

## Season 2, Episode 1 [August 11, 2021]: Interviews with Professor Cindy Chavez, University of California Merced, and Dr. Natasha Jones, Michigan State University

**Topic:** "The new normal" and misinformation about critical race theory and antiracist pedagogies, include in the [The Big Rhetorical Podcast Carnival](#)

Iris Ruiz: Welcome to Creating Coalitional Gestures: A BIWOC podcast by and for Black, Brown and Indigenous Women of Color in writing studies. This is the digital space by and for self-identified women, both cis and trans as well as non-binary scholars of color. I'm your host Iris Ruiz. This podcast is a collaboration between *Spark*, the Writing and Working for Change Series and scholars and writing in rhetoric in an effort to create resilient strategies. We are pro Black, pro brown, pro women, pro indigenous. We envision this podcast as a healing justice project seeking to transform the impact of BIWOC on the field of writing studies.

Creating Coalitional Gestures will take you on a journey. We will explore what healing means in writing studies by conversing with scholars, teachers, activists, and writers of color. We gesture toward healing and creating coalitions of women of color in order to remedy the silences because our culture stories and unique experiences continue to sustain us. We celebrate our traditions, our struggles, our triumphs, and our world as many of us are still searching for connection recognition, belonging and legitimation, while honoring who we are as critical writing studies practitioners who also delve on the margins of cyborg and queer identities.

Hello and welcome to Creating Coalitional Gestures. I'm Iris Ruiz your host, and I am really excited to be able to host our guest today and we are going to be featured on The Big Rhetorical Podcast's Carnival that we're really excited about. And I have a special guest with me here today to be able to talk a little bit about what it means to be returning to the new normal or what people are calling the new normal. I would just like to call it as why are we calling it normal? Is it a new normal? And we're going to be talking about this topic today in addition to the spread of misinformation that's been going on through the COVID era and we're going to be talking a little bit about what that means in particularly in relationship to anti-racism. Before we get into this really exciting, provocative discussion, I would like to give my guest Cindy Chavez a chance to introduce herself.

Cindy Chavez: Hi, thank you, Iris for having me. I'm so excited. I'm nervous, but I think this topic is one that people are trying to discuss but at the same time also avoiding it and just trying to sweep everything under the rug and just accept things as they are and one of the topics that you brought up is this new normal and so I'll get into just my perception on that but thank you for having me. As Iris says my name is Cindy Chavez. I'm a lecturer at UC Merced, but I'm also an instructor at Merced College, and I've been teaching in higher ed for about 17 years now so I'm excited for this time in my life, but at the same time even when I think back

about all the years that I've had all the students that I have had it's been a beautiful and evolving experience.

My background is actually, it's interesting because I started off in the humanities. I was an English literature major and then I actually went into cultural studies in North American philology, which is philosophy and literature together. And then, as I kind of evolved in my education, I actually went into educational psychology because I wanted to learn more about how people learn. And so my teaching experience and really what I based my teaching philosophy on is inclusion but also connection, so what connects us all and bringing it down to just the human experience. And I take it down even in the classroom is like the amygdala, like the oldest reptilian part of our brain that we have and what would that mean in terms of connecting us as humans and recognizing that the outside may be different but the inside and our emotional experiences are connected.

And what I do really my research is really broad, but not necessarily extensive. I try to focus a lot of medical humanities and how I ended up in that field is as a literature major, one of the things I really researched and read about was trauma theory and disability studies and how that evolved into medical humanities is because really it falls into so many different umbrellas. It falls into psychology; it falls into in the humanities obviously, social sciences, and medical field, and so obviously, delving into that I like to get my own research lab eventually so that's kind of been in the works. I've been in the talks with some people I've wanted to do this for years but now I feel is the time because again, it's a new normal so thank you. Sorry. That was a really broad introduction.

Iris Ruiz:

Oh no, thank you. That's so very, very interesting. We definitely have to have another conversation about medical humanities and medical sociology and all of the different elements that go into that as well. I didn't know that there was a connection there with disability studies and being an outgrowth of that but well, there's been a lot of talk about what it means to not only bridge divides between different disciplines but also about decolonizing the canon has been one thing and there's also been criticism about bringing in different social-justice oriented theories, such as critical race theory in the classroom.

And it's definitely been more pronounced since 2016, and we can see the executive order that was put into place in 2020 by President Donald Trump that basically made it illegal for any federally funded organization to use critical race theory as a lens for training and for teaching and things like that. And as we're considering going back to the new normal I just wanted to play a little snippet of a podcast where Kimberlé Crenshaw one of the biggest voices, right with critical race theory and intersectionality is speaking a little bit about what this moment means just to kind of kick off our conversation. Let me go ahead and get that.

Janine Jackson:

Welcome to CounterSpin your weekly look behind the headlines. I'm Janine Jackson. This week on CounterSpin. "This is a sickness that cannot be allowed to continue. Please report any sightings so we can quickly extinguish": Donald

Trump's disturbing September 5th tweet paired with his claim that "teaching this horrible doctrine to our children is a form of child abuse in the truest sense of those words." What is the sickness, the doctrine that Trump says is "being deployed to rip apart friends, neighbors, and families?"

It's critical race theory or really any of a whole group of interrelated social justice ideas like structural racism, implicit bias, or privilege, tools for talking about persistent inequities in US society. Trump's September executive order on combating race and sex stereotyping banned any training addressing racial or gender diversity for federal employees, government contractors, and the US military. The effects were immediate and chilling not just the end of workplace diversity trainings but academics forced to cancel lectures, research projects suspended, curricula scrubbed for fear of running afoul of what's being called the equity gag order.

Iris Ruiz:

All right. I was actually going to go back and look for that tweet that Janine Jackson mentioned in her little introduction to the podcast there talking about what's going on with CRT, and I just realized that yes, Donald Trump was banned from Twitter. He was banned from saying things like this. Any thoughts on that?

Cindy Chavez:

Well, it's interesting because obviously people ask me about my perception on critical race theory. My husband, who is not in academia, he's obviously curious as to what I think about it so then he can take it to work and kind of inform people. And I told him I get kind of mad, and it's because I went and paid for this knowledge. I went to school to learn about literary theory and critical theory and whatnot, and then all of a sudden, people think that they know about it. I spent hours, years sitting there learning about this, and people think that they can just read one tweet and know everything about it, and it makes me angry because it's not that easy to understand, and what I mean it's when we think about critical race theory and the way I explained it to people who aren't familiar with it is you look at a house.

When you look at a house, you can look at it as a homeowner, you can look at it as a seller, or you can look at it as a potential buyer. Every time you look at the same house it's going to be different depending on where you're at in your mind brain. When you use critical race theory it's looking at a subject in a field and a group of... We're talking about academia and even K-12 curricula and when we think about it is we're looking at from a different lens. Now, it's like what was it trying to teach? It created, and I'm not here questioning or undermining someone's experience in K-12, but when we think about what I went through as a student in K-12 this need of perfectionism, which as you know it's so frustrating because students are having like it needs to be perfect and that doesn't exist, but that was instilled in us again, as a framework that things need to be perfect.

Individualism, you must be able to do this on your own. That doesn't exist. I mean in the real world, which I hate that term too, but in outside of the schooling system, individualism is not welcome. You should work together as a

team to get things done. Quantity over quality lots of essays, lots of papers, lots of assignments, so when I look at critical... when I try to think about critical race theory in terms of like explaining it to other folks outside of the field, it's hard for me to say this is what it is because it's a lot more complicated and like I said, you and I both know what we learned about this in our education; it wasn't just a tweet. And that makes me mad because I wish it was a tweet it would have been cheaper but it's not that easy. It's very complex but-

Iris Ruiz:

Yeah. I'm thinking about this misinformation and as you said when you're approaching something important, such as your education, people approach it from different angles, right depending on your own positionality. Yeah, and one of the things that strikes me as very odd with critical race theory is that it actually comes out of an intellectual tradition just as you mentioned and out of that intellectual tradition, there was just a whole big body of knowledge that was created to be able to address social injustice. And one of the things with critical race theory that people who are fond of it, who find it very useful as an analytical tool, one of the things that they use it for is to tell what is called counterstories, right. And where you can use fiction in a way to talk about real circumstances, right?

Real things that take place that deal with racism without using people's names or the names of institutions in which these occur. Given that we can actually capitalize and use counterstorytelling let's go ahead and see if we can do a little bit of that here as we talk about what it means to enter back into the university under these types of divisive ideologies as a woman of color who is going back into the educational system that in California has definitely made a commitment to anti-racism. The reason why I'm suggesting counterstorytelling is because if you want to tell us a story about somebody you know or something you've read about, but you don't want to mention any names that's a possibility, but basically let's talk a little bit about what this means as a woman of color going back to university into this new normal, with these divisive ideologies but also after COVID.

Cindy Chavez:

Wow. It brings up a lot of emotions and a lot of ideas because when we talked about, and you mentioned decolonizing academia that's one of the things that I've really kind of set my mind to do, and I think about my own teaching and what I've done in my own experience as a student of color, first-gen student, my parents are immigrants, and I just remember not being... I just felt like I wasn't included in the conversations. I felt that I needed to check bigger boxes, more boxes than my peers, and obviously, that was never stated. And I say they as this omnipresent being, but the concept of power hoarding when I am going to be in the costume face-to-face, after this I'm removing all power structures. I felt that I've done that, but as always, students come in because they were in. They were taught that as an instructor, they're the person of power.

And while I do give grades which again, that's another topic as well the fear of not passing, I don't want students to come into my classroom with fears. I don't want them to come in and have fears of me while we live in a world where that

will be possible that they come in with these unknowns. I want them to feel welcomed, and I want them to know that I'm working hard on decolonizing the system, and it's going to take time, and it's going to take more than just one semester. It's going to take more than one year. It's going to take a lot of work on my end as an instructor as a person who takes my platform seriously, but being able to give students information, not just what I feel is right.

Because there's times where, as humans, we are biased, and that's fine, but at the same time knowing what's going to push them to succeed and that's where I'm at with this new normal is that I am working on decolonizing my classroom because it is frustrating when students come in and they're so apologetic, "Oh, I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry." And I'm like, "Why are you sorry?" And then I realized that they've lived in this undermining structure where they were subservient to this higher being whether it's a teacher or principal or somebody else, and I don't want them to feel like that in my classroom. That's one of my new normals.

Iris Ruiz: That's one of your new normals. Okay. I know that's a big one for sure because you're right, there's all of these power structures that come into play. Some are vivid, and some are hidden, a lot of them are actually hidden, but that's really encouraging in thinking about going in and trying to break down some of those power relationships, and luckily we have some freedom as educators in what we can do in our own classrooms, unlike some of the high schools or K through 12 institutions, but let's not get it twisted. We don't have all the freedom.

Cindy Chavez: Yes.

Iris Ruiz: Yeah. We're still sanctioned by parameters. We're still circumscribed by parameters. Right. And so with that said and being that we do have administrators and we work for writing programs and we're in writing studies and they have certain course learning outcomes. I know you and I we share that we work at the same writing program and our writing program, for example, has presented an anti-racist statement, and we're going to be working towards building an anti-racist writing program so...but we got COVID right. We decided this while we were in quarantine so we haven't done this face-to-face. What are you thinking about that in terms of going back? We still have these parameters, and we want to decolonize the classroom, but we cannot assume everyone's going to be on board.

Cindy Chavez: And they're not. I mean no one has to say anything for me to feel it and I've explained this to many people. Again, if we're looking at people may see me and they're like, "Oh, okay so you're working here, you do this." But, other people don't look at me the same way. Other people have come in and even in my own neighborhood I mean I've lived here for a while where people don't think I would live here, and it's just a regular old schmegular neighborhood, but I've been questioned as to me trespassing on my own property. And yeah, sometimes I came back from the gym, and sometimes I roll out of bed to drop

my daughter off at school. I'm human and so there's these moments in life where you are reminded the difference and that's in society, that's at work.

There is a reminder whether it's stated or implied but reminders that you don't belong. There's reminders of anti-racism is racist is what I've heard whether directly or indirectly. I learned this term reverse racism like no other, as an employee, as a teacher, as a student, I didn't know. I watched a lot of *South Park* and not to quote the great *South Park* legends and one of the things was I remember it mentioning reverse racism, and I thought what is that? And it was such a term that was not used daily, but I've heard it so much now since... And again, maybe my ears are just more aware. Maybe I'm recognizing that I will always be different in this setting and that's how I'm going to roll, and I'm not going to hide, which is something that I am struggling with because I have my parents because they were illegal immigrants.

They taught us to hide a lot. Don't make a lot of noise. They say, no, you just go with it, and it's one of those things that were instilled in me, and I didn't realize that until one of my students brought it up. How can my parents tell us that? And I thought, oh, was it just my parents? And then I realized it's this fear of being recognized as different or not belonging. And even though I was born in the US, I've lived with these little things that again, microaggressions come in different forms, and that's the hard part about microaggressions.

Because you think you get along with someone really well, and then all of a sudden bam, and I'm like where did that come from? And then the more I start to think about it the more I felt like, oh, they just don't feel like I'm part of this environment. Going back to this counterstorytelling there's a lot of stories as you know. Iris, we have a lot of stories to tell, and they're learning...I like to tell these stories in the classroom as well because I feel my students will have more weapons and I'm not meaning physical weapons, please don't take that as, the more to defend themselves with and that's my goal as an educator as well.

Iris Ruiz:

Thank you very much for that. I want to talk about students being able to defend themselves and you being able to pass the tools onto the students to be able to do that. What do you think? Could you give us a little picture of what that might look like in the classroom? Because a lot of times we talk about wanting to empower students, and everyone has a different definition of that. Right? And as you said depending on where you're coming from and your own positionality it affects you. Especially thinking coming back after COVID, coming back to this commitment to de-colonizing the classroom and coming back to practicing anti-racism what does it mean for you to empower your students?

Cindy Chavez:

I learned this from my students. My students have taught me to use my own voice, and I didn't realize the power of my voice because of the position I'm at because I've always again, society kind of made me feel this way without really recognizing it. But my students have taught me to use my voice because they are so empowering. I look at them and they have so many wonderful goals. When you talk to your students their dreams are amazing and I'm just like do it,

do it. They want to build this, they want to do a non-profit org here, they want to do activism here. Their enthusiasm is so inspiring that I need to keep going. I need to keep pushing them and say like you got to keep going and they'll contact me after they're in my class and they're like, I don't know what to do. And I'm like, you have these goals, don't give up.

I had a student once say she wanted to go to medical school, and one of my professors here told me that it's really hard to get into med school, and I go, and? Don't let that stop you because she contacted me she thought I want to change my major. I want to go into something else because this professor told me it's really hard to get into med school, and I go, you obviously can do it. You're extremely bright. You have that as your goal. Why not? Don't give up, even if it's hard to get into med school, there's so many different schools that you can go to. Don't feel like it's just these three schools that are out there.

There's so many different opportunities. You can do a post-bach. And then, I felt like I need to keep that in my own life. If I want to do something I need to, like my lab I have been told, and I've said this story to other colleagues that I said I think I was just mansplained research. I went in to talk to somebody in a different department about potentially working together and creating a lab and keeping my, at that time I was pregnant with my daughter so this is like five years ago. I said, "Listen, I'm actually pregnant right now, but when I come back, I'm going to come back with a vengeance. I want to open a lab, and I want to do research." And I realized they spoke to me the way they spoke to my students.

What's really hard to open a research lab. It's really expensive. And at first I said, "Yeah, you're right." And then, I thought of myself what I would tell my students, and? And? Okay, so you get a lab, but I can't get a lab, and all I wanted to do is kind of use their framework as a benchmark to start like, hey, I want to work with you just to collaborate. Medical school is in the works that you see Merced, and I want to potentially start with the medical humanities and do a lab there that way we have these two, writing program and the medical school linked together this way. And again, I had to think about what I would tell my students if they had a roadblock and it's, you've got to keep going even if they don't think you can you have to focus and you'll get there. It may not be linear, but nothing's linear ever. We've gone through circles and roads and whatnot to get to where we're at and I have to use that to model for my students.

Iris Ruiz: Yes, definitely. Yeah, you see Merced we're on the horizon right of just growing and growing and growing. I think we're going to-

Cindy Chavez: Exactly. There's so many opportunities.

Iris Ruiz: Yeah. We're growing so much and just to mention a little bit about our student population we have about 70% that identify as first-generation students and then over 50% that identify as quote unquote Hispanic and belonging to Latinx culture, races, and ethnicities. And then so we're basically the most diverse UC out of all of UCs. And we want to talk a little bit more about approaching and

empowering our students. They said that UC students are the most diverse class in history and we're coming back after quarantine and then they have a really big population of transfer students. And I'm just wondering everybody has their own brand, right of social justice pedagogy or social justice education and you were talking about empowering students. How do you feel about teaching critical race theory in your classroom?

Cindy Chavez:

I read a really good quote online about critical race theory and then they said somebody wrote, it doesn't matter if you tell me not to teach it I'm still going to teach it. And it's like this is the old school teachers who know that I do what I need to do to help my students and if it's teaching them about using their voice and recognizing that people will say this isn't racism and I've heard that many times. And I said, "Don't tell me what racism is. As a person of color, as a child of immigrants don't tell me how I should feel." Because I don't know if you've had this issue but a lot of people are like, "It's not always about race." And they said it is actually, it is about race and it won't be stated but we get judged within 16 seconds of seeing somebody and somebody looks at us and again, our brains just go in automatically and they're going to judge us on how we look.

And that's scary because I think about all the times that either I was ignored at a conference or I wasn't asked about my opinion, or I wasn't included in something. I felt maybe it was just me, maybe I didn't speak up enough. I'm such a timid per... Then I recognized maybe they had their own implicit bias, which is she doesn't know. And so when we think about critical race theory in the classroom it's about including our students stories.

Okay, including their stories, including their experiences and showing that their experiences are valid not well, it was a long time ago which again, or your parents are here now though, right? It's always this kind of justification well, you're fine or you survived. It's like no but do you see the trauma that someone can carry on having to suppress their experiences of food insecurities or dealing with other financial fears or DACA fears or getting DACA removed. There's a lot that our students are going through and critical race theory is critical because I'm going to teach it no matter what and being able to say, oh, it's not in the curriculum. It's not-

Iris Ruiz:

Academic freedom.

Cindy Chavez:

It's academic freedom.

Iris Ruiz:

Definitely.

Cindy Chavez:

And then I thought but people don't realize it's always been taught by teachers of color. Look at us being in the classroom is showing our students you can do it and I don't know what their it is but you can do what you want because it is your life and you have that right as a human being.

Iris Ruiz: Definitely thank you so much. That's very, very powerful to think about that people have been teaching this for a very long time. People say oh, it started in the '80s or it started in the late '80s. Well I think they had the social activists in the '60s were definitely theorizing about race then. I'm sure that we could go all the way back to abolition times and even before then and say how people were using racially based arguments then to fight for their freedom. Definitely there's that historical perspective in continuing to value our students voices as you said seems to be a really powerful way to engage with critical race theory even though it's not called that, right. You're going to teach it anyways even if it's not like you bringing in the Kimberlé Crenshaw text.

Cindy Chavez: Exactly.

Iris Ruiz: It's going to be there because like you're saying it's everywhere. It's omnipresent. How can you not talk about it? Right. You can really kind of have to go out of your way in a sense, right to not talk about it.

Cindy Chavez: Right. Exactly and it's one of those I think there's two things that people say don't talk about politics in a classroom and don't talk about race and those are two things I was taught when I first started my teaching career is like, these are the two things you'll avoid. I go, "But I thought this is where you talk about those things, in the classroom." This is where you get to say what you feel about politics, you get to say what you feel about race or how you've been experiencing your life as a person of color. This is it and then we get censored and I remember somebody is like, "I just don't teach that book." I think it was Flannery O'Connor. I was teaching it in a class and I said, "Oh, I just wanted to get some feedback on Flannery O'Connor. How do you teach it?" Like, "Oh, I don't teach any books on race." And I thought, what? Every book can be on race. Like if you use critical race theory, you can really apply that to any book.

And I always say, when people are we think about activism and performative activism and slacktivism all that and when people are like, "I'm all for people of color and fighting for them." And I always look and I say, "I've been fighting for people of color since I became one." Like this isn't just a slogan, this isn't just a temporary fight, this is for the next generation. This is for my students because I do take my platform seriously as an educator. I read a lot because I feel my students deserve an educated educator. I need to be informed, I need to hear what...

Because they teach me things like I don't have social media but they teach me stuff that's out there. I'm like, "Tell me more about this TikTok. What is this thing out there?" I learned so much from them and so I feel as my job is to teach them things that they may not be exposed to because of their times, generations, their research all those things. It's exciting times for me because like I said, I'm coming in hot [inaudible 00:32:51] COVID doesn't mean dirty. And hot people think I'm so passive and quiet it's like I hold back a lot. As you know Iris there's times we'll be in situations Iris and there's times where I just want to

come out and really say what I say but there's always this am I being professional enough? Or am I being academic enough? There's this like role-

Iris Ruiz: Responsibility. [inaudible 00:33:17] Exactly. And you've already talked about how you were born into this struggle and not only that but the different experiences that you have that you continue to have as a seasoned scholar and educator about outside stereotyping towards you and where you belong and where you don't belong which in some ways can make the space of academia feel unsafe many times and so thank you for sharing that with us. Would you like to leave us with anything in terms of what do you think is the best way, respectability politics aside what do you think is the best way to engage in these difficult conversations with resistant educators?

Cindy Chavez: I thought about this because obviously there's resistance in a lot of frames like family, professionals, neighborhoods. There's a lot of resistance and sometimes I tread lightly like, okay, I'm not going to bring up this or I'm not going to bring up that but I think what I want to leave off just for myself is that using my voice is what I need to do as somebody who's already gone through the system. I feel like there's times that I sold out where I said this isn't right when it comes to reading some material and like how people were deconstructing it and reading it. I mean there's so many times where I felt like this sounds kind of racist when people are talking about it or not recognizing the struggles. I mean I've been at conferences as an educator where I felt that I should have said something more but there's always that fear that I would get fired.

And so what I learned from my students is to be fearless. Okay. I have a family my job is very important to me because it not only helps me be part of this platform and help my students but also it provides, it's my bread and butter, it's what helps my family so there's things where I have to always balance and I don't want to live like that. I want to be able to call out things that are wrong without having fear of retaliation. I think my biggest thing that I'm taking out of after COVID is using my voice, recognizing power hoarding and definitely calling out everybody who I feel can do some damage to not just me but others around them.

Iris Ruiz: Wow. Thank you so much, Cindy. That's so powerful and just leaves me with thinking about what we have to face here in the next couple of weeks and I really appreciate you putting your spirit out there and your time and your energy.

Cindy Chavez: Thank you. You know what I did all these notes and I didn't use any of them. I just went wholistic on you.

Iris Ruiz: Hello, and welcome to part two of the Creating Coalitional Gestures podcast that's going to be featured on The Big Rhetorical Podcast and we are so excited about that. I am really excited to be able to introduce our featured guest today. I'm going to allow her to introduce herself in a moment. We're going to be continuing our discussion about misinformation in the COVID era particularly

from a woman of color academic perspective. We talked a little bit about in part one regarding the movement of critical race theory being something that can be equated with reverse racism or even being anti-white. We're going to be continuing our conversation on what it means to be a woman of color academic going back into our higher educational institutions wherever they may be under this umbrella of misinformation, COVID and certain types of backlash movements to anti-racist ideologies and pedagogies. I would like to go ahead and introduce our featured guest today, Natasha Jones. I'm going to give her just a second to be able to introduce herself. Hello, welcome Natasha.

Natasha Jones: Hi, thank you so much for having me on the podcast. I appreciate it.

Iris Ruiz: Oh yeah. You want to tell us a little bit about you, where are you, where do you teach and what is your work about?

Natasha Jones: Sure. I am a technical communication scholar, I'm an associate professor at Michigan State in writing rhetoric in American cultures department and my research primarily focuses on social justice, inclusion, and activism in technical communication and thinking more broadly about what inclusion, equity, and justice looks like in higher ed and academia. I'm really passionate about those things and thinking about ways that we can be more inclusive and more equitable, especially for those of us who are marginalized and multiply marginalized in their academy.

Iris Ruiz: Okay, great. That sounds really interesting. Do you want to mention maybe one or two publications that you might have out there for us to read?

Natasha Jones: Sure. I'm a co-author along with Dr. Rebecca Walton and Dr. Kristen Moore of the book *Technical Communication After the Social Justice Turn: Building Coalitions for Action* and that book came out in 2019 and we basically look at the state of technical communication and how we can build inclusive coalitions and push social justice forward in our field so that those of us who are marginalized and multiply marginalized can absolutely get our work done, contribute to the academy and to our field like we desire to. I would say that's the publication that I'm most probably drawing from and thinking about for the talk today.

Iris Ruiz: Oh, okay. Great. Yes, definitely. I think that it'd be great for us to talk a little bit about what the social justice turn means especially within technical communication and how we can continue to be committed to that. Right. In the midst of misinformation and the ways in which misinformation is everywhere, it's ubiquitous on social media. I wanted to also talk a little bit about how we were witnessing certain types of backlash movements to anti-racist ideologies and anti-racist pedagogies and the one that seems to stick out the most right now is the backlash towards critical race theory.

But I want us to be able to talk more generally because your work kind of centers on looking at the social justice turn and how does that affect and play out in technical communication. And so obviously I haven't necessarily read any work that specifically centers on critical race theory and technical communication but I think if we can approach that more generally, that would be great for our audience. And so before getting into that I wanted to share just a little snippet of Kimberlé Crenshaw's words actually on a podcast with Janine Jackson so let's go ahead and just transition to that here and then we'll start our discussion.

Natasha Jones: Okay. Sounds good.

Iris Ruiz: Okay, great.

Kimberlé Crensh...: People get the attack when they are in the street but when they are [inaudible 00:41:37] kind of attack [inaudible 00:41:52] attention and I think it's partly because people don't imagine materially what they do so part of our campaign is to try to give people a picture of materially, what they do. We put out just a call to folks who experience the consequences of this gag order to tell us what happened and within less than 10 days, we got more than 300 stories about talks being canceled, about research projects being halted, about training at the CDC that was about structural racism contributing to some of the horrific outcomes, discrete outcomes from COVID also being canceled. This is really having a significant impact but people just seem to be unaware of it.

Janine Jackson: On December 2nd the policy forums webinar series under the Blacklight focused on this campaign that you're talking about which is called truth be told and the gag order. And you heard folks saying like Lisa Rice from the National Fair Housing Alliance saying that she can't talk about residential segregation and racial disparities in home ownership when she's trying to talk about ending housing discrimination but you've started to talk about the roots of this like so many things, Trump didn't create this. But Trump may be sui generis he's his own person but he can't pull on strings that aren't there and there are historical roots to precisely this type of attack that you're talking about anti-racism is itself racist. There's context there, right?

Iris Ruiz: All right. There we heard from Janine Jackson and a little bit from Kimberlé Crenshaw about the effects of mandating these halts on critical race theory but also anti-racist focused trainings. Natasha, do you have any thoughts on what you heard there with that podcast?

Natasha Jones: Oh, sure. I think I'll talk more generally about this anti-racist pedagogies and processes that we see in our universities and academic spheres but I think that one of the things that that touched on and that made me think about are the DEI, diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives in the academy and it makes me wonder and also worry about what impact this pushback against anti-racist programs and pedagogies will have on these already kind of strained and faltering DEI programs in our academic institutions. And we've talked before

and also I published a piece in the *Community Literacy Journal* about how we need to think about complicity and complexity in DEI programs in academia, academic contexts and academic spaces because of the need to think more critically as Patricia Hill Collins talked about how power works across the four domains of structural disciplinary hegemonic and interpersonal power domains as she refers to as the matrix of domination and how our DEI initiatives and programs often don't address all four of those domains.

It remains kind of surface level and interpersonal, right? Thinking about individual actions which are important but I'm not moving beyond individual actions to think about how things like ideology and culture, things like rules, regulations, bylaws, processes, procedures, things like infrastructure impact the ways that we can actually do DEI work within the university and understanding that DEI work within the university has to not only be transformative and resistant but it also challenges the university itself infrastructurally.

Like how a university operates, how a university is actually structured as an institution. Hearing all the pushback in that not even speaking specifically about critical race theory but speaking about the anti-racist programs and pedagogies that our universities have started to implement it makes me worry for what will come down and how these programs will be funded, how they will be supported and how academics that are doing this DEI work will be protected and supported and funded and promoted and all those kinds of things. That definitely does I think raise concern for me and I'm not a critical race theory scholar so let me just say that out front but I think that I can worry ahead of time or be anxious about the ripple effects of what's going on.

Iris Ruiz:

Yeah, definitely. And I hadn't necessarily heard of that framework but I think that, yeah, complicity and complexity and putting those in comparison with one another and even in contrast to one another and we're looking at the ways in which they complement one another I think is really interesting the way that you talk about and Patricia Hill Collins talks about how it's more than just individual actions and there's are so many difference in network, right? It's like a network of actions that come into play. Yeah in order for these EDI measures to be successful.

And what I'm going to talk a little bit about, what does it mean as a woman of color in Michigan in terms of your own experience or even what you've just seen or what you witnessed? Critical race theory allows us to talk from a counter story perspective so we don't always have to say it's us but in terms of your own experience with DEI initiatives how do you feel about going back to the university or if we're going back whether it's virtually, hybrid or whatever but going back in the midst of COVID with all of these different kind of question marks about DEI work.

Natasha Jones:

Yeah. I mean I am for one very I don't want to say leery but kind of leery of how academia actually picks up the language of diversity inclusion and equity versus how they actually engage in an act, what's needed to ensure equity and

inclusion beyond just representative diversity. And so I think when about a year and a half ago or whatever when COVID was just hitting and also there was like these racial tensions and uprising about injustice in our police forces injustice on our campuses. One of the things I immediately thought about was like how we have police presence on our campuses and how that puts our students at risk and how our campuses can't afford to see themselves as functioning as these insular bodies and ignore what's happening in our communities and also understand how our campus community is impacted by what's going on out in the communities as well.

I guess thinking about this idea about pushing forward a return to normal, I'm very resistant to that idea because I feel like normal wasn't working for a lot of us. It wasn't working for Black and indigenous scholars. It's not working for queer and trans scholars. It's not working for lots of first-gen scholars. It's not working for a lot of us and academia was not a space that was built for us. It's not designed to support us, it's not designed to protect us, right so when we go back to normal, what does that mean? Does that mean campuses that are heavily policed? Does this mean campuses that are inaccessible? Does this mean campuses that are antagonistic to our queer and trans fam? Does this mean going back to the unequal and very disparate kind of populations where our student bodies don't look like our faculty and where faculty is especially Black, Indigenous, queer, and trans faculty are not being retained. They're not being promoted, they're not being protected. Right. Going back to that amid COVID which is still happening with this Delta variant I'm like how much are we supposed to take on?

And while I feel like a lot of folks or all of us are feeling this pressure I am just keenly aware of the way that the mostly marginalized and marginalized are feeling this pressure even more so. Right. Because a lot of folks weren't able to actually during COVID actually go home and take work from online. I've been very privileged and blessed but a lot of folks weren't able to do that and protect themselves in the ways that needed to be done. I think the going back to normal for me is a scary thought because I think normal wasn't working for a lot of us and we saw a lot of academic institutions across the country really say, hey, these are the things we care about. We care about community, we care about culture, we care about anti-racism, we care about resisting anti-Blackness, we care about making sure our marginalized and mostly marginalized faculty, students, and staff are protected. How are we going to do that now, if you're pushing to go back to normal? Are police still on our campus? Are our faculties being retained and supported? Are our grad students being retained and...

These are the statements that were put out now going back to the status quo is unacceptable. That's always my thing when I'm thinking about like what diversity and inclusion and equity looks like in the academy and just to draw out on Collins again, it has to be more than just a surface level interpersonal like in our individual classrooms what can we do, or in our particular syllabi what can we know it needs to be a structural change. It needs to focus on the structure and infrastructure of the institution as well as the rules, regulations, policies,

practices that guide how our institution work and how they function and we just can't go back to that quote unquote normal. We need to fuck it up as one of my... I just read an exam from one of my graduate students I serve on their committee and I want to give a shout out to Ruby Mendoza because they may also had me thinking and that's their term. Aside Ruby Mendoza let's think about how we can do something different and make it the normal doesn't work so, yeah, that was a long answer to your very short question. I apologize.

Iris Ruiz:

Do you hear that everybody? Do you hear why normal was not necessarily working for some of us folks, for a lot of us folks? And I think that you verbalize that very well, Natasha. You articulated that Dr. Jones, excuse me very well. Yes, thank you. And Gosh, you've given me so many things to think about and because some people are saying it's the new normal or what does the new normal mean? Like, now I'm going to go back and I'm going to do all of this work and people are saying I'm an ally and I'm an accomplice and I'm going to be onboard and I'm going to be doing this. These are the people that are saying they're onboard, I'm going to be coming back and not necessarily thinking about quote unquote what you said fucking things up, like let's tear it down and rebuild this thing wasn't working before.

But other folks were just like, "Okay I'm going to go back and it's going to be new and I'm going to restructure the canon and I'm going to restructure my syllabus." How do you feel about that? What's your reaction to people saying like, okay, this is a new normal and then before you answer that question, I also just wanted to comment a little bit about how I just wonder had it not been for COVID and everybody being home and I know that we've heard this in the media too but everybody being home stuck to their screen or on the screen more so than usual and then witnessing what happened with George Floyd and then Brianna Taylor and witnessing this over and over again what are your thoughts about that? I mean and that contributing to what we call quote unquote the new normal. How do you feel about those things?

Natasha Jones:

I guess right now I don't know what new normal will look like and so when folks say new normal it makes me wonder so what does this new normal look like and how is it going to be taken up in not only this social political context but in the academy and in our classrooms and in our communities and so I'm really hesitant to be just like, oh yeah new normal this is the things that we have to live with or these are the things that we have to deal with because I'm not, I just don't, I don't know what it looks like. And I think that that's one of the benefits of coalitions, right is to think alongside allies, think alongside colleagues, think alongside other Black, Indigenous POC, other mostly marginalized groups to actually figure out what... re-envision or re-imagine what we can be and what should be.

And I think it's, I definitely don't want to make it sound like it's super easy and that oh, we can just do this or change this thing or tweak this thing because I don't think that's the case. I think it's really complex and that it requires complex coalitional thinking to reimagine what could be. I haven't been using

the term new normal because I don't know what that looks like yet and I'm super happy to talk through with other colleagues and other folks about what we can do to make things better but I think it's definitely going to take a lot of people working toward the changes that we want to see and also a willingness to let go of the status quo let go of how things have been, let go of how we think things should be and just completely think about what does it mean to be equitable? What does it mean to be just? What does it mean to be inclusive? And I think those are big words and we all have different ideas of what those words means but like really thinking together in coalition with folks about those things.

Iris Ruiz:

Definitely. And we have the work is cut out for us, right because we also then have to be or I think I don't know. I don't want to speak for you but I've been trying to think about how to be strategic in entering into these conversations and trying to build coalitions with other colleagues and scholars because as you mentioned we're still at the point to where we realize that the faculty is not reflective of our student populations. Our student populations are changing in terms of diversity and in terms of generational status like preparedness and things like that not to mention culture, race, and ethnicity. But yes and what you're saying is that the faculty is still not reflecting that student population and what does that mean for us?

We are faculty and that means that we work with those faculty and that means that those faculty are also they're circumscribed by these kinds of ideas of the new normal and anti-racist pedagogy and they're probably situate themselves in different places on the spectrum with how to approach anti-racist pedagogy some of them saying like, I want to do it. Yeah and someone's like, I'm on board and then you have everything in between, which a lot of is probably like confusion like how do I do this? And just to bring in a concrete example and I'm sure you probably saw some of it going on social media with a sales blog and et cetera, how CWPA wanted us to come in and help them to change their outcome statement for first year writing programs but then not being ready to Institute the changes that we spent seven months working on.

And I think that's just demonstrative of how difficult these conversations are and then when you enter into the conversations the response often is, well, I don't know how to do that, or I don't know how I'm going to do that, or how can I learn that in one year, or do I really need to put in all of that labor to be able to do this? And it's kind of like, okay I know I don't have all the answers but there's something to be said right about trying to meet somebody halfway. Do you have any suggestions for strategies or anything like that? I know and we don't all have all the answers but do you have any suggestions about with all this uncertainty going in and then all of these commitments, anti-racist statements posted on all of these university websites and et cetera we're going into the cut in with the faculty that are not necessarily reflective of the student population but we have to enter into these conversations. Do you have any suggestions or any thoughts about how you might approach that when you do go back whether it's virtually or not?

Natasha Jones: I'll just keep saying coalitions, like find out where your allies are, who your allies are, find out those folks that will advocate for you behind closed doors as well as when you are present. Find out who you can depend on to draw on their allies and their coalitions and just draw as many folks in to address whatever strategic goal or objective that you have and draw on the expertise and the power privilege and positionality of those folks in your coalition. And so I guess it sounds like find your people, find like when we were kids mom would say find those helpers look for those helpers. And so I think that that is basically what coalitional work is, is drawing in folks to work strategically toward these goals that we have and figuring out who's committed and what they can offer.

Everybody can't do everything. People are going to mess up, people are going to screw up and I think that in a coalition there's room to be called in to do the work without that kind of fear of I don't know everything or I don't have any answers. Nobody's expecting anybody to know everything, I have all the answers. Nobody's expecting anybody to never mess up but the desire to actually do the work and join with other folks who want to do that work and draw on your areas of expertise and your power, your privilege, your visibility in order to push that work forward is the thing that I think we have to keep in mind.

Coalitions come into being and they fall out of being as needed, right? As well as the people who are in a coalition filter in and out depending on what they can offer or can't offer. Realizing that the coalitions aren't these static, non-moveable, immutable things they are actually living, breathing kind of what works in the moment, what works for this particular problem, what works for this particular strategic action, and what doesn't. Who can help with this and who can't, I guess that would be my thing is find your people, find your coalition.

Iris Ruiz: So helpful. That is so helpful. Thank you so much. You articulated that so well, I'm just learning a lot here from you.

Natasha Jones: [inaudible 01:05:01] I think that that is Dr. Walton and Dr. Moore basically in the book building coalitions for action that's what we're talking about like power, privilege, positionality, and figuring out how we can get stuff done in a coalitional way and what that means for tech comm but also what it means for the academy more broadly.

Iris Ruiz: Wow. Well, that's a perfect transition because I was going to ask a little bit about that like with a definition of the social turn maybe we could start a little bit there, the social turn because I know like the field of writing studies in general but specifically composition studies is predicated somewhat on a definition of a social turn right in the late 1960s and early 1970s with the open admissions and the Sydney University of New York, et cetera so that writing studies is really predicated on inclusion and accommodation, et cetera. With your particular scholarship what is meant first of all, by the social turn?

Natasha Jones:

Social justice turn is movement in regards to tech comm because I'm a tech comm scholar so that's definitely the way I approach it but just a focus on justice, equity, and inclusion in technical communication as a field and understanding that technical communication itself, even though it can be seen as objective neutral and removed it is at its core a humanistic field, right. Our concern is with people, our concern is to be advocates for end users and human centered design and all these kinds of things so how can we think about technical communication as a field to be more inclusive, more equitable, more just.

And I think that we marked the beginning of this turn not that folks weren't already thinking about these things but we marked the beginning of this turn in our book *Technical Communication After the Social Justice Turn* with Dr. Godwin Volcker's work as he was thinking about social justice and started actually was one of the first folks to use that term social justice in his writing and in his research. And so I think what we saw then was in these kinds of bits and pieces, other folks were also taking up this term social justice or even not necessarily using social justice as a term but taking up this focus on thinking about advocacy and inclusion in their work whether it was in their work about design or their work about localization and globalization or their work about pedagogy or their work about race and ethnicity or their work about feminism, right? Really having scholars starting to say, hey, we can't ignore the social political immaterial context that are impacted by the work that we do as technical communicators or that are impacted by technical communication as a discipline or technical communication as a practice. Right.

And so I think that it's really picked up steam in the last I don't know, decade or so where more folks are really on board with really thinking through what we call in technical communication these wicked problems, these intractable problems that are social, political, economic all of those things together. Yeah, I hope that answered your question about how I approach it and how I'm thinking about it from within my discipline of technical communication. And I think that writing studies in general especially rhetoric and composition was definitely their focus on social justice, equity inclusion, precluded way before technical communication making this field-wide like acknowledgement of the need for social justice and social action and in technical communication Carolyn Reed in one of her articles where she talks about the four big areas, the four big questions that tech communication and tech communicators are grappling with one of those are social action, right. And so I think being we see this field-wide turn to actually start to engage with those kinds of things.

Iris Ruiz:

Oh, wow. Thank you so much for giving us that really insightful definition and the history and how you envision that and how it works in the book. Hopefully you all will definitely check that out I know I will, as soon as I can. And so yeah, I'm wondering if you could offer just a little bit of reflection here before we let you go everybody's had to whether they wanted to or not have to learn whether it's rudimentary or a little bit more advanced how to take their pedagogies online. And yeah, that's definitely been a struggle. It's definitely

been a transition for many folks and it's interesting how these conversations about inclusion and accessibility have taken front and center stage in this transition and I just wonder since your area is technical communication and a lot of these conversations are really centering on inclusivity, accessibility, et cetera how we might think about including social justice or are those included in social justice relating to thinking about anti-racism for example. We're all taking our pedagogies online and we're thinking about, yeah, inclusion, accessibility and then the way that you were discussing social justice and technical communication. Can you talk a little bit about how folks might approach the going beyond the inclusion of just having access to the web? Does that make sense?

Natasha Jones:

Yeah. I would not say that's my area of expertise but I think that part of... I guess for me, that that's part and parcel of being inclusive is thinking about accessibility and thinking not just about it in general, but thinking about it specifically. I for one, I'm learning a lot from colleagues that I speak with, colleagues that I read their work about more inclusive pedagogical practices when are talking about online pedagogy. Things like Carte ASL and the Association for Teachers of Technical Writing ATTW conference just past, Dr. Laura Gonzalez and Dr. Ann Shivers-McNair were phenomenal inputting that on under the guise of Dr. Angela Haas who's the president and immediate past president of ATTW.

And also with the help of Dr. Khirsten Scott, who joined us to help think about accessibility, to think about inclusion, to think about ways to make the conference just really engaging, but really also accessible in a way that was just and equitable. And I learned a ton from those folks just about ASL, about making information available in different forms and formats, about transcripts. I mean just a ton.

I feel like I'm still learning and again I'm calling on my coalition to help me to better. And I think a lot of it is just sometimes asking your coalition to take looks at your coursework, to take a look at your course design, and also listening to what our students have always already been telling us they need in order to access our class and in order to make our pedagogy more inclusive. Like transcripts, multiple ways to engage, access to the instructors, access to their peers. Not necessarily pushing them and funneling them through university accommodations. Thinking about these things ahead of time what can you do to make your classroom more inviting and more accessible?

And I'm learning a lot and I am hoping to do better and better each time. Yeah that would be my novice [inaudible 01:14:45] take on that is just to always be open to learning and listening the structures of the academy says, you need this check, check, check. Like no, what do your students need from you? And I think I do want to acknowledge that does place a burden on students as well as if we're always saying, oh, well the institution says you can have this but not that or that but not this or you have to go accommodations to get this right. Thinking about what we can do as individual instructors on that interpersonal level again, right

to make our classrooms more accessible and I'm just looking forward to learning more and doing better and better and better and also hearing feedback from my students about what I can do to improve so yeah, that's my novice response.

Iris Ruiz: No, it's evident, very evident that you did learn a lot there from it's ATTW, correct?

Natasha Jones: Yes.

Iris Ruiz: Yeah. And yeah, just giving us so many things to think about. There's a lot to think about and although we might not necessarily have this clear picture in our mind about what it means to return to a new normal we have so many things to think about and I'm just glad too, that you really emphasize the importance of coalitions and the importance of dialogue and the importance to continue to be open and willing to learn from one another in the midst of all of this political conflict and obviously in the midst of COVID, there's just so much to think about. I think that's great to leave us on a where we can just try to put and start beginning in our minds to put little pieces of the puzzle together, one by one.

And it's just really encouraging to know that we have scholars out here that are thinking about this work that are doing this work that are really trained to make it accessible for us as educators in higher ed and so that we can pass that along to our students. So yeah thank you so much Dr. Jones for your time, for your insight on these difficult complex topics and I just wanted to give you an opportunity is there anything else you wanted to share with the audience or any other shout outs might want to give?

Natasha Jones: No, not really. Just definitely thanking my co-authors, thanking my colleagues, thinking folks in my coalition, they know who they are for always pushing me. Thank you for my students pushing me. Yeah, that's it and thank you for this opportunity. I really appreciate it.