

Review

Racial Shorthand: Coded Discrimination Contested in Social Media

Edited by Cruz Medina and Octavio Pimentel

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In *Racial Shorthand: Coded Discrimination Contested in Social Media*, Cruz Medina and Octavio Pimentel give scholars in Rhetoric and Composition our



first edited collection on multimodal composition from the perspectives and practices of people of color. Their

reasoning for this, as they say in the Introduction, is to “set out to unpack the dominant narratives that undermine the media produced by communities of color” that further erase “the rhetorical, oral, and aural traditions of these communities.” Though the discipline has discussed the use of technologies by people of color, the tendency has been to look solely at technological access to argue for the existence of the digital divide. While that conversation has been useful for thinking

about how power has functioned to control or prevent technology use within these communities, Medina and Pimentel expand our disciplinary conversations past the digital divide and to show how people of color compose through a multitude of technologies.

They declare their hope that the collection’s chapters will highlight and uplift multimodal contributions by communities of color that have been overlooked and erased because dominant assumptions about multimodal composing prioritize the digital over other creative composing practices. This prioritization operates through a colonial logic that purposefully ignores non-dominant approaches to technology use. Therefore, Medina and Pimentel strategically adopt a decolonial framework that presents “knowledge from rhetorical traditions that have been denied, dismissed, and ignored in favor of championing the centrality of whiteness in the myth of Western modernity” (Introduction). In turn, the authors explain how people of color use technology in the service of uplifting their own communities and sharing stories neglected by mainstream society.

In “Not the King: Cantando el Himno Nacional de los Estados Unidos,” Octavio Pimentel seeks to redefine the dominant perception of American identity by focusing on Sebastien de la Cruz, a young Mexican-American singer who performed

the National Anthem during the 2013 NBA Finals. Pimentel argues that the dominant belief of whiteness as what defines American-ness fueled racist reactions to de la Cruz's performance. Pimentel calls on the United States to "address racism, cultural difference, and translingualism in its educational system" to curb the further marginalization of students of color that furthers racist beliefs and leads to violence." He encourages writing instructors to consider race as they write in and across modalities with students in their classrooms.

The second chapter, "Miss American Terrorist: A Critical Racial Analysis of the Crowning of Miss America" by Charise Pimentel, furthers the question of what it means to be an American. Using critical media literacy, Pimentel looks closely at the history of the Miss America Pageant and how racism within that institution reflects racist discourses present in other aspects of American society. She, too, supports the integration of critical media literacy as a methodological approach in writing classes to help students critique normative discourses of racism that permeate and normalize perceptions of whiteness.

Alexis McGee then pushes on the normalization of whiteness in America by analyzing the rhetorical history and signification of Barbie. By critiquing both the doll and Mattel's Dolls of the World Collection, McGee argues that Barbie "produces forms of racial shorthand" rhetorically across multiple social media spaces ("Barbie Goes Abroad"). Employing

critical frames, McGee examines how the collective image of Barbies from around the world upholds racist, capitalist conceptions of beauty and bodily identity that particularly center whiteness.

In Chapter Four, "Essence of Mom 2.0: Media, Memory, and Community across an Extended African American Family," Julia Voss and Lillie R. Jenkins seek to amend the gap Medina and Pimentel identify by focusing on the creation of the MJ Project, a digital text that documents the life and legacy of Martha M. Jenkins, an African American woman whose life had an extraordinary impact on many. Voss and Jenkins reflect on the MJ Project's function as a familial multimodal literacy practice; they also discuss the methodological approach for creating this kind of multimodal text to honor the ethical concerns of MJ's family and communities. Their chapter ends with a set of best practices for collecting and writing a family history.

Next, Miriam F. Williams shows in her chapter, "#BlackLivesMatter: Tweeting a Movement in *Chronos* and *Kairos*," how Black social media activists have used Twitter to form the #BlackLivesMatter movement. She shares information gathered by conducting a qualitative rhetorical analysis of the top tweets using the hashtag for one day. Her article illuminates the data she gathered and a methodological approach to interpret this data set that Rhetoric and Composition may find useful. In doing her research, Williams learned that use of the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag has influenced

public conversation around resisting police violence, acknowledging that more work needs to be done.

In the second to last chapter, Laura Gonzales presents data gathered from a case study at a non-profit organization in Western Michigan. Gonzales suggests that we can learn more about how information is designed to fit different audiences by studying the ways multilingual communicators use what she calls “translation moments” to transform and adapt information across languages. She frames “Translation as Technology” that performs constant rhetorical negotiations based on cultural, strategic, and design needs. She concludes by asking scholars to reposition linguistic diversity as a valuable asset within professional, technical communication settings.

Lastly, Cruz Medina shows readers “how personal stories in culturally relevant multimodal storytelling contribute to scholarship that has been excluded from the landscape of academic print literacy” (“Digital Latinx Storytelling”). Medina refers to this form of storytelling as a form of digital testimonio—“a Latinx digital writing practice that makes use of the different semiotic affordances of multimodal communication in online environments, and embodies a resistant ethos in an academic space to engage with issues of race, class, gender, and disability.” The two digital testimonies he shares highlight how these forms enable Latinx composers to speak truth to power. Both videos are powerful, emotional texts that draw viewers in through the camera and into a

world where memory and story bring the past to us. Medina concludes his chapter—and this collection—with an argument for teaching digital testimonio in the classroom for how it promotes multimodal composing and supports social justice-oriented pedagogy.

This collection provides readers/viewers/hearers/writers with a sampling of texts through which to critically engage with how technologies and race intersect to impact everyone. We are all shaped by the racist discourses around us, and our technologies have not escaped that truth. However, just as technologies work in service of oppression and power, people of color have used the technologies we have at hand to act in resistance. This collection gives our discipline some tactics for responding to racism within technological platforms and for adapting the technologies we have at hand. As Medina and Pimentel make clear, people of color have long engaged in multimodal composition; it is past time that scholarly spaces make room for those texts.

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