Frankie Condon’s *I Hope I Join the Band: Narrative, Affiliation, and Antiracist Rhetoric* addresses an immediate but complex question for teachers: how does one approach the problem of racism in the classroom? Condon’s book does not provide easy answers to this exceptionally difficult question; instead, she reveals possible approaches through a series of essays that draw upon rhetorical theory and upon her experience as an associate professor and writing center faculty coordinator at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Although paraphrasing a book like *I Hope I Join the Band* threatens to be reductive, one could say that Condon aims to develop spaces for discursive borderlands, spaces where people of different racial backgrounds can voice their experiences, engage in critical self-inquiry, and imagine future conditions where solidarity, rather than hegemony, stands as the aim of educational practice. Condon’s book, which is ultimately a successful addition to the scholarship on antiracist rhetoric, reads more as a meditation than a practical guide for instructors. Readers looking for easy steps will be disappointed; however, for readers who understand that the subject of race cannot be merely academic, Condon’s book will remain a testament to the struggles and possibilities that lie before those who dare to engage with antiracist rhetoric.

Condon draws her book’s title from an African-American spiritual with the same name. From her perspective, the lyrics of this spiritual present hope as the “necessary condition for justice struggles” (4); unlike utopianism and optimism, hope can resist injustice at the same time it sustains the imagination for a more equitable future. In chapter 1, readers will notice that Condon’s sense of hope dovetails with her sense of antiracist rhetoric: both terms describe a condition that is at once activist and theoretical. In other words, Condon returns us to those borderlands always located between ideological positions. Condon makes clear that occupying such a position is difficult, alluding to the struggle she has suffered during her own experiences inside the borderlands with chapter titles evoking moments in the Old Testament. We have evocations of Jacob wrestling with the angel and the devout awaiting Elijah’s return from heaven. For the professional writing instructor or administrator, Condon’s first chapter at once encourages discussions of race while also warning that such discussions are difficult. To handle such difficulties, Condon deploys a vocabulary directed to professional instructors and administrators that aims to deconstruct racial assumptions.

In chapter 2, Condon develops this working vocabulary to talk about racist and antiracist rhetoric. Broadly conceived, racist rhetoric does not
only define explicit claims of racial superiority, but also implicit assumptions that guide arguments and educational policies. Condon, following the example of Minnie Bruce Pratt and later Marilyn Frye, calls these implicit assumptions *whiteness*, what Condon paraphrases as the “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). Because racism is often implicit within assumptions, antiracist rhetoric seeks to challenge and reframe assumptions. Condon uses the word “ideation” to describe the act of forming new ideas from different assumptions, identifying three forms of ideation as especially important for antiracist rhetoric: practical, critical and creative. The most promising form of ideation for antiracist rhetoric and practice, according to Condon, is creative ideation, or the capacity “to form thoughts about worlds not yet seen by building upon, but not limited by, history and lived experience” (47). Condon expands this definition into the field of composition practice when she argues that creative ideation is “relational at root,” that the ability to form these kinds of thoughts is the “intellectual labor of future perfect” (47). Condon thus moves from a vocabulary for writing professionals to a vision for their students, claiming that the antiracist classroom encourages acts of invention and creativity in order to develop possible futures less burdened by racist thinking.

Chapter 3, “Wrestling with Angels,” chronicles Condon’s efforts to put antiracist rhetoric into practice. Condon immediately connects this struggle to the Biblical story of Jacob wrestling with the angel. We should not forget that late in this struggle, Jacob’s hip is wrenched; despite suffering this injury, Jacob refuses to release the angel. Condon conceives of antiracist activism as a similar kind of wrenching, a subject position that accepts what Roland Barthes calls the punctum, the “accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)” (80). Condon relates some of her own struggles with this punctum through narrative. We learn about Condon’s last efforts to save her brother Rick, a child of the Sioux Nation who was “adopted” by Condon’s biological white family as part of the Indian Adoption Project, from drug addiction: she would no longer “extract” her brother from his problems; rather, she would provide a “support structure” (58). At the end of the narrative, Rick throws a chair and directs a racial insult at Condon, leading her to affirm that “love, alone, is never enough” to do the work of antiracism (59). Rather than relying on love alone, the antiracist activist must also engage with the “epistemological and rhetorical practice of decentering” (62). The antiracist classroom is therefore not merely an open-ended, creative place. As Condon elaborates in this chapter, creative ideation must “decenter” mindsets to achieve a more liberated learning environment. In the classroom, students might encounter the epistemological experience of decentering through rhetorical assignments and exercises.

The writing instructor would be right to voice concerns about encouraging decentering in the classroom. Don’t we face the risk of offending some students? Or even worse, losing control of the classroom environment?
Condon addresses many of these concerns in chapter 4, titled “Angels Before Thee.” The major concept of this chapter is nuancing, which “scratches, teases, tears at the binaries between self and other, personal and social, subjective and objective, individual and collective” (87). Very much aware of how decentering and nuancing might worry instructors, Condon subdivides her chapter into five sections: “The Agon,” “Whiteliness,” “Disinterest and ‘Objectivity,’” “White Guilt,” and “Fear.” Each of these subdivisions tackles a different concern that writing administrators and instructors might have in employing nuancing.

In chapter 5, Condon suggests that a failure to act in educational, rhetorical, and social spaces does not just threaten the present generation, but also threatens those who will inherit the world. The chapter title, “An Open Door for Elijah,” comes from the tradition that the prophet Elijah will return to Earth at the end of days and answer “all of the unanswerable questions” (121). For Condon, the open door represents the sort of intellectual and experiential challenge for antiracist and social justice practice: “the opening, the joint, the articulation between peoples is as dangerous and fragile a place as it is a locus of possibility” (122). Such an opening requires practitioners to imagine a mode of listening and reflection much larger in scale than is usually at stake in agonistic rhetoric. Borrowing her terminology from the musician and essayist Brian Eno, Condon advocates thinking of this opening in terms of the “Big Here” and the “Long Now.” For Eno, the Long Now marks the recognition “that the precise moment you’re in grows out of the past and is a seed for the future” (126). Writing administrators and instructors might think of this “Big Here” and “Long Now” kind of thinking as an ideal mindset, a best-case scenario after students leave the classroom.

Scholars of rhetorical theory and instructors invested in handling the subject of racism in the college composition classroom will find Condon’s book theoretically and personally valuable. Condon’s narrative is gripping and her reassurances to fellow instructors that it is better to tackle racism rather than to ignore it are persuasive; however, it is less clear how one applies antiracist rhetoric as an institutional practice within writing programs. Perhaps Condon’s relative silence on this matter fits into one of her larger points: because racism ossifies inside institutions, we should allow instructors and students the freedom to conduct their classes and write their narratives in a manner that cultivates decentering, nuancing, and ultimately, hope.

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