WCC

WRITERS: CRAFT & CONTEXT

Conferencing toward Antiracism: Reckoning with the Past, Reimagining the Present

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Inspired by the 2021 conference "Toward the Antiracist Conference: Reckoning with the Past, Reimagining the Present," designer Diamond Wade's cover visualizes the charge to engage conversations of anti-racism in conferences and ultimately re-imagine a more inclusive present and future through a construction metaphor. At the heart of this renovation, colors that are both shocking and thoughtful personify a dynamic and diverse community. Every member is a participant in demolishing the old structure, a nod to rigid oppressive Western rhetoric, and also a participant in the rebuilding of a space that embodies themselves and is inclusive and ever-evolving to meet the needs of the entire community. The display reflects the radical, active, and cognizant work that is required to pursue the issues described in this special issue and anti-racism at large.

Diamond Wade is a graphic designer and surface pattern designer based in Louisville, Kentucky. As a recent graduate of the University of Louisville's Hite Institute of Art and Design, Diamond has earned degrees in both Graphic Design and Fibers (Studio Art). Design specialties such as Brand Identities, Book Forms, Packaging, and Surface Design are of special interest to her. In the long term, Diamond aims to develop a lifestyle brand rooted in her love for print & pattern, whose products will serve as catalysts for everyday creativity. Nonetheless, design work which centers the human experience, aids in positive lasting change, and allows for technical improvement as well as exploration is always welcomed. For design inquiries and collaboration with Diamond, please refer to diamondwade.com.

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Conferences can be incubators of academic writers' personal and professional development—and of disciplines themselves. At their best, conferences are opportunities to learn about and discuss new ideas and collect feedback on our own works-in-progress, and they offer time and space in which to renew our sense of connectedness and belonging—to parts of ourselves, to old and new friends and colleagues, and to our disciplines and professions. And academic fields themselves are built through the kind of dialogue, between individuals and groups, that conferences can foster; consider, for instance, how many publications begin as conference presentations, roundtables, and keynotes.

Yet in our predominantly white fields of rhetoric, composition, writing studies, and technical and professional communication, the conference-as-usual is a space in which white supremacy reigns and historically oppressed groups continue to be dehumanized. Under such conditions, the experience for scholars of color can be an incongruous one: alternately dispiriting and fulfilling, alienating from the disciplines as a whole but bonding to subcommunities of color therein. In "Academic #BlackLivesMatter: Black Faculty and Graduate Students Tell Their Stories," Sherita Roundtree attests to this duality:

> Although the somewhat racial monolith of writing center conferences helped me grow accustomed to being the only Black person in any given space, I found myself standing in the middle of the CCCC [Conference on College Composition and Communication] hotel floor questioning how the space accounted for me. Perhaps, more immediately, I recognized a mistrust that developed in me toward the conference, the field, and the folks in it.

> After wandering around for a while and attempting to make sense of the massive conference program, I noticed a Black woman with her edges slicked back into a large afro puff, walking with a small group of other Black men and women into one of the conference rooms. At the time, there was only one Black woman professor at my undergraduate university and I was unaware that there were Black women professors in the field of Composition and Rhetoric because the writing center scholarship that I read up until attending the CCCC did not make this information evident. While I did not know this at the time, the Black woman with the afro puff was Dr. Elaine Richardson (Dr. E). (Botex et al., 2020)

For Eric House, the robust ties formed at CCCC with other Black scholars "helped [him] recognize and name the damaging effects" of the isolation he felt as the only Black graduate student in his department:

One [moment] was my first CCCC experience, where I was introduced to Black excellence in our field when I was sitting in a larger conference room as Dr. Elaine Richardson grabbed the mic and sang down the gospel song "Never Would've Made It" in her talk that almost made me break down. That moment and my first Black Caucus meeting at that same CCCC made it clear that there is a community that I might not always see in my own department, but can absolutely connect with even if only to inspire and motivate through our existence. (Botex et al., 2020)

Roundtree and House point to not only the importance of Black spaces within CCCC as places of connection and renewal for Black rhetoricians and compositionists across the country but also, more generally, the power of conferences to both alienate and unite.

Because conferences shape the trajectories of individuals and disciplines, and given the need for our field(s) to root out white-supremacist practices in every aspect of our work, we felt it was important to publish the conversations that began at the April 2021 Thomas R. Watson Conference on Rhetoric and Composition, a virtual event we titled "Toward the Antiracist Conference: Reckoning with the Past, Reimagining the Present." As the "call for consultation" described,

The exigence for our theme is global and local. This year's uprisings for Black liberation have only reaffirmed the need for institutions of higher education to confront their roles in perpetuating a white supremacist system and, with the BIPOC students, faculty, and staff who have endured this violence and marginalization, to create just and equitable structures in its place. Moreover, we seek to extend the repair work the Watson Conference has undertaken in addressing its own history of enabling anti-Black racism by forging a way forward. (See Watson and Anti-Black Racism for a complete discussion.)[1] ("Watson 2021: Call for Consultation")

Inspired by the *College Composition and Communication* symposium "Enacting a Culture of Access in Our Conference Spaces" (Hubrig & Osorio, 2020), we hoped the conference would serve as a forum to "interrogate existing conference policies and practices and reimagine them to foster antiracism in how conferences are conceived, organized, and staged" (ibid.). Held across three days and offered for free, the conference had 344 registrants from 162 colleges and universities. It featured two keynotes, two workshops, four panels, one roundtable, and opening and closing sessions with facilitated breakout groups. Presenters received honoraria for their work and were asked to contribute to an online Policy and Practice Archive, which showcases a variety of handouts, scripts, and slides both to document conference activities and to provide resources for future conference planners (e.g., Michelle Grue's script for her presentation, "TheFeministsAreComing: But are They Anti-Racist?"; Sumyat Thu's handout "Questions for Antiracist Conference Organizing," which was based on her presentation, "Antiracist Conversations and Organizing: Reforming Academic Conference Genres").

For some, the 2021 Watson Conference was productive and energizing; for others, Watson reinforced the marginalization that we—especially as an all-white planning team in a predominately white department—were trying to combat. During the conference, two Indigenous scholars, members of the American Indian Caucus of CCCC, emailed Andrea to share how the roundtable she planned, "Beyond the Land Acknowledgment: Decolonial Actions for the Watson Conference and UofL," was deeply hurtful and disrespectful. (For a detailed account, we refer you to a forthcoming report on the Watson website based on our 2022 CCCC presentation. We also recommend an essay by Andrea Riley-Mukavetz and Cindy Tekkobe [2022], which offers a bracing discussion of what settler scholars need to know when working, or seeking to work, with Indigenous scholars and community members; Riley-Mukavetz's experience at the Watson roundtable was the jumping-off point for the piece.) We entered Watson with the understanding that uprooting white-supremacist and settler-colonial habits and impacts from the Watson Conference would be a permanent project and not something that could be achieved in short or discrete periods of time. The experiences of those Indigenous scholars affirm the vast amount of work that remains to be done.

Because, as Rasha Diab, Thomas Ferrel, Beth Godbee, and Neil Simpkins (2013) remind us, "Equity work is always incomplete and always striving" (p. 6), our use of the term "conferencing" in our title is a deliberate one. The progressive aspect (conferenc*ing*) foregrounds the ongoing nature of the labor and activity entailed here. But this does not only refer to the intellectual labor of conference design (Almjeld & Zimmerman, 2021) and of presenting at and attending conferences. Rather, it also speaks to the larger, continual process of reflection—on our racialized assumptions, habits, policies, and practices—and then action toward justice. In understanding this process, we draw on Diab et al.'s (2013) framework, which articulates two "interdependent rhetorical moves that have the potential to re-design, transform, and move us closer toward racial justice," (p. 6): (1) "articulating (and re-articulating, regularly) our commitments" by asking ourselves questions about our values, emotions, relationships, and conditions for our work (pp. 6-7) and (2) "making our commitments actionable" through "self-work" and "work-with-others" on both interpersonal and systemic levels (pp. 7-14). The "care-full, processual, reiterative, and

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1 Our statement "Watson and Anti-Black Racism" analyzed the Watson Conference's role in perpetuating white supremacy. We recounted a racist incident at the 2018 conference and its aftermath in 2020, and we analyzed and apologized for the harms we inflicted. We then articulated commitments to fighting anti-Black racism at the 2021 conference and all subsequent Watson events.

self-reflexive" (Diab et al., 2013, p. 14) qualities that should characterize all social justice work must also be brought to bear on the act of conferenc*ing*.

The articles in this special issue seek to spur reflection and action on our individual and collective antiracist practices and policies at every stage of the conference experience. In this goal, we join a small but vital body of scholarship that rethinks conferences, including Ada Hubrig and Ruth Osorio's (2020) symposium on accessibility, Victor Del Hierro, Daisy Levy, & Margaret Price's (2016) essay on negotiating allyship at cultural rhetorics gatherings, Ebony O. McGee & Lasana Kazembe's (2016) empirical study "Presenting while Black," and a 2019 issue of *Religious Education* (volume 114.3) that offers eight different essays on problems with the 2018 Religious Education Association annual conference, "Beyond White Normativity," and potential antiracist solutions.

In conjunction with this vital published scholarship on conferences, there is a growing recognition of the conference itself as a work or act of scholarship (Almjeld & Zimmerman, 2021). As one recent example, Jennifer Sano-Franchini, Donnie Johnson Sackey, and Kristen Moore, chairs of the 2022 Association of Teachers of Technical Writing (ATTW) annual conference, drew inspiration from Natasha N. Jones and Miriam F. Williams's "The Just Use of Imagination: A Call to Action" (2020). For the conference, which was titled "Taking Action: Reimagining Just Futures in Technical Communication," the chairs write that "[f]or technical communicators invested in change-making, the current structures for gathering (e.g., traditional conferences) are limited in their potential to enact change across the field, our communities, and the world. Rather than stand-and-deliver opportunities, **we change makers** require spaces to build coalitions, to conduct meaningful research, to analyze mounds of data, and to make meaning" ([ATTW 2022 CFP](#), bold in original). In response to this need, Sano-Franchini, Sackey, and Moore created "action-oriented," "participant-centered" spaces that "help us re-imagine what conferences can and should be" ([ATTW 2022 CFP](#)). Our special issue participates in this ambition: to be in conversation with both published scholarship on conferences and with the conference-as-scholarship.

Because *Writers: Craft and Context* spotlights not only "the work [writers] do" but also "the contexts in which they compose and circulate their work, how they are impacted by policies and pedagogies (broadly conceived) and how they develop across the lifespan" ("[Writers: Craft & Context](#)"), we thought it was an ideal venue for our special issue. The contributors herein practice antiracist work with honesty, creativity, and care. Whether this takes the form of personal narratives that reflect on and theorize micro- and macroaggressions experienced in conference spaces and beyond (Tellez-Trujillo, Grayson) or lessons learned from efforts to build antiracist programs and conferences (Byrd et al., Johnston et al., Pettus et al.), the scope of work in this issue is wide. Other contributions lay out pragmatic approaches to ensuring accessibility in conference spaces (Allen and Kerschbaum)

and use a fictionalized case study to invite readers to consider how to move conferences and institutional spaces beyond deeply entrenched whiteness (Croom). Finally, one article applies decolonial critiques to academic institutions and settler-colonial epistemologies (Cariño Trujillo; Cariño Trujillo & Montelongo González). We therefore begin with articles situated specifically in conferencing work and transition to articles that extend beyond conferences.

ARTICLES IN THE SPECIAL ISSUE

The special issue opens with Karen Tellez-Trujillo's "What Am I Doing Here? When Conference Acceptance Doesn't Mean Conference Inclusion," in which the author examines how her expectations of national conferences contrasted with the realities she encountered. Tellez-Trujillo recounts being met by microaggressions and outright racism while attending conferences as a Chicana graduate student. Drawing on a framework of feminist rhetorical resilience, Tellez-Trujillo asks readers to consider how we can work to create more inclusive and welcoming conference spaces for all scholars and offers suggestions for accomplishing this transformation. She proposes that we address tensions between attendees' worries and realities, extend greater care to ourselves and other conference-goers, work against public and private exclusion, and increase access and compensation.

Next, in "Sharing Lessons Learned: Intersectional Collaboration, Collective Accountability, and Radical Care in Antiracist Programming," Emily Rónay Johnston, Amanda Solomon Amorao, and Jonathan Kim demonstrate some of the ways conferences can begin to enact positive changes like those suggested by Tellez-Trujillo. The authors draw on their own experiences with academic conferencing and conference planning—specifically, piloting a Certificate in Antiracist Writing Pedagogy and launching the Inaugural Learning and Teaching for Justice Conference at the University of California, San Diego—and call for change and reflection in our conference-planning practices. The authors introduce three guiding values that they argue are central to antiracist work in higher education: intersectional collaboration, collective accountability, and radical care. To conclude their essay, the authors provide questions for reflection and actionable takeaways based on these values for the audience to consider in their own antiracist work in higher education.

As we developed this issue, we prioritized offering tangible resources for fellow and future conference planners. Many of the pieces in the issue take up this call, including the two previous articles and Caitlin Burns Allen and Stephanie Kerschbaum's contribution, "Conference-Session Moderation: Guidelines for Supporting a Culture of Access." Allen and Kerschbaum examine ways moderators can encourage and model a culture of access and can attend to the intersections of disability and other marginalized identities in conference spaces. Emphasizing that creating a culture of access relies on adapting to specific contexts and

situations, Allen and Kerschbaum offer suggestions and recommendations for moderators to tailor to their own conference events, instead of providing a checklist of universally applicable practices. The guidelines are compiled and expanded from materials used and shared at the 2021 Watson Conference and focus on three different stages of conference organizing: before a conference begins, immediately before and during a session, and during the Q&A. We hope this article will ignite a rich conversation about the role and responsibilities of conference-session moderators.

The next two articles center large, national conferences in rhetoric and composition and the efforts made by organizers to create inclusive and antiracist conference environments. In "Social Justice Conference Planning for Writing Studies: Frameworks, Triumphs, and Challenges," Antonio Byrd, Maria Novotny, Michael Pemberton, and Vershawn Ashanti Young share personal reflections on their roles in planning CCCC between 2018 and 2021 as members of the Social Justice at the Convention Committee and the Local Arrangements Committee. The authors recount the challenges of organizing social justice programming as CCCC has changed over recent years. Through a combination of text and video, Byrd, Novotny, Pemberton, and Young offer both a conceptual framework and a series of guiding questions for readers to consider when planning their own social justice-related events at conferences.

Next, Mudiwa Pettus, Sherita V. Roundtree, Ruth Osorio, Jen Almjeld, Patrick Thomas, and Jessica Enoch wrestle with the labor of putting on the Feminisms and Rhetorics Conference in their article, "Non-Negotiable Inclusivity: Chronicling the Relational, Embodied Work of Antiracist, Accessible Conferencing." Detailing the work of the Workflow, Format, and Processes Task Force of the Coalition of Feminist Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition, the authors reckon with the fact that the organization and conference are populated overwhelmingly with white, straight, cisgender, able-bodied women. Their six individual sections grapple with the unifying question, "How should our conferencing practices change if we treat this kind of inclusive work as nonnegotiable, as something planners are not only accountable for but something that energizes and improves our conference, our organization, and our discipline?" Pettus, Roundtree, Osorio, Almjeld, Thomas, and Enoch offer hope in the recursive nature of conference planning, presenting a preliminary blueprint for a better imagined future.

In "Peer-Reviewed Article: Conferencing toward Racial Literacies from the Post-White Orientation," Marcus Croom continues the work of creating equitable conferences by forwarding what he terms a "Post-White Orientation" to conference planning. Contrary to racial orientations grounded in White ways of thinking and perceptions of BIPOC inferiority, the Post-White Orientation rejects philosophies depicting Whiteness as superior to "BIPOC(ness)." To help readers practice Post-White conference design, Croom includes a template that asks readers to "identify and reject" ideas,

practices, and rhetorics that ascribe deficiency in all its forms and, among other recommendations, "designate paid or unpaid roles for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) to co-design conference gatherings." Concluding with a case study that asks the reader to apply the Post-White Orientation to a fictional conference situation and an analysis of Croom's own article using it as a lens, Croom's work is the sort of interactive piece that encourages readers to reenvision conferencing as antiracist work.

Moving us beyond conferences and highlighting how conferences reflect the institutional structures they represent, Mara Lee Grayson weaves together two stories in her essay "Antiracism Is Not an Action Item: Boutique Activism and Academic (Anti) Racism." Incisively describing her work both at a nonprofit and in the English department at the pseudonymous South Lake State University, Grayson highlights the relationship between the microaggressive everyday interactions between colleagues and the larger structural issues of racism. Further, Grayson offers a sharp critique of the "liberal boutique activism" and white saviorism common in academic and nonprofit settings alike. She calls out the "DEI work" of many academic institutions as "mere costume" or "mak[ing] us look the part without embodying it." Noting that the performativity of antiracism is not accidental, Grayson challenges readers to consider if real antiracist activism is possible within their institution, ending with a powerful call: "What are you doing on a daily basis, *in praxis*, to decenter, destabilize, delegitimize, and dismantle white supremacy in your organization?"

Concluding our special issue is sociologist Carmen Cariño Trujillo's "'Precisamos de conocimientos para la vida, una universidad libre de colonialismo': Reflexiones en torno a la descolonización del saber y de la universidad desde la experiencia," or "'We Need Knowledge for Life, a University Free of Colonialism': Reflections on the Decolonization of Knowledge, and the University, from Experience." Cariño Trujillo, a descendant of Ñuu Savi, the People of the Rain, moves us far past conferences into the colonial and racist roots of the university and then "beyond university walls" in order to "build forms and processes of decolonization of knowledge." Available in Spanish and in an English version translated by Alejandro Montelongo González, her essay defiantly pushes us to make not just an epistemic difference but also an ontological one by forwarding the concept of *sentipensar*, or reason combined with love. Cariño Trujillo sees the work of decolonization as a "life project" for all of us to fend off death from both inside and outside the academy. Her work argues for us all to become *sentipensantes* as a means of resistance.

EDITORIAL PROCESS AND USE OF THE HEURISTIC FOR ANTIRACIST SCHOLARLY REVIEWING PRACTICES

Before we close, we want to share some information about the process of putting together this special issue. Given that the authors'

presentations had already been selected for the 2021 Watson Conference, we understood our roles as special issue coeditors to be those of mentors, assisting writers in developing their work for publication. This approach aligned well with *WCC*'s own conceptualization of journal editing as mentoring ("Call for Involvement"). In addition, we were guided by the "Anti-Racist Scholarly Reviewing Practices: A Heuristic for Editors, Reviewers, and Authors" (2021), developed by Lauren E. Cagle, Michelle F. Eble, Laura Gonzales, Meredith A. Johnson, Nathan R. Johnson, Natasha N. Jones, Liz Lane, Temptaous Mckoy, Kristen R. Moore, Ricky Reynoso, Emma J. Rose, GPat Patterson, Fernando Sánchez, Ann Shivers-McNair, Michele Simmons, Erica M. Stone, Jason Tham, Rebecca Walton, and Miriam F. Williams. This guide details how the reviewing process can be "a system of inclusivity, rather than gatekeeping and disciplining." The heuristic contains five principles that we strove to tailor to our work; we also asked reviewers to consult it. Below, we describe ways that we attended to each principle.[2]

A. "Recognize a range of expertise and encourage citation practices that represent diverse canons, epistemological foundations, and ways of knowing." As editors, we sought to respect the goals and purposes of the authors while offering guidance on how to contextualize essays in field-specific conversations. The articles include personal narratives, case studies, Spanish-language scholarship, and a translation. In addition, we asked reviewers to consider the extent to which each article is in dialogue with a diverse group of scholars and perspectives, including those of multiply marginalized scholars.

B. "Recognize, intervene in and/or prevent harmful scholarly work—both in publication processes and in published scholarship." When contacting Watson presenters about whether they wanted to develop their presentations into publications, we did not ask the settler scholars Andrea had invited to speak on the "Beyond the Land Acknowledgment" roundtable, given that that portion of the roundtable caused harm (c.f. the earlier discussion). In addition, as mentioned in §A, we asked reviewers to offer feedback on citation practices. Last, before copyediting, we did inclusive language checks, providing "another layer of protection against oppressive and anti-racist language ('catches' that are often too small for reviewers and too big for copyeditors)."

C. "Establish and state clear but flexible contingency plans for review processes that prioritize humanity over production." We were flexible with deadlines and greatly relied on that flexibility ourselves. *WCC* editors' own flexibility with their publication schedule made this possible!

D. "Make the review process transparent." We divided the articles in half and sent four articles to two reviewers each. Thus, each reviewer read four articles, and each article received two reviews. However, two articles received a third reviewer or different

reviewers because they required additional expertise (as explained in §F, below). Authors and reviewers decided whether to share their names in their manuscripts and feedback. Given the ways our lived experiences inform and infuse our writing, we wanted to make anonymity an option but not a requirement.

In addition, we shared the reviewer guidelines with authors, but we did not develop these guidelines until after the authors began to work on adapting their presentations for publication. As a result, when any differences emerged between author and reviewer expectations, we felt that the author's aims should be primary. We shared the full reviews, along with editorial framing, with the authors. We did not share these materials with the reviewers, however, an oversight that made the publication process less transparent for reviewers.

E. "Value the labor of those involved in the review process." We used the Watson endowment to pay honoraria to our reviewers and cover designer, as well as to pay our Spanish-English translators and our Spanish-English copyeditor.

F. "Editors commit to inclusivity among reviewers and in editorial board makeup." We thought carefully about whom to invite to serve as reviewers, looking for scholars who have expertise in antiracist work and have been involved in conference planning or served on professional organizations. In addition, for a few articles in particular (Allen and Kerschbaum; Cariño Trujillo; Cariño Trujillo & Montelongo González), we sought reviewers who also had expertise in accessibility, decolonial theory and methodology, and/or reading knowledge of Spanish. We also did an accessibility check before we sent everything out for review (e.g., ensuring pieces had image descriptions, captions, transcripts) to make sure that manuscripts were as accessible as possible for reviewers. In addition, when it was time for publication, Haley Fulco, the *WCC* graphic designer and production editor at the University of Oklahoma, double-checked the inclusion of alt-text and ensured that all text was tagged and that there was a logical order for screen readers.

Overall, we found the process of consulting the heuristic generative—a way for us, as four white scholars, to examine our editorial practices both in advance and throughout for ways in which we might be excluding and marginalizing our authors, reviewers, readers, and/or other stakeholders. We also recognize that there are places where we have fallen short. We hope readers will provide us with feedback so we can learn from them and proceed differently in the future.

CONCLUSION & GRATITUDE

Our goal in compiling this special issue was to broadcast innovative thinking around what antiracist conferences can look like,

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2 Thanks to Neil Baird and Bradley Dilger (2022) for modeling this kind of discussion in their special-issue introduction.

as well as to delineate the difficulties that confront us in pursuing that end. We offer a range of voices: junior and senior scholars, conference-goers and conference organizers, those involved in new and established conferences. These voices differ in their approach, ranging from reflective narratives and case studies to guidelines for action. But the pieces deliver a common call: the academic conference must be uprooted from its white-supremacist foundations to be made inclusive, representative, and equitable. In short, the conference must be wholly reimagined, and superficial adjustments are not only not enough but also only perpetuate the very structures we seek to challenge. At the same time, the authors highlight the potential for conferences to build our disciplinary communities and renew feelings of belonging–-and the need to stretch our thinking beyond university walls.

The articles collected here showcase the creativity and incisiveness of their authors and exemplify the valuable work these teacher-scholar-activists are engaged in. We hope they inspire future reflection and scholarship. Whether this discussion continues in *WCC* or across other venues, we are excited to follow future conversations about antiracist conferencing–-and to witness how the initiatives, ideas, policies, and practices shared within these pages are enacted.

More than a year in the making, this special issue has taught us so much as we have crafted it, and we are deeply grateful to everyone who has taken part. We are grateful to our authors who took this journey with us and turned their powerful conference presentations into these essays. We are grateful to our reviewers, who supplied detailed, generous, and generative feedback to the writers and helped elucidate our own vision for the special issue. We are also grateful to Diamond Wade for designing such a remarkable image for our cover. Last but not least, we are grateful to *WCC* editors Sandra Tarabochia, Aja Martinez, and Michele Eodice for their support, enthusiasm, and patience.

The wise and courageous voices of our authors have forever changed the way we understand conferencing. We hope you experience the same.

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Author Bios

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What Am I Doing Here? When Conference Acceptance Doesn't Mean Conference Inclusion

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W e've likely all spent time in places that have led us to ask ourselves, "What am I doing here?" Every now and then, there are those uncomfortable situations in which we must admit to ourselves that not only did we choose to be in this place, but we also worked hard to get there, and where conferences are concerned, we have watched attentively for acceptance of our proposed presentation. Although my hopes have been high when receiving the good news that I will be part of a conference program, I have often found myself asking the same three questions during my travels home from the conference: First, I ask if I am imagining feelings of being excluded or whether my feelings come because of imposter syndrome (Edwards), from which many students and junior faculty members suffer. Second, I ask whether I truly want or need to attend conferences that are not welcoming. Last, once I have reminded myself that conferences are part of the career I have chosen, I ask what specifically is bothering me and what I can do to help bring about changes at conferences for myself and others.

When questioning what I feel needs to be changed, I consistently come up with lists that fall under four categories that include my worry versus reality, concerns regarding care for myself and others, public and private exclusion at the hands of conference organizers and attendees, and issues regarding access. From worrying with and without reason, to feelings that care is lacking, I count negative conference experiences among the many adversities in academia faced unnecessarily by BIPOC scholars. With interest and labor, many of the difficulties faced can be remedied. Having spent a lifetime short on power, working with the resources I have on hand to make a difference comes as a second nature. I am also accustomed to seeking alliances that will lead to mutually beneficial relationships, where resources can be shared and exchanged. These behaviors are resilient responses that are feminist in that they are social, community driven in line with the concept of feminist rhetorical resilience (Flynn, Sotirin, and Brady). This concept is one that attracts me for many reasons, and I am not

Abstract
This chapter recounts negative experiences at academic conferences by one junior faculty member at a Southern California university. Discussion topics include her worries about the realities of conference attendance; care or lack thereof; public and private exclusion; and issues surrounding accessibility. In each section, the author offers recommendations for changes made by conference organizers and attendees toward making conference attendance more welcoming. Citing feminist rhetorical resilience (Flynn, Sotirin, and Brady) as a response to the adversity experienced by many attending academic conferences, the author also sees aspects of feminist resilience as reasons she is attracted to conferences and believes they are important to her growth as a feminist scholar and to the growth of other scholars. While this chapter makes recommendations for academic conference organizers and attendees, it also serves a broader audience who can also benefit from considerations of ways BIPOC are excluded in public and private spaces, as well as ways those in attendance, or organizing large gatherings can be more considerate of issues surrounding access.

Keywords
exclusion, inclusion, feminist, resilience, academic, conference, change, compensation

surprised I respond by wanting to retreat, ask important questions, and then replan my return, as many do in adverse situations.

What I find most compelling about feminist resilience as a research focus and as a response to adversity is its emphasis on "agency, change, and hope" (Flynn, Sotirin, and Brady 1), in which I see possibility where other responses might not yield a positive result at some point. Feminist resilience is also "communal, relational, and social" (5), which is further reassuring, as it is a reminder that the work of change, and the expectations born of hope, do not fall on the individual to be realized but on support systems and spheres of influence. Aspects of feminist rhetorical resilience, such as hope, community, relationality, and sociality, are those I have sought in conferences as gathering spaces from which I could draw from the resources provided by my academic community to expand on my efforts to grow as an academic. Ironically, I enact resilience in response to the adversity brought about by conference attendance. I believe enactments of feminist resilience support the potential that, with contributions from the conference-going community, the spaces where our fields gather can become more inclusive, caring, and productive, spaces where the resources distributed and received by many outweigh those shared by only some when exclusion is at work.

Some of the expectations upon which I have built my confidence and visions for conference attendance have to do with recognition that I am a fortunate heiress to the work done by Latinx scholars before me to forge a path so a Chicana like myself won't have to struggle through metaphorical fallen branches and expectations of tripping on exposed roots. There is a long history, such as is documented in *Viva Nuestro Caucus: Rewriting the Forgotten Pages of Our Caucus* (García, Ruiz, Hernández, and Carvajal Regidor), of the Chicano Teacher of English (CTE) and development of what is today the Latinx Caucus under the umbrella of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC). Romeo García and Anita Hernández, in their chapter in *Viva Nuestro Caucus*, note that the founders of the CTE, Carlota Cárdenas de Dwyer, Felipe de Ortego y Gasca, and Roseann Dueñas González, have called "attention to Latinx issues, advocate[d] for curricular and pedagogical support for Chicanx and all Latinx students and create[d] an agenda with which Latinx educators could engage in social activism and advocacy within the spheres of classrooms as well as in organizations such as NCTE/CCCC" (2). While my negative conference experiences are not specifically focused on CCCC or NCTE, one should understand why the work of trailblazing members of the Latinx Caucus, such as Victor Villanueva, and the voices of activist scholars, such as Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga, would have led me to believe the thorns along the academic path paved for Latinx and Chicanx scholars had long since been cleared—if not entirely, at least to the extent that we can celebrate some progress has been made. I maintain hope, as I see changes taking place as the result of conference stories shared at the 2021 Watson Conference and in other conversations

aimed at revision of conference organization since COVID-19 required that we take new approaches to attendance. The past few years have revealed numerous positive changes from CCCC conference organizers, but there is still so much work to be done. Among my wishes for change are that many of my worries can be quelled for future conference attendees, and that the reality fits the productive and positive anticipation that should come before we share our ideas, work, and questions with our academic peers.

WORRIES VERSUS REALITIES

Numerous situations I've anticipated and worries I've manufactured when writing a proposal to present at a conference come from my imagination, and then there are the realities. Among the realities have been concerns about debt because of conference expenses, jitters because of the fear of saying the wrong thing that might lead to not fitting in, fear of alienating myself from groups, or fear of being misunderstood as the result of nervous chatter. There is also the concern that the vulnerability of standing at the podium, particularly as a student, serves as an unwritten invitation for more senior faculty to use time set aside to ask questions to show their competence as a scholar instead of as a time to help a presenter think about their work more critically. I have been fortunate to have only experienced boastful posturing by a senior scholar once, when I was a graduate student but unfortunately watched presenters come under the fire of comments veiled as questions more recently, and it's hurtful to all who witness this, not to mention what the presenter experiences.

Admittedly, some of my worries have been for naught, and this is not necessarily a good thing. The reality is that my peers and I have most often presented to empty rooms. I could almost always count on presenting to my advisor if she was at the same conference, and I could usually count on my peers from my home university to show up to presentations, although we had already heard each other's presentations more than once. It seems, however, that more people than not had traveled an awfully long way to have an experience similar to mine. In such a case, I wouldn't have to say something wrong in my presentation to feel exclusion and alienation because I was not heard by many. But it is very easy still to feel unwelcomed in other ways, such as when a person of color like myself is perceived as being hotel staff rather than an attendee.

CARE

In the way of care, and to quell the worries of unnecessary vulnerability at the podium, I propose mandatory training for panel moderators, who will likely end up doing the work of facilitator in efforts to protect presenters from aggressions and microaggressions disguised as questions. If questions are presented on index cards, the moderator can sift through questions formed as statements,

and presenters could choose to bypass uncomfortable questions. A prepared moderator has the power to shift a conversation when the presenter is unable. Another way of assuring constructive and nondamaging post-presentation conversations is to require conference attendees to make commitments in advance, as was done with the 2021 Watson Conference, noting the penalty of not being allowed to return to a conference in response to violations. The wrong people are being made to feel they should not attend or return to share their research.

I believe it is also up to senior scholars to show care and interest in graduate students and junior faculty as they make their way into conference spaces. After five years of attending an average of four conferences per year, I at last felt welcomed when Stephanie Kerschbaum pulled me aside in a hotel meeting spot to meet some of her colleagues. I felt like someone had asked me to eat lunch at the table with the cool kids, and that for the first time in many years, I had made connections in my field with others whom I could email and ask for advice. This shouldn't have taken five years and attendance at nearly twenty conferences, from undergraduate studies to my doctoral program, to take place. This act of consideration and friendliness is free and only takes one moment but could lead to further conversations integral to evolving research.

ON EXCLUSION

Whether it was through the work done at the Watson Conference in 2021, or through conversations with faculty members across the country, I have learned I am not alone in feeling alienated at conferences, and the alienation happens in several ways, in public and in private. I won't posit whether one is more damaging than the other but am reassured in the realization that the behaviors occurring in both types of exclusion can be remedied through consideration for others and through changes in conference policies and what can become normalized practices centered on care.

Public Exclusion

The public exclusion I mention in this section happens where other people can see it taking place but do not speak up. An example of this is when comments are made on social media when a scholar of color has celebrated being accepted to a conference and that scholar finds others requesting that they stop posting and celebrating publicly in consideration for those who are not accepted. An invitation to attend a conference is a big deal and is usually the result of many months of research, interest, and thought. Thus, celebrating at home and sharing on social media is the way I best connect with not only family and friends but also with people in my field whom I would not otherwise get to know and be inspired by. I do see the potential for kindness in the gesture of asking people to not celebrate their wins in academia because others have been disappointed. I know firsthand that not getting accepted to a desired conference smarts, and I have many emails containing

such disappointing news. However, asking that those who have been accepted stop sharing good news is an act of pushing a person outside their community of practice while denying them social support and encouragement.

It is important to me to also relay that my desire to bring attention to this situation is less about ego and more about bringing about awareness, as comments shaming celebration and requesting the ceasing of sharing are often made by those who are tenured and whose well-acknowledged names are seen in the program of said conference and who are recognized as past and present organizers. When these same people's books and articles are given awards, or they are published in high-profile journals, it's acceptable to read about it on social media when others respond with sentiments of congratulations. Behaviors such as critiquing the celebration of a BIPOC scholar while continuing to be celebrated yourself is an example of public exclusion under the guise of encouraging kindness, care, and the protection for others' feelings. Criticizing the celebration of award recipients for the sake of preserving others' feelings is like the act of disciplining language that BIPOC already experience in classrooms, committees, and article and chapter reviews under the umbrella of "We will tell you when and how to behave." This public exclusion is like winning the race but not being allowed to accept the trophy.

Another form of public exclusion takes place when presenters are scheduled in a conference program to present at the same time as more popular or well-known scholars and thus know even before traveling that they will present to a room filled with many empty chairs. I acknowledge that conference organizing requires extensive labor, and for this reason I have committed to taking on more of the labor that goes on behind the scenes at conferences. I ask that organizers pay mind to scheduling, to creating these blocks with sensitivity to who is being scheduled and at what time. I frankly don't even want to be at my own presentation when well-known scholars are presenting. Scheduling undergraduate and graduate student presentations at the same time as established and consistently cited scholars is the conference equivalent of receiving the Seinfeld sitcom's "un-vitation"—a way of telling someone they were invited but not necessarily wanted. Seeing one's name on the conference program schedule at the same time as a scholar who holds near-celebrity status speaks volumes to a conference participant up front. A panel scheduled during a time block that competes with a popular presentation knows they will not have attendees and that they will also miss out on the spotlight presentation held at the same time as their own.

The above are only two examples of exclusion that can cause a junior scholar to feel ashamed, embarrassed, and outside their field. Experiences of exclusion do harm and we are less likely to hear about the acts of exclusion that take place in private in the same ways that microaggressions and unconscious bias are oftentimes managed by the BIPOC without the notice of others. BIPOC scholars experiencing exclusion are also at risk of feeling

that they are either unqualified or, worse, unwelcome to participate in their field of study. Without significant changes, we will continue to see the dismal numbers we already see of BIPOC in academia.

Private Exclusion

Private exclusion is damaging and difficult to track, because it is less likely to be seen unless it is pointed out by those it has affected. If stories of private exclusion are not shared, change is less likely to be seen. In many years past, I have witnessed and felt the private exclusion that begins with the Call for Proposals (CFP). In the past two years, however, I want to note that there has been a change in the language used in CFPs so they are more accessible, and the proposal review process is more transparent. These more accessibly written CFPs have fallen in line with shifts in composition and rhetorical studies toward a more just and democratic pedagogy that is changing the landscape of what we do as teachers of writing—and why we do it. A CFP should not require that students schedule meetings with advisors and faculty members to crack the language code of what is being asked for in an extended proposal. All CFPs should have accessible language that can be understood, not lead to feelings of intimidation, and should welcome contributions by scholars at all levels through language and supportive resources. A good example is the CCCC 2022 CFP written by Staci Perryman-Clark that invited all levels of experience and knowledge. I look forward to seeing more of this not only for myself but also for students I want to encourage to apply for conferences and learn to network in academic settings.

Another place in which private exclusion occurs is in the organization of the conference website, particularly with attention to listings for hotel accommodations near conference sites. Many conference attendees come from universities that, like my alma mater, offer little to no financial support for travel. Many believe debt and financial stress are to be expected of higher education and accept financial strain as a part of attaining a degree. Only listing the most expensive hotels is a form of gatekeeping that expresses to attendees that if they cannot afford to attend the conference, they do not belong.

Writing from experience, when a student who is new to attending conferences visits websites, they make determinations as to whether they should apply based on the information present. They wonder whether they will fit in based on such things as clothing, luggage, and technological possessions. Initial alienation takes place based on the city in which the conference is held, and once a determination is made that it is a city that offers potential safety from racial incidents, the next decisions made are based on hotel accommodations. Thus, I propose that the listings for accommodations close to conference locations should include a range of hotels and links to a wiki or forum where attendees can contact others for assistance with ride and room sharing, for instance. I understand that wikis exist in many conference websites but are oftentimes shared across very limited groups. This information should be accessible and part of the website and made available to all attendees. I imagine there are many conference attendees who want to connect with others regarding sharing expenses and questions about access before picking up their badges.

ACCESS

With access in mind, I have become and will continue to be a proponent for working toward possibilities for online attendance in addition to physical presence at conferences in a way I have neglected in the past. It took a worldwide pandemic to prove there are many creative ways to attend a conference. When I think of access, my mind turns to "Enacting a Culture of Access in Our Conference Spaces" by Ada Hubrig, Ruth Osorio, Neil Simpkins, Leslie R. Anglesey, and Ellen Cecil-Lemkin that reminds readers, "Access is more than the ability to physically enter a space in a wheelchair" (90). I am saying inclusion and access to a conference is more than having your proposal accepted or making sure boxes have been checked on a list for accessibility. I agree with all my heart that "access is love" (89) and is about making things possible, with care for the people around us. And if access is love, I would say genuine inclusion, the kind that makes someone want to return because they felt welcome, is tenderness. It is the tenderness that is given in return when someone shares their hard work with you, and kindness in the form of a hospitability that says that others value the work you've put into your research and that they want to hear about it and respond to your invitation to help you improve on what's been done.

So many of the requirements of access and inclusion fall into spatial awareness, reading a room, and informing others that you are available to listen and help make someone else's experience better because some of the accommodations needed cannot be anticipated. I applaud all steps taken to encourage accessible conference presentations and conference spaces. I am a person with a chronic autoimmune disease, and knowing that there are quiet places set up where I can retreat to rest makes a world of difference. I look forward, when financially feasible, to a time when conference organizers will also consider remote conference attendance, as our differently abled bodies do not always give notice they will not be travel friendly, and it is difficult to gamble with the expense of travel in cases when we cannot be sure we will be able to make a trip. I encourage all conference attendees to be cognizant of the people in the spaces around them who could be made more comfortable with a seat next to the door when they are anxious, or at a table closer to the presenter and screen in larger rooms. These actions are cost free and can make all the difference. Returning to feminist resilience, I want to acknowledge that change does not only come because of grand gestures taken to make a difference but also because of small gestures that, when taken together, are enduring and can oftentimes ripple outward when enacted in one space, and then another, and so on.

COMPENSATION

And last, while acknowledging the labor and money necessary to make changes, I propose compensation and recognition for scholars who do the work to train session facilitators, organize conferences in welcoming locations, and write the statements we must sign as a promise to behave as thoughtful and considerate humans. These could potentially come by way of

- registration fees waived for attendance or paid by sponsors;
- book stipends created in partnership with publishing companies;
- marked discounts on hotel accommodations;
- flight stipends;
- course releases for faculty members committed to large conferences that do not have money to pay organizing contributors.

I additionally propose that the money needed to assist students and contingent or part-time faculty with attendance could also come from private and corporate sponsors, as well as from the universities who oftentimes host events. This type of support is given at present but has been limited.

Making participants feel welcome to come together as an academic community is well worth the labor and costs incurred toward making changes. So many of the issues I've encountered at unwelcoming conferences can be changed for free, such as attention to schedules, introducing new scholars to others, and making sure others around you are comfortable. We should want to apply to a conference each time it is available, and likely would if we no longer had to ask ourselves why we chose to attend. Putting the ethics of care at the center of conference organization and attendance encourages connections through relationality and sociality, thus facilitating enactments of feminist resilience. Communities with values such as hope, care, and connection are those in which I look forward to investing time, money, and labor.

CONCLUSION

As I ask myself one more time why I want to share my experiences and visions for changes in conferences, I once again am certain that attendance is about engagement with a community of like-minded individuals who contribute to the pedagogy I rely on to bring about change for my students through gained and renewed knowledge. I have imagined leaving conferences with contact information, with names of people I could eventually call friend or whom I could call upon to share ideas and imagine projects. I have believed these connections could assist me in my endeavors to bring about change in my field and for my students when necessary, particularly when they face adversity in the writing classroom. Others, depending on the time frame in which a conference falls, could be looking to network prior to going on the job market, to

create an important contribution to a CV when promotion, retention, and tenure are in sight, or to get to know administrators and faculty at universities at which they might want to apply during the dissertation process.

As a feminist scholar committed to creating community, conference attendance makes sense to me because it provides me an opportunity to contribute to the communities from which I will benefit in what I perceive as an exchange of resources. Each time I respond to a CFP, I imagine meeting, listening to, and having a chance to ask questions of the people whose names fill my papers. Along with this image is the opportunity to present my ideas and research while asking that others with more experience or unique insight make recommendations, give examples, and present questions that guide my research. These are romantic visions, but not so far-fetched. While I am willing to sacrifice some of these visions, I am not willing to add conference attendance to a list of adversities I already face as an academic of color.

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Sharing Lessons Learned: Intersectional Collaboration, Collective Accountability, and Radical Care in Antiracist Programming

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INTRODUCTION

Our session at the 2021 Watson Conference functioned as a workshop to support antiracist conference committees in assessing their antiracist objectives. We showcased lessons we have learned about antiracist programming and guided participants in developing strategies for transferring those lessons into their own contexts, drawing from our experiences of piloting a Certificate in Antiracist Writing Pedagogy and launching the Inaugural Learning/ Teaching for Justice Conference at our home institution. Taken together, these two initiatives have taught us that antiracist work in higher education necessitates three guiding values:

- **Intersectional collaboration:** Conference committees prioritize participation from BIPOC and LGBTQ+ students, faculty, staff, and community members in planning and hosting conferences.
- **Collective accountability**. To sustain intersectional collaboration, conference committees share responsibility for reflecting on how the committee is living up to its vision of antiracism, especially when that may mean calling out (or calling in) instances or patterns of racism within the committee.
- **Radical care.** Just as intersectional collaboration cannot function without collective accountability, collective accountability cannot function without radical care. Radical care is the daily work of humanizing ourselves and each other in antiracist spaces. Humanizing ourselves and each other means we regard one another and ourselves as complex people working within hierarchical institutions who are navigating interrelated systems of domination, as we may also experience grief and loss, parent small children while working from home, struggle to put food on the table, and balance our everyday lives. Radical care means that we are not only aware of these realities but also that our antiracist work is informed by them.

These values have emerged from teaching, learning, and laboring in the specific institutional context of the University of California, San Diego (UCSD). At UCSD, the undergraduate student experience is defined by the seven-college system. Undergraduate students elect to join a college on campus that administers their living and learning experience. Inspired by the Oxford–Cambridge system, each college provides the structure to a student's general education curriculum and offers an academic and social environment defined by a specific intellectual theme. The college we work in emerged from student demands for what would later become UCSD's Thurgood Marshall College. In 1969, an alliance between the Black Student Council (BSC) and the Mexican American Youth Association (MAYA) resulted in the call for the university to establish Lumumba Zapata College. The BSC–MAYA alliance invoked the names of Patrice Lumumba, the first prime minister of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Mexican revolutionary leader Emiliano Zapata to stress the college's ethos of

Abstract

This article draws on our workshop presented at the 2021 Watson Conference that showcased the lessons we have learned about antiracist programming from piloting a Certificate in Antiracist Writing Pedagogy and launching the Inaugural Learning/Teaching for Justice Conference at our home institution, the University of California, San Diego. Taken together, these two initiatives have taught us that antiracist work in higher education necessitates three guiding values: intersectional collaboration, collective accountability, and radical care. In this article, we ground these values in scholarship and analyze the contradictory institutional context from which these values have emerged, namely from within a first-year writing program that expects students to become proficient in academic writing through the counterhegemonic study of social hierarchies and mass movements for justice. We explore the specific work we have done to navigate this contradiction so as to imagine and conspire with our audience towards substantive transformation within higher education. The article takes the form of a gathering of reflections from different stakeholders holding different positionalities within our program but who each have used intersectional collaboration, collective accountability, and radical care to guide their antiracist work. Specifically, the reflections represent those of the two presenters at the Watson Conference and those of a former student of theirs who was hired to coordinate the inaugural Learning/Teaching for Justice Conference. Regardless of our differing positionalities in the institution, we all three share an ethic of antiracist resistance and hope our experiences are useful as you engage in your own projects in the name of justice.

Keywords

antiracism, antiracist pedagogy, antiracist conferences, first-year writing, intersectionality, intersectional collaboration, collective accountability, radical care

social resistance. In the BSC-MAYA vision, this new college would center students of color by providing a culturally relevant general education (B.S.C.–M.A.Y.A., 1969).

The plan for this new college was approved in 1970. However, it took almost 20 years for the college to receive its official name in honor of Thurgood Marshall, the first African American Supreme Court justice and legal mastermind of *Brown v. Board of Education* that ended juridical segregation in the United States. Today, the mission, vision, and values of the college are defined by its motto "scholar and citizen," exemplified by the life and achievements of the college's namesake. All incoming Thurgood Marshall College students enroll in the Dimensions of Culture Writing Program (DOC), the required three-quarter core sequence that provides a unified academic experience for them. These DOC courses are grounded in the original BSC–MAYA student activists' commitment

to social justice and calls for counterhegemonic engagement with U.S. history, culture, and society, while meeting UCSD's requirement that students demonstrate proficiency in English writing and communication.

DOC's very existence is thus a potential contradiction, as we describe in the sections that follow. In DOC, we study issues of social justice and self-determination while under the university's mandate that we train students to master academic writing, a kind of writing defined by White language supremacy (Condon & Young, 2016; Inoue, 2015; Inoue & Poe, 2012). While the history of our college and program is unique, the contradictory nature of pursuing antiracist work in the racist, classist, and heteropatriarchal institution of higher education is not. Our presentation at the Watson Conference and this article explore the specific work we have been doing to navigate contradiction in the spirit of suggesting ways for our readers to imagine and conspire towards substantive transformation within higher education. Specifically, we offer the three aforementioned guiding values. These values have grounded our decision-making and actions for immediate and long-term change in the face of seemingly insurmountable institutional barriers.

The three guiding values emerged from our experiences in DOC at UCSD, but they are rooted in Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) groundbreaking work on intersectionality. Crenshaw reminds us that any antiracist agenda must include an analysis of multiple systems of domination simultaneously: if we are to truly engage in antiracism, she explains, our work "must include an analysis of sexism and patriarchy" (p. 166). Subsequent scholars (Carastathis, 2016; Collins, 2000; Collins & Bilge, 2016) have taken up intersectionality to include social systems centered on sexuality, age, ability, immigration status, and other dimensions of difference. Crenshaw and the body of scholarship her work has sparked affirm the naming of our first guiding value, intersectional collaboration, as the value informing the other two: collective accountability and radical care. Intersectional collaboration reminds us to prioritize participation from communities of Color and, importantly, from marginalized identities within those communities.

Moreover, our three guiding values are affirmed by scholarship in Writing Studies on committing to racial justice. As Natasha N. Jones, Laura Gonzales, and Angela M. Haas (2021) and Rasha Diab, Thomas Ferrel, and Beth Godbee (2017) make clear, declaring antiracist values is not enough: we must *do* antiracism. Diab et. al (2017) describe how personal reflection can be a powerful tool for articulating commitments to racial justice, but to translate those commitments into material change, these narratives must act upon us: to help us study ourselves and come to "'see [our] invisible beliefs' (Wheatley, 2002, p. 36)" (p. 26), to prioritize time for "self-work *alongside* [emphasis added] work-with-others" (p. 20), and to take action *within* [emphasis added] our institutions "because racism [itself] is institutional" (p. 35). In articulating the

need to shift between the personal and the collective, Diab et. al affirm our value of collective accountability. As an outgrowth of intersectional collaboration, collective accountability helps us prioritize the individual positionalities of and collaborations among participants involved in an antiracist project but also *how* those individuals push each other toward (or away from) the work.

But, we cannot effectively attend to the *how* without prioritizing care. As Jones et. al (2021) explicate, the *doing* of antiracism centers on for whom and how we care. Their discussion of care affirms the naming of our third value, radical care, as the culmination of the previous two values, intersectional collaboration and collective accountability. As we work to humanize ourselves and each other in antiracist spaces, we reject a culture of disposability, "ensuring that no one in our community feels disposable" (p. 30)—especially in the face of the calling out and calling in that can occur within a context of collective accountability. Like Jones et. al, we too have found that care is everyone's responsibility: indeed, in antiracist work, care means everyone is engaged in educating ourselves about racism in our programs, what we need to do to eradicate it, and how to leverage what power we have in material ways. And, we extend this framing of care to center participants' complex and diverse material realities—as family members, parents, caregivers, survivors.

What follows is a gathering of reflections from different stakeholders holding different positionalities in the DOC Program, but who each have used intersectional collaboration, collective accountability, and radical care to guide their antiracist work. Specifically, the reflections represent those of the two presenters at the Watson Conference and those of a former student of theirs who was hired to coordinate the inaugural Learning/Teaching for Justice Conference (LTJC). First, Emily R. Johnston, DOC's associate director, reflects on the Certificate in Antiracist Pedagogy she launched in DOC. Then, Amanda Solomon Amorao, DOC's director, discusses how this curriculum in antiracist pedagogy is deeply connected to the vision for an even broader antiracist initiative at UCSD, the LTJC. Finally, Jonathan Kim, UCSD class of 2020, reflects on his work of translating the antiracist vision of the conference into material reality through his role as the LTJC Coordinator.

We have chosen to present our writing in three sections to distinguish our positionalities, as the different levels of privilege and power that come with our varied statuses in the university, as the roles of lecturer and academic coordinator, tenure-track faculty, and alumni turned academic employee, respectively, shape our work in different ways. However, we each engage with the three guiding values to highlight the simultaneity of this work. Our curriculum development and conference planning have been recursive, dialectical, and intertwined processes. Moreover, a major theme in both our antiracist pedagogy curriculum and in the LTJC is

challenging the racialized, capitalist, and gendered hierarchies within higher education.[1] By choosing to format our article in three distinct sections engaging with a shared set of values, we seek to highlight how our positional differences shape our different relationships with antiracist work, while also conveying the collaborative nature of our work. Regardless of our differing positionalities in the institution, we all three share an ethic of antiracist resistance and hope our experiences are useful to you as you engage in your own projects in the name of justice.

DR. EMILY R. JOHNSTON, DOC ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

For the four years I have been serving as DOC's associate director, I have wrestled with balancing the teaching of content and the teaching of writing in our program. On the one hand, our very existence is the result of student demands for a college that centers the histories and experiences of BIPOC and working-class students (B.S.C.–M.A.Y.A., 1969), which necessitates teaching U.S. history, society, and culture from the perspectives of disenfranchised groups. On the other hand, the university mandates that we teach academic writing, which, as Asao B. Inoue (2015) reminds us, is steeped in Whiteness.[2] So, how do we teach our students to succeed as writers in the academy while also teaching them writing as a revolutionary act of speaking truth to power?

One answer I've explored lies in how I teach teachers, my core responsibility as associate director. With that, I have restructured our requisite pedagogy seminar for graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) in DOC as a curriculum in antiracist writing pedagogy. The curriculum guides GTAs in crafting a teaching philosophy and toolbox of practical methods for resisting White language supremacy[3] in teaching and assessing writing, while comprehensively supporting them in the larger work of pedagogical self-reflection and identity building. As indicated in the introduction, first-year composition (FYC) is entrenched in Whiteness. And, since FYC is among the strongest predictors of student success in higher education (Garret, Bridgewater, & Feinstein, 2017), FYC is an ideal site for teaching our first-year students to interrogate the standard language ideology that permeates higher education in the United States so that, as they move throughout their undergraduate careers, they have tools to identify Whiteness in other disciplines.

The year-long antiracist pedagogy curriculum begins with a deep dive into the growing body of literature on White language supremacy in Composition Studies, centering the work of scholars of color such as Asao B. Inoue (2015, 2019), Iris D. Ruiz (2016), and Vershawn Ashanti Young (2010). Following this intensive reading and discussion, I pair up new and returning GTAs to work together to develop specific antiracist teaching strategies for implementation in their classrooms. These partnerships segue into larger teaching circles, groups of GTAs that meet to discuss how their strategies are impacting student learning. GTAs report that the sharing of knowledge in these teaching circles inspires them to take greater risks in their teaching, integrate more play into their lesson plans, and name with students how standard language ideology shows up in academic writing. The year culminates with GTAs crafting statements of antiracist teaching philosophy and sharing them in a campus-wide ceremony.

While the implementation of this curriculum has been rewarding and beneficial for our GTAs and their students, the White-supremacist, patriarchal, capitalist conditions in which we all teach FYC remind me that implementing antiracist pedagogy within a single program is not enough. White supremacy infiltrates every facet of institutional life, so no single course, program, department, or instructor can vanquish its toxicity. We need to do this work in community to ensure we are actually serving BIPOC students and to sustain ourselves in the affective labor this work demands. I recognize that, at the very least, the DOC GTAs and I have a responsibility to share the work we are doing with our colleagues across campus.

In transitioning the antiracist pedagogy curriculum into concrete material resources for administrators, faculty, and GTAs in UCSD's seven other writing programs on campus and potentially in writing programs at other institutions, I have reflected on what can and cannot transfer from what we are doing as a teaching community to other contexts. Our program is unique in its approach to FYC because we are housed within an undergraduate college that emerged from student demands during the Civil Rights Movement and, in alignment with those demands, teaches composition through the theory and practice of social revolution. What's more, our GTAs come from myriad home departments and do not have backgrounds in composition theory and pedagogy. These conditions are not common at other institutions.

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1 Please note that we have purposely chosen to use the term "antiracist" versus "anti-racist" with a hyphen to emphasize that antiracist practices should not be conceived as reactions to racist systems and events. Antiracism must itself be a generative, proactive, and iterative process.

2 Like all racial categories, White is a social construction, or "a way of 'making up people'" (Omi & Winant, 2014, p. 105), and White*ness* refers to "the normalization of white racial identity" (National Museum of African American History, n.d.) to the extent that White folks often do not even see themselves in racial terms (DiAngelo, 2018). However, while race is human made and not biologically determined, race has had and continues to have a profound effect on United States history, society, and culture. Indeed, race has functioned as "*a master category*" (Omi & Winant, 2014, p. 106) of difference since the very formation of the United States as a nation.

3 White language supremacy is a tool of White supremacy that "uses language to control reality and resources by defining and evaluating people, places, things, reading, writing, rhetoric, pedagogies, and processes in multiple ways that damage our students and our democracy" (Conference on College Composition and Communication, 2021).

So, what can I share with other antiracist educators that may actually work in their contexts? This question helped me name three guiding values, which are outlined in our introduction: intersectional collaboration, collective accountability, and radical care. These values have helped me root our antiracist pedagogy curriculum in the legacy of Thurgood Marshall College: revolution from the inside out, from the institution and into the streets. And yet these values are flexible enough to accommodate a wide range of program and department structures and cultures. What follows is a description of how these values are helping me build our antiracist pedagogy curriculum outward, which can perhaps spark ideas in others invested in antiracist pedagogy to launch and expand antiracist pedagogy initiatives in their own contexts.

To live up to a term like antiracist pedagogy, which implies an active and constant resistance to White supremacy, a curriculum requires intersectional collaboration. As we defined it in the introduction, intersectional collaboration means any antiracist initiative must prioritize participation from BIPOC and LGBTQ+ students, faculty, staff, and community stakeholders. Admittedly, this participation has been challenging to enact on our campus. Whiteness is overrepresented in writing instruction at UCSD, and while many White writing faculty members such as myself are invested in antiracist work, if we are only or primarily collaborating with each other, we will continue to fall short of our antiracist vision. Given that reality, it's been essential to expand our network of support by collaborating with campus communities across disciplines and units, such as teaching-resource centers, writing centers, student-resource centers, and upper-level administrators positioned to amplify the urgency of antiracist pedagogy campus-wide.

To that end, Amanda and I have secured an Antiracist Pedagogy Changemaker Grant from the UCSD Teaching + Learning Commons, a campus unit that supports teaching and teaching research across the university. Through the grant, we have been able to materially compensate DOC students for participating in focus groups to assess the labor-based grading contracts (Inoue, 2019) we have implemented in our lower-division sequence, the most recent material consequence of our antiracist writing pedagogy curriculum. We have also been able to bring Dr. Inoue to campus (virtually) to guide our GTAs in implementing labor-based grading. We recognize that while labor-based contract grading is itself a potentially powerful antiracist practice, its impact on our students and GTAs has been disparate. Some students have struggled to develop the metacognition necessary to reflect on their labor. Some GTAs have struggled to balance an emphasis on learning and risk-taking alongside constructive feedback to students on improving their academic writing. Some students *and* instructors have found the labor of labor-based contract grading exhausting. The focus groups and Dr. Inoue's workshop with GTAs centered those most directly impacted by labor-based grading in the necessary process of revising our grading contracts in DOC: the students whose writing is being assessed under this model and the GTAs charged with assessing that writing.

As part of the research grant, Amanda and I participated with faculty and graduate students in a biweekly Antiracist Pedagogy Learning Community to read and discuss literature on antiracism across disciplines. Participating in this learning community provided a space for sharing about the antiracist writing pedagogy curriculum in our program and helped us redesign that curriculum to meet the needs and labor constraints of GTAs across disciplines. This grant will culminate in revised labor contracts and teacher-training materials for implementing labor-based contract grading in DOC's large-lecture, small-discussion section model of FYC to maximize both teacher and student agency. Through further conference presentations and publications, we hope these material resources will be transferable to writing programs with comparable structures.

Sustaining intersectional collaboration requires collective accountability, a compassionate naming of instances or patterns of racism occurring within our community, and radical care, a daily humanization of ourselves and each other. That is, to ensure that such collaborations are mutually beneficial and that they center antiracism, Amanda and I establish regular space for dialogue and reflection with our GTAs. These conversations during weekly teaching meetings explore how we have been caring for ourselves, our colleagues, and our students; the challenges in extending care; and strategies for how to support one another through the vulnerability of antiracist work. For example, we've had many difficult conversations as a teaching community about our own internalized racism as it shows up in the assessment of student writing. We have had to name moments when we, in the name of helping our students become more successful academic writers, are simply reinforcing hegemonic conventions such as logical argument and peer-reviewed research without also helping our students interrogate the uses and limits of these norms. We are learning to lean on each other to develop new vocabulary for responding to student writing in ways that respect students' responsibility for their own learning and that keep us focused on creating the classroom conditions in which learning can happen if and when students are ready for it.

DR. AMANDA SOLOMON AMORAO, DOC DIRECTOR

As director of the DOC Program, I feel acutely every single day the contradiction of our program's location in the university. As Emily points out, first-year composition (FYC) programs are entrenched in Whiteness. Many times in the attempt to teach students how to write "well," even the most well-meaning instructor is ultimately trying to teach students—especially students of color—to adopt a normative White voice that devalues the specific practices of language and lived experiences of minoritized communities (Inoue 2015). The inherently colonialist nature of FYC becomes even more obvious in a program like DOC, where the intellectual content is focused on exploring the development of social hierarchies

in the United States and movements for social justice in U.S. history. In other words, the challenge facing Emily and me daily is how to align our teaching and assessment of student writing with our content's focus on naming and resisting oppressive power structures. As Emily describes above, we have responded in a significant way to this challenge by developing a curriculum in antiracist pedagogy for the graduate students who labor as teaching assistants in our program and by committing to a significant structural change in our program's ecology through the adoption of labor-based contract grading (Inoue, 2019).

We have also responded by launching the Learning/Teaching for Justice Conference (LTJC) as an opportunity to explore the contradictions of enacting antiracism within higher education and to recognize how those contradictions in fact provide the fertile ground upon which transformative knowledge production and community building can and does happen. The culmination of ten months of planning, collaboration, and community building, the LTJC took place May 14–15, 2021, via Zoom. I offer the lessons learned from the conference as a model for how to create transformative spaces of learning across differences and within complex institutional contexts. In what follows below, I discuss how our three guiding values of intersectional collaboration, collective accountability, and radical care dialectically emerged from and defined the LTJC as we worked to manifest our commitment to antiracism.

The initial idea for the LTJC materialized in honor of Marshall College's fiftieth anniversary of its founding. In 2019, as college leadership initiated planning to celebrate the occasion, we began reflecting on that founding moment, evaluating how our college was living up to that legacy and envisioning the next fifty years. Marshall College's origin is fundamentally defined by antiracist student activism, as exemplified by the B.S.C.–M.A.Y.A. demands that the new college be "devoted to relevant education for minority youth and to the study of the contemporary social problems of all people" (B.S.C.–M.A.Y.A., 1969, p. 2). After protracted struggle, protest, and compromise, Thurgood Marshall College emerged. Some have gone so far as to call the naming of the college after Justice Marshall a neoliberal and multicultural compromise (Thurgood Marshall College, n.d.). The adoption of the name was read as symbolizing a redirection of the original anticapitalist, anti-imperialist energy and critique by the B.S.C.–M.A.Y.A. coalition into a rights-based framework of social change that upholds the nation-state as the guarantor of justice, rather than as the primary site of oppressive power and social critique. My vision for the LTJC was born from this deep consideration into how the college generally and DOC specifically were and were not fulfilling the original demands for a revolutionary college dedicated to and determined by students. Ultimately, my vision for the LTJC emerged from the desire to move beyond my own personal "confessional narrative" (Diab et al., 2017, p. 20) regarding my position as a writing-program director and toward "actionable commitment" to antiracism (p. 20).

The contradictions between the liberatory content of the assigned texts and the disciplinary nature of the writing assignments in our program are oftentimes frustratingly obvious in our day-to-day work instructing students in academic writing while simultaneously analyzing hierarchical systems of oppression in U.S. society. In these moments of frustration, however, I return constantly to intersectionality. As Vivian May (2015) observes, "An intersectional justice orientation is thus wide in scope and inclusive: it repudiates additive notions of identity, assimilationist models of civil rights, and one-dimensional views of power" (p. 3). An intersectional view of our program reveals the persistence of White (language) supremacy, class inequality, ableism, and heteropatriarchy as defined by the program's position in the university, *and* it also reveals the currents of resistance, counterhegemonic coalitions, and humanizing practices of care that defined the college's founding and continue to coexist with and challenge institutional and interpersonal relationships of domination in the college even today. It is thus my responsibility and the responsibility of all in our DOC community to maximize the practices of intersectional collaboration, collective accountability, and radical care. From this starting point, it became clear to me the LTJC could be a space to continue and amplify the radical student tradition that defined the B.S.C.–M.A.Y.A. coalition. The LTJC could be an institutionalized and biannual space where the power of student social analyses and activism were centered, where institutional hierarchies were broken down, and where clear connections between classroom learning and community impact were showcased. The LTJC would be a biannual public event, and I envisioned it as a critical tool of accountability that would force us to regularly evaluate our day-to-day work in antiracism and chart our growth (or lack thereof) for ourselves and our stakeholders.

With the support of Marshall College Provost Dr. Leslie Carver, I was able to convene a committee of volunteers who shared my vision and represented staff, faculty, and students. Absolutely pivotal to the functioning and success of this committee was the employment of Jonathan Kim as the LTJC coordinator. A former DOC student himself, Jonathan's daily labor regarding communications and logistics was essential in enabling the committee to operate according to the values of intersectional collaboration, collective accountability, and radical care. The committee's point of departure was Paulo Freire's (2005) notion of the teacher-student/student-teacher in order to break down racist and elitist hierarchies among undergraduates, graduates, faculty, and staff in higher education (p. 80). We had many conversations about how to cultivate an active, interactive, and inclusive space for educators to be students, and for students to be educators. We wanted to recognize that teaching is not done just by academics for students in lecture halls but occurs in residential halls/apartments, academic-advising sessions, student organizations, campus centers, and other formal and informal learning communities across the university.

More importantly, educators do, and must, learn from their students. To this end, we built into the conference-proposal process specific questions asking presenters how they would

center engagement and dialogue, highlight student voices, and encourage material action in the name of antiracism and social justice. Presenters were asked to address these questions in their proposals:

- How will you design your session to be active, or even participatory, for attendees in a remote/virtual environment?
- One aim of the conference is to center student voices in the conversations about justice in teaching and learning. How do you plan to involve students' perspectives in your presentation?
- Would you like the conference organizers to arrange for a student respondent (or respondents) to offer thoughts and comments on your session?
- What actions to advance justice in teaching and learning do you intend for participants to take as a result of attending your session?

To ensure potential presenters received as much support as possible in considering these questions and in submitting their proposals, we held a virtual workshop before the proposal deadline during which potential participants could get feedback from committee members and their peers. This preproposal workshop particularly focused on supporting those who had never before written a conference proposal or attended an academic conference. The workshop facilitators asked participants to identify what stage of drafting the proposal they were currently at and created breakout rooms where participants could brainstorm with each other and a conference-committee member. In this way, we sought to make the conference-proposal process not an individualistic competition but a communal one centered in radical care for each other.

For a conference to be antiracist, it must demystify the very conferencing process itself—an obscure process that can operate on uninterrogated disciplinary expectations and unconscious biases. In the name of collective accountability, the committee therefore adopted a practice of rigorous transparency that went hand in hand with a conscious rejection of a politics of disposability when it came to reading conference proposals. The committee engaged in a proposal-review process that centered on antiracist mentorship rather than on the evaluation of proposals against a hegemonic academic standard. The committee shared with potential participants all the written feedback from the committee on participants' proposals and followed that with an invitation to a preconference workshop intended to help presenters implement the feedback they had received. The preconference workshop offered concrete strategies on centering student voices during sessions, explored best practices in time management, and supported presenters in clarifying and articulating concrete actions to take to advance justice in higher education as it related to their specific topics. By shining light on expectations for proposals and deliberations

regarding selection, conference committees invited intended participants and attendees to hold the LTJC accountable to its stated objectives. Moreover, the preconference workshop ensured the LTJC materially supported presenters through the creation of a culture and practice of care. Presenters were not left to individually meet the goals of the conference; the workshop manifested our commitment to doing antiracist work in community.

In the lead-up to the conference, we also worked to recruit students from DOC courses who could act as respondents to sessions. In this way, students were empowered to bring their perspectives and experiences to every single session. Drawing on their exposure to intersectionality and racial formation theory in the DOC sequence, these students enriched presentation sessions with their questions and observations, all in the name of the LTJC's goal of antihierarchical and communal knowledge production. The conference afforded DOC students the opportunity to take what they were learning in the DOC sequence out into a larger community of scholarship. To support these students, Jonathan created a participation guide and facilitated an orientation session during which students discussed and communally agreed upon the attitudes and actions they would need to bring to the conference space to cultivate dialogue amongst audience members and presenters. Having Jonathan facilitate this workshop created a peer-to-peer system of mentorship in the name of conference goals.

To develop an authentically antiracist conference that served our constituents, we also attempted to center those experiencing the violence of White supremacy's most steadfast support systems: misogyny, capitalism, and heteronormativity. In selecting the conference keynote speaker, for example, the LTJC committee made a concerted effort to identify a dynamic producer of knowledge outside academia whose work emerges from their intersectional lived experience as a queer person of color. We were honored when author and poet Saeed Jones accepted our invitation to be the keynote. His address was grounded in readings of passages from his 2019 memoir *How We Fight for Our Lives*, which traces his growth as a young, Black, gay man from the South. We were also able to organize a workshop with Jones and student leaders interested in the power of writing to effect social change.

The inaugural LTJC was an inspiring two-day exploration of the power of learning and teaching—even within a contradictory institutional space like DOC at UCSD—to raise consciousness, build community, and effect structural change in higher education. The diverse range of presentation and panel topics testify to this and can be seen in the post-conference commemorative booklet created by Jonathan Kim.[4] Marshall College and DOC are committed to holding the LTJC on a biannual basis to regularly return to the antiracist and student-activist roots of the college so as to continue pushing for structural change in the name of justice on our campus. We hope the example of the LTJC is useful to you as you

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4 The booklet is accessible here: https://marshall.ucsd.edu/doc/ltjc-2021/index.html.

continue your own work in the name of antiracism. Our experience with the LTJC can provide a model for interrogating your own specific institutional context, naming the limitations and opportunities that context provides, excavating institutional visions for change that may have been forgotten or compromised, and holding the institution (and yourself) accountable to that vision in the name of a more equitable future for students from Black, Indigenous, and people of color communities.

JONATHAN KIM, CLASS OF 2020, LTJC COORDINATOR

As I logged off Zoom and closed my laptop, a wave of relief swept over me. Over the past 48 hours, I had overseen the inaugural Learning/Teaching for Justice Conference (LTJC). But instead of arranging rooms and running between buildings, my eyes had been fixated on my screen, carefully facilitating and monitoring over 30 zoom sessions. While I was familiar with the intricacies of hosting a series of Zoom meetings, acting as the LTJC's conference coordinator taught me the intentionality and labor required to host an online conference in an equitable and just manner.

Very few aim to intentionally facilitate a conference in an inequitable manner, but what does it mean to have a conference embrace justice? What makes that conference different? These were the main questions I wished to address as the LTJC's conference coordinator. Given the ongoing pandemic during the 2020–2021 academic school year, I was well aware of the ways the online format both fostered and hindered accessibility. More than featuring sessions centered on issues of justice, I felt it was imperative to embody those values in the format of the conference itself. Having been given a set of values from the conference committee, I wanted to dedicate my role to striving for how the logistics of this conference could be a reflection of equity, antiracist pedagogy, and justice amidst COVID-19.

While the constraints of the ongoing pandemic limited us to a virtual conference, I knew the virtual space offered a multitude of opportunities and options. In choosing whether sessions were to be synchronous or asynchronous, or even whether sessions would be presented concurrently or sequentially, my mind was drawn to one of the themes of the conference: antihierarchical and intersectional collaborations. While "antihierarchical and intersectional collaborations" was originally meant to provide a theme for session submissions, I was drawn to format the conference in a way that challenged the hierarchical nature of higher education. What format reduces barriers for participation while also challenging the rigid student-teacher dynamic? While thinking about this challenge, the word "accessibility" continually made itself apparent to me. I was cognizant of the overwhelming evidence that remote learning due to COVID-19 had disproportionately impacted the learning experiences and mental health of BIPOC and LGBTQ+ students, so it was imperative that the conference format avoided

adding to the increasing disparity and strived to create an environment that directly addressed those challenges (United States, 2021, pg. 40).

In surveying and speaking with current UCSD students, two prominent concerns emerged: stable Internet and substantive engagement. With these obstacles in mind, I began to craft a hybrid synchronous and asynchronous format. While live sessions promote engagement, participation would require a stable Internet connection, as well as the flexibility to operate across multiple time zones, as many students and presenters were presenting from all over the world. Therefore, I wanted to incorporate a number of asynchronous sessions to allow participants to engage with the material at any time. By offering two options for presenters, I wanted to create a structure that allowed sessions to maximize the strengths of each format. With careful planning, we could group topics so they did not overlap, allowing participants to engage with the same or similar topics throughout the conference.

After I developed the outline and presented the format to the conference committee, the idea was approved with several minor revisions. While the work for this conference was just developing, I deeply appreciated how this conference presented an opportunity to view common engagement or logistics issues and properly address them within the context of justice. Facilitating an engaging and seamless conference is more than a logistics challenge; it is impacted and informed by the circumstances of the participants. Overlooking the context of these circumstances not only does a disservice to those wanting to engage with the conference, it allows for inaccessibility and injustice to be improperly labeled as mere administrative constraints. To strive for justice means to acknowledge how even seemingly unimportant or mundane limitations are informed by social, historical, and economic contexts.

With the format decided, next came the process of screening and selecting presentations. In wanting to deconstruct the hierarchical nature of higher education and academic conferences, we started with the idea of centering learning in a way that weakened instead of reinforced elitism. Through many conversations with faculty and experienced administrators, I began to realize how the system of "rejection" and "acceptance" of proposals by a faceless committee lends itself to supporting the mysticism and elitist nature of academia. Without knowing exactly what conference committees are looking for, it is difficult for potential presenters to craft a proposal that aligns with the values of a conference. Traditionally, having experience in the field or access to those with experience would alleviate this issue. But assuming most of our submissions would come from first-time conference presenters, we knew it would be inequitable to merely pass decisions along without an opportunity for feedback.

As mentioned in Dr. Solomon's section of this article, to promote collective accountability, members of the conference committee led by Dr. Johnston graciously hosted the aforementioned workshop

before the submission deadline. This dedicated space gave presenters the opportunity to receive feedback on their proposals. In addition to informing and educating presenters on how to strengthen their proposals, the workshop also held the committee and me accountable for clearly communicating themes and expectations.

But while we wanted to support those seeking guidance, we didn't have the capacity to provide individualized support at every step in the process. Instead of leaving this challenge as a shortcoming of our administrative process, we reevaluated the selection process as an opportunity to provide some insight and feedback on submitted proposals. Instead of creating a binary of acceptance and rejection, our selection process emphasized the strength of each session and prioritized offering quality feedback over an unexplained decision.

Watching the conference committee approach the screening and selection process informed by the value of collective accountability was deeply inspiring to me. In positions of power, it is easy to centralize the decision-making process to streamline and decrease the amount of necessary labor. While typing and formatting feedback took a considerable amount of labor, we felt just giving a decision was not only a disservice to the community of presenters but also an act that reinforced the barriers to participation in higher education. Creating a system that holds presenters and the committee accountable to the conference's values made clear to me how typical processes can be reimagined in more equitable and practical ways.

As the details of the conference slowly began to materialize, the committee felt it was imperative to also center the voices of students not just in responding to the presentations themselves but also in the administration of the conference. We used this opportunity to recruit undergraduate students who would help in facilitating the conference on the days with live sessions. In addition to training them to deal with technical issues, I explained the intentions and decision-making process behind the format and systems we implemented. In doing so, I saw an opportunity to demystify the event-planning process. We hoped students could take the skills and information learned from centering justice in this conference and apply them to future events and organizations.

Furthermore, we sought to recruit students to act as respondents for the individual live sessions. As Dr. Solomon previously mentioned, having an opportunity for student respondents allowed students to engage with the conference at every step in the process. While an engaging session requires participation, it can be daunting to be the first person to speak in a group. By including student respondents, we not only centered their perspectives and voices as undergraduate students but also fostered a space where others could feel comfortable in speaking and offering their thoughts. Including students on the administrative side and as assigned participants allowed us to mentor and incorporate student involvement at nearly every level of the conference.

While I was inspired to incorporate intersectional collaboration, collective accountability, and the centering of student voices, I personally felt how *radical care* was essential to any work surrounding justice. As the conference coordinator, I found myself in a unique position. Having been mentored by many of the members of the committee in the past, I felt a huge amount of responsibility in organizing this event. Beyond a job, coordinating the conference meant much more to me. It was an opportunity to contribute to the UCSD community in a much larger capacity than I could have as an individual.

But in feeling the weight of responsibilities on my shoulders, I found myself constantly exhausted, wanting to implement even more strategies and systems into planning the conference. It wasn't until I felt overwhelmed with tasks that I learned how acknowledging my limitations and intentionally taking time for self-care were instrumental in my efforts to strive for equity and justice. Justice for myself meant being honest in acknowledging that while I knew the conference inside and out, I couldn't draft all the emails, oversee all the sessions, or answer all the technical questions by myself. By starting to recognize my limitations, I began to see how I could rely on the support of others. Acknowledging what I was capable of ultimately improved my mental health and prevented careless mistakes that could have impacted sessions and presenters. Radical care taught me how humanizing myself through this long journey was vital in the overarching goal of striving for justice.

While the two days of the conference were exhausting, they were even more gratifying. I felt extremely privileged watching the culmination of over 10 months unfold before me. For me, having the opportunity to give space to folks dedicated to forwarding justice in their communities felt extremely moving. But beyond being impressed by the work of others, I felt a deep sense of pride in facilitating an event that, from the ground up, sought to embody values of antiracist work. Intersectional collaboration, collective accountability, and radical care not only improved the processes of the conference but also made the act of organizing into a justice-centered project itself.

CONCLUSION

In closing, we acknowledge that while the work of antiracism is a daily struggle and never finished, our initiatives in DOC have contributed material change to Writing Studies. The Certificate in Antiracist Pedagogy and the Learning/Teaching for Justice Conference are but two examples of how we have shifted from *declaring* to *doing* antiracism. In launching an antiracist pedagogy initiative, particularly in our nontraditional FYC structure of large lectures taught by faculty with small discussion sections taught by teaching assistants, DOC has structurally embedded antiracism as a formative component of pedagogical professionalization for graduate students across myriad disciplines. Further, because we have embedded an antiracist pedagogy curriculum into the

requisite pedagogy seminar for graduate student teaching assistants (GTAs), GTAs have provided first-year student-writers with a unified academic experience that centers the comprehensive study of writers of Color, queer writers, and writers with disabilities; metacognition; and learning over mastery. And finally, in establishing the biannual Learning and Teaching for Justice Conference, DOC is creating an institutionalized space to center student knowledge production and activist projects, as well as antihierarchical practices of community, with the express purpose of leaning into the contradictions of higher education to facilitate change from within the institution.

In addition to naming our contributions, we also want to offer actionable takeaways for our readers to consider their own contributions to antiracism. In designing and implementing antiracist practices within the context of first-year writing programs and conferences regarding pedagogy in higher education, we have learned the three lessons below and offer them to you, with accompanying questions for reflection, as inspiration for your own work dismantling systemic injustice.

- **Intersectional collaboration** in the context of antiracist conferences means that in planning and hosting conferences, conference committees must prioritize participation from BIPOC and LGBTQ+ students, faculty, staff, and community members. One way we strive to collaborate intersectionally in DOC is by centering the needs and ideas of first-generation students, students of Color, students with disabilities, students of diverse sexual orientations and gender expressions, and students of diverse socioeconomic backgrounds in all our programming—in and beyond the classroom. How can your institution or context strengthen, amplify, and promote participation from BIPOC and LGBTQ+ students, faculty, staff, and community members?

- To sustain intersectional collaboration, conference committees must ground their work in **collective accountability**, a shared responsibility for reflecting on how the committee is living up to its vision of antiracism, especially when that may mean calling out (or in) instances or patterns of racism occurring within the committee. One way we foster collective accountability in DOC is through integrating structured reflection throughout the undergraduate curriculum, as well as in our beyond-the-classroom programming. What daily practices might strengthen, amplify, and promote reflection *and the respectful sharing of reflection* at your institution or in your context?

- **Radical care** is the daily work of humanizing ourselves and each other through the creation of antiracist spaces within hierarchical institutions. Radical care means that we are not only aware of the challenges of hierarchical structures but that we also push against them for ourselves and for each other. One way we care for ourselves and each other in DOC is by beginning and ending our teaching meetings with check-ins and renegotiating the distribution of labor as needed in response to these check-ins. What small, yet consistent mechanisms might work to humanize participants in antiracist programming at your institution or in your context?

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Conference-Session Moderation: Guidelines for Supporting a Culture of Access

Compiled by

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Abstract

In this essay, we consider the role conference-session moderators can play in supporting conference accessibility, drawing on our experiences with conference moderation at the 2021 Thomas R. Watson Conference in Rhetoric and Composition. Rather than offering a checklist of access moves, we offer guidelines and recommendations conference-session moderators can adapt and implement in their individual contexts, recognizing access is always situated in specific places, times, and spaces that lead to particular enactments of conference-session moderation. Our goal is for this piece to serve as a starting point for other conference organizers working to cultivate intersectional forms of access and accessibility.

Keywords

conference moderator, access, accessibility, culture of access, conference moderation, virtual conference

Access in conference spaces is crucial. More than ten years ago, Margaret Price (2009) noted that, notwithstanding how essential conferences are for many academics, they "are often among the least accessible spaces that people with disabilities encounter in the course of our work." While conferences have taken on new forms and configurations in the early 2020s, conference inaccessibility remains a significant challenge shaped by multiple factors.

In a recent symposium aimed at expanding conference accessibility, Ada Hubrig and Ruth D. Osorio (2020) learned from and extended disability justice principles created by disabled people of color to forward a definition of access as "the dynamic, collective movement of creating spaces where multipl[y] marginalized disabled people with a wide range of needs can engage in whatever manners they choose" (p. 91). Working from the definition of access Hubrig and Osorio unpack, in this essay we consider the role conference-session moderators play in supporting conference

accessibility. Elizabeth Brewer, Cynthia Selfe, and Remi Yergeau (2014) describe "a culture of access" as "a culture of participation and redesign" (p.153). Understanding access through participation and redesign points to the work session moderators do in influencing how presenters, attendees, and others sharing physical and/or virtual conference space move together. This work involves interaction with material artifacts and environments, as well as the creation and maintenance of social arrangements. Such moves also necessitate attention to what disability theorist Aimi Hamraie (2017) describes as a politics of knowing that insists we ask whose perspectives, knowledges, ways of moving, and practices are recognized and made legible, as well as what is consequently ignored and treated as illegible.

In the remainder of this essay we situate the enactment of conference moderation at the 2021 Thomas R. Watson Conference in Rhetoric and Composition. This context is necessary to share because access is always situated in specific places, times, and spaces that lead to particular enactments of conference-session moderation. We do not offer a checklist for conference-session moderation in general; such a checklist would inevitably fail (see Dolmage, 2015; Wood et al., 2014) and could never be applied to all potential conference spaces. Instead, we hope this might be a starting point for other conference organizers working to cultivate intersectional forms of access and accessibility, emphasizing, as Jay Dolmage and others do, the importance of continually learning and working toward accessibility rather than orienting to it as an achievement or an arrival.

THE 2021 WATSON CONFERENCE

Our recommendations and guidelines are rooted in our experiences during the 2021 Watson Conference, for which Caitlin served as an assistant director and Stephanie served as a panel moderator. The conference was held fully online over the course of three days in April during the COVID-19 pandemic. The conference's theme, "Toward the Antiracist Conference: Reckoning with the Past, Reimagining the Present," emerged through commitments to recognizing and grappling with the conference's history of anti-Black racism. The 2021 conference director, Andrea Olinger, noted in a statement about the conference's history that the conference and the "very institutions that host Watson and enable it" are "saturated in whiteness." This "saturation in whiteness" makes some bodies and their needs legible while ignoring others, as Hamraie (2017) pushes us to recognize. It further necessitated that the 2021 Watson conference organizers and those involved in making it happen engage the conference's history and actively work to transform its material spaces and social structures. The guidelines we share below were developed and implemented within this specific context and further revised for this special issue with generous and generative feedback from external reviewers.

Our goal in sharing these practices is to provide one example of how we worked towards a "culture of access" at one virtual conference. While virtual contexts can improve accessibility for some, an online conference setting is not always automatically more accessible. Consequently, creating a culture of access requires careful planning, attention, and reflection on the part of all organizers and moderators. Many of the guidelines below reflect the Watson Conference Commitments, a list of commitments organizers and participants were invited to support in order to "create a different kind of conference environment." Each of the commitments worked to create an inclusive environment in some way, but two are especially pertinent to these moderator guidelines. First, Watson participants were asked to commit to this statement: "We will co-create a culture of access while recognizing that this work is never complete." These moderation guidelines are rooted in and evolved from part of our efforts to uphold this commitment as organizers and to remind presenters and attendees to foreground access as well. Second, organizers asked participants to commit to the following statement: "We will actively attend to power dynamics in participation—and we will name and interrupt these dynamics as needed." During conference sessions—and especially during Q&As—moderators often have the most immediate opportunity to attend to power dynamics and intervene when there is a need.

We developed the following guidelines in response to the specific context of the 2021 Watson Conference, but future conferences and workshops will require that they be adapted to meet the needs of those settings. Hubrig and Osorio (2020) ask us to consider how our conferences might "transform if all organizers, volunteers, and participants approached access as an ongoing, recursive movement that, while never perfect, moves our communities toward belonging" (p. 92). Recognizing access as ongoing and recursive, we recommend tailoring these guidelines to each different context and conference. Every context requires reflection from conference organizers and moderators so they can adapt to their specific space and modality; different spaces and technologies allow and create different configurations and possibilities for access.

MODERATION GUIDELINES

The guidelines below are largely drawn from Stephanie's email communication with presenters on the two panels she moderated in the weeks before the Watson conference. Her work in writing these recommendations emerged from years of participating in and observing these and other access moves in disability-centric spaces, as well as through collaboration and connection with others doing this work in a wide range of academic spaces. The conference's virtual setting meant presentations were given online, using Zoom's meeting format. As mentioned before, many of the guidelines in our list can be adapted to fit an in-person conference setting, but they were originally drafted with our specific virtual conference in mind. These guidelines, which we have compiled and expanded from materials shared at the Watson conference,

are separated into three groups, based on the different stages of events—beginning with conversations for moderators to have with presenters in the weeks or days before an event, then moving to responsibilities immediately before and during a session, and concluding with considerations for Q&A.

Pre-event Conversations and Recommendations

- Remind presenters they should plan to visually describe any images or materials on their slides.
- Ask presenters to spell any names or technical terms important to the talk (e.g., "as Stephanie Kerschbaum K E R S C H B A U M has written..."). This helps the ASL interpreters fingerspell and helps listeners anchor onto a name. In addition, ask presenters to ensure authors' names are pronounced accurately. These practices not only help make the space more inclusive, given that many non-Western and/or nonwhitestream authors may regularly experience having their names mispronounced. Ensuring accurate pronunciation can additionally make it easier for attendees to locate an author's work after the presentation.
- If a presenter is citing or including a lot of citations, encourage them to write those citations into the prose since it is difficult to read aloud a string of names.
- Suggest presenters practice the pace of their speaking, including practicing taking deep breaths periodically between slides. (We sometimes find it helpful to write reminders about pacing, such as "take breath" or "slow down," right into the script).
- Open a discussion about session framing among the moderator and presenters. For instance, what role might/will land acknowledgements play in the session? Responses to this question will vary according to the context of the event or panel and the responsibilities, commitments, positionalities, and locations of the presenters and moderator. Other framing conversations might take up questions about what access moves or elements the moderator and presenters will build into the event space, deciding if/how presenters will describe or introduce themselves and/or giving attention to the needs or expectations people with different embodied experiences might bring to the event.
- Give presenters an opportunity to let moderators know what has worked well for them in past presentations and Q&As that they would like the moderator to consider, verbalize, or incorporate into their moderation.
- Create space for presenters to share any other suggestions, notes, or requests.

Moderator Responsibilities before and during Presentations

- Confirm the pronunciation of presenters' names and institutions.
- Confirm presenters' pronouns and preferences about how they would like to be referred to.

- Collect and share links to access copies, scripts, slides, and other materials with attendees (through the chat in a Zoom meeting, for example).
- Keep time, and send or give presenters appropriate reminders (such as five minutes left and two minutes left). In a virtual space, this can be done through the private chat feature, raising a hand, or another agreed-upon signal. Consider reminding presenters again if their presentations expand beyond the allotted time unless it's clear the presenter is very close to the end of their scripted remarks.
- Explicitly invite attention to the intersectional dimensions of access shaped through framing and enactment of a conference session. Moderators might do so by offering a land acknowledgement (see, e.g., Duwamish Tribe, "How to Make a Land Acknowledgement"; "Where We Stand: The University of Minnesota and Dakhóta Treaty Lands" [Čhaŋtémaza & McKay 2020]) and/or Black Body Acknowledgement (Young, this special issue) based on pre-event conversations, opening opportunities for presenters and attendees to move their bodies or adjust their spaces as needed (Price, *Access Invocation* n.d.), or sharing expectations or options for audience interaction or feedback such as applause, cheering, etc.

Moderator Responsibilities during Q&A Sessions

- Recognize there are multiple formats and approaches to a Q&A session, and consider which may be the best fit for your moderation approach, the presenters, and the session context.
- Give the audience a brief reminder of the guidelines for appropriate behavior during Q&A, such as considering one's positionality and relationship to power before speaking or putting a question into the chat (see Eve Tuck's Twitter thread [2019] on Q&A best practices).
- Remind attendees they can cause harm with questions that request access to disabled, BIPOC, and/or multiply marginalized presenters' traumas or lived experiences.
- Ask that questions go back and forth between presentations rather than having a string of questions focus on just one presentation. When questions are addressed to all presenters, ensure each presenter is given the opportunity to respond.
- Give presenters an opportunity to share how they would prefer to indicate their interest in answering a question if the question doesn't specifically focus on one presenter (e.g. raising a hand in Zoom, unmuting themselves, etc.).
- Stop screen sharing so people have fewer elements of visual clutter on their screens.
- Let participants know they can raise their hands to speak or be called on, or type their question into the chat for the moderator to read aloud.

- Remind attendees and presenters to share their names before speaking or asking a question (e.g., "This is Caitlin Burns Allen speaking").
- Actively monitor the chat so presenters don't have to, and voice aloud questions that come in through the chat, asking appropriate clarification as needed.

We envision these guidelines as a contribution—that is, a "place to start," as Dolmage (2015) has put it—in ongoing efforts to make academic conference spaces more accessible. As Brewer, Selfe, and Yergeau (2014) write, "[A] culture of access is a culture of participation and redesign" (p.153). We anticipate these guidelines continuing to develop, expand, and change to create a stronger culture of access for conference sessions.

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Social Justice Conference Planning for Writing Studies: Frameworks, Triumphs, and Challenges

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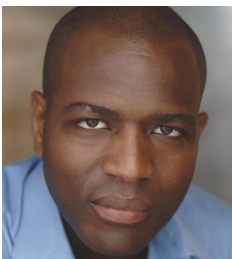
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INTRODUCTION

Rising social and political unrest coupled with public protests demanding radical change have ushered in a wave of "social justice initiatives" in businesses and organizations. For example, days after the murder of George Floyd (1973–2020), Walmart publicly announced its decision to build a Center on Racial Equity, and in the summer of 2020, the NFL announced a series of social justice initiatives, such as allowing players to display social/racial justice messages such as "It Takes All of Us" and "End Racism" on their helmets. However, neither of these publicly touted initiatives did much to address systemic racism in their own organizations. Critics quickly noted that Walmart could have immediately improved diversity in its corporate ranks and increased hourly employee wages rather than exploiting Black lives for a public-relations piece. And though NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell acknowledged the value of the #BlackLivesMatter movement in a press release following George Floyd's and Breonna Taylor's murders, he nevertheless continued to stand idle as former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick remained unemployed.

Mr. George Floyd's death also served as a tipping point that inspired educational institutions to release statements about the #BlackLivesMatter movement, racism, the killing of Black people at the hands of the police, and the ongoing protests. Within many of these statements is a now commonplace rhetorical structure that begins with an acknowledgement that oppressed people, in this case Black people, continue to be oppressed in insidious and often dysconscious ways. The acknowledgement often leads to a confession that neither people in power positions nor everyday citizens have done enough to intervene in these oppressions, to stop them. Then there is a description of what social justice means, what it might look like, and a renewed commitment, a promise if you will, to continue to pursue equality, diversity, and inclusion. Within these commitments are definitions of social justice that we also advance. Thus, we want to quote at length from three of these to orient you to what is influencing our thinking, our efforts, and our promotion of social justice within our conferences.

We begin with an excerpt from Scott Kurashige, then president of the American Studies Association. Kurashige (2020) writes:

> Over the past days and weeks, the public has learned the names that opened this statement because they are the most recent victims of a nation built on white supremacy, genocide, and colonialism. . . . And, still, the list keeps growing. Italia Kelly. James Scurlock. David McAtee. Dorian Murrell. Sean Monterrosa. . . . When armed white men stormed a state capital, they were held up as a model of protest by the same president [Donald Trump] who condemned Colin Kaepernick and others for taking a knee. . . . However, transforming structures cannot occur without simultaneously decolonizing our collective mind and transforming our ways of thinking. In this regard, those based in academia have

Abstract

In this series of personal reflections, authors from the Social Justice at the Convention Committee and the Local Arrangements Committee discuss their efforts to do social justice conference planning for the Conference on College Composition and Communication from 2018 to 2021. The challenges of doing social justice programming in a shifting convention landscape have been tremendous but, the authors have found, they are not insurmountable. The authors use their experiences to offer a conceptual framework and guiding questions for enacting social justice events at academic conventions. The lessons the authors have learned in the process about funding, labor, sustainability, and ethics of incorporating community voices will be important and useful to readers who want to highlight such programming in national, regional, local, and online venues.

Keywords
Social Justice, George Floyd, #BlackLivesMatter, Academic Conferences, Breonna Taylor, Community Engagement, Ahmaud Arbery, Community Partnerships, Tony McDade, Research as Care, Sandra Bland, Reciprocity, Manuel Ellis

particular lessons to learn from organizers on the ground creating grassroots models of community solidarity rooted in de-escalation, nonviolent conflict resolution, and transformative justice. We must especially pay attention to the women, queer, trans*, disabled, and formerly incarcerated persons of color at the cutting-edge of these struggles. Every person who says the phrase, "Black Lives Matter," should be sure to read the policy platform and call to action from the Movement for Black Lives.

At this point, it is customary in academic writing to restate the essence of a block quote in a sentence or two in the present authors' own words. But we are not going to do that here. If you take the time to read the words, we hope they land on your mind and heart and, further, are shown in your actions. So we quickly segue then to our second excerpt, "A Statement on George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery" (2020), penned by Trena L. Wilkerson, then president of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) and Robert Q. Berry III, the immediate past president of NCTM. They write:

> As president and past president of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM), we are committed to a position of social justice that challenges the roles of power, privilege, and oppression. We extend our heartfelt sympathies to the loved ones of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery. As a mathematics education community, we must not tolerate acts of racism, hate, bias, or violence. . . . As mathematics educators, we must engage in anti-racist

and trauma-informed education in our daily practices as processes of learning and adjustments.

Anti-racist and trauma-informed education not only raises our awareness of racism and trauma experienced by Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Asian, and all marginalized peoples, but it also recognizes that we must be purposeful in addressing racism and trauma.

And last, for our purposes here, we point to the "ELATE Statement on State-Sanctioned Anti-Black Racism and Violence: A Commitment to Antiracist Instruction in English Language Arts" by the ELATE Executive Committee of National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). ELATE writes:

> English Language Arts Teacher Educators (ELATE), a conference of the National Council of Teachers of English, is comprised of compassionate university teacher educators, graduate students, and middle and high school English teachers who are collectively outraged by the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and Tony McDade, all victims of the policing of Black bodies.

> We, members of the ELATE Executive Committee, write to demand justice and commit to taking action to create immediate and lasting change. We recognize that the white supremacist foundation upon which the United States of America, and its education system, was built over the past 400 years continues to inflict murder and violence on Black people and act in oppressive ways toward anyone representing differences. Our passion is centered on words and ideas and languages, the seemingly innocuous elements of ordinary life that nonetheless can and do kill people through othering, oppression, and covert/overt racist acts.

> In an effort to counter anti-Blackness, we demand that antiracist instruction be integrated into ELA courses and into ELA teacher preparation in schools throughout the country. The policing, silencing, shaming, erasure, and physical violence that youth, Black youth in particular, experience in America's schools have been and continue to be unacceptable; our schools must change now. (National 2020)

Following ELATE, not only must schools change now, but our conferences where we gather to develop, promote, and advance our principles and values must also change. Our conferences are sites where we co-construct and imbibe our professional ideologies that inform our professional and even personal worldviews—and, yes, influence our daily actions.

Thus, we begin our piece with this longish survey of examples to illustrate how social justice initiatives often fall short of enacting actual social change and rather work as lip service, that is, as empty commitments, as is the case with Walmart and the NFL. We must NOT be like Walmart or the NFL. The other examples espouse admirable, even inspiring, commitments to social justice. But we ask: Have you heard about these educational organizations' social justice successes, the results of the implementations of change envisioned by our colleagues in ASA, ELATE or NCTM? What are they doing now? What's working? What still needs to happen? Our questions are not intended to condemn but instead to encourage them, as we hope to encourage you, and make recommitments ourselves to this work, as we try to answer questions about what's working, what we are doing, and what still must happen.

As teacher-scholars of writing and rhetoric who believe in social justice practices, we are well equipped with the tools to critique public displays that merely enforce social justice tropes without producing meaningful social change. We recognize successful social justice work requires that we "amplify the agency of oppressed people—those who are materially, socially, politically, and/or economically under-resourced" using "a collaborative, respectful approach that moves past description and exploration of social justice issues to taking action to redress inequities" (Jones & Walton, 2018, p. 242). We further take an informed cue from Joyce E. King (1991) who frames social justice efforts as the opposite of what she calls "dysconscious racism." She writes, "Dysconscious racism is a form of racism that tacitly accepts dominant White norms and privileges. It is not the absence of consciousness (that is, not unconsciousness) but an impaired consciousness or distorted way of thinking about race." King argues that "[d]ysconsciousness is an uncritical habit of mind . . . that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as given" (p. 135). Please, don't miss the point: Even those of us who work against racism daily are still subject to perpetuating the racisms closest to us: the status quo. We therefore must effortfully resist our own and others' dysconscious participation in and perpetuation of the "…isms." Wringing [y]our hands, shaking [y]our heads, saying, "I'm only doing what I'm/we're told," or any other "going-with-the-flow," status quo BS ain't gone cut it no mo! Point. Blank. Period.

For us then, this multivocal article begins at that moment, confronting the challenges of planning, implementing, and integrating social justice practices[1] into our collective, disciplinary identity. The work we describe in this article is not new, but we are renewing it. We see ourselves both within and without the context of longer histories of equity-oriented change in the National Council of Teachers of English and the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC). Within this context, for example, in 1964 the NCTE Board of Directors required all affiliates of the organization to be open to historically marginalized people (Hook 1979), and NCTE later established the Task Force on Racism and Bias in the Teaching of English in 1969. In 1971 that task force

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1 The social justice practices represented in this article include antiracist conference planning and community engagement and community organizing.

encouraged publishers to produce teaching materials that represented racially marginalized people more favorably. They released an updated statement called Non-White Minorities in English and Language Arts Materials in 1978, which acknowledged some progress in publishing inclusive teaching materials while still addressing ongoing problems. Yes, we can locate ourselves in these noble efforts toward social justice.

However, despite these efforts, racism and discrimination continued within the NCTE affiliate CCCC, with Black scholars and teachers forming the Black Caucus in 1970. Fifteen Black conference attendees of the Seattle CCCC convention wrote a resolution that critiqued the "academic colonization of Black topics" at conferences and poor "working conditions in historically Black colleges and universities" and that called for publishers to "increase the quality of their Black-oriented products" (Gilyard, 1999, p. 636). Just two years later CCCC would adopt the Students' Right to Their Own Language resolution, known by its short name, SRTOL. SRTOL challenged the status quo racisms of academic discourse and the teaching of standardized English, stating this: "Language scholars long ago denied that the myth of a standard American dialect has any validity. The claim that any one dialect is unacceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another. *Such a claim leads to false advice for speakers and writers, and immoral advice for humans*" (quoted in Conference on College Composition and Communication, 1974, p. 2–3, emphasis added). The point to be made here is that despite the fact that this statement was first affirmed in April 1974, reaffirmed November 2003, with an annotated bibliography added August 2006, and reaffirmed November 2014, how many of you, of us, are still espousing, perpetuating, perpetrating and straight up pimpin the dysconscious "false advice for speakers and writers" in our classrooms? How are NCTE and CCCC still pimpin "immoral advice for humans" at our conferences and in our scholarly publications? It's not a hard question to answer. You see. And you know!

These equity-oriented efforts during and soon after the Civil Rights Movement have continued through the subsequent decades and into the age of #BlackLivesMatter, where we see remarkable struggles to bring equity and inclusion to our professional community and the students we serve. We also witness blatant contradictions between (NCTE's and CCCC's) words and (our beloved organizations') deeds. So, what are we/you to do?

The reflections we offer here emerged from our panel presentation at the 2021 Thomas R. Watson Conference, held virtually April 14–16. Our intent was to share our experiences doing social justice programming with attendees of the conference while also considering how the Watson conference could address its own complicity in enabling anti-Black practices. Joined by Vershawn Ashanti Young, program chair for the 2019 Conference on College Composition and Communication annual convention in Pittsburgh, we spoke to our efforts to make social justice a central focus for the convention and shared lessons learned that our audience should take into account in their own social justice conference planning. In this series of revised reflections, we discuss what it means to move beyond "social justice tourism" from our own perspectives. While we note challenges that can often make enduring commitments to a conference's host city difficult, we end with a call for others committed to social justice in the discipline at large to help us tackle these challenges in order to create a more sustained model for fulfilling the aims of social justice.

We would like to begin by asking readers to read the appended transcript of or view the video of Vershawn Ashanti Young's opening presentation for our panel (included with permission), in which he outlines his perspectives on social justice programming. Young spits several issues to us that are important to consider when weaving such programming into a professional conference, including explicit attention to equity, diversity, and inclusion; a constant awareness of the pervasive influence of White supremacy; a focus on cultivating cultural inclusiveness and awareness; the importance of listening to different groups; and the need for us all to offer Black body acknowledgements.

The video can be viewed on the Watson website.
Access the transcript here.

THE CCCC SOCIAL JUSTICE AT THE CONVENTION (SJAC) COMMITTEE

Michael's Story (SJAC cochair, 2018–2021)

As a way of beginning our shared reflections about "doing" social justice work at a national conference, I'd like to begin with a little bit of history, explaining how the SJAC came to be, what its mission is, and how we approached our work for each year's convention. Though I will out of necessity abbreviate most of the work and discussions that took place behind the scenes, I think it's important to understand the contexts in which we operated, particularly as

they impacted our sense of how to engage in social justice work at national conventions sited in host cities with social justice issues unique to their local communities.

In 2017, as the CCCC was preparing to host its annual convention in Kansas City, Missouri, the Missouri legislature passed Senate Bill 43, a discriminatory bill that, in the words of the NAACP, "would prevent individuals from protecting themselves from discrimination, harassment and retaliation in Missouri" (Missouri, 2017). In response, the NAACP issued its first-ever travel advisory for the state, which caused many members of CCCC to demand the convention be canceled in protest. The Executive Committee decided, over the objections of many BIPOC committee members, not to cancel the convention and referenced only the financial consequences of cancellation in their public-facing documents. Convention planners, led by Asao Inoue, then reshaped the program theme to focus strongly on social justice issues in research, in the classroom, in our nation's infrastructure, and in our home communities.

A central component of this new direction was the formation of the Task Force on Social Justice and Activism at the Conference (SJAC), chaired by Akua Duku Anokye, which planned, organized, and participated in a number of social justice initiatives including two free preconvention workshops, a system of volunteer travel companions, access to sessions via streaming media, and collaborations with local activist groups (see figure 1). The CCCC Executive Committee voted soon after to extend SJAC's work into future conventions, forming the Social Justice at the Convention Committee for a three-year (potentially renewable) term. The committee created a set of charges for SJAC and recruited members that included representatives from each of the CCCC caucuses.

In June of 2018, after having been recommended by Asao, I was contacted by CCCC President, Carolyn Calhoun-Dillahunt, and invited to serve as cochair of this newly formed committee. I would continue in this position for SJAC's initial three-year term, and my cochair would be each year's Local Arrangements Chair for the upcoming convention, cycling in and out annually. Those chairs, in succession, were Brenda Whitney, 2019; Maria Novotny, 2020; and Bradley Bleck, 2021. The number of committee members ranged from 11 to 14 during that time.

SJAC had five specific charges, two related to reporting duties and the other three focused on overall goals:

Task Force on Social Justice and Activism at the Convention

The Task Force on Social Justice and Activism at the Convention (SJAC) was formed by the 2018 Program Chair, Asao B. Inoue, from a recommendation offered by the Executive Committee after discussions in the EC during the summer months of 2017. This task force was designed to help the chair augment the convention and pilot structural changes to the convention to better address issues of equity and safety at our convention site. The task force had the following charges:

- Provide the Program Chair with a prioritized list of ways to make this year's annual convention safer and more accessible for members and provide events and experiences for members to do appropriate social justice and activist work at the convention site.
- Help coordinate, design, and put into action the ideas, events, and experiences that the program chair approves from the prioritized list.
- Work with the local planning committee on safety, accessibility, social justice, and activist ideas, events, and experiences.

2018 Program Chair Asao B. Inoue wishes to thank the members of this hard-working committee and their chair for the good, needed work they performed in the service of CCCC and its members.

SJAC Task Force Members

Akua Duku Anokye (Chair)	Brenda Brueggeman (Standing Group for Disability Studies)
Jessie Moore (Transparency Officer)	
Jane Greer (Local Arrangements Chair)	Ruth Osorio (Standing Group for Disability Studies)
Bump Halbritter (EC)	
Holly Hassel (EC)	Chad Iwertz
Stephanie Kerschbaum (EC)	Kristen Ruccio
Aja Martinez (EC)	Brent Chappelow
Michael Pemberton (at large)	Dana Driscoll
Casie Moreland (at large, grad rep)	Brian Hendrickson
Romeo Garcia (Latinx Caucus)	Amy Meckenburg-Faenger
Victor Del Hierro (Latinx Caucus)	Alisa Russell
Cindy Tekobbe (American Indian Caucus)	Mary Stewart
Gail MacKay (American Indian Caucus)	Matthew Vetter
Al Harahap (Asian/Asian American Caucus)	Kayla Bruce
	Jess Boykin
Jolivette Mecenas (Asian/Asian American Caucus)	Hillary Coenen
	Dev Bose
David Green (Black Caucus)	Thomas Ferrel
Ersula Ore (Black Caucus)	Daniel Mahala
Zan Gonçalves (Queer Caucus)	

CCCC CONVENTION, KANSAS CITY 2018   23

Figure 1: SJAC Description in 2018 CCCC Conference Program

1. Work with the program chair to understand their vision for the program and collaboratively outline a scope for SJAC's efforts at the convention within this vision.

2. Within the program chair's vision, collaborate with the local committee chair to develop social justice and local engagement activities that complement the convention theme.

3. Promote a culture of accessibility at the convention through member education and by organizing sustainable methods of increasing member access and engagement, onsite and online, during the convention and postconvention.

I want to highlight the significance of the first two charges, which emphasize the importance of the program chair's vision to SJAC's work. For the 2019 convention in Pittsburgh, the convention chair was Vershawn Ashanti Young, and we worked closely with him throughout our planning process, inviting his feedback and suggestions for possible initiatives. Our committee "met" officially for the first time via email in August 2018. We proposed 16 social justice initiatives, solicited Vershawn's opinion about which of our ideas best fit with his vision for the convention, and then encouraged SJAC members to volunteer for the ten resulting subcommittees that would put our selected plans in action.

The following is a list of our initiatives at that convention:

- A book drive for Book 'Em, a books-to-prisoners nonprofit. A dropbox and signage were placed next to the convention's registration tables, and attendees were invited to donate books there. (See figure 2)
- An ACLU table in the convention Action Hub. Members of the local branch of the American Civil Liberties Union were available to answer questions and distribute literature.

Figure 2: Book Drop at 2019 CCCC Conference

- A Write-In table in the Action Hub. Attendees were encouraged to reflect on their conference experiences, compose brief messages that could be shared and read by others, and comment on recent events.
- An educational case study of Pittsburgh social justice activism. Because we thought it was important to bring local social justice issues into writing classrooms after the convention ended, a subcommittee developed a case study that could be used for discussion and as a set of writing prompts.
- A cross-caucus preconvention event. We planned and scheduled a time for members of CCCC caucuses (Latinx, Black, Asian/American, American Indian, Queer, Jewish, etc.) to meet informally and network about common concerns and goals.
- Qigong/tai chi workshops. Time and space was reserved for certified qigong/tai chi instructors to lead convention attendees in exercises and relaxation activities to ease stress and contribute to mental health.
- A roundtable of local social justice organizations: Pittsburgh Action Against Rape (PAAR); Book 'Em; and Gay for Good. Representatives from local activist groups discussed both the challenges they faced and the successes they had achieved promoting social justice causes in Pittsburgh. The speakers were compensated with donations made to their organizations.
- A poetry slam featuring featuring local poets Jesse Welch and Kimberly Jackson. (See figure 3.) In addition to the featured presenters, convention attendees were invited to read some of their own works in an open area of the convention center.
- A celebration of scholars of color and underrepresented groups. As Vershawn mentioned in his talk, we worked with him to place a variety of banners throughout the convention area celebrating CCCC scholars of color and SIGs/caucuses of underrepresented groups.
- The Tree of Life Memorial installation. Shortly before the convention took place in Pittsburgh, on October 27, 2018, 11 people were shot and killed at the Tree of Life Synagogue. Members of SJAC arranged to bring a memorial installation to the convention where attendees could sit quietly at a table and write brief messages that could be placed on the installation's walls for others to read.

Figure 3: Flyer for 2019 CCCC Poetry Slam

After the convention, the committee met to discuss which of the initiatives were successful, which were less so, and which ones we wanted to include at the following year's convention in Milwaukee.

We planned to continue most of the activities we had performed in Pittsburgh—including the book drive, poetry slam (both on-site and off-site), panel of local activists, cross-caucus dessert reception, and yoga/tai chi sessions. There was also to be a guided bus tour of parts of Milwaukee that would illustrate the city's long history of racist redlining and racial conflict.

By January, we had plans in place, people lined up, funds allocated by the program chair, arrangements made with NCTE. On March 3rd, the CDC reported 60 COVID-19 cases across twelve states (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2020). That same day, CCCC sent an email to its membership saying the convention was still scheduled to continue as planned.

And then, nine days later, two weeks before the convention was scheduled to begin, we were told the convention was canceled.

At the time, I remember feeling this was the right and responsible thing to do. I also remember feeling stunned, realizing everything SJAC had done over the last year, the countless hours committee members had spent making plans and working closely with community members to build the convention's social justice programming, was just . . . gone.

I think the term *deflated* probably best characterizes the committee's reaction—a mixture of sadness and resignation that, unfortunately, brought with it a lingering aftermath of ennui. At a time when we would normally be gearing up excitedly for new social justice events in a new city, we were still grieving, still in the midst of a pandemic, and still living in a world where QAnon and the Proud Boys walked hand in hand with the GOP and took selfies with the president. That, coupled with a similar uncertainty about the following year's scheduled convention in Spokane, led many of us to wonder—even if we didn't say so out loud—whether our efforts would once again be for naught, just another exercise in futility that was bound to lead to disappointment.

But upon reflection, we understood social justice work is not easy, and we shouldn't expect it to be. Though a few people opted to leave the committee, and though we got off to a bit of a slow start, we persevered in 2020. Convention chair Holly Hassel, who had been on SJAC for its first two years, suggested we scale back our initiatives for 2021 and focus on those that could be easily adapted to an online format should convention planners decide to move in that direction. Eventually we opted to limit our offerings to a roundtable about the consequences of Milwaukee's cancellation, a poetry slam in the virtual networking lounge, an online yoga session, a booth in the virtual Action Hub, and a panel of social justice activists in Spokane (arranged by LAC Chair Bradley Bleck). Though virtual attendance at the 2021 convention was smaller than it had been in previous on-site in-person meetings, we felt we had contributed meaningfully to the program and enhanced awareness of social justice issues in the host city and in our professional teaching lives as well.

While we look forward with a fair amount of optimism to the 2022 convention in Chicago, we do so with some caveats. In the wake of CCCC's decision to hold its 2018 annual convention in Kansas City, the organization also updated its 2013 document "CCCC Convention Siting and Hostile Legislation: Guiding Principles." I'd like to call attention to one passage from the 2019 version, which states,

> In principle, CCCC will work to change state or local policies in host convention cities that diverge from established CCCC positions or otherwise threaten the safety or well-being of our membership. We will do so by consulting closely with local groups who share our principles and arranging activities and opportunities for members to support those who are disadvantaged by offensive policies or otherwise to use their presence in the offending state as a vehicle for nonviolent protest. (Conference, 2019)

I suspect SJAC was established, in part, as a way to demonstrate the CCCC's commitment to this principle. One of our formal charges is to work with local groups and provide opportunities for our members to demonstrate their support.

But what, exactly, do we mean by support?

Over the years, SJAC has discussed, albeit briefly, how to sustain and preserve the work we do as a part of each year's convention activities. Even early on, I think, we were developing an uneasy sense of how ethically problematic some of our convention initiatives were and are. While it's laudable to reach out to local activist groups and invite them to participate in our convention programs, highlighting the importance of local contexts to social justice issues and educating our members about the universality of racism, discrimination, prejudice, and white privilege in our country, we often do so in ways that feel like we're merely interested in a Cook's tour. We come in, we express our support for antiracist movements in the local community, and then we leave, not bothering to look back but instead quickly turning our attention to next year's convention in a new host city. Our impact is focused but brief, intense but not enduring. There is no denouement, only a story that ends abruptly without a satisfactory resolution.

Perhaps this is just the nature of the beast, an unavoidable consequence of annual convention planning, time constraints, and the sheer amount of volunteer labor and commitment necessary to sustain initiatives in host cities. Our committee charge requires us to develop new programming for each year's convention, and it's hard to look back when we're being told to constantly look ahead.

Antonio's Story (SJAC member 2018–2021; SJAC cochair 2021–Present)

Since 2018 I've collaborated with wonderful colleagues from across the country and from different institutions as a member of the Social Justice at the Conference Committee to make the CCCC Annual Conference a space for sharing resources, tools, and practices for social justice. I came to this work through my own conference attendance for the last 13 years. Three conferences stand out for their impact on my role as a tourist to different host cities and my thinking about the place of conferences in social justice and community-engaged work.

In 2010, Sigma Tau Delta, the International English Honor Society, held its annual convention in St. Louis, Missouri. I had the pleasure to fly with friends to present a science-fiction short story. This was the first time I had ever left the South. I was nervous about meeting new people, sharing a hotel room with my friends, and navigating a new city. However, the adventures in St. Louis as a tourist led to my realization that I didn't have to live in Alabama after finishing my undergraduate career. During my stay, I had many firsts: I ate frog legs for the first time; I visited an Irish bar for the first time; I made friends with a student from Massachusetts, bonding over video games, anime, and writing fiction; I delivered a reasonably funny poem during an open-mic event. By the end of my time in St. Louis, I remember telling a friend the city seemed pretty great. To which my friend replied, "Well, Antonio, you only visited the nicer part of town."

In 2013, I returned to Sigma Tau Delta's annual convention in Portland, Oregon, as a master's student. My friends and I had never been to Portland, let alone the Northwestern region of the United States. We were excited to be tourists again and, in fact, for some of my friends the convention was an excuse to see Portland and visit staples like Powell's Books, the largest independent new and used bookstore in the world, and Voodoo Donuts, known for its unconventional donut designs. However, during one of our many excursions on the streets of Portland, we ran into an interruption: we seemed to have strayed too far off the beaten path into a section of downtown where we saw homeless people living on the sidewalks. We discussed the disconnect between us as visitors, seemingly living a fantasy experience thanks to the generous support and privileges of our university, and the realities of Portland's racial and class inequality.

The 2018 CCCC Annual Conference in Kansas City, Missouri, further tore down this wall between conference attendance and the realities of the cities that hosted me. While many scholars and teachers canceled their attendance in response to the passage of Missouri's Senate Bill 43 and the resulting NAACP travel advisory, I took a car ride with friends to Kansas City from Madison, Wisconsin. I made this decision for two reasons. First, Black people have consistently fought the fires of racism because no one else would. Second, I remember the point my parents made after I told them Madison, Wisconsin, was a majority white city : "Racism is everywhere." There is no safe haven from racism in this country.

The all-attendee event "Literacy, Language, and Labor for Social Justice: Outward and Inward Reflection" revised my years-long excitement about being a tourist in a new city. The poetry of Glenn North, Poet Laureate at the 18th and Vine Historic Jazz District, and the tales of Alvin Brooks with AdHoc Group Against Crime showed me the realities the local community must address, and I left with phone numbers, new Twitter followers, and a sense of belonging in composition and rhetoric. After their presentations, I volunteered to facilitate small roundtable discussions with conference attendees about what social justice and community engagement looked like for the field. During these conversations, I began to understand how activism is intellectual work and requires causing "necessary trouble" (Lewis 2018).

While I understand the reason many colleagues decided to not attend the 2018 CCCC Annual Conference either in protest or out of concerns for their personal safety, I'm glad to have used that moment for action. Since then, I have returned to Kansas City as an assistant professor and found ways to contribute to the vision North and Brooks testified about in 2018. I know what I'm doing isn't unique. We can all attest to volunteering or know someone who does this community-engaged work as scholarship. But I tell this story to highlight the influence conference-going can have on one graduate student turning into early-career faculty, and how the social justice work that happens in one conference can lead to action. My own lived experience, which is a case study at best, gives me hope in what's possible at a conference.

To this end, I share one signature effort that echoes my own trajectory as a scholar and conference attendee, one that embodies hope for social change through social justice events at conferences but also one that addresses challenges that can derail such efforts. Working with Don Unger, from the University of Mississippi, and Liz Lane, from the University of Memphis, I helped organize and facilitate an event called "Exploring Local Activism: A Roundtable Workshop with Local Pittsburgh Activist Organizations." We wanted the event to be more than attendees sitting in a room listening to the local knowledge of Pittsburgh followed by a question-and-answer session. This approach would amount to conference attendees simply taking what they could without giving back or reciprocating the sharing of knowledge (Maria says more about reciprocity in her story). Instead, we wanted attendees to actively share ideas on how we as teachers and scholars can be better partners with community organizers and activists back home. Months in advance of the conference, we worked with the Local Arrangements Committee to identify potential activists. Liz and Don came with a background in community-engaged work, so I was learning from them as much as I was learning from the entire process. Key was communicating alignment between the conference and the activists' work, clearly stating we wanted the conference to be a space for thoughtful

reflection on our relationships between academics and activists. It was a time to honor their knowledge and teachings while encouraging attendees to act. We also ensured each panelist received an honorarium for their labor and time.

We brought together three divergent yet critical perspectives for the event. Julie Evans, MSW director of Prevention Services of Pittsburgh Action Against Rape (PAAR); Jodi Lincoln, a representative from Book 'Em, an all-volunteer, nonprofit organization that sends free educational books and quality reading material to prisoners and prison libraries in Pennsylvania and across the country; and Lindsay Onufer, chapter leader of Gay For Good: Pittsburgh, teaching consultant with the University of Pittsburgh Center for Teaching and Learning, and part-time faculty member for the Department of Community Engagement and the Composition Program at Point Park University. Bringing these voices together enacted one of the principles Vershawn discusses in his video above: listening to different groups. Conference attendees could listen to what activists did on the ground in Pittsburgh and learn about their relationships with universities as partners. Most germane was listening to how universities could partner with community activists for mutual aid, respect, and information sharing. This event would model how teacher- and scholar-activists may engage with community organizations in their home cities.

To this end, we posed a series of questions for panelists and then had breakout sessions where attendees and activists met to share ideas and practices. For the panelists, we asked,

- How do we define activism in or through our work?
- In what ways does our work reflect and support local Pittsburgh communities?
- What advice might you share for those looking to bridge partnerships with local organizations in their home communities?

And for the breakout sessions, we asked the following questions:

- What does global and local ("glocal") action mean to you?
- How can we enact glocal activism in cities we visit and in our home communities?
- What are three to five actionable items each participant might develop to begin steps toward action in these ways?
- How can we support one another in these goals? What resources are available that we might share and amplify?

After the breakout sessions, we called everyone back together for a whole-group discussion. We recorded key ideas each table suggested in a Google Doc. This would be a living document for documenting ideas from future activist panels. The activists and conference attendees had offered practical suggestions for establishing relationships with community partners, such as writing memos of understanding to set up parameters and consider what value a course and its students would add to the community

partner. I want to highlight three ideas that stand out for social justice conference planning. First, conferences can be a conduit for bringing together different organizations to educate the attendees and beginning conversations for long-term goal setting and practices beyond the event. Second, intentionally seeking to build a coalition helps avoid "national volunteer tourism," which, as Michael alludes to above, are one-off events that don't lead to real systemic change in the community. Coalitions also ensure attendees simply don't take from the local knowledge of community collaborators but use their own experiences to be a connector for other people. Third, local community organizations break out of their own silos and find future collaboration. This last point references an idea Jodi Lincoln, representative from Book 'Em, made during the event: Often community organizers stay in their own corners, competing for the same resources to do similar work, but an event like this made them aware of each other's existence and that they may work together.

The 2020 CCCC in Milwaukee would have continued the work established at Pittsburgh. Working again with Liz and Don, and guided by Maria, we had gathered Milwaukee-based activists who would explore new topics about social action: how you can use film or art and culture to convene conversations, create community-dialogue and grassroots coalition-building, and develop public pedagogy for civic action and racial justice. We would use questions similar to those used in Pittsburgh for panelists and breakout sessions to create new ideas and definitions of activism and community engagement. And the event would occur after the general opening sessions for greater participation. We planned to post these actions and practices online after the conference as a resource and an archive of our efforts. We would later plan to invite activist organizations that challenge housing discrimination inspired by Matthew Desmond's *Evicted*.

Of course, the COVID-19 pandemic canceled these plans, and planning for the 2021 Annual Conference in Spokane, Washington, presented a new challenge to SJAC: how to shift in-person social justice events to an online format. I did not fully come to understand these challenges, however, until I accepted an invitation to become cochair of SJAC for the Chicago 2022 conference. The committee was animated to plan social justice events in a hybrid format. The Executive Committee's (EC) announcement at the end of December 2021 that the conference would be fully virtual left us to quickly reconsider what events we could plan just three months before the convention. While a virtual book-donation and poetry-slam event went forward, we did not arrange an Indigenous activist panel in collaboration with the American Indian Caucus. Given that SJAC had paused its work until the EC announcement in December, Maria suggested combining the local-activist-panel subcommittee and the Indigenous-community-event subcommittee to streamline labor and time and strengthen attention on Indigenous activism in Chicago. However, this event required relationship building with the Chi Youth Nation, and that crucial relationality needed more than two months of conversation on

SJAC's intentions and its alignments with the mission and goals of the Chi Youth Nation. In addition to having little time to plan events or build relationships with Chicago community members, the switch to an online format added to the exhaustion of SJAC committee members. The pandemic had either exacerbated existing or created new challenges to members' professional and personal lives, so another virtual conference reduced our morale a little. The lesson here is that suddenly switching modalities in the middle of planning can add to volunteers' labor and time. The possibilities of returning to an in-person conference next year will hopefully animate our energy and commitment to social justice planning.

THE LOCAL ROLE IN SOCIAL JUSTICE CONFERENCE PLANNING

Maria's Story (2020 CCCC annual convention local arrangements Committee chair)

In the spring of 2019, I received an email from Julie Lindquist asking if I would be willing to serve as the Local Arrangements Committee (LAC) chair for the 2020 Milwaukee convention. As a past graduate student of Julie's and a "born and raised" Milwaukeean who was about to take a new job at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, I was honored to be thought of but admittedly knew very little about the responsibilities and expectations of the position. In need of more clarity before I could agree to such a heavy service commitment, especially as a pretenure faculty member, I turned to the *Local Arrangements Guide*, which serves as the handbook documenting the expectations of the LAC.[2] The guide stated that the primary responsibility of serving as the LAC chair would be "to see that the Local Committee operates smoothly." A bit vague, I thought to myself, but all in all doable. In fact, I thought the role might even allow me the opportunity to connect with others in my department and at other local universities, as I would be partially responsible for recruiting convention volunteers. With that rationale, I presented the service opportunity to my future department chair, and with his go-ahead, accepted the position.

Soon, I found myself with a slew of email updates and Zoom meeting requests. The work ranged in topic and in duration of time/labor required. For instance, there was an all-day accessibility audit of the convention site, the two adjacent hotels, and auditorium to more minor work researching local musical acts to perform at Julie's Friday-night food-truck event. These two examples illustrate the scope and range of conversations I suddenly found myself navigating. What made these experiences significant, and why I share them in this piece, is that the *LAC Guide* indicated that this work, while demanding, would be largely administrative. Yet, in the actual engagement with this work, there were moments for invention and reimagining the potential impact this convention

could cultivate. In other words, I found myself—a relatively newly minted PhD faculty member—with a lot of responsibility but also a lot of power to rethink the CCCC convention experience. With that realization, I came to believe that the LAC chair, while responsible for day-of-convention support, is also a unique national service opportunity whereby one can reshape a convention experience to amplify the assets of the host city while also grappling with the real social injustices the city endures. It is that balance I believe respectfully speaks back to the Kansas City decision and the need to always understand and be responsive to where and how CCCC members gather.

Much of this belief about how LAC should function as a support network for facilitating more community-engaged and social justice experiences at the convention emerged through my work with SJAC as the LAC chair. Prior to accepting the LAC position, I had minimal working knowledge about SJAC as a committee. This changed, however, when I received an email in the summer of 2019 from Michael Pemberton welcoming me as his adjacent SJAC cochair. A bit confused, I emailed Julie and Kristen at NCTE to inquire more about Michael's email, and they explained to me how the LAC chairperson automatically serves as the cochair supporting SJAC. With that context established, I replied to Michael, and our working relationship ensued. Following our initial meeting, Michael and I met several times both individually and with the greater SJAC membership to support the role and local needs of SJAC for the Milwaukee convention. As the LAC chair, I found myself in a position in which my local knowledge of Milwaukee could become an asset to other SJAC committee members looking to develop conference programming opportunities to highlight social justice issues pertinent to Milwaukee. Additionally, as someone who already had a close relationship with Julie, I often became a metaphorical translator between SJAC planning and broader conference planning. My position soon evolved from the vague description of ensuring the conference *runs smoothly* to a more *concrete*, *purposeful*, *justice-oriented* role ensuring the 2020 CCCC convention embraced a teacher-scholar approach to conference planning.

A teacher-scholar approach to antiracist conference planning embraces the four principles outlined in Vershawn's video. These four principles are (1) listening to different groups; (2) cultivating cultural awareness and inclusivity; (3) being attuned to the continual threats of white supremacy; and (4) a need for explicit attention to intersectional diversity, equity, and inclusion work as a collective set of principles to inform conference planning that embraces a more radically welcoming and culturally responsive experience at conferences (see Vershawn Ashanti Young's video performance embedded in this article). It is by adopting the four principles of Vershawn's framework that the labor of the Local Arrangements Committee chair shifts from a local coordinator

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2 We would like to note that after making transparent some of the challenges and disconnects related to LAC work, CCCCs created an LAC Task Force, which has since revised the handbook to better address these concerns.

tasked with conference planning to a broader justice-oriented role whereby antiracist beliefs are enacted in the practices that guide the organizing, planning, and ultimately the experiences of conference attendees.

In the case of Milwaukee, approaching the planning of the conference through a social justice and antiracist framework[3] was made possible due to my prior relationship with Julie. Having worked with Julie before as a graduate student, I had a more nuanced understanding of her vision and approach to the conference. Additionally, the lines of communication were more available between us, which allowed for more collaborative and innovative planning to foster opportunities for diversity, inclusivity, and equity. Further, Julie's convention theme that year offered a useful thread for weaving each seemingly separate identity closer together. The conference theme, common place, allowed for the conference planners—Julie, SJAC, and LAC—to consider where, when, and why we come together, the moments of overlap and shared interest. Such a theme resonated for a city like Milwaukee where racial, socioeconomic, and ideological divides are rather visible when one moves through the city. Aptly, Julie recognized the complex history of Milwaukee and its relationship with its citizens, writing in the 2020 CCCC program:

> That we come together this year to work toward social justice and inclusivity here, in Milwaukee, gives the work a very special, situated meaning. Our common place for 2020 has its own set of commonplaces: Milwaukee is known as a place of distinctive neighborhoods, fierce community, and summer festivals. . . . But Milwaukeeans also know what lives beyond these commonplaces: they know that Milwaukee is also a place of segregation, poverty, and precarity. Its poverty rate is 29 percent, almost three times the rate for the state of Wisconsin, and almost double the national average. Over forty percent of its children live in poverty. . . .. It is a place with a history of colonial displacement of Indigenous peoples: the land now known as Milwaukee County has, at one time or another, belonged to a great number of diverse tribal nations. . . . For the purposes of thinking about how our work as educators is, at heart, about access and inclusivity, Milwaukee is a meaningful location.

Her reflections served as an invitation for conference attendees to consider how their work aligns with the many social justice issues present in a host city like Milwaukee. To help foster these connections, Michael and I worked closely with other SJAC members to strategically centralize social justice as a core experience at the conference rather than an experience that could be described as "in addition to" or even "optional." Centralizing social justice throughout the conference, the two of us believed, was vital to

avoid any practices that might tokenize marginalized community experiences and is anchored in the concept of reciprocity.

My use of *reciprocity* is informed by Dawn Opel and Donnie Sackey's definition, which can be found in their 2019 guest editorship of the *Community Literacy Journal*. They explain that reciprocity informs (1) "how we define and categorize oppression before we enter communities;" (2) "how we gain access to the lives of people outside of universities;" (3) how we represent "community partners in the interpretation of data and in how we tell stories that are not our own;" and (4) "an emphasis on scholarly activisms, or commitment to effectuating change" (1). I find their definition valuable, as it can guide how conference organizers incorporate local community knowledge and centralize social justice within conferences. Further, Opel and Sackey's definition of reciprocity suggests it is a practice that requires time, trust, and reflection. Additionally, I would add that reciprocity is a practice that often occurs as a result of much invisible labor.

In this vein, I pivot to recount my attempts to develop reciprocal relationships with community partners so conferencegoers might experience a greater understanding of the complex social justice issues plaguing Milwaukee (and ultimately join in solidarity with them to take action). My labor in practicing reciprocity while conference planning asked me to engage in the following actions:

1. I acknowledged and continually reflected on my own privileged positionality as a white, cisgender tenure-track academic doing this labor.
2. I networked with my colleagues and other community-engaged scholars in the area to identify community activists working on issues of literacy, equity, and storytelling in Milwaukee.
3. Such networking allowed me to slowly develop relationships with community leaders by inviting them out to coffee to get to know them and their work first, NOT to tell them what I wanted them to do for me or for CCCC. Often this required a series of coffee meetings to slowly introduce the idea of conference participation.
4. If at those coffee meetings, community leaders seemed interested in participating in the conference, I listened to see what they expected and wanted from their participation. This meant getting feedback about compensation, access to resources, access to the conference itself, promotion on the LAC website, and the ability to network with other community organizations participating at the conference.
5. I circulated the knowledge I was receiving from the community leaders back to other conference-planning networks (the convention program chair, SJAC, LAC,

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3 We want to acknowledge that a social justice and antiracist framework is one that actively engages with and seeks to dismantle settler-colonialist practices by engaging with Indigenous theory and knowledges. This work has already been eloquently written about by Andrea Riley-Mukavetz and Cindy Tekobbe (2022).

NCTE/CCCC, caucuses) to see how we could have the conference meet/support community-organization needs. In many ways, my job was to serve as a liaison between community organizations and CCCC.

6. I had more coffee with community organizations to report back on what CCCC could or could not do. This often led to decision making on whether a community organization would be participating or not.

Engaging with community partners in this way resulted in the planning of a series of community-centered events for CCCC in Milwaukee. These events included:

- Indigenous vendors local to the Milwaukee area in addition to an exhibit featuring the violent history of Indigenous erasure in Milwaukee;
- An SJAC roundtable discussion about Matthew Desmond's book *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in an American City*, which centers on Milwaukee, with the participation of several Milwaukee-based activists addressing the issue of housing (Donte McFadden, co-programmer, Black Lens at the Milwaukee Film Festival; Katherine Wilson, executive director, Frank Zeidler Center for Public Discussion; and Keith Stanley, executive director, Near West Side Partners). The session was aimed at attendees who have used or will use Desmond's text in university common-reading programs, as well as at *all* attendees committed to community-engaged teaching and learning;
- The opportunity to see Milwaukee beyond the convention site and engage with social justice in a more hands-on format. This event was touted as the "Locally-Operated Bus Tours of Milwaukee Neighborhoods," arranged with the help of Adam Carr, deputy editor for Community Engagement at Milwaukee Neighborhood News Service. The tours offered a more local experience about the history and institutions of Milwaukee's Black and Latinx communities and neighborhoods. The $35 fee for the tour was intended to compensate the community organizations and activists featured on the tour;
- A Friday-night social event featuring Milwaukee food, music, and poetry. Billed by Julie as the "Big Truckin' Food Fair," the intention was to provide convention goers a flavor of Milwaukee's celebration of cultural festivals and compensate many of those leaders, including local Black sister music duo Sista Strings, former Milwaukee Poet Laureate Dasha Kelly Hamilton, and a series of minority-owned food-truck vendors.

Shortly after these events had been confirmed and many contracts were signed, the COVID-19 pandemic arrived, forcing a series of difficult decisions. Should CCCC 2020 in Milwaukee continue to take place? Should it be canceled? At this time, there were multiple unknowns about the real threat of the virus, which made decision making difficult. Fortunately, for the health of many, the conference

was canceled. Nonetheless, its cancellation also ushered in a series of challenges concerning social justice conference planning—many of which CCCC leadership continues to grapple with today.

ENDURING CHALLENGES TO SOCIAL JUSTICE PROGRAMMING

Our collective stories, woven together in this piece, emphasize the necessity of centering social justice and community engagement at annual academic conferences, and we show how we, on behalf of SJAC and LAC, have attempted to make social justice programming a meaningful contribution to the experiences of scholars and teachers and community activists at the CCCC annual convention. Although we have noted the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted our labor and time and brought on new challenges for doing similar work in hybrid and online-only modalities, we recognize the last two years have been unprecedented, a once-in-a-hundred-year event that may not happen again. In other words, we do not wish to let the COVID-19 pandemic cloud challenges that are ongoing and central and that do not happen once every hundred years, but rather happen every year when we gather to lead social justice programming. In this section, we describe four challenges that can disrupt social justice programming at academic conferences—funding, unaccounted/underappreciated/invisible labor, sustainability, and the ethics of incorporating community voices—and the ways we have tried to meet those challenges directly. We realize there are other challenges that limit the integration of social justice initiatives at conferences, but we focus on these four specifically as each was present in the various roles we occupied while conference planning.

Funding

Leading social justice programming at academic conferences requires funding. In addition to purchasing necessary items and reserving food for events, funding ensures local artists, poets, and activists are compensated for their labor and time. Too often local community members are underpaid or exploited for their labor, even though conference attendees benefit significantly from these collaborators' contributions. A funding model that requires an application request each year can undermine efforts of equity and fairness for these community members. Compensation is contingent on approval of funding and properly processing paperwork so local collaborators are paid on time. When requesting assistance from local collaborators, the subcommittee should give as much information as possible during the early planning stages, which includes the exact amount of compensation the subcommittee can offer. Conference leadership should account early and often for necessary funding requests to support social justice initiatives. Additionally, appropriate forms of funding should be regularly discussed and reflected upon. For instance, some conferences may compensate community members for their time/knowledge/labor by "comping" their conference registration. However, not all

community members feel welcomed or have an interest in attending the full conference, especially an academic conference, so such compensation has little value to them. Collectively, there is a need for more transparency around appropriate forms and approval processes, as well as an appropriate amount of funding for each community member's service to the program.

Unaccounted/Underappreciated/Invisible Labor

Funding is often an attempt to address the unaccounted, underappreciated, and invisible labor necessary to facilitate a community-engaged, social justice set of experiences at local conferences. Maria's list of formal and informal meetings and other liaison activities makes visible the often *invisible* moments not accounted for on CVs or compensated with an appropriate stipend. For her, this work is simply compiled under the litany of responsibilities in her role as the Local Arrangements Committee chair for CCCC. This year, Antonio has stepped into the new role of cochair for SJAC, and although Antonio has been a member of SJAC since the beginning, the role poses familiar and new challenges, such as recruiting new members to join the committee to ensure SJAC remains a sustainable and permanent part of CCCC and conveying the many needs of subcommittee members to the executive committee and program chairs.

Volunteer labor to support and sustain conferences extends well beyond appointed service positions like LAC and SJAC. To enact social justice experiences that reflect issues relevant to the conference's host city, local community members must be engaged, active participants throughout the planning process. The need to build trust between community members and academic spaces is an imperative in this work. A danger in this work, however, is failure to address the precarious positions these bodies occupy. There are far too many examples of academic misuse of community knowledge: Community partnerships can exacerbate existing problems rather than benefit community members, taking their knowledge without reciprocating similar knowledge sharing and treating community members as "having problems" that only White savior academics can fix (Cushman, 1996; Flower, 2008). How we ensure community members not only feel safe but also appreciated for their time, knowledge, and labor are true challenges for social justice organizers at academic conferences. Funding community members through honorariums and stipends only goes so far. How do we move beyond paying for community knowledge to *investing* in community issues?

One potential answer to this question is to develop a standing committee locally based near or in the host city, which can offer labor, support, and resources (at no charge) for community organizations

that align with the greater vision of conference organization.[4] Take CCCC as an example. During the planning of a CCCC convention, the Social Justice at the Convention (SJAC) liaison chair[5] could be tasked with developing a standing committee composed of local scholar-teacher-activists who could meet regularly with the selected community organizations to collaboratively listen, reflect, and identify a literacy and/or writing challenge each organization faces. After the convention takes place in that host city, this standing committee could continue to meet with each organization and compose a report to CCCC leadership outlining the challenges each community organization currently faces. This report could then be used to strategize other resources CCCC members could provide as potential solutions to the community's challenges. The following year, CCCC could highlight the community leaders and members of the standing committee by featuring these participants on a panel, whereby conference attendees could learn of the successes and limitations of this year-long investment, as well as identify future action and resources needed. Ultimately, a goal for this work would be for the standing committee to retain its relationships with the community organizations and continue to serve as a resource supporting their work. Over the years, then, and as the convention travels, CCCC could feature panels that discuss the ebbs, flows, and lessons learned in sustaining local community investments, with participants sharing how these relationships have evolved over years and how these lessons can inform other community-building work within other host cities. Such a plan would nonetheless encounter challenges; however, this offers one response that is relatively cost free and reasserts a convention's commitment to community work by allocating resources and time—even when conference attendees are no longer physically gathered in that community.

Sustainability

Successfully sustaining initiatives that promote and support social justice work remains a challenge when conference planning. Building conference infrastructures that sustain social justice work requires time, money, and on-the-ground community engagement/labor. This is often well beyond the scope of a three- or four-day academic conference, as Michael and Antonio note earlier. Further complicating this work is conference-planning turnover. Personnel and locations change from year to year, and documentation of prior conference planning that could be useful to subsequent conference organizers is a rare commodity. Building a social justice conference infrastructure should avoid reinventing the wheel and should incorporate mentorship between former and current social justice conference organizers. By doing so, precedents could be set regarding standard funding protocols and the ability to share lessons learned, assessing what works well and what does not

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4 Standings committees could be formed in each host city in order to increase the local commitments of a CCCC conference. In this way, as the conference moves locations, local support and infrastructure from CCCC becomes established. Ideally, the conference could return to the host city after a few years and report on the successes and limitations of sustaining local support through the standing committee.

5 This chair is a part of the Local Arrangements Committee and works as a liaison supporting local arrangements work and SJAC.

work well as conferences shift locations and highlight new community issues. (We note in this regard that the International Writing Across the Curriculum (IWAC) conference has developed and regularly updates a conference planning manual that is passed to each new conference chair in succession.)

The Ethics of Incorporating Community Voices

The cancellation of the Milwaukee convention meant there were no opportunities to compensate many of the community organizers who had already given much of their time, labor, and knowledge to preconference preparations. Nor was there an opportunity to showcase any of the community voices nor provide ways for convention goers to further sponsor their work. For those who worked to develop relationships and trust with community organizers, particularly those who served on SJAC and other LAC volunteers, the abrupt cancellation of the conference left a real sense of uneasiness given the time, energy, and labor community members had already provided in advance of the convention. Such a reality invites critical questioning into the ethics of incorporating community voices when planning/designing conferences to have a social justice, community-based experience. While we still believe in the importance of valuing and incorporating community voices, to engage in this work without critical inquiry and without considering "the need to listen to community members—especially about the potential *problems* with community engagement" (Shah, 2020, p. 7) is risky and could further perpetuate harm on community members.

Therefore, in conference planning work, we suggest all those involved critically reflect and discuss this question: What is the intention of including community voices and perspectives? This question includes considering why community members would even share their knowledge and/or resources with conference attendees. By listening to community members and why they are willing to share their time and knowledge with us, we may deepen our understanding of that community and realize ways by which we collectively support each other. When we listen, we may realize some of the hesitation community members have in sharing their knowledge. For example, some may be hesitant to give away their knowledge and experience for free. Much of their ability to engage in social justice work may depend upon monetary resources. Conferences committed to social justice must build in budgets that adequately and fairly compensate community members for their contributions.

Additionally, if and when a community member/organization agrees to participate, their knowledge and perspectives should be invited into the planning and decision making of conference organizing *early* in the process. Their knowledge and networks of care may enrich or provide new perspectives on how academics view the purpose of the conference. Additionally, conference attendees should engage in ethical citation practices, citing not just the *scholar* referencing the community organization but the

community member as well. Recognizing how the presence of community members at conferences shapes knowledge must be acknowledged in a social justice conference framework.

MOVING FORWARD IN SOCIAL JUSTICE WORK

In her 2021 CCCC address, Julie Lindquist asked us to reflect on the following question: "*If we are living in a time characterized primarily by loss, how might the experience of that, and the lessons we can't help but discover, deliver something like gains for the future? And: what is to be gained by understanding learning in terms of loss?*" To name our gains, we must first consider what was lost over the last three years: In Milwaukee (CCCC 2020), there was a loss of recognition for the labor we had put forward in conference planning, a loss amplified by the inability to carry out the spirit of reciprocity our conference planning had embraced. In Spokane (CCCC 2021), we lost the ability yet again to come together and gather as people drastically changed by the COVID-19 pandemic and year of racial unrest. And, in Chicago (CCCC 2022), we lost some sense of hope that we will be able to return to past conference experiences we considered "normal." As we look forward to future gatherings, we see opportunities for reimagining what could be possible and how amplifying social justice can renew our disciplinary need for conferences.

To reimagine new possibilities of coming together, we must seriously take up questions that ask us to grapple with the continued precarity of in-person events. This includes asking, How do we sustain social justice work when facing such precarity? For instance, collectively, we noticed at the Spokane convention smaller attendance at events SJAC coordinated, and as a result, an even smaller list of people interested in joining SJAC to help organize events for the convention in Chicago (four people visited the virtual Action Hub; two of them agreed to join SJAC in fall 2021). Collectively, these losses invite new considerations about the infusion of social justice commitments at national conferences— whether they be in person, virtual, or hybrid.

Reflecting on these collective years of loss, we have no doubt gained new perspectives. In turn, they ask us to grapple with new, complicated questions, such as, How do we move towards a disciplinary commitment to incorporating, learning, and amplifying community voices? In doing so, how can we build infrastructures that promote ongoing engagement and reduce conference-planning approaches that integrate community struggles through a "Cook's tour" point of view? Additionally, if we address these questions, what labor and talent is required of conference organizers to sustain our commitments to working in alliance with community members, even when we are no longer congregating in their city? Further, if we want to change conference identities to be more radically inclusive and welcoming to social justice initiatives, then we must rethink how we plan and invite participation at conferences. This may lead to larger, more fundamental questions, such as:

- *How might we collectively evolve our disciplinary identity to integrate and support social justice work that sustains itself?*
- *How might we move beyond statements offered by disciplinary organizations, like the ELATE example, and move collectively towards knowledge-making practices that denounce racist ideologies and perpetuate social injustices?*
- *How might we remove power from senior scholars who perpetuate harm and use critique as violence against marginalized scholars in more precarious positions?*
- *How might we create a conference culture that holds each attendee accountable to antiracist and social justice commitments?*

We understand the challenges posed to cultivating a social justice conference experience require time, labor, and commitments that aren't often visibly appreciated in tenure and promotion materials. This work, while slowly developing as a point of conversation (as evident with this special issue), remains largely invisible and often underappreciated. Our intention in sharing and reflecting on these experiences is to emphasize how social justice work—whether it relates to conference planning or community/disciplinary building—is never effectively performed in solitude. It requires ethical collaboration and reflective listening, which can lead to a realization that some practices will need to be revised or rethought. This is our call to you, readers who are committed to fulfilling the aims of social justice at our disciplinary conferences but more broadly as well in our teaching, research, and service: Be engaged. Be ethical. Be reflective. Be collaborative. Be listening.

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Appendix

This is a transcript for Vershawn Ashanti Young's videorecorded remarks. The video can be viewed on the Watson website.

VERSHAWN ASHANTI YOUNG: I want to begin by acknowledging the victory from yesterday's jury verdict that was rendered in the George Floyd murder trial of Derek Chauvin, who was convicted on all three charges. And as Black Lives Matter protesters and organizers have said, this is a reformation on the police reform, or on police brutality, and a reformation so that policing in America can be changed. It's not the end. It's just part of dismantling white supremacist ways of brutality and policing.

Now, my remarks will be centered on three big ideas about antiracist conference planning. The first organizing idea is my beliefs—or, you could say, my combined personal and professional beliefs--about antiracism in conference planning. And then, second, what I did as CCCC program chair, and following from that or folding in some of the things I did as the chair of CCCC, which I was last year and program chair the year before. And lastly, I want to reintroduce something that I introduced in my CCCC keynote about a week or two weeks ago, and that is Black Body acknowledgements, and how those can be used similarly to Native American and Indigenous land acknowledgments to be in the forefront of public speaking events.

So, first, my beliefs about antiracism and conference planning. I believe in some principles—I would say at least four principles—that a conference planner or programmer or committee can think about, at least four:

That there must be explicit attention given to equity, diversity, and inclusion. And I want to say what I mean by that—equity, diversity, and inclusion—because often, they are used as stock terms to sort of mean that diverse people are present.

I just think that diversity means not only that racial diversity is present, but intersectional diversity. So, and not just a white queer woman but a Black trans man, for instance. We have to have a wide spread of diversity and intersectional racialized diversity. But that's only one part. That's not really inclusion, and is not yet equity.

Equity means that those people are involved in decision-making practices and decision-making elements that are important to the conference. And that's what it means to sort of look at that through an equity, diversity, and inclusion lens. And those voices must be included. And those identities. So, that's one of the first principles.

The second principle is you gotta not only give attention to equity, diversity, and inclusion, but to its nemesis, I should say, to white supremacy. There's going to come a time when, hopefully, hopefully, at some point, we won't have to give attention to white

supremacy, because diversity will be the norm. But...but both are necessary: the equity, diversity, and inclusion framework and attention to the ways in which white supremacy continues to assert itself and to sometimes undergird, I'm sorry, not undergird, undercut, undercut those efforts. For instance, by appealing to the status quo on some decisions where something new needs to happen in order to be inclusive, but what gets in the way is the rules that allow for it, right, and appeal to the status quo instead of changing it when the status quo was developed and decided by under many times white supremacist ideologies.

And then, I believe you have to cultivate cultural inclusiveness and awareness. Like it has to be, you know, explicitly gestured towards, and created. And, to me, that means listening to different groups. So, those are the four principles: listening to different groups, cultivating cultural awareness and inclusiveness, being aware of white supremacy, and organizing the conference on equity, diversity, and an inclusive framework.

So briefly how I did that at the CCCC conference, I tried to model some of this by having frequent conversations with antiracist allies about the conference and how it needed to pursue antiracist means. So, listening to those voices and always promoting or placing diversity and people of color at the center. So in the iconography, the images, everything about the conference was situated in Blackness and also in cultural awareness, so I created signage throughout the conference to show what the values were telling the different caucuses, the Latinx caucus, the Asian American caucus, the Native American caucus, these different caucuses that we see them and that we hear them, and making sure that other people knew that that was a value as well. So that's why that signage was throughout the conference setting and also in the program in order to promote that, at least, on that level of cultural awareness.

Then as- further as my role as chair, one of the responsibilities is to create a taskforce or committees and give them charges. And so, I continued that work in antiracist understanding by creating a taskforce to assess NCTE and CCCC for whiteness and white supremacy, white privilege, created a committee to assess NCTE and CCCC on its involvement on people of color and particularly in leadership roles and struck other committees, also led the, I'm sorry, struck committees that produced those statements in relation to the Black Lives protests from last summer.

So, in summary, or in lieu of a summary, I want to offer my commitment, which is in the form of what I call Black Body Acknowledgements, which are modeled after the territory acknowledgements, otherwise known as Indigenous and Native People Land Acknowledgments. And of course we know these are often delivered before public events happening in an institutional structure built on land originally belonging to Native peoples in Canada and the U.S., at the least, and that people would violently seize. But these land acknowledgments don't often go far enough when

people make them, in my opinion. Because they acknowledge the land but not the rights of the people who owned the land or there's no common sense commitment for, to intervene into the longstanding consequences, for instance at the University of Waterloo we have a land acknowledgment on our web page, but we don't have an Indigenous Studies major or offer Indigenous Studies scholarships or anything that intervenes into the consequences. So, I think that it's almost words without action. But my commitment is to offer the Black Body Acknowledgement, particularly so that we don't forget the victory that we got yesterday in the conviction of Derek Chauvin in the murder of George Floyd and other Black bodies that have ensued after that. And so, I was born and raised in the U.S., but I currently live and teach in Ontario, Canada. My spirit and breath activate a Black male body that is part of a race that is disproportionately maligned, surveilled, policed and jailed.

I often can't breathe as Black men Eric Garner and George Floyd said respectively on July 17th, 2014, and May 25th, 2020, before their lives were snuffed out by excessive police brutality. I make a commitment here today within the scope of this presentation to make white supremacist capitalist patriarchy subordinate to antiracist aims and to pursue that through love as Black feminist bell hooks puts it. That ideology of love is to oppose oppression in all its forms.

I do this first and foremost today, or have done this, by sharing personal beliefs about antiracism and conference planning, identifying the ways in which I have pursued those aims and goals in making a commitment here to support others as they do so as well. Ashe.

Non-Negotiable Inclusivity: Chronicling the Relational, Embodied Work of Antiracist, Accessible Conferencing

Mudiwa Pettus

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Sherita V. Roundtree is an assistant professor of English at Towson University in Maryland's Baltimore-metropolitan area. Her research lives at the intersections of Composition Studies, Black feminist theories and pedagogies, community literacy, and writing program administration. More specifically, she centralizes the teaching efficacy, pedagogical approaches, and "noise" of Black women teachers of writing, as well as the networks of support they utilize. Some of Roundtree's work can be found in *Community Literacy Journal, Writers: Craft & Context,* and other forthcoming edited collections.

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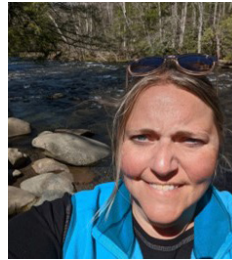
Jen Almjeld is a professor and Director of Graduate Studies in the School of Writing, Rhetoric and Technical Communication at James Madison University. Almjeld's research centers on feminist methodologies, identity performances, digital rhetorics and community engagement. Her recent work appears in the *Journal of Multimodal Rhetorics*, *Computers and Composition* and the *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*.

Jessica Enoch (she/her) is a professor of English and Director of the Academic Writing Program at the University of Maryland. Her teaching and research focus on feminist rhetorics and pedagogies, feminist memory studies, spatial rhetorics, and rhetorical education. She has published two monographs, *Domestic Occupations: Spatial Rhetorics and Women's Work* and *Refiguring Rhetorical Education: Women Teaching African American, Native American, and Chicano/a Students*. Her edited collections include *Feminist Circulations: Rhetorical Explorations across Space and Time* (co-edited with Karen Nelson and Danielle Griffin); *Mestiza Rhetorics: An Anthology of Mexicana Activism in the Spanish-Language Press, 1887-1922* (co-edited with Cristina Ramírez), *Women at Work: Rhetorics of Gender and Labor* (co-edited with David Gold), and *Retellings: Opportunities for Feminist Research in Rhetoric and Composition Studies* (co-edited with Jordynn Jack).

Patrick Thomas is an associate professor and Director of Undergraduate Studies in the Department of English at the University of Dayton. His teaching includes courses in digital writing, community literacy, research methods, and professional writing. With Pamela Takayoshi, he is editor of the collection *Literacy in Practice: Writing in Public, Private, and Working Lives*, and his scholarship also appears in *Computers and Composition* and *Kairos*: *A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy*. He is a previous conference co-host for the Feminisms and Rhetorics conference.

An articulated principle that guides the work of the Coalition of Feminist Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition (CFSHRC) is its investment in inclusivity and invitation. On the Coalition website, for instance, a key aim for the Coalition is to "cultivat[e] a dynamic, intellectually challenging, and professionally nurturing community. We welcome and sustain all who do feminist work, inclusive of all genders, sexualities, races, classes, nationalities, religions, abilities, and other identities, in their research and classrooms." Since 1997, the Feminisms and Rhetorics Conference, known colloquially as FemRhets,[1] has been a site where this intentional feminist community is expected to materialize and take shape.

In March of 2020, the Advisory Board of the Coalition voted to cancel the 2021 conference. As president of the Coalition Wendy Sharer explained in her 2021 Watson presentation, "This decision was made in light of COVID-19, but, more significantly, it reflected long-standing (and growing) concerns about the inclusivity of the conference: concerns about the whiteness of conference programs, concerns about accessibility, and concerns about the costs of attending (for graduate students in particular)" (Sharer 1). To address these concerns and rethink the conference as a whole, Sharer constituted our team, titled the Workflow, Format, and Processes (WFP) Task Force, and we were charged with studying the conference and its operations. The main work of this task force was to identify inclusive, invitational possibilities for conferencing and to recommend ways to restructure FemRhets.

We six authors were members of the WFP Task Force:

- Mudiwa Pettus, an assistant professor and Executive Board member of the Coalition;
- Sherita Roundtree, an assistant professor, Advisory Board member, and newly elected Member-at-Large of the Executive Board;
- Ruth Osorio, an assistant professor, Coalition member, and critic of FemRhets' cost and exclusion of graduate student leadership;
- Jen Almjeld, an associate professor and co-host of the most recent FemRhets Conference;
- Patrick Thomas, an associate professor, former conference host and member of the Advisory Board;
- Jess Enoch, a full professor, long-time Coalition and Advisory Board member, outgoing Vice President, and incoming President of the CFSHRC.

Our task force met twice a month for approximately a year, working as a full group of six as well as in pairs on distinct tasks. As a starting point, we chose to focus on the two most recent conferences, hosted by two members of our task force, though the concerns our committee addressed began well before 2017. In particular,

Abstract

Six members of a Coalition of Feminist Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition (CFSHRC) task force share their insights and affective responses to their work to identify and operationalize inclusive, invitational practices for the Feminisms and Rhetorics Conference (FemRhets). This article first describes understandings of antiracist practices that guided the group's work - rooted in the writings of scholars Sara Ahmed, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Michelle Grue - and highlights parts of the task force's 23-page report outlining partial, initial steps for inclusive, antiracist conferencing. The article ends with each author sharing personal experiences working on this project. The authors seek to root the non-negotiability of inclusive conferencing practices in the need for antiracism, accessibility, affordability, and transparency as central to conference planning.

Keywords

antiracist, academic labor, diversity work, inclusive conferencing, intersectional feminism

the WFP Task Force was responding to critiques raised in surveys and conference feedback, conference town halls, and social media discussions that FemRhets often feels exclusive and insular and that the conference and the Coalition as a whole is overwhelmingly populated by white, straight, cis-gender, able-bodied women. Too, interlocutors raised questions about the conference site selection and the full range of concerns around inclusion: accessibility, affordability, and transparency regarding conference planning and decision making.

Taking on this work brought on a range of affective responses from us all–responses that, as we discuss below, shaped our ideas about conference revision. We collectively felt a sense of discomfort as we quickly understood that this sort of conference re-visioning is difficult because no one of us ever knows or sees the full picture or history of the organizations we are working to change. We felt called to address issues whose origins began long before our arrival to the CFSHRC and to do so without a complete record of all the actions, committed publicly and privately, that have impacted members' experiences. We knew our vision and understanding were incomplete and there was discomfort in our partial understandings. Additionally, each member of the task force came to our group with different experiences of and emotional attachments to the conference and the Coalition. And yet, while grappling with these issues was often difficult, painful, and discomforting, we also saw our work as aspirational and hopeful.

Below, we first describe the understandings of antiracist, inclusive practices that guided our work, the model of diversity we operated

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1 In our task force report, which we offer sections of below, we use the acronym "FRC" for the Feminisms and Rhetorics Conference.

within, and ways we suggest the Coalition–and perhaps other national organizations–operationalize responses to these issues to create more welcoming conference spaces. As members of the WFP Task Force, our suggestions for FemRhets took the form of a 23-page report that offered partial, beginning steps for conferencing change that we see as non-negotiable. As authors here we each draw from this report and use it as a springboard to consider our re-visioning of FemRhets and antiracist, inclusive conferencing. We deepen our engagements with the report here by imbuing our comments with our own perspectives, each of us sharing our personal, embodied responses to this process–and to particular parts of the report–in an effort to document the messy, complex, vulnerable, and partial work of collaborative change making.

ANTIRACIST, INCLUSIVE CONFERENCING WORK

Looking back on our task force work, we can define our operations as mirroring the feminist practices advocated by Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa Kirsch (2010) of "tacking in" and "tacking out." Drawing on the work of Clifford Geertz, Royster and Kirsch see "tacking in" as "focus[ing] closely on existing resources, fragmentary and otherwise, . . . to assess what we now understand and to speculate about what seems missing"; "tacking out" is seeing from a distance, a satellite perspective, "in order to to broaden our own viewpoints in anticipation of what might become more visible from a longer or broader view" (p. 651). As a task force, we "tacked in" by addressing the particular concerns raised about recent FemRhets, and we're grateful especially for Michelle Grue's (2021) presentation at the 2021 Watson conference that astutely named these criticisms and her call to engage in new possibilities for interactive, antiracist conference work more broadly (p. 3). Grue names the specific and longstanding critiques about FemRhets: a lack of listening to non-leadership members stemming from defensiveness of leadership, a lack of accessibility, high cost, and the dominance of whiteness and white feminism that permeates the Coalition's decision-making (p. 4). Grue invites us to learn from one another how to better engage in antiracist conference work, acknowledging that while we "lack a clear model of what antiracist conference spaces, physical and digital, should look like," we can look to ways other organizations have mitigated similar concerns "so that folks can stop saying 'I don't know how to do this' as an excuse to not do the work" (p. 2).

Inviting us to engage in the practice of "speculating the academic future" (p. 3) and helping us to envision ways to "tack out," Grue considers how the Coalition is poised to cultivate a more inclusive, antiracist culture of conferencing. She points to the intersectional goals of the Coalition's social media plan and the inclusive, accessible content of its Twitter account to demonstrate the contrast between exclusionary conference spaces. In highlighting this contrast, Grue draws attention to the tensions between the *reality* of our predominantly white Coalition and conference–and the prevailing commitments of white feminism that uphold racist

and exclusionary systems of both–and the *possibility* for creating more intersectional, antiracist organizational structures and spaces. We see Grue's discussion of the possibilities that stem from her critiques as a critical exigence for our work, recognizing that the Coalition can continue to re-envision the organization itself and FemRhets as a more intentionally intersectional, inclusive, and antiracist space. Yet we still see it important to recognize that the Coalition's push to make FemRhets an inclusive conference is inexcusably belated. Due to experiencing and witnessing racism, ableism, nepotism, and class-based exclusion at past conferences, some members of the Coalition and those in rhetorical studies writ large have decided to no longer attend FemRhets. Some individuals have distanced themselves from the Coalition altogether. We understand these decisions. In the end, we join Grue in "speculating the academic future," and we move forward with the hope that the Coalition will carry this loss of community on its conscience, seeking ways to redress past harms while devising inclusive conferencing protocols that will shape future conferences.

In speculating with Grue, we shifted gears in our feminist practice to "tack out" to imagine the invigorating potentials of *antiracist,* inclusive practices. As we tacked out, we found that one key component to transformative antiracist work is relationality: an attunement to how we are connected in a myriad of ways, and an investment in nurturing those connections. Relationality as a research methodology is informed by Indigenous epistemologies and cultural rhetorics, which emphasize that, as Shawn Wilson (2008) writes, "[r]elationships do not merely shape reality, they *are* reality" (p. 7, emphasis in original). As our narratives illustrate below, relationality entails not only learning from each other but also seeing our work in relation with past and future conference organizers, with the critics of the conference, and with future conference goers. Rather than sever our connections to the complaints that made us uncomfortable–and yes, sometimes, the complaints did make us squirm–we oriented ourselves to be in relation to the humans behind the complaints. This required a level of vulnerability amongst one another, as we spoke across multiple forms of difference: race, gender, rank, and connection to the Coalition. As we attended to the needs of each other and ourselves, we imagined a FemRhets that would attend to the various needs of future conference goers. As Andrea M. Riley Mukavetz (2014) explains, "relationality as a practice allows us to expand and sustain our disciplines, to challenge disciplinary and professional practices that emphasize strict categorization and demarcation" (p. 114). It was this dedication to each other, to fostering connection even when it was hard to do so, that enabled us to even attempt what we hope to be transformative work in the discipline of feminist rhetoric.

Our relationality and indeed vulnerability provided an important step for our group to critically consider the elements of what Sara Ahmed defines as "diversity work." In *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (2012), Ahmed questions the process of *becoming* a diversity practitioner, especially for people of

color in academia who often find themselves on call "when race turns up" (p. 5), and she explores "what diversity does by focusing on what diversity obscures, that is, by focusing on the relationship between diversity and racism as a way of making explicit a tendency that is reproduced by staying implicit" (p. 14). The acknowledgement of diversity needs, at times, can become reduced to appearances—the appearance of institutional documents that change in language but not in meaningful practice, the appearance of increased numbers of people of color present in organizations doing diversity work with no explicit measures to sustain them within and beyond that work. As Ahmed explains, "Diversity work is typically institutional work" (p. 19), and so institutionalized diversity work is "material as well as symbolic: how time, energy, and labor are directed within institutions affects *how they surface*" (p. 29). Writing can sometimes be a means to an end that allows for strategic planning, but documentation alone is not the *work*. Therefore, the development of the 23-page WFP report, the documentation of that labor, and the negotiation that resulted in this article are stepping stones within the work—a push to intrinsically link FemRhets to the work of sustained, institutional change. Ahmed (2017) reminds us that "diversity work is messy, even dirty, work" (p. 94). It is also, she argues, embodied, emotional and willful. By presenting our stories alongside our recommendations, we make visible the messy, hopeful, and at times heartbreaking nature of diversity work.

As we attempted to take on the "diversity work" Ahmed advocates, we also grappled with the very definitions of antiracism and inclusivity that would drive our practice. We were especially driven by Kimberlé Crenshaw's understanding of antiracist practice, which is one that works towards the "active dismantling of systems, privileges, and everyday practices that reinforce and normalize the contemporary dimensions of white dominance" (qtd. in Shim Roth, 2020)**.** Crenshaw's words guided us to know that striving only to ensure that marginalized groups are present at FemRhets, or prioritizing what scholar Dafina-Lazarus Stewart refers to as "compositional diversity," will not rectify the inequities engendered by how the conference has been planned and executed historically (p. 1). Likewise, in developing our recommendations, we aimed to reject the conservative impulse to approach inclusivity as a simple matter of assimilation. Rather, our goal is that the inclusivity practiced by the Coalition will align with the theoretical contributions of Black feminist scholar, Cecilia Shelton. In "Shifting Out of Neutral: Centering Difference, Bias, and Social Justice in a Business Writing Course," Shelton argues for the inclusion of the "invisible labor" of Black women and the "significance of [Black women's] bodies" in the field of technical and professional communication (p. 2). Claiming her and other Black women's epistemes, experiences, and bodies as valuable texts for scholarly and pedagogical engagement, Shelton proclaims, "To include me is to share the labor of making sense of my intellectual contributions with me, even when (perhaps *especially* when) my ways of knowing, and

being, my references and insights are not familiar or easily accessible to those of you who are operating out of traditional Western knowledge and value systems" (p. 1).

In her writing, Shelton offers a stipulative definition of inclusion that is predicated upon labor, collaboration, and generative discomfort, one that we deem useful for how the Coalition might be oriented in restructuring FemRhets. In our recommendations, we assert that the Coalition leadership, not marginalized members or individual conference hosts, should assume responsibility for ensuring that the conference is inclusive and that the organization should be accountable when issues arise. Additionally, we have argued that groups who have been excluded historically from FemRhets should not just be invited into the existing structures of the conference. Rather their epistemes, experiences, and even critiques must be given the space to radically alter the conference's culture. We believe that if the Coalition includes the perspectives of its members who have long been marginalized and minoritized, especially those who are non-white, disabled, poor, queer, immigrants, employed contingently and/or at community colleges and minority-serving institutions, then FemRhets will become a remarkably different conference. Rather than fighting this transformation, we hope that the Coalition's leaders and membership will welcome the change.

BRINGING OURSELVES TO THIS WORK

Through task force deliberations, we centered on four guiding principles that actualized our work, identifying "inclusive conferencing" as conferencing that is antiracist, accessible, affordable, and transparent. Our team used these overlapping nodes of concern as heuristics for our research and thinking, and they structured our 23-page report.[2] We use them again in this essay to anchor our comments below. In one of our especially poignant task force conversations, we identified a question that drove much of our research, discussion, and recommendations. We asked: *How should our conferencing practices change if we treat our four guiding principles–conferencing that is antiracist, accessible, affordable, and transparent–as non-negotiable, as tenets planners are not only accountable for but something that energizes and improves our conference, our organization, and our discipline?*

What we want to dwell on as authors of this piece is our investment in the non-negotiability of inclusive conferencing practices. The following vignettes capture how we imagine this commitment to non-negotiability and consider what this non-negotiability might look like in future conferences and in expanded support from the Coalition via renewed investment in antiracism, accessibility, affordability, and transparency. Our meditations illustrate the recursive, relational dimension of diversity work as we engage the four principles that guided our work and formed our report, and

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2 We also included "Good Ideas" (Fig. 7) appendix for future conference hosts and a proposal for establishing the Fellowship Pod Program.

we demonstrate the themes we identify are not isolated but rather overlap and build upon one another in both tangled and generative ways. We hope the following sections present the urgency of antiracist work, the possibilities and risks of invitations to build coalition, the necessary expansiveness of accessibility practices, the deep and vulnerable work of transparency, the importance of shared accountability, and an exciting glimpse into the future of FemRhets.

"On most days, I find myself possessing a 'hope not hopeless but unhopeful' (p. 209). But I am rooting for the Coalition to surprise me." — Mudiwa Pettus

When Jen, Patrick, Sherita, Ruth, Jess, and I were deciding how to organize our contribution to this special issue, I noted that our transparency concerning the amount of time we reflected, imagined, and deliberated together seemed requisite. As highlighted in Figure 1, we reviewed Coalition members' feedback on past conferences, examined past FemRhets programs and budgets, and researched methods for how the Coalition might attend to the equity issues of the conference. Additionally, we developed relationships with each other that enabled us to do this work with a certain level of openness and trust. In the end, the process of composing our recommendations regarding how the Coalition could *begin* to address critiques of FemRhets spanned nearly an academic year. In my mind, our pacing emphasizes the care that antiracist conferencing planning demands. Simultaneously, I am vexed by the protracted nature of our work.

Our lives are molded by neoliberal metrics of productivity, cruel ethics of personal responsibility, vicious competition, and unequal resource distribution. Trying to survive in these conditions means that many of us are running on fumes constantly. Of course, individuals racialized as non-white bear the brunt of these death-making forces.

While I recognize the necessity of thinking prudently about antiracism, as our task force has attempted to do, and the importance of conserving energy so that we might live to fight another day, my hope is that we prioritize pursuits of survival and endurance that are not dependent on the destruction, alienation, or exploitation of others. We must labor as hard as we can and as fast as we can bear to imagine and build a society for the good of all people. To this end, my wish is that we become ambivalent, conflicted, perpetually around slowness and antiracism, and our ambivalence should extend to any conversation about antiracist conference planning. We never should seek to reconcile the productive tension between respecting the limits of our physical, emotional, mental, and temporal capacities in pursuing social justice and knowing that expecting people of color to wait for the full spectrum of our personhood to be respected in our personal and professional lives is unconscionable. Additionally, we should make room for what the rhetorical theorist Tamika Carey has referred to as "rhetorics of impatience" to be heard and to be acted upon.
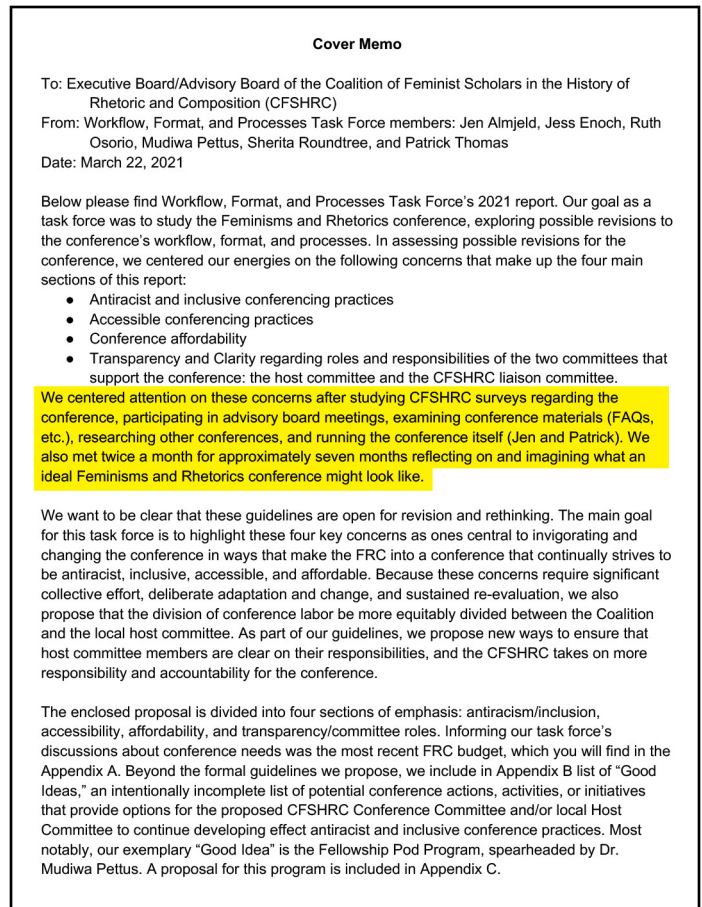

Cover Memo

To: Executive Board/Advisory Board of the Coalition of Feminist Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition (CFSHRC)

From: Workflow, Format, and Processes Task Force members: Jen Almjeld, Jess Enoch, Ruth Osorio, Mudiwa Pettus, Sherita Roundtree, and Patrick Thomas

Date: March 22, 2021

Below please find Workflow, Format, and Processes Task Force's 2021 report. Our goal as a task force was to study the Feminisms and Rhetorics conference, exploring possible revisions to the conference's workflow, format, and processes. In assessing possible revisions for the conference, we centered our energies on the following concerns that make up the four main sections of this report:

- Antiracist and inclusive conferencing practices
- Accessible conferencing practices
- Conference affordability
- Transparency and Clarity regarding roles and responsibilities of the two committees that support the conference: the host committee and the CFSHRC liaison committee.

We centered attention on these concerns after studying CFSHRC surveys regarding the conference, participating in advisory board meetings, examining conference materials (FAQs, etc.), researching other conferences, and running the conference itself (Jen and Patrick). We also met twice a month for approximately seven months reflecting on and imagining what an ideal Feminisms and Rhetorics conference might look like.

We want to be clear that these guidelines are open for revision and rethinking. The main goal for this task force is to highlight these four key concerns as ones central to invigorating and changing the conference in ways that make the FRC into a conference that continually strives to be antiracist, inclusive, accessible, and affordable. Because these concerns require significant collective effort, deliberate adaptation and change, and sustained re-evaluation, we also propose that the division of conference labor be more equitably divided between the Coalition and the local host committee. As part of our guidelines, we propose new ways to ensure that host committee members are clear on their responsibilities, and the CFSHRC takes on more responsibility and accountability for the conference.

The enclosed proposal is divided into four sections of emphasis: antiracism/inclusion, accessibility, affordability, and transparency/committee roles. Informing our task force's discussions about conference needs was the most recent FRC budget, which you will find in the Appendix A. Beyond the formal guidelines we propose, we include in Appendix B list of "Good Ideas," an intentionally incomplete list of potential conference actions, activities, or initiatives that provide options for the proposed CFSHRC Conference Committee and/or local Host Committee to continue developing effect antiracist and inclusive conference practices. Most notably, our exemplary "Good Idea" is the Fellowship Pod Program, spearheaded by Dr. Mudiwa Pettus. A proposal for this program is included in Appendix C.

Figure 1: Cover Memo of the WFP Task Force Recommendation Report highlighting Our Four Areas of Concern

Writing from and immersed in a Black feminist perspective, Carey reminds us that "[e]quity and justice are late" (p. 275). Accordingly, when members of our communities voice displeasure, frustration, and even rage regarding their mistreatment, we should act with urgency and humility to address their needs and concerns. The most disempowered and vulnerable among us should always set the pace of our work.

Even though we have developed our recommendations deliberately and with the best of intentions, I am not arrogant enough to claim that what we have offered is perfect. At its core, antiracist work should be recursive. As scholars of writing and rhetoric, I hope that we welcome the revision process. On this matter, I am moved particularly by the words of prison abolitionist and community organizer Mariame Kaba. In describing the central role that experimentation and revision play in processes of social transformation, Kaba primes us to recognize the necessity of performing "a million different little experiments, just building and trying and taking risks and understanding we're going to have tons of failure, and failure is actually the norm and a good way for us to learn lessons that help us" (p. 166). Frankly, believing that any predominantly white organization, including the Coalition, will keep running

experiments in the interest of antiracism, especially in the face of failure, requires a good bit of faith and hope. On most days, I find myself possessing a "hope not hopeless but unhopeful" (Du Bois, p. 209). But I am rooting for the Coalition to surprise me.

"Trust is not a default in feminist, coalitional work. It is fostered. It is negotiated. It is renegotiated. And sometimes it is broken." — Sherita Roundtree

In "Interrogating the 'Deep Story': Storytelling and Narratives in the Rhetoric Classroom," following the 2016 U.S. election, Sharon Yam uses sociologist Arlie Hochschild's (2016) "deep story" theory to argue that writing and rhetoric teachers should use personal narratives as an opportunity to help students interrogate their own deep stories. Developed in 1995, Sonja K. Foss and Cindy L. Griffin explain that "invitational rhetoric" offers the rhetor an alternative option "when changing and controlling is not the rhetor's goal" (p. 5). Foss and Griffin go on to state that "Ultimately, though, the result of invitational rhetoric is not just an understanding of an issue. Because of the nonhierarchical, nonjudgmental, nonadversarial framework established for the interaction, an understanding of the participants themselves occurs, an understanding that engenders appreciation, value, and a sense of equality" (p. 5). In

Proposed Antiracist, Inclusive Conferencing Practices:
(1) Create FRC planning structure that overtly foregrounds antiracist, inclusive priorities and initiatives.

(2) Advertise conference widely, ensuring that that CFP and conference announcements are shared with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), tribal colleges, Hispanic Serving Institutions, other minority-serving institutions, and community colleges.

(3) Establish an antiracist, anti-ableist, inclusive review process for panel and presentation proposals.

(4) Engage the contemporary and historical complexity of the FRC location (campus, conference event locations, city, state).

(5) Compose and institute land/territorial acknowledgements that are accompanied with materials forms of redress (See Isador, Vowel).

(6) Invite and engage with BIPOC scholars to keynote events in ways that honor their distinctive intellectual/artistic/activist contributions and their preferred ways of engaging FRC attendees and CFSHRC membership.

(7) Offer guidance to attendees on antiracist inclusive strategies for conference sessions.

(8) Establish and maintain connections to BIPOC scholar-teachers and organizations beyond the CFSHRC membership.

(9) Coordinate at least one panel or plenary event that spotlights emerging scholars, especially the work of the Nan Johnson Travel Award and the Shirley Logan Diversity Scholarship Award recipients.

(10) Identify and institute publishing opportunities for FRC presenters, especially BIPOC, emerging, and disabled scholars

(11) Redesign conference name tags/badges to promote nonhierarchical community building.

(12) Facilitate multiple opportunities at the conference for community building across membership.

(13) Welcome children to the FRC

(14) Create a system for receiving feedback and addressing grievances regarding the conference.

Figure 2: Recommended Antiracist, Inclusive Conferencing Practices
(for fuller description, see Task Force Report, p. 3-7)

the classroom, deep stories often operate under the guise that if misinformation about a community "feels-as-if" it is true, it is true and this "truth" leads to a defensive stance rather than a stance that is introspective and collaborative — an invitation to coalition. However, this invitation to coalition had not always been my experience as a Feminisms and Rhetorics presenter and attendee, and my concerns often echoed the concerns that other attendees expressed over the years—that Feminisms and Rhetorics (and by extension, the Coalition) is overwhelmingly white and inaccessible.

The invitational conference practices value that developed out of our series of recommendations to the CFSHRC questions who the FemRhets Conference's invitations are for and under what premise. More specifically, I believe this value seeks to explore how invitations without infrastructure–to support and listen to the voices of those invited–potentially create undesirable demands of invitees' labor, time, resources, wellness, etc., especially when their experiences serve as additional considerations rather than being central to conference planning. Yam suggests that a hyper focus on persuasion limits the possibility that engaging with someone who has a differing perspective can lead to a change of mind and/or perspective.

In many ways, the Feminisms and Rhetorics Conference has worked under a system where there is a goal to seek common ground or a desire to compromise and a belief that all parties involved have mutual trust. But trust is not a default in feminist, coalitional work. It is fostered. It is negotiated. It is renegotiated. And sometimes it is broken. Working with Mudiwa, Ruth, Jen, Patrick, and Jess on the task force helped me to recognize what these meaningful negotiations look like in practice. Our recommendations for future conferences call attention to the need for dialogue that leads to community-informed changes and reimaginings. Aja Martinez's discussion of "counterstory" acknowledges that "oral tradition as taken from lived personal experience is valued as 'legitimate knowledge'" (p. 66). This task force's recommendations recognize that scholars of color, disabled scholars, LGBTQIA+ scholars, and many other scholar communities—whose experiences intersect and extend beyond those I have listed here—have shared their stories many times over about invitation without representation at the conference. Storytelling alone does not account for the structural changes needed in conference invitational practices and motivations. Our invitational recommendations for conference practices recognize risk for scholars whose work and public scholarship and lived experiences lie at the intersection of listening and dismantling.

The recommendations propose critical, coalitional reflection and exploration of the deep stories that we may be holding on to in our imaginings on FemRhets and other spaces in the field. Specifically, the call to action, which names and proposes actionable change, is intentional and specific; it challenges hierarchies but it does not shy away from critique and recognizes that collaborative revision is an inherent part of diversity work. As shown in Figure 2, which

Mudiwa and I collaborated on within the report, the recommendations highlight strategic ways of employing antiracist strategies, and, in many ways, those antiracist strategies start with developing transparent communication and elucidating organizational processes (with the option of changing those processes). They serve as a call to action for many of the stories that have already been shared and redistribute the labor on conference organizers and not the invited. This work, similar to Sonja K. Foss and Cindy L. Griffin's (1995) discussion of invitational rhetoric, provides "an impetus for more focused and systematic efforts to describe and assess rhetoric in all of its manifestations" (p. 5).

Section 3:
Recommendations for Conference Affordability

In the last five years, The Feminisms and Rhetorics conference (FRC) has received criticism via social media, direct emails, survey results, and other venues regarding registrations costs. This criticism highlights that costs are prohibitive to graduate students, part-time educators, independent scholars, and full-time faculty not receiving travel support. In the wake of the pandemic, it seems likely that travel budgets will continue to decrease for all faculty. Thus, this is an ideal time to revisit conference affordability as a matter of anti-racist and inclusive conference design.

Figure 3: Screenshot of Recommendations for Conference Affordability ([Task Force Report](), p. 12)

"Complaints are pedagogical, and we need to practice feminism to learn from them."

—Ruth Osorio

Affordability *is* an access issue. Therefore, affordability is a social justice issue. As Osorio et al. argue in "The Laborious Reality vs. the Imagined Ideal of Graduate Student Instructors of Writing," (2021) graduate programs often imagine grad student instructors as "those with economic privilege and thus are more likely to be privileged along other axes of identity, e.g., white, single/childfree, cisgender, nondisabled" when constructing the pay and benefits package for GSIs (p. 139). This is true for stipends, and it's also true for the other costs grad students face when attempting to enter the profession, including high conference registration fees. When a conference is too expensive for grad students, the conference is inaccessible to grad students. The same holds for adjunct instructors and independent scholars. And historically, FemRhets has been too damn expensive.

In 2017, I was a part of a collective of grad students concerned about access, mentorship, and affordability at the Feminisms and Rhetorics Conference and the Coalition more broadly. The cost of the conference for grad students that year was $250, only $50 less than the cost for full-time faculty. The leaders who met with us responded to our concerns with a list of reasons why the conference cost so much. For them, the high cost was inevitable, and because they did not see it as a social justice issue, they weren't willing to re-imagine the conference to be more affordable and accessible. Many of us left that meeting feeling unheard, with some vowing to not return to the conference.

In 2019, I emailed the FemRhets Conference organizers asking about the cost for grad student registration. Co-chair Jen responded right away with the same numbers as 2017; there had been no change to the cost of grad student registration. Jen, now a colleague and a friend, admirably did what she could with the limited resources and support she had and reduced the grad student fee by $150, a welcome move indeed. At the 2019 conference town hall, I learned that the leaders we had met with in 2017 did not communicate our concerns to the conference organizers or the wider Coalition Advisory Board.

In all these conversations about conference cost, high registration fees have been justified by a laundry list of conference essentials: space, meals, technology, speakers, activities, swag, etc. More than once, conference organizers (and not just at FemRhets) have blamed high registration costs on American Sign Language interpreters and live-action captioning—an ableist argument that frames disability access as a financial burden (Hubrig & Osorio, et al., 2020). These conversations have left me frustrated and discouraged.

That was, until I joined the WFP Task Force in 2020.

I learned that with a small group of folks committed to access, we can imagine new ways of organizing a conference that reduces the cost for members. Our task force prioritized feminist praxis through creative thinking, collaborating across ranks and experiences, and listening to the complaints of grad students. Yes, it's easy to dismiss complaints, especially ones that make us uncomfortable. But as Ahmed (2021) argues, complaints are pedagogical, and we need to practice feminism to learn from them. By assuming a posture of openness, rather than defensiveness, in the face of complaints, we were able to imagine a more affordable, accessible, and inviting conference experience for grad students and other precarious scholar-teachers.

"Transparency is … a reiterative act that asks us to speak and share and also listen and allow ourselves to be changed."
—Jen Almjeld

Ruth and I met trying to solve a problem for the 2019 FemRhets Conference. Running a conference is pretty much all about solving problems. Anyone who has planned a conference will probably agree that by the end all you really want is for people to have gotten something out of the event and for you to have survived and so joining a task force four months after our conference wrapped–largely to revisit issues and mistakes from past conferences–was not at all what I wanted to be doing. But the process gifted me new colleagues and friends–Ruth and the rest of the team–and also taught me something about feeling defensive and about the trust and relationship that can be built via vulnerability and transparency. Participation on this committee was both valuable and, at times, painful as I reconciled my conference team's best efforts with some participants' very real discomfort and disappointment

with multiple issues at this and previous FemRhets. Conference hosting is entirely a labor of love–there is, for most of us, no extra pay and limited recognition and so revisiting the "pain points" in need of attention at the conference I was in charge of was difficult. But giving voice to this discomfort in our task force meetings–in what I registered as a safe space–helped me begin to uncover some of my own biases and also to really trouble the super complex work of conference hosting. Transparency was a leading value for our group's work and the recommendations we would make. Representing multiple genders, ethnicities, and career positions, we brought ourselves to this work and we tried – as often as possible – to mine the ways our positionalities colored our understandings, needs, and choices.

As the co-chair of the most recent FemRhets Conference, being transparent in conference planning was a goal for our local planning committee as well. In fact, the decision to discuss the conference budget at a town hall during the 2019 conference was intended to help others "see behind the curtain" of conference planning. However, it was, very understandably, read by some as ableist when the costs for CART services and other accessibility measures were discussed. I wish we had the insight that an Access Coordinator (as described in Figure 4) might have brought to the town hall to render our transparency more thoughtful. Being transparent, then, means not only sharing your intentions, but also seeing and honoring the impact of those intentions and actions. Learning to be accountable for my actions as a conference planner and to stand in the discomfort that comes with that is an important lesson I learned from hosting and being part of this task force.

In our task force work and, we argue, in the future of the conference, transparency cannot be a one-way action. It must be work that organizers at all levels (local hosts, Coalition representatives, and conference partners) as well as participants commit to taking up together. Being transparent about needs, resources, decision-making, and goals does not mean you make everyone happy, but it may lead to a greater sense of shared community and trust.

A quick perusal of scholarship on leadership and transparency reveals ways transparency is longed for in university governance (Ramírez & Tejada, 2018), promises to encourage better, freer science (Lyon, 2016) and medicine (Milton, 2009) and can be both liberatory (Farrell, 2016) and challenging for organizations and individuals (Král & Cuskelly, 2018). So many of these articles seem to understand transparency as a strategy or tool, but our committee came to see it as a way of being and an orientation to the work to help us begin to understand ourselves and others.

Feminist scholar Cheryl Glenn, in *Rhetorical Feminism and This Thing Called Hope* (2018), discusses "the feminist commitment to transparency" (p. 117). While Glenn focuses mainly on ways transparency is vital to research and knowledge building, the parallels between rhetorical feminism itself and transparency as both "in a constant state of response, reassessment, and self-correction"

(p. 4) seem relevant. Our work as a task force is an important step in "self-correction" regarding transparency in our conference values, goals, and voices. Our field is one predicated on notions of re-claiming and re-visioning, and it seems that the same commitments we've made to honoring research participants is relevant to ways we honor one another's work in the knowledge-building spaces of conferences.

Transparency, then, is not a performance or a strategy. It is a reiterative act that asks us to speak and share and also listen and allow ourselves to be changed. Being transparent as an organization does not mean simply telling others what we are doing, but it requires vulnerability, active listening, and a willingness to see our mistakes and to try to do better.

Accessibility is a major priority for the Coalition of Feminist Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition (CFSHRC) and the Feminisms and Rhetorics conference (FRC). The WFP task force approaches accessibility and access services here as an "asset that benefits the growth of knowledge, relationships, and disability/social justice in our field's shared spaces" (p. 105). As a community, we must be dedicated to creating, revising, adding to, and reflecting on the access services we put in place at FRC. This section offers guidelines and heuristics for such services and practices. (Please see Section 4 of this report that outlines FR Host Committee and the CFSHRC Conference Committee for suggested responsibilities concerning these practices.) Here, we first outline the work of a proposed Access Coordinator; then we outline practices with which the FR Host Committee and the CFSHRC Conference Committee should assist the Access Coordinator as well as strategies for amplifying the work of disabled scholars and scholarship relating to disability.

Proposed Accessibility Practices for FRC
(1) Identify and fund the hiring of an Access Coordinator for the FRC.
    (a) This person would be a member of the FR Host Committee (see Part 4) and their work would be to coordinate and carry out the majority of access services for the conference. We see this position as critical given that accessibility should be a focus for the conference. This work necessitates one person who can oversee access services and strategies in total and who is in charge of implementing these services and strategies at the conference. We also see this role as one in which the coordinator would gain skill and knowledge in accessibility practices and services. Thus this position could be defined as a professionalization opportunity, either for a disability studies scholar to contribute directly to CFSHRC, a disability rights advocate, or a graduate student interested in

Figure 4: Rationale and Position Description for the Access Coordinator for the Feminisms and Rhetorics Conference Committee (Task Force Report, p. 8)

"Shared accountability asks us to think about our collective responsibility to each other, as both conference planners and attendees." —Patrick Thomas

I was excited to be invited to this task force. As a previous conference host, I wanted to provide guidance for future hosts that I had found missing in my own experience. Primarily, my concerns were pragmatic: I was concerned with giving advice (as much as that is possible given the unique circumstances of any conference location). Jen and I even brainstormed ideas for a workbook-style conference host guide. After all, we had drawn on the expertise of previous conference hosts, we worked our best to replicate those models, and now we would provide future hosts with the same guidance. In retrospect, my naiveté is laughable: these pragmatic concerns like how to organize proposal reviewers or how to think about planning the conference schedule were so far removed from the work that our committee really needed to do, which was to radically rethink who the FemRhets conference was serving, and why.

Jen noted above that conference planning is a labor of love. Extending this idea, I would add that our conference committee allowed for me to ask the question that I was unaware of while I was preparing for the 2017 FemRhets conference, which is: how do the activities of conference planning demonstrate love? For whom was I expressing love in my conference? If conference hosting is an expression of love, then my love was being directed toward the Coalition itself, not necessarily toward attendees–a misdirection that in part stems from conference hosts' interest in putting on a "good conference" a characterization that resulted in reproducing the same kinds of conference experiences I had attended.

The tendency to reproduce prior conferences is even easier when we consider how little that conference hosts are given in terms of guidance, support, or requirements from the Coalition. Therefore, during our initial meetings, a thread I continually wove into our task force conversations was the need to provide conference hosts with more dedicated support for the work of hosting. As Jen and her colleague Traci Zimmerman (2021) have written,

> conference organizing [must] be recognized not only as incredibly taxing invisible labor, but also as viable intellectual work, something that the academy marks, values and rewards. Continuing to undertheorize and undervalue such work may damage not only individuals, particularly those marginalized by gender, race, and other identity markers, but also may have a negative impact on individual universities and disciplines that will likely continue struggling to find hosts willing to take on such demanding and often-discounted scholarly work. (p. 35)

Without clearer support for hosts and attention to the concerns that conference participants had been raising over the last four years, the Coalition was just beginning to recognize the very real consequences that Jen and Traci describe. What's more, the work of conference planning and hosting is complicated by the fact that this work has to be continually recast and reinvented every two years of the FemRhets Conference cycle. I attribute this complication to the intentionally "hands-off" approach that the Coalition has taken as a way to allow conference hosts to take full advantage of the unique offerings of their conference locations. Such an approach certainly delivers on an ethic of openness and interest in local control; however, as any organization is prone to developing norms and expectations tacitly — and as the FemRhets Conference has grown — the lack of guidance for conference hosts has likewise morphed into an unanticipated problem. Specifically, how does the conference enable hosts to bring a locally responsive and nationally accessible conference to fruition? To be sure, materially the Coalition asks very little of hosts beyond a few dedicated spaces and activities (manuscript mentoring, awards, a Board meeting). However, this hands-off approach is precisely what perpetuates the enduring criticisms of FemRhets: because the Coalition is never actually responsible for hosting the conference, it has been easy for past Coalition leadership to dismiss concerns about issues like

Previous Coalition Support of the FemRhets Conference	Recommended Revisions to Coalition Support of the FemRhets Conference

• $1,000 in seed money
• Assistance with use of CFSHRC website
• General help from a liaison committee of 3-5 Coalition members.
	• $5,000 in seed money
	• A newly established Conference Committee comprised of members serving in three-year staggered terms:
	  ○ A previous conference host
	  ○ A graduate student
	  ○ A contingent faculty member
	  ○ A future FemRhets host
	  ○ A member of the CFSHRC Executive Board
	• Recruit local hosts
	• Select host sites with attention to antiracist, inclusive, accessible practices
	• Coordinate with Access Coordinator
	• Offer guidance to host committees on enacting antiracist, inclusive, accessible practices
	• Provide guidance on budgets to maximize affordability
	• Create a Rapid Response Team to collect on-site feedback
	• Assist the host committee in archiving the conference
	• Provide input on speakers, planned activities, or community engagement as requested
	• Take charge of conference proposal review procedures
	• Write letters of recognition for host committee members.

Figure 5: Comparison of Previous Coalition Support and Recommended Revisions to Coalition Support for the Feminisms and Rhetorics Conference
([Task Force Report](), pp. 15-18)

affordability, whiteness, and accessibility as problems of a particular location or host committee rather than a larger problem for the Coalition itself.

What was necessary for me, then, was to ensure that our task force responded to the logistical and operational concerns on behalf of the Coalition rather than relying on individual hosts to temporarily solve a problem within a two-year cycle. The solution, to me, was one of shared labor in the revision of the Coalition's Conference Committee: in sharing the workload of regular conference activities — such as reviewing proposals, sending invitations, scheduling sessions, maintaining the conference website and social media, and evaluating the conference — the Coalition can make the conference more manageable for local hosts who can take up the work of arranging keynote speakers, organizing site-specific activities, and making sustaining connections between the Coalition and the local community (see Figure 5 above).

As our task force moved into more granular discussions of antiracism and accessibility, the notion of shared labor between the Coalition and local hosts changed shape for me. While the notion of shared labor certainly seemed an improvement over the current relations between the Coalition and the FemRhets hosts, it also still seemed inadequate for understanding how we could envision a different FemRhets Conference, one that espoused the additional values of antiracism, inclusivity, accessibility, and affordability. This is because an approach based on shared labor of conference organizing still presumed that the conference itself was already an inclusive space for all, which our 2017 and 2019

post-conference surveys indicated was not the case. For instance, the perennial concern about (and lack of solution for) conference affordability demonstrates how maintaining a replication model for the Conference perpetuates inequalities and exclusionary practices. As our task force continued, the issue of affordability moved from a peripheral to central issue, in large part due to parallel concerns about accessibility and the numerous constraints (travel, location, conference timing and duration, and on-site amenities) that in-person conferencing poses, as well as how conference practices that require in-person attendance might be counterproductive to the invitational ethos and conferencing practices and activities that we proposed in our recommendations. Beyond this, we recognized that tiered systems of registration are no longer a guaranteed way of managing conference affordability as faculty travel funds have been slashed over the last decade. In this way, while our recommendations for affordability remain tentative and ongoing, the response to the ongoing concern of affordability has taken on renewed urgency in the partnership between the Coalition and local hosts.

The affordability issue also illustrates how our task force's work developed beyond an accounting for shared labor to provide a set of recommendations that allow the Coalition and local hosts to re-envision the conference in ways that take on an ethic of shared accountability. Such shared accountability asks us to think about our collective responsibility to each other, as both conference planners and attendees, as both members of the Coalition and as members of local host committees. We are at the same time occupying both spaces, and by participating in the shared work, we become the people who determine the terms and conditions that shape the discourse of the conference.

Recognizing our shared responsibility to the collective care of the Coalition and its premier event — the FemRhets Conference — we are better able to help local hosts enact justice-oriented, antiracist, and inclusive conference activities and to construct spaces that overcome the Coalition's history of exclusionary practices. To do so, our task force re-visioned the role that the Coalition will play in the FemRhets Conference, and in supporting new antiracist, accessible, inclusive, and affordable values in conference planning, hosting, and evaluation.

"We need to add to, revise, reconsider our recommendations so that inclusiveness and antiracism are deeply woven into everything we do as we create this next conference and the ones that follow." — Jess Enoch

As our task force worked on our report for antiracist, affordable, accessible, and transparent conferencing practices, we knew that composing a document of recommendations could not be enough. As Mudiwa and Sherita note above, reports alone will not do the trick; we cannot offer "invitations" without creating "infrastructure"; "meaningful practice" must follow. Patrick's section clarifies our intention to suggest a change in the structure of how FemRhets

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Proposed Responsibilities for CFSHRC Conference Committee (CC):
(1) Actualize antiracist, inclusive, accessible, affordable conferencing practices for the FRC
   a. Craft the Call for FRC Hosts that underscores the value of antiracist, inclusive, accessible, affordable conferencing
   b. Select conference hosts and sites, paying particular attention to how the potential hosts will incorporate antiracist, inclusive, accessible approaches to conferencing
   c. Offer guidance and support to hosts regarding accessibility services for the conference
   d. Office guidance and support to hosts regarding FRC budgeting to maximize affordability
   e. Create a Rapid Response Team (RRT) that is tasks with collecting feedback and responding to grievances related to antiracism and inclusion as well as accessibility
   f. Collaborate with hosts regarding accountability and responsibility if/when issues arise at the FRC. The CFSHRC should share responsibility with hosts.

(2) Create opportunities for information sharing and structural support that recognizes hosts' labor and enables streamlined, consistent labor practices
   a. Create a sustainable portal for FRC proposal submissions that can be used for numerous conferences
   b. Coordinate vendors for the FRC and/or identify a more productive role for publishers at the FRC
   c. Write letters for hosts' annual review file to acknowledge their labor.

Additional Suggestions for the Coalition Conference Committee:
The responsibilities outlined above require changes to the current FRC workflows and processes, as well as the following suggestions regarding additional finances, personnel, resources, and actions.
   (1) Increased Finances for hosts: The conference seed money for the HC from the CFSHRC should be increased to $5000.
   (2) Suggested Resources: To assist future local conference host committees, the Conference Committee should create the following documents:
      a. Local host guidebook (as an update to current Host FAQs)
      b. Revise host application and Call for FRC Hosts to reflect investments in this report relating to antiracist, invitational, accessible, and affordable conference practices
   (3) The Committee should take on greater responsibility through increased presence, guidance, and labor for the next FRC.

Figure 6: Description of Responsibilities and Suggestions of the Proposed Coalition Conference Committee (Task Force Report, pp. 15-18)

operated so that there was consistent collaboration, commitment, and responsibility from the Coalition. We thus recommended that the CFSHRC constitute a standing Conference Committee that would take on the work of actualizing, revising, and adding to our recommendations. This committee's responsibility and privilege would be to envision and support consistent, non-negotiable, structured attention to antiracist, inclusive practice across conferences. Members here would serve a three-year term, selecting and supporting Host Committees for two conference cycles. Critical to note is that the Conference Committee would not set out marching orders for what the host must do, but instead this committee would collaborate with the host and take the opportunity to create inclusive, antiracist conferences.

As Figure 6 details, we identified that the duties of the Conference Committee would include composing a Call for Conference Hosts that prompts hosts to articulate how they will take up inclusive, antiracist conferencing practices, including conference themes and identification and amplification of BIPOC and emerging speakers. The Conference Committee would select and meet regularly with the Host Committee, ensuring, for example, that their call for papers (CFP) and conference announcements are shared with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), tribal

colleges, Hispanic Serving Institutions, other minority-serving institutions, and community colleges, and the Conference Committee would guide hosts through an antiracist, anti-ableist, inclusive review process for proposals.

Importantly, too, the Conference Committee would work with the Host Committee to engage the contemporary and historical complexity of the conference location (campus, conference event locations, city, state). As best they can, site selection should account for participants' precarities. The Conference and Host Committees should prioritize the safety and well-being of participants by openly acknowledging and naming past and present harms regarding how the location may impact conference attendees. The committees, too, should work together to create both programming around site selection and space for conversation regarding concerns participants might have. And yet another role of the Conference Committee would be to collect and archive the inclusive, antiracist work of each conference so that Coalition members and future hosts can draw from and reflect on our past work so that we can map out even more inclusive futures.

As my task force members have written, much of our collective WFP work was built on patience, respect and hope. I'm so thankful that the members of this group took on this challenge as we did and I'm proud of both our process and our product, because as most feminist work makes clear, the process of working together and grappling with these ideas as a group was just was critical as our product: the completed report. But the next step in the Coalition's process is just as important as the work the WFP completed. Once we submitted the report, we trusted that the Coalition would listen and respond, first and foremost, by constituting the Conference Committee. The Coalition has taken this next step, with Ruth, Jen, Patrick, and I transitioning to this new committee joined by Erin Banks-Kirkham, Erica Cirillo-McCarthy, Michelle Bachelor Robinson, and Britt Starr.

I am excited and a bit daunted by the work ahead of us, for I see this committee holding great responsibility as it is accountable not just to the Coalition and its members but also to the recommendations of the WFP report. As we set out on our work, though, I hope this new committee embraces the kind of accountability Ann Russo imagines when she writes that accountability "encourages us to shed critical light on how [oppressive systems] are manifesting in our lives and in our communities," enabling us to "build critical consciousness and action that would work to undermine and disrupt these systems" (p. 23). Feeling accountable and acting with accountability, therefore, is not only a critical endeavor; it's a creative one: as Russo explains, accountability "can free us up to act, to change, and to transform ourselves," and I would add, the structures around us (p. 23).

This is the emotional and embodied response I'd like to dwell on and sit with as I reflect on our WFP work. As I collaborated with this group, responding to criticisms, researching new possibilities,

considering different routes, I moved through a range of emotions. I have a deep commitment and attachment to the Coalition, to its goals, and its ambitions; it has been my intellectual home, even though I know it is, of course, flawed, and I know too it can do and be better. However, there was a shift for me in thinking (and feeling) about antiracist, inclusive conferencing when we started talking about our recommendations not as only addressing criticisms, which we no doubt *needed* to do, but in imagining new futures, in seeing new possibilities; it became something hopeful, creative, and exciting. The Conference and Host committees, Coalition members, and FemRhets participants should see this as a opportunity for imagination and invention–one in which we not only redress but re-imagine and see this moment of conference revision as one of transformative possibility–one we should welcome with excitement and energy because FemRhets will no doubt be a better conference as a result.

CONCLUSION

As our narratives illustrate, re-imagining the conference experience is not easy work. In building relations, we had to dig deep into uncomfortable feelings and realizations. Mudiwa reminds us that there is a "productive tension" in social justice efforts that often leave us with tentative hope, especially for scholars of color whose labor gets consumed by the ebbs and flows of this work. In conversation with discussions of labor, Sherita emphasizes the value of invitational conference practices that understand what critical narratives offer antiracist work and interrogate how current perceptions of conference practices reflect the experiences of its membership. Ruth documents the frustrations of advocacy work when organizations seemingly ignore the needs of its memberships and reflects on how collaboration can offer new perspectives. The discussion of communication and transparency expands as Jen invites us to consider how transparent conference planning pushes against performativity, and instead requires reiterative, personal and collective reckonings. Patrick discusses the need for a bridge between conference hosts and the Coalition and the shared labor and responsibility of "collective care." Lastly, Jess provides insight to the imaginings that we have alluded to throughout our collective reflections by narrating the development of the Conference Committee and mapping its commitment to support "consistent, non-negotiable" conference practices now and in the future. This work challenges us to listen, trust, and be open to critique. It requires that we continue to confront how conferences and our professional organizations uphold whiteness and able-bodiedness as the norm. Our drafts of various iterations of the report revealed to us what we already suspected: this work does not neatly fit into categories or operate as a series of items on a checklist. Instead, it is a series of temporal relations. It is recursive, demanding attention to the labor of reflecting on the past, attending to the present, and hope for an antiracist, invitational, and accessible future.

Again, it is not easy work, and the scope and depth of this kind of relational work will not be reflected on our CVs or tenure and promotion dossiers. And there is no guarantee that the recommendations we put forth will radically transform the Coalition or FemRhets. But, as Rebecca Solnit (2016) explains, "to hope is to gamble. It's to bet on the future, on your desires, on the possibility that an open heart and uncertainty is better than gloom and safety" (p. 4). Hope does not occur in a vacuum or on a whim; rather, as Kaba reminds us, hope is a discipline. In meeting to openly discuss our experiences of conferences, to link vulnerability with action in those conversations, we practiced hope. Not hope in the Coalition or any other professional organization, but rather, we chose hope in ourselves and each other as we laid bare the human cost of exclusionary practices in our profession. By no means is our set of recommendations a statement of resolution. Instead, we echo the notion that our work on the WFP task force not only presented hopes for imagined futures and a preliminary blueprint to bring those critical imaginings into fruition, but also fostered the kind of community where such imaginings could take place.

Coda: At the time of this writing, the Conference Committee has selected sites for the 2023 and 2025 conferences. Michelle Bachelor Robinson moved from the Conference Committee to the chair of the Host Committee, and we're thrilled to say that Spelman College will host the 2023 conference; the conference theme is "Feminisms and Reckonings: Interrogating Histories and Harms, Implementing Restorative Practices." The 2025 conference will be held at the University of New Hampshire, with Cristy Beemer serving as the chair of the Host Committee. The WFP Task Force looks with excitement and anticipation for FemRhets at Spelman and UNH. While we anticipate challenges as the Conference and Host Committees consider the WFP recommendations, we, the WFP task force members look forward to learning how these new committees build on and revise the suggestions we've provided as they consider how to imagine and deliver FemRhets that are antiracist, accessible, affordable, and transparent.

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Figure 7: Our "Good Ideas" List of Informal, Invitational Strategies for AntiRacist, Inclusive, Accessible, and Affordable Conferences (Task Force Report, pp. 20-21)

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Peer-Reviewed Article: Conferencing toward Racial Literacies from the Post-White Orientation

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Marcus Croom is assistant professor in Literacy, Culture, and Language Education at <u>Indiana University</u> in Bloomington. As a race critical researcher, his inquiries focus on race and literacies within educator preparation and educator development in American schooling, specifically teaching and learning as practiced with the Post-White Orientation. He typically generates knowledge through practice of race theory (PRT), case study, and qualitative methods, especially race critical practice analysis. His mission is to cultivate more human fulfillment and mitigate human suffering. Holistically, his work involves using research and experience to help individuals and groups develop racial literacies, which thereby advances the justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts of schools, universities, businesses, organizations, and communities.

Abstract
The 2021 Thomas R. Watson Conference theme was "Toward the Antiracist Conference: Reckoning with the Past, Reimagining the Present." As an invited expert, I presented a workshop that challenged Watson Conference participants to racially reorient themselves, personally and professionally, toward the Post-White Orientation as well as post-White conference design. Likewise, in this 2022 special issue of *Writers: Craft and Context*, this article urges readers to begin identifying and disrupting antihuman racial orientations and practices in themselves as well as conference designs. Such race reorientation work should use practice of race theory (PRT) to explicitly engage in healthier ways of thinking and doing race (i.e. developing and practicing racial literacies).

Keywords
conference, antiracist, practice of race theory, prt, post-white, racial literacies, equity practice

INTRODUCE: (CON)TEXT

In response to the 2021 Thomas R. Watson Conference call for consultation theme, "Toward the Antiracist Conference: Reckoning with the Past, Reimagining the Present," I presented a workshop that challenged participants to racially reorient themselves, personally and professionally. This challenge involved identifying and disrupting antihuman racial orientations and practices within conference designers themselves so they might understand how to begin using practice of race theory (PRT) to explicitly engage in healthier ways of thinking and doing race (racial literacies) and, in turn, begin to design conference opportunities for their conference participants to also develop racial literacies (defined below). In this special issue article, I offer a written experience of that online conference workshop crafted as an explicit depiction of expository writing. You have already begun this written experience by interfacing with this text in your own multifaceted, racialized context. The introduction is followed by a discussion of related literature, characterization of the Post-White Orientation, and an original conference case that should be used to initiate the practice of post-White conference design, particularly among higher education professionals. I conclude with useful questions that might guide you further toward post-White conference designs in 21st-century U.S. contexts. Overall, this article exemplifies the transforming framework *equity practice*, defined as identifying and discontinuing inequities (Croom, 2020a). Equity practice is transforming because the roots of inequities are accounted for and acted upon. In this instance, *equity practice* is applied to conferencing, but the *equity practice framework* has also been applied to U.S. schools, school districts, and universities in my previous and ongoing consulting work (briolearning.com). Throughout, from the article title to the references, I have created opportunities to notice and trace multifaceted racialization using this text as written for *Writers: Craft and Context* (and its

audiences, communities, their norms, their powers and positions, their languages, and so on).

RELATE: THEY SAY, I SAY

Dr. W. E. Burghardt Du Bois anticipated a practice theory of race and also indicated what racial literacies involve:

> Thus [Du Bois writes, with the aim of debunking the false concept of group and racial exclusiveness], it is easy to see that **scientific** [i.e. a biological] **definition of race is impossible**; it is easy to prove that **physical characteristics are not so inherited as to make it possible to divide the world into races**; that **ability is the monopoly of no known aristocracy**; that the possibilities of **human development cannot be circumscribed by color, nationality, or any conceivable definition of race**; [and yet] all this has nothing to do with the plain fact that throughout the world today **organized groups** of men by monopoly of **economic and physical power, legal enactment and intellectual training** are limiting with determination and unflagging zeal the development of other groups; and that the concentration particularly of economic power today puts the majority of mankind into a slavery to the rest. (Du Bois, 1940, p. 137; emphasis added)

In other words, (1) the common sense view of race is false (Croom, 2020b); (2) despite the fallaciousness of the biological theory of race, the "plain fact" is that race is real in human history and experience (Croom, 2016a, 2020c); (3) warranted is an alternative theorization that demystifies race and more accurately accounts for race in human history and (intersecting) human experience (Croom, 2020d); and (4) the ongoing fact of consequential human racialization calls for racial literacies (Croom, 2016a), that is, race critical "ways of thinking and doing that support human well-being amid the various processes that racially situate our lives, and some of these race practices and racial experiences are violence and trauma(tic)" (Croom et al., 2019).

As pioneers of race critical scholarship have pointed out for over 100 years (Berry & Gross, 2020; Du Bois, 1903, 1940; Morel, 1920; Morrison, 1992; Robinson, 1983; Wilson, 1860; Woodson, 1933), Western European and U.S. customs of race practice are routinely oriented by the baseless and morally bankrupt notion of racially White superiority, and anti-Blackness in particular (Grosfoguel, 2013). Thus, the vindicationist tradition and the Post-White Orientation (described below) name and counter this antihuman, Deficiency Philosophy, which continues to be generated and perpetuated needlessly through various forms of racial thoughts and practices, including European science and European critical theory (Croom, 2020b; Drake, 1987; Herbjørnsrud, 2021a, 2021b; Hoover, 1990; Rabaka, 2009; Robinson, 1983).

DEFINE: RACE AND THE POST-WHITE ORIENTATION

Du Bois has clarified, and the American Anthropological Association has recently confirmed, that it is "impossible" to define race on biological terms. Therefore, how should race be defined? In practice of race theory (PRT), race is defined as "consequential social practice" (Croom, 2020b). This means race is not in our bodies at all. Rather, race is what we *think and do*, including attributions to human bodies, to good or ill (intersecting) effects. According to this practice view of race, our racial past and racial present need not be our racial future because understanding race as practice and process refutes racial inevitabilities. That is, we can think and do race for good rather than ill. Obviously, it remains to be seen whether human beings *will* think and do race for good, especially those persons (across racial groups) who are stockholders with investments in the fake value of White and Whiteness. Still, toward the aim of post-White racial futures for us all, I have proposed that we use race critical conference designs as avenues to cultivate and distribute healthier ways of thinking and doing race and to accelerate the realization of post-White racial futures in the United States and perhaps other Westernized contexts as well.

PRT is one of at least six race frameworks currently used in the field of education, including critical race theory (CRT), Marxism, Whiteness studies, cultural studies, and the multidimensional theory of racism and education (Croom, 2016b; Leonardo, 2013). Historically, there are at least three orientations to race: the White, Anti-Black Orientation; the Post-Racial Orientation; and the Post-White Orientation (Croom, 2016c). Each of these orientations is embedded within a worldview or philosophical stance. According to Mary Rhodes Hoover (1990), there are two enduring worldviews of human beings that are categorically distinct, namely Deficiency Philosophy and Vindicationist Philosophy. These standpoints are linked to thoughts and practices that racialize human beings differently; some are hyperraced (to the point that race is distorting or obscuring other aspects of persons) while others are hyporaced (to the point of minimizing or neutralizing race as an aspect of persons).

On one hand, the Deficiency Philosophy views the hyperraced as "inherently flawed, deficient or pathological and [the hyperraced] are inferiorized relative to Whites, the hyporaced" (Croom, 2020c, p. 535). On the other hand, the Vindicationist Philosophy "views both Whites and BIPOC as racial groups, but this philosophy also recognizes the full humanity of the hyperraced. From this standpoint, [the hyperraced] are vindicated from all the false and harmful notions that deficiency philosophy perpetuates simultaneously to the detriment of the hyperraced and to the benefit of Whites" (535). Furthering Hoover's work, I have noted that a weakness of Vindicationist Philosophy is the unwanted possibility of maintaining White and Whiteness as a reference point or frame of reference (Croom, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d). Therefore, I have coupled "post-White" to Vindicationist Philosophy in order

to delete—*in every way*—any false valuations and unnecessary reference-making to White(ness) (Croom, 2016c).

Parenthetically, the "post" in the term "post-White" signals that "human culture—likely forever transformed by (White superordinate) racialization—is arguably returning from a brief, horrific hiatus wherein the racially White and Whiteness were baselessly, yet experientially, significant" (Croom, 2020b, p. 279). In other words, "post-White" conveys that (a) the barbaric distortions of White(ness) have occurred and are consequential, (b) racialization remains (post-White is not postracial), (c) and White(ness) is neither the preeminent nor preferred way of being in human culture—contrary to all the forms of false claims that have and continue to prop up White(ness) as if it is or ever was inherently preeminent or preferred. Accordingly, "post-White" is not at all "anti-White" because the Post-White, Vindicationist Orientation is principally indifferent to the empty, valueless notion of White(ness)—though admittedly "White supremacy" at times might elicit a nose chuckle.

Continuing, I have also contributed terms—"hyperraced" and "hyporaced"—to further interrogate uncritical race practice, to further disrupt the Black-White binary, to further highlight the diversity and precarity of White(ness), and to further expose White(ness) as a racial classification rather than as some neutral or nonracial existence (Croom, 2020c). In sum, whereas the White, Anti-Black Orientation and the Post-Racial Orientation are both embedded in Deficiency Philosophy, the Post-White Orientation is embedded within the Post-White, Vindicationist Philosophy. This results in rejecting—*in every way*—the false notion of White(ness), or the hyporaced as above the hyperraced, or BIPOC(ness). BIPOC(ness) means Black(ness), Indigenous(ness), and People of Color(ness), where "ness" includes the intersecting aspects of these ways of being fully human (e.g. languages, (non)religions, etc.). Regardless of our past and present, ongoing racialization does not itself justify antihuman racial hierarchies. We can reorient and practice race for good, not ill (develop and practice racial literacies).

When we reorient from Deficiency Philosophy to Post-White, Vindicationist Philosophy with regard to conference designs, a few questions arise: **How is the White, Anti-Black Orientation operating in ourselves—across racial groups? How so in our conference designs? Also, what patterns and barriers are hostile to the humanity of BIPOC conference participants?**

After introducing the Post-White Orientation and raising these questions, I offered a template that conference designers could use to support the development of racial literacies through de/reconstructing the priorities and practices of their conference gatherings (see Figure 1). The aim was for conference designers to understand how to begin using practice of race theory (PRT) to explicitly engage in healthier ways of thinking and doing race and, in turn, begin to design conference opportunities for their conference participants to also develop racial literacies. Defining,

and reincorporating from above, "racial literacies . . . means developing those ways of thinking and doing [race] that support human well-being amid the various processes that racially situate our lives, and some of these race practices and racial experiences are violence and trauma(tic)" (Croom et al., 2019, p. 17).

ILLUSTRATE: POST-WHITE CONFERENCE DESIGN

As Du Bois and many others have long pointed out, an alternative theorization of race is warranted, one that demystifies race and more accurately accounts for race in human history and (intersecting) human experience. Practice of race theory (PRT) is the alternative account of race that aligns with the Post-White, Vindicationist Philosophy. As stated above, race is not biological, human-capacity determining, or natural. Rather, race is what we *think and do*—with human bodies and more—to good or ill consequences.

When we advance from the "common sense view" of race to the "consequential social practice view" of race (i.e. PRT), we begin to understand "there is a mutual relationship between race micropractice, race mesopractice, and race macropractice" (Croom, 2020b, pp. 269, 279). In other words, whether in texts like this one or during scholarly conferences, race is being thought and done for good or ill—across racial groups. This fact raises additional questions: **When are we ourselves (not) practicing race? And why? When is race (not) practiced in conference documents (written form) and discussions (unwritten form)? And to what effect?**

When the questions above are considered, they demand practical answers to an obvious question: What do we do now? *We begin developing racial literacies and practicing post-White conference design.* The bolded questions above support the development of racial literacies and the following is a guiding template for how to practice post-White conference design:

- **Identify and reject** all forms of the Deficiency Philosophy; the White, Anti-Black Orientation; and the Post-Racial Orientation.
- **Identify** forms of **race practice** (unwritten, written, symbolic, material, individual, institutional, etc. using PRT).
- **De/reconstruct** processes and practices that perpetuate the Deficiency Philosophy; the White, Anti-Black Orientation; and the Post-Racial Orientation.
- **Establish** processes and practices that perpetuate the Post-White Orientation (Croom, 2016c):

   By post-White orientation, I mean a racial understanding and practice characterized by (a) unequivocal regard for "non-White" humanity, particularly "Black" humanity; (b) demotion of "White" standing (i.e., position, status); (c) rejection of post-racial notions; (d) non-hierarchical

racialization; and (e) anticipation of a post-White socio-political norm.

• **Designate** paid or unpaid roles for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) to co-design conference gatherings. Note: This process follows the identifying and re/designing work that has already begun and that will continue after hyperraced co-designers become involved. These designated co-designers are not the "clean-up crew" for troubled conferences or conferences in crisis. Rather, these are expert analysts and conference-design leaders.

Post-White Conference Design Template
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Identifying

LAUNCH — Identify and Reject All Forms of the Deficiency Philosophy; White, Anti-Black Orientation; and Post-Racialism — Confirmed? → Identify Forms of Race Practice (unwritten, written, symbolic, material, individual, institutional, etc. using practice of race theory or PRT)

Confirmed?

Re/Designing

CONTINUE — De/Reconstruct Processes and Practices that Perpetuate the Deficiency Philosophy; White, Anti-Black Orientation; and Post-Racialism — Confirmed? → Establish Processes and Practices that Perpetuate the Post-White Orientation

Confirmed?

Designate Paid or Unpaid Roles for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) to Co-Design Conference Gatherings
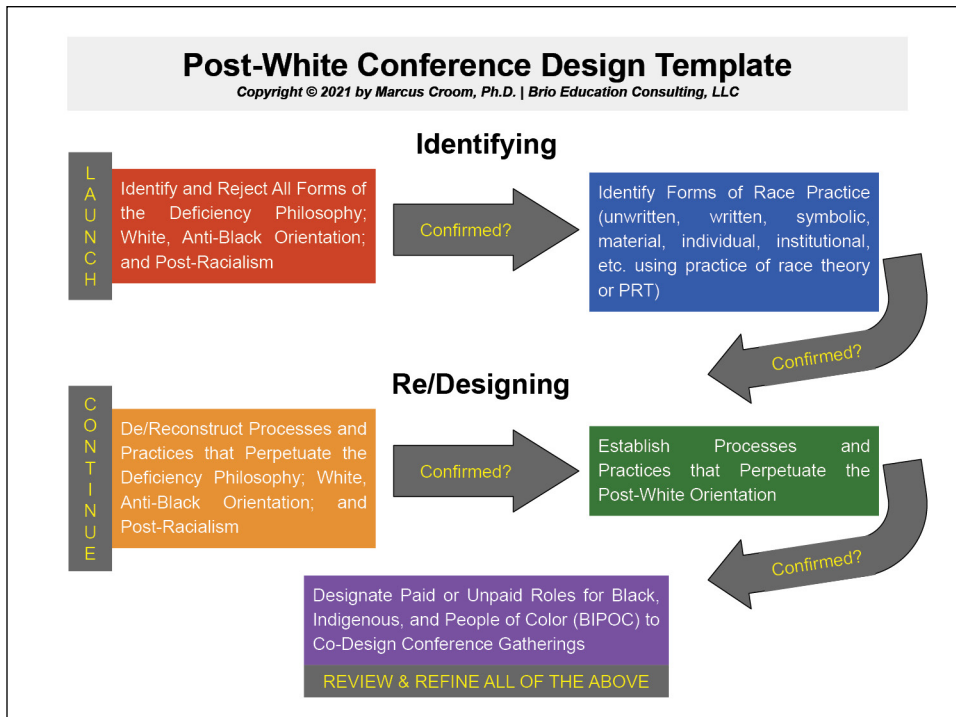
REVIEW & REFINE ALL OF THE ABOVE

Figure 1: Post-White Conference Design Template

To provide conference designers the opportunity to begin de/re-constructing future conferences by developing racial literacies and practicing post-White conference design (as discussed above), I offer a fictional conference case below. This original conference case is not intended to portray any actual academic conference that exists anywhere in the world.

The IAAA Conference Case [version 9.8]

The International Association of Anonymous Academics (IAAA) meets annually at a selected venue throughout the world. The annual conference is designed by a committee whose members serve a three-year term. Members roll onto the committee, run an annual conference, then roll off the committee after the third year, having provided support to new committee members as well as those who are currently responsible for carrying out an annual conference.

During the planning of the upcoming conference, concerns were raised in the feedback about a prior conference and about how some members were experiencing their annual gathering. For example, while IAAA members clearly celebrated more inclusive bathroom facilities, the use of additional languages for all materials and sessions, and indicated they liked the enhanced online features and platforms of the conference, members also said that they "*feel excluded*," are "*invisible*," and one even stated they are "*tired of getting so little in return for my IAAA membership, conference registration and my travel costs*." The conference planners were puzzled.

With these member comments in mind, conference planners took a closer look at the sessions' feedback. It seemed the sessions with groups of attendees who moved together across various sessions reported a different experience than individuals who attended various sessions. The planning committee also noticed that informal events were mentioned as members discussed the formal conference schedule and events. For example, one member said, "*I don't even go to the keynote anymore. Instead, I catch up with colleagues or meet with people who want to talk about our work. I play back the keynote online after the conference is over*." Other comments suggested some members were very happy with the sessions: "*I really like the way we have moved away from identity politics to put more focus on research! The last few annual meetings have felt really odd. Great job.*"

More generally, conference planners also picked up on differences related to incomes, resources, status, and how members envisioned the future. One member said, "*I plan my participation by the location of the conference. If it's not held within driving distance of where I live, I don't come.*"

Another member asked, "*Are we really an international organization if we only meet outside the U.S. every fifth year? When was the last time we gathered in Paris? Why do we keep going to Florida and California?*"

Some on the planning committee were stumped to read, "*Once I arrive, I find a grocery store so I can make sandwiches in my room. If there's free food or bottled drinks, I make the most of it until I can get back home.*"

Related to the future, a member shared, "*I'm not sure if I'll keep coming. Now that I'm a professor, it seems like I'm hearing the same old stuff every year. Our peer-reviewed sessions report and present the same ideas over and over again. And most of it has nothing to do with the real world.*"

But the planning committee also read a different take: "*I'm thankful I had a chance to present a poster session about my work. My children said they see me in a different light now. Plus, this is the first major trip my spouse and I have had since I started my doctoral program! Next year, I plan to present a paper.*"

Notably, even the feedback from the keynote speaker suggested differences: "*When you reached out to me, I was hesitant to accept your invitation, but I did. Looking back, this was not a good decision. Not only did I feel disrespected by some of your members, but I also discovered that you offered me a smaller contract than last year's keynote speaker. After rearranging my schedule to join you, covering my own travel expenses, receiving a smaller honorarium, and being disrespected before and after my keynote, I'm upset by all of this and regret my decision.*"

The conference planning committee understood something was going wrong with the annual conference. The feedback made this clear. It was not at all clear what they should do to redesign the conference based on what they learned.

IAAA Conference Case Analysis Guide

Since this conference case is wholly fictional and is not intended to portray any conference anywhere in the world, begin by noting whether any actual conference experiences came to mind for you as you (re)read. Describe and examine such associations if they occurred and note other connections that you bring to your reading of this fictional conference case. Also, consider each example of quoted feedback from IAAA members and the guest speaker. What question(s) did their comments raise for you? Given that there are no names provided in this conference case (International Association of Anonymous Academics), how are you imagining each anonymous character presented? Write and/or draw what you had in mind as you (re)read the conference case. What do your own thoughts reveal about your own racial orientation (i.e. White, Anti-Black Orientation? Post-Racial Orientation? Post-White Orientation? Combinations?) and your own positioning as a reader? Relate your own race thought to your own race practice in light of this conference case, whether these are imagined racial practices or actual racial practices (as defined in PRT). Which case comments or sections above would you connect to the post-White conference template? Why? Using the post-White conference template, share three actions you would take to begin redesigning the IAAA annual conference. Justify your

possible actions by relating them to words and/or meanings in the IAAA Conference Case.

CONCLUDE: DISCUSSING AND FURTHERING QUEST(ION)S TOWARD POST-WHITE CONFERENCE DESIGN

Although I had a conclusion in mind when I began crafting this article, I did not write the conclusion you are now reading until I had revised this article a number of times, including revisions that responded to early feedback from peer reviewers. Guided by helpful feedback from my peer reviewers, as well as other readers I contacted for feedback, I made various minor revisions; moved some text from the introduction above to this conclusion; foregrounded some ideas within the text; further defined key terms throughout to avoid misunderstandings; wrote an original conference case (IAAA Conference Case) to provide readers an opportunity to begin developing racial literacies and practicing post-White conference design; and decided against connecting this article to the work of one or two fellow special issue authors (as suggested in some feedback) because highlighting only one or two special issue articles in my own contribution, instead of highlighting each article published here in this conference volume, might undermine my purpose for writing this contribution: to help readers use the philosophical, theoretical, and conceptual understandings discussed above (Post-White Orientation, PRT, racial literacies, post-White conference template, etc.). Along these lines, I also added that this article exemplifies *equity practice*, defined as identifying and discontinuing inequities (see "Identifying" and "Re/Designing" in Post-White Conference Design Template above) (Croom, 2020a). This revision was important because readers might benefit from explicit reference to the *equity practice framework* and the possibilities of applying this framework in various contexts within or beyond U.S. schooling.

When you look back at what is written in this article, do you see I have provided signpost headings throughout this text, beginning with the article title, that point out the largely invisible or unspoken conditions to which the writer and the writing are responding, particularly multimodal and multileveled racialization? For example, this text is structured according to Westernized academic conventions routinely hierarchically racialized as White and regarded as universal, although many erudite expository writing possibilities and conventions beyond Western Europe and the United States of America might have been as effective or even more so.

Also, have you considered that the selected citations provided as references (i.e. the authorities to which I have chosen to refer) do not fully account for all the persons who have informed what these writers have said or what I am now saying? This means I have crafted a text that proffers who should be regarded as authoritative, as well as who might not be regarded at all, depending on what readers bring to their reading of this text. Given the pervasiveness

of the false notion of White superiority—especially in Westernized contexts—the Deficiency Philosophy and the White, Anti-Black Orientation could either be perpetuated or debunked through my citations. Does my text reject Deficiency Philosophy, the White, Anti-Black Orientation, and postracialism?

Altogether, readers are invited to use my text to not only "learn about" my selected topic (an exposition) but also to "learn across" the situated positions involved with my writing task and any other selected writing task (an exposé). Accordingly, look back at the text above to note what I take for granted and what I make explicit because each move should open up questions and conversations. Also, consider how my expository task (this crafted text) exposes the situated, hierarchical racialization already in progress before the text (the writer), in the text (the writing), beside the text ("*The Archive*" and the archive; Croom, et al., 2021), and behind the text (historically, politically, citationally, etc.; Croom, 2021), even tacitly in some instances. Restated, having read this text, now look back for everything this text is pointing toward, explicitly or implicitly. Engage—rather than evade—the multiple, situated aspects of racialization that this article raises and let's work together to end harmful race practices through conference design and other avenues.

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Antiracism is Not an Action Item: Boutique Activism and Academic (Anti)Racism

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Abstract

As organizations and institutions responded to calls for racial justice following the murder of George Floyd in 2020, many did so in performative ways that maintained the racial status quo. In this article, the author argues that such performativity has been both pervasive and intentional. Drawing parallels between her experiences advocating for racial justice in a nonprofit organization and in an English department, the author explores the type of liberal boutique activism that, already common in nonprofit spaces, directs much of the discourse on (anti)racism in academic settings and squashes more substantive efforts to challenge white supremacy. The author also explores how her positionality as a white Jewish woman impacted her experiences as an antiracist activist in an academic department, illuminating how linkages between racism and antisemitism are covertly weaponized in white spaces by those who profess interest in social justice but really seek to uphold white supremacy.

Key words

academia, activism, antiracism, antisemitism, Jewish, nonprofits, performativity, white supremacy

I n June 2020, I resigned from the executive board of a small nonprofit on which I had served for three years. The fund, as members referred to it, supported educational and extracurricular opportunities for Black and African American boys and young men under eighteen. It had become clear during the time I served on its board that the fund's practices were steeped in ideologies of exceptionalism and white saviorism and that perpetuated rather than challenged systemic anti-Black racism and that there was little interest in interrogating how white supremacy sustains itself structurally and rhetorically, even within spaces that profess to work toward racial justice.

As a white Jewish scholar-activist whose work focuses on antiracism, I was familiar with this dynamic. In fact, at the time I was extracting myself from the fund, I witnessed the same dynamic play out in the English department where I work. I know how important it is to build coalition and call others in, particularly white folx, to do the work. Some coalitions, however, lead to more dead ends than open doors.

In this essay, I tell you two stories. One is about the nonprofit. The other takes place in an English department. It will become clear as these stories unfold that they have run on parallel tracks, neither of which leads to social justice. Ultimately, this essay seeks to expose the liberal boutique activism that, already common in nonprofit spaces, directs much of the discourse on (anti)racism in academic settings.

STORY #1: WHITE-SAVIOR PHILANTHROPY

By the time I'd joined the fund, the president and founder, an older white woman I'll call Amy,[1] was having trouble recruiting new scholars and soliciting donations. Despite telling me she hoped new membership would be revitalizing, she categorically dismissed my suggestions. I learned quickly that we functioned as a board in name only: There were no votes and few conversations.

"She can't handle anyone who disagrees with her," a board member named Phyllis explained. A white social worker in her midseventies (and, to my knowledge, the only other Jewish woman on the board), Phyllis had been with the fund since its founding.

It was only with Phyllis that I discussed my concerns: I was troubled that eligibility for scholarships was determined by grades and standardized test scores, which have been shown to be biased against Black and Brown students (Strauss, 2014). Public schooling was designed with the express purpose of assimilation, an aim it continues to serve (Keisch & Scott, 2015). Because the emphasis is on performing whiteness, it seemed the fund was perpetuating racial exceptionalism rather than challenging racist injustice.

Fundraisers, which previously had been held in a racially and economically diverse neighborhood, had been moved 20 miles away to the predominantly white gated community where Amy now lived. The change was for the benefit of Amy's neighbors, some of whom were donors or sat on the board (though, according to Phyllis, they were more interested in the Sunday brunches Amy hosted than in racial justice). Of 15 members, all but two were white. A wealthy West Indian neighbor served on the board, as did an Asian retiree who rarely attended meetings or replied to emails. Though there had been attempts to recruit more BIPOC some years earlier, the Black teacher educator who joined the board had resigned after six months.

Still, as an old friend of Amy's, Phyllis remained an active member, as did I, thinking I could contribute to a more equitable organization. Maybe that was my own white-savior complex talking.

In 2019, Amy threatened to dissolve the fund: "We've had a long and productive run. It saddens me that it will end with me." One board member suggested we "rethink our mission and target group." We didn't hear from Amy for six months.

In June 2020, less than a month after George Floyd was killed on camera by Minneapolis police officers, and while uprisings were occurring in cities across the country, Amy introduced our newest board member: Olivia, the daughter of Amy's West Indian neighbor who also served on the board. That same day, Amy requested "immediate" feedback on a letter she had drafted to "the

boys" (scholarship recipients) directing them to write about their experiences with racism for their update to the board, a biannual scholarship requirement. The letter read:

> When my husband and I first conceived of this program it was because we were both horrified over the fact that so many black youth were being incarcerated. We felt that if they were offered enrichment programs, they would be able to envision a life separate from street culture . . . You boys are all bright and have experienced different kinds of enrichment which will help you pursue a career and a productive life. I wonder do you feel you are somewhat handicapped by the color of your skin?

I got a phone call from Phyllis: "*Street culture*? Asking them if they're *handicapped*? How can she say this?"

Amy expresses horror at incarceration rates of Black men but does not acknowledge the racism of the criminal-justice system that leads to such outcomes. She elides systemic racism when she refers to "street culture," a racist trope even more transparently euphemistic than "urban" or "inner city." She suggests the support of the fund will help the scholars "pursue a career and a productive life," a statement that both reductively implies educational enrichment will open doors for the scholars who receive it, overlooking the various ways racism manifests structurally outside of education, and presents Amy as the white heroine who can help these "boys" access a better (and whiter) life.

"What's the point of this requirement anyway?" I asked Phyllis. I was more familiar with the fundraising side of the organization. "What do they usually write about?"

"They just say what they've used the money for and thank Amy for the support. That kind of thing. I'm going to say something."

"I will too."

Phyllis emailed the board that the letter was "patronizing" and presented the fund as the "great white savior." I added I was troubled by the voyeuristic nature of the writing task and its potential to trigger or retraumatize those assigned to complete it. I suggested we discuss our aims: Why were we asking young Black men to talk to us (a board comprised largely of white women) about racism? Why was any writing assignment mandatory? In a conciliatory move designed specifically for the fragile white audience I recognized I was dealing with, I said I appreciated the apparent intention to "listen" but added we may want to think ahead: "What will we do with the information we may obtain or the stories we may hear?"

Olivia quickly shared a revision: Terms like "street culture" and "handicapped" had been deleted, but the letter still opened and

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1 All names of fund and faculty members are pseudonyms.

concluded with the mandate to write about racial injustice, and there was no mention of why those stories were solicited or how they might be used. The next day, which happened to be Juneteenth, Amy emailed a third draft with only minor changes and informed us she had already sent the letter to the scholars that morning, without board approval.

Because philanthropy can easily end up "reinforcing the very social ills it says it is trying to overcome" (Dorsey, Kim, Daniels, Sakaue, & Savage, 2020), an organization must acknowledge how whiteness functions in its operation "before it can earnestly and holistically support racial justice" (Cordery, 2020). I wondered if this kairotic moment could lead to such a conversation. If the organization was a system, this, I thought, might be a point of leverage at which "the least amount of effort can enact the most amount of change" (Melzer, 2013, p. 86).

I emailed the board, expressing my hope that we too might be able to consider what this moment meant for our organization and reflect upon the work we could do, as an institution, to combat our complicity in white supremacy. Where the annual letter was concerned, I suggested we reconsider our approach in the future because the requirement itself could be seen as racist.

Phyllis called me: "You used the word 'racist.'"

"I called the requirement racist."

"I know. That's not how Amy's going to read it."

To many white people, it is worse to be called racist than it is to actually *be* racist. Given my audience, I could have employed a more strategic approach, but dancing around white fragility is exhausting and responding to white racism with whitely politeness does little to challenge the overt or covert ways white people enact whiteness and racism on a daily basis.

As Phyllis had predicted, Amy became defensive, immediately reframing herself as the harmed party: "We have wonderful relationships with our scholars and their parents for more than 25 years," she said, "so I find your comments offensive." By emphasizing her individual relationships, Amy attempted to distance herself from systemic racism. In apparent efforts to further assert her own moral goodness, she then forwarded an email from a donor praising her for teaching him "what it means to help people." Tactics like this serve to protect a person's "moral character against what they perceive as accusation and attack while deflecting any recognition of culpability or need of accountability" (DiAngelo, 2011, p. 64).

Olivia defended Amy: "I'm mixed race," she said, "and I don't think it's racist."

I've thought about this a lot since. My impressions of Amy were pretty fully formed by then, but I didn't know Olivia and I wanted to honor her experiential knowledge as a mixed-race person, knowledge I do not and cannot possess. We exchanged emails. In Olivia's view, we were "just asking the boys to share their thoughts on this historic time in the way that we might ask any young person—regardless of race—to share their thoughts." In my view, questions remained: Would we have been asking any young person to share their thoughts on this historic moment? Or were we asking because the protests were about Black lives and the young people in question were Black?

Unfortunately, we couldn't even have that conversation: Perhaps predictably given that white supremacy in the nonprofit world often manifests "in the silencing and/or removal of foundation staff that speak out against" that same white supremacy (Cordery, 2020), Amy sent two emails in quick succession requesting my resignation, one noting that my opinions did not align with her work, the other declaring me "not a good fit" for the board.

Even after I (and Phyllis) resigned, Amy didn't let it go. She claimed my "rhetoric" had ruined her friendship with Phyllis, a move that minimized the significance of our concerns by reducing them to a term that, though it denotes my field of research, often carries a pejorative connotation in popular discourse. With this, Amy confirmed what I'd always sensed: This fund had little to do with social justice and much to do with her personal relationships and her whitely sense of self. In fact, Amy continued to harass me via email, alternating between direct insults and passive-aggressive heart emojis—I wish I could say I was joking—until my second request to be removed from the email list.

How naïve was I? I had seen Olivia's appointment to the board and Amy's letter, problematic though it was, as signs she and the board would be willing to engage in a more in-depth and nuanced discussion of the organization's role in combatting anti-Black racism. That did not turn out to be the case.

And I wonder now about my own motives. The letter was, in my view as a race rhetorician, blatantly racist, but, looking back, I think my resignation was not only about the letter; it was also about my general dissatisfaction with the fund and not feeling heard for three years while serving on the board. I just wasn't interested in the "boutique activism" (Szetela, 2016) of women for whom social justice was a weekend activity akin to shoe shopping. Maybe the change I needed to make in that kairotic moment was not institutional but individual.

I, like Amy, had made it personal. Maybe I was one of the problematic white women for not letting it go. And maybe Olivia, as the newest member and the daughter of another member, felt she had no choice but to defend Amy. But I can't shake the feeling that Olivia's appointment was not only about nepotism but also about tokenism.

This is one story of one small nonprofit that, I imagine, will fold sooner rather than later. But situations like this are microcosmic and illustrative of a problem increasingly apparent in academia, especially as programs, departments, and universities rush to respond to public outcry for racial justice in the most whitely and neoliberal box-checking ways possible. The next story illustrates this dynamic.

STORY #2: WHITE-SAVIOR SOLIDARITY

By the time I'd joined the English department at South Lake State University as the only Jewish faculty member, the major was having trouble recruiting new students and retaining current students, and many of my colleagues seemed, for lack of a better description, generally unhappy. Some of the first meetings I attended devolved into passive-aggressive arguments rife with racism and sexism among tenured faculty members. Despite telling me they hoped my presence as a new faculty member would be revitalizing, often I felt ignored and dismissed. I also noticed I was having trouble communicating with most of my new colleagues, who never seemed to speak directly. Like many Ashkenazi Jewish people from New York, I've been accused of having a more "aggressive" communication style than non-Jews (Schiffrin, 1984; Tannen, 1981). I speak directly and animatedly, and I lapse occasionally into *Yinglish*, "English-language phrases with syntax influenced by Yiddish" (Benor & Cohen, 2011, p. 71). For Ashkenazi Jewish people, animated speech and argumentation are part of "sociability," not, in fact, argument (Schiffrin, 1984), but whenever I spoke passionately, I felt my coworkers' eyes on me like I'd grown horns since opening my mouth.[2] I began prefacing my comments with "I'm from New York, so . . ." to prevent misunderstandings, even though I really wanted to say, "I'm a Brooklyn Jew and this is how I talk so please just listen to the content of my statement and don't make me keep giving you this disclaimer."

Suzanne, a recently tenured woman of color, gave me a warning one afternoon after closing the door to my office: "When I got here, I was advised to be careful. People here hold grudges." I became close with Rita, a tenured woman of color who dealt with the department by avoiding it and the people in it as much as possible, and Daphne, a white woman who repeatedly tried in vain to get all the women together for a meeting to discuss strategies for combatting the sexism and racism in the department. Rita and Daphne shared stories about their experiences in the department and repeatedly told me we had to do something.

I learned quickly that the practices I had by then come to associate with academic departments were nowhere to be found at South Lake: There were no bylaws, no elections, and few conversations. In the year before a middle-aged white woman I'll call Diane was elected chair—she ran unopposed after the dean threatened to appoint an outside chair if no one stepped up—I worked with Suzanne and Daphne to develop bylaws and create an elections committee and with Daphne and Rita to introduce conversations about racism and misogyny in small corners of the department. The bylaws and committee stuck, despite Diane's complaint that she couldn't see why everything needed to be "codified," but the conversations didn't.

In June 2020, less than a month after George Floyd was killed on camera by Minneapolis police officers, and while uprisings were occurring in cities across the country, two Black women in prominent staff roles on campus (outside the English department) called out the relative silence on the university employee listserv. As interim director of the writing center, I had already shared our philosophy, which explained across five pages how the writing center enacts antiracism through its approach to writing tutoring, and I had presented at academic senate on antiracist approaches to writing instruction. I'm also one of the few white faculty on my campus whose work explicitly examines racism. So, I sent a call to white faculty and staff, cosigned by Daphne and five other white-identified colleagues, calling white members of the campus community into this work. Over the next month, 60 white members of the faculty, staff, and administration attended workshops we hosted to discuss the roles of white people in dismantling racist systems.

In the English department, around the same time, I asked my full-time colleagues what we were doing to support Black students and part-time lecturers. (There were no Black faculty members on the tenure track.) Another colleague suggested we write a solidarity statement. No one wrote anything, so I drafted three sentences, emailed them to my colleagues, and asked them to expand upon the statement. A colleague suggested we include links to organizations doing substantive antiracist work and to resources for people seeking support. For two weeks, those three sentences were circulated among the members of the department for little more than wordsmithing. Commas were changed, "antiracism" was taken out, and "Black liberation" was replaced with "equality," which was then replaced with "Black liberation." No additions were made and no resources were provided, but the statement was posted.

In response, a coalition of graduate and undergraduate students and part-time lecturers emailed the department decrying the brevity and insincerity of the statement. Over the next month, they called us to collective action via emails and letters pointing out the racism, sexism, and linguicism they experienced in the department. I led a workshop for my colleagues on how we could begin to challenge inequity in our department. Rita and Suzanne shared stories of the racism and misogyny they had been subjected to at the hands of their colleagues; Diane, the new chair, turned off her camera.

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2 One trope in anti-Jewish propaganda is the depiction of Jewish people as having horns.

Following this workshop, Rita and I shared additional resources about antiracist pedagogy via email with the department. Daphne said she was excited to keep this work going. Diane replied to say we couldn't continue because we weren't on contract during the summer, and, despite my requests, did not put any discussion of antiracism or the structural inequities of the department on the agenda for the first two department meetings of the semester. At the first meeting, I asked why we weren't continuing the conversation we began over the summer. Others seemed interested, so we discussed ways of building a more diverse curriculum and more inclusive pedagogies. Diane's agenda went quickly out the window.

At the second meeting, Diane showed us PowerPoint slides about how to use the degree audit system for student advising. When someone mentioned we should consider culturally relevant approaches to advising, Diane told us a story about one of her former students: He was "African American *but* he had potential," she said, and explained that, through her persistent mentorship efforts, she was able to "get him across the finish line" (emphasis added). Diane's use of "but" to describe the relationship between the student's racial identity and his academic aptitude as she perceives it marks his "potential" as extraordinary. This construction demonstrated her view of this student as exceptional, distinct from other Black and African American students, who, it is implied, lack such potential. Further, by emphasizing her individual efforts, Diane attempted to distance herself from systemic racism and further assert her own moral goodness as someone who "helped" a Black student. Like Amy's emails, this tactic served to protect Diane's "moral character" from attack "while deflecting any recognition of culpability or need of accountability" (DiAngelo, 2011, p. 64).

When I tried to interject, Diane told me we had no time and had to move on, then switched to another slide. No one said anything in the meeting about Diane's comments, but I received text messages from Rita and Daphne, who were equally horrified. No further meetings were scheduled, and we barely heard from Diane for six months. I heard through the grapevine that Diane was distraught about the prospect of having to run another meeting because she didn't want to be called racist, specifically by me. (That I had never called her or anyone else in the department racist was apparently irrelevant.) She had told people she couldn't understand why I was suddenly so "angry." I must be "unwell," she said. Of note, these labels draw upon racist and ableist anti-Jewish stereotypes (Gilman & Thomas, 2016; Schiffrin, 1984; Tannen, 1981) that have positioned the Jewish body and its expression as essentially distinct from and inferior to Christian bodies and their expression (Gilman, 1991).

In early March 2021, Diane finally called a meeting for April; the dean, we were informed, would be facilitating the meeting. Then, on March 16, a white man killed eight people, six of whom were Asian women, in a series of shootings at three spas and massage parlors in Atlanta, sparking a national conversation about violence against Asian and Asian American people in the United States.

After two weeks, and after numerous other departments had released statements claiming solidarity with AAPI colleagues and students, Diane reached out to the department to suggest we craft a similar statement. "I think we need to say something," she wrote.

Daphne wrote that she had reservations but would be willing to contribute if we were honest in the statement: "I'd rather admit where we have fallen short and explain how we plan to do better if the other options are empty gestures or, worse, silence." Ilana, a white woman who had joined the department that year, and therefore wasn't present for the previous solidarity statement debacle, attached a draft of a solidarity statement to which she asked others to contribute and suggested we have a meeting to discuss this further. We were now a week into April, and I was having a distinct and overwhelming experience of déjà vu. I wrote,

> The rise in anti-AAPI hate crimes has reintroduced what I see as a familiar dynamic in our department: We talk a lot about the work we need to do—with some of us talking a lot more than others—and little material happens to improve working conditions for us or learning conditions for our students. . . . This [antiracist] work involves, among other things, critical self-reflection, open and honest discussion, reconsideration of internal structures that serve as barriers to equity, and intense collaboration. . . . I completely agree with Ilana that a meeting to discuss this is in order.

A white man replied all: "Let's talk about this at the department meeting." No one else replied, and, when Diane sent the agenda for the meeting a week later, there was no mention of the solidarity statement on it.

Over the next six months, conversations about antiracism were replaced with empty talking points about "collegiality" and "civility," perpetuating a discourse that disproportionately burdens people of color (see Newkirk, 2016) and marginalizes anyone not acculturated into the discourse of what I have called, admittedly somewhat facetiously, "being American" (Grayson, 2020, p. 71). In a professor culture that centers whiteness and suppresses conflict (Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001; Yoon, 2012), the violence of the institution emerges even through "warm (even cherished) ideals such as solidarity, loyalty, and collegiality" (Ahmed, 2021, p. 180). While I worked with programs and initiatives outside the department, my experience inside the department worsened. For over a year, Diane had refused to meet with me about my progress toward tenure, my course schedule, or the work I was doing in either composition and rhetoric or antiracist education. In my annual review, in which she begrudgingly recommended my reappointment, she undercut my accomplishments and injected enough little barbs that I had to write a three-page rebuttal. Making matters worse, the new emphasis on "collegiality" made it even easier to hold my New York Jewish speech patterns against me. Whenever I spoke directly, I was told I was "inappropriate"

or "rude," and I was constantly advised to "be nice," even when I thought I *was* being nice.

Over the next year, in my attempts to advocate for my colleagues, my students, and myself, I learned what Sara Ahmed (2021) meant when she declared, "To be heard as complaining is not to be heard" (p. 1). Through the complaints I made, those voicings of negativity I, like Ahmed, saw as "political action" (p. 68), I experienced the powerlessness institutional complaint creates in the complainant, the sense that "making a complaint about harassment can often feel like being harassed all over again, becoming subjected, again, to another's will" (p. 45). And most people I encountered in the institution had little interest or incentive to address the problem. A few months earlier, I had conveyed my concerns to the interim dean, who admitted Diane was not fulfilling her duties but said I was stuck with her because no one else was willing to serve as chair and because he wasn't "willing to fail" as dean. A literary scholar, he had retreat rights to the English department, he told me, but, for obvious reasons, he didn't want to work in the English department either. I had also spoken to the provost, who attributed the backlash to my antiracist work as "a vehement last gasp of white supremacy" and hired two restorative-justice mediators to address the "problems" in the department. The mediators, however, one of whom advertised herself as a Christian-faith-based counselor, were less interested in sexism or racism than they were in resolving "the growing tensions" between Diane and me. Like many other administrators when faced with bullying of a woman faculty member by a woman bully, the administrators at South Lake and even the mediators they hired dismissed my complaints as "stereotypical infighting rather than recognizing the intensity and impact of bullying" (Sepler, 2017, p. 301).

When I told the mediator I'd expected the mediation to be about the department as a whole and that I didn't want to be "in circle" with Diane (a term I still don't understand and which they told me I wouldn't understand unless I was in said circle) without knowing how I would be protected as a probationary faculty member, the mediator told the university I was "not a suitable candidate" and should be excluded from mediation. From what I understand, Suzanne refused to participate. Daphne and Rita chose to be "in circle," however, and seemed to grow increasingly sympathetic toward Diane and increasingly resistant to any overt discussion of racism or sexism. To my knowledge, no one else in the department was asked to participate.

I did not feel heard when I complained to the administration, but when I finally filed official complaints with the university, I learned just how little I would be heard from that point forward. If we understand all "universities are part of the society in which they are created" (Shenhav-Goldberg & Kopstein, 2020, p. 256), and that the United States is built upon a racial contract (Mills, 1997) designed and continually reshaped to maintain white supremacy, we can deduce that, in the microcosm of the university, legislative bodies and administrative procedures are likewise intended to uphold the racial contract. The same is true of even those administrative entities tasked with enforcing university policies and relevant laws ostensibly intended to increase equity, officially if not in practice, like Title IX officers, who often are among the first in a series of administrators one encounters in the "messy and circular" process of filing a complaint (Ahmed, 2021, p. 35). In this way, university agents like the interim dean and procedures like those we are required to follow to file a complaint can be seen as "coercive arms of the state . . . working both to keep the peace and prevent crime among the white citizens, and to maintain the racial order and detect and destroy challenges to it" (Mills, 1997, p. 84).

The department had been a toxic place long before I arrived, but faculty members had become resigned to racial and gendered imbalances in workload distribution, frequent microaggressions, and instruction motivated by deficit ideologies about language, writing, and learning (Grayson, forthcoming). When I pushed my colleagues and supervisors to face the violence of these dynamics, I was blamed for having revealed them. When a person complains about racism, "it is racism that leads her to use the word racism" (Ahmed, 2021, p. 156), yet in naming racism, I challenged the racial contract I was expected to accept in exchange for the privileges of whiteness (Mills, 1997).

Ahmed (2021) notes that "a complaint can be how you learn about institutional violence, the violence of how institutions reproduce themselves, the violence of how institutions respond to violence; yes, we can be hit by it" (p. 180). And I was hit with it: I stopped receiving emails about committees I was on; the interim dean ignored me at campus events. When we finally had another department meeting and Daphne suggested we talk about how our department interactions could improve, I shared that I felt I had been ostracized in recent months. No one responded. Diane, however, began reading from a prepared list of grievances, some of which were directed at me. When I interjected to tell Diane that the concerns I'd shared had not yet been addressed, the meeting devolved into a yelling match, and I logged off the Zoom call.

After my complaints became official, my experience shifted from "covert" or "quiet bullying," a type of strategic "relational aggression" (Sepler, 2017), to "academic mobbing," a type of workplace bullying that frequently targets teachers or researchers "who speak out against unethical behaviour" (Khoo, 2010, p. 63). Privately, Suzanne, Rita, and Daphne all told me they knew how unfairly I was being treated and they didn't think the situation would improve any time soon. Perhaps relatedly, they each said, in separate phone or text message conversations, that they wouldn't feel comfortable defending me publicly in group settings like department meetings. "People are scared of you," Suzanne told me over the phone one afternoon. "You're just so… New York! We aren't like that here."

A colleague who experienced similar mistreatment in another department referred to it as a form of hazing, a term I think applies if

we understand hazing is really about socialization and indoctrination. In the context of an institution designed within the parameters of the racial contract, it might be more accurate to think of such hazing as a "metaphysical operation" (Mills, 1997, p. 82) intended to compel acceptance of the racial contract through "ideological conditioning" (p. 81). The academic mobbing I experienced was designed to teach me, someone deemed "too new to abide by, or respect, an institutional legacy" because I was unwilling to reproduce it, that, in this institution, "the right kind of people were the white kind of people, the kind of people who would not complain about racism" (Ahmed, 2021, p. 153).

How naïve was I? I had seen my appointment to the faculty and the attendance of my colleagues at the workshop I ran as signs that members of the department would be willing to engage in a more in-depth and nuanced discussion of the department's role in combatting racism. I thought that, on some level, even if they weren't shouting it from the rooftops, the department wanted real equity work. I mean, they hired me, right?

But that's the trap. The truth is that most institutions just want to *look like* they're doing equity work. After all, as Ahmed (2007) explains in "A Phenomenology of Whiteness," in white institutional spaces, "recruitment functions as a technology for the reproduction of whiteness" (p. 157). To the extent that "spaces extend bodies and bodies extend spaces" (p. 158), I was expected to understand that my presence in the space of the department was a condition of my own white privilege and conditioned upon my willingness to extend, not challenge, whiteness. Intellectually, I knew this, but I had convinced myself that this time it was different; I convinced myself *I* was different—how very whitely of me indeed.

Part of my work as a white-privileged person is self-reflection: challenging the willful ignorance and misunderstandings of racism the racial contract requires of white people. And part of my work as a white-privileged antiracist educator is helping other white people separate themselves from the agreement they have entered into "to see the world wrongly, but with the assurance that this set of mistaken perceptions will be validated by white epistemic authority" (Mills, 1997, p. 18). Self-reflecting in this way since filing those complaints, I've realized my confidence in filing them, my sense that I was entitled to complain, likely stemmed in part from my own white sense of entitlement. And perhaps it was my whiteness, my entitlement, that led administrators to doubt the validity of my complaints. As Ahmed (2021) points out, "[T]hose with a strong sense of entitlement tend to dismiss complaints *as* expressions of entitlement" (p. 147). Maybe I was another one of the problematic white women because I, like Diane, like Amy, couldn't let go of the harms I'd suffered.

But I was also the complainant whose complaint made her a target, and once you complain, "you can end up being made to feel that you are the problem, that the problem is you" (Ahmed, 2021, p. 16). I've wondered about my own motives, particularly where

the solidarity statement was concerned. Diane's sudden urge to release a solidarity statement was hypocritical and whitely, but, looking back, I think my refusal to contribute was not only about the statement; it was also about my general dissatisfaction with the department and not feeling heard for three years while working so far beyond my contractual obligations that the only day off I'd taken in all that time was to nurse a concussion I'd suffered during a midsemester move. I'd spent the past year working to exhaustion during a pandemic that killed multiple family members and friends, trying to figure out how I, as an academic, could stay active as an activist. The truth is, I was exhausted. And I was pissed off.

The process of complaint forces the complainant to pay closer attention to their surroundings and take note of things that previously "might have been part of the background" (Ahmed, 2021, p. 41). I began to remember other things: I remembered that, when I arrived, a colleague mentioned the department was suspicious of "outsiders." I remembered an incident a few months later when, seated around a conference table during a meeting, a colleague told a joke that made my stomach drop. The punchline was one word: *kike*. The colleague later apologized, and I brushed the incident into the background—or, more accurately, *back into the ground*. That is to say, I buried it. I buried it because, at the time, acknowledging even the possibility of antisemitism challenged my white self-conception and the racial contract I too, despite my work, despite my Jewish positionality, had tacitly accepted. Now, here I was, the only Jewish faculty member, being made the scapegoat for the department's toxicity.

In white, Western, Christian societies, Jewish people have historically been constructed as outsiders (Bronner, 2019; Gilman, 1991), and scapegoating has been one of the primary rhetorical strategies and manifestations of antisemitism (Kiewe, 2020). Scapegoating is "the projection of guilt in an otherwise unguilty entity; it is the result of guilt experienced by the one who practices scapegoating" (p. 17). In other words, it is about displacement: Scapegoating the outsider allows the community to deny the problems the community faces by framing them as problems introduced by the outsider, whether the outsider pointed them out, attempted to rectify them, or did nothing at all. Consider, for example, the chants of "Jews will not replace us!" from the neo-Nazis who marched in Charlottesville in 2017. This white-supremacist expression of replacement theory relies upon the belief that Jewish people are the "hidden hand" directing challenges to the white Christian way of life (Bronner, 2019). Given that Jewish people make up 2 percent of the U.S. population, the logic at play here isn't that Jewish people are "trying to replace whites with Jews. They are trying to replace whites with Browns and Blacks, and pulling the strings to do so" (Baddiel, 2021, p. 50). In the eyes of white supremacy, the problem in the community isn't racism but instead the attempt to challenge it. These same logics made me, a Jewish person who does antiracist work, an easy scapegoat in a department seeking to maintain its white racial order and unwilling to admit as much.

Since filing formal complaints, most of which went nowhere, were addressed "in ways that reproduce[d] the problems" (Ahmed, 2021, p. 22), and required an abundance of "communicative labor" (p. 35), I've also thought a lot about that initial offer of mediation. Should I have participated? Should I have shared the harms I'd shared so many times before—and have shared so many times since—with a person who insisted I was to blame for them and only talked behind my back? Meeting with Diane "in circle," on the off chance we'd be able to work things out, might have made my daily activities at work easier for me, but that restorative mediation had nothing to do with activism, and I don't think I owe it to anyone to spill my traumas for an audience that just wants to watch me bleed.

Despite the whiteness of my skin, I still can't shake the feeling that my own hire was also a form of tokenism.

BOUTIQUE ACTIVISM AND PERFORMATIVE (ANTI) RACISM

I resigned from the fund less than two weeks after Democrats in the House of Representatives knelt down in Kente cloth to demonstrate they cared about Black lives and police reform while protestors marched in the streets for police abolition and racial justice. To many progressives like myself, this congressional piece of performative (anti)racism was typical of "the Democratic Party, the party of optics and gesture" (St. Felix, 2020). In that first workshop I gave for my department the following month, I defined *performative (anti)racism* as declaring oneself antiracist without actually doing anything (Condon, 2020). Performative (anti)racism is oppositional to antiracism—but where, I've been wondering, does activism fit in?

I have been teaching college classes since 2010, when most of my students were barely younger than I was, when I still wore pencil skirts and buttoned-up button-downs to approximate an image of the college professor based more on fiction than reality. But the longer I spend in academia, the more I realize it's all performative. Like the elbow-patched tweed my father wore when he taught theatre classes at the local community college and the uptight necklines I wore to teach college seniors as a grad student, most supposedly antiracist programming (or what academic institutions label "DEI work") is mere costume. It makes us look the part without embodying it.

Most "DEI work" stems from inadequate and incomplete frameworks that conflate or overlook the structural, interpersonal, and psychological dimensions of racial literacy (Guinier, 2004) and do not challenge the deeply rooted ways of knowing and doing that result from and perpetuate white supremacy. Even when individual and interpersonal dimensions are addressed, the structural dimension is rarely addressed directly or substantively. After all, institutions exist in order to, well, exist. That's the only way they

have power. Thus, initiatives that focus on individuals rather than systems generally are implemented in lieu of broader structural changes. As Shirley Anne Tate and Damien Page (2018) note, "[T]he institutionalisation of unconscious bias as an alibi for white supremacy is part of white fragility and, thereby, unconscious bias reinstates white racial equilibrium" (p. 146). In this way, these initiatives do not challenge but instead perpetuate whiteness and white supremacy.

In April 2021, I spoke to teachers and scholars at the Watson Conference about the approach I use when I work with campuses, my own included, on antiracism and critical whiteness. I approach organizational change using a structure designed to address the ingrained ideological, rhetorical, and institutional nature of white supremacy and how these structures perpetuate racism and inequity. I explained that this integrative approach examines how white supremacy functions at multiple levels and in multiple spaces within an organization or conference. I described some of the successes I'd had on my campus: Inequitable policies, including those around student conduct, plagiarism, and academic integrity, were revised; I was invited to join the university's strategic planning committee to contribute to a reconceptualization of the university's mission and vision, which now include direct statements and multistep plans for antiracist reform. I also described the challenges, some of which stemmed from the fact that the systems we work within weren't built to be equitable. We tried to get a resolution submitted in Senate to better compensate contingent and BIPOC faculty for invisible labor like mentoring; as soon as we completed the necessary documents, we were notified that Senate procedures had changed, requiring us to repeat the entire process, which it was too late to do in that semester.

Once I'd been labeled the campus's "equity warrior" (Dugan, 2021), I was asked to do a lot of things for free that were, despite being my areas of research and activism, far outside my actual job duties. I know the same is true for many of my colleagues, particularly women of color. What troubles me, though, is that, while some of us began to turn down "invitations" and "opportunities" for extra work that wasn't supported, some of the same colleagues who complained to me about the extra work women were doing continued to take on that labor because, to paraphrase one coworker, they love the department, dysfunctional as it is. I recognize not everyone shares my progressive politics or my activist orientation, but I wonder if they realize that the institution will never love them back and that things won't change if the same people keep picking up the slack.

Professional organizations are institutions too, with long histories of racism and, generally, little incentive to change. Committees are formed to do the labor the organizations long should have been doing; then, the work of scholars of color is ignored or rejected for being too radical (Inoue, 2021). Committee members try in vain to make changes via unwieldy bureaucratic procedures designed to make the process of changemaking difficult. Statements

released by organizations represent years of work and considerable compromise (Smitherman, 1995). Organizations try so hard to appease all of their members, including those who adhere to or actively promote racist ideologies, that they achieve, at best, incremental change; more commonly, they achieve nothing but the maintenance of the status quo.

The theme of the 2021 Watson Conference was antiracist conference planning, but this year, like in previous years, instances of racism made clear the conference remained a "space saturated with whiteness" (Olinger, 2020). Part of the problem is that large-scale change is hard and takes work and necessitates that we "imagine worlds not yet seen" (Condon, 2012, p. 121). Too often, "educators treat equity as a series of tools, strategies, and compliance tasks versus a whole-person, whole-system change process linked to culture, identity, and healing" (Dugan, 2021). This sort of reductive conceptualization imagines equity as an endpoint rather than ongoing, "on-the-ground activism" (Condon, 2012, p. 137). Real change requires we move beyond "DEI" and "implicit bias" to explore interpersonal relationships, encourage leaders to examine how policies and practices may (inadvertently) perpetuate inequity, and develop integrative and transformational practices.

But the other part of the problem is something that, for many, is very difficult to admit, though it is readily apparent in the stories I've shared about my experiences in nonprofit and the academy: The performativity isn't accidental. The institution doesn't want to dismantle itself. Institutions steel themselves from the impacts of real, transformative antiracist work in much the same ways they protect themselves from complaints against the institution: through strategic inefficiency, policies that do not achieve the ends they state, and institutional procedures that incentivize silence and the acceptance of the status quo (Ahmed, 2021). Thus, our institutions and many of the people in them, if they aren't wholly reactionary, commit only to liberal performative gestures like implicit-bias trainings for the same reasons Democrats wore Kente cloth instead of passing legislation. They want symbols like solidarity statements for the very reasons many of us want to move beyond those symbols: Symbols don't fix structural ills. But in educational spaces that have substituted diversity for inclusion, it makes sense that the only sort of activism tolerated is the boutique activism that "substitutes multiculturalism . . . for a real progressive political position" (Szetela, 2016). Thus, the antiracist activist must, as Frankie Condon (2012) explains, "learn to name and critique the disparities and contradictions between what institutions say they stand for and what and how they actually do what they do" (p. 138).

Not long ago, I talked with antiracist writing studies scholar Alexandria Lockett about how we each define *activism*. I said activism requires we actually *do* something. I couldn't find the words to explain what I meant, but, of course, she could: She said activism is defined by risk—we put something on the line to do something.

She's right. And that definition helped me make sense of things I've been trying to work through myself for over a year now:

I'm not sure there's any space for activism in institutional "DEI work" because the institution doesn't want to put anything on the line.

The institution will take your activism and turn you into a martyr.

The only activism, then, is what we do that challenges the institution.

For these reasons, I'll conclude this essay much as I concluded that [presentation] at Watson 2021: Is antiracist activism possible within your organization? Racism is contextual. Racial literacy is contextual. And antiracism is contextual. In short, you can't have an antiracist conference if you don't have an antiracist organization. And, frankly, you won't have an antiracist conference or an antiracist organization simply because you attend a few presentations on antiracism and conference planning. This is deep, long, ongoing work. No single event, handout, consultation, or conference is going to fix the intentional design and unintentional complicity of our field in racism and white supremacy.

So, I ask you: What are you doing on a daily basis, *in praxis*, to decenter, destabilize, delegitimize, and dismantle white supremacy in your organization?

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"Precisamos de conocimientos para la vida, una universidad libre de colonialismo". Reflexiones en torno a la descolonización del saber y de la universidad desde la experiencia

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INTRODUCCIÓN

"Precisamos de conocimientos para la vida, una universidad libre de colonialismo"

Aline Ngrentabara Lopes Kayapó,
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El texto que aquí presento fue pensado y escrito en el marco de la invitación que recibí de la Universidad de Louisville, USA, para participar en una mesa organizada por la Conferencia Watson en la que participaron académicos/as nativoamericanos y una académica originaria del Pueblo Chatino (Oaxaca) la Dra. Hilaria Cruz Cruz, profesora de dicha universidad estadounidense, a quien agradezco la invitación a éste espacio ya que muy pocas veces pensadoras-académicas "indígenas" de *Abya Yala*[1] somos convocadas a estas Conferencias en Universidades del Norte Global.

Es importante decir aquí que no hablaré desde la "neutralidad", ni desde la distancia que impone la objetividad científica, hablaré en primera persona desde mi experiencia y como una campesina académica originaria del Ñuu *Savi*, pueblo de la lluvia[2], en

Resumen

El presente documento reflexiona en torno a la descolonización del saber y de las universidades a partir de la reflexión del papel de las Conferencias como espacios de descolonización. Se reflexiona colocando en el centro el reconocimiento del lugar de enunci-ación de quien escribe y desde ahí se *senti-piensa* en torno a la importancia y urgencia de trabajar por la descoloni-zación más allá de las Conferencias y más allá de las Universidades. Se par-te de la idea de que la descolonización más que un discurso o una metáfora es una apuesta por la vida y con los pies en la Tierra. El colonialismo es hoy en día una realidad cotidiana y permanente que enfrentamos con más violencia los integrantes de pueblos racializados, pero es también desde esos lugares de resistencia donde están surgiendo reflexiones y acciones importantes hacia la descolonización. En este tex-to se analiza también el papel de lxs académicxs provenientes de pueblos indígenas y la crítica a la Universidad como lugar hegemónico de construcción del conocimiento.

Palabras clave

descolonización, colonialidad del saber, sentipensar, descolonizar la universidad, académicos indígenas.

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1 Tierra Madura, Tierra viva o Tierra en florecimiento, nombre utilizado por el pueblo Kuna, para nombrar al territorio que hoy se conoce como continente americano.

2 "El territorio histórico-cultural del Pueblo de la Lluvia hoy en día se encuentra dividido política y territorialmente entre los estados de Oaxaca, Guerrero y Puebla, en el Estado nación México. A partir de la Colonia y hasta el día de hoy, el Ñuu Savi se ha dividido en: 1) Mixteca Alta, región fría y montañosa en el estado de Oaxaca que sobrepasa los 2000 msnm; 2) Mixteca Baja, region cálida y erosionada del noroeste de Oaxaca, este de Guerrero y sur de Puebla por

el sur de lo que hoy se conoce como México. Me interesa reflexionar en torno a la universidad y su relación con la *colonialidad del saber,* las implicaciones y posibilidades de descolonizar la universidad, así como del papel de los y las investigadoras indígenas en las universidades, las condiciones en las que se llega y las posibilidades de generar conocimientos situados y al servicio de nuestros pueblos o colectividades desde otras epistemologías y ontologías que tienen profundas diferencias con el pensamiento hegemónico de las universidades de occidente³/occidentalizadas.

Este texto se presentó en una Conferencia que se planteó como objetivo repensar y reimaginar el papel de las Conferencias. Y si bien las Conferencias con importantes espacios de reflexión dentro de las universidades, el proyecto descolonizador tiene que ir más allá de ellas. Porque considero que es fuera de los muros universitarios donde se vive y lucha cotidianamente frente a un sistema de muerte, es fuera de la universidad donde se están construyendo alternativas que resisten al actual sistema moderno/colonial.

Creo también pertinente señalar aquí que mis referencias para la elaboración de éste texto son principalmente los *sentipensares* de hombres y mujeres al sur del Río Bravo, algunos están en la académica y otros fuera de ella. Son reflexiones también desde la sociología y la antropología, así como desde los estudios rurales. Con esto no niego que existan en otras latitudes trabajos valiosos referentes a éste tema sobre todo de personas racializadas, por ejemplo, de integrantes de pueblos nativoamericanos que sé que también han venido reflexionando estos temas con los pies en la tierra, desde sus territorios. Sin duda esos trabajos son de mi interés, pero son textos que no están traducidos al castellano y eso dificulta el intercambio, sucede también con los textos escritos en castellano o en otros idiomas que no están traducidos al inglés y que por tanto no son leídos en el norte del continente. Sin embargo, considero importante construir diálogos sur-sur y por eso valoro mucho la oportunidad que me da la Conferencia Watson para traducir y hacer llegar este trabajo a lectores que no leen en castellano.

LA UNIVERSIDAD OCCIDENTAL, COLONIALIDAD DEL SABER Y VOCES SUBALTERNIZADAS

No llevemos la ingenuidad hasta el extremo de creer que los llamamientos a la razón o al respeto del hombre puedan cambiar la realidad. Para el *negro* que trabaja en las plantaciones de caña de Robert no hay sino una solución: la lucha.

F. Fanon, 1986,224

La universidad occidental está colonizada. La ciencia moderna y el eurocentrismo son sus bases (De Sousa Santos, 2021:17; Lander, 2011) sobre las cuales se sostiene su pretensión de verdad y universalidad. La universidad es el lugar privilegiado de la colonialidad del saber. Éste, es un concepto acuñado por Edgardo Lander (2011) que se deriva de la idea de la colonialidad del poder del sociólogo peruano Aníbal Quijano (1992; 2011). Colonialidad no es lo mismo que colonialismo. Aunque la colonialidad, no niega la continuidad del colonialismo, es muy importante diferenciarlos porque aporta elementos que hacen énfasis en la existencia de la colonización del imaginario de los dominados y la apuesta de los dominadores/colonizadores por impedir la producción de otras formas de pensamiento y concepciones de mundo, así, la colonialidad se define como:

> …una sistemática represión no solo de específicas creencias, ideas, imágenes, símbolos o conocimientos que no sirvieran para la dominación colonial global. […] represión [que] recayó, ante todo, sobre los modos de conocer, de producir conocimiento, de producir perspectivas, imágenes, sistemas de imágenes, símbolos, modos de significación; sobre los recursos, patrones e instrumentos de expresión formalizada y objetivada, intelectual o visual. Fue seguida por la imposición del uso de los propios patrones de expresión de los dominantes, así como de sus creencias e imágenes referidas a lo sobrenatural, las cuales sirvieron no solamente para impedir la producción cultural de los dominados, sino también como medios muy eficaces de control social y cultural, cuando la represión inmediata dejó de ser constante y sistemática (Quijano, 1992:12)

En este sentido, la colonialidad del saber opera racializando los saberes, es decir, clasificando y jerarquizando los conocimientos de los pueblos colonizados. De tal forma que, los saberes de los colonizadores fueron considerados como válidos y los de los pueblos colonizados destruidos y/o construidos como "diabólicos", por tanto, podrían ser eliminados sin ningún problema o consecuencia. Durante el periodo colonial los religiosos de las distintas congregaciones fueron quienes asumieron esa tarea como mandato divino. El 12 de julio de 1562 Fray Diego de Landa Calderón, misionero franciscano, quemó en Maní, Yucatán, a la vista de toda la población, los códices mayas que le habían sido mostrados por los habitantes de esas tierras, una vez que el fraile ganó su confianza. Diego de Landa, quien escribiera después la *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán*, fue el artífice de incinerar sesenta toneladas de libros de conocimientos de ese pueblo milenario (Meneses, 2011). Sobre ese mismo hecho Lourdes Arizpe y Maricarmen Tostado (1993: 69), señalan: "miles de códices fueron destruidos por los

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debajo de los 2000 msnm, y 3) Mixteca de la Costa, region que corre a lo largo de la costa del Pacífico de Oaxaca y Guerrero". (Aguilar, 2020: 23)

3 *Occidente,* se entiende aquí como lo define Stuart Hall, como una idea, un concepto, un lenguaje para entender, para imaginar un complejo conjunto de historias, ideas, eventos históricos y relaciones sociales. *Occidente*, como *idea*, permite caracterizar y clasificar sociedades en categorías, captar imágenes complejas de otras sociedades a través de un Sistema de representación que establece un modelo de comparación estandarizado que a su vez establece un criterio de evaluación para clasificar a las sociedades (Hall, 1992)

conquistadores españoles; fray Diego de Landa quemó cien mil códices mayas".

Juan de Zumárraga, fue otro fraile franciscano, que como lo describe I. Rayón, en el *Diccionario universal de historia y geografía,* ordenó la quema de miles de libros considerados como un peligro*:* "viendo en los códices figuras del mal y para quitar la idolatría al pueblo, se apoderaron de los archivos de Tenochtitlán y Tlatelolco, incendiaron con ellos una hoguera del tamaño de un monte que ardería por espacio de ocho días" (Rayón, 1854: 979). La cantidad de libros quemados es de dimensiones incalculables (Davies, 1988: 23; Polastron, 2007: 45).

Para el siglo XIX fueron los Estados-nación emergentes quienes se encargaron de dar continuidad al proyecto colonial y fue entonces cuando se institucionaliza la universidad de la forma como la conocemos hoy entre 1850 y 1914 (Wallerstein, 1996:15) la tarea encomendada fue impulsar el conocimiento científico "objetivo" de la "realidad" con base en descubrimientos empíricos (*Ibidem.*) Cabe señalar, que esas universidades estaban asentadas en apenas cinco países Gran Bretaña, Francia, Alemania, Italia y Estados Unidos.

La universidad desde su origen ha jugado un papel legitimador de ese conocimiento autodefinido como válido en la medida que se presenta como el templo del conocimiento científico dotado de una supuesta "objetividad" y "neutralidad". Se trata del conocimiento científico moderno/colonial basado en las *separaciones.* Esas separaciones establecieron una ruptura primordial entre sujeto/objeto de conocimiento, de tal forma que:

> Sólo mediante la construcción de una ruptura radical entre razón y cuerpo fue posible la postulación de un sujeto de conocimiento totalmente separado del objeto, de un sujeto de conocimiento que como tal no está de modo alguno implicado en el objeto, y por lo tanto puede producir un conocimiento sin contaminación del sujeto, esto es, un conocimiento objetivo. De esta manera la construcción que separa sujeto y razón representa la posibilidad de una propuesta de un conocimiento objetivo y universal (Lander, 2011: 169)

Así, desde esta perspectiva, la *universalidad* se basará en la idea de un conocimiento que no depende ni del lugar, ni del tiempo en el cual se produce (Lander, 2004: 169) tampoco importa *quién* la produce, lo cual resulta ser una falacia. De tal forma que, desde la Universidad occidentalizada, "cualquier conocimiento que pretenda situarse desde la corpo-política del conocimiento será considerado como no científico (Anzaldúa 2015; Fanon, 1986).

La *colonialidad del saber,* es también una forma de *colonialismo epistémico* el cual está profundamente relacionado con lo que Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1998) nombró como *violencia epistémica* definida como la imposición de la idea que considera no científicos los conocimientos resultado de otras epistemologías que reconocen el lugar de enunciación y la subjetividad de quien investiga. Esa *violencia epistémica,* perpetúa la opresión de ciertos conocimientos, así como de las personas que los generan*.*

Es así como el aparato universitario occidental estará estrechamente ligado a la *colonialidad del saber,* a sus sistemas científicos sustentados en lo que se ha nombrado como conocimiento experto (Restrepo, 2018:12), el cual niega la existencia de otros conocimientos o de otras formas de conocer. Sin embargo, coincido con la postura que la universidad también es un terreno en disputa (De Sousa Santos, 2021:17) y por ello, para muchas personas pertenecientes a poblaciones que históricamente han sido excluidas de ese lugar hegemónico del saber entrar a la arena universitaria implica una apuesta política, como plantea la pensadora y docente Maya-Kaqchikel Aura Cumes: "[la universidad] no es llegar a un espacio para crear libremente, sino que es, antes nada, un campo de poder donde hay que empezar por luchar[4] para que nuestras voces puedan ser escuchadas en medio de las voces legitimadas" (Cumes, 2018: 136).

La universidad, como la conocemos ahora, ha reproducido las narrativas y epistemologías colonialistas, capitalistas, racistas y patriarcales, cuestiones que están profundamente arraigadas también en sus burocracias y formas jerárquicas de toma de decisiones, es decir, tanto en la administración como en los programas de estudio.

Aunque las universidades han pasado por procesos de cambio importantes a lo largo de la historia, la década de los sesenta del siglo pasado marcó el inicio de un proceso de apertura que implicó, en algunos países, el acceso a la educación universitaria para sectores populares. Sin embargo, esas transformaciones, aunque importantes, no tocaron sus estructuras en términos de sus integrantes, los currículos, la docencia, la epistemología y ontología desde donde se genera el conocimiento científico.

Con el neoliberalismo y el giro de las universidades a un modelo empresarial y burocrático se operan y refuerzan los planos de colonización de la universidad (Restrepo, 2018:17). El neoliberalismo fortalecerá la racionalidad instrumental que tiende a formar tecnócratas y expertos al servicio del mercado no solo en las universidades privadas, también en las públicas. Condición que se torna cada vez más excluyente y que evidencia que esta exclusión no solo se debe a factores económicos, sino raciales, culturales, de género. En ese sentido, la universidad no solo ha sido elitista sino también colonialista, racista, sexista.

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4 "la lucha es simplemente la vida de la gente que está tratando de sobrevivir en los márgenes, en busca de libertad y mejores condiciones, en busca de justicia social. La lucha es una herramienta tanto para el activismo social como para la teoría" (Tuhiwai Smith, 2017: 351)

La lucha por la descolonización de la universidad será limitada si no se articula con la *descolonización del saber*, y contra todas las formas de *colonialismo* y *colonialidad* (del poder, del género, del ser, de la naturaleza). La apuesta descolonizadora entonces requiere de un proceso de profunda desestructuración de los sistemas de opresión que operan de forma fusionada y que están presentes también en la universidad. Por tanto, para pensar en un proceso de descolonización de la universidad se requiere ir más allá del *reconocimiento* de las formas de dominio que han sostenido el racismo, la exclusión y el despojo del que también forman parte las universidades. Porque reconocer la opresión o exclusión puede ser un paso importante pero no implica la descolonización, el camino hacia la descolonización implica trabajar por echar abajo el andamiaje epistémico-ontológico que sostiene la estructura de la universidad moderna/colonial.

La descolonización tampoco se circunscribe a lo teórico o abstracto, sino que va necesariamente acompañada de la práctica política concreta, como lo expresa el pensamiento del pueblo *Nasa*, de Colombia: "la palabra sin acción es vacía, la acción sin palabra es ciega, la palabra y la acción por fuera del espíritu de la comunidad, son la muerte". Es decir, apostar por la descolonización solo en el discurso, fuera de los territorios donde se disputa la vida en medio de la explotación, el despojo y la violencia es palabra vacía.

EL "OBJETO" COMO SUJETO DE INVESTIGACIÓN EN LAS UNIVERSIDADES

La objetividad científica me estaba vedada, porque el alienado, el neurótico, era mi hermano, mi hermana, era mi padre. He intentado constantemente revelar al negro que en cierto modo se anormaliza: al blanco que es a la vez mistificador y mistificado

F. Fanon, 1986, 225

La presencia de indígenas en las universidades en el caso de México es un hecho claramente marcado hasta la década de los 90 del siglo pasado, antes de esa década era aún más difícil encontrar estudiantes o investigadores indígenas en instituciones de educación superior. Para esa década México cuenta con la mayoría de la población indígena del continente, sin embargo, en cuanto a la educación superior, las estipulaciones son que la matricula indígena en el nivel superior es apenas el 1% (Barreno, 2003)

Realizar estudios universitarios ha significado un largo proceso de lucha que requiere de un enorme esfuerzo para poder mantenerse lejos de las redes familiares y comunitarias, pagar cuotas, rentas, alimentación, libros, etc., pues siempre las universidades han estado lejos de nuestras comunidades. Concluir los estudios también requiere de un esfuerzo mayor, pues se está en desventaja respecto a jóvenes que cuentan con las condiciones necesarias.

En mi caso salí de Chila de las Flores, en la mixteca baja, a los 14 años para ingresar a la preparatoria en Huajuapan de León, Oaxaca, la ciudad más cercana, pues en mi pueblo solo había posibilidades de estudiar hasta la secundaria. Posteriormente migré a la ciudad de México, a seis horas de mi comunidad de origen, para realizar estudios de licenciatura, sabiendo que para continuar mis estudios tenía que trabajar, pues mis padres, campesinos sin tierra, no podían pagar una renta en la ciudad ni cubrir mis gastos. Enfrentarme a esa situación no fue fácil, de hecho, muchos jóvenes de comunidades indígenas no se plantean salir de sus pueblos para estudiar por las múltiples dificultades a las que hay que enfrentarse.

Llegar a la universidad implica también desafiar la *violencia epistémica*, en la que, por ejemplo, se construye la idea de que los conocimientos que traemos de nuestras comunidades no tienen importancia ni utilidad. Además, por ejemplo, en mis estudios de licenciatura, así como en la maestría y doctorado, no tuve ni un(a) profesor (a) perteneciente a un Pueblo indígena, lo cual refuerza la idea de que la presencia indígena no es compatible con la universidad.

La no presencia de indígenas en las universidades tanto en México como en todo el Continente explica por qué la mayoría de lo que se conoce sobre Pueblos indígenas ha sido contado por investigadores no indígenas, en muchos casos, provenientes de universidades del norte global. Hilaria Cruz (2021: 40), reflexiona como en el caso de los académicos externos a las comunidades, casi siempre (blancos, mestizos, extranjeros en territorios indígenas) administran los datos seleccionados en el campo y los guardan celosamente incluso a la misma comunidad, la cual no tendrá acceso a esa información y el investigador se atribuirá el derecho a publicar sus "descubrimientos" o "hallazgos" según sus propios intereses y lejos de la comunidad.

Es importante también señalar que el ingreso a la universidad no implica en automático iniciar un proceso de descolonización (Aguilar, 2020), al contrario, históricamente la universidad ha reforzado la desindianización y negación de lo que somos así como el abandono de los conocimientos que traemos emanados en las milpas, el traspatio, la fiesta, el trabajo y vida campesina-comunal.

El racismo en las universidades se expresa también en políticas discriminatorias y excluyentes desde la poca admisión de estudiantes indígenas y es aún más evidente cuando se observan cuerpos docentes donde los originarios de los pueblos indígenas son una minoría o no existen, por tanto, tampoco están presentes sus pensamientos y aportes teórico-epistémicos. En las universidades, tanto del norte como del sur global predomina una política del conocimiento basada en las epistemologías del Norte global, la historia mundial es la historia europea, el eurocentrismo, el orientalismo y la supremacía neocolonial (De Sousa Santos, 2021:229). Así, tanto los conocimientos como la historia serán estudiados-aprendidos desde una perspectiva que coloca

a occidente, como el referente, el punto de partida y el de llegada, mientras que otros conocimientos y formas de conocer serán negados o convertidos en objetos de estudio.

La universidad occidental, transmite a los estudiantes indígenas un conocimiento estandarizado, que está lejos de sus realidades, de los problemas y necesidades de sus pueblos. Eso significa que quienes llegamos a las universidades, somos "formadas" con el modelo teórico-epistémico dominante que no responde a los contextos de los cuales venimos (Cariño, 2020: 270). De tal forma que nuestra llegada a la universidad se da en esas condiciones de desventaja y de exclusión de nuestras formas de pensar y entender el mundo.

La *epistemología colonial*, que promueve la racionalidad occidental, se basa en la idea de la existencia de *una* sola forma de conocer y un tipo de conocimiento válido, lo cual contribuye al fortalecimiento de *la historia única* (Ngozi Adichie, 2018) y a la anulación de otras epistemologías. Es precisamente por esto que, de acuerdo con Linda Tuhinwai Smith, "es importante reclamar aquellos espacios que se consideran, por derecho, posesión de Occidente. Tales espacios tienen que ver con los espacios intelectuales, teóricos e imaginativos" (Tuhiwai, 2017: 357).

La presencia de académicos indígenas en las universidades es sin duda importante, sin embargo, es apenas un paso que para quienes venimos de pueblos o colectividades que han sido subalternizadas, encontramos en estos espacios un campo de poder para que las epistemologías de nuestros pueblos sean re-conocidas como existentes y como horizontes de saber importantes para el sostenimiento de la red de la vida en relación con todo lo existente.

Históricamente llegar a la universidad ha sido un privilegio de hombres y mujeres blancas, provenientes de clase acomodada, quienes han tenido las condiciones necesarias para acceder a grados de estudio superiores, en ese sentido, éstos han sido los que han tenido la posibilidad de producir conocimientos. A los pueblos indígenas en esa *geopolítica del conocimiento* (Mignolo, 2000)[5] les ha tocado el lugar de objetos de estudio. Cuando lxs integrantes de pueblos indígenas irrumpen en las universidades ya no como objetos sino como sujetos, generadores de conocimiento,

pueden llegar a sacudir esas estructuras y ponerlas en cuestión al debelar el doble discurso de la "objetividad" y "neutralidad" en las que se sostienen.

Llegar a la universidad, reconociéndola como un espacio de saber-poder, en el que opera la *colonialidad del saber* es muy importante y lo es más frente a la *violencia epistémica* que se alimenta del *extractivismo epistémico*[6]. Toca entonces luchar porque nuestras ideas sean escuchadas, por aprender a expresar de forma oral y escrita pensamientos que puedan aportar y caminar con nuestros pueblos. Es muy importante *sentipensar*[7] partiendo de nuestras epistemologías, nuestras formas y modos de conocer, desde los saberes ancestrales que surgen en nuestros territorios y que también se renuevan en los contextos y realidades que nos tocan vivir.

LAS UNIVERSIDADES COMO ESPACIO DE SATURACIÓN DE BLANCURA

La *saturación de blancura* es un asunto que considero necesario poner en cuestión cuando hablamos de quienes tienen el poder de nombrar y de generar conocimientos en las universidades tanto del norte, como del sur global. Entiendo lo *blanco*, como una forma de pensar, no como un color de piel.

Como campesina y originaria de un pueblo indígena considero urgente que la gente privilegiada que ha tenido el monopolio de la palabra y la escritura, guarde silencio. Para escuchar y conocer otras formas modos de vida que han sido negados, ninguneados o silenciados.

La saturación de blancura resultado del privilegio blanco que prevalece en las universidades, opera de tal forma que pareciera que la violencia, las agresiones contra la población no privilegiada por raza-clase-sexogénero-nacionalidad, son una exageración o algo sin importancia. Es por ello urgente trascender el discurso de la meritocracia y cuestionar permanentemente los privilegios para contribuir a la apertura de grietas que permitan derrumbar esta estructura que jerarquiza saberes, voces, cuerpos, modos de vida en detrimento de otros saberes inferiorizados, considerados sin importancia y, por tanto, sin validez teórica-epistémica.

5 Para W. Mignolo, la "historia" del conocimiento está marcada geohistóricamente y además tiene un valor y un lugar de "origen". La *geopolítica del conocimiento* plantea que el conocimiento no es abstracto y deslocalizado, sino una manifestación de la diferencia colonial (Mignolo,2000)

6 Esto ha pasado cuando personas provenientes de grupos subordinados han ocupado espacios dentro del ámbito universitario, aunque también es importante señalar que otrxs se han insertado sin un mayor cuestionamiento, reproduciendo acríticamente la racionalidad, las epistemologías y la metodología hegemónica. Reconozco que existen esas otras oposiciones, pero en este caso me interesa enfocarme, en las experiencias de compañeres con los que comparto el interés y la importancia por reconocer el lugar de enunciación y origen como un compromiso político con nuestros pueblos, de quien no queremos desvincularnos

7 El *sentipensar*, es un concepto que el sociólogo colombiano Orlando Fals Borda, toma de los pescadores de San Martín de la Loba, Departamento de Bolívar, Colombia, quienes le hablaron de "pensar con el corazón y sentir con la cabeza". De tal forma que el hombre sentipensante es aquel que combina la razón y el amor, el cuerpo y el corazón, para deshacerse de todas las (mal) formaciones que descuartizan esa armonía y poder decir la verdad (Moncayo, 2015: 10)

Es por ello de vital importancia trabajar cotidiana y permanentemente por erradicar la supremacía blanca en todos los espacios, y por supuesto que eso implica hacerlo también en las universidades.

Pienso que es urgente construir formas y procesos de descolonización del saber más allá de las Conferencias, pues si bien estas son importantes, no es aquí desde dónde vamos a construir otros mundos, no lo es tampoco en las universidades por más críticas, progresistas o de izquierda que parezcan. Es justo, fuera de los muros universitarios.

Muchas de las que venimos de los pueblos racializados del planeta sabemos que al participar de los espacios académicos universitarios no estamos pidiendo oportunidades de acceso a las ventajas o "avances" de Occidente, no se trata de querer "demostrar" que nuestros pueblos tienen capacidad de pensar o que sus saberes también son científicos. Muches de nosotres no estamos interesades en reivindicar nuestros conocimientos y formas de vida en términos de lo que Occidente plantea como válido. Lo que queremos es marcar la diferencia, no solo epistémica, sino sobre todo ontológica, en la medida que nuestra presencia aquí es un grito por la existencia, porque queremos seguir siendo lo que somos, vivir en dignidad y hacer vida según nuestro modo y mundo en relación con la tierra-territorio y todo lo existente.

La universidad debe romper los muros simbólicos y reales que la separan de la comunidad, los pueblos, las múltiples realidades. Esa separación hace parte de la Universidad Ilustrada[8], noreurocentrada que reproduce la jerarquización y la fragmentación de la vida.

Las formas convencionales de las prácticas académicas conciben a las personas de pueblos indígenas como objetos de estudio o de intervención, y nunca como portadoras de saberes, es decir, como sujetos epistémicos. La *blanquitud*, por tanto, el privilegio blanco, es el presupuesto epistémico y sobretodo ontológico del colonialismo que invadió estas tierras hace 524 años y es en el que se siguen sosteniendo los grupos dominantes hasta el día de hoy. Ese privilegio blanco es el que sigue determinando el ser y el no ser, es decir qué vidas importan y qué vidas no, que conocimientos son válidos y cuáles no.

En ese sentido no se trata de "**apoyar** a los pueblos, comunidades y naciones indígenas y desmantelar las estructuras supremacistas blancas", sino de cuestionar y tomar acciones para echar abajo las estructuras materiales y simbólicas, y transformar las relaciones coloniales de poder tanto en el ámbito objetivo como subjetivo (Fanon, 2010). Se trata de echar abajo el discurso salvacionista

colonizador, que reproduce la idea de que los pueblos racializados están esperando que "alguien", el investigador foráneo o extranjero, venga a salvarlos.

No es así, los pueblos y la gente de pueblos racializados, existimos, porque hemos resistido a las múltiples formas de colonialismo y de colonialidad que siempre han buscado imponerse a través de la violencia. La apuesta es entonces en ver más allá de la Universidad y que en todo caso que la universidad sirva para destruirse a sí misma, como templo de la *colonialidad del saber* y contribuya a derribar desde dentro el sistema capitalista racista moderno colonial patriarcal antropocéntrico que hoy tiene a nuestro planeta al borde del abismo.

Como universitarios originarios de comunidades y cercanos a ellas tenemos un compromiso con los problemas que enfrentan nuestros pueblos. Esto no sucede con los investigadores externos, pues la mayoría llega a las comunidades un rato, se va de la comunidad y muy probablemente ya nunca regresa (Cruz, 2021: 23). Sin embargo, son esos privilegios de clase-raza-nacionalidad-género, los que le convierten en *experto* (a), aunque solo hayan estado en la comunidad por un día o por algunos meses. Tenemos también el compromiso por no reproducir las formas/modos que históricamente han negado las epistemologías de nuestros pueblos. Así que, pensar con los pies y el corazón en la tierra-territorio es parte de esa responsabilidad de la que hablamos. Nuestro trabajo académico-ético-político busca no desprenderse de la raíz que nos sostiene. Se trata de construir conocimientos comprometidos con la red de la vida que, como plantea la pensadora indígena Aline Ngrentabara Lopes Kayapó (2021), contribuye:

> [a] repensar el antropocentrismo, las acciones de la racionalidad humana y la idea de progreso que lleva a cabo la comunidad mundial. El proyecto humano de desarrollo [que] generó una situación de absoluto desencanto y crisis agravada aún más por la ambición, las vanidades y la búsqueda del poder a cualquier precio. Este comportamiento civilizador ha ido deshumanizado a nuestros pueblos, etiquetándonos históricamente como desalmados, infieles, holgazanes, mentirosos, bárbaros y enemigos del progreso.

Por ello decimos que no basta una política de reconocimiento para cambiar las relaciones coloniales que siguen presentes en nuestras sociedades, así como en las universidades, si no se cuestiona la matriz colonial que sigue vigente en nuestros territorios. La política de reconocimiento, es una estrategia muy limitada por más que se presente como apuesta descolonizadora. En un contexto en el que las demandas de los pueblos indígenas en prácticamente todos los continentes giran en torno al derecho a la

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8 La Universidad Ilustrada, se entiende aquí como la heredera y promotora de la Ilustración y su discurso legitimador de la expansión colonialista europea del siglo XVIII. El filósofo colombiano Santiago Castro Gómez hace referencia a el discurso científico ilustrado el cual se constituye sobre la creencia de poseer un lenguaje universal, el de la razón, por medio del cual el científico adquiere la posibilidad de elevarse por encima del lenguaje común y situarse en un punto cero de observación, neutro, objetivo, desde el cual podía generar conocimiento válido universalmente (Castro-Gómez, 2005)

Tierra-territorio y a la autodeterminación como pueblos, es decir, se trata de una lucha por la existencia.

No es necesario esforzarse demasiado para darse cuenta que el discurso liberal del reconocimiento es limitado y peor aún apropiado por los estados y sus instituciones, sus políticas, en la medida que no cuestiona las bases de las relaciones coloniales. En el caso mexicano es apenas uno de los muchos ejemplos que existen en términos de los discursos de reconocimiento, la existencia de leyes no ha garantizado el ejercicio pleno de los pueblos a la autonomía y autodeterminación. En ese sentido el reconocimiento podría entenderse no como el punto de llegada, sino el de partida para exigir reparación, restitución de lo robado, la tierra, el territorio, la vida digna. El discurso del reconocimiento no ha desafiado las estructuras que sostienen el estado colonial, ni, en el caso de las universidades la política del reconocimiento no ha trastocado el fundamento racista de la *colonialidad del saber* que es su fundamento.

Comparto con F. Fanon (2010) la importancia del autorreconocimiento y reconocimiento en términos estrictamente instrumentales, es decir, solo como punto de partida para una lucha que busca transformaciones profundas y radicales. De ahí que no basta las reivindicaciones "incluyentes", pues esto no garantiza la eliminación de las estructuras racistas sexistas, xenófobas, existentes en las universidades. Sin duda el lenguaje puede crear y destruir, pero no es solo el lenguaje, pues este se sostiene sobre una estructura racista que es a su vez profundamente violenta.

La descolonización debe pensar en el sistema universitario en su conjunto, en sus estructuras, en sus políticas, en la forma en la que se toman las decisiones, en sus estudiantes y docentes así como en sus planes de estudio, en tu teoría y en su práctica y en el sistema educativo en su conjunto. Esto implica a su vez la incorporación de otras metodologías, otras epistemologías y otras ontologías que pongan en el centro a la Madre Tierra, la gran pedagoga y la apuesta por un conocimiento que no separe la razón del corazón como plantea Abadio Green Stocel, teólogo, filósofo y etnolingüista del pueblo Gunadule[9].

REFLEXIONES FINALES

"Es cuestión del habla y su tiempo. El presente se habla en individual, el pasado y el futuro en colectivo. La muerte, entonces, es una cuestión que sólo tiene poder en lo individual, y la vida sólo es posible en colectivo. Por eso decimos "muero" y por eso decimos "vivimos", y "viviremos".

Memorias del Viejo Antonio. Sabio Maya. (Comisión Sexta del EZLN, 2007)

Como descendientes de pueblos que han habitado *Abya Yala* desde hace milenios y cuya herida colonial nos atraviesa, podemos decir que nuestra herencia histórica-cultural fue y sigue siendo negada y al mismo tiempo motivo de expropiación. En esa misma lógica de despojo nuestros pueblos son estudiados generalmente por investigadores externos con la nula participación de sus integrantes como investigadores de su propia historia y en todo caso nuestros conocimientos son tomados en cuenta en la medida que podemos servir de informantes (Aguilar, 2020: 58; Cruz, 2021). Es así como se perpetúa una forma de construcción de conocimiento que reproduce permanentemente la mirada del colonizador, desde la *mirada imperial* (Tuhiwai, 2017).

Las epistemologías y ontologías desde las voces de los integrantes de los pueblos colonizados siguen negadas. "Todo esto ha generado una desvinculación del pasado con el presente, una disyunción entre la herencia viva de los pueblos indígenas (lengua, literatura oral, rituales, organización social) y su herencia histórica-cultural (códices, mapas coloniales, textos coloniales y restos antiguos pre-coloniales) como un todo. Entonces ¿podemos hablar también de un extractivismo académico-epistemológico? ¿De una academia colonizada y a la vez colonizadora?" (Aguilar, 2020: 58) la respuesta es positiva.

En ese proceso por la descolonización del saber, considero fundamental el papel y los aportes de las personas provenientes de poblaciones racializadas, es urgente también tomar la palabra, para re-construir nuestras propias narrativas, labor que afortunadamente ya está en marcha en muchos pueblos de *Abya Yala*. En palabras de Aline Ngrenhtabare Lopes Kayapó (escritora y académica aymara):

> Nuestra lucha no es para ser incluidos o integrados en las academias de las letras. En primer lugar, esas palabras, "inclusión", "integración", producen lo que los odontólogos llaman bruxismo, rechinar los dientes. Nosotros, los indígenas, jamás seremos integrados, pues si nos integramos a la sociedad nacional, nos separaremos de nuestra cultura originaria y viceversa. Lo que proponemos es una interacción, pues cuando interactuamos logramos compartir aquello que es nuestro y absorbemos lo que es del otro sin olvidar que pertenecemos a nuestros pueblos (Lópes y Bepkro, 2021)

Sin embargo, aun cuando considero importante la disputa dentro de las universidades, soy escéptica, en creer en la universidad occidentalizada como espacio de *descolonización del saber*. De hecho, creo que la *descolonización del saber* camina en los márgenes de la Universidad, pero, sobre todo, fuera de ella. Situarse en el margen, entendido como el lugar de lucha y resistencia (Anzaldúa, 2015), como la frontera como un espacio no vacío,

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sino como un lugar de gran potencia epistémica, para disputar desde ahí la narrativa de la historia única.

En este proceso somos los descendientes de los pueblos que por milenios han habitado *Abya Yala*, quienes estamos intentando caminar en la reconstrucción tanto de nuestras epistemologías como de nuestras ontologías, las cuales tienen como referentes principales la reconstrucción de la red de la vida y de los mundos en relación que coexisten y re-existen. Hacer grietas es sin duda fundamental, así como construir puentes que reconstruyan los lazos rotos con gente que esté dispuesta a cuestionar el sistema de dominación moderno/colonial así como sus privilegios, con gente que esté dispuesta a luchar codo a codo desde la escucha, el aprendizaje y reconocimiento de las múltiple formas de conocer, entender y hacer mundos para de esta forma desmontar las estructuras coloniales que sostienen el sistema de muerte, explotación y despojo a la que son sometidos los mundos no modernos y así generar conocimientos al servicio de la vida y construir espacios de aprendizajes sin ninguna forma de colonialismo ni colonialidad.

Como parte de una comunidad[10] amenazada por el extractivismo minero y las megagranjas avícolas, entre otros proyectos que amenazan la vida en el territorio, considero que una apuesta descolonizadora es asumir la responsabilidad y el compromiso por la defensa de la vida. De qué nos sirve que en un auditorio cerrado se hable de descolonización o incluso de investigue sobre diversos problemas que aquejan a la sociedad, cuando esa información quedará solo en los libros o publicaciones lejos de los pueblos que están viendo como sus medios y formas de vida son destruidos y convertidos en mercancías, de qué sirve el reconocimiento de esos problemas si no se lucha junto con los pueblos desposeídos de su tierra, agua, saberes, etc. No estoy hablando de ayudar, estoy hablando de responsabilidad, de compromiso, de poner los conocimientos al servicio de los pueblos que resisten al capitalismo racista colonial patriarcal, dentro y más allá de las fronteras estatales. Denunciar, señalar al mounstro y sus múltiples cabezas, destruir a la hidra capitalista como han señalado los zapatistas del sur de México, denunciar el sistema de muerte y sus formas de operar, creo que ésta podría ser una forma de asumir la responsabilidad colectiva de la lucha por la vida

También considero que los lugares desde donde podemos construir otros mundos se encuentran precisamente ahí donde estamos. Donde podemos organizar la resistencia y construir esos otros mundos de vida. Se trata de poner pensamiento-corazón y acción al servicio de la vida, no del capital. La solidaridad

como hermandad no de "solidaridad" como botín para construir carreras académicas o políticas, o "para construirse una escalera propia al Poder" como han señalado los zapatistas (Palabras de la Comisión sexta del EZLN en el Foro Nacional de Solidaridad con las comunidades zapatistas, 2007). No se trata de ver el dolor de los pueblos como una inversión con fines individuales, para la carrera académica.

Creo que se trata de *pensar haciendo* y *hacer pensando*, como apuesta política descolonizadora desde la tierra en la que nacimos, crecimos o a la tierra a la que llegamos, pues en ella estamos/somos. Lo aquí dicho hace resonancia con el sentipensar-hacer zapatista del sur de México:

> Pero nosotros hemos aprendido que las semillas se intercambian, se siembran y crecen en lo cotidiano en el suelo propio con saberes de cada quien. […] Los terremotos que sacuden la historia de la humanidad empiezan con un "ya basta" aislado, casi imperceptible. Una nota discordante a mitad del ruido. Una grieta en el muro. Por eso es que no venimos a traer recetas, a imponer visiones y estrategias, a prometer futuros luminosos e instantáneos, plazas llenas, soluciones inmediatas. Ni venimos a convocarles a uniones maravillosas. Venimos a escucharles. "[…] de lo que hablamos las comunidades zapatistas es de una causa, de un motivo, de una meta: la vida. No se trata de abandonar convicciones y luchas. Al contrario. Pensamos que las luchas de mujeres, de otroas, de trabajadores de originarios, no sólo no deben detenerse, sin que debieran ser más profundas y radicales. Cada quien enfrenta una o varias cabezas de la Hidra. (Palabras de los pueblos zapatistas, 13 de agosto de 2021)

La apuesta entonces es por construir resistencias desde el rincón del mundo en el que nos ha tocado vivir y echar raíces. Construir historias de resistencias grandes o pequeñas, frente a un sistema de muerte, el sistema capitalista. El reto es agrietar muros para construir vida ahí donde pareciera que solo hay lugar para la muerte, individualismo, deseo de consumo, destrucción, acumulación de riquezas.

Descolonizar el saber implica apostar por las grietas y desde las grietas, abrir surcos y hacer crecer desde ahí semillas para corazonar, co-razonar, es decir, para pensar desde el corazón poniendo en el centro la vida digna, el buen vivir, como lo hacen los mayas tojolabales al sur de México. O como lo expresan los integrantes del Consejo de Gobierno del Pueblo *Kitu Kara,* en los

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10 Soy originaria de Chila de las Flores, municipio mixteco, ubicado al sur del Estado de Puebla, México. Mi pueblo es uno de los sitios donde se encuentran yacimientos de litio, en noviembre del 2020, el gobierno federal, a través del Servicio Geológico Mexicano, dio a conocer la existencia de éste mineral considerado como el "oro blanco", esta noticia nos ha robado la tranquilidad ante la amenaza que la explotación de éste mineral y el peligro que podría generar para el ecosistema en su conjunto. El territorio también enfrenta el acoso de empresas avícolas que presionan permanentemente a las autoridades y población para que acepten la instalación de megagranjas de pollos. Estas empresas están interesandas en las tierras, agua y la ubicación que el municipio tiene y para asegurar sus ganancias.

Andes ecuatorianos: "Corazonar: pensar con el corazón liberado, nutrir el pensamiento con el impulso de la vida poniendo voluntad." (Guerrero, 2010) Corazonar el sentido de las epistemologías dominantes y desplazar la hegemonía de la razón, cuyo horizonte es la construcción de propuestas epistémicas otras y sentidos otros de existencia (Guerrero, 2017:97). Descolonizar, corazonarlo todo, dentro y fuera de la academia.

Para muchos quienes hacemos parte de pueblos indígenas y que estamos en la universidad, consideramos que para que nuestra tarea abone a la descolonización nuestra labor no debe separarse de las necesidades y problemas de nuestros pueblos. Por ello cuando hablo de descolonización no me refiero solo a una cuestión teórica, epistémica abstracta, hablo de la descolonización del poder, del ser, de la naturaleza, del género como algo concreto, del día a día y a largo plazo. Hablo de la apuesta por la vida, por la tierra y con la Tierra, de la reconstrucción y defensa de los mundos de vida que están siendo amenazados por la modernidad/colonialidad y su racionalidad descorazonada.

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"We Need Knowledge for Life, a University Free of Colonialism": Reflections on the Decolonization of Knowledge, and the University, from Experience

Carmen Cariño Trujillo

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Abstract

This document reflects on the decolonization of knowledge and universities through reflection on the role of conferences as spaces of decolonization. The reflection emphasizes the recognition of the place of enunciation of the writer and from there engages in *sentipensar* about the importance and urgency of working for decolonization beyond conferences and beyond universities. The analysis is based on the idea that decolonization is more than a discourse or a metaphor; it is a project for life with both feet on the ground. Colonialism is today a daily and constant reality that racialized people are faced with more violence, but at the same time from these places of resistance, important reflections and actions towards decolonization are emerging. This text also analyzes the role of Indigenous scholars and the criticism of universities as a hegemonic place of the production of knowledge.

Keywords

decolonization, coloniality of knowledge, sentipensar, decolonizing the university, Indigenous scholars

INTRODUCTION

> We need knowledge for life, a university free from colonialism.
>
> Aline Ngrenhtabare Lopes Kayapó,
> Brazilian Indigenous poet and thinker

I conceived and wrote this text in response to the invitation from University of Louisville to participate in a meeting organized by the Watson Conference. Dr. Hilaria Cruz, an academic from the Chatino People of Oaxaca and professor at said university, as well as other Native American scholars, attended this event. I thank her for the invitation to

this space since Abya Yala's[1] "Indigenous" intellectuals are rarely called to these conferences at universities in the Global North.

It is important to say that I will not speak from "neutrality," nor from the distance imposed by scientific objectivity. I will speak in first person, from my own experience, as a peasant academic native to Ñuu Savi, the People of the Rain,[2] south of what is now known as Mexico. I am interested in reflecting on university life and its relationship with the coloniality of knowledge, the implications and possibilities of its decolonization, the situation and the role of Indigenous researchers, as well as the possibilities of generating localized knowledge in the service of our peoples or communities, from other epistemologies and ontologies, which have profound differences from those of the hegemonic thinking of Western[3]/ Westernized universities.

This text was presented at a conference that sought to reimagine conferences. Although conferences are valuable spaces of reflection within universities, the decolonizing project must go beyond them. Because I believe it is outside the university walls that we live and fight daily against a system of death, we must take the alternatives of resistance to the current modern/colonial system outside the university.

My reflections are deeply inspired by *sentipensares* of Southern men and women beyond the Rio Grande, who in some cases participate in sociology, anthropology, and rural studies academies. My intention is not to deny the existence of valuable reflections made by racialized people, mainly Native American, who have been working in a situated and committed manner from their territories. However, dialogue becomes difficult because their texts, undoubtedly important, are not translated into Spanish, an analogous situation to the fact that our reflections, not written in English, are very rarely studied in North America. For this reason, I really appreciate the intermediation of the Watson Conference to get this essay to those who do not read about it in Spanish, and in this way, establish the South-South dialogue.

WESTERN UNIVERSITY, COLONIALITY OF KNOWLEDGE AND SUBALTERNIZED VOICES

I do not carry innocence to the point of believing that appeals to reason or to respect for human dignity can alter reality. For the Negro who works on a sugar plantation in Le Robert, there is only one solution: to fight.

F. Fanon 1986, 224

The Western university system is colonized. The bases that sustain its claim for truth and universality are modern science and Eurocentrism (De Sousa Santos 2021; Lander 2011). The university is the privileged place of the coloniality of knowledge. Edgardo Lander (2011) coined this concept, inspired by the ideas of Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano (1992, 2011) about the coloniality of power. Coloniality is not the same as colonialism. It is very important to differentiate between the two terms because although coloniality does not deny the continuity of colonialism, this notion emphasizes the colonization of the imaginary of the dominated and the attempt of dominators to prevent the production of other forms of thought and conceptions of the world. Thus, coloniality is defined as

> a systematic repression not only of specific beliefs, ideas, images, symbols, or knowledge, that were not intended for global colonial domination . . . . repression [that] was directed, above all, on the ways of knowing, of producing knowledge, of producing perspectives, images and systems of images, symbols, modes of meaning; on the resources, patterns, and instruments of formalized and objectified expression, intellectual or visual. It was followed by the imposition of the use of the patterns of expression of the colonizers, as well as their beliefs and images referring to the supernatural, which served not only to prevent the cultural production of the dominated, but also as effective means of social control, when the immediate repression stopped being constant and systematic. (Quijano 1992, 12, translated by Montelongo González)

In this sense coloniality of knowledge operates by racializing colonized people's knowledge in such a way that the knowledges of the colonizers were considered as the only valid ones, while those

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1 Mother Earth, Living Earth, or Flourishing Earth. The Kuna people thus name the territory that today is known as the American continent.

2 "Currently, the People of the Rain's historical and cultural territory, is divided politically and territorially between the states of Oaxaca, Guerrero and Puebla, in Mexico. Since the colonial period, Ñuu Savi has been divided into: 1) Higher Mixteca, a cold and mountainous region in the state of Oaxaca that exceeds 2000 meters above sea level; 2) Lower Mixteca, a warm and eroded region of northwestern Oaxaca, eastern Guerrero and southern Puebla below 2000 meters above sea level, and 3) Mixteca from the coast, a region that runs along the Pacific coast of Oaxaca and Guerrero" (Aguilar 2020, 23, translated by Montelongo González).

3 I think of the West as defined by Stuart Hall (1992), that is, as an idea, a concept, and a language to understand and imagine a complex set of stories, ideas, historical events, and social relationships. The idea of the West allows us to characterize and classify societies into categories, capturing complex images of other societies through a representation system that establishes a standardized comparison model, which in turn establishes an evaluation criterion to classify societies.

of the colonized peoples were condemned as "diabolical" and in this way destroyed without consequences. During the colonial period, the members of the different religious orders carried out this mission as if it were a divine mandate. On July 12, 1562, in Maní, Yucatán, Fray Diego de Landa Calderón, a Franciscan missionary, burned, in front of the entire population, the Mayan codices the inhabitants of those lands showed him after the friar earned their confidence. Diego de Landa, who later wrote the "Relación de las Cosas de Yucatan," incinerated sixty tons of books that contained the knowledge of that millennial people (Meneses 2011). In this regard, Lourdes Arizpe and Maricarmen Tostado (1993) maintain that "the Spanish conquerors destroyed thousands of codices; Fray Diego de Landa burned one hundred thousand Mayan codices" (69, translated by Montelongo González).

Juan de Zumárraga, another Franciscan friar, ordered the burning of thousands of books considered dangerous: "Friars saw in the codices evil figures. They seized the archives of Tenochtitlán and Tlatelolco, and to end the idolatry of people, made a bonfire of the seized books, a mountain of them, which burned for eight days" (Rayón 1854, 979, translated by Montelongo González). The number of books burned is incalculable (Davies 1988; Polastron 2007).

In the 19th century, between 1850 and 1914, the emerging nation-states continued with the colonial project, institutionalizing the university as we know it today, promoting "objective reality" and scientific knowledge based on empirical findings. It should be noted that the first universities were located in just five countries: Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy, and the United States (Wallerstein 1996).

Since its beginning, the university has validated modern/colonial scientific knowledge, flaunting itself as a temple of "objective" and "neutral" knowledge. However, this knowledge is based on separations that establish a primary rupture between subject and object of knowledge in such a way that

> only through the construction of the radical break between reason and the body was it possible to postulate a subject of knowledge totally separate from the object, a subject of knowledge that is not involved in any way with the object and therefore can produce uncontaminated objective knowledge. In this way, the separation between the subject and reason implies the possibility of objective and universal knowledge. (Lander 2011, 169, translated by Montelongo González)

For this perspective, universality is based on a notion of knowledge that depends neither on the place nor on the temporality of who produces it. But this is false (Lander 2004, 169). For the Westernized university, any knowledge situated in the body politic

of knowledge will be considered as unscientific (Anzaldúa 2015; Fanon 1986).

Coloniality of knowledge also refers to a form of epistemic colonialism, deeply related to what Gayatri Spivak (1998) conceptualizes as epistemic violence, that is, the presumption of the unscientific nature of knowledge based on epistemologies that recognize the place of enunciation and the researcher's subjectivity. Epistemic violence perpetuates the oppression of those who generate this type of knowledge.

The Western university apparatus is closely linked to the coloniality of knowledge and its scientific systems, which are based on what has been called expert knowledge, which denies the existence of other knowledge or other ways of knowing (Restrepo 2018). However, I also consider that the university is a disputed field (De Sousa Santos 2021, 17). For many people and populations historically excluded from this hegemonic place of knowledge, access into universities implies a political act, as stated by the Maya-Kaqchikel thinker and teacher Aura Cumes (2018): "[The university] does not mean creating freely within a space, but rather, above all, a field of power where we must begin the struggle[4] so that our voices are heard among legitimate voices" (136, translated by Montelongo González).

The university, as we know it today, has reproduced colonialist, capitalist, racist, and patriarchal narratives and epistemologies deeply rooted in its bureaucracies, its hierarchical forms of decision-making, its administration, and its programs of study.

Universities have undergone important processes of change throughout their history. In some countries, the 1960s marked the beginning of the opening of higher education for lower-income sectors. However, although important, these transformations did not alter university structures in terms of its members, curricula or teaching, or the epistemology and ontology that sustain scientific knowledge.

Neoliberalism and the shift towards a business and bureaucratic model reinforced mechanisms of colonization of universities (Restrepo 2018, 17). Neoliberalism has strengthened instrumental rationality, training technocratic experts at the service of the market in both public and private universities. This situation deepens the exclusion originated not only by economic factors but also by race, culture, and gender. In that sense, the university has been not only elitist but also colonialist, racist, and sexist.

The struggle for decolonialization requires total dismantling of the fused systems of oppression present in the university. So, thinking about a decolonization process implies going beyond the simple recognition of dominant forms that involve universities and

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4 "Struggle is simply the life of the people who are trying to survive on the margins, in search of freedom and better conditions, in search of social justice. Struggle is a tool for both social activism and theory" (Tuhiwai Smith 2017, 351, translated by Montelongo González)

that have sustained racism, exclusion, and dispossession. The recognition of oppression and exclusion is an important step, but decolonization implies dismantling the epistemic-ontological scaffolding that sustains the structure of the modern/colonial university.

Decolonization must necessarily be accompanied by concrete political practice because otherwise it is limited only to abstract theorizing. For the Nasa people of Colombia, the word without action is empty and action without word is ignorant. Words and actions alien to community spirit are death. In other words, if we only seek discursive decolonization, without linking ourselves to the territories where life is defended in the midst of exploitation, dispossession, and violence, ours will be an empty word.

THE "OBJECT" AS A RESEARCH SUBJECT IN UNIVERSITIES

Scientific objectivity was barred to me, for the alienated, the neurotic, was my brother, my sister, my father. I have ceaselessly striven to show the Negro that in a sense he makes himself abnormal; to show the white man that he is at once the perpetrator and the victim of a delusion.

Fanon 1986, 225

In Mexico, the presence of Indigenous people in universities was evident from the 1990s. Previously, it was very difficult to find Indigenous students or researchers in higher-level institutions. In that decade in Mexico, the majority of the continental population was Indigenous people. However, regarding higher education, it is estimated that Indigenous enrollment was only 1% (Barreno 2003).

For Indigenous youth, completing university studies implies a long process of struggle because it requires an enormous effort to stay away from family and community networks and pay fees, rent, food, books, and so forth. Universities have always been away from our communities. Graduating also requires a greater effort because Indigenous students have a disadvantage compared to young people who have ideal conditions.

In my case, I left Chila de las Flores, in Lower Mixteca, at 14 years old, to enter high school in Huajuapan de León, Oaxaca, the closest city, since there was no possibility of continuing to study in my village. Later I migrated to Mexico City, six hours from my community, to study for my bachelor's degree, knowing I would also have to work since my parents, landless farmers, could not pay rent in the city or cover my expenses. Facing that situation was not easy. In fact, many young people from Indigenous communities do not leave their villages to study due to the many difficulties involved.

Attending the university also implies challenging epistemic violence, which reproduces the idea that our community's knowledge is of no importance or use. Furthermore, during my bachelor's degree, master's degree, and doctorate studies, I did not have any Indigenous professors, which reinforces the idea that our presence is not compatible with the university.

The absence of Indigenous people in universities, both in Mexico and on the rest of the continent, explains the fact that most of what is known about us has been said by non-Indigenous researchers coming from universities in the Global North in many cases. Hilaria Cruz (2020, 40) reflects on the way in which academics external to the communities, mostly white, mestizo, or foreigners, handle the information generated during field work, jealously guarding it, even from the community itself. The researcher reserves the right to publish their "discoveries" or "findings" according to their own interests, preventing communities from accessing information.

It is also important to note that access to university education does not automatically imply a decolonization process (Aguilar 2020). On the contrary, universities have historically reinforced the deindianization and denial of who we are, as well as the abandonment of our knowledge, which arises from *milpa*[5], backyard festivities, work, and peasant communal life.

In universities, racism is expressed in discriminatory and exclusionary policies that include the low admission numbers of Indigenous students, and this is even more evident in the composition of the teaching staff, where Indigenous researchers are a minority, and, consequently, their thoughts and theoretical-epistemic contributions are not considered. A politics of knowledge based on epistemologies of the Global North predominates in universities around the world. World history is European history, Eurocentrism, Orientalism, and neocolonial supremacy (De Sousa Santos 2021, 229). Thus, knowledge and history are studied and learned from a perspective that places the West as the main reference, the measure of all things, while other knowledges and ways of knowing are denied or turned into objects of study.

The Western university transmits to Indigenous students a standardized knowledge, which is far from the realities, problems, and needs of their peoples. This means we are "formed" with the dominant theoretical-epistemic model that does not respond to the contexts from which we come (Cariño 2020, 270). Our access to university education occurs in conditions of disadvantage and exclusion from our ways of thinking and understanding the world.

Colonial epistemology, which promotes Western rationality, is based on the idea of the existence of only one way of knowing and only one valid knowledge, which contributes to the strengthening of the single history (Ngozi Adichie 2018) and to the nullification of other epistemologies. This is why, as Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2017)

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5 *Milpa* is a complex and millenary cultural creation based on the ecological balance among corn, beans, chili, and squash.

puts it, "It is important to reclaim those spaces that are considered, by right, the possession of the West. Such spaces have to do with intellectual, theoretical and imaginative spaces" (357, translated by Montelongo González).

Although important, the presence of Indigenous academics in universities is only a first step for those of us who belong to subaltern peoples or communities since there is a field of power that prevents the recognition of the value of the epistemologies of our peoples for sustaining the web of life in relation to everything that exists.

Historically, access to the university has been a privilege of white men and women of the wealthy class, who have had the necessary conditions to carry out higher studies, and, in that sense, have had access to the possibility of producing knowledge. In this geopolitics of knowledge (Mignolo 2000),[6] Indigenous peoples have been objects of study. When Indigenous peoples break into universities, not as objects but as knowledge-generating subjects, they can shake and question these structures, revealing the double discourse of "objectivity" and "neutrality" that sustains universities.

It is very important to recognize the university as a space of power-knowledge where the coloniality of knowledge and epistemic violence, which fuel epistemic extractivism, operate.[7] We must fight so that our ideas are heard, and we must learn to express, orally and in writing, thoughts that can contribute to and accompany our peoples. *Sentipensar*[8] is crucial, starting from our epistemologies, our ways of knowing, and the ancestral knowledge that arises in our territories, which is also renewed in the contexts and realities we must live.

UNIVERSITIES AS A SPACE OF THE SATURATION OF WHITENESS

I consider it necessary to question the saturation of whiteness since it implies discussing who has the power to name and generate knowledge in the universities of the Global North and South. I understand "white" as a way of thinking, not as a skin color.

As an Indigenous peasant, I consider it urgent that privileged people, who have had a monopoly on words and writing, keep silent and listen and learn about other ways of life that have been denied, ignored, or silenced.

The saturation of whiteness, a result of white privilege that prevails in universities, operates in such a way that it seems violence and aggressions against the population not privileged by race/class/sex/gender/nationality are unimportant exaggerations. For this reason, it is urgent to transcend the discourse of meritocracy and permanently question privileges, which will contribute to the appearance of cracks that allow the collapse of the structure that hierarchizes knowledge, voices, bodies, and inferiorized ways of life considered unimportant and, therefore, without theoretical-epistemic validity.

It is of vital importance to work daily and permanently to eradicate white supremacy in all spaces, including universities. I think it is urgent to build forms and processes of the decolonization of knowledge beyond conferences, which, although important, are not the places from which we will build other worlds, nor are universities, no matter how critical, progressive, or left-wing they may seem. We will have to go beyond university walls.

Many of us who come from the racialized peoples of the planet are aware that by participating in university academic spaces, we do not ask for opportunities to access the advantages or "advances" of the West, nor do we seek to "demonstrate" that our peoples have the capacity to think, or that our knowledge is also scientific. Many of us are not interested in claiming our knowledge and ways of life in terms of what the West holds as valid. What we want is to make a difference, certainly epistemic but above all ontological, insofar as our presence means a cry for existence, because we want to continue being what we are, living in dignity according to our way in the world in relation to the land-territory and everything that exists.

Universities must break down the symbolic and real walls that separate them from communities, peoples, and multiple realities. This separation is characteristic of the northeurocentered Enlightened[9] University, which reproduces the hierarchy and fragmentation of life.

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6 For Mignolo (2000), the "history" of knowledge is geohistorically marked and also has a value and a place of "origin." The geopolitics of knowledge proposes that knowledge is not abstract and delocalized but rather a manifestation of colonial difference.

7 This happens when people from subordinate groups access university spaces, although I recognize some of them uncritically assume rationality, epistemology, and hegemonic methodology. However, I am interested in focusing on the experiences of colleagues with whom we share the interest and importance of recognizing our origin and place of enunciation as a political commitment to our peoples, from whom we do not want to disassociate ourselves.

8 This concept was proposed by Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda, inspired by reflections of San Martín de la Loba fishers, in Bolívar Department, Colombia; these fishers explained to him the importance of thinking with the heart and feeling with the head. A *sentipensante* person combines reason with love, body, and heart, speaking honestly to eliminate all distortions that destroy said harmony (Moncayo 2015, 10).

9 Enlightened or erudite in relation to the legitimizing discourse of European colonialist expansion of the 17th century: According to Santiago Castro-Gómez (2005), enlightened scientific discourse presupposes a universal language of reason located in a neutral and objective place, the zero point of observation, to transcend vulgar language and generate knowledge of universal validity.

Conventional academic practices understand Indigenous peoples as objects of study or intervention, never as producers of knowledge or epistemic subjects. Whiteness, that is to say white privilege, is the epistemic, and mainly ontological, presupposition of colonialism that invaded these lands 524 years ago and in which the dominant groups sustain themselves to this day. White privilege continues to determine being and not being, which lives matter and which lives don't, which knowledge is valid and which is not.

In this sense, the point is not about **supporting** Indigenous peoples, communities, and nations, or dismantling white-supremacist structures, but about questioning and taking actions to tear down material and symbolic structures, transforming colonial power relations in both the objective and the subjective spheres (Fanon 1986). This implies dismantling the colonizing salvationist discourse, which reproduces the idea that racialized peoples are waiting for "someone," an outsider researcher, to come and save them.

It is not like this. We, the racialized peoples, exist and resist the multiple forms of colonialism and coloniality that have always sought to impose themselves through violence. Our intention is to see beyond the university, and that in any case, as a temple of coloniality of knowledge, the university self-destructs and contributes to overthrow from within the anthropocentric patriarchal modern-colonial racist capitalist system that today has our planet on the edge of the abyss.

As Native university students, we are committed to the problems our peoples and communities face, unlike external researchers, who mostly arrive in communities, stay for a while, leave, and most likely will not return (Cruz 2020, 23). But they are experts due to their class/race/nationality/gender privileges, even if they have only been in the community for a day or a few months. Our commitment is not to reproduce the ways that, historically, have denied the epistemologies of our peoples. Thinking with feet and heart in the land-territory is part of this responsibility. Our academic-ethical-political work does not seek to detach itself from the root that sustains it. We try to build knowledge committed to the web of life that, as stated by Indigenous thinker Aline Ngrenhtabare Lopes Kayapó, contributes

> [to] rethink[ing] anthropocentrism, the actions of human rationality, and the idea of progress carried out by the world community. The human development project generated a situation of utter disenchantment and crisis, further aggravated by ambition, vanities, and the search for power at any cost. This civilizing behavior has dehumanized our peoples, historically labeling us as heartless, unfaithful, lazy, liars,

barbarians, and enemies of progress. (n.d., translated by Montelongo González)

For this reason, we say that a recognition policy is not enough to change the colonial relations of our societies and their universities if the current colonial matrix in our territories is not questioned. The politics of recognition is a very limited strategy, even if it is presented with a decolonizing intention. The demands of Indigenous peoples, on practically all continents, revolve around the right to land-territory and self-determination, which means a struggle for existence.

It is not too difficult to see that the liberal discourse of recognition is very limited. And even worse, that the states, their institutions, and their policies have made it their own without questioning the foundations of colonial relations. Mexico is only one of many examples in relation to discourses of recognition. Laws have not guaranteed the peoples autonomy and self-determination. Recognition is not the point of arrival, but rather the starting point to demand reparation and restitution of what has been stolen, including land, territory, and a dignified life. This discourse has not challenged the structures that sustain the colonial state and, in the case of universities, the politics of recognition has not disrupted the racist foundation of the coloniality of knowledge.

I agree with Fanon (1986) on the importance of self-recognition and recognition in strictly instrumental terms, that is, only as a starting point in a struggle that seeks deep and radical transformations. Hence, "inclusive" claims are not enough, since inclusivity does not guarantee the elimination of racist, sexist, and xenophobic structures that exist in universities. Language certainly creates and destroys, but it is not just about language but also about the deeply racist and violent structure that sustains it.

Decolonization must consider the university system as a whole, its structures, policies, the way decisions are made, and its students and teachers, as well as its programs of study, theory, practice, and the educational system as a whole. This requires incorporating other methodologies, epistemologies, and ontologies, which put at the center Mother Earth, the great pedagogue, through a knowledge that does not separate reason from heart, as stated by Abadio Green Stocel, Gunadule theologian, philosopher, and ethnolinguist.[10]

FINAL REFLECTION

It is a matter of speech and its time. The present is spoken individually, the past and the future collectively. Death, then, only has power individually, and life is only possible collectively. That

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10 Abadio Green Stocel is Coordinator of the Indigenous Education Program and professor of the bachelor's degree in Pedagogy of Mother Earth at the University of Antioquia, Colombia.

is why we say "I die" and that is why we say "we live" and "we will live."

Memoirs of Old Antonio, Mayan sage (qtd. in Comisión Sexta del EZLN, 2007, translated by Montelongo González).

As descendants of peoples inhabiting Abya Yala for millennia, traversed by the colonial wound, we can say our historical-cultural heritage was and continues to be denied and expropriated simultaneously. From this logic of dispossession, it is generally external researchers who study our peoples, without the participation of our members as researchers of our own history; our knowledge is taken into account to the extent that we serve as informants (Aguilar 2020, 58; Cruz 2020). This is how a form of knowledge construction is perpetuated that permanently reproduces the colonizer's gaze, the imperial gaze (Tuhiwai Smith 2017).

Epistemologies, ontologies, and voices of the members of colonized peoples continue to be denied.

> All this has generated a disconnection between past and present, a disjunction between the living heritage of Indigenous peoples (language, oral literature, rituals, social organization) and their historical-cultural heritage (codices, colonial maps, colonial texts, and remains ancient precolonial) as a whole. So, can we also speak of an academic-epistemological extractivism? From a colonized and at the same time colonizing academy? (Aguilar 2020, 58, translated by Montelongo González)

The answer is yes.

I consider the role and contributions of racialized peoples as fundamental in decolonizing the knowledge process; it is urgent to take the floor to reconstruct our own narratives. Fortunately, many Abya Yala peoples already are doing this work. In the words of Aline Ngrenhtabare Lopes Kayapó, Aymara writer and academic:

> Our struggle is not to be included or integrated into the academies of letters. First of all, those words, "inclusion," "integration," produce what dentists call bruxism, teeth grinding. We, the Indigenous people, will never be integrated, because if we integrate ourselves into the national society, we will separate ourselves from our original culture and vice versa. What we propose is an interaction, because when we interact we manage to share what is ours and absorb what belongs to the other without forgetting that we belong to our peoples. (n.d., translated by Montelongo González)

However, even though I consider the dispute within universities important, I am skeptical of the idea of the Westernized university as a space for decolonization of knowledge. In fact, I believe that decolonization of knowledge walks on the margins of the university, and mainly outside it, standing on the margin, understood as a place of struggle and resistance (Anzaldúa 2015), a border that is not an empty space but a place of great epistemic power to dispute the narrative of the single story.

In this process, the descendants of the peoples who have inhabited Abya Yala for millennia try to walk towards the reconstruction of our epistemologies and our ontologies, which have as their main reference the reconstruction of the network of life and the worlds in relation that coexist and reexist. It is essential to cause cracks as well as to build bridges that repair the broken ties with those people who are willing to question the modern/colonial system of domination and its privileges. People who are willing to fight side by side by listening, learning, and recognizing the multiple ways of knowing, understanding, and making worlds—and in this way dismantle the colonial structures that support the system of death, exploitation, and dispossession that subjected the nonmodern worlds—generate knowledge at the service of life and build learning spaces without any form of colonialism or coloniality.

My community[11] is under threat from extractivism and poultry megafarms, among other projects that threaten life in the territory; for this reason, I believe that a decolonizing project entails the responsibility and commitment of defending life. Talking about decolonization in an auditorium or investigating problems that afflict society is useless if information does not go beyond a book or publication far from peoples who see their means and ways of life destroyed or converted into merchandise. If we do not fight together with peoples to face the dispossession of their lands, water, and knowledge, simple recognition of the problem is useless. I'm not talking about help but about responsibility and commitment, putting knowledge at the service of peoples who resist patriarchal, colonial, and racist capitalism, inside and outside state borders. I'm talking about denunciation and destruction of the capitalist hydra, the multiheaded monster, as described by Zapatistas of the Mexican southeast. I'm talking about denouncing operating mechanisms of this death system as a way of assuming collective responsibility in the struggle for life.

In my opinion, the place where we are is precisely the ideal place to construct other worlds. There we can organize resistance thinking with the heart and acting at the service of life, not capital. Solidarity as a fellowship, not as loot to make an academic or political career, or as "a personal stairway to power" (Comisión Sexta del EZLN, 2007).

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11 In Chila de las Flores, a southern Mixtec municipality located in Puebla, Mexico, there are lithium deposits. In November 2020, the Mexican Geological Service was notified of the existence of this mineral, considered as "white gold." Since then, we have felt uneasy due to the danger its exploitation would generate for the ecosystem as a whole. Poultry companies constantly harass authorities and people to consent to the installation of megapoultry farms in their territory. Their interest is based on the importance of the municipality's location, land, and water for their profits.

I think it's not about taking peoples' pain as an investment for individual purposes or academic careers, but thinking by doing and doing by thinking, as a decolonizing political project, from the land in which we were born and/or grew up or to which we migrated because that's where we are. My words agree with Zapatista and the *Sentipensar* way of doing from southern Mexico:

> We have learned that seeds are exchanged, planted, and grow daily in our land, together with the knowledge of each one. . . . The commotions that shake human history begin with an isolated, almost imperceptible "That's enough!" A dissonant note in the middle of noise. A crack in the wall. That is why we have not come to bring magic formulas, to impose visions and strategies, to promise bright and instant futures, massive rallies, or immediate solutions. Nor do we promise wonderful unions. We come to listen to you. . . . Zapatista communities refer to a cause, a motive, a goal: life. We are not talking about abandoning convictions and struggles. In contrast, we think that struggles for women, for gender diversity and equality, and for indigenous workers should not stop but deepen their radicalism. Each one faces one or more heads of the Hydra. (Palabras de los Pueblos Zapatistas, 2021, translated by Montelongo González)

The project consists of consolidating resistance from the corners of the world in which we live and settle. Let's build stories of resistance against a system of death, the capitalist system. The challenge is to crack the walls to promote life where apparently only death, individualism, desire for consumption, destruction, and wealth accumulation are possible.

Decolonizing knowledge implies *corazonar*, that is to say, cracking and opening furrows for the seeds to grow, as the Tojolabal Mayans of the Mexican southeast do, thinking with the heart and putting a dignified life and good living at the center. This is how the members of the Government Council of the Kitu Kara People, in the Ecuadorian Andes, express it: "*Corazonar*: think with a liberated heart, nurture thought with the impulse of life and our will" (Guerrero 2010, translated by Montelongo González). *Corazonar* the meaning of dominant epistemologies to displace the hegemony of reason. This horizon points towards the construction of other epistemic proposals and meanings of existence (Guerrero 2007, 97). The proposal is to decolonize and *corazonar* everything, inside and outside the academy.

Many of us who belong to Indigenous peoples and are in the university maintain that our decolonization work cannot be separated from the needs and problems of our communities. When speaking of decolonization, I'm not referring to decolonization of power, being, nature, and gender as an epistemic, theoretical, or abstract question, but as something very concrete, daily, and long term. I talk of a life project, for the land and with the Earth,

for reconstruction and defense of the worlds of life threatened by modernity/coloniality and its *racionalidad descorazonada*.[12]

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