been through preparations understand the timing and logic of certain practices (like when to pull course materials off our Learning Management System so that scab teachers can't easily take over our classes, and when to start pledging for our "solidarity fund" that connects faculty who need financial assistance during a strike with faculty who can offer no-interest loans) that can feel arcane to newer faculty. Adding to the stress for newer/junior faculty is the voice our leadership (at both the campus and state levels) tends to adopt, which often

sounds belligerent/strident/angry/all of the above, especially when the situation doesn't change for months at a time (which is common).

On top of all that is pressure from students and their families, along with management and many members of the public, not to “harm” the students by being so “greedy.” The union instructs us not to talk about negotiations or possible strikes during class time, but it's hard—and frankly unwise—to avoid conversations (outside of class time!) that focus on what happens to students if faculty go out. Does the semester get canceled? Do final exams get delayed? Do students who are student-teaching or doing internships keep doing them if their faculty supervisors are striking? Those concerns are genuine (when students raise them on their own, but not when union-haters hide behind students to delegitimize the whole notion of strikes), and the very real concerns we have for our students' well-being adds to the pressure of preparing for and being willing to strike if necessary.

Finally, the logistics of actually being on strike can be complex. For example, like almost every college campus, parking is miserable here. Every time I signed into Facebook or went to any meeting for the month before we went on strike, somebody would ask why we were instructing them not to park on campus (as a public university, the streets are technically city property, so in a sense, they're not “campus”). As we started developing/assigning picket schedules, people were nervous about where they could use restrooms. Those concerns are entirely valid, but as people began pushing harder on why “they couldn't just go into [a building] to pee,” I realized that most of us didn't understand the legal implications of what we were doing. If you cross a picket line, your legal rights change; management can order you to work, and if you don't comply, you're insubordinate.

What matters through those examples isn't so much the specific problem-solving—we could have worked out lots of solutions—but the sense among the members that the leadership knew what we were doing, and among the leadership that the members were committed and focused. The key moment for me was realizing all the questions were telling me that members *wanted to get it right*. They weren't looking for excuses not to participate; they wanted not to make mistakes and damage the effort. Once I figured that out, about two weeks before the strike date, I was much more confident that we were ready (enough).

## **Audience Audience Audience**

I get frustrated when scholars who study public discourse say “Why doesn't the public understand [our field of study, or higher ed, or tenure, or ...]? Why we can't get them to support us?” We know from decades of scholarship that “the public” doesn't exist as such, and yet we constantly invoke it in that exact form.

Throughout early/mid-2016, as the news media across Pennsylvania began covering our preparations, some faculty nervously complained about negative press we were getting. Those complaints were true; the state's mid-sized papers

(e.g., the Allentown *Morning Call*; the Reading *Eagle*) often published pieces that presented the State System’s version of events without any response from the union, while union and faculty-hating trolls dominated the comments sections. During a meeting one day, I realized why I was relatively unconcerned.

I’d love for everybody to love academics and unions, but they don’t. And as much as I bemoan shrinking newspaper readership, collapsing faith in journalism as an institution, and so on, it’s the reality. Taken together, the insight was: we can’t worry too much if the few people who still read the *Morning Call* don’t support us. It would be nice if they did. But the people we needed active support from weren’t them, and their opposition wasn’t especially helpful to the powers-that-be. Instead, we needed to focus on reaching the people with actual power: students, alums, and their families. The way to reach them most effectively was in social media, a venue the State System hardly entered, and we had a huge advantage there thanks to our union’s Social Media Coordinator’s efforts maintaining presences in multiple platforms.

Perhaps the signature moment in the run-up happened in early October, when both the Chancellor of the State System and APSCUF President Ken Mash did Facebook Live sessions for students and interested folks. Mash received over 81,000 views, and the comment thread was strongly positive. Mash’s “meeting” with the students was two weeks after Chancellor Frank Brogan had done his. Brogan’s video attracted about 15,000 viewers, and the comment thread was a mixture of the same practical questions faculty get (e.g., what will happen to the semester and student credits if there’s a strike) and derisiveness at his tone (e.g., “He talks to us like we’re three year olds”). In short, Brogan’s session went poorly, Mash’s went well, and it seemed clear who had the stronger relationship with the constituencies that mattered most directly.

The phenomenon is in some ways consistent with the surprising political victories of Donald Trump and the UK’s post-Brexit election in which the Labour Party significantly overperformed polls and pundit expectations. The “nobody saw this coming” part wasn’t true in our case, but Charlie Cooper’s point in *Politico*, writing about the UK election, is:

Newspapers and broadcasters also failed to pick up on the scale of the Labour surge coming down the track. Labour did however, dominate on social media channels. According to Campaign magazine, it had a much higher level of engagement on Facebook—around 80,000 to 100,000 engagements daily in the last week of the campaign, compared 30,000 to 40,000 for the Conservatives.

(Cooper)

I don’t claim that I’ve discovered anything new about mobilizing/organizing in social media. My argument is more about the ways that we were able to use social media in ways central to rhetoric: target our audiences very precisely and to construct them not just as recipients of information but as agents of circulating it (in concrete terms, students and alums circulating information, images,

videos, and so on, across social media platforms, some of which the union didn't even know about); and recognize (or if you're a defender of traditional mainstream media, abuse) the decreasing power of traditional news outlets by simply circumventing them. Yes, I see the parallel between this point and Donald Trump's insistence on "going directly to the people" in order to avoid "fake news" outlets.

Such a myopic focus is obviously not healthy over a longer term, as students leave and their families are less interested in university/union affairs. A challenge as we move into our future as a union that has struck successfully is to figure out how we maintain that relationship with those who leave our system. If we mean what we say about educating the future leaders of the Commonwealth, then sustaining healthy relationships with them seems like an opportunity we can't miss. Put another way, if social media organizing/activism works for *movement-building* because of the conditionality and context-dependency of *networks* (see, e.g., Tufekci's *Twitter and Tear Gas*; Rosen's "The People Formerly Known as Audience"; Brecher and Smith's "Is Social Networking Useless for Social Change?"), we can't expect those networks to outlive a generation of students or a contract negotiations cycle (which don't exactly but basically overlap) and have to also build something more permanent.

### **On the Line!**

In his chapter in this collection, Lee Artz argues that in a post-truth era, *speaking truth to power* is an exercise in futility. Never has that been more evident to me than standing on a picket line. Our union had been speaking the truth to the press, in negotiations, and so on for years, and it never seemed to register with decision-makers on the other side.

What they heard, finally, was power—the power of nearly 6,000 faculty marching, picketing, chanting, and getting hours of television coverage doing it; the power of thousands of students across the state standing with us (their organizing among themselves is a chapter I wish I could write); the power of preternaturally quiet campuses, as handfuls of students wandered around, managers and retired faculty (who could cross the line without any problem) checked to see if anybody was working, and staff (office and professional staff, grounds crews, janitorial services, housekeeping, nurses, and public safety officers are members of other unions) reported to work because Pennsylvania labor law requires them to. It was a powerful moment of "embodied argumentation" that Jason Del Gandio credits with these four functions (or impacts):

Such embodied argumentation does at least four things: it allows activists to critique social norms and practices; it allows activists to promote alternative norms and practices; it alters activists' own perceptions and understandings; and it implicates wider audiences. (2)

I'm particularly concerned with the last two. Members of the union still talk about how transformative the experience was, how we'd never seen or felt (or believed possible) the level of trust and caring we displayed for each other over those three days. Del Gandio contends:

[R]ebellion and resistance are embodied, sensory, and even joyful experiences. There is something unique about the co-presence of bodies acting together in public space. Collective public defiance heightens the senses and stimulates the body; one becomes more aware, alert, and enlivened; one's politics become enlivened. This kind of affective experience allures people to the action, builds a sense of collective identity, and further motivates people to act, resist, and disrupt. Such an experience can be very liberating. (4)

Or, as my friend and collaborator Robin Sowards put it in a comment on a Facebook post, "A strike is pretty much the only thing that makes the members \*feel\* a union in their gut" (Sowards).

That feeling, to be sure, was the product of the organizing and solidarity-building that we'd done over the course of nearly 18 months. On our campus (and my fellow Mobilization Chairs reported the same on their campuses), the turnout among faculty was overwhelming. We had scheduled picket duty carefully so nobody had more than a few hours at a time, but our Picket Chair and I were drafting an email to send over the weekend telling members that they needed to stick to their assigned scheduled times the following week; we were worried about burnout. Fortunately, the issue became moot when the settlement was announced later that day.

Throughout the strike, our bodies were (re)presented in photographs in newspapers around the state, on television news (all the Pennsylvania markets, plus New York and Washington, DC); the national higher education trade press (the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Inside Higher Ed*), and most importantly, as I argued earlier, all over social media. As videos of picketing faculty, and students with us—most spectacularly, marching bands at three universities joining picket lines at full blare—spread on Facebook and Twitter, the sense of momentum was overwhelming. I spent most of my time during the strike coordinating logistics in a nearby park; as a result, I got to see most of that social media coverage unfolding in real time. When I would make the rounds to the picket sites around our campus, I could show faculty what was happening everywhere else (e.g., "The Screen Actors Guild just sent a truckload of pizzas to Kutztown!"). The State System simply couldn't counter this effect, and our negotiations team reported seeing and hearing it during the final stages of the process. Presumably the State System's negotiators were too. Maybe my most visceral memory from the whole experience was on Friday (the last day) afternoon standing among a group of probably about 200 faculty, crammed shoulder-to-shoulder into a group that would show up all at once on television

cameras, chanting (yelling) “Get it done, Brogan! Get it done, Brogan!” for a good ten minutes. It was loud, physically imposing, and broadcast statewide. Within an hour, it was over.

### Aftermath and Future Considerations

In July 2017, nine months after the strike, now-former Chancellor Brogan announced his retirement. It’s hard to imagine that failing to break our strike didn’t have something to do with that. In October 2017, about nine months in advance of our current contract expiring (June 30, 2018), the union and the State System announced a one-year extension of the agreement. We’d like to believe the system’s willingness to negotiate this agreement so far in advance is an artifact of our success, if for no other reason than it signaled a willingness on the part of the State System to negotiate earlier and in better faith than anyone can remember over the last 40 years. And finally, although we haven’t built a permanent workers’ utopia, it’s fair to say that morale among the faculty across the system remains higher than most, if not all, of us can remember—because we listened to, and cared for, and trusted each other in ways small and large, over a long period of time, in textual and embodied rhetorical ways, across ranks and employment statuses, across disciplinary and institutional rivalries.

As we move forward, it’s important to situate the APSCUF strike in both the current moment of academic labor activism *and* the larger sociopolitical anti-union moment in which we live. In *We Are the Union*, Dana Cloud calls for a renewal of “militant unionism” as a way of breaking through too-comfortable relationships between management and workers they’ve co-opted (via fear, favoritism, and so on). I don’t think either Cloud or I would describe what APSCUF did as *militant*, but some members would. And/or, we can see the strike—from preparations through the ratification—as an act of *radical kindness*, a term I’m extrapolating from Beth Boquet:

Too often, we think of kindness as a quality someone either possesses or does not. We admire a kind person as a rare object. We speak of kindness as a random act, something that surprises us precisely because it is unusual, unexpected. Kindness, however, is really a habit, an orientation, something we practice and, indeed, can become better at. Kindness is something we practice in relation to community, and some kindnesses are not associated with any one individual but with a sense of collective purpose. (11)

Whatever term we use to describe that, it’s incumbent on the union’s leadership to convince our membership that *we did it*. Not just us, either: the faculty at Long Island University–Brooklyn withstood a 12-day management lockout in September 2016, forcing a contract agreement the union believes was at least



reasonable (Jaschik). Other faculty (and K-12 teacher union) strikes, perhaps most notably the Chicago Teachers' Union in 2012, have established a frame within which teachers/faculty who strike aren't doing it "for the money" or "because we're greedy" but because we all recognize that our working conditions are students' learning conditions (yes, it's a trope) and defending them is not about ourselves. We struck over issues of operational control over curriculum and staffing, and to protect shared governance over hiring, renewal, tenure/promotion, and evaluation procedures. We struck to make sure departments and curricula couldn't get undone by people who don't know anything about either, and without regard for students who depend on stability in order to finish.

However, the threat to public unions may require that we do enact more of that kind of solidarity, more aggressively and frequently. As I was drafting this chapter, the Supreme Court had agreed to hear the *Janus v AFSCME Council 31* case, which they've decided. The decision undoes agency fees for public unions—the result of which is that non-members are entitled to union representation without having to pay for it. In response, we are ramping up membership and recruiting efforts in anticipation; all public unions are doing the same. Likewise, there is anti-labor legislation in every state legislature in the country, and even in the US Congress, that would (in one form or another) undercut unions' rights to bargain, grieve, arbitrate contract violations, strike, collect dues, and more. If unionism is going to survive the current onslaught, it's going to take union members doing every single thing we can to fight back the assault. Everything we know about network building, audiences, trusting, radical kindness, putting our bodies on the line, all of it we're going to need.

The good news is—we know how. *We've done it.*

## Notes

- 1 For more details of APSCUF history, see Kevin Mahoney's "You Can't Get There from Here" in this book's first edition.
- 2 See my "From Solidarity Invoked to Solidarity Built."
- 3 I presented this approach at a strike-training workshop APSCUF conducted in January 2013. The slideshow for that presentation is at <https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1fnRKW4k57ZZnKSJZxJjaBrOY-DA7n8nSjyVHsckx5Q/edit?usp=sharing>.

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## 12 Affect and Activism in the Rhetorical Context of the Post-Truth Era

*Catherine Chaput*

If you want to be well-embraced by the powers that be—if you want to become well-adjusted to injustice—don't opt for the Socratic alternative. That's not the one you want. You want to be Donald Trump.

(Cornel West 2009)

In the first edition of *Activism and Rhetoric*, I began my contribution by discussing Ronald Reagan who, at the time of the writing, was being memorialized as the great communicator whose wit, humanism, and clarion call to “tear down this wall” purportedly ended communism. Years later, there exists a similar media frenzy surrounding another President and his communication skills. Rather than being celebrated, President Donald J. Trump is often reproached for his contradictory statements, exaggerations, and outright lies. This discourse, we are told, heralds a new post-truth era. The discursive style of Presidential speech is not the only rhetorical element that has reconfigured itself in the contemporary context, however. Written in what was then called the age of globalization, my earlier piece explored the World Bank as one of the global economy's premier institutions. I attempted to tease out its strategic engagement with communist discourse in hopes of reproducing a counter discourse for anti-globalization activists. The heightened anti-globalization activism of Seattle 1999 seemed to have disappeared with the near national paralysis that took place in the wake of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. In this decidedly inactive moment, I thought activists might learn to appropriate some of the tactics of their adversaries. But history took another turn as enthusiasm swelled over the candidacy of Barack Obama. During the eight years of his presidency, and even more so since his successor took office, public protest has been on the rise. As Dana Cloud says, “the long period of political quietude that reigned through the Bush-Clinton-Bush years has ended, and, as in decades past, productive social and political unrest may again flourish” (21). The productivity of such unrest hinges on understanding its rhetorical context, one in which truth has been discarded for felt identifications and antagonisms.

Given the shift from the great communicator to the advocate of “truthful hyperbole” as well as from quietude to unrest, my contribution to the second

edition of this collection redirects its attention from a huge international lending organization like the World Bank to the circulation of neoliberal energy that replaces the search for truth with the process of affective identification, emboldening some groups and indicting others. As an academic, I am interested both in how intellectual production contributes to this context and how it might reconstitute the terrain of rhetorical engagement. This focus is driven by the belief that the current post-truth moment represents the appropriation of leftist scholarship on behalf of a neoliberal agenda. Contrary to a singular milieu that all speakers inhabit equally, the discerning post-truth context welcomes only certain members of the diverse public sphere. As a wealthy, white, male, Trump has the privilege to voice decidedly untrue claims, speak authoritatively on subjects about which he knows little to nothing, and break political protocol as well as the rules of good communication in ways that others do not. To understand the uneven landscape of our post-truth world, this chapter briefly surveys the intellectual history of neoliberalism as a form of political activism, explores its superficial use of intellectual ideas against the substantive problematizing work of scholarly inquiry, locates affect as one of its key strategies, and concludes with a suggestion to reorient our own activist projects from the lens of truth to the biopolitical production of oppositional collectives.

As is well documented, the political economic structure of neoliberalism was crafted by an international group of business leaders, economists, philosophers, and journalists who came together immediately after World War II to form the Mont Pèlerin society. After almost two decades of strategizing, their seeds were put into production—they were economically planted in the early 1970s, politically cultivated in the 1980s, and culturally sown in the 1990s (Van Horn and Mirowski; Harvey; Ventura). This history reveals the long-term relationship among intellectuals and practitioners to produce the terrain in which a businessman highly adjusted to the injustices of the free market, as West's prescient comment in the epigraph suggests, can assume the Presidency of the United States, fill his administration with billionaires, support racialized sentiments, eschew diplomatic protocol, and peddle what his administration calls "alternative facts" based on a surrogate reality. Of course, neoliberalism has never been without its opponents. In the late 1990s, for instance, people who were feeling the results of a deteriorating welfare state took to the streets in protest against some of the biggest institutional arms of this political economic colonization. As oppositional politics highlighted the disastrous policies of the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund, it seemed important to understand the rhetorical strategies that helped such large institutions appeal to so many citizens across the globe. The strategy I highlighted in the first edition was the appropriation of Marxist theory and its divergent representations on behalf of capitalist historiography. Today, in a different historical moment, there is an even more clear and egregious appropriation of oppositional theory on behalf of the most powerful individuals and corporations across the globe. Although it feels shocking to see the World Bank affirm Marx and Engels's *Communist Manifesto*, as it did in its

1996 World Development Report, the borrowing of leftist ideas on behalf of conservative agendas is a much more widespread phenomenon.

Neoliberalism, which began as an interdisciplinary intellectual pursuit in collaboration with both the private sphere of business and the public sphere of media production, emerged in universities, but spread through the activist strategies of organizing, protesting, and publicizing. [Editors' note: See Mahoney, this volume, pp. 117–119 for details on this network in the United States.] As West explains:

Under the Reagan years, you actually then had right-wing social movements and right-wing organizations penetrating the academic in such a *powerful* way—learning their lessons from the left, but using it for right-wing purposes with their independent networks of think tanks and various foundations. (559)

Using the strategies honed by the left, Milton Friedman, for instance, attended the founding of the Mont Pèlerin society, helped found the influential American Enterprise Institute, worked with the Reagan administration to influence legislation, wrote popular economics books, and produced a multipart television documentary on the virtues of free market capitalism. Through these almost invisible practices, the political economic climate that allowed conservative President Richard Nixon to assert that we are all Keynesians mutated into one in which unrestrained free marketism became the irreproachable doctrine of American democracy. Following his colleague Friedrich Hayek, Friedman indicted Keynesianism as an intellectual fiction that flies in the face of the facts on the ground. Asserting that intellectuals falsely presume to know all economic factors while the general public actually possesses truth in an unarticulated and tacit form, these economic activists significantly rewrote the rhetorical terrain.<sup>1</sup>

This new political economic climate became even more ossified post-9-11, making those intellectuals who had the audacity to critically interrogate the United States and its institutions targets of the now highly organized network of conservative activists. Take the case of ethnic studies scholar Ward Churchill, for example. Shortly after the terrorists attacks, Churchill likened the class of investment bankers working in the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center to “little Eichmanns” as a way to highlight how financial workers uncritically follow professional practices without regard to how those practices affect others. Although the appropriateness of this analogy can be debated, the task of drawing critical attention to our participation in the world and its consequences reflects the historical role of humanist studies; clearly, Churchill serves the questioning function of intellectualism that neoliberals so despise. Originally written as an opinion piece for an online publication, his controversial comparison was unearthed by a faculty member at Hamilton College where Churchill was scheduled to speak. After the student newspaper ran a story highlighting Churchill's three-year-old statement, it was picked up by a nearby Syracuse newspaper, the *Wall Street Journal*, and eventually, Fox News's

*The O'Reilly Factor*. The faculty member who discovered the statement was collaborating with David Horowitz's Center for the Study of Popular Culture, which was housed in the larger Students for Academic Freedom project, both of which mobilize the same "fair and balanced" branding that became the hallmark of *The O'Reilly Factor*. This multilayered conservative apparatus extended the context of Churchill's speaking invitation both back in time to the events of 9/11 and across the landscape of political commentary.

This strategic extension of a situated comment penalized a well-known leftist intellectual as a way to undermine broad scholarly investigations into historical and contemporary truth-making, and it did so by using specifically leftist strategies. First, it used coalition politics by working through a highly efficient activist structure that included Horowitz's organizations, national news outlets, think tanks, and other groups. Second, it used language—the study of popular culture and academic freedom, for instance—that emerged from and had become commonplace through leftist organizing. Like all borrowings, however, these activists redeployed them in unique ways. Whereas cultural studies began as a valorization of working-class cultural production and its often-critical engagement with established culture, this popular culture work taps into what Raymond Williams calls the "structures of feeling" among working-class individuals in order to suppress that critical edge. Similarly, whereas academic freedom traditionally has been the umbrella under which controversial intellectual inquiry takes shelter, Horowitz's Academic Freedom Project serves to reassert the conservative position as the boundary for legitimate scholarly inquiry.<sup>2</sup>

Using leftist oppositional strategies to undermine leftist agendas, this loose conservative cooperation propelled the University of Colorado (Churchill's home institution) to dismiss one of its leading, tenured, full professors. Masquerading as academic dishonesty, the formal charges against Churchill sanctioned his leftist political activism—they attacked his pamphleteering, his ghost writing, and his interpretation of America's anti-Indian policies (Churchill). The university transformed his leftist orientation into the dismissible charge of academic dishonesty, quarantining both truth and reality within a conservative worldview. Amazingly, this was all accomplished through a precipitating event—his scheduled lecture—that never took place. The right-wing protest against his talk erupted *before* he arrived and resulted in its cancellation, and his own university's response to the controversy sprung up "not in response to substantive pressure from the right, but purely in *anticipation* of it" (Churchill 147). These anticipatory responses reflect what Brian Massumi calls a politics of "preemption" (9). Lacking an event to which one responds (an objectionable speech, for instance), this politics manufactures its own reality: it "compensates for the absence of an actual cause by producing a present effect in its place" (Massumi 15). In order to do this, the imagined future threat—a leftist intellectual rallying students against American values—is "affectively held in the present in a perpetual state of potential emergence(y)" (Massumi 15). In this case, a three-year-old comment lying dormant in the vast archives of cyberspace returns to life in the form of an imminent crisis that requires

immediate response. Asserting that alternative viewpoints, such as Churchill's, threaten American democracy, conservative politics uses this manufactured danger to produce a collective victimhood.<sup>3</sup>

Shifting antagonisms from inequality to material affectivity, this conservative appropriation of leftist strategies reconstitutes the grounds of activist politics. No doubt, political advocacy has always used rhetoric to negotiate material questions. In the introduction to *What Democracy Looks Like*, Amy Pason and her coauthors cite such antagonisms as the "ontological condition for social change rhetoric" (15). So conceived, materiality reflects the lived experiences of individuals—their working conditions, their cultural production, and the political power afforded through these—and rhetoric emerges as an advocacy tool. The need to advocate rhetorically on behalf of such material issues may be more necessary than ever given the growing economic inequity and environmental impact of neoliberalism. However, because social change results from "organized classes struggling within the parameters set by a given historical situation," the contextual grounds of materiality must be constantly reassessed (Macek 233). Indeed, the election of a well-known and well-connected billionaire on the paradoxical "outsider" platform, the liquidation of truth from political deliberation, and the construction of alternative realities among diverse constituents all indicate the need to interrogate our material foundations including those affective energies surging through and orienting our lived environments.

Daniel Brouwer and Marie-Louise Paulesec highlight the problems that arise when our analyses do not reflect the contextual realities of rhetorical situations we study. In particular, they caution against too quickly identifying diverse struggles across the global as counterpublic manifestations. The public-counterpublic dyad, they remind us, has a specifically Western history; using this framework to study other sites imposes that history and thus functions as a kind of "conceptual neocolonialism" (76). Building off this argument, I suggest that the post-truth era and the rise of Donald Trump's diverse coalition stems from the opposite movement. These conservative groups are cultural pirates of activist strategies just as the corporations they support are cultural pirates of indigenous products. Rather than imposing intellectual frameworks through "conceptual neocolonialism," they appropriate and redeploy intellectual insights through practices of "conceptual imperialism." They use the postmodern critique of metanarratives to destabilize alternative truth claims; they use first amendment rights and academic freedom to silence academic dissent and re-establish a single version of American history; and they mobilize diverse coalitions around a felt sense of victimhood in order to redefine diversity as discrimination. This conceptual imperialism sucks the affective life out of leftist politics in order to fuel its conservative opponents. To oppose these politics by grounding ourselves in truths, decrying free expression, and attacking emotional attachment as irrational unravels decades of arguments for progressive politics by redisciplining our rhetoric with the problematic dichotomy between fact and fiction.

Instead of wielding these familiar arguments, we might be more successful by borrowing from the affective production of this conservative activism. Many scholarly activists on the left have experienced the same learning curve that Dana Cloud describes in her reflective essay on the importance of on-the-ground interactions with, rather than distanced study of, activist struggles. As she says, “activists have educated me about social movements, not the other way around” (18). A truism of any organized struggle, her reflection is meant to curb the impulse to appoint ourselves as the privileged members of such politics. This essay has attempted to extend the purview of this important lesson by arguing that we have as much or more to learn from interacting with those activists we oppose as we do from those we support. Our tendency is to deconstruct the problematic ideologies of those groups we oppose and celebrate those we endorse. When we do this, we deprive ourselves of the opportunity to learn from and creatively engage the activist practices of our opponents. Consequently, we might benefit from releasing our grip on truth so as to focus on the struggle over affectively tuned dispositions. As Cornel West, one of the most engaged activist scholars of our moment, explains it, political engagement requires substantive, context-bound, long-term struggle for “the cultivation of self and the maturation of souls dealing with history and reality and morality” (West 563). In this broader view, political activism cannot be reduced to a single, utilitarian victory like pressuring President Trump to admit any of his many falsehoods or even blocking the repeal of universal health care. Instead, says West, political struggle is about “the kind of human being you want to be” (570). In our post-truth context, rhetoricians would do well to help cultivate morally courageous speakers and actors and not just illuminate single issues.

## Notes

- 1 In *Fatal Conceit*, for instance, Hayek argues that individuals correctly intuit market information from their local contexts and Friedman develops his positivist methodology around this notion of implicit action that correlates to correct mathematical decision-making. See his “The Methodology of Positive Economics.”
- 2 For a discussion of the conservative intellectual agenda proposed by Horowitz’s project and its collaboration with Lynn Cheney’s ACTA group, see Karen Powers and Catherine Chaput.
- 3 This incident exemplifies what Leah Ceccarelli cites as the rhetorical production of a manufactured controversy.

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## Part IV

# Re-Theorizing Activist Rhetoric

While earlier sections have been impelled by more concretely material organizing principles (locations/venues for organizing; audiences, technologies for reaching them; etc.), the chapters in this section tend toward the more explicitly theoretical. Lee Artz updates his original chapter with an even clearer call to “speak power” and increased clarity (with nine years of retrospect) on how efforts to do so have looked and felt and worked; Rodrick Schubert and Omar Swartz offer a detailed account of Jane Addams’s New Federalism as a model for organizing local political power into recognizable governing units; Charles Bazerman updates his narrative of discovering *the personal is historical* and understanding the affordances of middle-class-ness as an activist; Madrone Kalil Schutten offers a different alternative to the regime of reason from Lee Artz, articulating a holistic, restorative rhetoric grounded in, but not limited to, environmental activism; and Dana Cloud closes the section by renewing her call to “change it,” even (as she adds in a new section) when opponents directly threaten your safety.

Veteran activist-turned academic/rhetoric scholar, Lee Artz’s “Speaking the Power of Truth: Rhetoric and Action for Our Times” is a revision of his original chapter, clarifying and extending his original point that the “speak truth to power” trope is limited by the fact that the powerful generally already know (or don’t care) about the truth; our task as rhetoricians is to “speak power”:

Rather than communicating with those in power who benefit from the already known truth of wage exploitation and social inequality, humanity would be better served by conversations among those [working people, the vast majority of the world] who will benefit from creating new truths, new powers. (169)

While we can’t depend on truth to win just because it’s true, we can and must build solidarity that creates power in response to exploitation and abuse.

New to this edition, Rodrick Schubert and Omar Swartz’s “Tradition and Transformation in Jane Addams’s New Federalism: Creating Community Sphere by Empowering Municipalities” recalls Jane Addams’s intellectual

and political legacies, especially her vision of social justice, which the authors call “civic liberalism” or “new federalism.” The authors claim that Addams’s University Settlement House movement provides a model/vision for a democratic liberal society by “life-long civic engagement through an intentional community ... grounded in a shared responsibility and commitment to others” (173).

A “tale in pursuit of morality,” Charles Bazerman’s “The Work of a Middle-Class Activist: Stuck in History” describes the struggle that many academics face reconciling middle-class privilege with the impulse to represent (make a better inhabitable world but sometimes inadvertently dominate) others in our various social milieu. Bazerman gently reminds us to “act beyond” with the acknowledgement that “history is what unfolds around us by our being part of it. If we must resign ourselves to being in history, we have no choice but to be active in the ways our own dim and flickering lights dictate” (200).

Another brand new contribution, Madrone Kalil Schutten’s “Social Justice Activists, Environmental Fatigue, and the Restorative Practices of Doing ‘The Work That Reconnects’” describes her environmental activism, particularly the healing practices of magick. Particularly meaningful is her discussion/ritual of the rhetoric of grief and the re-languaging of vernaculars that honor/heal the suffering of burnout or compassion fatigue with new (intuitive, earthly) eyes, which in turn helps “members continue their sustained activism by providing a sacred space to heal wounds from sustained political action” (208). She proposes a new way to face the post-truth era and continuous environmental crisis; not reinvigorating the rigor of “hard” science but cultivating internatural communication and a new environmental ethic of care.

Originally the lead chapter in the first edition, Dana Cloud’s “[Still] the Only Conceivable Thing To Do: Reflections on Academics and Activism” narrates her experiences as an activist academic, reflecting on the successes and frustrations she has faced over more than a decade of working on LGBTQ, anti-capitalist, and anti-war efforts. Cloud advocates a practical-activist scholarship, informed by social movements, which puts ideas “in the service of historical education, political analysis, and collective action” (217). Cloud helps readers frame the complexities—personal, institutional, and theoretical—of taking on activist work, arguing in the end that nothing but commitment to large-scale social change, by grassroots organizing and social movements, will get us through the periods when our work isn’t paying off in discernable outcomes—a conclusion she extends in this edition by detailing personal and professional risks she’s faced in the last few years, and encouraging us to confront those.

# 13 Speaking the Power of Truth

## Rhetoric and Action for Our Times

*Lee Artz*

News about fake news is fake news. It is a maneuver by media pundits and political operatives to distract the public from the very real fake history that they are peddling. Indeed, power largely depends on fake history for public support. The United States sent 500,000 Americans to war on Vietnam, killing hundreds of thousands, in part, justified by a Vietnamese Gulf of Tonkin attack that never happened. In the 1980s, the United States directed a contra war against the democratically elected Nicaraguan government under the fear of Soviet military expansion that did not exist. The US rallied support for invading Iraq in 1990, falsely claiming that Iraqi soldiers killed “incubator babies” in Kuwait. Clinton blockaded Iraq, killing more than 500,000 children, claiming a threat that did not exist. The United States brought “shock and awe” to Iraq again in 2003 ostensibly to preempt “weapons of mass destruction” that did not exist. Obama launched weekly drone attacks around the Middle East, killing hundreds of civilians, against imagined threats. Pointing to fake dangers to public safety and jobs, Obama and Trump deported hundreds of thousands. In each case, and always, power knows the truth. Corporate and government power continually make feeble attempts to obscure facts and distract the public from the very real conditions of inequality, racism, and war. Their rhetorical appeals based on lies temporarily act to confuse and disorient many. At the same time, inequality is so severe and the disparity in resources for communicating so profound that rhetoric for social justice seldom appears in the mass media.

Under the real conditions of unequal access to communication, rhetorical constructions by government officials are almost universally distributed over the airwaves, by the daily press, and even on social media. Post-truth has become the new norm. In this context, there is no meaningful democratic public debate or discourse. Democracy as a political goal and social process has been trashed by media agenda setting, media framing, and myriad public relations, news, and fake news operations organized by government agencies. The ideal speech situation, the democratic sphere, imagined by rhetorical theorists can only be realized within and among democratic social movements that challenge existing power—not by speaking truth to that power—but by speaking

the power of our new truth: we are the majority, we must collectively argue, debate, and decide how to save humanity. Conditions of life for millions of world citizens in the 21st century indicate that for democracy to exist, the economic and political power of corporate capitalism must be replaced with a just society. Rhetorical appeals are needed that can organize actions for social justice, yet argument, discussion, and even investigations cannot occur freely in the contemporary world capitalism order.

History attests that established power seldom is moved by what is rational, good, or ideal for humanity. Yet, resisting and replacing illegitimate power cannot be reduced to punching a Nazi. Lone anarchist attacks on racists and right-wing nationalists do not educate, persuade, organize, or mobilize the millions of citizens needed for social change. The rhetorical effect of antifa bravado echoes superhero movies that counsel citizen inaction and reliance on individual heroes. While the majority of young adults reject capitalism, many may even applaud the dramatic display of antiracism, but remain politically inactive, seduced by the two capitalist political parties and concerned with their own consumerist needs. The relationship between rhetoric and action, and the true power of democracy, appears more pragmatically and theoretically effective in the August 2017 mass demonstration against white supremacy in Boston that sent the handful of neo-fascists scurrying in the face of organized democratic power. In San Francisco, the public call by Local 10 of the International Longshore Workers Association for area unions, workers, and citizens to join their protest led the “patriotic” racists to cancel their march. Likewise, the mass response to the killings of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, Trayvon Martin, and hundreds of other victims of racist police violence, has launched a national movement against racist practices, celebrations, and monuments. The rhetorical appeal of each of these mass actions trumpets engagement, dialog, action by the democratic majority. Such actions rhetorically inspire many to more actions and organized democratic power, while symbolically highlighting the socioeconomic, geographic, racial, and other conditions of class inequality. In collective actions, the truth of our power becomes more apparent. Meanwhile, continued fake news and well-crafted public relations campaigns attempt to legitimize and reinforce the current social order, obscuring social class difference, including all of its gender, ethnic, racial, and class contradictions. The question for those intent on defending the social order and for those seeking social justice is how their persuasive appeals affect social and political action.

Most theoreticians and practitioners of rhetoric and social activism accept that rhetoric is a “rationale of instrumental and symbolic action” (Bowers and Ochs 1) crucial for initiating and motivating human action. Unfortunately, prevalent discourse theory (Mumby) and contemporary liberal reform groups (e.g., [www.MoveOn.org](http://www.MoveOn.org); [www.indivisibleguide.com](http://www.indivisibleguide.com)) accept existing social relations and social structures in need of new leadership or minor reform. Their rhetorical appeals reflect as much and reinforce the very conditions of

inequality they tepidly address. My experience in antiwar movements, civil rights campaigns, labor struggles, and international solidarity actions prompts a different emphasis that rejects speaking truth to power, one that recognizes capitalist class relations in all of their contradictory effects, one that seeks the power of truth mobilized by the democratic majority.

One basic assumption notes that persuasion depends on an attentive audience response, but what conditions allow for audience reception or even recognition of an appeal? Rhetorical exigencies, urgent social problems, trigger calls for possible solutions (Bitzer). But what makes a problem more or less urgent? Not the rhetorical appeal by itself. It must conform to the needs and interests of the audience, filtered through existing social norms and cultural values. Publics come to each rhetorical situation with pre-existing interests and needs as they understand them. Interests and needs always have prior impulses informed by prior rhetorical appeals and cultural beliefs. Still, no matter how they have been cultivated, interests and needs always arise from the sociopolitical conditions being lived at the historic moment of crisis.

This may be dismissed by those who do not accept material reality, but I suggest that whether any rhetoric can prompt social action depends in large part on how well it addresses the sociopolitical conditions of those involved. Social action arises in response to rhetorical appeals that address the life experiences of those affected, life experiences that occur individually, but in the aggregate depend on social relations, social position, and social power. Peer groups, social interactions, expectations, understandings, skills, aptitudes, tastes, and other characteristics and proclivities, result from the concrete historical conditions of one's life. We benefit or suffer from our social class position: we speak Spanish, Chinese, or English depending on our upbringing; we are well educated or not depending on our families and neighborhoods; police harass or defer to us depending on our social class and apparent racial identities. In short, the cogency of an exigence and the possible response to any rhetorical appeal are first and foremost framed by one's relation to the condition and the proposed solution—relations dependent on the larger social order that precedes our individual recognition. We are born into conditions not of our own making; we cultivate ourselves in the existing social relations; we interactively are socialized into the mores, norms, and practices that cradle our existence. Available resources, including language, material culture, social interests, and their relations frame and inform whatever specific, historically contingent social order we enter. Thus, the response to any condition of life may range from a dramatically pressing exigence, to a minor irritation, to complete unawareness—depending on one's social position and development.

While once-in-a-century hurricanes may threaten the lives of all in their path, the aftermath presents radically different exigencies. For many, survival is a daily question; for others with more resources, relocation is a realistic option; and for a few, extreme profits can be made from rebuilding after the disaster to others. The executive order by Obama to deport immigrant children

from Honduras and the Trump threat to dismantle the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals that allows immigrant children to postpone deportation and apply for work permits have different exigencies, pose a different problem, depending on one's social position. Archer Daniels Midland (ADM), Perdue Chicken, and GOP or Democratic operatives are affected differently and respond differently to those executive orders than will Homeland Security, anti-immigrant militia in Arizona, undocumented youth, or their high school science teacher. What is the exigence? What action addresses what problem? Will ADM and Perdue raise prices on corn and chicken to defray costs from employment disruption? Will Homeland Security hire more enforcement police? Will neighbors and friends of DACA youth oppose the order and shelter immigrants? Will schools and teachers block government inquiries? The exigence of immigration policy obviously is different for those in different social positions, to those with different economic, political, and ideological interests. The effectiveness of any rhetorical appeal transcends the rational argument, because the exigence itself depends on the social interests of diverse social positions.

What is the "exigence" of a "runaway" slave? This posed a different problem for a banker, slaveholder, sharecropper who witnesses the liberated, the police charged with the capture. . . . For the former slave, the "runaway" is no exigence at all! It is the rational solution to the condition of slavery. A banker, however, considers the loss of chattel wealth a serious problem in need of resolution. Others, neither slave nor master, have less immediate self-interest, but, nonetheless, may be influenced or constrained by the legal, cultural, religious, and other experiential factors responding variously as witnesses, abettors of the Underground Railroad, or legal and social apologists for slavery—loosely paralleling the "habitus" of their social position (Bourdieu). Indeed, many nurtured in the culture of slavery sought to avoid resistance to human bondage out of fear, apathy, and even confusion, as well as those that benefitted from what W.E.B. DuBois called "white skin privilege."

In more contemporary crises, the US invasions and occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, of the bombings of Libya and Syria, and drone attacks in all of those countries, plus Pakistan, Syria, and the Sudan, pose different problems for different social classes and national groups—inconsistently reflected in their identification or agreement with a variety of political arguments and actions. For or against US wars, Halliburton and Lockheed shareholders and Hill & Knowlton PR account managers confront a dramatically different set of decisions than a National Guardsmen sent to Kandahar or a college professor, and all of those are radically at odds with the exigencies pummeling citizens being bombarded. The rhetorical situation may appear the same—for or against a US war—but the possible consequential actions entail some extremely unequal behavioral choices. Will Halliburton accountants assist in privatizing Iraq or overcharging the Pentagon? Will Hill & Knowlton interns contribute to propaganda spin? Will the soldier report to duty, shoot, kill, bomb? Will the

professor incorporate the war into a syllabus, speak out at a student forum? Such choices are not equivalent. Undoubtedly, each choice is more or less informed by the same facts and arguments culled from the debate—a debate that occurs under restricted political conditions and is witnessed largely according to one's social position that both accords or restricts access (to multiple media sources, the Internet, and cultural milieu) and predilection (skill, norms, cultural milieu). Access and preference in knowledge acquisition are only rough indicators of other social differences. Attitudes toward Obama's drone attacks and US missile attacks on Syria are influenced by persuasive appeals—to the extent that news and information is available and to the extent that rhetorical appeals resonate with one's cultural and social positions. Citizens (who have already internalized dominant cultural values from two decades of militarization and normalization) evaluate the arguments and claims (that they hear from their reinforcing preferred media) from disparate social positions that afford diverse and contradictory experiences, consciousness, and constraints. Simply put, we might expect that: shareholders seek profits; publicists promote clients; soldiers obey; and professors stick to the curriculum. Each choice is organized by the social order, its structures, practices, and social relations, with some variety depending on individual social positions: soldiers do their duty; professors don't shout; publicists don't question a client's ethics or campaign; the market is god; and patriotism is natural ... unless the exigent crisis is so severe that it disrupts everyday life allowing social movements to disrupt the social relations of power, cultural norms, and ideological justifications.

The ability to receive and perceive rhetorical appeals is based on one's rhetorical experience, but that rhetorical experience occurs within a culturally defined space at a historically specific time. The language, images, and representations that are most readily understood parallel the experiences of one's historical condition. Charlotte Beers and the US State Department failed in their PR campaign for Muslim support in the Middle East because no rhetorical trope exists that could shake the visceral, and very real, experience of “shock-and-awe” violence against civilians. Bombing the Middle East convinces more of US intentions than all the lame rhetorical assertions of defending democracy and freedom. Bombs, troops, and drones are more rhetorically convincing than any persuasive leaflet dropped from the same planes that dropped bombs the day before.

Rhetoric will not stop the next hurricane headed for the Atlantic Coast, nor do hurricanes stop for those that don't believe in climate change. Some social conditions have the same inexorable material properties. Talk will not, by itself, stop war, inequality, oppression, or environmental destruction. Nor will the failure to perceive inequality, injustice, or climate change make them any less real. Rhetoric may enable the privileged to turn away, but for those that suffer the condition remains calling out for concerted action.

This understanding by no means dismisses rhetoric, the classic art of discovering all the means of persuasion. Indeed, a full appreciation of rhetoric



means including “all” the means. Privileging argument without regard to social class puts the world at peril. We must not omit the social relations of power in which and through which all rhetoric must pass. Capitalist hegemony built on popular consent needs us to accept the rhetoric of the marketers: hyper-individualism; narcissism; immediate self-gratification; bottom line profits over social needs; and the corporate model for all decisions—from health care and air quality to class size and curriculum, to “infinity and beyond!” to quote a Disney icon. But in the words of an HBO icon, “winter is coming” for global capitalism.

Activists seeking to save our species, close the hole in the ozone, end US occupations and attacks on countless nations, abolish race discrimination, replace patriarchy, or simply pass a school referendum need a more class-conscious rhetoric. They, *we*, need an effective, history-changing, history-producing rhetoric addressed to and constructed with the participation of working people, the vast democratic majority of the world. The ingredients of this rhetoric for social change and social justice must begin by addressing the conditions of the disenfranchised and the oppressed, fully and truthfully, by stating clearly that overcoming social inequality requires changing the social relations of power by replacing capitalism. Who leads, what political program, what democracy? A rhetoric of social change proposes a working-class leadership that puts people before profits, a political program of solidarity and action with all of the oppressed, and decision-making by and benefits for all of humanity.

In the 21st century, for the first time in history, humanity has the means and resources for feeding all, housing all, playing music for all. Technology for humanity can shorten the work week and the drudgery of work, if it’s democratically directed. Currently, neoliberal globalization—the accumulation of wealth by the dispossession of the many (Harvey), shareholder profits, and government coercion against the majority—prevents the realization of global democracy. A rhetoric that is truly audience-centered, truly reciprocal and democratic would speak to the power of change and to the truth of the majority.

I arrive at this conclusion, not just from study and training—some have even argued that this position is evidence of a lack of scholarly ability. I reach this profound understanding from experience, reflection, and dialog with others, in validation of Paolo Freire’s pedagogy of the oppressed, with a class consciousness resulting from evidence witnessed by the successes of ongoing social movements for change.

Speaking power to truth is one lesson from my years as a participant and occasional leader of antiwar campaigns on Vietnam, Nicaragua, Iraq, of civil rights efforts for schools and in labor, of struggles for democracy and improved working conditions, and of mass solidarity campaigns for African liberation and in defense of the efforts toward a 21st-century socialism in Venezuela, Bolivian, and Ecuador. I was convinced of the radical perspectives of these movements by the effective rhetoric of others that resonated with my social

position and experience as a working-class youth, a working-class college student in integrated social circles at the peak of civil rights activity and black nationalist organization—from King to Malcolm to the Panthers and Stokely. Friends and collaborators in these efforts articulated well with music, sport, social life, and daily conversations. Before knowing of rhetorical theory, I learned the art of persuasion at cafeteria tables, dorm lounges, local clubs, street corners, and campus debates. The US war in Vietnam affected daily life: family, classmates, childhood friends faced the draft and then the violence. My initial ambivalence was resolved by letters from Kris Blumer, a friend drafted to Vietnam, who wrote of the horror and hypocrisy of the US occupation. Members of the corporate and business classes did not and could not receive such letters, because draftees in their majority were working class and front line troops in their overwhelming majority were working class. Elites like George Bush and Donald Trump received deferments, excuses, officer training. The letters from Kris were persuasive, real not fake news. His letters complemented the rhetorical appeals of the mass antiwar organizations. The ultraleft Students for a Democratic Society (the Black Bloc of the times) faded, as mass, peaceful demonstrations demanding “US Out Now!” represented and recruited the majority of American citizens (Halstead). Experiences conditioned by my social position opened a pathway for antiwar rhetoric; I became a member officer, state and regional leader of the National Peace Action Coalition, responsible for press, public speaking, public debate, organization, and persuasion. As a draft age, draft-eligible, but non-draft-dodging, antiwar working-class youth, my experiences contradicted the accepted claims and news of the war before many others reached those same conclusions. From 1969 to 1971, as the material consequences of Vietnamese resistance disrupted the insularity and confusion of the majority of Americans, leading antiwar rhetoric became convincing because the appeals met the changing conditions of everyday life in the United States.

After graduation, I became a public school teacher in Detroit. I was immediately part of school desegregation conversations and campaigns because my earlier interactions with Black family and friends on race and Vietnam, higher education, and daily life connected well with my everyday classroom experiences and the rhetoric of equality in education, critical pedagogy, school desegregation, and affirmative action. I transitioned from college student and middle school teacher and from leading antiwar actions and battles for school desegregation in Detroit and Boston (Hillson) to become a steelworker and machinist active in labor reform (Nyden). I shared the experiences of many other working-class youth. Although the commercial media and most schools filter information contradicting the ideological claims of market power and its government contract, many of my peers missed hearing the exceptional rhetorical appeals that I encountered, appeals that would have resonated with them, appeals that could have changed their social consciousness and political perspectives, appeals that passed unheeded by the more privileged youth. In

short, rhetoric must be seen, understood, and acted on; rhetoric for change must meet the needs of those capable and interested in changing social relations of power, to find their own power to make a new truth.

This short biographical account closes with how a working-class youth, a participant in mass social movements, also became a reluctant academic. Fifteen years as a machinist and union member working for union democracy in the steelworkers' union, affirmative action, solidarity with Central American revolution, and improved labor contracts ends with a battle over a plant closing, a precursor to the disruptions of globalization and technology. Our plant closed but not before the local union won major severance benefits in health care, retirement, and education. Most of my co-workers opted for training in HVAC or electronics; I chose to improve communication for the union, to learn how to appeal to members and allies misinformed by the media and corporations. The process ended in a graduate degree, while opportunities for union work as a machinist disappeared. So, here I am, a hybrid, organic intellectual in Gramscian terms, in a new privileged social position, but personally informed and motivated by decades of experiences campaigning for a better world.

My experience informs my understanding, my knowing, and places me against the stream of the poststructuralist, postmodernist, rhetorical turn, against immaterial cultural studies and identity politics. Hence, I replied to what I found to be misguided and irresponsible claims by Ernest Laclau and Chantal Moufée in the case of the Nicaraguan revolution (Artz), for example. I offered a materialist-based rhetorical analysis: rhetoric was not the reason Nicaraguans removed the Somoza dictatorship in 1979, nor was rhetoric the reason the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) grew from a dozen in 1962 to win 75% of the popular vote in 1984, the first democratic election in Nicaragua, then to be displaced by a US-backed regime in 1990. Rhetoric provided the spark only when the material culture was mature. As the working class grew, the agricultural working class politically matured, the capitalist classes were betrayed by Somoza, the professional middle class found no satisfactory accommodation to the dictatorship, and the Christian life of the working classes found Liberation Theology, which spoke to their everyday conditions; then—and only then—the FSLN led the Nicaraguan revolution. In 1962, the rhetoric of the FSLN meant little, was heard by few; in 1978—a unique conjunctural moment in history having to do with rapidly changing social class relations, including the political and economic contradictions of international capitalism—the FSLN found the material ground necessary for their rhetorical and political leadership. Notably, as class relations, size, power, experience, and alliances changed (including changes in international class relations in the form of US intervention), the FSLN rhetoric remained static, out of step with the new social relations of class power in Nicaragua and the world. Anti-Somoza rhetoric forged a revolution, it offered no guide for building a new democratic order. By 1990, the FSLN was retreating from its nascent

revolutionary program, assaulted by the US–contra war and unable to delineate a program for a new Nicaragua. Since then, the FSLN has fragmented, former FSLN leader Daniel Ortega was elected president again, but this time with a populist rhetoric that accommodates neoliberalism.

Meanwhile, the dynamics of the Bolivarian socialist project in Venezuela and the success of working class and indigenous social movements in Bolivia and Ecuador create political space for the resurgence of more radical politics in Nicaragua and elsewhere. In every case, the trajectory and outcome depend on the social relations of material power, not simply the rhetorical flourishes of charismatic leaders. Indeed, the modern history of Venezuela belies reliance on rhetoric absent social conditions. Hugo Chavez attempted an ill-advised coup in 1992, a bold *antifa*-style adventure that had found no popular support, but his return as a candidate in the 1998 elections resonated with a more politically active population. Chavez replaced his heroic epic with a new rhetoric of participatory democracy, community-based parallel institutions, and 21st-century socialism. Millions answered the Chavez rhetorical call to overcome the political corruption, economic malaise, and inequality of capitalism. Delivering policies and programs for literacy, employment, housing, education, media access, and participatory cultural change, the Chavez rhetoric was on solid, practical ground with empirical evidence supporting his appeals. In contrast the limits of rhetoric can be easily discerned when comparing Lula and Rouseff in Brazil and the Kirchners in Argentina with Chavez and Maduro in Venezuela. In Argentina and Brazil, rhetoric substituted for actual social change; in Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador, the rhetoric of 21st-century socialism carries and is reinforced by palpable actions and government performance.

A more recent and domestic illustration comes from the Barack Obama presidency. Obama's rhetoric of hope, change, and fairness drew thousands to the two-party electoral system—a process partially reenacted by the Bernie Sanders 2016 campaign. Obama's pledge to represent all Americans was cheered and applauded, but his rhetoric was just that in the pejorative sense—just rhetoric—words without substance, promises without intent. Capitalists did not fear him; indeed, many financed his campaign. His presidential actions quickly affirmed his allegiance to capitalism, while his mass support rationalized the need for pragmatic politics and how much better off they were with Obama than Bush or any other Republican or Democrat. At that point, Obama should have unfurled George Bush's "Mission Accomplished" banner over Wall Street; he had succeeded in winning consent from disillusioned millions who had soured on the US political system, bringing them by the thousands back to the hegemonic institutions, conversations, and vocabularies of capitalist rule. Within Obama's first 100 days in office, the public subsidy of private banks, the expansion of the war on Afghanistan, the protection of health care insurance companies, and the continued social inequality of race, gender, and class were seamlessly maintained, indeed, restitched with solid public support. During his rule, Obama deported more immigrants than all of

the US presidents of the 20th century combined; his drones killed ten times as many as George Bush's, and he adroitly diverted all challenges to racial inequality and violence against black youth. Obama channeled possibilities for real social change into an electoral chimera, securing consent for capitalist politics in the process. The power of rhetoric was revealed! (Of course, the willing participation of the entire commercial media apparatus and the two-party political system was in full gear during Obama's two terms to supplement the rationalized misplaced hopes of millions of citizens.)

For capitalist hegemony, mass consent for the market and liberal pluralism is paramount and not a particular candidate's success. Corporate American and the transnational capitalism system can prosper with Clinton, Bush, Obama, or Trump. The vagaries of partisan politics and its tragic consequences for millions is of secondary concern, as long as order is maintained. Any captain will do, as long as they steer the boat in the right direction and protect those on the top decks. Thus, in the United States and in most nations now in the orbit of transnational globalization, political campaigning has become constant, elections and party activity the norm. As Bruce Gronbeck discovered almost three decades ago, US presidential campaigns, and candidate-choice only contests in general, do not function primarily as political decision-making in any democratic sense, but as rituals that "make us feel generally content with the process" while producing "both acquiescence and quiescence" (217). Despite the distortions of public interest and majority preference following the 2016 election of Donald Trump, commercial media and politicians from both parties work overtime to reinforce two-party elections and capitalism as the essence of democracy. In one of many examples, the *New York Times* columnist Charles Blow asserts "the power of resistance is limited, and the best way to achieve real change ... won't come until the polls open in the next round of elections" (A21). Whatever calamity might befall citizens, above all, they must be convinced of the political hegemony of capitalism and its deformed version of democracy.

These examples, selectively rendered here, represent observations of a veteran social activist and professor of media studies. In this view, rhetoric must meet and adjust to social relations, but rhetoric without regard to social relations (or covering for those social relations) will not change anything fundamentally. So why do other, see differently? With the five richest capitalists (who make profits from the labor of millions) now owning as much wealth as 50% of the world, why do many still discount social class and the glaring social inequality of the capitalist world?

Humans have amazing biological and physical capabilities, sight being among the most remarkable. Yet, our eyes have a peculiar trait: they have no visual receptors where the optic nerve connects the eye to the brain. Hence, we all have a blind spot. An object close to the eye, prominent in the field of vision, disappears from our view. The object does not disappear simply because it is not perceived; it disappears because of our unique blind spot. It's there, we just

don't see it. Communication and media studies has a similar sociological and professional blind spot. Located within institutions serving power, US academics have a perceptual handicap that often cannot see capitalism and social class contradictions. Read any mass communication, advertising, public relations, journalism, or media studies mass market textbook. Most promote the ideology of liberal pluralism and the myth of the "free marketplace of ideas" (e.g., Folkerts, Lacy, and Larabee). There are very few that do not at least accept the validity, if not the preference, of wages, profits, and the capitalist market as the best of all possible worlds. Public interest appears as one of many market side effects, offering opportunities for more markets and advertising. Even in rhetoric texts, where the presumption of democracy remains, social class, class inequality, or capitalism do not appear in the glossary of key terms. But what is more defining of our current global condition than capitalist social relations?

Predictably, activists nurtured on these nuggets (as well as most activists weaned on popular culture and its insistence on superheroes to the rescue and valorization of narcissistic celebrities) are inspired to "speak truth to power!" Why? Who cares? Power is the source of the problem. Power knows the truth of social inequality and exploitation of labor for corporate profits. Power concedes nothing without demand, as Frederick Douglass so cogently noted. Truth has no bearing on corporate functions, only market share and public perception. Speaking truth to power only reinforces power. We don't need more truth, we have an abundance of evidence of climate change, gender discrimination, racist violence against black youth, corporate deception, and government corruption. What we need is to activate, to realize our own power. We need to speak power to the truth of social inequality, to speak power to the truth of an emergent, democratic leadership. We are not the grass roots, or an alternative: we are the majority.

In many cases, we learn the truth that power already knows long after the fact. Did class power know the truth about the US genocide of Native Americans, the criminal (and unnecessary) atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the absence of incubator babies in Kuwait, the fabricated claims of nuclear weapons in Iraq, or the videotaped evidence of police murders of black youth? We know the truths that power already knows: institutional racism, gender discrimination, poverty, air pollution, inadequate health care ... A strategy of speaking truth to power neutralizes any rhetoric for change, because it is predicated on accepting existing power as the decider (as George Bush would have it). Rather than communicating with those in power who benefit from the already known truth of wage exploitation and social inequality, humanity would be better served by conversations among those who will benefit from creating new truths, new powers.

Rhetoric and activism. Three things. First, recognize the material conditions of our lives, especially the social relations of capitalism and its class contradictions in neoliberalism, consumerism, individualism, two-party elections, and the quality and inequality of life. Explaining why she joined the FSLN, a young

female biologist said that as she learned about the planet, she realized that “to be a biologist is to be a revolutionary.” Second, identify those who are capable of making fundamental social change—those social classes that have a vested interest, some predisposition, and are in a position socially, economically, and politically to reorganize society for social justice and humanity. Dockworkers, railworkers, IT workers, farmworkers, and others have the power to halt a war, stop a fascist rally, and prevent the production and distribution of unsafe or environmentally destructive products. Their actions depend on mass consent, but their actions can also inspire and lead others to take action. Finally, present a rhetoric for a new consensual, participatory social power emphasizing the truth of capitalist inequality and its destruction of human life and the environment. Offer rhetoric advocating participatory communities, expressing the need for new democratic social relations—in Gramscian terms, advancing a new cultural hegemony that demonstrates the benefits of a new socialist society.

The urgent task of rhetoric for social change and social justice is to speak the power of truth. The power and truth of the existing transnational capitalist order are connected. The truth is we live in a class society that drags the nation to war killing working people abroad and destroying lives at home. Truth is profit-driven production for consumption is destroying the earth. The truth is we live in class society, with race and gender inequality cutting across class lines. The truth is the working majority has the interest, need, and power to end and prevent US wars anywhere, to halt global warming, and to end race and gender discrimination. We need to learn who we are.\*

Once aware of the truth of capitalism, the working majority can become aware of its own power and its ability to change the world. An effective rhetoric of social change necessarily arises from those material conditions. On the 100th anniversary of the Russian Revolution, history tells of Russian peasants who walked away from the front lines and ended World War I. Fifty years ago, freedom riders asking for coffee at lunch counters prompted a mass civil rights movement that ended Jim Crow segregation. Less than 20 years ago, indigenous workers led an uprising in Cochabamba, Bolivia, that stopped the privatization of water . . . other movements may not have had the same success, but the material conditions for resistance and transformation recur from Vietnam to South Africa, from Palestine to Venezuela, from Ferguson to Sioux lands in North Dakota. Although media entertainment, news, political power, and state coercion seek compliance, everywhere daily life urges each of us to overcome injustice. Social justice advocates can offer persuasive appeals that move those visceral responses to conscious political action. The future of humanity depends on those who work to speak, to act, to lead. Rhetoric and activism for democracy and social justice must speak the power of that truth: working people keep the world running; working people should run the world.

\*Here is a short lyric on our collective self-recognition that has been well received when publicly delivered. Modification and use of this benediction—words to benefit all—are encouraged.

WE

So who are WE?

We need a vocabulary for we—not I or me—but WE.

I only am because of you, because of us,

I am because WE are.

We need a VOCABULARY of WE.

But First we need a SENSE of WE.

Who WE are and what WE need, what WE want ...

WE are not those on TV, in the Magazines, or Movies.

We are not the RNC, the DNC, ABC, or NBC.

We are not any C-E-O any corporation.

WE are not those images of Superstars, Super Heroes, or even SOCIAL MEDIA pics.

We are not a collection of individual success stories of You or ME.

WE did not invade Vietnam, Iraq, or Afghanistan.

WE did not decide 25,000 of ours starved today.

WE.

WE are those who work by the hour, the week, the job.

WE are those

who do not survive without the hour, the week, the job.

WE.

WE are the POWER of the world.

All that WE have—is made by those like US—

Those who live and work by the hour, the week, the job.

The table, the chair, the bread, the beer.

Nothing moves unless WE decide.

The trains, the lights, the food, the electric clocks.

WE keep the world running. It's time that WE run the world.

Lee Artz

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# 14 Tradition and Transformation in Jane Addams's New Federalism

## Creating Community Sphere by Empowering Municipalities

*Rodrick Schubert and Omar Swartz*

In 1889, Jane Addams (along with Ellen Gates Starr) formed an open community of action oriented social-solution facilitators called “Hull-House residents.” Living and working together as an activist community, they developed many socially transformative programs to address community needs based on assessments performed by settlement house residents in partnership with neighborhood community members. Addams maintained that active neighborhood resident suggestions and input were necessary to accurately address and assess community requirements. Her vision of social justice—which we describe as a *civic liberalism* or *new federalism*—remains unfulfilled in the early 21st century. We propose bringing back the University Settlement House (USH) movement model for encouraging, developing, and sustaining life-long civic engagement through an intentional community. Such living, grounded in a shared responsibility and commitment to others, reinforces a democratic sensibility that can reinvigorate liberal society.

### **Neighborhood Settlement: Building Together**

Until recently, there were no labor rights, minimum wage, disability insurance, right to strike, or any protections workers today take for granted in the United States. Workers lived and often died in the service of others' property and capital. Society practiced a cruel “survival of the fittest” in which workers starved, bled, and died under the heavy hand of management with the full backing of the law, policy, and military. In legal terms, Addams operated in a time known as “Lochnerism,” a period from 1890 until 1937 when the US Supreme Court actively struck down state and federal regulations to curb abusive working condition in factories, mines, the railroads, and in other places of employment. The judicial philosophy underpinning Lochnerism included the belief that the structuring of private economic relations was not a matter of the general welfare protected by the state. Rather, economic relations were a species of human liberty outside of government regulation. This reasoning reduced the sum of social relationships to the proposition that the “one

has as much right to purchase as the other to sell labor.”<sup>1</sup> This notion, typified by industrialist Andrew Carnegie in an influential 1889 essay, argued that “upon the sacredness of property civilization itself depends—the right of the laborer to his hundred dollars in the savings bank, and equally the legal right of the millionaire to his millions” (Carnegie/editors Smith/Dawson 28). Any progressive law that violated this principle of a fictional formal equality was unconstitutional because it violated the right of workers to contract for their conditions or the right of the wealthy to use the tools of the state to exploit labor for their own personal profit. Examples of reasonable laws struck down by the courts include those intended to limit work hours, outlaw child labor, and enact a minimum wage.<sup>2</sup>

Addams recognized, along with other progressives of her era, that wealth constituted something more than resources extracted from land, which often consumed and destroyed communities in the name of “investment.” Such wealth could not better the human community as a whole, which required that each individual be treated with dignity, humanity, and respect. She viewed individuals as essential components of the ever-greater sphere of expanding community networks: networks of mutual benefit, a democratized governance process rooted in the fertile soil of social ethics and justice coming from righteous behavior toward each other. Its starting point requires a world peopled by those experiencing the bounties of plenitude: individuals without want, working together to minimize privation and avoidable suffering for others. As John Dewey noted, “The conditions that generate insecurity for the many no longer spring from nature. They are found in institutions and arrangements that are within deliberate human control” (Dewey 60). Addams urges us to seize this control.

Addams emphasis on community engagement bore a striking resemblance to similar broad ideals discussed by Aristotle (Aristotle 68). While we reject Aristotle’s limited notions of citizenship, his argument that the purpose of the city was to enable the flourishing of its residents resonates. This, in turn, necessitated a common intellectual currency to realize that:

education must necessarily be one and the same for all, and that the superintendence of it should be common and not on a private basis—the manner in which each at present superintends his own offspring privately and teaches them whatever private sort of learning he holds best. For common things the training too should be made common. At the same time, one ought not even consider that a particular citizen belongs to himself, but rather that all belong to the city; for each is a part of the city. But the superintendence of each part naturally looks to the superintendence of the whole.

(Aristotle 223)

Addams adapted this concept to include literature, music, poetry, physical education, public speaking, creative writing, and many technical/scientific topics.

She understood that, for neighborhood residents to become socially ethical community participants, experiences that expanded intellectual horizons were foundational tools. This would start with the children—a major emphasis at Hull-House itself—but continue throughout life.

Aristotle's point was important for a well-organized ancient city-state. By the 19th century, differences among those within each governance sphere called for significant modifications. Addams understood this. Her pragmatic process examined past intellectual currency and placed it back into circulation only when efficacious for solving problems at hand. What is important to take from Aristotle, for our purposes, is developing an empathetic and relational community sense; we each belong to our community and ourselves. Addams developed Hull-House to become a community center that not only honored the diversity of cultural mores among neighbors but also facilitated their incorporation into Chicago (Addams 1898).

Each community defines for itself its specific needs, wants, and desires. These are developed through the active involvement of all community members as their time, ability, and inclination permits a flexible liberalism: the liberation of individuals so that realization of their capacities may be the law of their life. This ideal liberalism derives its consent from the governed because the process starts at the level of the municipal sphere. It then expands outward through the state and finally arrives at the national level. This concept, when coupled with a more clearly defined governance-management schematic, contributes to a new vibrant national tapestry through a process weaving the threads of common goals together.

At a basic level, the most stringent check on overarching national governance power is not consent granted by electing (purported) representatives; rather, it derives from direct community participation. Placing primacy for development of national goals into smaller-sized population units (typically those within a municipal sphere) amplifies the voices of the people. Localized groups provide smaller, more active, and powerful participatory venues that combine, as needed, into larger spheres of governance, thus increasing the political scale. Dialogic processes expand as more individual actors can communicate intentionally and interactively in multidirectional and multilevel dialogues, presaging variations that ultimately foster glocalization in the political process. The respective municipalities intersect with the larger state units and finally the national level where a complete governing consensus is adduced. Given the already-international aspect of Addams's Hull-House neighborhood, we assert these laborers were human currency that flowed across national borders almost as freely as capital. The steps to build a global forum like the United Nations, over one-half century away for Addams, are suggested in the migration of labor as a commodity required for industrial production.

The changes presented by Addams and others are neither simple nor clear-cut. She advocates a democratic process promulgated by a governmental framework responding to the needs, wants, and desires of all because each person is worth more than a vote. Under this vision, voices enfranchised with

power start with themselves, join others in their neighborhood, and expand their influence outwards like ripples in a pond. People have as much equality as possible under Addams's theoretical framing, which not only comes from voting but also from the economics of mutual beneficence, participation, and cooperation. In this context, economic equality is an important component of a socially responsive democratic practice.

### **Impact of Rapid 19th-Century Growth on Civic Life**

Advances in production and communication technologies through the late 19th century catalyzed the shift to urbanism that contextualized Hull-House. By the time Hull-House began in 1889, the expansion in commercial commodities, goods, and trade had increased its circulation and scope significantly. It brought the American, British, French, German, Russian, and Japanese political economies from the nation-state into a steadily developing international framework for commercial business transactions. These new and improved production technologies driving this expansion spread and were inevitably adopted by various smaller local manufacturing concerns to maintain their profitability as well. Small businesses and agricultural communities sought to compete locally with the larger firms that participated globally. We suggest that, from her Hull-House vantage point, Addams was fully cognizant of these changes and more. The multiethnic diaspora was occurring in her midst since Chicago was one of the primary destination points in the United States. These observations combined with her innate empathy that understood others needs from their perspective and enabled her to see that when human beings are reduced to another resource commodity to fuel the factory system, social justice through democracy cannot prevail.

Finally, the speed with which information could be sent rapidly advanced with the advent of the telegraph, telephone, and early wireless telegraphy. This brought about rapid growth in mass communication, which provided the information needed for a dynamic, urban mass culture. Steam-driven rotary presses allowed printed materials to be reproduced at rates, and in quantities, unheard of during the 18th century. The rapid shift to an urban nation was visible in Illinois where Addams was born, received her education, and came of age. Her post collegiate travels, mostly in Europe, allowed a view toward developing Addams's expansive creative philosophical and political horizons.

At all levels of scale, human life felt the impact of this dynamic local, regional, national, and global change. It brought about a rapid, energetic, and revolutionary pace change through the burgeoning industrial production system and helped catalyze instability that would be played out in many communities. Addressing the pressure these challenges placed upon accepted social textures/mores would require increasingly active political enfranchisement for all residents of municipal and nation-state governance combinations.

Significant migration into the United States was also occurring during this period (as noted earlier). Presciently, Rachael Wendler examines ways in which Addams's Hull-House pedagogy would develop what today we call "community literacy":

As a community-literacy forerunner in the early 1900s, Addams led the Hull House in hosting a wide range of innovative community-literacy activities, from literature and political theory reading clubs to place-based adult ESL classes, community theatre, and social-action writing groups. ... [She] provide[s] a portrait of a literacy worker who challenged existing ideas about educating underserved populations, invested in teaching language as a form of social action, and developed a broad notion of literacy that extended beyond functional literacy to include cultural, workplace, and political literacies.

(Wendler 1)

This notion of "community literacy" emphasized how people can participate to their fullest—new community members becoming actively engaged—in their new places and spaces without discarding the best social practices individual immigrants had brought with them. Addams and her Hull-House resident colleagues were some of the initial participants in what was quickly becoming a worldwide conversation: what theoretical framework and philosophical base can assist the arriving urban settlers to develop the negotiation mechanisms essential for one's new place and space without losing themselves in a sea of benevolent paternalism? This negotiation was not one of assimilation and discarding but a process that incorporated the ideas of newcomers into open, respectful conversation. Addams's work to develop "community literacy" was designed to function as an antidote for the injustices faced by the rapidly expanding and diverse influx of humanity, who were experiencing substantial social consequences from their diaspora while settling within the urban confines of Chicago. Social justice could be soundly secured when people were both linguistically and politically literate, invested in a community that, in turn, invested back in them.

### **Addams's Definition of the Problem**

Addams presented the philosophical underpinning of her social program in *Democracy and Social Ethics* (1902), which argues that without systematic implementation of economic justice rooted in the proper distribution of wealth, there is no social justice. Democratic process demands more than voting. Without a morally/ethically responsible and responsive citizenry, democracy is partial. In *Democracy and Social Ethics*, Addams finds troubling that immigrants settling in the United States tended to acquire "the American veneration for wealth and successful business capacity," which concerned Addams because

she saw the threat to democracy from excessive income inequality (Addams 2002a: 69). When wealth acquisition becomes paramount, we easily overlook marginalization of those denied opportunities to access wealth from the community, which leads to an obvious lack of commonality:

By the very exigencies of business demands, the employer is too often cut off from the social ethics developing in regard to our larger social relationships, and from the great moral life springing from our common experiences. This is sure to happen when he is good “to” people rather than “with” them, when he allows himself to decide what is best for them instead of consulting them. He thus misses the rectifying influence of that fellowship which is so big that it leaves no room for sensitiveness or gratitude. Without this fellowship we may never know how great the divergence between ourselves and other may become, nor how cruel the misunderstandings.

(Addams, “Social Ethics” 70)

Key to her process of re-democratization, Addams calls for leadership of all, by all, and for the good of all—similar to the Aristotelian ideal of governing and being governed in turn. New leadership constantly consults with constituents to achieve concerted decisions. State power does not initially reside in its policing power and sanctioning authority. Rather, power initiates and inheres in a dynamic system of re-federalized inter-connected communities. Addams’s rethinking of power changes the concept of rights as granted from above via governing authority to people holding ourselves mutually responsible, and by extension the whole society. Developing Addams’s ideal society would require much reflection, thought, and legal re-imagining. Fundamental is to, as a society, move beyond ideologies rooted in a militarism, which makes common cause with the other impossible.

We suggest that life in the United States of the 21st century is not very different from Addams’s world. Has there been a non-military peace, especially during the past 200 years? The 20th century alone experienced two world wars, multiple economic collapses, but also a belief among some in great progress toward alleviating human suffering. Addams’s point is humanity’s success, when measured by wealth, goods, and services, always supports militarism: as both standing armies and military industry on the one hand; and domestic police forces on the other. Both exist to fill the vacuum left by our inattentive or inauthentic commitment to community.

For Addams, a developing cosmopolitan city, like Chicago, held promise for developing and building a new non-militaristic society. She worked within a particular Chicago community toward its betterment by engaging a group in developing solutions and then taking concerted action. She firmly believed that governance structures worked best when the primary mechanism for governance was small, manageable, and approachable.

Addams was concerned with how the modern nation-state projects social power as an authority for regulation and control. Policing powers are interwoven within multilevel legal systems with the intention of managing whole populations. Addams sought to confront this by placing governing responsibility with individual behaviors situated within their communities. Communities would interconnect to create the larger communities our system of federalism employs, i.e., to start within individuals and build on the sense of mutual concern observed among her Hull-House neighbors. Addams articulates a “mistake” among historians who focus on war-makers instead of the multitudes of people who live out their lives in peace, practicing mutual kindness and equity (Addams 2002a: 7). This narrative oftentimes focuses on carnage and devastating consequences, for example, tales such as Homer’s *Iliad* and Virgil’s *Aeneid*. Essential texts for the well-educated of Addams’s time, they have literary merit but at their core exult conquest and exploitation, promulgating historical narratives fraught with war as the normal state.

These same narratives rendered ordinary means of sustaining life as less important—or simply ignored them. An uncritical reader could easily believe a state of warfare was normal for humankind. The people who live actual daily life remain ominously silent or at best obfuscated. We are currently experiencing the after-effects from this narrative in myriad ways, including the removal of dignity from, and the devaluing of life. How can we expect governing authorities to walk in the ways of peace when they only clearly understand armed conflict? This would require changed ways of thinking and teaching about the human situation.

During people’s educationally formative years, both the content and developing the skills to address, receive, discern, and then process data into usable information are equally significant. To Addams, a conventional 18th-century education developed people’s primary concerns about property, order, and ownership, ensuring that human dignity and sanctity would only be granted to those who achieved a certain propertied status. Since this status acquired through wealth and property required militaristic actions to secure, protect, and defend—as presented through most historical narratives—state power was established by these like-minded, powerful individuals as they banded together to promote their commercial actions.

Addams proposed a curriculum that taught citizens to reflect on and develop consequential activities for their daily lives. This capacity would serve community members well as they participated in its political process. The call for change she was issuing did not seek to areas of progress that had provided vast benefits for each person. Instead, her call sought a change in the treatment of one another. Gone would be the exploitative behavior, enforced through military domination on the part of a burgeoning industrialized society. Granting de facto legal immunity for exploitative business practices had become acceptable during Addams’s first years at Hull-House. Each Hull-House success in the mid-1890s, such as sweatshop reforms and improvement in labor conditions for children and women, were met with challenges<sup>3</sup> (By the Residents



of Hull-House 2007). Governance promulgated through ethical social principles, using active democratic participation, requires relocating state power into communities, individual people making up each group joined into small communities that become sources for social power and re-formational ideas. We maintain this would be a reasonable outcome when employing Addams's political philosophy for civic activism.

### **Re-formational Consequences of Growth: Where Do Local and Federal Scales Intersect?**

In "Problems of Municipal Administration," published in 1905, Addams elaborates a theoretical basis for governance within the United States that responds to 18th-century exigencies, which had changed markedly and rapidly within the urban environment; she presented a critical framework still applicable given our current global/local circumstances:

We are accustomed to say that the machinery of government incorporated in the charters of the early American cities, as in the federal and state constitutions, was worked out by men who were strongly under the influence of the historians and doctrinaires of the eighteenth century. The most significant representative of these men is Thomas Jefferson, whose foresight and genius we are here to commemorate, and their most telling phrase is the familiar opening that "all men are created free and equal."

(Addams, "Problems" 425)

She then asserts a suspicion that "the present admitted failure in municipal administration," which she labels as the "shame" of our cities, is due "to the inadequacy of those eighteenth-century ideals" (Addams, "Problems" 425). Thus, community members in a democratized society must possess enough empathy and concern that they can come to understand another's decisions based on the daily exigencies they face:

Because their idealism was of the type that is afraid of experience, these founders of our American cities refused to look at the difficulties and blunders which a self-governing people was sure to encounter, and insisted that the people would walk only in the paths of justice and righteousness. It was inevitable, therefore, that they should have remained quite untouched by that worldly wisdom which counsels us to know life as it is, and by that very modern belief that, if the world is ever right at all, it must go right in its own way.

(Addams, "Problems" 426)

For Addams, the Declaration of Independence and Constitution propagated key underlying philosophical elements used to support the oppressive and exploitative conditions of industrialization. A wealthy oligarchy had come to

dominate US governing practices, most visibly in large municipalities such as Chicago, New York, Boston, and Cincinnati. They provided a quasi-legal sanctuary for inhumane labor management practices and squalid living conditions.<sup>4</sup> Addams understood the ways in which the legal system as constituted at the time was inadequate to the demands of a rapidly developing cosmopolitan and urban society. New strategies, she determined, were required to meet the new challenges.

One troublesome source of democratic impediments was the co-optation of state authority by the governing oligarchy, which combined wealthy individuals and investors who created constitutionally protected networks through their industry-by-industry cartels or monopolies. While a limited number of people prospered magnificently from industrialization, the vast majority of workers, those directly producing goods and services, suffered horrible exploitation and denigration—what Marx described as “cretinism” (Marx translated Bottomore 124). A growing chorus (anarchist, socialist, communist voices) came to decry this condition, but commerce and industry remained protected within the courts by free-contract-of-labor concepts and Social Darwinism. To protect such “liberty,” courts regularly invalidated progressive legislation intended to control corporate power and help the country’s majority working poor achieve a better life. The result was the Gilded Age, a period of immense wealth for a handful of Americans and immense suffering by the rest. One-third of textile mill workers did not live to see their 25th birthdays (Fleming 57).

Addams engaged the problem of judicial protection of corporate property interests with regard to the strike at the Pullman Car Works in Pullman, Illinois. In mid-June 1894, railway workers across the United States began selectively removing Pullman-manufactured cars from trains and placing them into an out-of-service status. They were not damaging the cars; they simply refused to work with them. Workers were demonstrating enough power through their actions that by July 2, 1894, an injunction to cease interference with railway traffic took effect. Eugene Debs, and other officers of the American Railway Union who organized the strike, violated the injunction, leading to their arrests and the breaking of the strike (Papke). Outraged by the behaviors on both sides of the conflict, Addams searched for an ethical, democratically principled response to this and similar situations. Reviewing her essay, “A Modern Lear” (1912), accentuates an important source of Addams’s conception of social power.

Addams begins by asking, “If the responsibility of tolerance lies with those of the widest vision, it behooves us to consider this great social disaster, not alone in its legal aspect nor in its sociological bearings, but from those deep human motives, which, after all, determine events” (Addams 2002b: 163). She weaves a narrative that intertwines Lear’s desires for gratitude from Cordelia with the gratitude some philanthropically oriented citizens sought from the masses they claimed to help. Lear and Pullman were both devastated by the show of ingratitude. In Pullman’s case, the workers were slowly gaining

economic emancipation; as they learned to desire choice, Pullman's abilities for control diminished. Addams's assessment of the situation shows her prescience and applicability for many communities in our globalized world.

After commending the contributions that Pullman made to his workers in the town where he housed them—Pullman, Illinois, was considered a “model” company town which provided modern living conditions, theaters, a cemetery, schools, and other amenities including recreation opportunities drawn from workers' salaries—she notes that these comforts came at a human cost:

[Pullman] socialized not only the factory but the form in which his workmen were living. He built and, in a great measure, regulated an entire town. This again might have worked out into a successful associated effort, if he had had in view the sole good of the inhabitants thus socialized, if he had called upon them for self-expression and had made the town a growth and manifestation of their wants and needs. . . . [U]nfortunately, the end to be obtained became ultimately commercial and not social.

(Addams, “Reader” 166)

In other words, Pullman's planned living community was paternalistic in the extreme, an experiment in forced industrial living, providing management with near-complete social control over workers' lives, enforcing an “almost unbroken dependency” (Forbath 797). Pullman created his town and ran his factory as if the people who lived there and worked there were his moral and political *inferiors*: not fellow citizens, but objects to be used and controlled. It was an authoritarian attempt to suppress unionization and dissent. As Addams more delicately explained:

[Pullman] assumed that he himself knew the needs of his men, and so far from wishing them to express their needs he denied to them the simple rights of trade organization, which would have to be, of course, the merest preliminary to an attempt at associated expression. If we may take the dictatorial relation of Lear to Cordelia as atypical and most dramatic example of the distinctively family tragedy, one will asserting its authority through all the entanglement of wounded affection, and insisting upon its selfish ends at all costs, may we not consider the absolute authority of this employer over his town as a typical and dramatic example of the industrial tragedy? One will directing the energies of many others, without regard to their desires, and having in view in the last analysis only commercial results?.

(Addams, “A Modern Lear” 167)

Addams articulates humans' capacity and responsibility to create reasonable conditions for people to work and live, and to respond democratically, i.e., socially responsibly, when discord arises. When all voices have a fair hearing and hand in developing an action plan, militaristic solutions become

anachronistic. Consent and agreement can ameliorate dissension when power is shared equitably, especially when all parties listen openly first, then discuss, and remain open to compromise. Above all, Addams was shocked at the violence of the strike in an era where principled negotiation was possible.<sup>5</sup> Such dialogue was fundamental, grounded in respect for the other, one of her principle ideals. For Addams, mutual care was essential to human flourishing. She was, however, afraid that the bonds created through caring were fraying through the shift from agrarian communities to urban industrial ones during her life:

Probably there is no relation in life which our democracy is changing more rapidly than the charitable relation—that relation which obtains between benefactor and beneficiary; at the same time there is no point of contact in our modern experience which reveals so clearly the lack of that equality which democracy implies. We have reached the moment when democracy has made such inroads upon their relationship that the complacency of the old-fashioned charitable man is gone forever; while, at the same time, the very need and existence of charity, denies us the consolation and freedom which democracy will at last give.

(Adams, “Social Ethics” 11)

Then as now, progressive political operatives contend that governmental authority needs to provide for its citizenry. Addams shifts the role of the governing authority from the deliverer of charitable actions to facilitative the support actor. Charity, or concern for the welfare and society of others, is a basic bonding agent within each person necessary for democracy to function. Voting booths were measuring devices, but democratic societies were communities with actively engaged resident participants caring for each other’s well-being and development.

To develop a contemporary program leading to engaged citizen participation in community-based political processes, we suggest the political philosophy of Jane Addams should re-enter 21st-century contemporary activism’s fray. The associates in Hull-House were mostly young women and some men intent on doing their civic duty through active community-based service to others.

### **A Blueprint for Building an Engaged Sustainable Electorate**

During the summer of 1892, Addams was a lecturer for the School of Applied Ethics held in Plymouth, Massachusetts. In her lecture, “The Subjective Necessity for Social Settlements,” she delivered a prescient and stinging rebuke that still bears great cogency today. The additional liberties that appear apparent at present in the 21st century should not obfuscate the continuing accuracy of this assessment from Addams:

It is not difficult to see that although America is pledged to the democratic ideal, the view of democracy has been partial, and that its best achievement thus far has been pushed along the line of the franchise. Democracy has made little attempt to assert itself in social affairs. We have refused to move beyond the position of its eighteenth-century leaders, who believed that political equality alone would secure all good to all men. We conscientiously followed the gift of the ballot hard upon the gift of freedom to the negro, but we are quite unmoved by the fact that he lives among us in a practical social ostracism.

(Addams, "Reader" 15)

We draw attention to her pragmatic sensibilities as she asserts that more is required than "political equality alone" to create a socially just society. Addams is not looking for a political philosophy of competing legislative ideals that provide liberty.

By this point-in-time, Addams was becoming a significant voice in the growing movements recognizing that democracy was more than a governing system. For late 19th- and early 20th-century theoreticians, a newer set of ideals had to develop. They understood that for the US experiment with democratic-republican ideals to continue, the whole population needed to be active participants. To this growing chorus of reform voices, social and economic justice were essential and elemental parts necessary for this governance experiment to continue. The United States governing documents were an 18th-century response that developed a framework to solve the issues they were confronting. Our 21st century task is to bring to fruition the concept of popular sovereignty as a deployable practical process.

Here one must be careful, as she was, to identify that which is working and recognize those that are not. She and her Hull-House fellows understood that only through thorough investigation and considerable reflection on their exploratory findings could they identify proper plans of action. In light of this caution, the idea of re-invigorating the University Settlement House model has become compelling for us. Each settlement house is composed of small directed groups actively engaged at the community level "in the spirit of those to whom social equality has become a necessity for further social development, so we are impatient to us the dynamic power residing in the mass of men, and demand that the educator free that power" (Addams, "Social Ethics" 80). We suggest they were beneficent urban guerillas waging an insurgency against the dominant forces. Using educational tools as weapons, they sought to rectify economic and social injustice through providing life-long learning instead of just the basic obligatory schooling. Teaching that the importance of civic participation extended beyond the ballot box was most successfully conveyed through personal involvement.

Twenty-first-century society confronts issues our late 18th-century forebears in governance system design could not foresee; our needs and exigencies have changed dramatically. We in the 21st century are the inheritors of a worldwide

political economy that passed through 19th-century industrial-capitalist system expansion. Its factory system provided the productive mechanism for the ensuing consumption revolution prevalent throughout the 20th century. Our inherited political-economic juggernaut steamed ahead at full throttle throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Many human hands became reduced to feeding its all-consuming maw without ever seeing much less touching the levers of control.

A trenchant monograph issued in 1941 is a particularly appropriate transitional bridge into our current century. In *The Managerial Revolution*, James Burnham argued that the revolution in social organization in the decades prior to World War II did not concern which political system would govern a nation (Burnham). Instead, the social environment had become complex enough that only knowledgeable managers could facilitate a well-ordered, productive society. The upper financial echelons did not have their hand on global community controls, either those to transact daily business or larger scale governance concerns. As the global community approached the midpoint of the 20th century, regardless of name or ideology, the social was being managed segmentally. For totalitarian regimes, such as those in Germany, Italy, Spain, or the USSR, this did not present significant governance problems. The regimentation Addams labeled as an effect from the militarizing of society in *Newer Ideals of Peace*, we suggest was not only initiated from the military mindset. Regimentation and behavioral standardization met the management needs of industrial capitalism. For the factory system to convert raw materials into consumables, chains of command and control are required to organize human capital in an orderly, systematic manner. From the vantage point of Hull-House, Jane Addams witnessed the full-fledged impact of an industrial society on its human components. Addams and her fellow Hull-House residents observed the managed society and its impacts that Burnham characterizes as a human revolution. Finding a democratic community-level alternative built upon a political philosophy rooted in social and economic justice was Addams's goal.

Developing practicable social and economic justice within the larger US republic is our goal. As such, we are proposing systematically providing and encouraging life-long civic participation. With our present technological tools for simultaneous and instant communication, we have implements that can be plowshares of liberty. These tools at present are fast becoming personal shackling devices or swords used for tyrannical oppression. Ours is world on a political-economic trajectory that currently builds on Burnham's global situation—a social environment heavily dependent on skilled management teams that appear as our ever-present minders of requisite necessities. We are thus suggesting that, for a republic based on popular sovereignty, the will of the people must actively manage the managers. Without a discernable, definable consensus emanating from the popular sovereigns directing the 21st-century society managers, a totalitarian state will quickly ensue. Implicit within the meaning of democracy, rule by the people, is popular sovereignty.

More apparent than before are today's concerns with building an ethical governance system predicated on popular sovereignty with the intention of providing social and economic justice for all. Individual sovereignty, property rights and responsibilities, equality, and personal responsibility to one's self in addition to one another are all significant considerations addressed by governance systems that meet social and economic justice challenges. "Liberty" and "freedom" are used as calls to action, but their implications are ambiguous at best in our present managed society, especially since that society no longer directs its managers. Developing programmatic ideals based on initial questions concerning "Liberty for whom?" or "Whose freedom should prevail?" would provide one starting avenue. Madison's philosophical ideal and Addams's pragmatic reality practically intersect through the 21st century's rich technology. Their skillful and intentional employment could hand the popular sovereigns greater control of those employed to manage society on a day-to-day basis.

Life-long learning and participation are impeded for many by the perception that their lives are far too busy, or they just do not like politics. We propose to bring back the USH movement model for encouraging, developing, and sustaining life-long civic engagement. This is not a complete nor fully developed proposal at this point. It is also not intended to be based on philanthropy, though potential support and involvement from civic-minded individuals would not be discouraged. The proposed goal of this plan is to develop active adult community members who fully participate in the deliberative decision-making process that would bring Addams's philosophy regarding public participation to fruition. Only when all citizens are fully informed, capable, and wholly enfranchised can we perform as popular sovereigns. The proverbial devil will be in working out details that are appropriate for and specific to each community. Each community center must interweave specific local needs into larger state and national scale considerations. As we address the life-long participatory education required for actively engaged and socially aware citizens, we must bear in mind our shared responsibility in a democratically conceived governance system for one another's well-being.

Although the specific details are necessarily local, we offer these suggestions going forward. First, each civic education center must be sited as close to the people as possible. Using public high school buildings as focal points could provide an appropriate initial setting. According to the US Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics reports, in 2013 there were 24,280 high schools throughout the United States. Our plan proposes that these would be placed into after-hours use as community centers for civic engagement teaching. They are in almost every community within the United States and function as central points for most.

Second, to meet the personnel staffing requirements, an obligatory community political service component would be added to all collegiate graduation requirements regardless of major or field. The line supervision individuals for the settlement house resident cadre would be graduate students enrolled in political science and social science programs throughout the United States.

Our suggestion would be to provide compensation for this supervisory work in direct tuition assistance and student loan forgiveness. The NCES reports over 12.2 million students in college from 18 to 24 years of age. Staffing the political settlement locations with 100 college students each would only require just over 2.45 million students per semester. The staffing could be done without great difficulty for not all communities would require the many same staffing level demand for workers to perform the life-long community educational facilitation.

Third, Charles S. White developed some interesting observations about using the plethora of internet tools for civic deliberation in 2010 (White 23–28). He accurately noted the United States is not able to do much more than tap into opinion survey techniques at best (White 24). This technological area remains extremely potent but underdeveloped, especially for direct democratic action (White 27–28). This collegiate community partnership can function in ways we cannot yet imagine, but their technological expertise intentionally focused can develop ways to mitigate the time constraints placed on busy citizens pursuing lives filled with daily obligations. Programs for increasing political participation must successfully address actual individual time constraints and our shared contemporary perception that individuals have no time for daily practical political deliberation. Providing useful information akin to their Settlement House Residents' model demands granting each community flexibility to develop fluid, dynamic, practical, and pragmatic programs that strategically address their needs. No blueprint existed for settlement house residents to follow as they began during the waning years of the 19th century. Ingenuity, sensibleness, and pragmatic imagination were provided by each resident to build local community civic awareness with far simpler tools than exist at present.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout this essay, we have outlined Addams's broad but basic requirements allowing for social democracy. The cosmopolitan community she sought to develop would be ethical because they employ an active participatory form of democratic process. Their implementation would change our present umbrella-like model for federalism. The change would be from governance that starts at the national level as the broad rain cover, granting and protecting citizen rights, while state governments provide the sturdy support mechanisms for specific geographic community policy. Addams's would start with individual members and radiate outwards. These intersecting spheres of power formulated first within their respective community sphere would extend through municipal units into the state sphere, and finally onto the national sphere. What this would require at first seems quite extensive, but we argue that much of our present framework has served well and while revision is needed, it should be prudent. The most extensive revisions would be reserved for our statutory procedures and governance administrative processes.



We have yet to beat our many scaled swords into plowshares, but through socially responsible and ethical democratic processes, engaged human beings have started moving toward action worldwide. Understanding that our communities occupy place and space that is both local and global remains crucial. Much work remains, but a politically literate population instituting significantly modified or new legal frameworks, performing equitably, would be a considerable first step. Democratic process is not a one-model-fits-all idea. Addams's great gift to humanity is to outline ways of thinking but not to impose her solution; each community comes to those decisions for themselves, democratically.

## Notes

- 1 *Lochner v. New York*, 198 US 45 (1905). At issue was a New York state law limiting the maximum number of hours bakers could work to ten a day or 60 a week (the legislature was motivated by evidence that longer hours constituted a severe health risk to bakers). For more information, see Paul Kens, *Lochner v. New York: Economic Regulation on Trial*.
- 2 One exception was *Muller v. Oregon* 208 US 412 (1908) in which the Supreme Court distinguished *Lochner* and upheld a state social welfare law that prohibited females from working in a laundry for more than ten hours a day. In sexist and racist terms, the Court reasoned, "Healthy [white] mothers are essential to vigorous offspring, the physical well-being of women becomes an object of public interest and care in order to preserve the strength and vigor of the race."
- 3 Initially these color-coded map documents enumerated ethnic settlement patterns whose socio-economic data was systematically gathered/presented. These pieces had additional narrative information. Gathered together this cumulative effort was first published during 1895 in *Hull House Maps and Papers*. The collection, mapping process, and narrative creation were supervised by resident Florence Kelley. Additionally, Hull-House Residents' work brought attention to the garment industry workers' plight. Their systematic collection and presentation methodology brought critical data concerning social and economic conditions into clear view.
- 4 Novels by realist authors such as Theodore Dreiser, Frank Norris, Upton Sinclair, and others depict the prevalence of these practices.
- 5 She would have the same reaction to World War I and the inability of "civilized nations" to work rationally out their problems. Closely reading Addams's corpus, one realizes it requires a substantial change in the moral-ethical foundation of each person, then expressed nationally and internationally.

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# 15 The Work of a Middle-Class Activist

## Stuck in History

*Charles Bazerman*

I was born in 1945, midway between VE and VJ day. As I was growing up into political consciousness in the 1950s, it was easy not to like parts of the world I saw around me. After all, I was an adolescent. It was also easy to take for granted all that my suburban life offered me. After all, I was an adolescent. What was not easy was to put the two together. In 2005, when I first wrote this essay, and when I revised it in the middle of 2017, times were going awry, and some of my choices feel dangerously exposed and frayed. In the following morality tale, or rather tale in pursuit of morality, I will present the issues as they appeared, filled with the limitations, contradictions, and struggles of trying to make sense of the world as I went through it, making the limited choices life handed me.

Both my parents had known real hardship and injustice, immigrating with their families from the pogroms and famines of eastern Europe to the poverty of Brooklyn tenements just after World War I. They both came into adulthood during the Great Depression. One of my grandfathers was a sweatshop tailor, with a sewing machine in the living room to do piecework. My mother nostalgically sang me picket songs: “The Shirtmakers Union is a no good union, it’s a company union by the bosses ... Dubinsky is our leader, we shall not be moved.” David Dubinsky was president of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) from 1932 to 1966. My parents met at the Young Communist League and courted at party picnics. My father was nearly expelled from City College for raising money for the Lincoln Brigade during the Spanish Civil War. It was clear what not to like in their world, and clear where the remedies lay if you were young, working class, Jewish in Depression-era New York. Struggling against injustice was struggling for the interests of yourself, your family, and friends.

There was another set of remedies, individual remedies, to protect yourself against injustice. So the college my father nearly got kicked out of, but graduated *magna cum laude* from, was a business school—the downtown branch of City College, later to become Bernard M. Baruch College. By the time I knew my parents, their membership in socialist organizations had lapsed, and my father was a storm window salesman, eventually to become partner in a small manufacturing company. When I was five we moved from Brooklyn to

the post-war suburbs and my father drove us around in his Oldsmobile, then a black Cadillac with legendary tailfins. On Saturdays, he brought me with him to work so I could earn spending money by packing hardware for door installation kits. I felt a tinge of fear that if instead of being the boss's son I were to become one of the minimum-wage hourly workers on the noisy and dangerous drill presses and fabricating machines.

So I learned the lessons of class from the top side. Even as my parents divorced, and my father went bankrupt trying to become a stock broker, then at age 48 died of a heart attack, I still benefited from post-Sputnik enrichment programs targeted at the middle class, hobnobbed with academically successful kids, graduated near the top of my suburban high school, and went on to the Ivy League—though needing help from scholarships and social security. My brother (who became a patent attorney) and I never doubted we belonged to the comfortable middle class from which we would meritocratically make our way (though anxious about how easy it would be to fall into the victimized classes). The sociopolitical remedies our parents sought had gotten no further than New Deal bottom-slung safety nets, but individual remedies had brought their children up to the professional classes.

Nonetheless, the social and political problems remained for me to notice as I grew up on the quiet streets of Long Island. Television brought the McCarthy hearings and the investigations of the House UnAmerican Activities Committee, Edward R. Murrow exposés, and school desegregation confrontations. While Eleanor Roosevelt told us to light candles, newspapers brought ground-zero target maps of the New York metropolitan area, and school brought duck-and-cover drills. My father's brokerage company underwrote the stock offering of a fallout-shelter producer. Even Broadway musicals brought critiques of racism, class exploitation, militarism, and international animosity; off-Broadway productions of Brecht brought a great deal more. Enrichment programs brought me into Manhattan where newsstands sold me left-wing magazines not found in Bellmore.

The world clearly needed to be made a better place. I declared my allegiance by pasting SANE cartoons on the school walls during bomb drills, writing history papers on Marx, English papers on Lorraine Hansberry and Mark Twain (safe beginnings), then Langston Hughes and Bertolt Brecht. I wrote a paper on the psychological and social consequences of nuclear devastation. I joined civil rights picket lines around local restaurants and bused to Washington for marches. I listened to lots of folk music.

But the biggest gesture toward humanity was to commit myself to science, because we all knew that scientists were morally pure, rational, and out to make the world better—both the United States and the USSR agreed on that. Although knowing I was benefiting from post-Sputnik national security programs and aware of the ethical dilemmas of scientists (I and my friends were quite firm that we would never work on bomb technology—after all, we did read the *Bulletin of the Union of Concerned Scientists*), not until much later did I

clearly understand the military-industrial reasons both governments invested so much ideological and financial capital in science.

Though as an undergraduate my interests turned from science, I maintained my commitment to knowledge and the professional life to transform society. What I had seen of my father's life left me with a bitter taste about the shallow satisfactions and sharp dealing of business. Of course, in school we had read *Death of a Salesman*. I could see, nonetheless, that money did keep you from being the victim of society and allowed your children to enjoy the benefits of the moderately privileged classes. The professional life, and especially the protected professional life of professors, offered a way to avoid victimage and victimizing. From the Marxian perspective that work is what we do to transform the world to make it more habitable, I was trying to resolve the tension in my parents' lives. How could I make my life and the lives of those immediately around me more habitable without making it less habitable for others? How could I in fact realize what we had been high-mindedly told, that all our fates depended on each other?

This tension was to pull at me once more, as my undergraduate wanderings brought me to the humanities to work on my personal problems. When I asked what kind of life devotion to literature would lead me to, I could come up with no good answers—only devotion to the words of someone long ago, who was no wiser or kinder than anyone else, but likely devoted to outworn aristocratic beliefs. Nor could I answer for myself what professing those words to students would do to make this a better world. Even satire and critique seemed to me saving your conscience by despising others.

I was also torn and unhappy because of the hovering presence of the Vietnam War draft that monitored my every decision. While I protested and marched and talked with draft counselors, I was not yet ready to go underground or give up my professional niche. During an exploratory trip to Canada, my draft board breathing down my neck, I was overcome by outrage that I was being forced to give up my way of life. Powerless to stop the outrages to the world, having power only to keep myself from immediate complicity, I was thrown back to being outraged by the loss of my personal privileges. Brecht's lines came back to me: "*Erst kommt das Fressen, dann kommt die Moral*—First feed the face, then quote right and wrong."

So here is the melodramatic moment of deliverance. After I spent a year sequestered in grad school sponsored by a National Defense Education Act Fellowship (and you don't believe that the humanities are ideological?) becoming increasingly morose about a literary career, the government ended all graduate student deferments. The only alternative I found to boot camp, jail, or Canada, was teaching elementary school in inner-city Brooklyn, through an emergency credentialing program. What could be more of a deliverance—a way to avoid complicity in the war, a way to make the world better by overcoming racial and class inequities, a way to privilege education and knowledge, and a way to maintain a meager, but nonetheless middle-class salary and

professional identity. A way that almost seemed plausible given my summer jobs in Headstart programs and camp counseling.

In truth, I knew very little about teaching and the summer crash program did little to prepare me. On the other hand, it was the year of the teaching as social action books—Herbert Kohl’s *Thirty-Six Children*, Jonathon Kozol’s *Death at an Early Age*, and James Herndon’s *The Way It ‘Spozed to Be*. These books gave me some sense of the classroom and some classroom tricks, but much more a stance toward teaching and a model for understanding the kids. Then there was the exhilaration at the end of the summer, just before I started work, of the Chicago Democratic Convention, getting tear-gassed, charging barbed wire trucks and chanting “the whole world is watching.” What did we need conventional classroom wisdom for?

Things got even more complicated and exhilarating. I was assigned to PS 93K, in the heart of Bedford-Stuyvesant in Brooklyn, near the corner of Flatbush and Nostrand Avenues and in the shadow of the elevated train that every eight minutes shook the windows of the apartments of the most disrupted and distressed families in the school. The first day of school was also the first day of the divisive Ocean Hill-Brownsville Teacher’s Strike over community control. Although unions were an article of faith to me, I saw the community advocates were correct, that the union in the most difficult schools protected the interests of the teachers at the expense of the students. Community control offered some hope of making the schools accountable to the families the schools were supposed to serve. So I started my first day of teaching as a scab. With a community group and two more senior teachers (and the aid of an enormous bolt cutter), we unchained the gates of the school and “liberated” it (as we said in those days). High on political adrenaline, I spent the next two hours trying to amuse 60 kindergartners and first graders in an improvised lesson on upside-down and inside-out. For two months, until the strike was resolved, we improvised, and I moved around grades—I hardly remember the chaos, but we maintained the politically necessary fiction that the school was in operation without the union teachers.

At the end of the strike, I was braced to be fired by the returning principal. But the principal was greeted at the door by a large funeral wreath sent by someone in the community. He turned around, a community appointed principle took over, and I had my job for the rest of the year. I was ostracized by all the teachers except for those two who opened the school. A new third grade was formed for me from the children the other teachers wanted to get rid of. All the supplies I received were a ream of crumbling yellow paper and a handful of copies of a Dick and Jane reader. I was given advice on how to get the children to sit quietly. It was a year before Sesame Street was to debut and Bank Street had barely begun to produce its inner-city reading series. So I improvised. A local used book store owner would buy children’s books in bulk and sell them to me for pennies above his cost; I left them at the back of the room, to be used in class, to be taken home, to be stolen. To produce class reading, the whole class collaboratively composed (that’s what we would call it

today, but then it was just a lot of screaming and jumping up and down) a script for the then popular Crusader Rabbit cartoon. The kids knew those words, understood the story lines, and could read the scripts we wrote. I bought a box of spirit masters and reams of paper, and liberated a key to the copy room. Every morning I would get up at 5 a.m., and rapidly compose directly on the typewriter onto the Spirit Master that day's episode of the Marcia and Willie stories—basic vocabulary inner-city adventures that the class could relate to. I also made some math work sheets and transcribed the previous day's Crusader Rabbit group writing. I got to the school a half hour before other teachers arrived, so I could break into the copy room and print this all off. Some days after school, I was naive enough to visit unescorted the houses of the children who were missing class; it was obvious from the junkies in the hallways, urine in the stair wells, nodding-out mother, and train rumbling every eight minutes why the kids had problems. I don't know that my visits did any good, except to get the kids another beating. I did manage to avoid being mugged and I learned how bad some kids' lives could be. On Saturdays, I took three or four kids to museums. And then I collapsed until 5 a.m. the next Monday.

I don't know what I accomplished, but it did at least feel honest, and I survived the year. However, my class was far too noisy and unconventional for the community chosen principal, and I was again fired. Again, the community stood up for me, and I got rehired into a sheltered program for kids with emotional problems. Again, I improvised, but had the support of a team. Some kids made real progress, and others were deeply troubled and I could do little with them. Again, I was fired for not following the rules, the way it 'spozed to be. In 1970, I took that as a badge of radical honor. By that time, I also was sufficiently an emotional and physical wreck to get a 4F draft classification.

I came away from those difficult and transformative years with an important lesson. From those children who succeeded in school, I could see how literacy transformed minds, personal bearing, and place within society. And for those who didn't, I could see the enormous costs. As I watched my third graders move into fourth grade, I could see those who would make their way in schooling and those who would choose the streets. They were already getting tough. I could see chaotic first graders turning into students as they caught on to reading and writing. I also realized how fortunate this privileged child of the middle class and Ivy League had been, and how different my experience was from the meager, painful educational scraps offered to the kids of PS 93K. I understood literacy was something an adult could devote a life to, something that would help people and communities—something that might even ameliorate race and class divides. However, because composition was still unformed as a field and I was ignorant of the possibilities in education, I returned to graduate school in literature—for want of any better idea what to do with myself.

After a rapidly written dissertation on Renaissance poetry, I landed a part-time job at Baruch College, City University of New York. This soon turned into a regular position funded by an equal opportunity program tied to the

recent open admissions policy. For the next 19 years, I taught in the same building my father studied in, helping an ethnically diverse, but homogenously poor and working class, group of students follow the same path of upward mobility my father had. I was happy to know my job was to teach writing to those students who had never had that opportunity before—in a few years, Mina Shaughnessy was to help us label these students “Basic Writers.” Some of them seemed the older cousins of the children I had just taught in Bed-Stuy, but only the ones who had succeeded to make their way through a failed school system. Though graduating in the upper parts of their class (large numbers never graduated), some were reading at a sixth grade level, writing at the third grade. I saw my task as sharing the cultural capital my fortunate education had given me. I thought of it as spilling the beans on class secrets. I began to unpack what it was that I knew that allowed me to do well at elite institutions. But I also knew enough of their lives that I could not, should not assume they had the same experience, motives, knowledge I had. As savvy human beings, they brought plenty to the classroom, but not the same things I did. So my teaching started in two places, looking at the students, what they knew and could do. Then looking at what I knew and could do. The pedagogy was to try to bring the two together. Bring their energy, concerns, knowledge, skills, communicative impulses into the academic place I knew well, and provide the tools so they could take possession of it.

One thing led to another in terms of pedagogy and research, leading me to the ways students used reading to write, the ways their writing and reading were located within disciplines, and the advanced literate practices of the disciplines and professions that provide the high end of aspiration and criteria. This is a story I have told elsewhere in more academic contexts, and the traces are in my publications. This work proceeded through constant engagement with the student writers in my classrooms, almost all of whom were seriously motivated once they trusted I was offering them something real and useful. They were wonderful to work with and their motivations, personalities, and individual growth kept me attuned no matter how many times I taught the first year writing courses, no matter how many papers I graded. Soon the issue became more than survival in college and the economic mobility offered by a degree; it became the increasing sophistication of thought, valuing of knowledge, and maturity of judgment that came with writing that engaged with the knowledge the university offered them. Predisposed by my earlier faith in the sciences and professions, I began to see the work of disciplines as themselves enriching all our worlds, solving problems, fostering cooperations, and improving lives. My pedagogic mission expanded from working-class mobility to literacy as part of the infrastructure of communication, knowledge, and society. Again, this motive can be clearly seen in my published research, theory, and pedagogy.

This appreciation of the value of writing and its engagement with academic knowledge has led me to act beyond advancing the particular lines of research and thought I have become attached to. I have become increasingly



involved in discipline building activities. This is another lesson drawn in part from Mina Shaughnessy who established some of the first institutions of the field, the CUNY Instructional Resource Center, the *Journal of Basic Writing*, and then sponsoring Harvey Wiener, Ken Bruffee, and Bob Lyons in forming the CUNY Association of Writing Supervisors. I particularly saw a need for building the research and theory of the field, and thus have started study groups, founded the Research Network Forum, instigated discussions leading to the Consortium of Doctoral Programs in Rhetoric and Composition, served as lead faculty member in the Dartmouth Summer Seminars on writing research methods, developed the Writing Research Across Borders conferences, and established the International Society for the Advancement of Writing Research. I have also taken on many editorial roles, from forums to edited volumes, to book series. These editorial roles have provided the opportunity to mentor newer researchers, to foster exciting new work, and to gather collected learning about writing in methods, handbook, and reference guides projects. While these projects may seem narrowly academic, I see them as continuations of an activist commitment to make the world more habitable by advancing the cause of writing. I believe many of my colleagues in the teaching, research, and theory of writing share this commitment and will understand why I claim this academic work as political.

This commitment has also led to struggles in academic politics. Like many in composition, I have had to fight (with incomplete success) to create institutional place to serve students well, to make English departments and universities respect and provide resources for the work of writing, to bring more progressive ideas of writing to campus requirements, to have publications in composition accepted for tenure and promotion, to have universities hire professionals on professional lines to lead the work, and to create graduate programs to advance the field. These issues have been a struggle on every campus I have worked and every campus I have visited. The particulars change and the frustrations accumulate, but on every campus there has been progress, and in the last five decades, the profession as a whole has made enormous progress. I feel great pride in working with colleagues across the United States and now internationally in bringing changes to the teaching of writing, impacting not only every college student, but every child in every language arts class. While those in the profession may have very different views of what is important about writing, what theories should apply, or how knowledge of writing should be advanced, we all share a deep experience of the power of writing, and we have all shared in the great struggle of making this new field—a field devoted to improving all people's abilities to think, communicate, and mobilize knowledge for their own purposes in their own words.

The consequence of finding a professional commitment and life so satisfying to my activist impulses was, however, for many years a waning of my overt political life. I had paid at the office. I always voted, sometimes

gave money, fumed at TV, was riveted by Watergate hearings, occasionally knocked on doors for candidates or turned up at a town meeting. I recycled and didn't buy gas-guzzlers. I treated politics as a spectator sport of the comfortable and secure middle class. No matter how the vote turned out, my salary gradually increased, bank account accumulated, and publications list grew. The question that troubled us in the 1960s, whether we could work in the system, seemed to have ironed itself out. I saw enough other good people working laudable corners of the system that I could keep alive the belief that in the long run, progressive causes moved progressively, especially if thoughtful, educated, generous minded people found their way into positions of power.

Nonetheless, the rightward drift of the country; the failure of any ideology to restrain the most unfettered and rapacious versions of free-market capitalism after the collapse of the Soviet empire; the increasing power and irresponsibility of multinational corporations, deregulated here and above the law of any country, so powerful as to dictate national policies around the world; the strange alliance between a bullying religious right and these corporate interests; the narrowing ownership of the media; and a Republican party so empty of political morality that it was ready to corrupt the entire system for short-term advantage, all the while we were ignoring impending environmental and resource catastrophes—these things started to crowd my suburban academic dream. Bill Clinton I saw as Horatio at the bridge, holding these dark forces at bay, but so preoccupied by them that he could get little else done. The last bulwark seemed to be collapsing with the stolen 2000 election. I had a brief hope when the early months of the Bush regime were so corrupt and inept that popular support was falling and the country rapidly seemed to tire of a kleptocratic corporate oligarchy. But when 9/11 came, I feared not another attack—after all, we were just learning that American exceptionalism did not grant an exemption from the insecurity that much of the world lived under for much of the time—but that we would be caught up in an emotional spiral of violence that would escalate hostilities, brutalize our nation, and tear apart the international cooperation needed for pressing global problems. I was actually heartened by a brief period of national maturity, with the media asking hard questions, and people who had never traveled overseas recognizing the complexities of the world, wondering who we were and how we were perceived by others. But then Georgie got his gun and turned our confusion and fear into hate. Like in a bad Western, we were in a corner and going to shoot our way out of it. To where? An Empire. The world had to be made convenient for the United States. Afghanistan was perhaps acceptable as an extended police action, doing what was necessary to gather criminals and their accessories, but when Bush began to make sounds about Iraq, I knew I could no longer just yell at my television, if just for my psychic well-being and sense of integrity. We were losing the country in the name of a free-market dystopia spiced by religious hopes of final days.

Fortunately, in Santa Barbara I was surrounded by a community that had long been activist. We almost immediately began a series of marches opposing the war and were early to join the over 200 cities, towns, and counties and states to pass both anti-war and defense of civil rights resolutions. It was easy to join in, especially as the internet had made spreading the word and logistics much easier. It also provided the news not carried by the media. On campus, a group of faculty and staff formed to support student leaders, who soon emerged to organize teach-ins, lectures, forums, concerts, poetry readings, vigils, walk-outs, days of reflection. We saw this well within our educational roles to foster discussion of major issues and provide opportunities for the growth of future leaders. How could we remain silent and allow the campus to remain silent when major issues of the future of our nation and the future of the world were at stake? Again the internet proved powerful as we created a local list-serve, still in operation, to keep us informed of the latest news. We were lucky to have on campus experts on international law, the Middle East, and social movements. I could add a little rhetorical analysis into the mix.

Although we took our first moves from the play book of the 1960s, we improvised with no unified programmatic agenda beyond opposing the war, joined in solidarity with tens of millions of others nationally and internationally. It was a passionate rejection of policies that moved us and a passionate commitment to peaceful solutions for the world that drew us together. Seeing the power of these new communities built around a passion for peace and facilitated by the internet, I challenged the community of rhetoricians to get involved on a professional list-serve. The response was large, and almost immediately we were able to establish the Rhetoricians for Peace list-serve, which enabled newly bonded colleagues to create an information table and discussion resources for the 2003 meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), during which, fatefully, the United States began bombing Baghdad. This energized community became a formal organization, creating workshops, endorsing resolutions, building a website with resources for teaching and learning about the rhetoric of war and peace (special thanks to web builder Randy Cauthen and teaching resource coordinator David Stacey), and providing support for colleagues isolated in hawkish parts of the country. At our workshop at the 2004 CCCC, Harriet Malinowitz fostered the idea of a national 1984 reading and discussion, which rapidly won the endorsement of the Conference and the NCTE. The Rhetoricians for Peace continues through today with its discussions and workshops.

The Obama years provided some respite by showing some understanding of the complexity of the world and our place in it, a commitment to act on climate change despite Congressional resistance, a respect for democratic principles and human rights, and efforts to serve the needs and provide opportunity for the vulnerable. Political pressure and action became possible within ordinary processes, sometimes in the streets, but more often through meetings and programs. Even Black Lives Matter moved from the streets to the media and

the courts to push back against entrenched racism. From a personal perspective, I felt my work on literacy in the United States and increasingly in international contexts continued to pull on the arc of justice, and I could return to giving at the office. Yet, the arrival of the Trump administration shows how fragile gains can be. The damage Trump is wreaking domestically and internationally has discovered places G.W. Bush and Cheney never imagined. Peace seems on the retreat. The Iraq War has left a shell of a country and destabilized the region. Afghanistan continues in turmoil, Syria is in chaos, and Trump bellicosity is heating up situations with Iran and North Korea. Urgent action on climate change is threatened by Trump's announcement to withdraw the United States from the Paris Agreement. Corporate greed and deregulation are winning the day again. Income inequality is only going to increase. The future of health care and other social programs is filled with uncertainty. Xenophobia and racism have surged. The electoral process may have been irremediably corrupted. In such a situation, language education seems a slow and tenuous project—even more so when the governmental “education reforms” have made the conditions for serious language education near impossible in K-12 and threatened to seriously dampen open communication on university campuses.

Resistance has become the word, but it is difficult to know where one can dig in and find some traction. Electoral politics seem to offer little hope for new directions, action in the streets does not seem to work. Protection of what can be salvaged of rights advances through the courts and institutional action seems to offer the only viable strategies for survival in the moment. Beyond supporting those organizations that know how to use legal action and exert group pressure to preserve rights, I do not know where and how to act. I, along with many others, watch the news, horrified at what is going on, and seeking hope in the drama of investigations. Yet, who knows what will happen in this fast evolving and unpredictable story. It is an odd kind of optimism that Trump is even more chaotic, ineffective, and prosecutably corrupt than I could have imagined and the dissension he arouses is leaving his agenda and party in disarray. Yet, his erratic, despotic, mendacious temperament that respects no limits—not even the respect hypocrisy shows toward laws, values, and customs—threatens even the basis of our democratic institutions and culture. So illusory optimism and hope float above a sea of pessimism and dread.

Nonetheless, I live in the protective bubble of a progressive state within a secure position in a progressive university with progressive students, so while the urgency I feel is moral and empathetic to those under immediate threat, I do not feel the urgency of personal threat. The personal remedies are ever more distant from the social and political ones. I do not know what I can do except watch, support investigative journalism and rights organizations, make symbolic gestures of solidarity, and wait for those moments when new realities worth acting on will be born.

When I first agreed to write this essay in 2004, I had hoped to tell a triumphal story of moving from youthful social commitment to professional contribution, then using the skills and position I had gathered to meet political

challenges. When I actually wrote it in 2005, as I turned 60, I was left with the problem of my adolescence—too easy to see what is wrong with the world, too easy to take my privileged life for granted. How could I reconcile keeping my little corner of the world habitable, if I live at the expense of the turmoil elsewhere? How would it even be possible? What were the actions that will allow me to see my life as honorable? What was a future of activism that made sense? When I revised the essay in 2009, though I had a bit more hope, those same questions stayed with me. Now in my 70s, these questions have become even more despairingly pressing.

Twenty-five years ago a foolish wag declared the end of history. Fifty years ago, struggling with the politics of Vietnam war and the draft it dawned on me (duh!) that we all lived in history, that history is what unfolds around us by our being part of it. If we must resign ourselves to being in history, we have no choice but to be active in the ways our own dim and flickering lights dictate. I guess this is what you call activism. I hope that the good my generation has done is not undone, or our own contradictions exposed nakedly so quickly that we are emptied of purpose while we are still around. On the picket lines of my youth, I remember singing politically rewritten gospels—“Keep your eye on the prize, your hand on the plow, hold on.” “Gonna hold up the blood-stained banner, gonna hold it up until we die.” Where is the picket line? What is the prize? What banner?

Since I was a teenager, I had been meaning to write Pete Seeger, who had been singing bravely since his early days in the Weavers, even in the face of McCarthy red-baiting and dark times in the cold war. My parents told me they brought me to visit his upstate New York home even before I remember. At every stage in my life I would draw courage and energy from his concerts and recordings, his anthems of freedom and endurance and joy. In early 2003, as I became engaged in activism around the Iraq War, I wrote him a long and rambling letter about what he had meant to me. He sent me a postcard. The picture side was the Milky Way, with a little arrow at one of small dots: “You are here.” On the back he wrote, “You keep singing, teaching. Who knows? Stay well, Pete” And he drew a banjo.

Thanks Pete. I’m here, still singing, teaching, still trying to channel your force.

## 16 Social Justice Activists, Environmental Fatigue, and the Restorative Practices of Doing “The Work That Reconnects”

*Madrone Kalil Schutten*

My education has informed my activism and my activism has primed much of my scholarly focus. I consider myself lucky to have a career that blends well with my non-academic life. I have spent my adulthood as an activist for a variety of social justice causes. When I was younger, I felt I was born in the wrong time and should have been a young adult during the late 1960s to 1970s, longing to be a part of the radical history that helped shape the modern United States. Given the recent rise of nationalism in American society, I no longer feel that I missed my time. Rather, I feel that now is a time of urgency perhaps more so than ever before. The United States has not owned its destructive and violent past acknowledging that we have significantly wounded the earth, humans, and “more-than-humans” (Abram). In our denial, we have forgotten our place in the web, our interconnections.

This chapter is not a typical chapter about environmental conflict or crisis in the way you may be used to reading. Rather, my goal is to illustrate an environmental ethic of care by highlighting communities that use alternative symbolics that work to shift our anti-earth paradigm. Specifically, this chapter looks at a group, Woman’s Way Red Lodge (WWRL), who provides a healing space for activists suffering from environmental fatigue due to the intersectional social justice issues facing us today. First, we explore WWRL and learn about the practice of magick, Hoop communities, and alternative symbolics. Next, we discuss burnout, environmental fatigue, and social dramas. Following this we look at the rhetorical practice of grief as an access point for The Work That Reconnects (Macy and Brown). The alternative symbolics discussed in this chapter require you to briefly suspend your disbelief as a “modern literate” and believe in magick (conscious will) because “magick works, sometimes intentionally, to overcome the trained incapacities of modern literates, incapacities that are central to the objectification, exploitation, and destruction of the natural world” (Schutten and Rogers 274).

### **Woman’s Way Red Lodge and Alternative Symbolics**

Woman’s Way Red Lodge states, “we work to learn how to co-create our lives in a deep body connection with nature and natural cycles. We remember

the wisdom of our ancestors, celebrate the beauty in what is, and honor our intuitive sensing” (wwrl.org). WWRL strives to create a power-from-within model versus a power-over structure. I have been involved with WWRL for several years and served as a member of their board as a “lodgekeeper” from January 2013 to January 2016. I facilitate a group called Drumming into the Seasons, which honors the changing of the seasons on the Wheel of the Year (Winter Solstice, Spring Equinox, Summer Solstice, and Fall Equinox). I also facilitated a WWRL service project called Weaving the Hoop that Connects (Hoop). This group was an intergenerational women’s group that met once a month for six years to explore the mysteries of the sacred feminine. WWRL takes seriously the wisdom of the sacred feminine and “woman’s way” but is open to everyone who wishes to explore the feminine side of themselves and their earth walk. The work of WWRL advances the alternative symbolics and listening practices discussed in Salvador and Clarke and Schutten and Rogers. They also actively advance a re-membling of the sensuous world (see Abram). The purpose of WWRL is as follows:

Responding to an urgent call to restore balance, we build community and connection in safe and healing spaces for discovering, growing and sustaining the joyful warrior within each of us. We empower and recharge spiritual and social justice leaders from all walks of life to collaborate creatively so that we joyfully contribute to learning and sustaining a new paradigm for positive change in our larger communities.

(WWRL.org)

Much like trees that need a deep taproot to draw their strength from, in order to advance and sustain social justice work, we must have a root structure that supports us. WWRL teaches this through creating healing spaces via community ritual events that honor multiple interconnections like the examples mentioned above. They also acknowledge and practice magick, intuitive knowing, earth walking, and other forms of sense-making that have not been accepted as “legitimate” by the dominant paradigm. These ways of knowing are often seen as intuitive rather than reasonable or factual and thus are typically not viewed as valid knowledge claims. Take for example the practice of magick which can be defined as the “exercising of conscious will in the manipulation of natural materials and symbols, and the attendant fostering of alternative ways of listening to natural entities” (Schutten and Rogers: 262). Magick fosters an alternative listening and/or alternative symbolic that embraces the senses. Starhawk (“Dreaming”), an environmental activist, Neo-Pagan leader, and self-identified witch, explains that “learning to work magic is mostly a process of learning to think-in-things, to experience concretely as well as to think abstractly” (27). WWRL encourages and props-up these forms of knowing as core, legitimate, and important. This retraining helps humans to “re-member immanence in all entities through exercising modes of sensation that have become dormant”

(Schutten and Rogers 267). In addition to the practice of magick as an alternative symbolic, Schutten and Rogers argue that

Neo-Pagan practices [like those of WWRL] hold substantial potential for the cultivation of a sustainable environmental ethic and provide a useful illustration of the kinds of practices that are consistent with a transhuman, "green" theory of communication, one that actively includes the natural as part of the communication process, deconstructs the symbolic (ideational)/material dualism, and fosters a sense of the interconnection between culture and nature, human and other-than-human. (279)

Ritual practices that foster grounding and a re-remembering or connection to the senses provide one way that humans can re-connect to the natural world around them. This project of how we teach and nurture reconnection to the senses cannot be overlooked or underestimated if we are to shift our paradigm to view the world as interconnected.

WWRL as a non-profit embraces alternative ways of knowing that attempt to enliven the senses. WWRL functions as a part of a larger environmental justice movement. I have argued elsewhere that ecofeminism could be seen as a social movement merging with the Neo-Pagan Movement where witches are the primary activists (Schutten and Rogers). WWRL members do not necessarily identify as witches but they do operate from a strong ecofeminist/Neo-Pagan lens, even if they may not necessarily use these words to describe themselves. These alternative groups are important because they are doing the work of shifting ideologies from linear and mechanized epistemologies to cyclical and intrinsic ways of knowing. This is key because in order to respond to the current environmental crisis we need an alternative discourse. To this end, Bullis writes:

Treating the environment as an issue within a dominant discourse is inadequate because the dominant discourse inherently perpetuates the environmental destruction responsible for the current [environmental] crisis. Instead, alternative discourses not grounded in the current dominant discourse are essential for adequate transformation. (123)

The research I have been doing most of my career has been aimed at understanding what these alternative discourses look like "on the ground." WWRL is one example of an organization working to re-surface alternative ways of knowing, in turn countering dominant modes of thinking that reject cyclical understandings of nature. Their values merge with an important Neo-Pagan tenet arguing that it is important to resist "a dominant discourse about the nature of reality, which marginalizes certain kinds of spiritual and imaginative experiences as irrational and irrelevant" (Magliocco 197). This alternative



symbolic put forth by WWRL is actively being cultivated by members and has the potential to deepen our awareness of how to nurture, heal, and thrive in community while honoring the earth.

### **Burnout, Environmental Fatigue, and Social Dramas**

Given our current environmental crisis, many organizations and community partnerships are needed in order to create meaningful change toward a sustainable future. Environmental communication scholarship has illustrated that Westernized humans do not see themselves as part of nature (Schutten “Chewing” Carabaugh). Thus, many environmental scholars have argued for a dialogue with nature where nature has a voice as a participant and is not simply an object used in the construction of both symbolic and material reality (e.g., Bullis; Burford and Schutten; Milstein; Peterson et al.; Rogers). Because of this dominant view, it is crucial to help humans see that they are interconnected and that nature is a participant in their realities. People need to feel connected to their environment and to have a “sense of place.” This is a challenge as technology moves us farther away from natural rhythms.

Our access to instant information has propelled some social movements farther but it can also create a feeling of overload. Evces writes that burnout is a “persistent feeling of exhaustion, cynicism and inefficacy resulting from chronic exposure to work-related stress” (18). Historically, this term referred to drug abuse or overwork at one’s job. However, in today’s political climate, many people claim activism as a second or third job, becoming increasingly more involved in democratic processes as a part of an informed and active citizenry. As such, they are struggling to manage excessive exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy or a lack of power. Compassion fatigue is an effect of burnout and refers to a form of desensitization where people have exercised their compassion in so many directions that they become fatigued (Patel). This fatalist exhaustion can be caused by news media and also “too many social crises occurring in one year, distance or relevance of issues, unsolved humanitarian issues, or personal traits and values of audience members” (Patel 4).

With each new environmental shock, we experience increased “social drama” (Turner). Turner discusses four phases of social dramas: breach, crisis, redress, and either reintegration or recognition of schism. We are living in a time where there is continued breach after breach and crisis after crisis with little time to complete or begin processing the third and fourth stages of the drama. Turner writes, “Social dramas are in large measure political processes, that is, they involve competition for scarce ends—power, dignity, prestige, honor, purity—by particular means and by the utilization of resources that are also scarce—goods, territory, money, men and women” (71–72). Dramas like the destruction caused by hurricanes Harvey, Irma, Jose, Maria, the pulling out of the Paris Agreement, the raging fires in California, Oregon, Montana,

and much of the west all occupied headlines during the summer and early fall of 2017. Social dramas involving pipelines (Dakota Access, etc.) and mines (Boundary Waters in MN), an Environmental Protection Agency director that was decidedly pro-corporation, shrinking habitats, bark beetles destroying forests due to drought, increased flooding, increased temperatures, more or less moisture, "red tides," "green slime," and so forth merged with political dramas. These political dramas include, but are not limited to, struggles over health care reform, tax reform, immigration (and resulting detention camps for children), international instability (Niger, North Korea, just to name a couple), and open discrimination against race, gender, sexuality, and climate refugees. All of these dramas created breaches and crises that have kept activists busy lobbying Congress, creating rallies/marches, and doing whatever they can to have some control in shaping futures. Just this small list is illustrative of the environmental/political dramas or breaches of the norm, that have created burnout and compassion fatigue. In 2013, *The New York Times* ran a piece on "environmental warning fatigue." Today, environmental warning fatigue has transitioned into more of a general constant environmental issues fatigue. No longer is the fatigue about warnings of what might happen but an "on the ground" reality with activists responding to continual anti-environmental policy changes and acknowledging finite time for increased actions to mitigate harms. It is as if every aspect of life is being challenged and nowhere is this more obvious than with the consequences of human-caused climate change. In addition to Turner's phases, Burke writes that rhetoric is a "strategy for encompassing a situation" (109). So, rather than just adding up all the repeated breaches and crises of repeated social dramas, I offer the Hoop (and circles like it) as an alternative strategy embedded in alternative symbolics.

Our historical moment of environmental compassion fatigue requires sacred spaces to "fill up" and take care of ourselves so we can continue to do the important work of "co-creating a new paradigm for positive change in our communities" (wwrl.org). This is the purpose of WWRL. As such, the vision for the Social Justice Hoop (SJ Hoop) is to hold space for activists, generators, and change agents so they can more fully, and in a healthy space, recharge in order to continue this important paradigm-shifting work. Communities like this articulate another moment in the Turner schema that does not necessarily reside in the public sphere. Activists who participate in the Hoop have an opportunity to regenerate in private and then, as activists with "bodies on the line," are social movement actors agitating for change within public spheres. Reading Turner this way is useful because even though Hoops are not public, they directly inform actions in the public sphere. I have long been interested in the public and private issues facing movements noting that "using a culturalist lens, public spheres need not be the only arenas for contestation. Actually-existing democracies include multiple public spheres such as emergent subaltern counterpublics" (Schutten, "Coming" 22).

In this way, the WWRL Hoops function as a subaltern counterpublic of larger social movements (e.g., environmental). They may advertise publicly for members, but at some point, most Hoops shift to meeting in private spaces. Thus, when we think of Turner's schema for social drama, we must address the relationship between public and private spheres for social movement change. Turner defined the first stage of a drama as manifesting itself as "a breach of a norm, the infraction of a rule of morality, law, custom, or etiquette in some public arena" (70). His schema referred to "some public arena"; however, we do not always publicly see the rhetoric of dissent within "official" public spheres (Fraser). Critics of the culturalist perspective (more private) of social movements contend that culturalist movements are apolitical (Buechler). Elsewhere I have argued "this creates a false dichotomy between a movement that is political and a movement that is cultural when movements can be comprised of both aspects" (Schutten, "Coming" 3). I see more value in looking at movements from both perspectives because the cultural perspective allows us to understand aspects that may be missed by using only a political lens. For example, using only a political lens would not highlight or focus on the energy activists' gain in the private sphere (Hoops). Activists in the Social Justice Hoop value the importance of gathering to create a safe space through the experience of magick and the power of sitting together in a circle to tell our stories, to release the pain and sorrow of what does not serve us, and to rise again with renewed energy to sustain the multiple movements of which we are participants. Movements today are not bounded but rather are fluid, intersectional, and fragmented. As a result, the activist strategies to sustain action for multiple campaigns need to take into account ways to cope with extreme fatigue.

### **Doing "The Work That Reconnects"**

The practices of self-care in order to do the important environmental social justice work that this moment demands are not typical and not mainstream. Rather, these rhetorical practices fall into performatives and co-creative rituals that bring communities together in non-traditional ways. The practices of WWRL and Hoops could be seen as part of the larger project of what Joanna Macy and Molly Brown refer to as "The Work That Reconnects" (64–65). "The central purpose of the Work That Reconnects is to bring people into new relationship with their world, to empower them to take part in the Great Turning, and to reclaim their lives from corporate rule" (Macy and Brown 65). The Work That Reconnects walks a metaphoric spiral and has four consecutive stages: "Coming from Gratitude, Honoring Our Pain for the World, Seeing with New Eyes and Going Forth" (Macy and Brown 67). *Gratitude* helps people to come back to their "source" or center and to express our love for life on earth, which helps us "be more fully present and grounded for acknowledging the pain we carry for our world" (67). When we *honor our pain*

we learn to "suffer with" and this pain that had "isolated us in private anguish now opens outward and delivers us into the wider reaches of our collective existence" (67) so we can move closer to healing and shifting our paradigm. These first two stages help us move to the third stage where we *see with new eyes* and feel a growing sense of interconnection to past and future generations and other species (Macy and Brown). Finally, we *go forth* into the actions that call us as we apply our new understandings to the social change we are working toward (Macy and Brown). The spiral begins again and again, and the sequence could repeat within any phase (Macy and Brown). For example, the Seeing with New Eyes step "may reveal to us with greater clarity the horrors being inflicted on the Earth community, bringing up fresh grief and outrage. We may need to honor that pain with a practice or ritual before moving on" (Macy and Brown 68). These stages are part of what WWRL as an organization and the Social Justice Hoop articulates in their projects. Moreover, The Work That Reconnects nurtures and promotes what Emily Plec defines as internatural communication or "the exchange of intentional energy between humans and other animals as well as communication among animals and other forms of life" (6). The SJ Hoop and WWRL do the work of validating alternative symbolics (e.g., intentional energy) and in turn help to shift human ways of *interaction with* and *listening to* the natural world. Put another way, Rogers states, "we need to learn how to listen in the 'wrong' ways" (255). He goes on to write that the aim is "not to escape symbolism, but to promote and nurture different modes of symbolic activity" (268). Now let's turn for a moment and explore what a Hoop's structure might look like in creating new models for symbolic activity.

In all examples, the process of a Hoop or any circle is co-creative. This understanding allows for spontaneity and "spirit" to influence the outcome of the circle. Hoops are not rigidly organized or held to what was planned prior to the actual gathering. Members begin a gathering by acknowledging the elements (air, fire, water, earth) and sitting together in a circle. Circle work is a powerful form of joining-with that creates a synergistic feeling and energy (Macy and Brown). WWRL circles embrace both new and powerful vernaculars that illustrate human to more-than-human connections or pain and they embrace emotive sharing about these connections with the natural world. I argue that the ritual forms of healing in Hoops come from alternative symbolics or propping up alternative ways of understanding the natural world that are not on the "rational" end of the dualism but fall more on the "intuitive" side. In circle, we learn to trust our body wisdoms as legitimate voices in turn honing our abilities to listen to natural rhythms and callings (intuitive knowing).

Of course, humans are not going to suddenly embrace alternative symbolic activities. As such, there are ceremonial practices that circles like the Hoop create to help participants access new ways of seeing the world and enlivening our senses. At the first SJ Hoops we discussed a general ritual structure that would have a round for shared releasing, a round for filling up, reclaiming, healing

and so forth, and finally end with a round of raising energy. This last round was conceived to shift one's self out of continued exhaustion and worry for the world into the place of a joy-filled warrior. These rounds "work" the spiral and help members continue their sustained activism by providing a sacred space to heal wounds from sustained political action.

I have two brief examples I would like to focus on as restorative co-creative ritual/ceremony. These examples highlight practices that bring humans more into their body wisdoms in turn strengthening their resolve as activists and shifting how they see themselves in the web of life. The stories I share here are mine but are characteristic of experiences that may be co-created in circles like the WWRL Social Justice Hoop. Over the years, I have heard similar stories from other WWRL members that speak to these circles as examples of enlivening the senses and creating alternative symbolics.

WWRL offers me spaces to practice and to re-learn how to *think about* and to *feel into* the earth and its beings as having intrinsic worth, as interconnected with humans (an ecofeminist tenet). For example, I remember early in my MA graduate career (1997ish) learning about ecofeminism and the phrase "rape of the earth" to describe the powerover nature we as a society continue to wield. To many, including my uncle who looked at me like I was ridiculous for using this phrasing, this idea would be considered over the top or too strong of a statement, a linguistic description that should be reserved for humans only. WWRL language, not only what is spoken about, but the way the language is used, re-constitutes the world around us as inclusive of environmental realities both human and more-than-human. Groups like WWRL that are co-creating vernacular that reflects and embodies the natural world are doing part of The Work That Reconnects. I argue that as symbol-using beings, this re-languaging starts the process of recognizing interconnection in order to move us to a place where there "are no words" to describe a variety of phenomenological experiences.

More recently, the WWRL Morning Circle members held space (offered support) as I shed tears learning of the death of Tilikum, a captive SeaWorld orca who died after living almost all of his life in a concrete prison (see Buford and Schutten for more on orca captives). I had been working for two years writing about captive classes and analyzing the documentary *Blackfish*. Because of this, I felt a strong release and awareness of the freedom death would bring him. My emotion caught me off guard but someone from the circle pointed out that it would be more bizarre for me to *not* feel grief after such a sustained interconnection to his reality. Our connections to the animate world are real if we allow them to seep into our consciousness. These types of perspectives are validated and shared in a SJ Hoop where we re-language our relationship to the earth and this type of sharing is status quo, to be expected, and understood versus dismissed as coincidence, cute, or overly emotional. Together, members of Hoops co-create a new normal that cultivates an "internatural communication" (Plec), which is important for further environmental

stewardship ethics. Stories of internatural communication are validated and recognized in these circles. Speaking about connection to more-than-humans is not dismissed as a “hippy dippy tree hugging” experience but as legitimate communication.

In the example above, I discussed how Hoops and WWRL embrace vernaculars that highlight interconnection illustrating how global pains of the world or specific entities affect consciousness and ways of being. Next, I would like to consider practices of releasing grief. Grief is not an emotion that many feel comfortable discussing or expressing. As a rhetorical practice, grief about environmental injustice is an everyday reality and thus a key point for generating action and change. As a practice, Hoop members learn that grieving is both an individual and collective process. We start by allowing tears whenever they flow without explanation or apology. Practicing expression of grief in these circles has given me permission to extend my heartache to all living entities, including the perceived pains of the earth without feeling strange or odd for tuning into the more-than-human.

My next example of releasing the global pain of the world is achieved by literally screaming. In their book *Trauma Stewardship*, Laura van Dernoot Lipsky and Connie Burk write that trauma stewardship “demands that we embrace a paradox: If we are truly to know joy, we cannot afford to shut down our experience of pain. We know that there have been many attempts to hide the evidence of suffering in the world” (15). In this way, it is clear that honoring pain is a radical action performed by the SJ Hoop. Awareness of pain is important for an environmental ethic of care to flourish where humans see their actions as cyclical and affecting themselves and other entities. We live in a world with “systemic oppression” or institutionalized formal and informal oppressions (Lipsky and Burk). As such, it is not startling that emotions of grief have an omnipotent presence for activists.

The first time I tried to “scream out” my pain, the pain of others, the pain of the earth, I could not get anything to come out. Standing in my power trying to scream was no easy task. I asked for help from the circle and another woman stood behind me with her arms hugging me around my hips supporting me as I tried to work up the courage to scream. I could not believe how hard this was. I was in a safe space, outside by a river, on several acres of land, with no one near me to fear mistaking my scream as a cry for help (although it could be interpreted this way regardless). Finally, I got three screams out and felt a huge relief. I was able to shift some anger and grief inside me in order to be more fully present for both my own continued growth and for others. Interestingly, trying this in a car or into a pillow did not have the same feeling as releasing with nature as witness.

At another circle I had the opportunity to grieve with community. During this experience, I realized the power of releasing through group screaming, crying, moaning, yelling, and movement. Grieving in a group takes courage and trust to not be stuck in your rational or ego mind worrying about what

others think. Even writing this here takes courage as sharing about personal experiences in a piece of academic writing is not the norm. In this particular circle we first shared some of what we were grieving for ourselves, others, the earth itself, the beings on the earth, and so forth. It was wisely suggested that we not to compare our grief to others. Next, we released vocally while a drumbeat played on in the background as if this sound was helping us to push out the pain. The drumming was constant and just like our heartbeats gave us the strength to keep walking forward into the darkness, into our deep knowing of the pains in the world. It felt like a birth with laboring and exhaustion. It was a re-birthing. Others echoed my screaming, my tears were witnessed and mirrored, and being keenly aware that these opportunities for release are rare, we were encouraged to let it all go. We were in a liminal (Turner) ritual experience, a time out of time. Turner writes that during a liminal ritual moment “the cognitive schemata that give sense and order to everyday life no longer apply, but are, as it were, suspended—in ritual symbolism” (84). Because we were in a safe space, what made “sense” in the everyday mundane world gave way to the new sense of tuning into our pains in order to shift. Turner also writes that achieving a state of ritual liminality is “in most cultures regenerative” (84). This regeneration process is hard to articulate because with the example I have shared, words have no place. The experience is about energy, emotion, synergy, and a whole host of phenomena that are not best articulated with words but rather through experience. Suffice to say that this rhetorical practice of grieving as activist work offers an opportunity to wail for the world, to honor this pain. Just like we might send prayers to the wombs of the world (a WWRL Red Tent activity), we can send energy through our screams, our tears, and our commitment to the work of releasing this pain so we can move forward as social justice warriors fighting injustice. What happened in this circle was nothing short of magick, my conscious will to change my being by releasing grief, and in turn, healing. Every healing we do individually contributes to healing the cellular memories of the collective, human and more-than-human, and the earth.

### **Going Forth**

WWRL and circle communities like the Social Justice Hoop help us to See with New Eyes and Go Forth as activists championing holistic change free from systemic oppression. Lipsky and Burk write:

Oppression plays a leading role in creating and maintaining systems that perpetuate suffering and trauma for all sentient beings, as well as the planet we share. The more we can understand this relationship, the better our insights into the ways that trauma affects us individually and collectively around the globe. (28)

There is much work to be done to gain insight into these traumas. The information we need to heal from trauma and environmental fatigue will not be found by reading books and looking up statistics about social justice crimes against the earth and humanity but it can be found in our conviviality to the forests, oceans, deserts, and so on. We must re-member where we came from without going back to some pre-industrial way of life. Put another way, when it comes to earthly ways of knowing, rational paradigms do not provide the full story. These epistemologies ignore the intuitive parts of our being, the parts needed to cultivate an internatural communication.

In this time of post-truth, it feels ironic to be advocating alternative symbolics that ask us to believe in what has been dismissed as “illegitimate” ways of knowing. But perhaps this time it works to the activists’ advantage. If everything is deconstructed into nothingness, if there is no one Truth, but multiple truths, and fact has been eroded, perhaps there is room for new ways of seeing and going forth to surface. After all, this is a practice Hoop members engage in regularly. They listen to people when they have an intuition about something and do not dismiss these alternative symbolics and/or signs as untruths even when they have not had the same experience. In this way, there are multiple truths or interpretations of the natural, each unique to those who are open to listening. Our interactions with the environment and the natural world are dependent on our ability to recreate balance. To this end, Starhawk “Fifth” writes:

All people, all living things, are part of the earth life, and so are sacred. No one of us stands higher or lower than any other. Only justice can assure balance; only ecological balance can sustain freedom. Only in freedom can that fifth sacred thing we call spirit flourish in its full diversity.

(Forward)

In the SJ Hoop these words are prescriptive. The practices and actions of this circle actively engage in restorative exercises that are a part of *The Work That Reconnects*. These activists link the ecological stability of the earth with freedom from systemic oppressions. Together, by honoring pain and co-creating vernaculars that support internatural communication, they are working toward a new environmental ethic of care.

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# 17 [Still] The Only Conceivable Thing to Do

## Reflections on Academics and Activism

*Dana L. Cloud*

A new and ominous phase of global politics has now opened, which not even the most cloistered of academics will be able to ignore. Even so, what has proved most damaging is the absence of memories of collective, and effective, political action.

(Terry Eagleton 7)

Socialism means a classless society, or it means nothing at all. And it was here that those few months in the militia were valuable to me. For the Spanish militias, while they lasted, were a sort of microcosm of a classless society. In that community where no one was on the make, where there was a shortage of everything but no privilege and no bootlicking, one got, perhaps, a crude fore- cast of what the opening stages of socialism might be like. And, after all, instead of disillusioning me it deeply attracted me. The effect was to make my desire to see socialism established much more actual than it had been before.

(George Orwell, about his participation in the Spanish Civil War, quoted in Wengraf)

In his eleventh thesis on the German philosopher Feuerbach, Karl Marx chastised philosophy for its abstract and detached gaze on the world of political struggle: “Philosophers have merely interpreted the world,” he wrote. “The point, however, is to change it” (Marx, *Theses*). Marx was a philosopher, economist, critic, and historian—that is, a scholar, as well as an activist. His writings on ideology and philosophy are indispensable to critics who want to locate political discourse (such as the rhetoric of war) in economic contexts (such as how war is motivated by economic and geopolitical aims, for example, the control of oil). His ideas informed his political commitments to international working-class solidarity and movement; more importantly, his experience in movements influenced his scholarship. He and Engels could not have composed *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* in a vacuum-sealed academic office. Rather, all around him revolutions erupted across Europe in the late 1840s, inspiring him to enter practical politics and to notice how the capitalist system

produced upheaval and revolt. The accelerating exploitation of the Industrial Revolution fueled his theorizing in *Capital*, where he argued that we live in a fundamentally exploitative society that creates the force that can end it: workers whose labor (still today) makes the whole system run (and whose refusal to labor, therefore, could bring the whole system to a halt).

Marx's scholarship and scholars following his method often emphasize how such ideologies as the normative, ideal nuclear family, the myth of individual upward mobility, and the circulation of racist, sexist, and homophobic ideas operate in a context of unequal power relations, including the economic. At the same time, however, he and subsequent revolutionaries noticed that a person's consciousness is not completely dominated by reactionary ideas. The lived experience of ordinary people, which often contradicts the official stories, is a resource for criticism and action. Going to work every day is a grim prospect for millions of people around the world, even as politicians, advertisers, and journalists tell us that we can live the dream of upward mobility (see Cloud, "Change Happens," *Dilemmas of Dissidents*, "Routine Misconduct").

Mobilized by these contradictions and galvanized by the political discourse of the left, masses of people in nations across the world and at times across modern history have risen up to demand justice. In such times, intellectuals and ideas are important in demystifying ideology and producing rhetoric (speeches, writings, leaflets, signs, meeting facilitation and intervention, and so on). This is the terrain upon which my scholarly work and political organizing intersect. In what follows, I will relay several of my experiences that point to the relationship between activism and academic life.

I began my political life as a feminist at Penn State in the mid-1980s. My roommate and friends were involved in the South African divestment movement against apartheid; I was yet unformed politically and narrowly focused on completing a double major. I kept my head down. However, I also found and became part of a community of women and began to study the ways in which culture and political discourse shape women's lives. I attended a national pro-choice march of hundreds of thousands of people in 1989, and the experience was a turning point in my political development. I entered graduate school in rhetorical studies at the University of Iowa in 1987. It was a program rich in social theory classes and lessons in the rhetorical criticism of ideology. My first research was on the consequences of the rhetorical separation of public and private spheres for women in the suffrage and anti-slavery movements. I continued to develop feminist consciousness. It seemed to me that doing feminist scholarship was in itself political, and I had little public involvement in movements at this time.

Then came the first Gulf War in 1990–1991. It struck me and many others immediately as an irrational set of atrocities clearly motivated by the interest of US corporations in oil profits. As the buildup to war culminated in the bombing of Baghdad in February 1991, I and many others became increasingly aware of

mass-mediated government propaganda. With the help of paid public relations firms, the first Bush administration whipped up stories about babies left to die in incubators and other crimes, omitting coverage of events that contradicted the official story. For example, it came to light in alternative news sources that a US ambassador had given Saddam Hussein's regime a "green light" to invade Kuwait; the invasion then served as a pretext for US action. Likewise, many people knew that the United States had supported and armed Hussein through the 1980s; suddenly he was no longer "our" dictator (Kellner).

News of civilian casualties and US losses moved my friends and me to action. I had gotten married in 1988, and had a daughter, Samantha, in the fall of 1990. Despite multiple demands on our time and attention, my husband and I became involved in "Operation US Out" (OUSO), the Iowa City anti-war organization. Through icy streets and snowy skies, we marched against war. Samantha "marched" with us, sometimes bundled in a stroller or in a baby carrier under my winter coat. The topknot of her knit hat would peek up out from under the coat. We were afraid (or hopeful?) that her first words would be "No blood for oil!" (Her first word was "kitty.")

In OUSO, activists made arguments about oil and imperialism, about the hypocritical history of US interventions around the world, and about the motives and consequences of war. The people who spoke in the meetings and who made the most sense, most of the time, were socialists. Their key point was that in a system bent on profit by any means necessary, ruthless competition by corporations and nation-states always trumps providing for human need. Wars, occupations, and sanctions (which killed hundreds of thousands of civilians in Iraq) are inevitable byproducts of corporate and then international competition over the world's labor, resources, and markets. Corporations and politicians are wedded together, so that corporate interests determine both domestic and foreign policy. Further, racism, sexism, and homophobia prevail in politics and the media (with a few exceptions for rich gay people) and divide us from one another so that we blame blacks, or women, or gays for our problems rather than targeting the system. Imperialist wars are about plundering and controlling other nations where dominant powers have geopolitical and economic stakes.

It became clear to me that socialism could explain the war in connection with economic reality—in other words, in terms of *imperialism*—better than many other organizations and individuals with whom I had spoken. In my academic life as a communication scholar, my colleagues and I discussed the rhetoric of war. We compiled videos of media coverage of the war and taught our students to look at this coverage with critical eyes. In OUSO, my comrades and I talked about the war itself. Then we marched against the war. Activists were and are intellectuals as much as any professor, but at a level with political events, not one step removed. This activism was a manifestation of intellect in the service not of the production of abstract knowledge but rather of action based on knowledge. By the time the war was over, I had joined

the International Socialist Organization (ISO; [www.international-socialist.org](http://www.international-socialist.org)). Eighteen years have passed [see the addendum for an update], and as a member of the ISO, I have participated in struggles for abortion rights and workers' rights, against corporate globalization and for affirmative action, against racism, sexism, and homophobia, for gay marriage and against the tragic wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. I also have been proud to be part of a socialist organization that sustains itself over the long haul with the goal of becoming a mass organization capable of mounting a fundamental challenge to capitalism itself. Movements come and go, sometimes winning reforms, sometimes ending in defeat. Through it all, the ISO has been my political home.

Likewise, my scholarship over the years has come together into a defense of Marxist discourse theory and the articulation of a range of Marxist critical concepts to rhetorical practices. Ideology criticism is based on the Marxist method of exposing how the dominant ideas in our society (whose mass mediation is controlled by about five multinational media corporations; see McChesney) obscure real inequalities and injustices in society. Using the tools of ideology criticism, I have published essays about racist stereotyping in the mass media, the mythos of the American Dream and family values, and the silencing of race in the culture of labor movements (among other things; see Cloud, "Limits," "Hegemony," "Rhetoric of Family Values," "Null Persona"). I wrote a book about the rhetoric of therapy, or, in other words, about how our cultural and political life is dominated by ideologies that reduce social problems to individual, emotional problems (Cloud, *Control*). For example, employers often provide counseling for disgruntled workers, whose complaints are about wages and work conditions, and media coverage of support groups during the first Gulf War convinced people that coping with the war was better than criticizing it.

In addition, I have critiqued the post-structuralist and post-Marxist turns in discourse theory, which reject the idea of system-oriented workers' struggle rooted in their own objective interests, and which refuse to tie communicative practices to social classes. Whereas I regard capitalism as a real economic system whose discourses systematically operate in the objective interests of an actually existing ruling class, a number of contemporary theorists believe otherwise (see Laclau and Mouffe; Hardt and Negri; contra. Cloud, "Bringing Down Suharto," "Matrix"). For me, the concreteness of meeting labor activists at a conference inspired me to write a book on the role of dissidents in reforming the labor movement. My practical experience in movements taught me that theory does not make sense except if one had little or no contact with the real world. Too many scholars attempt, in Marx's words, to "fight phrases with phrases," ignoring the real existing world (*German Ideology*).

An experience I had during the spring of 2004 exemplifies the limits of fighting phrases with phrases. At that time, I was active in the Austin Coalition for Marriage Equality, an activist group that sprang up after lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and otherwise queer (LGBTQ) persons in San Francisco and

Boston had demanded and won the right to marry. That same summer, I taught a graduate seminar in social movements at the University of Iowa. In my seminar, theoretically sophisticated students challenged the idea of working for gay marriage because the phrases “gay” and “marriage” were ideologically problematic. They argued that we should reject basing any movement on an essentialist notion of gayness or a defense of the nuclear family. Instead of joining activist groups to keep the pressure on society to grant gay marriage rights, they argued that we must do the “hard political work” of deconstructing these categories. Having been denied basic rights, liberties, and material advantages on the basis of my sexuality, I found that discussion frustrating.

The same argument arose during a conference on historical materialism in 2008. My argument for a movement calling for marriage equality was enjoined by a prominent feminist scholar (whom I had long admired), who argued that the category of marriage was itself the oppressor and that gays and lesbians seeking marriage rights were complicit in that oppression. Never mind that my partner of ten years, suffering from a chronic illness, spent a year away from our home for a job with decent health benefits; never mind that thousands of us have no access to our lovers’ sickbeds, no medical or fiscal decision-making capacity, no health insurance benefits, and no right to shared property.

In such a context, the kind of intervention necessary to defend civil rights and procure social justice requires attention to material and institutional consequences of oppression, as well as public, interventionist movements involving intellectuals alongside others pushing for these gains. As Gramsci explained, intellectuals should put ideas into the service of historical education, political analysis, and collective action. Criticism of prevailing ideologies and consciousness is part of intellectual work, *but critique must happen in conjunction with practical political activity if it is to be relevant at all to the democratic project.*

Of course, as a longtime socialist, I am skeptical about the nuclear family; the ideal of the family is often used to oppress women and to justify not having any social services, because families are responsible for taking care of their own. Further, I do not regard “gayness” as a biological or permanent characteristic, so I understand why embracing this and related terms may be problematic. However, to win full recognition of gay and lesbian families along with the benefits attendant to marriage (including health care, custody of children, inheritance of property and pensions, and so on) would mean real improvement in the living standards of many LGBTQ people. Further, to erode the foundations for judgment in a practical political world is to disarm the oppressed and exploited, who are supposed to study their identities rather than winning real gains. To fight anti-gay bigotry, we need to do the harder political work of organizing as LGBTQ persons and our allies, because homophobia institutionally and materially targets a real group of people, however complex their identities may be.

Another example: in November 2003, the annual convention of the National Communication Association took place in Miami, coinciding exactly with the meeting of members of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). The goal of the meeting was to establish trade policies across North and South America, extending the North American Free Trade Agreement to other nations. (The group has not produced a comprehensive agreement as of the time of this writing.) For labor, NAFTA had been a disaster (see Chomsky; “North American Free Trade Agreement”). Far from creating the promised increase in US jobs, the agreement made it possible for US employers to threaten US workers to “move the jobs to another country” when workers organized in unions (while severely restricting the mobility of workers on both sides of the border). Along with those of the World Trade Organization (WTO), FTAA agreements were to govern matters of labor, environmental conditions, international patents and copyrights, and the rules of trade; neither of these groups is elected or beholden to anyone in the affected countries.

Massive movements of labor, environmentalist, human rights, and peace activists confronted the FTAA at its meetings; November 10, 2003, in Miami was no exception. Twelve (of 25; the rest were turned away) busloads of union members (scheduled to hold a permitted labor rally inside the Bayfront Amphitheater), environmentalists, and tens of thousands of other activists thronged the designated “protest zone.” The Miami police, state troopers, and other police were out in the hundreds, decked out in riot gear and armed with clubs and guns loaded with rubber bullets. Outside the amphitheater, each unionist, including a number of elderly people, was searched one by one before entering. Snipers were at the ready on corners of buildings surrounding the protest site. Unbelievably, an enormous tank had been brought in to quell unrest if necessary.

The atmosphere was tense; protesters were penned in and frustrated; police, having learned from the WTO protests in Seattle in 1999, were on edge and trigger-happy. When a few activists approached the fenced barrier marking the perimeter of the protest zone and pressed against it, there was sudden bedlam. Police began pepper-spraying demonstrators in the face and shooting rubber bullets into a now-fleeing crowd. One rubber bullet hit a young woman sitting and praying on the ground. Another knocked out an elderly woman trying to hobble out of the *mêlée* with her cane. There was only one exit, and thousands of people ran for it into the deserted streets beyond. Phalanxes of police, hanging out of the sides of police cars with their clubs held out to knock down anyone close, were ready to leap into the crowd. They flanked thousands of demonstrators and began beating them (for coverage see Driscoll; Sustar).

A group of about a dozen National Communication Association (NCA) members, including myself, had gathered to observe and/or participate in the demonstration. At the time that the police riot began, we were separated, but several of us escaped the police press by running up onto a rail platform. Trains had not yet stopped running (although they were about to, closing off the

possibility of escape for thousands of others). Dirty and stunned, we made our way back to the conference.

As we had exited the hotel to attend the demonstration hours earlier, we passed some familiar scholars on their way to panels. I asked one, "What session are you going to?" He said (with no sense of irony), "A session on social movements." Back at the hotel, it was very frustrating to see media coverage blaming the violence on mythically inflated "anarchists." (Apparently, police had discovered a single protester with a brick.) Discussion of the protest with colleagues over (welcome) ten-dollar martinis at the bar felt surreal.

However, to be active in social movements does not mean giving up scholarship and criticism. We must defend ourselves, too, when the right mounts increasingly virulent attacks on academic freedom (Wilson). We must fight the battle of ideas as well as the battles in our workplaces and the streets. Understanding racism, sexism, homophobia, nationalism, and other ideological justifications for oppression is important work. This kind of work can happen both in the university and in the public sphere. In the (former) ISO and among activists more generally, I have found activist-intellectuals whose writing and speaking ability and analytical acumen rival those of many, if not most, of my academic colleagues (see Shawki; Smith, *Women, Subterranean*; Wolf; *International Socialist Review*).

From their work and experience, I know that in order to change culture one must attack the roots of the problems in unequal material relations of power. So long as it is profitable to objectify women in advertising, the critique of advertising will have limited impact. So long as governments and corporations fearing unified opposition to their rule "divide both to conquer each," in Frederick Douglass's words, there will be little hope of undoing racism in mass culture. Critique is not enough. It is the system of exploitation that needs addressing at the point of production, the only place ordinary people have been able to win significant material gains. In those struggles, sexism, racism, and other oppressive ideas can evaporate quickly.

For example, in 1997, a number of ISO members and I walked the UPS picket line with the workers during their strike that cost UPS US\$1.6 billion dollars and won them real gains against permanent part-time work. On the line, I heard workers making homophobic remarks about replacement workers ("scabs") crossing the picket line. They were hooting at the scabs to "bend over for the boss"; they called scabs "fags." Ironically, a significant number of UPS employees (as in any workforce) on that line were LGBTQ persons. Many were walking the line that day. Perhaps they would have quit the line out of disgust with their co-workers' homophobia and broken the solidarity that kept the strike strong. As an out lesbian, I was worried about this possibility and spoke to one strike captain about the homophobic language. Because it was clear to him that he and other heterosexual workers had a material interest in maintaining the strength of the strike, and thus in abandoning their homophobia and standing in solidarity with their LGBTQ brothers and sisters, he



spoke to other leaders on the line and, soon enough, the equation of scabs with gays no longer held. In labor and movement history, there are many stories like this one, and there are others in which oppressive ideas ruined solidarity and led to crushing defeats. I have published work on the labor movement describing the differences between union movements with internal activist groups as opposed to those entrenched in sluggish bureaucratic concession-making (*Dilemmas of Dissidents*). The former category definitely sees more victories, from which scholars can learn the mechanisms of the formation of class consciousness and confidence (Smith, *Subterranean*).

Of course, however, students, intellectuals, and those not so clearly positioned as workers often stand on principle in solidarity with those fighting for economic, racial, gender, and sexual justice. (It should be noted that most scholars share, even materially speaking, more in common with all kinds of workers than we do with our bosses or the ruling class more generally.) As an intellectual who could choose not to face the alienation and exploitation characteristic of most workplaces in our society, I would not know the stories of solidarity without having been there. After the 1997 strike, at the annual march and rally honoring Martin Luther King, Jr. in Austin, a woman we had met on the UPS picket line approached the socialist table. She purchased some literature and expressed interest in the group. She said to several of us, "I remember you from the UPS picket line. You were there for us."

Thus, activism has been one of my classrooms, perhaps the most important one. Activism and activists have educated me about social movements, not the other way around, such that it is harder for me to figure out what my scholarship has to teach movements. I am not of the mind that I have some special technical knowledge that, out of some academic *noblesse oblige*, I will bestow upon movement actors. Although not without my critics, I am a fine communicator attuned to contemporary politics. However, many people I have known in movements (untrained, in the academic sense) have been better public speakers, better facilitators of meetings, and more accurate readers of political opportunities and constraints than I or many of my scholarly colleagues. They are movement intellectuals.

Academia, for all its politics and burdens, is still a space of freedom in comparison with many forms of labor in today's world. I am privileged to have flexible work hours, access to public spaces for meetings and demonstrations, access to information and people, adequate pay, the use of cutting-edge communication technologies, and many other resources. As a tenured faculty member, I am especially able to take political risks. In 2000, I was part of the anti-death penalty movement (as a member of the Campaign to End the Death Penalty ([www.nodeathpenalty.org](http://www.nodeathpenalty.org)) when the state of Texas put Gary Graham (a.k.a. Shaka Sankofa) to death. He had a strong case for innocence, and his situation as a poor black man highlighted the racial and economic bias in the application of the death penalty across the United States. His case raised the profile of the anti-death penalty cause and galvanized thousands of

people nationally and internationally, and in Austin (the belly of the beast), we built some large demonstrations. At one of them, activists, including myself, engaged in civil disobedience, blocking the gates of the Governor's mansion. The Austin police and state troopers arrived on the scene and eventually rushed in to haul us away.

People in the hundreds-strong rally chanted "The whole world is watching!" echoing a slogan from the 1960s anti-war movement. The troopers restrained us with plastic cuffs that cut into our wrists. They kicked one protester in the head. They pulled my partner from the ground by her head, injuring her neck. They pushed me on my face, sending my glasses across the pavement and bruising my arms and legs. As she was dragged away, my friend Ameanda shouted at the top of her voice, which cut through the crowd, "It's not justice, it's a lie! Gary Graham must not die!" Her voice disappeared into the police wagon. As we faced the police, a reporter got in my face with a microphone and asked me whether I was afraid for my job, if the publicity and arrests would have repercussions at the university. In the heat of the moment, I said that I wasn't worried: "This is what tenure is for, and I'm going to use it" (quoted in Nolen).

My Dean called me in and told me that she had gotten some mail concerning my statement. My actions had made the College controversial among potential donors and alumni. She said that having tenure was not license to say and do anything political in public. I told her that, according to what I knew, short of committing a felony, tenure did protect faculty from censure of their political views and actions. (The 1940 American Association of University Professors statement confirms the protection of extramural speech.) I asked her to defend my freedom of thought, assembly, and speech, even when questioned by Regents, parents, and donors. Alongside many others, I have done other controversial and often unruly things on and off campus (resulting in my receiving enormous amounts of hate mail over the years; see Cloud, "Foiling") and would not have done anything differently. Risks are inherent in political life, and scholars are often in a position to take them.

I feel that it is my obligation and that of other academics to employ our privilege in the construction and support of activist and deliberative movement spaces and activities. These groups cannot be mere spaces of education, cultural expression, survival, or play; if our goal is material social change, the public life we co-create must have an instrumental dimension. In other words, we must conduct education, consciousness-raising, and direct action of the sort that has always been necessary to pressure the system from below.

May Day 2006 was an example of an oppressed group coming into public space to demand equality and dignity. On that day, a million immigrants filled the streets of cities across the United States, demanding that their labor and dignity be recognized. I was thrilled to be part of the 25,000-person march in Austin, where marchers chanted in both English and in Spanish, "The workers' struggle has no borders."

Likewise, I was incredibly honored to work side-by-side with the family of death-row inmate Kenneth Foster, Jr. to stop his execution. Even the state of Texas recognized that Kenneth had killed no one; he had been convicted on the basis of the “law of parties” that warrants condemning anyone at the scene of a murder for the murder itself. Kenneth had been at the wrong place, at the wrong time, and family members, activists in groups like the Campaign to End the Death Penalty, scholars, and other activists spent countless hours building rallies, circulating petitions, holding public meetings, writing letters, reaching out to churches and other organizations, and doing consistent media work to bring attention to this case. On August 30, 2007, the day of Kenneth’s scheduled execution, we got the word: the Governor, responsive to the public outcry, commuted his sentence to life in prison (which we’d like to overturn as well). Kenneth’s lawyer acknowledged that it was the activist campaign that made the difference between life and death for his client.

The election of Barack Obama to the presidency in November 2008 raised the hopes of liberals and progressives across the United States that maybe now the wars—having cost unthinkable tolls in human life and the world’s resources—would end, health care reform would include the millions of uninsured, gays and lesbians could find a hearing for their argument for equality, and so on. Even though the Obama administration has not moved substantially in those directions at the time of this [original] writing, layers of new activists have emerged into movement activity. In 2008, two union struggles were victorious, one a strike at the Boeing Company and the other a factory occupation at a small, unknown company called Republic Windows and Doors. Scholars have a lot to learn from these emerging fights.

The need for struggle hit my scholarly home during the 2008 NCA Convention in San Diego. The summer before the conference, members learned that the owner of the conference hotel, the Manchester Grand Hyatt, had donated US\$125,000 to the campaign to ban same-sex marriage in California by passing Proposition 8, an anti-gay-marriage initiative. Meanwhile, we learned of a boycott of the Hyatt organized by the textile, hotel, and restaurant workers’ union, UNITE HERE! The union had aligned itself with the LGBTQ community in San Diego in a campaign called “Sleep With The Right People” (DeGange, “Customers,” “Response”). An organized political movement had called for a boycott, and numerous academic and other associations were pulling their business from the Hyatt.

NCA’s decision to remain at the Hyatt filled those of us with ties to union and LGBTQ movements with a sense of betrayal. We considered it a serious problem that NCA’s site selection policies contained no language allowing the Association to withdraw its business in case of strike or boycott. I knew many scholars who did not want to enter the Hyatt under these conditions, but who had papers to present and interviews to attend. For this reason, a coalition of NCA members began to organize an alternative conference in the neighboring Embassy Suites, calling it the UNconvention, since, ironically, the theme

of the NCA convention that year was unCONVENTIONAL! (with stress on the CONVENTION, not the “un”). It was a testament to its principles and skill that the group put together a conference of more than 80 panels, business meetings, open houses, and other meetings in a space of weeks. Supported by the Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies, Feminist and Women’s Studies, and LGBTQ divisions of NCA, the conference drew hundreds of attendees. UNconvention scholars also spoke at UNITE HERE!-sponsored rallies that drew union members and LGBTQ activists alike and brought attention both to the boycott of the hotel and to the struggle against Proposition 8.

Arguments about the alternative convention over CRTNET, the NCA listserv, were fierce. Detractors claimed that it would harm graduate students and young scholars building their careers; and that it was divisive, politicizing NCA, an organization that many members like to think of as apolitical. Space does not permit an extensive response to these arguments; I can only say that the UNconvention did not actually threaten the lives, careers, or convention experiences of members who did not want to participate, for whatever reason, in the boycott.

It is a boycott that continues to play a role in the national movement for labor rights and LGBTQ liberation. Queer activists across the country mobilized their communities for the national march for equality in Washington, DC on October 11, 2009. Its demand was for full equality under the law, nothing more and nothing less. I mobilized my local coalition to take a contingent of Texas “queermadillos” (“y’all”-saying, two-stepping, bootwearing marchers) to DC. In this and many other contexts, activism has taught me how to organize for change, both within and without all of the institutions—family, university, association—that influence my political, scholarly, and personal life. Leaving a conference session to confront the police in Miami or to stand in solidarity with hotel workers and San Diego’s gay communities outside a hotel were the only conceivable things to do.

I began my scholarly career a structuralist, emphasizing the role of ideology in maintaining social stability (“Limits,” “Hegemony”). Now I have learned, through involvement in political activity, that the struggle for hegemony is never one-sided. Ordinary people come to a sense of themselves and their own agency in spite of ideological and institutional forces arrayed against them. The experience of life and struggle in our society joins political theory and history to produce critical consciousness and to fuel effective resistance. I witness this process now in the movements in which I am involved, and we can see it in the myriad other movements that are springing up today—for Palestine, in support of universal health care, and labor struggles.

Of course, I still write, teach, publish, and serve in my academic life. The perverse priorities of capitalism (trillions of dollars for war and corporate bail-outs alongside privatized health care, gutted worker protections, eroding civil rights, the ongoing failure to address world hunger, child and slave labor, and the staggering list of other abuses and harms) may meet resistance in the form

of intellectuals making a blog, building a radical website, staging an anti-war play, or writing interpretations of television shows. But these activities—as much as I enjoy them myself—cannot make a new world.

As noted earlier, the long period of political quietude that reigned through the Bush–Clinton–Bush years has ended, and, as in decades past, productive social and political unrest may again flourish. The 1960s followed the 1950s. And the 1930s followed the 1920s. To wit, in 1928, Americans elected the very conservative Herbert Hoover as President. Progressives could have put their heads in the sand or collapsed weeping with despair. They could have decided that broad political organization at the grassroots level was futile and retreated to the academy. But they did not mourn; they organized. Four years later, our nation witnessed a near-revolution of ordinary people, who came together to challenge their employers and the state for a better deal. They also challenged racism and sexism; for example, in the Communist Party-led, years-long struggle to free the Scottsboro Boys, nine black youths framed for rape and targeted for execution. During this time period, the ideological climate of the United States shifted profoundly (Denning). Organized radicals, among them thousands of intellectuals, played an important role during this period alongside and inside of practical movement struggles on the part of workers and the poor.

We could take as a final example the roles played by intellectuals in the Spanish Civil War, when many thousands of workers, scholars, writers (including George Orwell), artists, and so on joined radical organizations and the Spanish people to challenge Franco's fascism (see Wengraf). Although the war was lost (betrayed by the Stalinized Communist Party and the Hitler–Stalin pact), mass organizing from below was the only way it might have been won. I am reminded of what Orwell wrote about his experience as a soldier in the Spanish Civil War, recounted in *Homage to Catalonia*. Moved by the experience of walking through a Barcelona controlled by workers, where workers and shopkeepers addressed each other and anyone else as equals, where revolutionary posters hung from every doorway, where every workplace had been collectivized, he recognized the situation as “a state of affairs worth fighting for.” He also wrote, “I had come to Spain with some notion of writing newspaper articles, but I had joined the militia almost immediately, because at that time and in that atmosphere it seemed the only conceivable thing to do.”

In an instant, Orwell was moved from a position of intellectual distance to one of immediate engagement among others, as equals. He was a maker of words, become a maker of deeds. His writing did not lose importance, but rather gained meaning for history from his shift in stance from intellectual to activist. And so, I ask you, students and makers of words, where will you be when the next crisis comes? If you recognize a state of affairs worth fighting for, I encourage you to join and build social movements, to see the value in long-term organization for social change, to exhort others to become involved, and to create and use spaces for education, deliberation, and action

in the community around you. If you are a critic of our system, the ideologies that sustain its horrors, putting ideas into action is the only conceivable thing to do.

### **Addendum for Second Edition**

In June 2017, Cloud was targeted by white supremacists for her statements in an activist context. Since then, she has been working to support other targeted faculty and writing about her experience in the context of the neoliberal assault on the academy. She recently published a brief “how to” for academics facing right-wing bullying as well as an analysis of how right-wing targeting is linked to white supremacist movements in our neoliberal moment (Cloud, “Responding,” “From Austerity”).

The presence of outright thuggery at colleges and universities seems like a new development in the Trump era. Indeed, he has emboldened white supremacists and anti-intellectuals. But such bullying is, in fact, a social movement tactic that is closely tied to other, long-term attempts to minimize the critical potential of universities. Attacks on professors are part of a collective, social movement phenomenon. Our responses, accordingly, must also be collective in nature.

The tactic of individually bullying professors is part of the larger pattern of neoliberal assault on both resources and ideas. Today, this assault is a product not only of a recent proto-fascist movement in our society but also a longer history of pressure on the academy to give in completely to the imperatives of a version of capitalism that requires greater austerity, privatization of social responsibility, massive student debt and a resulting downward standard of living among ordinary people.

The other thing it requires is a quiescent population. The system’s advocates want to squash the creativity, energy, and openness to radical politics among the next generations of citizens. The state, the corporations, and their pundits think that they can make campuses safe for white supremacists—who are again pitching their campaigns against anti-racist “political correctness.”

The question facing faculty, staff and students today is: How do we fight back?

It is also time to think more broadly about how to respond. We need to look to the Berkeley movements in the 1960s to see how they challenged the corporate agenda. All academics should organize, not only on our own behalf, but on behalf of every member of the academic community. Faculty, staff, and students should organize against racism, sexism, anti-LGBTQIA activity, and other injustices as part and parcel of protecting ourselves from the Right. The American Association of University Professors is a good resource for organizing. So are particular political organizations like the Campus Antifascist Network or the one I belong to, the International Socialist Organization.

However, in March 2019, the International Socialist Organization dissolved itself during a crisis of leadership. Details can be found at my blog (Cloud, “On Disintegration”). This outcome is tragic given the urgency of revolutionary socialist organizing against the rising right wing around the world. Moreover, the ISO was the largest such organization. I urge readers to find other sites of activism; if interested in socialism, the Democratic Socialists of America might be a good choice. That organization is not revolutionary, however.

In addition to those resources, the biggest source of power for us will be unions.

Since the National Labor Relations Board revisited the implications of the 1980 *Yeshiva* decision in 2016 (Flaherty), graduate students in both public and private universities across the country have used their unions to win real gains and protect themselves against austerity and exploitation. Despite some defeats and bitter opposition by their administrations, they have won higher stipends and better working conditions at the University of Chicago, Columbia University, New York University, Yale University, and many other places (Schmidt).

It is more difficult to organize faculty members into unions because professors think primarily about themselves as individuals in a meritocracy, believing that if they just work hard enough, publish enough, get good enough teaching evaluations, and so on, they will be protected from precarity. But over the decades of the right-wing capitalist assault on the academy, things have only gotten worse for professors. And where faculty are unionized, they do better. It is little wonder that faculty unions are on the rise (Schmidt).

The other source of power we have is unity. *The Atlantic* has reported that the assaults on higher education, including the tax bill, have brought together broad coalitions of activists (Blakely). We should unite with labor beyond the university, as well. Welch argues that the division between industrial and intellectual labor is an ideological fiction that obscures the ways in which scholars face the same employers’ offensive as workers outside the academy’s walls.

Learning the alternative histories and experiences of oppressed people could lead naturally to challenging the system that requires that oppression: capitalism. We can only mount such a challenge together. As a unified economic force, unionized professors and graduate students can threaten a university’s profitability and reputation. They can bargain for all faculty and/or all graduate students as a bloc, securing protections and advances for everyone.

We are not just defending ourselves against the thuggery of the Trump era. We are pushing back against a decades-long attempt to render our campuses safe for capitalism and dangerous for the rest of us. Our collective, unified, economic power is the most serious weapon we have in this fight. We can use it not only to improve the terms of our work but also to keep our public spaces of dialogue, critique, controversy, and activism alive. As inspiration, we must look to the past when students, staff and faculty rebelled against McCarthyism and the corporate university and demanded change on campuses around the world.

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# Afterword Meet Me at the Gates

## Calling for Scholar-Activism Where You Are, Now!

*Michelle Rodino-Colocino*

Writing this afterword for the second edition of *Activism and Rhetoric*, I am reminded of the wisdom that this volume so generously shares. Bryan McCann's chapter vividly demonstrates why we—scholars of rhetoric and communication—must “activate the spaces in which we labor” (4), meaning take action for social justice in our places of work. G Patterson convincingly argues that rural communities are allies in progressive struggles and that multiply marginalized people may be excellent leaders, in part, because they challenge standards of “palatability” that are “rooted in white cis-hetero supremacy” (4). Dana Cloud urges us to realize “our collective, unified, economic power” as faculty, staff, and students united *as* and *with* workers seeking fair and equitable working conditions (23–4). Contributions to this volume powerfully argue for the following: Be an activist where you are. Researching and teaching rhetoric afford opportunities to effect social justice. With privilege comes responsibility to create social justice. Do not merely “engage” across borders of academia and oppressed communities, realize that academia produces oppressed communities, and therefore, requires activism if we are to make academia a place of liberation. Words and knowledge of history are necessary but are not enough; collective action, coalition-building, and solidarity must be part of our activism.

These lessons may inform decisions about how academics can best spend energy, mere days after a white supremacist man murdered 22 people by gun in El Paso, Texas on August 3, 2019. The terrorist targeted Latinx people and left behind a manifesto that mobilized anti-immigrant hate speech from US President Donald Trump. As I write, news reports compare the language of the murderer's manifesto to Trump's anti-immigrant rhetoric (Baker and Shear). Five days after the massacre, ICE (Immigration, Customs, and Enforcement) put official anti-immigrant rhetoric into action by arresting 680 mostly Latinx people in the largest single-state immigration raid in US history. Labor activists view the raid as retaliation for workers' multimillion-dollar class action lawsuit settlement with Koch Industries, whose chicken processing plants were targeted. The lawsuit alleged sexual harassment, racial and national origin

discrimination, and retaliation against Latino workers (“Mass ICE Raids”). Other plants targeted in the raid had unionized.

Writing this afterword a few weeks before a new semester, I think about how I might draw on insights in *Activism and Rhetoric* to make sense of this anti-immigrant, anti-Latinx, anti-worker violence in my Political Economy of Communication course (an upper division class with 50 majors) at Penn State. Drawing inspiration from Matthew Abraham’s, Jonghwa Lee’s, Christina Moss’s, and Rodrick Schubert and Omar Schwartz’s chapters, our class might discuss the rhetorical and political history of white supremacist patriarchy. We might explore, more specifically, how anti-immigrant policy and violence in the United States, including Trump’s discussion of Mexican and Central American migrants as “invaders,” as well as brutal practices of detainment and deportation hark back to rhetoric and operations of past US presidents. President Hoover blamed Mexicans for the Great Depression; President Truman called them “invaders”; racist language (even in policy name) underwrote mass deportations of millions of US citizens and hundreds of thousands more Mexican nationals under President Eisenhower. As of this writing, President Obama holds the record for deporting the most people, approximately three million, while in office. We might consider how immigrants’ rights groups like Cosecha, RAICES (Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services), and Project South (which seeks social justice on many fronts) defend immigrants against family destruction, detainment, deportation, abuse, and death. Additionally, we might participate in movements to end white supremacist patriarchal gun violence by supporting the work of Southern Poverty Law Center, campus or community immigrants’ rights groups, or movements against gun violence. Taking a cue from G Patterson’s essay in this volume, we might venture into nearby rural communities to build solidarity between underpaid and unemployed rural whites and workers of color targeted by the state. We would likely consult alternative news media like *Democracy Now*, *Pro Publica*, and perhaps local outlets like *Raging Chicken Press*—featured in Kevin Mahoney’s essay in this volume. Such sources are also “radical media” because they “express an alternative vision to hegemonic policies, priorities, and perspectives” and cover movements working to realize this vision (Downing v). I might encourage students to contribute to a movement or movement media as part of the course’s “media activist assignment” that asks students to intervene in a social justice issue of their choice as it relates to the problems covered in the course. The pedagogical ideas I have outlined here put into the practice one of the key insights of *Activism and Rhetoric*: there are no borders to cross when it comes to studying, teaching, and taking action as communication scholars seeking social justice.

Very likely, class discussion would get even more personal. I want to flash back to a moment where we changed our path in a course midway, following a mass shooting that personally touched a student’s life. Thinking back 18 months ago to the evening after the Parkland massacre in 2018, one of my students

in Political Economy of Communications messaged me on social media, “I’m not sure how this relates to our class, but I knew someone who was a victim in this shooting and I felt like I had to share this with you” (the student gives me permission to quote their words but not reveal their name). Hopeful that I might be able to make connections between what they were feeling and what we were learning in the course, my student wondered if they could share in class what they and their family were going through. Responding that evening, I told them that there were insights into the tragedies that political economy of communications could lend, but, “more important, is the human connection.” “That’s what education should be about,” I emphasized. And I meant it. Education is personal and political; it is about connecting as people. As we do, deeply personal and political issues arise. My student was relieved by my assurance that the next day our class would provide that space where they and their classmates could explore the shootings on a personal and academic level. Discussion in class inspired action, as this student and several others formed a team for our media activism group project to study media’s relationship with gun control laws in the United States (and the dearth thereof) and take action based on their analysis. Students wrote letters to our university president and Congressional representatives calling for curbs on gun ownership. This group of students also joined gun control advocacy associations including the national Moms Demand Action, which has a local chapter serving our county. Modest as these actions were, they were significant in students’ lives because these steps opened a gate to acting on knowledge, out of a sense of social justice, and from a point of grief. Together, we had opened gates from the personal into the political, from class to community, from isolated students into a group who channel grief into collective action.

Flash forward to today’s grief. Moms Demand Action, the organization that my students and his classmates joined, organized a demonstration days after the massacre in El Paso to help people mourn victims and survivors and to take action to stop such terrorism. The action began with a gathering at another set of gates familiar to Penn State community members who engage in activism for social justice, called simply, “The Gates.” Poised at the geographical confluence of city and campus, Penn State describes The Gates as “the gateway into town ... meant to symbolize the transition from college life to the ‘real world’” (Taverno). The Gates hosts dozens of public demonstrations each year, including a weekly “Standing at the Gates for Justice,” founded by campus minister Ben Wideman. On August 5, 2019, this liminal ground between “town” and “gown” hosted 30 of us: faculty, students, staff, and community members (myself included). After reading the names of the murder victims of the El Paso and closely timed Dayton shootings, we walked to our public library to write postcards to our Congressional leaders, imploring them to pass gun control legislation. The actions at The Gates were modest, and they certainly did not integrate all of the inputs that led to the two massacres on the weekend of August 3, 2019. But they underscored the wisdom that *Activism*

and *Rhetoric* and my students offer: the gates between personal and political, town and gown, student/faculty/staff/community member and activist await our crossing.

The “gates” metaphor, however, can only take us so far. As many of the authors in this volume argue, academic work also transcends passage through gates (physical and metaphorical) because the spaces of town and gown, of personal and political, and places where students, faculty, staff, and community members work are often *one and the same*. Privilege, however, forms cataracts that distort or even blocks academics’ ability to perceive the very spaces in which we work as sites for “engagement” or intervention and transformation (e.g., privilege in the form of whiteness, ability, cis, hetero, and male identities, and tenure for those who are even eligible; spaces of campus, classroom, office as well as faculty, committee, and association meetings and the journals in which we publish).<sup>1</sup> Bryan McCann argues in this volume that it is easy to see academic space as a space of struggle if one experiences oppression.

Anyone who has survived sexual harassment and assault as a student, faculty or staff member, or shift worker on campus understands this. I know this first hand as a survivor of sexual harassment and assault throughout my academic life: while an undergrad (one of my white cis male professors sexually harassed me during office hours in his office, and my white cis male date to a party freshman year raped me) and as a grad student (a white male cis serial perpetrator gave me a full body hug after I completed my comprehensive exams). As an assistant professor, I endured gendered, misogynist forms of hazing (one white male cis senior male college administrator blocked my inquiry into adding time on the tenure clock for birthing a baby, and a cis male university administrator of color publicly and repeatedly scolded me for asking a question about motherhood and tenure package framing at a training for “diverse” faculty). After tenure, a white cis male colleague deemed I was “too young” to lead a faculty labor union although I was in my 40s. I do not have the space to recount all of the times I have received misogynist comments from students, faculty, staff, and members of the public (especially for my public scholarship and feminist activism), but suffice it to say that as a cishet, white, tenured woman who has traded stories with colleagues and students, I have not been targeted as viciously by predatory, retaliatory faculty, administrators, staff, and students as have queer, gender non-binary, of color faculty and students and underpaid staff.

It was my sense of privilege, survivorship, and allyship that inspired me to work with students, staff, faculty, and community members to found a campus movement, Survivors and Allies United, to end sexual harassment and assault at and around Penn State in 2018. Many of us were inspired by the Me Too movements. I was also inspired by my own students’ coming out to me as survivors of rape while at Penn State (on university and adjacent property) as well as by my doctoral adviser’s reflection on the toxic environment of sexual harassment and assault at my alma mater, the University of Pittsburgh (Stabile). Additionally, members of our movement were inspired by how Times Up, the

legal fund turned workplace movement, was committed to changing the system, especially in regard to how sexual violence symptomatizes and reinforces white cishet capitalist patriarchy. Sexual violence is also an academic labor issue, as it is one means that pushes members of oppressed communities out of our industry and keeps us from advancing while we are in it.

Our work via Survivors and Allies United demonstrates that higher education is a space for engaged research, teaching, and service. Compared with other campus movements to end rape (like EROC that does impactful work to change policies, practices, and the culture on campus), we are not unique, but as a movement in which I am directly involved, I can speak about it with the auto-ethnographic confidence that Dana Cloud, Seth Kahn, Richard Vatz, and many of the authors exhibit in this volume. As a participant activist (Rodino-Colocino “Participant”), I organized and supported survivors as I traded insights relevant for research and teaching communication with survivors, local activists, and campus counselors. This labor happened on PSU campus and off, in virtual writing spaces, and is recorded in the pages of our scholarly journals (Rodino-Colocino et al.). This labor has occurred at our scholarly association conferences (Rodino-Colocino “#ThisEndsHere; Rodino-Colocino “Time’s Up”). Such labor also took place publicly, in demonstrations at The Gates, when we supported survivors and opposed Brett Kavanaugh’s nomination to the Supreme Court because of allegations that he sexually assaulted multiple women. These demonstrations at The Gates also opened gates for action whereby students, faculty, and staff who had not previously taken political action signed letters, did media interviews, and joined the movement (Fox “Stand Together”; Fox “Cancel Kavanaugh”; Paez). Perhaps on an even more poignantly personal level, some demonstrators came out publicly for the first time as survivors; some realized for the first time that they were survivors. Corners of the campus and community came together to support and work with each other. We are still doing this work now as we seek recognition as a Penn State student organization, to build coalitions with campus and community organizations, and to affiliate with Times Up Now. Over the past year, we worked to build trust, solidarity, and be “morally courageous” as Catherine Chaput puts it in her chapter in this volume, important movement work as Seth Kahn and G Patterson argue in theirs. These examples of working as an activist communication scholar in teaching, research, and service also makes it possible, given the constraints of time as Kevin Mahoney and Seth Kahn point out in this volume, to integrate activist and professional work.

The honor of having the last word obliges me to do it justice. Thus, I want to close by underscoring that engaged research, teaching, and service not only can happen in the academy, but must. Organizing against sexual harassment and assault makes our workplace safer, more dignified, and more equitable for women, LGBTQ, and of color students, staff, and faculty, for our colleagues and students with disabilities, and for our underpaid co-workers. Similarly, creating learning environments in which students discuss their grief following gun massacres allows them to find ways to make the world—a world that is

both of and “off” campus—safer and more equitable and humane. This work is activist in the deepest sense of the word because it is world-changing for the people it affects. Such activism is radical when it erodes systems of oppression that sexual violence and gun violence symptomatize and reinforce. The academy is a place like any other where systems of oppression operate and opportunities for personal transformation and liberation abound. So many important movements exist right here on campus, serving members of our Penn State community including movements for Black Lives, movements to preserve our climate and environment, to support our immigrants and people of various national origin, and our contingent faculty. Movement members have much to teach us, even more than we have to teach them as several authors in this volume argue. I ask readers to take up Lee Artz’s call in this volume to “speak the power of our truth” by standing in solidarity together in the work that we do as scholar-activists. *Activism and Rhetoric* details some of the ways that readers may take action as scholars to end oppression and promote social justice on and around our workplaces. The contributors and I stand together in making this point clear: the academy demands our engaged research, teaching, and activism. We need not leave our campus nor step out of our roles as scholars to do this work. We need not exit through borders nor traverse gates. We are here. How will you answer the call?

## Note

- 1 Furthermore, as Sheena Howard (2014) and Erin Rand (2014) show in their studies of black queer identity and queer activism (respectively), making knowledge production intersectional and liberatory constitutes activism for social justice. The academy, as Rand emphasizes, is “the scene of the real fight” (11). For further discussion of Howard’s and Rand’s books and of the need to recognize knowledge production and academic labor as ripe for activism, see Rodino-Colocino (2016).

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