

## *Rhetoric, Politics & Culture* Statement on Antiblackness and Antiracism

At a time when Black people and their allies fill city streets across the US in response to antiblack violence from the state and other institutions, rhetoricians must reflect on what we might meaningfully bring to the table. Many in our field have always had a great deal to say about the role of rhetoric in affirming the value of Black lives and struggling against the myriad social forces that would snuff it out. As teachers and theorists of rhetoric today, a moment such as this certainly calls for our collective work to be more consequential.

Although *Rhetoric, Politics & Culture* did not arise from a collective effort to confront white supremacy at the level of law enforcement or public policy, our story is one of the racism that permeates our profession. While a letter penned by Dr. Martin Medhurst, and another collectively written by almost all National Communication Association Distinguished Scholars, sparked the activism that gave rise to this enterprise, these problems are not new. The overwhelming whiteness of our field's journals, award recipients, tenured ranks, graduate programs, conference participation, and syllabi testify to the agonizing fact that rhetoric's whiteness is an inherent feature. The Black Radical Tradition, from Carter G. Woodson to Sylvia Wynter, reminds us that schooling, disciplinary knowledge, and the structure of the academy are rooted in the theories and processes that create and sustain antiblackness. Our field's origins are also in white supremacy and the logics that make Black people such as Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, Tony McDade, Breonna Taylor, and legions of others vulnerable to premature death also sustain the norms of rigor, merit, and distinction that permeate rhetorical studies.

For these reasons, we are less interested in identifying what rhetorical theory and criticism might bring to bear on the current explosion of activist discourse in response to Black death than we are in reflecting on how rhetorical scholars ourselves can respond to the antiblackness that finds expression in our professional and quotidian practices. Instead of describing others' activist rhetoric, we wish to center intersectional antiracist deconstructions of the ways we do our work in the field. To this end, we recommit *Rhetoric, Politics & Culture* to its antiracist mission and call on our colleagues to join us in continuing to address the following:

- Disrupt rhetoric's canonical politics and citational practices to include Black voices in ways that challenge and refine our norms of intellectual inquiry.
- Promote scholarship that engages Blackness and all other positionalities through an intersectional lens.
- Name and confront antiblack and other violent professional practices that even the self-fashioned progressives among us tolerate and perpetrate. These include, but are not limited to:
  - Engaging in harassment, gaslighting, and other aggressive practices that entrench the marginalization of Black and other minoritized individuals.

- Relying on overwhelmingly white professional networks to recruit faculty and students.
- Using norms of evaluation that center white knowledge practices and marginalize Black and other minority epistemologies.
- Weaponizing review and promotion processes to punish outspoken Black and other minoritized colleagues.
- Dismissing the critiques of Black graduate students and defending and ignoring the rampant white violence, from faculty and other graduate students, in our graduate programs.

This is obviously an incomplete list and we invite our colleagues to build upon it. Our most fundamental commitment in drafting this statement is to strengthen the structures of accountability that call upon this journal to contribute, in whatever modest ways it can, to disrupting the hegemony of whiteness in rhetorical studies. Doing so requires that we think not only of what critical tools we have to offer those who confront antiblackness in public life, but also take stock in the material consequences of the antiblackness that shapes our profession.