

Review: *Truth be told: White nostalgia and antiracist queer resistance in “post-truth” America.*

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Hot off the press: Laura Elliot Tetreault’s *Truth Be Told: White Nostalgia and Antiracist Queer Resistance in “Post-Truth” America!* Tetreault’s debut book, published in September 2025, is situated at the crossroads of intersectional rhetorics, digital and cultural studies, and gender & sexuality studies. For such a little book, it covers a lot of ground. This text focuses on and encourages the use of narratives, community relationships, and critical analysis in order to resist oppressive rhetorics and their regimes. Tetreault wastes no time getting into the depths of analysis, and neither should we.

Truth Be Told is a collection of case studies, and each chapter is dedicated to a critical sociocultural moment from 2016–2024: Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement and protests; the Women’s March national organizing body; Unite the Right March in Charlottesville, VA; the January 6 insurrection; and anti-trans legislation. *Truth Be Told* boasts an alluring blend of rhetoric and technical communication due to Tetreault’s focus on digital dis/misinformation, digital activism, and different means of organizing online. Intending to arm the reader with means of fighting rhetorical exhaustion and disinformation, Tetreault utilizes racial rhetorical criticism through a queer lens. Ultimately, this text uses and provides oppressed groups with strategies to resist dis/misinformation.

We are familiar with Make America Great Again (MAGA)— the fascistic motto that relies on nostalgia for an imagined time when white supremacy reigned without pesky left-wing questioning and outcry. Tetreault, however, does not let the criticism of white nostalgia rest there—well-meaning, white, liberal nostalgia is called into question, too. Tetreault pairs these nostalgias with their critique of post-truth and civil discourse, as both become spokes on white supremacy’s wheels. Before launching their readers into criticisms of political rhetoric, they encourage us to engage with crisis rhetoric—that taunting voice in the back of everyone’s mind, whispering, “it wasn’t always like this. *beforebeforebefore.*” In facing this political/rhetorical moment, disinformation is not a static example. Instead, each instance of disinformation is an “evolving rhetorical [act] that [carries] racialized and gendered logics” (p. 27); this distinction allows Tetreault’s analysis to hone in on activist responses to disinformation events.

Chapter one centers on the early BLM movement and the narrative activism that propelled the movement’s resistance to public misrepresentation and villainization of BLM’s leaders and participants. For Tetreault, narrative activism represents lived experiences and employs Black queer feminist storytelling

methods. Here, narrative activism wrestles with white supremacy's fixation with monolithic, violent criticisms delivered to marginalized groups and the effort made to undermine organizations' reputation. Digital systems and responses, made visible by algorithms, are paramount; if violent imaginaries seek to limit perceived possibility, algorithms disseminate this further. Any interaction propels dis/misinformation due to the algorithm's inability to differentiate between positive and negative engagement. We return to a discussion of who is/is not perceived as civil; namely, how this dichotomy has been positioned within white supremacy and the perpetuation of "civility" through algorithmic biases.

Chapter two centers activists' response to foreign infiltration and the resulting spread of disinformation in online organizing spaces, specifically concerning BLM and the Women's March on Washington national organizations. The narrative foundation of the previous chapter extends to relational activism, exemplified by Ella Baker's imperative question: "Who are your people?" (p. 55) The rhetorical practices outlined here provide examples of community members relying on the integrity of their community to verify the validity of unfamiliar actors. After the 2016 federal election, the Russian Internet Research Agency's manufactured social media propaganda made foreign influence over critical online communities clear. As such, the focus given to relationality becomes increasingly important. While disinformation spreads, it is necessary to understand *who* is speaking to *whom*. As rhetoricians, this is something that we are familiar with. Tetrault's emphasis is a framework for less familiar readers and clearly demonstrates the dialectical importance of subject and speaker. The response time and integration of relationality separate tightly bound organizations from others: BLM was well-equipped to respond to Baker's question and was prepared to ward off bad actors, whereas the Women's March on Washington was forged in a fire that gave them no time to actually organize in a meaningful and longstanding way.

In chapter three, Tetrault focuses on the nationwide response to the Unite the Right March in Virginia. In 2017, the country was reconciling with the first Trump administration and the accompanying proliferation of far-right rhetoric. For many, the visible virulence of this march acted as the first example of mainstream white supremacy. After the blatant demonstration of white supremacy, President Trump released his first of many "both sides" statements; in his estimation, bad actors incited violence on either side of the protest. This phrase became a quick favorite of Trump's, and a simple way of siding with white supremacy without raising excessive concern from the public. It also became an effective means of wasting activists' time, and opened up a door to cry "incivility" in the event that activists resisted at all. Wasting time is important here, because it accumulates into rhetorical exhaustion—a state reached when the sheer amount of extremely polarizing news provides no reprieve—and this is exactly the point Tetrault raises. The onslaught of polarizing headlines serves as a distraction tactic; inversely, activists refusing to waste time with the obvious ploys or attempts to rage bait allows us the energy to organize and mobilize.

Chapter four brings readers to the January 6 insurrection to analyze the rhetorical gaslighting spouted off by the Trump administration and public media. The extension of disbelief and skepticism from the individual to others' experience of the same event—gaslighting—relies upon the public's (rhetorical) exhaustion. It acts as yet another way to divide civility along the lines of perceived emotionality, creating further ruptures between people rather than directing criticism to the Trump administration. Rhetorical gaslighting provides

an avenue for a “both sides” type of rhetoric before turning around and blaming the people it affects for having an opinion regarding the consequences on their lives. When the public response to an event is as divisive as this was, the repeated news coverage becomes a ploy: each headline must one-up the last, at the expense of viewers.

The final chapter brings us to queer rhetoric and returns to narratives; specifically, trans negotiations of joy and spite in the face of discriminatory regulations and laws. The increasingly common “unreachable standard for evidence” (p. 115) acts as a barrier to attaining care because assumed cis-identification challenges the lived-experience of individuals—you cannot unequivocally prove someone’s identity in the way that you can prove their blood type. Further, puppeting the burden of proof can act as a moving benchmark; this is complicated when white liberalism doubles down on the medicalization of individuals and gives new life to harmful perceptions of what does (not) count as a trans person and body. While this runs the risk of further codifying anti-trans legislation by playing into their hand, it simultaneously leaves non-white and non-wealthy trans folks out of the equation. If transness is reified through a medical diagnosis, what becomes of those without medical insurance, or those who cannot take prolonged leave from work to recover from gender affirming surgery? Once again, Tetrault directs readers to narratives as a means of resisting oppressive rhetorics.

I assert that *Truth Be Told* is a pedagogical tool as much as it is a scholarly one. Tetrault poses many important case studies, which allow readers across many levels to engage with, question, and analyze several contemporary and critical political moments. Further, the text serves as a kind of introduction to critical frameworks and communities. While there is a common thread and position throughout the communities that Tetrault is analyzing, each chapter focuses on a different aspect or subset of these communities; we ruminate, but don’t languish in the oppression or violence of one group, and there are many points of entry for people to be represented. The confluence of perspectives gives readers a community-centered, counter-knowledge, and intersectional approach to dismantling white supremacy’s dis/misinformation tactics and effects.

As a young queer scholar, Tetrault’s text homes in on many of the issues that shaped my political and scholarly awareness. I was a bright-eyed high schooler in 2016, and, as such, this text engages with some of the most formative moments in my maturation; these sociocultural moments construct the zeitgeist that shaped many of our young academics. *Truth Be Told* has become something that I point people to—whether they are my first-year writing students looking for approachable academia, people outside of the academy, or other scholars looking to bolster their citations regarding dis/misinformation studies. This is one of this text’s greatest strengths; it is applicable to a variety of readers and does so without assuming much of anyone at all, so long as they are prepared to interrogate the connected systems of oppression within complex narratives.

Biography

Rhiannon Zwiég (they/them) is a first-year graduate student in the Department of Writing Studies at the University of Minnesota. Their research focuses on the intersection of queer and feminist rhetorics, theories, and pedagogies, with a particular emphasis on archival practices, digitality, social media, and identity and/or subject formation.

References

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