

# POSTSCRIPT

The title of this book was inspired by two works that, for us, define an emerging tradition in RCWS research that attempts to theorize race—*Race, Rhetoric, and Composition*, edited by Keith Gilyard, and *Race, Rhetoric, and Technology* by Adam Banks. We owe a great debt to these two texts, which offer philosophical lines of inquiry that have led to a significant body of works about race and racism in the field (see Chapter 1). In the introduction of this book, we review some of this research, noting that such work identifies the absence of race in RCWS research, interrogates negative characterizations of BIPOC, and/or resists the marginalization of minoritized people via linguistic dominance. We envision our book as part of current transformations in “critical” knowledge making in the discipline that takes seriously the need to address how structural racism affects our scholarship. Focusing on this problem motivated us to create work that could open up even more space for research that is guided by antiracism as a critical methodology. Whether you work on historical or contemporary subjects, we sincerely hope that our various approaches represent and/or stimulate your research interests, as well as your willingness to talk about race.

One way that our book differs from Gilyard’s collection (an edited collection) and Banks’ work (a single-author text) is that *Race, Rhetoric, and Research Methods* is a co-authored work. Four authors developing a book as one voice that could showcase multiple voices embedded into a coherent work required us to work differently than any of us were trained during our academic studies. The process requires negotiation, flexibility, and trust. Nevertheless, we crafted this book as a cross-cultural effort in overcoming these composition challenges.

Collaborative authorship has the potential to serve as a major characteristic of antiracism research. More people need to write together about how politics, especially structural oppression and violence, affects our everyday lives. In our case, it increased critical engagement with one another’s work, as well as presented us with a long-term writing group that could support the development of our research writing and enrich our race-consciousness. Collaboration may also provide a way to have very difficult conversations about race and improve one’s understanding about how to learn how to talk about it. We also believe that collaborative race-centered research will enable us to create new knowledge about high-stakes political issues and improve the generosity of idea exchange, overall.

Since we aim to produce ethical work, we must concede that composing this work has not been a seamlessly harmonious enterprise. We definitely encountered plenty of conflict along the way. Miscommunication occurred via long email chains, and commitment to the project was tested by various constraints such as

the professional demands of directing writing programs, teaching in a Trump-era, negotiating multiple research projects, communicating with editors, succeeding on the academic job market, organizing comprehensive tenure and promotion portfolios, as well as grappling with extreme personal issues such as deaths in the family, parents' medical problems, poverty, incarceration, relationship break-ups, and so much more. Admittedly, we did not all enter the project with strong interpersonal relationships, which affected our ability to show care for one another. At any given time, two of us knew each other prior to the project, whereas the other two were strangers albeit colleagues. Some of us thought the best of each other or the worst of others. We cried, laughed, made meetings, missed meetings, provoked, relented, retracted, apologized, and forgave. Emotions ran too high to ever forget the experience. Some feelings were hurt, other feelings were good, passion and commitment were tested, and synergy was sometimes achieved.

Despite our struggles, the project continued. Our relationships strengthened as much as our desire to develop and finish this work. Working on our communication was a critical part of the creative process that yielded dramatic insights that prevailed over any obstacles we experienced along the way. We were better together, we had to trust each other, and absolute respect was necessary to inspire each other to create their best contributions to the work. But we aren't perfect. We aren't ashamed to discuss our difficulties because, as we often preach to our students and acknowledge in composition research, writing ain't easy. Our cycles of creation and resistance simply emulate this thing called "life." We know that we may not recognize lessons of this collaboration—its joys, traumas, etc.—for many years to come.

For graduate students and faculty seeking to innovate their methods and locate opportunities for eradicating racism, we hope that our book will serve as a critical resource that models a range of ways to make meaningful antiracist research. As we discussed in our introduction and throughout the text, antiracism informs the selection of methods capable of investigating culture, difference, and knowledge as concepts that are embedded in conflicts over the meaning of justice. Our book has attempted to shift the social justice turn in RCWS away from shallow conversations that briefly acknowledge that structural inequality exists towards deeper contemplations about how such observations ought to affect the field's research practices. Certainly, RCWS has a strong tradition of critical inquiry, as well as recovering texts that enable us to construct diverse disciplinary herstories. Our scholarship about injustice includes the problem of equitable assessment, lack of engagement between Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) and writing programs, linguistic imperialism, institutional racism, "remedial" program design, inadequate working conditions, unequal pay, insufficient racial diversity across all ranks, and sexual harassment, among several other

issues. We build upon this work by focusing on some of the epistemological implications of studying race and racism.

All our chapters, collectively, culminate in a series of strategic questions that could help guide future work that draws on antiracism as a research methodology:

1. Why am I interested in studying race and racism?
2. What sources of knowledge affect my understanding of race and racism?
3. What are my most memorable personal experiences with race and racism? Have I adequately considered the role of these experiences in how I think about knowledge, who produces it, who owns it, and what we ought to be studying?
4. How am I responding to national and global events involving race, class, gender, and sexuality? To what extent should this context be addressed in my scholarship? Why or why not?
5. When and how do I talk about race? For what purposes? What do I learn from these conversations?
6. How do conversations about race and racism, or oppression in general, tend to make me feel? What makes me uncomfortable, passionate, disinterested, etc.?
7. Have I disclosed my personal interest in studying race and racism? Did I discuss how I feel affected by these subjects? Have I been explicit about the challenges that affect my ability to do this kind of scholarship?
8. Do my research questions about race reflect an attempt to eradicate racism?
9. Do I consult and engage (e.g., cite) research written by women, under-represented minorities, and other marginalized writers?
10. Does my research clarify specifically what it contributes to our knowledge about race and racism?

This line of inquiry, by no means exhaustive, informs methods that we already practice in the field: critical historiography, autoethnography, filmmaking, visual rhetorical analysis, and critical technological discourse analysis. These methods benefit studies about race and racism because they bring researchers into contact with their own habits of seeing and their relationship to their own racial identit(ies). This methodology invites researchers to build their confidence about how to responsibly talk about and study race. When more people engage antiracism as methodology, we will be capable of having much richer dialogues about race without alienating each other. We recognize that people are afraid to talk about race because they don't want to get it wrong, offend, and face harsh penalties for "ignorance." However, we strongly believe that the nature of this work is emotional because it requires grappling with absurdity, pain, violence, and (how we ought to share) responsibility.

As we conclude this book, we must draw your attention to the great catastrophes of 2020. We are currently living in a global pandemic where the US has failed to control the virus. Over 100,000 Americans have died from COVID-19, and we have millions of cases compared to numerous developed countries who are flattening their curves down to only a few hundred cases or less. Black, American Indian, and Latinx people disproportionately make up over half of COVID-19's victims (Wood). The U.S. president refuses to listen to leading scientists and doctors and implement nationwide measures that would enable us to reduce our scaled suffering. Instead, he has left states to fend for themselves while he hosts large rallies where people don't have to be socially distanced or wear masks. He weaponized the virus, racializing it by calling it the "Kung Flu" and the "China Virus," at the glee of his white supremacist base of voters. He compared peaceful protesters to Antifa, Fascists, Terrorists, Thugs, and Scum, deploying the national guard in D.C., who then used rubber bullets and teargas against the demonstrators.

Meanwhile, the entire nation has experienced a major awakening regarding racism and police violence. Millions of people all over the world are still staying home. Our attempt to combat the virus plus the mass unemployment rate (likely over 11 percent nationwide), as well as the cancellation of sports, slowed us down and made us focus on three heinous murders (Iacurci). Ahmaud Arbery, a Black man on a jog, was hunted and gunned down by three white supremacists in Brunswick, Georgia. Breonna Taylor, a Black woman EMT was asleep with her boyfriend, Kenneth Walker, when police conducted a no-knock warrant in Louisville, KY. Walker, thinking it was a home invasion, grabbed his licensed firearm and confronted the police. Police immediately opened fire into the home, brutally killing Taylor in her sleep. They were at the wrong house. The police involved have not been charged. These two incidents were amplified by the cruel murder of George Floyd, a tall Black man in Minneapolis, MN. Bystander Darnella Frazier recorded officer Derek Chauvin placing his knee on Floyd's neck for eight minutes and forty-six seconds. Three other officers actively participated and/or passively watched. The reception of this video sparked global outcry unlike any other film footage before it.

Of course, Floyd's suffering is part of an ocean of human pain. So many hashtags preceded #JusticeforGeorgeFloyd, like #BlackLivesMatter, #ICantBreathe, #HandsUpDontShoot, and #SayHerName. Yet, the citizen videography of Floyd rhetorically appealed to the masses. Like Emmett Till, the four little girls in Birmingham, MLK Jr., Malcolm X, Fred Hampton, Medgar Evers, and countless others, Floyd's unnecessary death signifies a clear and present danger to any claims to American Democracy.

During his eulogy of George Floyd, Reverend Al Sharpton declared that Floyd's literal death symbolized the current human condition under violent, corrupt, inhumane systems:

What happened to Floyd happens every day in this country—in education, in health services, and in every area of American life. It's time for us to stand up in George's name and say, "Get yo' knee off our necks!" (See Appendix B: YouTubePlay-list)

And suddenly, people were putting on their masks by the millions, protesting police brutality and cruelty against humans during a pandemic. Books on antiracism are on bestseller lists. Monuments of racists and colonists are falling. The state of Mississippi finally signed a law to remove the confederacy symbol from their state flag—they are the last state in the US to do so. Suddenly, every major corporation is using the slogan #BlackLivesMatter. NFL Commissioner, Roger Goodall, apologized for not listening to players (whom he did not name) peacefully protesting the national anthem. Even Mitt Romney showed up to a protest and actually said that he believes that #BlackLivesMatter.

Indeed, it is worth dwelling on the fact that publicly talking about race and racism has always been extremely taboo. These concepts are highly emotional subjects that we all experience differently. Take race, for instance. It is absurd. It is a riddle. It is everywhere and nowhere. It is something that we may not see and we can't get out of. More specifically, it is hard to talk about race and racism because it is nearly impossible to tell the truth about what we see. Nowhere feels all that safe, and the precarity of safety leads to fear, suspicion, and shame. Regardless of who you are, or how "objective" and "professional" you attempt to be, we have to choose our words carefully when it comes to race. We make meaning about it as we go along, relying on a complex mapping of visual signs and linguistic codes that signal whether we should or shouldn't say certain things to certain audiences.

However, structural racism has created so many catastrophic consequences that it manifests quickly as a matter of life and death. The parallels between the behavior of COVID-19 and racism are increasingly striking enough to expose that the world has become so hostile and inhabitable for human beings, in general, that everyone's lives are at stake. Under this crushing reality, we are grateful that it is making conversations about antiracism more urgent and culturally relevant to the mainstream. Seeing #BlackLivesMatter and discussions about the possibility of defunding the police taken seriously by journalists and everyday people is something we could not have anticipated when we began this project in 2015.

Nevertheless, there is still so much work to do.

The preservation of human life and its overall quality literally depends on the eradication of practicing racial hierarchies in sign and deed. The “lives” in the Black Lives Matter (#BLM) movement vividly illustrate that unchecked, unexamined acts of racism disproportionately kill people. In fact, #BlackLivesMatter inspired us to wonder about the rhetorical power of the word “life” and how it presents an opportunity for literary and rhetorical investigation. Antiracism encourages us to consider how racism is unsustainable in the most literal sense. How does it systematically destroy and fail to sustain life? To consider anti-racism as a methodology means acknowledging that everything we do—even research—has real implications for human survival and quality of life. Thus, we must choose research methods that are capable of generating knowledge about what it means to live and survive in a colonial, capitalist, patriarchal, white supremacist global society. How many risks are we willing to take in our research to fight for truth and justice? If our goal is to make knowledge about language and culture, how are we limited by the extent to which we can be honest about what we do and don't see?

The energy of this moment is anxious, frustrated, and unstable. The US has failed so miserably at responding to the rapid spread of COVID-19 that the EU has banned travel from this country. Some colleges and universities are laying off thousands of contingent laborers and demanding that faculty return to in-person teaching in fall 2020. Almost every single state is surging in COVID-19 cases, as experts estimate over 350,000 deaths as of January 2021. November feels like ages away. We anticipate that during these intense times, navigating graduate education will be the most difficult that it has ever been. The academic job market was already terrible, and it is destined to get worse and worse if U.S. leaders continue to ineffectively balance public health with “the economy.” However, education is a public good that will never lose value as long as people seek excellence and a better life for us all. With these rhetorical considerations and opportunities in mind, antiracism is a profound and necessary course of epistemic action.

## WORKS CITED

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