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To cite this article: Collin Bjork & Frida Buhre (2021) Resisting Temporal Regimes, Imagining Just Temporalities, Rhetoric Society Quarterly, 51:3, 177-181, DOI: [10.1080/02773945.2021.1918503](https://doi.org/10.1080/02773945.2021.1918503)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02773945.2021.1918503>



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Published online: 12 Jul 2021.



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INTRODUCTION



Resisting Temporal Regimes, Imagining Just Temporalities

Collin Bjork  and Frida Buhre 

The coronavirus pandemic has inundated the globe with discussions of time. Incubation periods, contagion intervals, exponential growth curves, hospitalization timelines, belated government responses, supply chain delays, limited store hours, paused economies, weeks of quarantine, months of isolation, years to develop and distribute the vaccines, decades of consequences, and millions of lives cut tragically short. These temporalities are ubiquitous and alarming but not distributed or experienced equally (Chirindo et al.). Most of Singapore's early cases stemmed from overcrowded foreign workers' dormitories where social distancing was impossible and workers were surveilled by police 24 hours a day (Ng). The Navajo Nation struggled to adequately protect their people through routinized hand washing because many did not have access to clean running water (Lee). Formerly colonized African nations like Zimbabwe and the Central African Republic lacked sufficient medical supplies and expertise to respond in a timely manner to large outbreaks (Baker). And it quickly became apparent that COVID-19 disproportionately took the lives of Black Americans due to the accumulated force of decades of systemic racism (Kendi). Even the ways that nations collectively mourned, or failed to mourn, these untimely deaths become politicized events that marked some bodies as worthy of remembrance and others as forgettable (McElya). The unequal power regimes that pervade healthcare systems, policy decisions, political structures, and economic activities distort the temporal frameworks that give shape to our daily interactions and form an oppressive dynamic that is further amplified in a global pandemic. Crucially, rhetoric operates at this nexus of time and power, both as a tool for facilitating these injustices and as the inventive means to critique, resist, and rectify them. In response to these inequities, rhetorical studies must better account for the multiplicity and asymmetry of the temporal regimes that structure rhetorical relations and, at the same time, work toward articulating and enacting more just temporal frameworks.

Prior to the coronavirus pandemic and beyond rhetorical studies, scholars across the humanities have already been at work critiquing and resisting asymmetrical temporal regimes. Postcolonial and leftist thinkers have critiqued the ways that neoliberal, imperialist economies monetize time (Chakrabarty; Rosa) and construct unequal "power-chronographies" (Sharma 14) that transform our most mundane personal interactions. Scholars of climate change politics have warned how the accelerated extraction, consumption, and waste of carbon-based resources disrupts ecological time and jeopardizes our collective futures (Casagård and Thörn; Knappe et al.). In Black studies, Sharpe has theorized the afterlives of slavery as a present wake, and in disability studies, Samuels has conceptualized "crip time" as an alternative to normative temporal models. Indigenous scholars have challenged notions of "temporal distancing" (Fabian 30) and "settler time" (Rifkin 9) as the dominant temporal regimes for understanding indigeneity. Gender studies scholars have probed the temporality of waiting as a mode of objectification (Burke) and developed the notion of "revolutionary time" to interrogate the intersection of sexual difference and time (Söderbäck 21). And a number of scholars have extended earlier research about queer temporalities (Edelman; Freeman) to reconsider time's connection to disability (Gallop), feminist histories (McBean), and race (Rohy). Together, this constellation of research highlights the

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plurality and asymmetricality of the temporal regimes at work in our communities, but the interdisciplinary dialog between these fields and rhetorical studies still has room to grow.

Although temporal rhetorics is not a named research area in rhetorical studies—like spatial rhetorics, material rhetorics, and cultural rhetorics—time is foundational to the design of rhetorical theory and practice. Famously, Aristotle used the past, present, and future to delineate three different rhetorical genres in the civic sphere (I.4–14). And *kairos* has long served as a temporal “cornerstone” (Sipiora and Baumlin 3) of rhetorical practice (Kinneavy), rhetorical criticism (Foley; Hesford), and rhetorical theory (Miller; Rickert). Researchers have emphasized the rhetorical significance of *chronos* as a temporal concept that complements *kairotic* notions of time (Allen; Winderman), while others have investigated how rhetorical actions unfold over time, foregrounding the durative and accretive aspects of rhetoric (Bordelon; Burton). As researchers have become increasingly invested in issues of power, scholars have examined how rhetors invoke temporal tropes in political discourse to either resist or reinforce hegemonies and political imaginaries (Buhre; Dunmire; Ore and Houdek). Other researchers have explored the rhetorically salient ways that time, as a commodity, is inequitably circulated by media and communication technologies (Bradshaw; Castells) and unequally experienced by different bodies (Hahner). Historiography, too, has proven central to the ways that rhetoricians reimagine the present state of the field in light of different pasts (Ballif, *Theorizing Histories*; Jarratt; Mao, “Writing the Other”). Moreover, a prior special issue of this very journal has upended the “problematic fiction” of chronological histories, embracing instead the “*untimely* nature of historiography” (Ballif, “Untimely Historiographies” 202). Indeed, rhetorical scholarship about time—and, more or less explicitly, about power—has reached such a critical mass that rhetoricians have recently spoken of a “temporal turn” in our field (Houdek and Phillips 371; Mao, “In the Present”). Building on this already rich body of scholarship, we argue that understanding the complicated relationship among rhetoric, time, and power is essential to the ongoing social justice efforts in our field.

This special issue, then, highlights some of the less obvious temporal rhythms that shape rhetorical actions and collectively argues that attending to these covert temporalities is essential to the larger rhetorical project of resisting oppression and reorienting our communities toward justice. Together, the constellation of scholarship contained herein interrogates *temporal regimes*, understood as the ways that humans negotiate their temporally situated power relations with each other via discourses, histories, cultures, bodies, and technologies. And, in an effort to upend these oppressive temporal regimes, some of the contributions in this special issue begin to identify how other temporal frameworks might point the way toward emancipatory justice. Rather than identifying a single temporal regime that might be the “root” of subjugation and persecution, we suggest that rhetoricians continue the diligent work of exposing and resisting the many temporalities that enable exploitation and inequality. Instead of sketching a single rhetorical temporality that might assure social justice, we seek to account for a plurality of temporal frames that may make possible political emancipation.

In the opening essay, “Temporal Containment and the Singularity of Anti-Blackness: Saying Her Name in and across Time,” Logan Rae Gomez argues that the temporal regime of white linear time performs its violence through the *temporal containment* of Black lives. Her analysis of the *Say Her Name* (SHN) social movement reveals how white linear time conceives of Black deaths as singular events that do not confront the long continuous history of white violence against Black women or the aftermath of that violent history in contemporary American society. By studying SHN as an archive, Gomez demonstrates how SHN discourses—despite their liberatory potential—remain nonetheless contained by oppressive notions of white linear time.

Diane Davis situates an unquestioned faith in linear time and historical progress at the heart of American democracy’s inadequacy to itself. In “Rhetoricity, Temporality, Democratic Nonequivalence,” Davis contends that the “spirit” of democracy, which distinguishes itself from its disappointing political form, iterates in irruptive, *kairotic* bursts. In sustained dialog with Sylvia Wynter and Jean-Luc Nancy, Davis proposes that the event of democracy takes place (each time) through an “exercise of rhetoricity,” an engagement with the other(s) at the threshold of an open space

that both shares and differentiates “us.” And a truly democratic politics, Davis argues, would protect this opening “against any attempt to wall it off or to stuff it with an essence or identity.”

If Davis sees in democracy a tension between its temporal possibilities and its temporal realities, then Nomi Claire Lazar notes a similar disjunction between what utopian rhetorics promise and what utopian rhetorics can actually deliver. In “Utopian Rhetoric Has a Pleasure Problem,” Lazar employs wide-reaching historical and contemporary examples to demonstrate how utopia’s search for a perfect order runs up against the paradoxes of static time. If the desire for *pleasure* drives human action and conflict, Lazar suggests that utopia needs to actually “stop time” to satiate the desire for pleasure—and as a consequence—end conflict. In the end, however, Lazar views this “pleasure problem” as an insurmountable obstacle for utopian rhetorics that can never surpass the dynamic temporal regimes of law and politics.

While Lazar articulates a temporal paradox in the possibilities and limitations of utopian rhetorics, Nathan R. Johnson and Meredith A. Johnson highlight the conflicting temporalities at play in urban planning. In “Time and the Making of Space in Urban Development,” Johnson and Johnson introduce the term *coeval rhetorical temporalities* “to account for multiple, in/congruent human and nonhuman experiences of time and space as complicated in transportation planning.” By interlinking theories of *kairos* and *chronos* with an analysis of one of Tampa Bay’s most notorious interstate exchanges, they emphasize the political and ethical dimensions of the multiple timescapes that shape the planning of places and spaces in large urban centers.

Like Johnson and Johnson, the final essay of this issue interrogates the power dynamics of multiple temporalities. In “Braiding Time: Sami Temporalities for Indigenous Justice,” Frida Buhre and Collin Bjork analyze the Indigenous Sami movement for political and social justice in early twentieth-century Sweden. Buhre and Bjork show how the leader of the Sami activists, Elsa Laula, employs a rhetorical move of *braiding time* that mirrors the millenia-long interaction between the Sami and their eventual colonizers. Their analysis illustrates how Laula uses her public writings to resist the temporal othering expressed by the Swedish press and the violence of Swedish colonial policies that deliberately erase Sami temporalities. Buhre and Bjork illustrate how, by braiding Sami and settler Swedish histories and futures together, Laula crafts a more just temporal belonging for the Sami present.

The special issue concludes with an Afterword by Ersula Ore that, among other things, meditates on the function of the “Lost Cause” as a temporal regime that is deployed and adapted to celebrate Trumpism, to uplift white supremacy, and to oppress people of color. In this sense, Ore suggests that “temporal regimes such as state time and white national time—as well as their variants, of which Trump time might be one—function as time sucks that strip, take up, and waste time in ways that exhausts . . . others.” Ore then counters these violent temporal regimes by describing Tamika Carey’s theory of “rhetorical impatience” as one way of imagining a more just temporality for Black Americans, and especially for Black women and girls.

Together, this special issue demonstrates how rhetoric plays a central role in (1) molding conceptual and political imaginaries of time, (2) countering hegemonic timescapes that reorient memories, histories, and futures, and (3) both constructing and resisting the asymmetrical temporal regimes that unevenly structure the circulation of discourses, experiences, and resources. Ultimately, these contributions point to the prevailing argument in this special issue: no single dominant temporality exists without also being rhetorically intermeshed with a plurality of alternative temporalities that can be mobilized to erect more just temporal landscapes. This special issue thus extends our field’s rich tradition of interrogating the relationship between rhetoric and time by focusing specifically on the tension between oppressive temporal regimes and the struggle for temporal justice. Collectively, these essays underscore how rhetors mold new temporal imaginaries that can help reorient our communicative cultures, bodies, conceptual heritage, social justice activism, and the ontological underpinnings of rhetorical encounters. And by integrating perspectives from democratic theory, materiality, memory, critical race theory, political philosophy, and postcolonialism, this special issue explores the many ways that rhetoric and time come together to yield the conditions for oppression or emancipation. Time, in other words, is deeply intertwined with the rhetorical act of harnessing and subverting power in the unfolding struggle for justice.

Acknowledgments

We thank the contributors for their brilliant and dedicated work, the reviewers for their thoughtful feedback, copy editor Edrees Nawabi for his keen eye, and RSQ Associate Editor for Special Issues Robin Jensen for her guidance, enthusiasm, and tireless support.

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