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Trump's University: Argument and Pedagogy in the "Post-Fact Era"

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About a decade ago, Princeton professors and friends Cornel West and Robert George began to collaborate on a freshman seminar, "Great Books: Ideas and Arguments." West is a prominent scholar of democracy and self-identified Leftist, while George is an accomplished theologian and conservative. Their political differences shouldn't be overstated—George is not Ann Coulter—but in the midst of the 2016 presidential election, the kind of genuine dialogue their seminar reflects inspired us to teach a similar course, one that would ask students to weigh contrasting points of view, read and reflect slowly and deeply on compelling arguments, and formulate their own opinions with nuance. So, in 2016, as Donald J. Trump made the unbelievable move from Republican candidate to nominee to president, we developed and co-taught an Honors Seminar at Ithaca College, which in a nod to West and George we called "Great Debates in Writing and Film."

Trump's success created a difficult space—and continues to do so—in courses focused on writing and argument. Where students could once be told that their use of language needed to be clear, concise, and follow grammatical regularity, or that their arguments need to come from a place of logic and evidence, the president is an omnipresent reminder that for some this just is not true. It may be tempting for our students to believe that the old rules no longer apply, that truth is always relative, and that courses focused on logical argument and clear writing are now a complete waste of time. It is easy to understand where these students are coming from as, given the Trump-related news saturation in the US media, it is easy to think the inauguration of Donald Trump ushered in a complete break from the history that precedes it. While there is no denying that the Trump administration is marked by a troubling public relations platform that uses lies and attacks on the "mainstream media" to distract from—or bait the public into support of—its fostering of overt racism, increased US military aggression, and violent deregulation of the corporate enterprise, what we attempt to highlight for students in our respective argumentation courses is that the Trump presidency's relation to the truth is actually a continuation and even amplification of recent history rather than a break from it.

So, as we struggled with these challenges in our Honors class, we looked for the most effective

ways to topicalize Trump, that is, to emphasize that he is not himself a foundational problem in American politics, but instead that he is a direct result of larger systems of racism and privilege that our students can easily overlook. The "network literacy" which emerges as a major principle of this collection—or "the need to understand the infrastructure, platforms, ecologies, and relationships that determine how information and knowledge is made and experienced," as the editors explain in the Introduction—informed our approach to Trump as symptomatic of a deeply racialized "post-fact" era. We wanted the class to provide students with an opportunity to step back from the heat of debating pro and con, to slow down and build the literacy strategies to look for symptoms and the causes of those symptoms. As writing professors, we are uniquely suited to engage our students in examination of these systems because of rhetoric's longstanding attention to the distinction between cause and sign. Moreover, the rhetorical standpoint that values are always constructed by and through communities of speech suggests that we have never not been post-fact. With few exceptions, the history of rhetoric is a couple-millennia-long discourse on the slipperiness and opacity of "facts." As writing professors we can ask students to complicate our current "post-fact" moment by viewing it through the lens of rhetorical history to reveal the ways the discourse of truth has been racialized since the colonial era.

Keith Gilyard outlines this history in his essay "Higher Learning: Composition's Racialized Reflection." Gilyard argues that the construction of racial categories served to make social and economic inequity appear natural—corresponding with claims of racial hierarchy. Compounding the fraught rhetoric of citizenship Shereen Inayatulla and Michael T. MacDonald identify elsewhere in this collection, this racial hierarchy consequently works to imbue the narratives of white Europeans with greater influence. Given this longstanding history, and Trump's growing list of deception and disinformation aside, we can unveil the underlayment of US political rhetoric as a two-tiered relationship to truth in which white Europeans and their descendants are seen as automatically valid producers of truth, while the truths produced by the descendants of the colonized are automatically viewed with confusion and/or skepticism. Walter Mignolo calls this global divide of knowledge *coloniality*, evidence of the ways colonization affected not just geographies and bodies but also the discourse of truth. And so, we view it as our responsibility to facilitate our students' learning through this context, which reveals that when Trump talks, even when he lies, he brings this historical privilege of truth to bear on his speech. Viewed in the context of such an epistemological landscape, which places people of color into an infinite state of deferral and (pre) development, the "postfaktisch" nature of Trump's rhetoric is revealed. As a white man in power, he doesn't need facts; his statements have rhetorical force without them, as evidenced by Trump's carrying 58% of white voters, and only 8% of black voters.

Indeed, the perception that Trump somehow represents a break from convention that inaugurates the new post-fact era is only possible in a racist neoliberal orthodoxy in which individual actors are responsible for their own status. This bootstraps mentality is, not coincidentally, the very worldview that glorifies Trump as a self-made man, a brilliant business strategist, and a top-notch maker of deals. The view that Trump embodies the mythical self-made man was not uncommon in our classroom**.** Even when students and professor alike are shocked and saddened by the election of

someone they mostly agree is a bigoted misogynist, there is nevertheless an underlying assumption that Trump earned his victory, that Trump represents success in the world of business, that he is, to borrow his words, "a winner," and a businessman uniquely qualified to defeat Hillary Clinton and "drain the swamp." This assumption is perhaps unstated, and it is perhaps begrudging, but it is there nevertheless.

The reality, contrary to conventional thought, is far more insidious, and it is evident not only in the everyday fallout of the Trump presidency but also in Trump's rhetoric itself. Conventional thought holds that Trump was victorious because he was convincing to a resurgent body of blue-collar voters, who, uneducated and media illiterate, were easily persuaded by a series of assertions ranging from loose interpretation of fact to omission to all-out lies and fake news. But this view can only hold by turning away from the vast body of evidence that shows that Trump's victory represents in no way a new era of politics, but rather a continuation of the same racist foundations that have dominated US politics since its founding. Compare, for example, Trump's revilement of Mexicans during his campaign with similar remarks made at the 1928 Congressional Hearings on Western Hemisphere Immigration. First Trump:

> When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us (sic). They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. (Staff)

And here is Dr. Roy Garis, of Vanderbilt University, arguing in support of the 1928 bill:

> Their minds run to nothing higher than animal functions—eat, sleep, and sexual debauchery. In every huddle of Mexican shacks one meets the same idleness, hordes of hungry dogs, and filthy children with faces plastered with flies, disease, lice, human filth, stench, promiscuous fornication, bastardly, lounging, apathetic peons and lazy squaws, beans and dried fruit, liquor, general squalor, and envy and hatred of the gringo. These people sleep by day and prowl by night like coyotes, stealing anything they can get their hands on, no matter how useless to them it may be. Nothing left outside is safe unless padlocked or chained down. Yet there are Americans clamoring for more of these human swine to be brought over from Mexico. (qtd. in Villanueva 657)

What we see here is that Trump's statements are shorter and rely more on inference ("problems") than direct "evidence" of the savage nature of Mexicans because his statements are founded upon the very ideas put forth by Garis—ideas already ingrained in our cultural consciousness. In the example from Garis, we see an attempt to "scientifically prove" the inferiority of Mexicans, but Trump can just refer to it as if it were common sense. There is no attempt at providing evidence (no matter how problematic)—only naked assertion. To borrow from Villanueva, "racism runs deep" (650), deep enough to remain sufficiently shrouded from scrutiny to serve as a commonplace of public discourse. Thus, to suggest that Trump is a political innovator, the catalyst for if not the cause of this transformation of the political scene, is to misconstrue Trump's victory for something other than what it is, another triumph of racism in US politics.

Cause Versus Sign: Topicalizing Trump

We used a rhetorical lens to bring this history to bear on our study of argument in our Honors course. The problem we were responding to is that when we focus solely on Trump, when classes are devoted to critique of his administration's actions, policies, and tweets, we risk reducing the racism that has been the unknown known of US politics from the beginning to one man, unwittingly giving students the impression that Trump is the cause of racist deception in US politics. The reality, of course, is that Trump is a sign of this larger underlying phenomenon, not its cause. An argument from sign, unlike an argument from cause, is an argument that suggests two phenomena are linked in a relationship of correspondence. The occurrence of one phenomenon predicts the existence of the other. If we as educators overlook this distinction, diving into a cathartic pool of laments over Trump without first providing the conceptual framework necessary to fit these phenomena into a larger narrative, we isolate the phenomena as causal, rather than a symptom or sign of a larger historical pattern. Students are thus left with the misconception that things would be "all better" if Trump were simply out of office, that racism was all but taken care of before Trump, and that this kind of opportunistic utilization of racism in politics is a relatively new phenomenon. Students lose the opportunity to better understand our political reality, and as teachers of writing and rhetoric, we lose for our students the opportunity to gain critical reasoning as a praxis. In essence, we want students to understand that the Trump presidency is not the cause of American problems but rather the effect of systemic post-factualization regarding race, religion, and economics that have existed since the birth of the nation.

To help students develop this critical reasoning praxis and navigate their own thoughts and discourses surrounding Trump's presidency and its countless impacts on society, then, we avoid Trump as a topic the first few weeks of the semester. Instead, we focus on providing students with the contextual knowledge that would make a deeper discussion of Trump's presidency successful. We adapt our approach from Laura Greenfield and Karen Rowan, who argue in "Beyond the 'Week Twelve Approach': Toward a Critical Pedagogy for Antiracist Tutor Education," that topics such as racism, sexism, and homophobia be brought up immediately so that the students are not surprised when the topics arise in class and so that they can develop an understanding of how these topics intersect with seemingly apolitical and impersonal topics such as housing policy or tutor training.

When it comes to Trump, we are making a seemingly but not actually oppositional suggestion—to wait until the critical foundations have been laid. While at first it may seem like we are arguing against their approach, we are actually making a compatible argument. Trump is not as foundational to society as racism or sexism. He is a symptom of these elements in our society: his status, business empire, and presidential appointment are a direct result of sexism, racism, xenophobia, and a host of other social issues. Thus, Trump is best treated as a "topic" through which these phenomena can be analyzed. Essentially, delaying the focus on Trump until later in the semester, and after students have had a chance to build contextual knowledge, will lead students to appropriately historicize the "post-fact" era and to build the literacy skills—such as the ability to distinguish between symptom and cause—necessary to recognize and produce nuanced, engaged arguments. Such an approach

also avoids one of the common pitfalls of a course in writing and rhetoric that draws significantly on political content, wherein the instructors can be seen as politically biased or proselytizing their political views. By giving the students opportunities to analyze issues that cut across political viewpoints, such as racism and sexism, before engaging any overtly political content, students are positioned to make well-reasoned arguments about the political content themselves.

How We Approached Trump in Our Class

The class in which we tried this approach was an upper level Honors elective, "Great Debates in Writing and Film," which we co-taught at Ithaca College, a Carnegie classified M1 university in upstate New York. The student body in 2016 was comprised of 4315 White, 460 Hispanic/Latino, 328 Black, and 216 Asian students. The class was significantly whiter and less diverse than the college overall with only one student of color out of 16 total. Honors courses at Ithaca College are made up of all classes—in any subject—that are taught within the Honors Program, a minor without a discipline. They are distinct from any department-sponsored honors classes (e.g., Honors in English), and bear the HNRS prefix. Like West and George's class, our class deliberately undercut the notion of the "Great" or eternal and universal text. On the contrary, the syllabus presented texts that destabilized and animated the history of debate by continually posing and then undermining a succession of epistemologies. For example, early texts such as excerpts from Crowley and Hawhee's *Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students* and Nietzsche's "Truth and Falsity in an Ultramoral Sense" assumed an idealized and ahistoric public sphere as the context for rhetorical action. This was useful for presenting our students with some of the basic elements and principles of rhetoric. We followed these texts, however, with works like an excerpt from Sheryll Cashin's *Place, Not Race*, and the episode "Debateable" from the podcast *Radiolab*, which present a messier, more historicized public sphere. We deliberately introduce the role of race in the construction not only of ethos, but also of the epistemological grounds of rhetoric themselves. To what extent, we ask, does racism comprise the unknown known of the rhetorical situation, overdetermining the potential utterances by allowing and denying access on the basis of race? Consider, for example, how Republican Senators repeatedly "cut off" Senator Kamala Harris's questioning of Jeff Sessions when he was a candidate for Attorney General (Stafford and LoBianzo), compared with how Trump was praised for calling football players "sons of bitches" (Graham). Political decorum does not hold up as a rationale for this discrepancy, but race certainly might. In other words, following Greenfield and Rowan, we use race to complicate the study of rhetoric from the beginning, to present some of the fundamental questions of rhetoric, rather than a content area onto which students apply rhetorical concepts.

Moreover, and here our course differed significantly from West and George's, while at times we modeled debate for the students, most of the time we attempted to move the center of the debate from the front of the room to the students by posing questions and engaging them in small group work. Students in the class were, for the most part, highly engaged, and driven by an ideal of education "for its own sake." On the first day of class we asked the students why they chose to pursue an Honors minor, and the most common answer was the promise they believed it held for interesting

conversations about "big ideas" and questions that weren't covered as part of their majors (which for their part ran the gamut from physical therapy to music education to physics). Students' stated desire to engage in conversation bore out in class, with most students participating in discussion every class to greater or lesser extents.

We drew on critical race theory and rhetorical theory simultaneously to teach our students about the social-epistemic nature of rhetoric, thus undermining the very dichotomy between appearance (doxa) and reality (episteme). Drawing on texts such as Gorgias' "Encomium of Helen," Chideya's *Don't Believe the Hype: Still Fighting Cultural Misinformation about African Americans,* and O'Neil's *Weapons of Math Destruction: How Big Data Increases Inequality and Threatens Democracy*, we began by exploring the rhetorical and political nature of the so-called fact. We undermined it. We asked students to question whether or not such a thing as a fact can be said to exist—anywhere or at any time.

We began by pointing students to the subjectivity of perception, and although there are many texts that would serve as an example, we started students off with W.E.B. Du Bois's description of poor whites in reconstruction America because of the way it ties subjective perception directly to race:

> It must be remembered that the white group of laborers, while they received a low wage, were compensated in part by a sort of public and psychological wage. They were given public deference and titles of courtesy because they were white. They were admitted freely with all classes of white people to public functions, public parks, and the best schools. The police were drawn from their ranks, and the courts, dependent upon their votes, treated them with such leniency as to encourage lawlessness. Their vote selected public officials, and while this had small effect upon the economic situation, it had great effect upon their personal treatment and the deference shown them. White schoolhouses were the best in the community, and conspicuously placed, and they cost anywhere from twice to ten times as much per capita as the colored schools. The newspapers specialized on news that flattered the poor whites and almost utterly ignored the Negro except in crime and ridicule. On the other hand, in the same way, the Negro was subject to public insult; was afraid of mobs; was liable to the jibes of children and the unreasoning fears of white women; and was compelled almost continuously to submit to various badges of inferiority. The result of this was that the wages of both classes could be kept low, the whites fearing to be supplanted by Negro labor, the Negroes always being threatened by the substitution of white labor. (700-701)

Opening a course with these passages is helpful because it causes students to consider the ideological origins of the white race and the ways that whiteness is directly tied to the labor market and the creation and maintenance of anti-black ideology. The idea of "psychological wage" is also a simple but productive metaphor for students, who often take to the idea of "being paid in complements or social favors" even if they choose not to agree with Du Bois's argument. Giving students a concept they can manipulate even if they are unable to agree with the larger theory also provides us with the opportunity to introduce the notion of ethical argumentation, which we do—drawing on John Muckelbauer's *The Future of Invention: Rhetoric, Postmodernism, and the Problem of Change*—giving

students opportunities to discuss moving beyond argumentation as a zero-sum game with winners and losers, and toward argument as cooperation and discovery, where interlocutors are challenging each other's ideas as a way of creating new variations in human knowledge. Moreover, Du Bois's text offers students a chance to wrestle with the idea that race, fear, and labor are all in a symbiotic relationship, and offers them an opportunity to draw parallels between the 1860s, the 1930s (when Du Bois was writing), and the contemporary era.

The most important aspect of Du Bois's passage, for students, is that it provides an entry point into the role that language plays in the construction of societal norms and behaviors. We build on Du Bois with texts that help students dig deeper into the rhetorical constructions of normalcy. For instance, Nietzsche's "Truth and Falsity in an Ultramoral Sense" asks about the nature of truth:

> What therefore is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms: in short, a sum of human relations which became poetically and rhetorically intensified, metamorphosed, adorned, and after long usage seems to a nation fixed, canonic, and binding; truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that they are illusions; worn out metaphors which have become powerless to affect the senses; coins which have their obverse effaced and now are no longer of account as coins but merely as metal. (694)

Here Nietzsche argues that truth is directly tied to the frequency and duration of which certain words and phrases are used. The more a phrase is used, the more natural and self-evident it becomes. For Nietzsche, the power of language is the ability to create truth through repetition and time. This passage is important in the development of students' ability to critique Trump because it destabilizes language and provides an opportunity for students to begin questioning the ideas and classifications that they take for granted. Also, when we finally get to addressing Trump, Nietzsche provides a framework for helping students to make sense of how so many could support Trump's often vague and outlandish claims.

As a way of helping students to further decipher and apply Nietzsche's argument, we assigned the first few chapters of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By*. Of all these chapters, we placed emphasis on the section covering argument as war and the fifth chapter, which focuses on how metaphors are connected to cultural coherence. What this text offers students is an opportunity to see the connection between certain phrases or words and the ability to navigate social situations. Without understanding the reciprocal nature of language and culture or society, students would be unable to fully grasp how the Trump presidency is an expression or result of American history and cultural norms.

By this point in the semester, students have become increasingly comfortable with the rhetorical nature of what they understand to be normal. While they may have been skeptical of Du Bois's analysis of the white working class and the creation of the white race as something defined as having more rights than blacks, the follow up readings from Nietzsche and Lakoff and Johnson have gotten them engaged in playing with the theoretical framework surrounding Du Bois's ideas. This is also the point where we begin to introduce works that are more explicitly critical of the contemporary era's metaphors. Specifically, we point toward Barbara and Karen Fields introduction to *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life*. Near the middle of their introduction, Fields & Fields accurately

summarize the ideas we have been pushing students toward: "From very early on, Americans wove racist concepts into a public language about inequality that made 'black' the virtual equivalent of 'poor' and 'lower class,' thus creating a distinctive idiom that has no parallel in other Western democracies" (11). By indirectly explaining the connection among psychological wages, metaphor, and racism, this text helps our students to discover for themselves the connection between Du Bois and the other texts and begin to experiment with these ideas in relation to current politics. This text is foundational, then, in helping students to make the transition from repeating critiques of society they may have picked up from political pundits or family members to beginning to create their own critiques and thoughts.

Additionally, since Fields and Fields have their own argument about racecraft, the book's focus, students also have a model for how to begin using the tools provided in the course to create their own arguments about contemporary politics. For instance, after providing their own definitions of race and racism based on their earlier statements about the connection between "black" and "poor," Fields and Fields state:

> Distinct from *race* and *racism*, *racecraft* does not refer to groups or to ideas about groups' traits, however odd both may appear in close-up. It refers instead to mental terrain and to pervasive belief. Like physical terrain, racecraft exists objectively; it has topographical features that Americans regularly navigate, and we cannot readily stop traversing it. Unlike physical terrain, racecraft originates not in nature but in human action and imagination; it can exist in no other way. (18)

This passage illustrates to students that Fields and Fields are using concepts and research from the past to make new arguments. Even if students are initially confused by "racecraft," they can understand that the authors are demonstrating a way for them to make new arguments about commonplace topics, a literacy skill they can build on as they grapple with these ideas in their own projects. By demonstrating a connection among race, racism, language, and the shared imagination that created witchcraft during the 1600s, Fields and Fields's piece not only stimulates classroom dialogue but also invites students to make arguments drawing on their connections between the course readings and "texts" they may encounter outside the classroom.

In Context: What Difference does Trump Make?

Only at this point in the semester, when we had given students the critical tools they need to effectively analyze Trump as a topic, did we turn to the current political situation and the inauguration of Trump. In our class, because students had already worked to analyze some of the causes of the political issues of which Trump is a marker, students did not exhibit "resistance," or offer objection to our presentation of Trump as an object of study. From this position, we asked, what difference does Trump make? How do Trump's rhetorical actions change public deliberation? How do they affect access to public fora? We raised the issue of increased racist rhetoric from the White House, which actively incites hate speech and racially motivated crime across the country, asking students to analyze Trump's argument that Black Lives Matter protests lead to increased violence against police.

Students can, in response to this, not only summarize parallel historical examples but also draw on works like Fields and Fields as models for their counterarguments. Were we to teach the course again, we could point to incidents ranging from physical assaults against Muslim women to the events in Charlottesville to bomb threats in synagogues. We might point out that the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), which has been tracking what it calls a "national outbreak of hate" following the election of Trump, documented 867 cases of racially motivated "harassment and intimidation" in just the first ten days following Trump's election (Werner-Winslow). We could add that ThinkProgress has maintained a similar study, relying on news and police reports and its own investigations instead of voluntary reports as the SPLC used, which documents 261 hate incidents between November 9, 2016 and February 9, 2017 (Jenkins). We might suggest that the more public presence of anti-immigrant and white nationalist sentiment, with "Build the Wall" becoming a national rally cry of Trump's base and a major Alt-Right convention taking over a major public-private building in our nation's capital, has also had a significant impact on our political landscape.

But then students could respond that, from the perspective of the history of rhetoric, Trump changes little. Yes, we had a president who allegedly sought help from a foreign government—Russia—to win his election. So did Richard Nixon, who tried to undermine the Paris peace talks, and Bill Clinton, whose 1996 campaign received contributions from China. Yes, we had a president who has completely dismissed the line between public service and private enterprise, often using the power of the presidency to funnel money to one of his many properties or to secure a more favorable business deal (S.M.; Kumar; Venook). But Trump is hardly the first politician whose politics were tied to their purse. Students might point to Andrew Jackson, who as an Army commander made his fortune coercing Native Americans from their land and then buying the plots at substantial discounts.

Students would be right in raising these objections. They would be right to point out that Trump is only a symptom of a larger historical phenomenon, and thus but one topic in a class on rhetoric and argument. What is more pertinent to the aims of the class, they might suggest, is whether Trump has caused any kind of a shift in the rhetorical landscape of US and global politics, or if he is rather simply the latest example of a longstanding trend.

We argue, then, that Trump has not fundamentally changed the public presumption that truth is situated but has rather continued its racist precedents. Moreover, Trump has introduced greater ambiguity about the values of public debate by overlaying and often displacing the rhetoric of the political sphere with the rhetoric of corporate hyper-individualism. As Christian Fuchs argues in "Donald Trump: A Critical Theory-Perspective on Authoritarian Capitalism," "Trump is a brand. Trump is a strategy. Trump is entertainment. Trump is a spectacle. Trump is politics. Trump is the instrumentalisation of everything surrounding him. Trump is the absolute commodification of the self. Donald Trump made a career by branding and selling himself" (48-49).

By injecting such hyper-individualist values, long operative in corporate capitalism, Trump introduced greater ambiguity into political discourse, making it less clear to participants which set of values— those of corporate capitalism or those of civics—were primary. A principle of argumentation is that disagreement requires a base of agreement. No argument can proceed unless the parties involved in the argument can agree on a few things, among them what is being argued

about, what counts as an argument, what counts as evidence, that they wish to engage in argument, and so on. Trump's ethos of a bombastic billionaire—so different from the traditional ethos of the public servant—injects greater ambiguity into political argumentation, making it more difficult for participants to understand what has and what has not been agreed to. There are many examples when presidential candidates in the primaries, for example, seemed at a loss as to how to respond to some of Trump's insults. At the same time, the viewing public is not confused because Trump is drawing on values readily available in corporate capitalism with which the viewing public is already familiar. Instead, many viewers see these insults as Trump's having "won" the debate. Indeed, the white supremacist, patriarchal, corporate ethos entrenched in Trump's persona itself becomes the unspoken content of the debate.

This is evident even in the primaries, but it was put in dramatic relief when Trump was pitted against Hillary Clinton, who emerged as the paradigmatic public servant. Clinton's campaign saw this opportunity to showcase the differences between the two candidates early on, choosing to emphasize that Trump is "unfit" to serve as president, does not have the character of the public servant. That Trump was successful without needing to fashion himself as a "presidential" candidate suggests a continuation of the aggressive, white supremacist, patriarchal, individualistic, anti-establishment habits and consciousnesses that dominate the national spotlight anytime the "natural order" (Jim Crow, white male presidents, etc.) is threatened. This had a noticeable effect on the level of discourse during the primary and general campaigns, with name-calling and bragging often taking the place of substantive debate because Trump's rhetorical presence ensured that debate was no longer required.

Given this trend, it is important to provide our students with the critical skills they need to make measured decisions about their political reality. We must give students the tools to adequately and critically analyze their political reality, to allow them to see Trump as an example of Perelman's liaisons of coexistence, a symptom of the racist foundations of US politics. We must provide them enough of the foundations of rhetoric and argumentation so that they can understand that while knowledge is not rooted in any universal truth, neither can we say that there is no such thing as knowledge, that every opinion is equally valid, replacing the notion of the public sphere with a Roman amphitheater. We must give our students histories and counterhistories of US politics, so that they can see how racism has played a formative role there from the beginning—even as the fight for civil rights and equity has been there. We must not, with Stanley Fish, subscribe to the myth that the classroom is a politics-free zone, the liberal arts ideal of learning for its own sake. But neither must we reduce our classroom to a political soapbox where any opinion is valued so long as it mirrors the assumed political values of the professor. Rather, we must create space for our students to develop their own political literacies that will allow them to emerge as effective and self-aware political actors. We must prepare them as such to be capable of making distinctions in uncertainty—in other words, to be rhetoricians who search not for an always elusive Truth, but rather examine and reinvent the shared ground that constitutes a rhetorical exchange.

What we hope this chapter illustrates is that the best way to bring Trump into the classroom is to examine the historical context that continues to make his rhetoric successful in gathering political support. Such an approach includes providing students with the language necessary to name and

rename the political trends they see developing around them. By topicalizing Trump as a symptom of longstanding racism, students develop the literacy skills necessary to analyze any political moment in its historical context, and to evaluate the arguments and assertions they will encounter throughout their daily lives. In essence, what we found most successful in our course was giving students the framework to productively engage in ongoing political discourse by formulating their own theories of why the current political moment exists as it does.

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