

Guest Editors' Introduction: Community Resistance, Justice, and Sustainability in the Face of Political Adversity

Isabel Baca,

*University of Texas
at El Paso*

Laura Gonzales,

*University of Texas
at El Paso*

& Victor Del Hierro,

*University of Texas
at El Paso*



Image source: <http://www.theroot.com/woman-in-viral-photo-from-women-s-march-to-white-female-1791524613>

For many, the results of the 2016 election brought a shock and much-needed wake-up call, as residents of the U.S.(and other nations across the world) faced a reality that can be easy to forget and ignore:

White supremacy still reigns, both in the U.S. and abroad. While the results of the election appeared to surprise residents and poll analysts alike, for many marginalized communities, the election of a President with a history of [racism](#), [sexism](#), [ableism](#), and homophobia was merely another reminder of the discrimination embedded in our daily realities; a reminder that as marginalized people living in the United States, our fight for survival and agency is far from over.

Indeed, recent events in U.S. history (including, but not limited to, the 2016 election) have brought renewed attention and visibility to the collective power of individuals from marginalized communities—people who come together to sustain each other and push forward despite increasing politically sanctioned discrimination. Movements like [#blacklivesmatter](#), [#idlenomore](#), [noDAPL](#), [#SayHerName](#), and ongoing feminist protests across the world showcase how individuals from intersectional historically oppressed communities (e.g., people of color, LGBTQ, and Indigenous communities) organize and collaborate to protect and make space for each other by leveraging communicative, technological, discursive, and material resources to fight for and sustain social justice.

Building from the energy of collective resistance movements, this special issue of *Reflections* features the work of scholars, artists, activists, teachers, and community organizers in various forms and media, highlighting the rhetorical work currently taking place in communities to face, resist, and overcome the discrimination embedded in and sanctioned by the current political climate. We are proud to feature a wide-range of submissions that leverage the open-source, digital format for this special issue of *Reflections*.

The cover of our special issue, titled “Pledge of Allegiance,” was created by artist and graphic designer Ronnie Dukes. Originally from Chicago, Ronnie’s art has been featured in venues and galleries including Columbia University, the Manhattan Borough President’s Office, and the Abrons Art Center in New York. His [graphic novel debut, A.W.O.L.](#), depicts the daily struggles of a sister and brother living on the Ciudad Juárez, México and El Paso, Texas borderland. Ronnie designed our cover to illustrate the many tensions and forces

at play in the current political climate of the U.S. We are grateful for Ronnie's art and inspiration.

The issue then opens with Ronisha Browdy's "Strong, Black, and Woman: Black Women's Perspectives on Naming and Claiming their Strength as Everyday Rhetorical Practices." In this piece, Browdy explains, "self-definition and self-valuation allow Black women to not only claim aspects of their identities that they deem valuable and important, but also give individual and collective meaning to those qualities and characteristics." Citing the work of social media movements like #BlackGirlsAreMagic and #BlackGirlsRock in addition to her own study, Browdy illustrates the rhetorical power that Black Women leverage as they shape their identities through their own voices, continuing to reject, expand, and counter the stereotypes often imposed upon them.

Next, Lehua Ledbetter's "Understanding Intersectional Resistance Practices in Online Spaces: A Pedagogical Framework" presents a feminist writing pedagogy, a pedagogy that asks students to use "their experiences, rhetorical knowledges, and feminist theories to question the nexus of professionalism and identity." In this piece, Ledbetter takes the reader through her self-reflection journey, showing the challenges a female, woman-of-color writing instructor faces when integrating themes of race, gender, and sexuality into her pedagogy and offering strategies to help address these challenges and difficulties.

In "Listening to Ferguson Voices, Finding the Courage to Resist," Joel Pruce describes an oral history research project, "The Moral Courage Project," which documents the experiences of individuals who witnessed the uprising following the shooting of Michael Brown by Officer Darren Wilson in 2014. Through audio testimonies, community members tell the story of Ferguson, reflecting on the "demands of daily resistance and the transformative power of standing up." Across the voices presented in the piece, *Courage* becomes an important touchstone that helps catalyze transformation. Courage to speak, to stand, and to endure. Ferguson itself has been a catalyst for consciousness of injustice and future movements. However, as the nation's eye has shifted to Charlottesville and elsewhere, it is important

for us to come back to Ferguson and see how “transformation” has become a strategy for creating and sustaining long-term change.

Next, Jasmine Villa and Taylor Figueroa share “Youth Activism and Community Writing by Latina Youth,” a piece that illustrates how Latina youth can use digital and alphabetic storytelling to sustain activist movements. Villa and Figueroa present their work with Latinitas, a non-profit organization that works to empower Latina youth through multimedia and technology. Through brief testimonios from Latinitas participants, Villa and Figueroa highlight how Latinitas sustains social justice efforts by providing “an interplay of multimodal spaces (physical and digital) for Latinx youth to use as a platform for self-expression.”

In “An Open Mesh of Possibilities: Engaging Disability Studies as a Site of Activist and Leadership Possibilities,” Stephanie Wheeler presents a case study involving the development and implementation of a free activist and leadership course, the Electoral Activism and Leadership Academy. The course involves a partnership between the Latino Leadership Institute (LLI) and the University of Central Florida’s United Faculty of Florida (UCF-UFF). Through a discussion of “madness narrative” and “nothing about us without us” methodologies and a description of the course, Wheeler demonstrates that “when oppressive cultural and political climates fragment bodies and identities of marginalized people, that fragmentation becomes the catalyst for opportunities of resistance.” She argues that too often community needs are responded to in a transactional relationship that only provides for the community “based on what we think they need, rather than what they say they need.” Wheeler emphasizes the need to listen to the voices of “the (dis)missed rhetoricians in our community and discipline.”

We close the issue with a submission from Two-Spirit Cherokee artist, activist, and scholar Qwo-Li Driskill, “Our Lady of Perpetual Bloom Quantum.” The photograph, taken by Michael Floyd, is accompanied by an artist’s statement, where Driskill explains that the image is from an assignment centered around “[The Radical Politics of #selfies](#).” The assignment, Driskill clarifies, grew out of a student’s willingness to share their own selfies as performance art. The image that Driskill has gifted us to share in the special issue

carries important pedagogical significance, while also distilling a sentiment of grassroots movements and everyday resistance.

Together, the pieces in this special issue reflect activist research, art, and pedagogy that are not a reaction to or product of political adversity, but are rather shaped by the continuous investment that marginalized communities put into sustaining each other. Our goal in sharing these diverse pieces is both to highlight the individual and collective work that our contributors are doing in their communities, and to establish what we hope to be an intersectional conversation about the power of community activism. In this way, we aim to continue the legacy of *Reflections* as a space for civically-engaged, community-driven research with material impact. We feel honored to be able to showcase this work in this special issue, and we look forward to continuing these much-needed conversations.

We thank Jessica Pauszek and Steve Parks for providing us with the opportunity to contribute to a digital platform that can amplify the many different ways through which marginalized voices can be heard and recognized. Through the multi-layered elements embedded in this issue, we aim to provide encouragement, motivation, and hope for what our collective efforts, scholarship, teaching, and community partnerships can achieve. Together we are stronger. Together we can accomplish so much more.

Isabel Baca, University of Texas at El Paso

Laura Gonzales, University of Texas at El Paso

Victor Del Hierro, University of Texas at El Paso

Isabel Baca is an associate professor of Rhetoric and Writing Studies at the University of Texas at El Paso. Her scholarship focuses on community writing and service-learning as venues to engage in social action. She is a member of the Conference on College Composition and Communication and the National Council of Teachers of English, serving on the Research Foundation Board of Trustees, the College Section Steering Committee, and the Language Policy Committee.

Laura Gonzales is an assistant professor of Rhetoric and Writing Studies at the University of Texas at El Paso. Her work aims to highlight the affordances of linguistic diversity in professional, academic, and community spaces. She is a current member of the Cultivating New Voices Among Scholars of Color fellowship program sponsored by the National Council of Teachers of English.

Victor Del Hierro is an assistant professor of Rhetoric and Writing Studies at the University of Texas at El Paso. Focusing on the relationship between Hip Hop, Borderlands, and Migration as a purposeful practice, his work is interested in the ways that DJs and Emcees can teach us how to engage across cultures and communities. Victor is currently serving as a member of the Task Force on Social Justice and Activism to the Conference on College Composition and Communication and is a former Hawisher and Selfe Caring for the Future Award winner.