

Transcript for S2 Episode 4: Teaching During the trump Era Pt 2

Run Time: 40:55

Cue music: "RSPN" by Blank and Kytt

BL: B. López (host, co-executive producer)
BK: Ben Kuebrich (co-executive producer)
KS: Katlin Sweeney (guest)
YR: Yanira Rodríguez (guest)
SC: Shivaun Corry (guest)
SR: Simon Ruchti (guest)
GGDM: Genevieve García de Müller (guest)
DM: Deborah Mutnick (guest)
CVC: Christina Victoria Cedillo (guest)

BL: Welcome to *This Rhetorical Life*, a podcast about radical pedagogy, counterstories of rhetoric and composition, and the rhetoricity of our personal and political lives. We're your hosts B. López...

BK: ...and Ben Kuebrich.

BL: B. is a queer PhD student of color, an archival enthusiast, and a cat dad above all else.

BK: Ben is an organizer and a teacher of journalism and writing. Join us here every month as we talk with educators, scholars, and activists about their research, their classroom interventions, and their struggles for a more just world.

BL: Welcome back everyone. We're excited to share some narratives by educators throughout the U.S. about what it means for them to teach during the Trump era. We think it's important that we allow these folks to share their experiences.

BK: With seven contributions, we've got a diverse set of perspectives on how to teach for this moment, which build on our previous episode, the round table with Dr. GPat Patterson, Dr. James Chase Sanchez.

BL: Here's our first submission.

KS: My name is Katlin Marisol Sweeney. I'm a second year PhD student in the department of English at the Ohio State University. I'm a biracial Salvadorian American whose work in Latinx studies is influenced in part by my own experiences of Central American erasure in U.S. Latinx discourse. I think that teaching in the Trump era for me has meant how do I as a writing instructor ensure that my students – most of whom will only take writing courses that they're required to take by GE curriculum – how do I make sure that these students are best prepared to contextualize the world around them? And by that I mean how am I taking care to provide them with a wider sociopolitical context that they're going to need in order to see through the fiction that Trump

somehow created institutionalized xenophobia, racism, et cetera?

When I'm in front of the classroom, a priority for me is to emphasize to them a feelings-first approach in which whatever music video, article, Instagram post that I've given them for that day, I ask them to talk about and really marinate in what their emotional reactions to this piece were. I found that this allows me space as an instructor to work with them when identifying emotional responses that may or may not have been relevant to them and guiding them through that process. And for students who feel neutrally also asking them to think critically about that and track the source of these emotions and contextualize where they may stem from positionality, privilege, or something else. I think that one of the greatest mistakes we could make as writing instructors is to simply hand students violent material such as a Trump speech or representations of queer folks being murdered in narrative media and saying, "okay, analyze this."

Effectively what we're doing in that moment is normalizing violence and violation stating, "well, it's a current event and it's useful to look at because it's something that relates to our course theme or the learning objectives." While I think that we can incorporate those texts into the class if we feel it's necessary to do so, I think that we have to work actively to frame those moments that students don't see us also participating in that normalization, but instead of asking them to think about perhaps what are the conventions that folks have accepted as being related to Americanness or how do U.S. politics reflect for us the issues that are at stake for many of us in our daily lives and are not optional. I want my students to think about how they might see something as violent or how, or they might not see something as violent.

I want them to recognize those blind spots that we all have in part due to what we have each inherited from various social institutions like family or education. I consciously make space for students to know that they're supported through this process and that I practice patience as an instructor, but I do so through a kind of firm patience in that I want students to feel that they can ask genuine questions but also know that I'll be straightforward in my responses. I think at the heart of what I work at as a teacher is how do I make sure that my students are best prepared to express themselves in the world around them and in particular, how are they best prepared to be an educated voter, an educated self advocate, and an educated person who's going to be able to stand up for themselves in moments that are necessary and stand up for folks who might not have the same resources as them.

BK: Next a submission from Yanira Rodriguez journalism and writing professor at West Chester University in Pennsylvania.

YR: Memories of teaching during the current person in office's election are both episodic and vivid, which, when I reflect back on that moment, feels like a function of trauma in many ways. For example, I recall very specifically deciding I will not be discussing the election in class. That instead I would focus attention on the kinds of fascist soundbites and commonplace ideologies that were infiltrating public opinion and you know, leading some of these young people to engage in incidents like what we saw at the rally at UVA, right, where students were among the white supremacists carrying tiki torches on the campus while they were chanting anti-Semitic and other problematic slogans. And so, you know, I decided I wasn't going to teach about the election. I was going to do my job, which was to teach writing and critical thinking. And you know, for some students critical thinking is synonymous with hyper liberal or progressive. And I have encountered that forever in a day in my classrooms. But I was going to continue to do that work.

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And so that semester I recall I had mostly young white men, many who were in like in STEM, in forensics and national security fields of study. So that... in itself is interesting. And then I had one student who was an ROTC student and he'd often come into the classroom in full camo, you know, military uniform. And it wasn't the first time I was teaching a ROTC student. But you know, that experience, it's usually pretty jarring because, you know, so I had this group of students and many of them were really vocal about their support for the current person in office and were more than usual because I mean I've, because I've had these students before, but more than usual, they were very open about promoting their views. And it was as if they felt protected by one another and the public dialogues that have been circulated.

Because right before that summer, before that fall, I remember there was these like public dialogues circulating about engaging in deep listening. I mean, I recall one article in the student newspaper titled "Feeling Unwelcomed: Trump Supporters at Syracuse University Want Civility," which was a very interesting title for the piece when we think about how the word civility functions at universities. But these kinds of pieces are very pervasive, and they told the story of this hyper-liberal university where conservative students were being victimized for their views by liberal/progressive faculty. But the happenings inside my classroom, you know, they told quite a different story and it's a story I had been experiencing prior to the election where white male students have always dominated conversations with their opinions and perspectives.

But if anything, it was just an emboldened version of a common story that I was witnessing during the election. And some of the behaviors of young white men in the classroom came at the expense of other students, namely students of color, who were often overwhelmed by some of the antics and felt like they couldn't speak up. I recall two Black women in my classroom emailing me after the election results because they said they could not enter the classroom. And I didn't blame them. You know, students were gloating that day. So it was a semester for me or redirecting much of this overt and more subtle violences that made it into the classroom. And while I could redirect large group conversations what came from free-flowing small group discussions presented me with like a different challenge of having to be more at more than one place at the same time, and by that I mean I had to be listening to what some of the stuff that was happening beyond the small group work I was doing with students.

And then there were the violences that were redirected at me or me seen as an embodiment of the content I was trying to guide students to think through. So for example, for an assignment asking students to respond to a text on meritocracy, which is one of the common place issues that we were thinking through. Instead I received a piece of writing where the students decided to forego fulfilling the assignment and then instead decided to explain to me what it meant to be a "true American." At the end of the course, I also received a very damning evaluation which was signed #TrumpPence and so these are some of the incidents I remember. Incidents which I sought mentorship and received a dismissive "this is a function of the election" response to, and I recall being so overwhelmed by this and writing a social media post that asked, you know, "how can we keep ourselves, our students and our pedagogies alive under such conditions?"

And for many of us, this was not new. Emboldened yes, perhaps. But what we've been, but you know, we've been teaching against great odds since we started doing this work and to a certain extent we're prepared, but in other ways were quite overwhelmed.

BK: Next up a submission from Shivaun Corry from Duquesne University

SC: I am an invisible immigrant in Trump's America. I was born in Canada, then moved to Turkey as a teenager, and then to the USA in my 30s. My skin is... fairly white... and my accent is... ambiguous but American if I force it.

At my last visit to the immigration office, the kindly old receptionist -- who has probably worked there since the Nixon administration -- warned me that, these days, I shouldn't even take out the trash without bringing all my paperwork.

I make sure that the roots of my dark hair aren't too obvious -- surely no one would mistake this bottle-blond for a Latina. Surely no one would mistake this accent for an illegal immigrant's. Because my students don't think of me as an immigrant, I hear things that other immigrants don't hear. Not that my students repeat Trump's lines about murderers and rapists, but I learn something almost as terrifying. More terrifying than Reagan's talk of the evil empire or Bush's axis of evil. Are there concentration camps at the border? They don't know. Their lack of trust in the media pushes them into apathy. How can you make yourself vulnerable to caring about the misery of a fellow human when they might be so-called "crisis actors"?

I asked my mentor, the philosopher of technology Andrew Feenberg, how I could teach my students who to trust. His reply was that you can't tell them who to trust. Instead, you can only encourage them to experience the world for themselves. To talk to local journalists and community organizers to find out if they really are being bankrolled by Wall Street. To go to protests to see what they are really like.

How do I teach my students about immigration? I can shed my cloak of invisibility. I can tell them that every time I pass through the border I am terrified that I'll be separated from my 3 year old daughter, just like those other immigrant mothers.

And maybe some of them will share their stories of how their Latino ancestors have been living in what is now Texas for at least 300 years. Maybe some of them will tell stories of how they came to the USA illegally before they could even walk or talk and that America is the only place they call home.

Maybe they will realize that there *are* stories they can trust: they can trust their own stories.

I'm Shivaun Corry from Duquesne University, and this is teaching in the age of Trump.

BK: Next is a longer discussion with another colleague of mine at West Chester University.

SR: Simon Ruchti chair and associate professor of womens and gender studies.

BK: Simon tells me about a classroom incident and its aftermath in a women and gender studies lecture.

SR: The day of the election, and I had made a point of not talking about the election and it was bothering my students. They really wanted to talk about it. And the day of the election—two o'clock in the afternoon—I asked how many folks had voted and how many plan to vote and the numbers

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weren't as high as I wanted them to be. So I said, all right, well we're talking about propaganda today. So Hillary Clinton just released this commercial and you know that I am very liberal, on the left. And so I feel like it would be fair for me to show a video of Hillary Clinton and critique it as propaganda so that there's no implication of bias. And so I did this and I didn't take it easy on the video and all. I was just showing them ways to critically engage with media and some students got upset and said, "if you're not going to show the Trump, then that's not fair because now you've just done an advertisement for Hillary Clinton."

I said, but I just like critiqued her, if anything, I might've scared people away from voting for her. They said, anyway, you have to show the Trump video -- he put one out last night. And I said, "I can't show that video." We just had a conversation last week in class where one of the students in the class, a Republican who's Jewish, talked about all the Anti-Semitism he deals with. And I'm not going to show that video and subject anyone to Anti-Semitism. And as soon as I said, I was like, "oh shoot." And another student is like, "well, but you just called Trump an anti-Semite and you aren't letting us watch the video to see whether we agree with you." And I was like, "you know what? You're right. I shouldn't have done that mistake. But I'm not showing you the video." And the students got really upset.

So that night I got some nasty emails from students accusing me of being biased and anti-Trump and forcing my leftist agenda on them. And so I went into class with, you know, the election was over, Trump had won. And I went in and I apologized and I said, "you know, I shouldn't have, I should have been more careful and I'm sorry about that but I have to tell you some of the things I was hearing in class were really upsetting." And all of a sudden some students start kinda yelling at me and a bunch of them are standing up and yelling and swearing at me and yelling about how Trump won so we can say what we want now. And I saw some of those students, which are white students, storming out of class. There were 180 students about that day, maybe more, so a bunch of students start storming out of class.

Everybody's talking, yelling, and as I see this white women walk past, I saw them say something, I saw the look on some African American students' faces, just kinda like... I found out the next class, we were going to unpack that a bit, that what those white women said is Trump got elected, I can say what I want and called them the n-word. And apparently the use of the n-word was way up in that class. I couldn't hear it because it is a massive auditorium. And so I think that was when, I think they stormed out the day of the election. So they'll say something like, it's Trump age of Trump, I think is what they said. And then the next class was when I sat up there, basically cried in front of the class and said I'd never experienced anything like that. You know, by that time, you know, I'm morally just crushed.

I'm just shocked that we elected this guy president and I go back into a classroom where I've got these students who had just started screaming about, you know, Trump, MAGA, all this shit in class and storm out and clearly something was being said that wasn't okay. So it was that next class that Thursday after the election that I came in and was talking about this and one of the African American students, that's when she says, "well this is what happened." And the people sitting around her were like, yeah, it was shocking. And the women who said it are still sitting front and center right in front of me and for the next couple of weeks of the semester they would just sit there and stare at me and text. Or posting I think on social media is what they were doing.

And that next class I noticed that there were two random women and a woman probably in her 20s or the woman, maybe in her 40s probably or 50s hanging out behind this dividing wall that separates a little hallway from the auditorium, the seating, and they had something in their hand and it wasn't their phone that they were recording with. They were recording it. And I was watching them and some students were like, "Oh yeah, they're recording the class." And I kind of went over and looked at them and they kind of giggled and left, these two women, white women. And I thought "Oh crap are there are people coming in here and recording the class?" And then it happened again on the other side of the room. Somebody was sitting there hiding behind the wall with a laptop out and I think a microphone recording the class. And some of my students drew my attention to it and so I saw her, I was like, "you got to go." And it happened a couple of more times and a couple of times I didn't notice it because students later said to me, "Hey, you know, every class since the election I have seen somebody hiding behind one of these walls."

So we actually had public safety come in, sit in on the class just to make sure there was no more people recording a class and also just to make sure there was no like blow ups like that again, cause if there's that many students, there's no way I can manage it. And that's never in my career as a faculty, as a professor, you know – at that point I'd been, I was probably in my 10th or 11th year teaching at a university students – never had anything like that happen. I've had tense classes, but that was amazing.

And after that I just, I was afraid to broach topics that would cause a fight because of the impact it had on my students of color and my immigrant students and my queer students. A number of them dropped out of school. It didn't feel safe, you know, they just, they would, they were talking about all the things that they were hearing and just sitting in front of this room full of students while all these students are talking about the bias they've been experiencing, how much worse it's been and I'm crying and they're crying.

And then you've got these other students out there that are literally laughing at us like it's funny.

BK: And that's, students from that class dropped out?

SR: Students from that class ended up dropping out. Quite a few of them not, I mean, honestly it's packed full of first year students that are blocked enrolled. So usually what happens is it's almost all white students, a bunch of the white students realize what we're going to talk about and they drop the class and then it fills with students of color. So there's more students of color than average on campus, but not a lot. So I don't know how many of them ended up dropping out in the end, but I can think of at least three of them that did leave.

But then in the next semester, I teach of course called Sexual Identity and Culture, which is very much an intersectionality-based course where we talk about the use of sexuality and sexual repression as a tool for oppressing particularly racial minorities. You know, and, and I was so anxious about offending people and having the white students yet again take it out on the students of color, or when you're talking about queer sexualities and non-binary genders that I was going to subject all of my queer students to have to listen to my non-queer students say the most horrific of things. But I was also, I think like a lot of us just trying to figure out how many of my students aren't safe. So the next fall, the year after Trump got elected, I'm teaching that same large 200 student class. And it's boring because I'm afraid to say anything that will offend anybody. And the whole point in the class is to get them thinking about the more controversial things and how they're going

to deal with it. And I'm always very clear. My job isn't to tell you what to think, it is to help you figure out how you think, or what are better ways of expressing your opinions, or really understanding what you want to think.

But I couldn't bring myself to say anything that would cause a problem. And there was this one guy in the class. Only reason he took the class was because, he said, because his sister was in the class. And he was senior, but he was going to take the class because he didn't want his sister to have to take the class without him there basically to protect her. But he would say some really messed up stuff and when he'd say it instead of addressing it, I would just be, "Oh, well, you know, let's think about that. Let's talk about that." Instead of saying what I usually say which is, "wow, that was really fucked up. Not saying you're racist, but that was a really racist thing you just said there." Whatever it is, I can somewhat gently say to be like, "That was fucking racist," you know?

But I wouldn't with him. I would entertain it. I would say, "Hey, that's a really interesting contribution. Thanks for saying that. We want to get all these different points of view." If he'd say something really problematic, I would gently shut him down or redirect it. And by the end of the semester I knew the students were bored. I was bored. They weren't learning what they needed to learn. The purpose of the class had been pretty much shot to hell. And we're doing the review for the final exam last week of classes and we had just finished covering intersex and there's a whole lot in the class on Islam and Islamophobia. There's a lot on race and myths about Black parents, stuff like that. And trans and gender queer stuff. And during the review and I'm reviewing some of the stats and information on intersex and knowing everything we had just covered in class, knowing that I'm trans, knowing that I'm very probably intersex and didn't find out about it until later in life... He yells out, "I just checked the statistics and only one in..." and then he gave some number, and it was probably the statistic for people who have one very rare form of intersex. And he said, "So you're wrong. It's not one in 200 or around one in 200."

And I was like, "yeah, but remember you're looking at a particular from." "Oh no, I'm looking at the numbers right here." And I'm like, read it to me. Cause I'm just like, "dude, we've got a lot to cover." He starts reading it to me, and I'm like, "right, you're talking about one form." He's like, "well, it's not a real thing. And trans people aren't real. Like they're just confused." And I'm like, what are you doing? I'm your professor – why are you doing this? And then he jumps in a little bit later, right after that with, "Muslims are all terrorists." And the reason black people have higher crime rates is because black fathers are never there for their kids and don't raise their families. Even though I'd already shown him the stats that say it's the exact opposite, right?

And he wouldn't stop. And I finally was like, I don't remember exactly what I said but I'm like, "You need to stop. I have had it. That was racist, it was Islamophobic, and all this bullshit about trans people. What are you trying to do here?" And the students in the room broke out in applause. And it wasn't just a few of them, it was almost all, well not almost all, but the vast majority of them started applauding, stayed after class to thank me because I just let them have it. Because I was like, "listen, I'm starting to think the only reason you took this class was to ruin it for everybody else. And that is what you have done. I have catered to you all semester. I have done everything I could to make you comfortable at the expense of everybody else in the room. And I've come to find out that you're making Islamophobic statements and homophobic statements, racist statements back and forth with your friends here while everybody else has been subjected listening to it. You know damn well that you were surrounded by a Muslim woman in front of you, a Muslim woman behind you because they're wearing a hijab. You're, you've got a gender queer students sitting next to you.

You've got a African American students sitting by you. You got a Mexican American sitting right next to you and you think we should all just have to listen to what you have to say. But as soon as anybody says something even remotely unsupportive of Christianity, you,” and I pointed at his sister, “well you two get upset. And “you're like, well everybody is free to have their opinion but we shouldn't be subjected to.”

And then I just feel that, I think what I learned from that moment was I'm not the kind of person that can let that kind of stuff happen and still feel okay about myself, but also my efforts to make it safer for my minority students in the room actually made it worse. You know, cause not only was I assuming they couldn't handle it – like the stuff that happened nobody can handle that – but for the most part, you know, they can handle it. And they told me like, we need to hear this and we're going to hear it anyway, so at least let us do it in context of this class where at least you're going to be there to back us up. But it just, it didn't stop. And so I decided from there on out, I wasn't going to do that anymore.

And so 2018 I taught the class like I used to and it was the best semester I've ever had. I mean I had students who would get up and storm out or you know. I have blocked assigned seating so that I could kind of separate these, so all the A's through C's sit over here and that kinda thing. But students would, when I would say something they didn't like, like something about white privilege, you'd hear this boom with the book bags picking up and like it wasn't just all at the same time, it was like one and then another and then another and they just kind of get up and storm out and make a scene of it. And I had got so fed up and one day we're talking about trans stuff and this group of maybe four or five white men get up and collectively walk out of the room. And I'm like, you got to be kidding. Everybody's looking like, “seriously?” So the next class I'm like, listen, here's the deal. When you're doing that, when people get up and walk out, that's your choice. But you're looking like jackasses. You're looking like you're not mature enough to handle it. And when it is a group of five of you all at once... And I looked over at them, and so the guys' eyes get big and they start whispering back and forth. And finally one of them raises his hand, and he goes, “so we all left early because we had an appointment to look at an apartment and we couldn't be late.” I'm like, “you should've been paying attention in class because you didn't know that that was the worst time to walk out. But those guys were so much more attentive after that.

At one point there's this, you know, conservative Christian recently finished his last tour in the Marines, a guy, non-trans student in the class, and he was, he was not afraid to start some crap, but he finally had had enough with everybody walking out of class because they'd heard something they didn't like, you know, other conservatives. And he turned around and he's like start this rant where he's like, “if you can't handle it, you're not mature enough to be in college. They're offering their opinions and we've got a professor here who lets us offer ours and if you don't have the courage to say it, then get the fuck out. “I was like, okay. So class has been better since then. However it is, it is exhausting and emotionally draining. And it seems like every time there's a topic in one of my classes, the Trump administration does the very thing that week before we're covering it. We're going to talk about trans stuff, he talks about a trans ban. We're talking about immigration and all of a sudden the week before he ups the ante on the abuse of immigrants. It's just nonstop, exhausting. Still trying to figure it out.

BK: Sounds like amazing classes. Like what you're doing in that class. Sounds like an incredible thing for the students who go through it.

SR: Yeah. We'll find out next year. It's going to get a lot harder next year, I suspect. I tried to explain to some faculty, a couple of administrators that when you teach women's and gender studies, the stakes are always really high and you're doing a lot of emotional labor because you're coaching, kind of helping students deal with difficult emotions in a logical, you know, academically rigorous way, but also the things that are destroying our country and our world, are the things that we teach. Environmental issues. You know, living a more sustainable life, treating other people with dignity, but doing it in a way that gives them a theoretical foundation so that as the world shifts and a new scapegoat appears that they can apply what they've learned about things around race or sexual orientation to things like immigration. You know? Um, so every once in awhile I'll be honest, I think I can't do this anymore.

I'm too tired. I, you know, by the end of every school year, I'm averaging 70-80 hours a week just to get everything done as chair and I think I can't do anymore. I've got to stop. And then I think: Oh, if I stopped doing that, we'll have one less person teaching these classes. And for every person I teach in that 200-student class, each one of those students, if let's say, let's say a hundred of them buy into what I'm teaching and they then pass that on to just five other people. It's small, but it's a difference. Right? And especially if those students in my classroom are going to be teachers now they're going to impact a lot of people. And to me it's worth all the work. It's a lot more painful. I'll be honest it is much more painful teaching these classes in the age of Trump.

BL: Genevieve García de Müller from Syracuse university adds...

GGDS: I think in terms of my identity, I think it's important that I identify as a Chicana, as a Latina and as bisexual. It's hard to answer these questions because I get really emotional thinking about this, about what has changed in this post-Trump era. I think the most important thing that I can do in the classroom is to continually make sure that I show my students that we are here to talk about truth, to talk about justice, to talk about equity, that in my classroom that we value a diversity of identities and we value an intellectual pursuit and that we completely will not allow violence towards anybody – whether that be material or whether that be theoretical. I think sometimes we need to consider how certain theories are violent against certain groups and what that violence leads to in a very real way. I think my commitment to social justice has always been there even before as just a matter of who I am and the struggles that I've had in life.

And I think when Trump was elected, I tried to find solace in the work that I was doing and I tried to find solace in how empowered I felt. My grad students, how hard that they work always brings a lot of joy into my life. I'm so proud of so many of my grad students. So I don't think necessarily that my thoughts about the classroom or what I preferred in the classroom changed. But I think I had to be more explicit about it. So I have, you know, very explicit policies on my syllabus about how we discuss things in the class and how we treat each other as human beings, as people that we respect. You try to make sure that, you know, when I feel like students are being questioned in negative ways in the classroom that I intervene. So I just, I think I'm more hyper-aware of interactions between my students and between me and my students. And I've tried to, as much as I can create a space where people can feel like they can be themselves and that they can express who they are.

BK: Here's our next submission.

DM: Hi, my name is Debra Mutnick. I teach at Long Island University's Brooklyn campus. And I'm responding to your call for participation in this episode by answering the question, “what does it

mean to teach thoughtfully in this political moment?” For me, it was certainly Donald Trump's election, which happened to coincide with an unprecedented faculty lockout at my university that tore away the veil, so to speak, of the limits of neoliberal capitalism's capacity to sustain life on the planet. But as many people have argued as heinous as Trump is, his presidency is a symptom more than a cause of the crises we now face, which can be summed up as the spread of fascism and white nationalism worldwide; the impact of transnational capitalism on global inequality, the rise of surveillance, militarism and police states everywhere and most alarmingly the growing existential threat of climate change.

What changed in my pedagogy – which I strongly believe must now be practiced in a very Freireian sense of dialogic teacher-student, student-teacher relation outside as well as inside classrooms and union halls, community centers, activists, organizations – is that I place a critique of capitalism at the center of my teaching, not in dogmatic, polemical, doctrinaire or coercive ways, but as necessary for understanding and acting to transform the essential relations of production and reproduction that have brought us to the brink of extinction.

I also approached the critique of capitalism historically with respect to the alternative of some form of socialism that must be developed in light of the triumphs and failures of actually-occurring socialist movements and revolutions. That for me is our collective task.

BK: And our final submission is from...

CVC: ...Christina Victoria Cedillo, and I'm currently an assistant professor of writing and rhetoric at the University of Houston Clearlake. Teaching right now in what we might term the era of Trump has definitely been interesting. It's very much a continuation of a paradox that most people will tell you is ever-present when you teach from the perspectives of social justice and decoloniality and decolonization. The thing about it is that whenever you teach from these perspectives, you're going to come up against students who their initial reaction might be to discount these perspectives because it doesn't really go with the way that they'd been raised or have they been trained to think about the world around them, especially if they are members of the dominant culture. So it's something that we face all the time, but I think right now what has happened is that that has really been exacerbated, that resistance to wanting to entertain experiences and ideas that don't originate in that dominant culture perspective.

One thing that I do notice is that students are more likely to be open about white supremacist positions. And so a lot of the times they see these perspectives or these ideas validated with what is happening in presidential discourse and in political procedural rhetoric. And because they see it validated a lot of the times they don't recognize that that is part of white supremacy and that white supremacy is structural. But this actually gives us opportunities to unpack that and to deconstruct that. Very rarely has it been the case where students deliberately and openly embrace these sorts of notions for the sake of white supremacy. Although that has happened as well. But thankfully it's been very few people. I say thankfully because I think in some way it gives me hope that perhaps we are making a difference. But definitely the need to teach about social justice is now more important than ever. But it has definitely become much more precarious and difficult.

BL: The roundtable discussion with Dr. GPat Patterson and Dr. James Sanchez and these narratives have me thinking about the role that educators have in their classrooms and also about how their identities are more present even if their students don't think so. Now more than ever is a time to

reflect on the privileges that come with being in front of a classroom and how we view our positionalities. I find it important to think of not only surviving this era, but also moving beyond it by making sure that I make space for my identities in classrooms and hold students accountable to their own

BK: Speaking personally, I've learned a lot from these discussions the past two episodes. They've made me reflect on the importance of giving space to the emotional current of a classroom. They've been a source of courage to enter into the spaces of tension and debate that come with any socially relevant material I teach.

BL: We encourage our audience to continue the conversations that are brought up and to discuss their own experiences in this era.

BK: This Rhetorical Life is edited and produced by B. López and Ben Kuebrich. follow us on Twitter and Facebook for new episodes each month.