

## Review:

### **Frankie Condon. *I Hope I Join the Band: Narrative, Affiliation, and Antiracist Rhetoric.***

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**F**ranksie Condon implores her audience to imagine new ways of performing anti-racist activism and pedagogies throughout her book: *I Hope I Join the Band: Narrative, Affiliation, and Antiracist Rhetoric*. For Condon, building an antiracist epistemology involves an individual's ability to weave together the affective and spiritual dimensions of knowing alongside of multiple stories, which highlight histories of oppression, exploitation, and privilege. She emphasizes the idea that antiracist work is incomplete, messy, disruptive, and uncomfortable. To that end, her project illustrates how the affective, spiritual, and rational form alternative ways of being and thinking within anti-racist activism. Throughout each of the chapters, Condon offers readers an account of herself. She reflects on her understandings of privilege and oppression and demonstrates how difficult it is to excavate our narratives of activism and critically evaluate the extent to which they produce change, despite our progressive intentions. In effect, her impetus is to call for

methods through which we can recover from of our personal and collective amnesia regarding histories of oppression, because these rhetorical practices can allow for a more kaleidoscopic understanding of theories and practices of social justice.

Make no mistake—Condon is out to attack white privilege at its core but not in the ways that her audience may be accustomed to. She is very deliberate in directing her work towards white activists/scholars/teachers, and she argues that we seem to confuse “will, desire, and energy for readiness” (11). She targets well-intended white activists/scholars/teachers who are committed to addressing inequalities in an effort to bring about social change. She believes there is a pressing need for more effective solidarity against racism. To do this, she argues, we must attend to the epistemological practices of “whiteness” (Frye; Pratt). Whiteness functions as “learned ways of knowing and doing characterized by a racialized (white) sense of oneself as best equipped to judge, to preach, and to suffer” (34). Her exigency, then, is to abandon the ways that we address white privilege as activists, scholars, and teachers—through apology and shame for example—and instead focus on how to be more critical, mindful, open, and present. To that end, she calls for an active state of readiness—one in which we are ready to learn, to fail, and to continue to delve into the process.

All of Condon’s chapters foreground the role of storytelling in antiracist activism. In Chapter 2, “Chatting with Angels,” Condon invites her audience to critically assess how they construct their narratives of antiracist activism, and she begins the chapter by exploring the following questions: who are you? Why do you do this work? Condon discusses her personal relationships to antiracist activism. However, she does not allow her narratives to stand on their own. Instead, she complicates her stories against the backdrop of larger systems of oppression. Her work in this chapter is to expose how dominating stories of activism may work to eclipse alternative narratives thereby reifying, rather than eradicating, racism:

If white participation in the production of resisting stories of racialized experience is to be meaningful, the stories we tell and the matter of their production must be conceived of as

opportunities to learn, to revise, to reconstruct in order to more fully represent, one hopes, increasingly nuanced understandings. (37)

As we are consistently critical of our stories, and how they may impact the lives of others on both an individual and a systemic level, we can engage in creative, pursuant, and critical ideation (47). Undoing our mindscape is a consistent process, where we are forced to “unlearn our consent” and be attentive to how we may unconsciously participate in acts of racism. It is through this process that we can imagine alternatives foundational to an antiracist epistemology and rhetoric (56).

Condon foregrounds distinct inquiry-based methods for engaging in antiracist activism in the following three chapters: “Wrestling with Angels”, “Angels before Thee,” and “An Open Door for Elijah.” Because Condon emphasizes that whiteness is an epistemological and rhetorical practice rather than as an ontological condition (76), she provides readers with inquiry based methods to undo these oftentimes uncontested ways of thinking. First, she argues for the practice of decentering, which asks individuals to be mindful of the ways their identities shape how they see their relationships to others. Further, she argues for white activists/scholars/teachers to participate in the process of nuancing. Nuancing involves working “in and out of collective memory”; and “engages us in the work of recognizing and articulating critically the scope, dimensions, and impacts of existing relationships among and between the local and the global, the individual and the collective” (86-87). She emphasizes that both practices deliberately destabilize the individual in an effort to dismantle the problematic divide between the individual and the self. Throughout these chapters, Condon emphasizes the idea that it is only when we are aware of our own limitations that we can engage in an everyday consciousness. These chapters show us how to dismantle the idea that the self is fixed and stable, as she teaches us how to *actively* engage in the process of inquiry.

*I Hope I Join the Band* affords readers with an analytic for critically examining our everyday lives. To “join the band” we must attend to the ways we have been conditioned to think and be—to be mindful,

present, honest, and vulnerable. In the final chapter of her book, Condon illustrates how we must continue to face one another as we continue to teach and lead across racial divides:

The risk comes from us, it's in us. The only way I know to face that risk is to account for it is to turn to remember the past; to recognize the traces of the past in the present and in you; to acknowledge your own pain and the pain of others without accounting yours the more pressing or distressing; to admit the partiality of your ability to know yourself and others; to prepare to prepare for the making of mistakes; to practice compassion for yourself and others; and to speak the truth as best you can discern it and to speak that truth to power. (189)

This book intends to get readers motivated as they critically explore just how ready they are to address racism head on. In this way, Condon pushes us to move beyond an acknowledgement of our invisible knapsack (a la Mackintosh) and to continuously engage in the more subtle, unconscious, affective, personal, and systemic reasons that may create a disconnect between the type of change we believe we are making in relationship to what actually occurs on the ground. With that said, the major ideas of this book serves as a guide for re-thinking a more simplistic understanding of how privilege happens. Taken together, Condon's work offers readers a valuable way to consider race, identity, and privilege more broadly as they embark on their own political agendas within their classrooms and beyond. Her project offers teachers of varying levels the space to abandon how we may have understood our roles in antiracist activism and to be more critical, mindful, and present of the stories that we tell, in hopes that they can formulate *real*, and sustainable change.

Kelly Concannon is a professor in the department of Writing and Communications at Nova Southeastern University. She encourages global awareness and responsibility, which she situates as central to various literacy practices. She has published work in journals such as the *Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning*, *The Journal of Feminist Scholarship*, *Academic Exchange Quarterly*, the *Journal of Advanced Composition*, *Enculturation*, and *College Literature*. She participates in various community activist projects and alliances, including the South Florida Diversity Alliance and serves as a Mentor for the Women of Tomorrow Program in Ft Lauderdale, FL.