The Enthymematic Hegemony of Whiteness:  
The Enthymeme as  
Antiracist Rhetorical Strategy

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White supremacy forced [white] Americans into rationalizations so fantastic that they approached the pathological.

—James Baldwin

Most persons have accepted the tacit but clear modern philosophy which assigns to the white race alone the hegemony of the world.

—W.E.B. Du Bois

Whenever the subject of whiteness comes up in conversation, a good friend of mine likes to chime in and say, "It's all about making white people feel guilty about being white." In such conversations, I often suggest that guilt can be useful in some ways, but I try to explain that I see whiteness more in terms of racialized responsibility. That is, I approach the problem of whiteness from a phenomenological perspective that sees whites as being always already raced and as being in a racialized positionality for which we should take responsibility. Embedded in my friend's comment is an acknowledgment of the fact that being white carries with it the historical accumulation of privilege that comes at a great cost to people of color. My friend's comment also seems to have meaning against a faded backdrop of under-examined understandings of
white responsibility for our privileged racial positionalities—that is, an inherited unwillingness to become more aware of white supremacy and to work against it.

What seems to make white folks uneasy is my suggestion that our privileged positionality comes at a cost to nonwhites and, further, that whites are ethically and politically responsible to do something about that inequity. When I suggest further that not working against racism constitutes complicity with the perpetuation of white supremacy—and that we are all guilty of ignorance, apathy and inaction—white folks don’t like the insinuation that we are racist. In fact, it seems that concerning whiteness, white folks’ primary defensive-oriented goal is to establish themselves as being nonracist. Unfortunately, this goal seems to be accomplished easily enough for many whites, so they suppose, simply through the performative speech act of declaring, “I’m not racist.” I want to make it clear that my discussion here places us firmly on racist ground. That is, being white is not a dualistic matter of being racist or not being racist; rather, we are variably complicit with the racism of white supremacy because we live in a racist society. The issue at hand is how to reduce our complicity in white supremacy and work against racism when and where we can.

Part of the problem of whiteness, then, is that it is too easy for whites to assume a position of supposed racial neutrality; we assume that if we are not doing anything overtly racist, then race is a non-issue for us. I am arguing that there is no such thing as a neutral racial stance. We must, therefore, work to limn out some of the ways that whites are involved in matters of race that go beyond willful, conscious, and intentional acts. Furthermore, I am advocating that whites accept a racialized positionality wherein we cannot remain ignorant, silent, or inactive regarding our complicit relationship with white supremacy. In the discussion that follows, I hope to provide some different ways of seeing whiteness, white supremacy, and racism that are rhetorically and pedagogically useful in doing antiracist work.
At this point, the reader may be questioning my use of the term “white supremacy” and its relevance for contemporary discussions of whiteness and racism. It is important to consider that traditional white supremacy has lost much of its ability to carry out its agenda by means of demonstrative violence commonly associated with the terms “white supremacy” and “racism.” I want to stress that my argument here is in no way meant to discount the ongoing racist violence that happens every day; conversely, my goal is to sharpen our rhetorical acumen and build our pedagogical potential in responding to continuing racism in our country that ranges from structural discrimination in education, to large-scale oppression of immigrant farm workers, to racial profiling of Arabs, to horrific racially motivated murders such as that of James Byrd. It is safe to say, however, that the relationship between whiteness and racism is qualitatively different now in significant ways. In what Charles Mills calls “the first period” of white supremacy, whites’ status as the only privileged race was socially transparent: “white supremacy was openly proclaimed” (73). Arguments for white supremacy were more clearly delineated in laws and codes, in boardrooms and on billboards, and in everyday activities such as riding the bus or going to the bathroom.

Nowadays, in the “second period” of white supremacy, things have gotten messy; to a large extent, racism has “written itself out of formal existence,” and we are left with the tensions of a de facto white supremacy, where whites’ dominance is, for the most part, no longer “constitutionally and juridically enshrined but rather a matter of social, political, cultural, and economic privilege” (73). And it is precisely this mercurial element of whiteness as a set of shifting and dynamic power relations and “political commitment to white supremacy” that allows white supremacy to continue, to go unanswered, and to remain efficacious (126–27). Amid the recent influx of academic discourse on whiteness studies (though the terms and ideas can be traced back in scholarship as early as Frederick Douglas and W.E.B. Du Bois), Maulana Karenga advocates an
emphasis on issues of white supremacy as a social problem. The
focus, rather than simply on comparative oppression or white
“privilege” as an advantage whites have, should be on white
political, economic, and cultural domination—the ability “to impose
one’s will” (26–28). White supremacy as I am using it here can be
defined as political, economic, and cultural systems in which
“whites are overwhelmingly in control of power and material
resources, where notions of white superiority are widespread, and
where relations of white dominance and nonwhite subordination
are daily reenacted across a wide array of institutions and social
settings” (Harris 1714 n.10).

With political correctness informing shifts in the policies and
practices of white supremacy, arguments for white supremacy
have consequently gone underground and have been reduced to
more subtle and insidious kinds of arguments that have always
served as the ideological backdrop of racism; they were simply
overshadowed by the white-hooded racism at the fore. Arguments
for white supremacy fifty years ago could have taken the shape of
a simple (yet believable, supportable, and enforceable) categorical
syllogism that would account for white supremacy arguments on
most levels:

All fully human men are created equal
All white men are fully human
All white men are created equal

And, with the appropriate Aristotelian/Hegelian twist:

All men who are not fully human are not created equal
All nonwhite men are not fully human
All nonwhite men are not created equal

Syllogisms of this kind are based on mainstream Enlightenment
philosophy and modernist notions of social ontology and episte-
mosity inherited from classical Greek and Roman thought. I would
content, along with other scholars, that such philosophical dis-
course is “raced” and has produced an epistemology and ontology
of whiteness that has enabled not only monumental historical events such as the congressional three-fifths formula and the judicial Dred Scott decision, but has also discursively imbued our everyday ways of thinking about race.¹

But this is a kind of "old-style" reasoning; such logic is not openly acceptable today. You cannot say things like, "Nonwhites are less deserving of civil rights than white people," or "White people are more trustworthy than nonwhite." In fact, you can lose your job or get sued for using "that kind of language" based on "those kinds of ideas" in making an argument. So arguments for white supremacy have become much more elusive. Instead of the syllogistic logic noted above, we read and hear things stated more speciously: "The [white] policemen were exonerated of any wrongdoing in the death of a [nonwhite] suspect."² Statements such as this form an argument as an enthymeme, consisting of a major premise (missing): "White men are credible witnesses"; a minor premise: "the officer is a white policeman"; and a conclusion: "the officer is a credible witness." An enthymematic inversion of this is also "true" for arguments supporting white supremacy: "Nonwhites are not credible witnesses," and the evidence and testimonies provided by others of color—particularly women—are routinely dismissed.³

In everyday discourse, however, enthymemes are not laid out so neatly for us. We often only catch one of the premises or the conclusion floating by, a piece of drifting discourse as it were: "The appearance of Arabs boarding the plane made us feel uncomfortable," is a phrase often heard from pilots, airline staff, and white passengers regarding "Arab-looking" passengers on airline flights since September 11, 2001.⁴ (Following my discussion of the postmodern enthymeme, I will return to this example of what the ACLU refers to as a growing pattern of discrimination.) My immediate worry here is that we become too complacently accustomed to hearing phrases such as "Hundreds of Arab-Americans are still being held in U.S. prisons without access to legal counsel," or "The victims of Katrina who stayed got just what they deserved," or "Illegal immigrants should be deported." Even in the supposedly
"liberal" media, there are occasions every day to catch such phrases.

I recently heard Joe Cafferty on CNN (aired regularly during Wolf Blitzer's "The Situation Room") asking viewers, "Should Phoenix, Arizona police be able to enforce federal immigration laws?" In what Cafferty sees as "another example of local governments getting serious about illegal aliens, while our so-called leaders in Washington continue to do nothing and in the process compromise this nation's security," he has embedded a racist enthymeme wherein people of color are associated with a breach in national security (emphasis in reading of his delivery). In today's political climate, national security is very often associated with its discursive counterpart: terrorism. Cafferty adds to the existing racialized undertones of his message and its association with terror by asserting, with emphasis, that "More than a thousand illegal aliens are caught every day crossing from Mexico into southern Arizona—a thousand a day!"5

I am not saying that a particular individual such as Cafferty or organization such as CNN is being intentionally racist. The point is that racist enthymemes can function to support arguments for white supremacy inconspicuously and indirectly. Such phrases, or "fragments of discourse," are examples of unfinished and underexamined arguments that we might hear on the radio, see on the television, read in the paper or on the Internet, hear over the cubicle wall, or hear across the picket fence before restarting the lawnmower.6

My concern is that we leave our encounters with such discursive fragments of arguments unexamined and uncontested. I'm worried that we are no longer outraged (enough) by such information, but that such phrases are increasingly accepted as contemporary versions of what Aristotle meant by "urbane and well-liked" sayings that are easily understood and allow for "a kind of learning" or furthering of knowledge through informal argument (3.10.4–5). An important aspect of this passage on the enthymeme is that Aristotle seems to imply that urbane and well-liked sayings rely on a sense of contrast for dominant "common sense" and "reason-
able” arguments to be effective. In other words, through racialized enthymemes, whites gain a feeling of empowerment at the disparagement of the racialized other. The significance of this notion regarding white supremacy is that the face of whiteness constructed as “good” is reinforced by the portrayal of the face of color as “evil.”

An important aspect of the “rhetorical situation” of such phrases for my purposes here is the role of the white people. Contemporary discourse has been transformed such that the mercurial quality of whiteness works more insidiously as a morphing sphere of shifting and dynamic power relations with a political commitment to white supremacy. In my describing white supremacy in such intangible terms, one might ask, “Then how do we fight it?” I think part of the answer, as activists have suggested for centuries, is in not allowing arguments for white supremacy to continue unidentified, unanswered, unresolved, and therefore efficacious.

One of my goals in this paper is to uncover ways arguments for white supremacy might work in a postmodern fashion and how whites, and those invested in whiteness, are complicit in those arguments and their awful consequences. As a white rhetoric and composition education scholar trying to understand and develop antiracist theories and pedagogies, I am also struggling to become aware of ways that I am invested in the whiteness of my endeavors, and how my privilege has come from and continues to thrive at a cost to Others. And while this paper is written primarily for and to myself, I hope that it will be theoretically, politically, and pedagogically helpful to those compositionists, rhetoricians, and critical educators who read it.

I will now review the literature on the enthymeme in hopes of reconceptualizing it in a postmodern light so as to be adapted for critical rhetorical and pedagogical strategies informed by whiteness theory to contest the subtle and elusive arguments of white supremacy—arguments that are not always clear, logical, syllogistic, and yet are persuasive. I will argue that we “the people” as an audience—especially whites and those invested in the privileges of whiteness—are in an enthymematic relationship with the hege-
monic premises and claims of white supremacy where the unspoken goal is to maintain structures of privilege. And, I will argue, as long as I remain silent and inactive in this relationship, I give tacit consent and de facto support to enthymematic arguments for white supremacy. I believe it is only by speaking and acting out that I can disagree with the enthymematic arguments of white supremacy, position myself as much as is possible against these oppressive ideological stances, and engage in the perpetual work of active antiracism in promoting social justice.

In reviewing the enthymeme, my discussion will partially redefine classic notions of speaker, speech, and audience (or author, text, reader); these concepts will be discussed enough to develop my argument, but surely require more extensive treatment than is feasible in the scope of this paper. Bringing the enthymeme up to date, I will show its usefulness in critiquing the hegemony of whiteness, and conclude by exploring some of the implications of whiteness theory for postmodern critical rhetoric and composition.

The Enthymeme in Review

In continuing the historically slender but significant discussion of the enthymeme, I will avoid pursuing a line of inquiry bound to determine the precise definition of Aristotle’s enthymeme; I will move away from what seems to have been a modernist endeavor to fix the enthymeme historically—to categorize it etymologically—and instead move toward a postmodern definition that is more relaxed (not weak), flexible, and rhetorically agile and useful in counter-hegemonic and antiracist work.

Carol Poster suggests that it is not necessary to define the enthymeme as a term—there is no definition as such. The problem regarding the enthymeme in Poster’s view has not been one of incorrect definitions but rather of “applying a semantic notion of definition to a semiotic problem.” For Poster, the enthymeme should be analyzed, not as a part of regular language demanding definition, but as a part of homogenizing meta-discourse, a term
used by rhetoricians accustomed to "a listing of relationships and boundary conditions with respect to terms used" across time and writers (21–22). In part, this paper is a critique and a reconfiguration of the relationships and boundary conditions concerning the enthymeme as a rhetorical term and "the nature of the process by which our assumptions about the enthymeme have evolved" (7).

Although the enthymeme appears in the works of classical writers such as Isocrates and Quintilian, most of the literature on the enthymeme is rightly focused on defining the term as it appears and functions in Aristotle's conceptualization of rhetoric. "Nowhere outside of Aristotle's Rhetoric is the term enthymeme used as central to rhetoric, particularly as a syllogistic structure" (Conley 180). Many scholarly articles offer discussions of the enthymeme that are typically philosophical and modern. Charles Mudd's examination of the enthymeme offers a helpful revision of the concept of probability in premises, but is ultimately an attempt to present "a correct understanding of the enthymeme as it was originally conceived by Aristotle" (414). 8

The traditional understanding of the enthymeme as a truncated syllogism with one of the premises or the conclusion omitted has been a popular definition and is a common conception today. McBurney and his coauthors, however, refuted this notion as early as 1951. Others such as Raymond continue to refute a strict syllogistic definition and use of the enthymeme. The spirit of Gage's article is to liberate the enthymeme—to "view the enthymeme apart from the strictly syllogistic context that generally defines it, and thereby to view it as something other than a strictly logical concept" (166). And Jeffery Walker characterizes restrictive definitions as wholly inadequate and argues for a more flexible view of the enthymeme.

There has been a broad range of approaches to studying the enthymeme, and while some scholars move away from a strict logical definition of the function of the enthymeme, most definitions are founded on modern notions of communication that emphasize authorial intent, formal structure of the argument, wholeness of the message as content, and audience reception. 9 Even those that
argue for a more flexible definition and use of the enthymeme as it is the heart and the very body of rhetoric restrict the enthymeme to intentional and unified speech acts. These approaches seem to rely on a modernist paradigm that treats communication as monological with a unidirectional flow of static information that \textit{begins} in the mind of the creator and \textit{ends} in the mind of the interpreter of the text (speaker, speech, and audience; source, message, receiver; or writer, text, reader).

Barbara Emmel, for example, teaches the \textit{processes} of the enthymeme as opposed to its \textit{form} as a strategy of inquiry. But her discussion is focused on tidy classroom pedagogies that reward the shared realization of arguments in communication as intended knowledge that can be \textquote{completed.} And while this concept of the enthymeme is useful to an extent, it does not get at how I think arguments work in formal and informal communication outside of often contrived writing pedagogies in classroom contexts.

Green and Gage have both used the enthymeme as a modernist form of structured argument to teach the rhetorical concept of invention. They both argue that underlying any argument is a fundamental enthymeme that controls the overall logical relations and rhetorical flow of the discourse.\textsuperscript{10} \textquote{Enthymemic reasoning runs throughout all discourse so completely that we are apt to see right through it and follow the way it patterns our thought without being conscious of the patterning itself} (Green 623). \textquote{The enthymeme can stand for the rhetorical conditions underlying all compositional decisions} (Gage 39). Such conceptions of the enthymeme are potentially powerful, but we seem to restrict the enthymeme to controllable settings hoping to avoid theories and practices of real life that are, as one colleague of mine said, \textquote{too messy.} We tend to maintain modernist paradigms that only allow enthymemes in \textquote{special} carefully constructed circumstances. Such paradigms are invested in the concept of a cohesive development of a logical argument in written discourse—\textit{the} writer leads \textit{the} reader to \textit{the} meaning of \textit{the} text, enthymematically (as I am supposedly doing now).\textsuperscript{11}
Both Green and Gage, however, make qualifications about the enthymeme that go beyond their use of the concept in such a structured fashion in the classroom. Gage suggests that the enthymeme was used by Aristotle to address "the human problem that truth is not available to us about all of the questions we deliberate and it represented the dynamics of the search for real knowledge that can be answered without the systematic perfection of pure reason" (49). Green also troubles the neatness of the enthymeme: "Behind every premise lurks another premise, behind every answer to the question, 'why?' another 'why?' And beyond every consequence is another consequence. . . . This complex situation is closer to the one in which we live, with its qualifications and shadings" (633–34).

And it is there, beyond the neatly defined space of classrooms, essays, and textbooks, and closer to the complexly normed situations that constitute our everyday lives in contemporary U.S. culture, that I would like to take my discussion.

The Importance of Complicity in Enthymematic Discourse

To limn more fully the elements of a modern enthymeme, I need to consider Bitzer's 1959 landmark article. In the midst of historical bifurcated discussions about whether the enthymeme is formally or materially limited, Bitzer's definition of the enthymeme was and is significant:

The enthymeme is a syllogism based on probabilities, signs, and examples, whose function is rhetorical persuasion. Its successful construction is accomplished through the joint efforts of speaker and audience, and this is its essential character. (408)

As James Raymond points out, "Bitzer nicely resolves the polarity between the two schools of thought" on the enthymeme by demonstrating that they are both wrong: the enthymemes in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* are not "limited in form to the syllogism with an implied
premise, nor are they limited to syllogisms with debatable premises. Whether they are used in expressed or implied syllogisms, whether they produce certitude or mere probability, is irrelevant" (141).

To clarify the issue of "joint effort" in his definition, Bitzer states that agreement on how to proceed in an argument, in dialectic, takes the form of question and answer. In rhetoric, it takes the form of the enthymeme: "The speaker draws the premises for his proofs from propositions which members of his audience would supply if he were to proceed by question and answer" (408). The notion of a "joint effort" in Bitzer's definition of the enthymeme has been criticized because it places the completion of the enthymeme in the complicit moment of agreement or understanding.

In an attempt to relegate the enthymeme to formal logic, Lanigan argues that Bitzer's formulation actually produces a maxim and not an enthymeme. Lanigan further maintains that no individual can supply the universal premise that would logically complete the formulaic enthymeme (212–21). M.F. Burnyeat, however, offers an extensive and detailed discussion of the nature of Aristotle's enthymeme—to the conclusions that the enthymeme is a "syllogism of a kind," a demonstration of a kind, and a deduction that is not always a predictable and valid deductive argument. Burnyeat argues for a relaxed interpretation of the enthymeme that includes deductively invalid signs as being respectable. It is appropriate for a speaker to advance and for an audience to accept a sign argument as "proof of a kind" that is deductively invalid when it is convincing (107–09).

Building on Burnyeat's work, I would like to summarize the modern enthymeme as an argument (a syllogism or demonstration of a kind, that is not a predictable or valid deductive argument) presented by a speaker (who draws the premises for proofs from propositions which members of the audience would supply if he or she were to proceed by question and answer) to an audience (requiring joint effort or complicity for successful completion). I will problematize the concepts of speaker, text, audience and subsequent "moment of understanding" as I argue for a postmodern
conceptualization of the enthymeme and its importance for exam­
ining the hegemony of whiteness.

**Getting Beyond Modern Limitations**

In its many variations, the modern enthymeme could be conceptu­
alized as consisting of a single speaker who offers the speech and 
requires identifiable and speakable premises from a unified audi­
ence—an audience that is positively identifiable and describable to 
some extent (knowable in the sense that I, from my positionality, 
presume to know what they are thinking). In redefining speaker, 
text and audience in the enthymeme, Scenters-Zapico looks at the 
discourse in the enthymeme as a dialogical combination of written 
and oral texts that gets beyond monologic authorship and posits 
the speaker as an intertextual producer of enthymemes. “With the 
intertextual enthymeme, discourse communities are not restricted 
by immediacy nor by proximity.” The assertion is that enthymematic 
understanding is not strictly linear; rather, “it is an understanding 
that metamorphoses and jumps along the live social and the 
technologically social world of print, radio, television, e-mail, fax, 
etc. in order to become meaningful to its seeker-recipient” (81–82). 
(And we would certainly add the Internet and wireless technology 
to the list today.)

Along these lines Jeffrey Walker talks about the real “adher­
ence-motivating power” of enthymemes as being its relationship to 
a “web” of meanings that surround a fragment of discourse—
meanings (as in Perelman’s liaisons and ideas) that are invoked 
and alluded to in discourse (58). However, in conceptualizing the 
enthymeme as postmodern, it might be helpful to think of texts not 
only as dialogic, but also as fragmented—texts as the perpetual 
proliferation of signs and floating symbols. Roger Aden sug­
gests that audiences in postmodern societies process enthymemes as condensed, mediated arguments (54). As 
McGee puts it, audiences primarily process new combinations 
of previously articulated fragments and “the apparently finished
discourse is in fact a dense reconstruction of all the bits of other discourses" ("Text" 279).

And so, while Scenters-Zapico's definition expands the possibilities of the enthymeme, one of the limitations of this social constructivist view is that it is still operating in a modernist paradigm as an intentional determined discourse: the message (albeit multimedia and polyvocal) looking for the response (albeit from a distant audience). In other words, it posits a nonlinear intertextual enthymeme looking for its missing premise provided by the audience to complete the meaning implying the need for the "a-ha!" of the enthymeme—that moment of illumination when the ideal intended audience "gets" it (83).

The way that the audience "gets it" is a point on which I'd like to focus in transitioning to a postmodern sensibility of the enthymeme. Walker suggests that "Aristotle's contribution to the notion of the 'enthymeme' is, of course, his insistence on its underlying rationality. . . . Like the dialectical syllogism, the enthymeme relies on a basic intuitive capacity for deriving inferences and forming judgments from relationships between ideas" (54). A modernist interpretation of this means that intuitive inference should be relegated to those self-aware and comprehending beings peculiar to the Enlightenment. That is, rationality is universal in the sense that if we think long and hard enough we'll come (as in a Platonic rising) to the same commonsensical and reasonable conclusions. A postmodern view of this underlying rationality would allow for moments and modes of universality where some meanings are shared in a communal sense, but there would be aspects of understanding that must remain uniquely individual and necessarily contingent. Postmodern notions of subjectivity trouble the assumed rationality of enthymematic understanding in helpful ways, though an adequate digression into the importance of postmodern subjectivity is beyond the scope of this paper.

I would propose a definition of the audience along the lines of McGee's notion of "the people" to suggest that the audience seen as "the people" is not restricted to a particular set of individuals, but as a fiction toward which discourse is directed ("Search" 1975).
The premises then, for enthymematic discourse, are not necessarily drawn from an identifiable audience of specific individuals as a cohesive and static group, but rather from an idealized version of the audience. Conceptualizing the audience as such broadens and ruptures the formulaic enthymeme in that individuals can identify with the proposed idea of "the people" as designated in enthymematic discourse by supplying individualistic premises, or, in the name of "the people," individuals can supply possible premises or conclusions that could work for a particular argument. Even though the discourse (speech, text, message) may not be directed at a particular audience, enthymemes may be formed based on premises that "the people," as a real or fictional community, might and could supply, or are desired by the speaker to supply.

The complicated relationship between speaker and audience is exacerbated by Bitzer's claim that "the successful building of arguments depends on cooperative interaction between the practitioner and his hearers" (407). As mentioned, cooperative interaction does not necessarily require nor depend on immediacy and proximity. And I would argue further that this changes the "moment of understanding" that seems essential to the modern enthymeme. Is the audience required, in the moment of understanding, to indicate agreement explicitly? Does implicit and tacit agreement count? Is silence considered consent? Can understanding be equated with assent? And if I need to show disagreement to avoid tacit consent, how do I show it?

Jackson and Jacobs question Bitzer's claim that agreement is reached because the audience explicitly agrees with the unstated premise for a claim. They argue that agreement is made because the audience does not object to the claim: "Under ordinary conditions, participants do not search for possible gaps in their partners' utterances unless they have good reason to disagree" (263–64). So, according to Jackson and Jacobs, I am left to believe that (1) if people do not ask for clarification, they understand, and (2) if they do not indicate otherwise, they agree. Of course, I want to object to this notion—this seems a bit absurd—but I think it is indicative
of how the enthymematic arguments of white supremacy draw on
hegemony to be effective. In other words, enthymematic argu-
ments for white supremacy might not be readily identified and,
even when they are, whites might not feel a great desire to disagree
demonstrably with arguments that ensure their superior status.

The Postmodern Enthymeme

A reconceptualization of the enthymeme with a postmodern sen-
sibility would allow for more than one premise to be supplied by
individuals as part of a fiction of the audience in order to make
multiple meanings. Furthermore, these meanings can be tentative
and dynamic. A postmodern enthymeme would allow for types and
levels of understanding, for abeyance, and for variation in implicit
and explicit manifestations of agreement and disagreement. In the
postmodern enthymeme, the speaker, text, and audience are
fragmented, shifting, dynamic, multiple, and not always real (in a
positivistic tangible way). That said, we must keep in mind the fact
that discourse can carry unmistakable and injurious weight.12

For example, I might “get” a premise or conclusion from a neo-
conservative radio program: “Immigrants aren’t interested in learn-
ing English”; then I find that the Utah legislature has passed the
“English Only Initiative,” and later I listen to a colleague complain
about all the Mexican-American students in her class who speak
Spanish when they should be speaking English (and she mentions
that her ancestors were German and they learned English). In my
mind I am able to form an enthymematic argument along the lines
of the following: “Mexican immigrants should learn English if they
are going to live here.”

I might disagree with such an argument even as I formulate it.
But I might also think that this enthymeme I’ve formed is based on
reasonable, sensible, even logical grounds—that is, on the sup-
posed common or shared social ontological and epistemological
assumptions and values that drive our politics, economy, educa-
tional system, and media. Roger Aden suggests that “arguments
in postmodern cultures function deductively, relying upon audience agreement of what’s already ‘known’ to create further agreement” and are therefore enthymematic (55–56). To illustrate with an overt example, Aden analyzes how David Duke, in an appearance on the Phil Donahue Show, relies on a particular brand of white supremacist mentality in the audience to complete and make sense of his ambiguous and unfinished arguments.

Duke makes several remarks concerning affirmative action and welfare: “The best qualified person, the person that works harder, performs better, he’s the one who should get the job or the scholarship or the promotion or whatever.” Importantly, Duke contrasts the implication that whites are hard-working and therefore deserving, with the idea that nonwhites are not: “And I think it’s wrong for people to work hard to pay for children of their own, and to educate children of their own, and to have to finance a massive illegitimate birthrate among welfare recipients.” In today’s political climate, the issue of immigration surely would have played a more prominent role in Duke’s enthymeme, adding to his portrayal of whites as victims of nonwhites. As he states, “The true minority on this planet is the European people, or the white people of the planet” (Aden 57–59).

According to Aden’s analysis, Duke’s message forms an enthymeme wherein Duke only has to supply one element of the argument: government policies such as affirmative action favor racial minorities and hurt whites economically and socially. The other elements of the argument are left to the audience to supply: racial minorities are the “cause” of government policies and therefore racial minorities are the cause of whites’ socioeconomic problems. I would add that Duke’s comments do not form just another common enthymeme, but a racist enthymeme in support of white supremacy.

Duke’s overall message functions as an enthymeme because the audience can think of possible ways to complete it by supplying the missing premises and conclusions based on shared assumptions and values. And the missing prejudicial premise or racially discriminatory inference in Duke’s argument remains unstated.
Aden explains: "He does not state the controversial portions of his enthymeme. He is not forced to argue the inferential leaps between its parts and risk exposure" (60). This is more obviously the case for Duke, given his particular background with overt white supremacy. Duke never has to say anything overtly or explicitly racist because those who want to understand it in racist ways can. The insidiousness of this kind of coded discourse is that Duke can deny that he has said anything directly, plainly, or logically (syllogistically) racist; he can, ironically, deny his racist discourse on the same grounds on which it works: invalid deductive evidence as probable arguments that are convincing (to some) but cannot be proved (by others).

This conceptualization allows an individual to make one meaning of an enthymeme, while still being able to see how it may make meaning in other ways (double entendres, veiled threats, racial innuendos). In other words, as a member of the audience as a fiction, I can see how an enthymeme might be understood, and in that sense be in agreement; I can also disagree with it because I can see how it might be discriminatory. And though I am focusing on the individual here, it is vital to keep in perspective the notion of our being-in-a-racialized-world with a racial horizon that is imbued with a long history of racialized discourse. Unfortunately, in the history of that discourse there has been and is too much talk that is racist and not enough talk that is antiracist. As Meta Carstarphen suggests, we are bombarded with messages about race every day, and racial enthymemes are successful "precisely because the same fallacious ideas about race are shared" (28). As such, I am arguing that it is our rhetorical and pedagogical responsibility to learn to recognize and work against, as best we can, postmodern enthymematic arguments for white supremacy.

**Recognizing Contemporary Racist Enthymemes**

More recently, and significantly in light of my discussion of Duke's arguments concerning affirmative action being racially charged for
nonwhites at the expense of nonwhites, we might look at the regrettable developments of affirmative action in Texas and Michigan as examples of racist enthymemes as arguments for white supremacy.

In a manner consistent with his father's decision to oppose the Civil Rights Bill of 1991, wherein quotas in the workplace would give "unearned privileges" to racial minorities at a cost to whites' right to those privileges, current President George W. Bush more recently opposed affirmative action in higher education, stating, "I strongly support diversity of all kinds, including racial diversity in higher education. But the method used by the University of Michigan to achieve this important goal is fundamentally flawed." In an attempt to establish himself as nonracist, and turning the audience's attention to programs and policies, Bush enacts the same kind of racist enthymeme as his father, arguing that "points" or privileges assigned to people of color will give "unearned privileges" to nonwhites instead of "deserving" whites.

Perhaps a more exigent example, as mentioned above, is the growing problem of anti-Arab sentiment and behavior today. Take the case of Assem Bayaa, an auditor for Arthur Anderson bound for Saudi Arabia, who was removed from a United flight at Los Angeles International Airport as it was about to take off for New York. When Bayaa questioned his removal, the airline's ground security chief told him, "Because the crew doesn't feel comfortable having you on board" (Rozenweig).13

The security chief's enthymeme could be depicted by the following syllogism:

All radical Muslims are terrorists
All radical Muslims look like Arabs
All Arab-looking people are terrorists

While we may not encounter such direct racist syllogisms, we may encounter a softened version of the argument in a form such as, "All Muslims hate the United States and anyone who looks like one should be regarded as a potential terrorist." Or, as Ann Coulter put it in a reductio ad absurdum racist enthymeme: "Not all Muslims
may be terrorists but all terrorists are Muslims" (FAIR, "This Isn't "Discrimination"). While we might expect this from a neo-conser­vative quasi-celebrity radio shock-jock, we might expect a bit more tact from government officials. Recently, however, Homeland Security Chairman Peter King argued that while “not all Muslims are terrorists, all recent terrorists are Muslim.” King is currently endorsing the requirement of people of “Middle Eastern and South Asian” descent to undergo security checks because of their ethnicity and religion and adds that airport screeners shouldn’t be hampered by “political correctness” (Palmer). It is important to highlight the racialized discursive backdrop against which such arguments are formed and to foreground white peoples’ ways of seeing and understanding race and racism by asking whether we “get nervous” when someone who “looks like” Timothy McVeigh or Hal Turner or William Pierce gets on a bus or an airplane? Are we relatively calm because they seem like “regular” white folks and are therefore not a terrorist threat?14

Now, while many of us might not listen to right-wing radio (there are plenty of people who do), we still encounter discursive “frag­ments” that can serve as the premises and conclusions of such arguments, though they are not so closely connected in a distinct piece of discourse. For example, following September 11, we were all exposed to numerous television stories and images about the suspected terrorists and, subsequently, al-Qaeda. We were shown images of the “deck” of 52 most wanted Iraqis and perhaps we visited the “Rewards for Justice” web site to see pictures of terrorist suspects.15 Connected with this, we might have instilled in our minds the loose argument that Arab/Palestinian countries are part of the “axis of evil” who sponsor terrorists bent on destroying peace and democracy of the United States. And perhaps we’ve conflated TV news stories on Palestinian suicide bombers with our knowl­edge about racially marked middle-easterners. More recently, we see the further demonization of Arabs in reference to the activities of Hezbolah and Hamas. Consequently, when we read a headline stating, “Flight delayed by Arab passenger,” our “logic” about Arabs being potential terrorists is shaped and confirmed.
While working on this article, I was surprised at how many instances of racist enthymemes occur everyday if I was willing to look for them. Most recently, another Arab-American, Raed Jarrar was prevented from getting on his Jet Blue flight from JFK to Oakland, CA and was told by security officials that he could not get on the flight unless he changed his shirt. Jarrar was wearing a t-shirt designed by The Critical Voice and Artists Against War (AAWNYC) that has the phrase “We Will Not Be Silent” written on it in English and in Arabic. Jarrar was told by one of the officials that, “wearing a t-shirt with Arabic script in an airport now is like going to a bank with a t-shirt that reads, ‘I am a bank robber’” (Democracy, “Silent”). The security officer’s statement reiterates the racist enthymeme that all Arab-Americans should be seen as potential terrorists. In this case, both the man’s skin color (and specific physiognomy) and the Arabic language are criminalized and associated with terrorism.

The ability to recognize and the willingness to speak out against racist arguments in their multifarious forms is particularly difficult for whites, who have a racialized view of the world from an unnamed, supposedly neutral, center. According to Mills, whites experience “genuine cognitive difficulty in recognizing certain behavior patterns as racist” (93). One of the privileges of being white is the comfortability of not having to think, talk, or act in racially marked ways; we can remain silent and suppose that racism is not relevant to us. However, a view from a racialized somewhere (a stance or positionality) may help us see how any given speaker, or a collection of fragments of discourse, might—intentionally or not—be using enthymematic arguments for white supremacy; people may be “enthymeming-without-knowing-it” (Walker 55). If enthymematic racial meanings are not relegated to the speaker’s intention but are extended to the hearers of discourse on racially informed grounds, then modernist notions of meaning are wrenched from the speaker’s mouth where “reasoning” about white supremacy and racism is concerned.

While Aden suggests that many “people” today are probably not trained in contemporary rhetorical criticism, he asserts that
democratic participation in public discourse relies on "the people's" ability to decode what is said and what is not said, because, ironically, it has already been said: it is crafted and coded to mean a particular thing in a particular way, not stated in an open, democratic, premise-revealing fashion. "Exposing the unsaid as the already said," however, may force me (as a teacher, neighbor, friend, relative) to realize that "business as usual" depends upon my "acceptance of the usual/already said" (62). The important task for me is to analyze and reveal the unstated premises of enthymematic arguments that may reveal my silent acceptance and complicity with hegemonic arguments for white supremacy as it is upon the very basis of tacit agreement with unstated premises and conclusions that hegemony works.

Whiteness as Stance

One way of explaining the effectiveness of enthymematic argumentation is to consider the enthymeme in terms of what Jeffery Walker calls "stance" and "identification" (in a Burkean sense). Walker argues that one factor that makes discourse enthymematic is a

grounds-claim kind of movement, in which the claim is not simply a proposition but an inferential and attitudinal complex—a stance—and the "grounds" consist simply not of a quasi-syllogistical premise but, more fully, of a cluster of emotively significant ideas or images that work to motivate a passional identification with the speaker's stance. (59)

More simply stated, enthymemes can be seen as a discursive stance on racial grounds where the stance is an inferential and attitudinal complex and the grounds is a cluster of emotively significant ideas (or images) that work to motivate passional identification. On the stage of U.S. racial formations, this definition seems ready-made for analyzing the charged thinking and feeling of racialized discourse on topics such as immigration, terrorism, and the aftermath of hurricane Katrina. 18
While most people are not trained in classical rhetoric, I would argue that they are well versed in certain "species of enthymemes"; that is, we are all very adept at making self-serving arguments about how one should feel, what one should think, and what one should do. Of specific concern here is the issue of whites' investment in the privileges of whiteness; without being formally trained in argumentation theory, most whites are very proficient at justifying privileges related to whiteness. Such arguments often work on the grounds of an assumed ideology of white supremacy that is seemingly justified by socially constructed and material conditions.

I find it useful to think of this grounding ideological framework as the hegemony of whiteness where a *hegemon*—literally a power or force—is an energy that works kind of like an artificial gravity that gives weight to whiteness. There certainly is an accumulative power to whiteness, but the amount of force or power that whiteness carries or conveys in a given discursive moment will vary according to how it is discerned within a sphere of meaning. In a Foucaultian sense, whiteness circulates and is made manifest variably through-discouraging subjects as capricious channels for the power of whiteness. That said, I do not want a sense of whiteness as being varied and elusive to override the negative concrete impact that white supremacy has—as a real force—on the lives of people of color.

**The Enthymematic Hegemony of Whiteness**

One of the more accessible and useful definitions of Gramsci's concept of hegemony that I have found defines it as the

I ideological predominance of bourgeois values and norms over the subordinate classes . . . an order in which a certain way of life and thought is dominant, in which one concept of reality is diffused throughout society in all its institutional and private manifestations, informing with its spirit, all taste, morality, customs, religious and political principles, and all social relations, particularly in their intellectual and moral connotations. (Carnoy 66)
This definition resonates with Harris' definition of white supremacy above; if I substitute "white" for "bourgeois," then I can read "one concept of reality" as "whiteness." I am suggesting that the enthymeme is a useful rhetorical strategy for examining how self-supportive hegemonic arguments inform whiteness as reality. The ways in which hegemony draws on the views and interests of allied groups to support white supremacy are analogous to ways that the enthymeme draws on the knowledge of the audience to supply the supporting premises—the identification with the stance. The concept of hegemony allows me to see how enthymematic arguments might be real and powerful when agreement is tacit or unspoken.

The Latin phrase, *qui tacet consentit*, rendered, "he who remains silent consents" (as it is used in political and legal discourse), has relevance here: if I remain silent in my response to the enthymematic claims of public discourse, particularly with white supremacy, then I am in de facto agreement with the argument that is made and the premises drawn from the dominant ideologies of hegemony upon which the argument is made. Bitzer's point that, "owing to the skill of the speaker, the audience itself helps construct the proofs by which it is persuaded," helps me make sense of how "the people" as a fiction conceptualized as "white" are silently complicit with arguments for white supremacy. Uncontested "business as usual" then, can be seen as the silent agreement and complicity of well-intentioned white folks with the enthymematic discourse of white supremacy; there is an implied identification with the stance of whiteness. And it is by unquestioningly going along with things, by "accepting all the privileges of whiteness with concomitant complicity in the system of white supremacy, one can be said to have consented to Whiteness" (Mills 107).

An example of this was brought to the fore recently when Republican Senator George Allen called an Indian-American, S.R. Sidarth, a member of a rival campaign team, a "macaca" and welcomed him to the "real world of Virginia." And while Democrats called for President Bush to condemn the act, the Bush administration not only remained silent, but continued with their fundraiser
for the Senator that evening. To this point, Phil Singer, communications director for the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee stated that, "By staying silent, the president—who fancies himself as a man of integrity—is giving tacit approval to comments that have no place in the public discourse" (Wilson).

Regarding the "macaca incident," the current Bush administration, informedly or not, makes use of silence and the enthymematic hegemony of whiteness as an argument form that incorporates conventional wisdom (seemingly good opinions) or doxa. McGee states,

Rhetors are advised to ground their arguments in doxa, using the taken for granted rules of society. . . . Doxa is silent, and it should be kept silent, unless it becomes the source of grievance. Discourse derives its rhetorical power more from the silence of the cultural imperative than from the imperative itself.

McGee suggests that the missing premises can either be left out or supplied, depending of whether or not they make a difference in "interpreting or acting upon apparently finished discourses. If missing premises do make a difference, they must be clearly articulated, thus becoming part of the text ("Text" 71).

It is precisely this epistemic power to determine what counts and does not count as "making a difference," particularly as a racial grievance, that needs to be explored and contested. In terms of stasis theory, we need to become more vigilant about what counts as a racial issue. We must make it a priority to point out that those in power have the ability to determine what will count as racist discourse and the power to make discursive meaning "stick" in political and material ways that reinforce the hegemony of whiteness. In a dismissal of what Allen's campaign manager, Dick Wadham, referred to as a "feeding frenzy" in the news over the senator's comments, Wadham stated that the media were creating "national news over something that did not warrant coverage in the first place." Furthermore, Allen's spokeswoman Dana Perino suggested that with Senator Allen's apology "it is in all of our best
interests and as we work in politics and we work to improve the tone and the discourse, that when apologies are offered, they are accepted (Wilson). According to Senator Allen's team (1) there should not have been a grievous issue made of the comment and (2) upon apologizing, all should be forgotten. Thus, the racist impact and significance of such fragments of discourse that should count as issues are all-to-often discursively dismissed on the terms of those in power.

We live in a racial polity, underwritten by a supporting discourse designed to reproduce a racial order that secures privileges for whites by maintaining the subordination of nonwhites. Whites benefit from a world created in their cultural image where politics favors their interests in an economy structured around racial exploitation of others operating with a privileged moral psychology, wherein the way things are for whites constitutes the way things ought to be and the status quo of differential entitlement is normed and remains unquestioned. Rhetorically speaking, the hegemonic power of whiteness is wrapped up in the power to set the terms of the discourse, to determine the taken for granted rules of society, what counts as a source of grievance in society, and who gets to make a difference. This is often made manifest in whites' silent agreement not to talk about racism (with its underlying social, ontological, and epistemological premises and assumptions). And the unfortunate reality is that the disempowered don't often get to decide what is a source of grievance—and when they do, and say so, they are often not believed. If this is the case, then how might the very white bodies of rhetoric and composition be implicated?

**Implications for Rhetoric and Composition**

If rhetoric is in part a method by which a culture analyzes its own discursive practices, as Poster suggests, the question that vexes us is whether or not the overwhelmingly white body of rhetoric and composition can examine its own culture and its investment in
whiteness. Maurice Charland suggests that rhetoricians need to "critically reexamine the assumptions of their own practice." Charland warns, however, that "ironically, because it doubts the efficacy of marginal practices that operate only from outside of hegemony and the discourses of power, the rhetorical tradition itself is unspoken and unacknowledged by those whom I am convinced should be its theoretical and practical allies" (464–71).

Since one of the basic tenets of whiteness theory is to identify and work against hegemony, I would suggest that synthesizing critical rhetoric and whiteness theory would create a powerful means for a serious reflexive analysis that could turn a critical rhetorical lens on the heart of our traditions.

One of the tasks of critical rhetoric, Raymie McKerrow argues, is, "to undermine and expose the discourse of power in order to thwart its effects in a social relation" (447–48). In similar terms concerning critical whiteness, George Lipsitz suggests "Those of us who are 'white' can only become part of the solution if we recognize the degree to which we are already part of the problem—not because of our race, but because of our possessive investment in it" (384).

While I am in agreement with scholars such McKerrow and Lipsitz, I have serious doubts about my ability to come to a self-reflexive understanding of my own investments in the whiteness of the discourse of rhetoric and composition as they are part and parcel of the discourse of white privilege and power. The ability of white scholars to engage effectively in self-reflexive work has been rightfully questioned; Mills maintains that "white misunderstanding, misrepresentation, evasion, and self-deception on matters related to race are among the most pervasive mental phenomena of the past few hundred years" (19). That said, we should not allow a sense of impossibility or the enormity of the task of antiracist work keep us from engaging in it.

I would therefore argue that we whites should try to position ourselves in the difficult location of accepting the political and ethical charge to work against the racism of white supremacy without knowing exactly what it is we are supposed to do. Such a
positionality can cause what Chris Mayo refers to as a sense of "vertigo" at the heart of whiteness. I would argue that such an approach to a positionality for whites in rhetoric and composition might suggest a sense of humility in our work that softens or moves away from what I have referred to elsewhere as the "hubris of critical consciousness" that seems to imbue and control much of our critical thinking about race and other sociopolitical issues (Jackson, Matthew). That is, those of us who think we have achieved a sense of critical consciousness concerning whiteness seem to rely too much on our sense of reason to do antiracist work. Stated another way, it is a belief that if I can just understand a problem well enough by gaining the right kind of knowledge, and if I can make everyone else understand it in the same way, then I'll be able make things right. According to this way of thinking, if all white people understood whiteness theory well enough and in the same way, then we might be able to put an end to white racism.

The problem here is that the "sense" through which we are able to determine what is "right" concerning whiteness and antiracist work is through reason, the self-checked goodness of our own thinking. I cannot, through an act of willful intentionality, step out of the fray of racist oppression; my critical consciousness does not exonerate me from my racialized responsibility; it heightens it. Furthermore, there is a danger in thinking that because we are critically self-reflexive about whiteness, our thinking about the problems of whiteness is therefore inherently ethical. The implications for our theoretical and pedagogical work are that we must guard against the belief that we can, through critical self-reflexive reason, unquestionably right ourselves. I would argue that egoistic economies of reason limit the political and ethical possibilities of our antiracist work and perpetually reposition whiteness at the center of that work.

I wonder if, because of my evasion and self-deception, I suffer from what Edward Said, in the introduction to *Culture and Imperialism* refers to as an "occupational blindness." Am I unable to make connections between the historical reality of racial oppression in the U.S., my heritage, and my scholarly pursuits as situated in that
history? How is my rhetorical stance, under the normative rubric of white epistemologies, situated in a cozy ivory space? It is difficult to identify ways that, by representing and reifying the characteristics of the raced space of rhetoric and composition education, I norm and am normed in that space: I am a rhetoric and composition scholar in part because I originate from that kind of space, and that space has those properties in part because it is populated by people like me. In a modification of Bourdieu’s thought, we might see white supremacy as being reproduced in its own logic of circular causality, a process to which we are in part blind, but which we must strive to critically understand.22

Toward a Pedagogy of Witnessing Against Whiteness

If, as I argued in the beginning of this article, I am phenomenologically positioned as a white person who is privileged by the dynamics of my racialized society and I remain silent and inactive concerning matters of whiteness, then I can be found guilty of being complicit with the perpetuation of white supremacy. In order to resist this type of complicity, I would argue that I must learn how to identify whiteness as much as I can—acknowledging that I will have blind spots—and to speak out and take action against whiteness to work against it.

For my purposes here, I would suggest that we think about resisting whiteness in terms of developing a rhetorical stance and a pedagogical positionality that is not relegated to the confines of a particular course during a given semester but one that aims at a more fundamental way of being-in-the-racial-world in an ethical and political way. While I am using the term pedagogy here in the traditional sense to focus primarily on our classrooms, I want to invite a broader understanding of our pedagogies to include our inter-actions that go beyond our academic environs and into our everyday lives—into the seemingly mundane behaviors and relations that make up much of our meaningful lives as white folks. What I mean by this is that we must broaden our critical attention
to whiteness beyond our scholastic pedagogies to be mindful of the ways that we “teach” and enact whiteness in the ways that we live and interact with others when we are not in front of a captive audience of students. For instance, where and with whom do we choose to live, shop, recreate”; what media do we entertain and what questions do we ask (or fail to ask) about it?

Mills suggests that a crucial aspect of the perpetuation of racism is simply the failure to ask certain questions” (73). For my purposes here, this means those difficult questions contesting the often missing or silent premises of the doxa of white supremacy. I would add my voice to the many that have argued that racism needs to become part of the text—part of our formal and informal discourse—as we develop an exigency in identifying what may be racial grievances, particularly where whiteness is concerned.

The difficult choice for whites is to speak or to remain silent. To oppose the enthymematic hegemony of whiteness with its conceptual frameworks designed in part to thwart and suppress such opposition, one has to think against the grain. In order to reject the norming inequities of whiteness, I must “speak out” and actively struggle against white supremacy. The enthymematic arguments of white supremacy will continue to prevail unless they are vigilantly, explicitly, and overtly contested. And this is precisely why, if I choose to remain silent, I can be understood to consent and be held accountable for the consequences of complicity. And to those who would argue for the viability of a detached, neutral, or objective stance on such issues, Freire asks: “What is my neutrality, if not a comfortable and perhaps hypocritical way of avoiding any choice or even hiding my fear of denouncing injustice. To wash my hands in the face of oppression” (101).

What I am suggesting here is a way of being imbued with a Freirean sensibility of questioning, of problem-posing, of being critically self-reflexive and curious about the racialized world in which we live without the hubris of thinking that we have all of the answers or assuming that our antiracist work is inherently ethical. I am suggesting that we examine our whiteness and our investment in white supremacy more closely—that we ask the hard
questions. If we do not know how to ask them, then we must put in the time and effort required by antiracist thought and action.

In summary, I have argued that we can redefine the enthymeme for our postmodern condition and make it rhetorically and pedagogically useful in antiracist and counter-hegemonic work. I have argued that if I, as a part of “the people,” remain silent, I am in de facto agreement with arguments for white supremacy as expressed in fragmented, mediated formal and informal discourse. I have argued that an enthymematic view of whiteness requires white people to actively and perpetually act and speak out against dominant hegemonic ideologies—to disagree explicitly with and make plain their underlying premises and conclusions, to resist being complicit with the racist consequences of those arguments. And I have also provided a framework for a tenuous rhetorical stance and pedagogical positionality for whites working against multifarious forms of white supremacy. This is not a stance that positions me as “one who gets it” and is free then to assume an unproblematic antiracist positionality, but rather one that heightens my vigilance in my work with all others to continually improve our ways of working against white supremacy.23

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Notes

1. See Alcoff, “Philosophy” 67–76; West, especially chapter 5; and Bernasconi.
2. In the 2006 “officer-involved shooting death” of Benjamin Uwumarogie in DuPage County, Illinois, State’s Attorney Joe Birkett stated, “It is my opinion that Officer Bradley did reasonably believe that shooting Benjamin Uwumarogie was necessary to prevent imminent death or great bodily harm to himself or others.” Racial profiling and police brutality continue to be prevalent and sometimes deadly practices of predominantly white law enforcement. See one discussion of the recent case of Sean Bell at http://www.democracynow.org/article.pl?sid=06/11/28/1454244&mode=thread&tid=25. For more examples see http://

3. See Razack, Ross, and Williams.

4. This recent form of racial profiling and discrimination has been dubbed “flying while brown,” perpetuating the racist logic of “driving while black, Indian, or Asian.”

5. See Cafferty. Interestingly, Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting did a piece on Lou Dobbs and Joe Cafferty and their anti-immigration crusade (FAIR).

6. See McGee’s work on “fragments” of discourse in “Text.”

7. There are many good studies along these lines. See Richard Dyer’s important book, White dealing primarily with visual images. See Toni Morrison’s book, Playing in the Dark for a consideration of these ideas in terms of whiteness in American Literature as foregrounded against the background of what she calls an “Africanist presence” in that discourse.

8. Mudd sees two conflicting notions concerning the enthymeme: (1) universal claims are unacceptable in deductive argument, and (2) the enthymeme is to be tested by formal rules of logic. He resolves this conflict by suggesting we revise our concept of probability and base our premises on probable universals rather than particular absolutes. Goulding also poses the question, “What are the characteristics, forms, and applications of the enthymeme in rhetorical discourse as Aristotle conceived it?” See also Grimaldi’s classical study of the enthymeme.

9. Delia positions the enthymeme as subservient to psychology: “The enthymeme constitutes the substance of persuasion because it builds directly upon universal psychological processes. The enthymeme builds upon the fundamental tendencies of ‘harmony’ and ‘equilibrium’; the enthymeme as a deductive argument operates in accordance with the operation of the natural rational processes of consistency maintenance” (147). Miller and Bee take an extensive look at the affective components of the enthymeme by studying its etymology and its relationship with rhetoric and with practical wisdom and action. Nancy Harper, in contrast to what she sees as a history of discussion about Aristotle’s explicit statements about the enthymeme, proposes that a careful analysis will offer a new definition of the enthymeme and shows how it can be distinguished from the syllogism. Lanigan, for example, proposes that the enthymeme is best understood as a speaker’s syllogistic method and not a listener’s syllogistic response. Don Kraemer offers a brief critique from a feminist perspective of the discussion of the logical syllogistic elements of the enthymeme in any form.

10. It’s not evident who thought or published the idea first. Gage credits the Rhetoric Department at the University of California at Berkeley.
11. My arguments in this text are operating on the assumption that readers, as part of the audience, have certain shared values and knowledge about political, ethical, and philosophical issues that are, to some degree, based on Western social ontological, and epistemological assumptions. These assumptions run along the lines of: we live in a society and we ought to try and get along; there are problems with our society; we use language to name and explain these problems (race, class, and gender); people suffer because of these problems; something can and should be done about problems; solving problems takes a lot or work; work can be intellectual and physical; work can be described in writing; writing is a good way to share, promote, and do work; editors decide what is “good” and should be published; published ideas are valid; people should read what is published; and people should consider taking action based on what they read.

I begin by invoking James Baldwin and W.E.B. Du Bois and then draw heavily on Charles Mills, a contemporary African-American philosopher, throughout this paper to add credibility to my arguments. I quote Burnyeat as a reference on the interpretation of Greek in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* for use in the field of rhetoric. I reference a lot of “big names” associated with the topics in my paper (Alcoff, West, McGee, Gramsci, Foucault and a host of prominent rhet/comp scholars). I have quoted the relevant scholars and articles for the review of literature on the enthymeme and created my own discursive space by building on previously published arguments.

I make use of other discursive strategies, such as assuming that it’s okay to insert Latin terms, though I (and some readers of the article) have no formal training in Latin, using the term as it is used in our political and legal systems, which, in turn assumes something about my audience and their values. My additional reference to concepts such as “cubicle wall,” “picket fence,” “pedagogy,” “social justice,” “antiracist” and terms such as epistemology and social ontology are based on my understanding of the concepts as a white middle-class Christian male junior faculty member. I make recommendations (possible solutions) in this paper based on the very foundations I am critiquing, operating on the assumption that I can be and am aware of my own investments in them (such as whiteness).

While my use of whiteness and white supremacy is defined, my use of racism (based largely on Albert Memmi’s work) is not, nor is the concept of race (see Omi and Winant). I imagine that my audience will “get” my usage of the terms and make sense of my arguments as laid out in the scope and purpose of this paper. (If you and I were to engage in dialogue, depending on the asymmetrical power relations, we would hopefully achieve stasis in a more dialectical fashion—assuming that’s possible, as many feminist theorists question.) I have framed this paper after the
pattern of classical rhetorical argumentation structure that has been reified by academic and professional institutions and organizations, such as JAC, and formatted the text in the appropriate documentation style. And while, in the scope of this paper I have focused on "race," the absence of a presence of gender and class should not be taken to mean that they are not important as they are inextricably intertwined with race, particularly in whiteness theory (see John Hartigan, or Minnue Bruce Pratt for example). These are all parts of my argument in this paper, the publication of which serves further to legitimize my arguments.

12. For a good discussion of this notion, see Butler.

13. While working on this article, I have read increasing accounts of innocent Arab-Americans being racially profiled and harassed at airports and other immigration checkpoints. For example, see Democracy.


15. Sadaam Hussein was pictured prominently as the “ace of spades.” The racist connotations of “spade” should not be lost here. These cards are still available for public purchase; see http://www.rewardsforjustice.net.

16. It is worth noting that the phrase, “We will not be silent” is taken from the White Rose student activist group who opposed Hitler and the Nazi regime during WW II. See Scholl. Also see http://thecriticalvoice.org concerning the Artists Against the War and the t-shirt available for purchase.

17. Two additional cases that add interesting insight to the growing problem of racial profiling include the Paraguayan-born U.S. citizen, John Cerqueira, who was pulled from an American Airlines flight because he presumably looked Arab, and the (white) Australian man Allen Jasson who was pulled from a Quantas flight because he was wearing a t-shirt depicting President George W. Bush and the statement “World’s Number One Terrorist.” See Democracy “High-Flying,” and Democracy “Airline.” Regarding the latter case, a spokesperson for Quantas said: “Whether made verbally or on a T-shirt, comments with the potential to offend other customers or threaten the security of a Quantas group aircraft will not be tolerated.”

18. The scope of this paper does not allow for an adequate consideration of visual rhetoric and how images contribute to racist enthymemes. For an example of a general discussion of imagery and enthymemes, see Finnegan.

19. Thanks to Audrey Thompson for helping me to clarify the significance of this point.
20. One of the tendencies of whites, even academic critics, is to ignore issues of whiteness, or acknowledge them and take a stance of an informed, sensitive white who "gets it." Elizabeth Ellsworth recalls R.D. Laing's formula for the "double-bind predicament" and applies its logic to the suppression of discourse about race and ethnicity: "Rule A: Don't. Rule A.1.: Rule A does not exist. Rule A.2: Do not discuss the existence or nonexistence of Rules A, A.1, or A.2" (262).

21. My thoughts in this paper are informed by the important antiracist work of rhet-comp scholars such as Victor Villanueva, Geneva Smitherman, Catherine Pendergast, Jaqueline Jones Royster, Shirley Wilson Logan, Keith Gilyard, Thomas K. Nakayama, Carrie Crenshaw and Ronald L. Jackson II, to name a few.

22. See Homo Academicus, especially chapter. 3

23. I would like to thank to Susan Miller, Christine Oravek, Deborah Brandt, Gregory Clark and an anonymous reviewer for encouragement and insights on this article.

Works Cited


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