THERESA LADRIGAN-WHELPLEY: Welcome to INTEGRAL, a podcast production out of the Ignatian Center for Jesuit Education at Santa Clara University. Exploring the question: "Is there a common good in our common home?"

I'm Theresa Ladrigan-Whelpley, the Director of the Bannan Institutes in the Ignatian Center and your host for this podcast. We're coming to you from Vari Hall on the campus of Santa Clara in the heart of Silicon Valley, California.

This season of INTEGRAL, we're looking at the ways in which issues of racial and ethnic justice intersect with the question of the common good. Today we enter the conversation at the crossroads of American identity on social media. How is the common good negotiated on Twitter, Facebook, blogs, and digital testimonial?

TWEET: Well, I won't be drinking #Coke anymore. We speak English in the #USA. Get over it. --Stephanie Weaver(@Stphniwvr)

THERESA LADRIGAN-WHELPLEY: To unpack these questions, we're joined today by Cruz Medina, Assistant Professor of Rhetoric and Composition in the Department of English at Santa Clara University, and Bannan Institute Scholar in the Ignatian Center. His book *Reclaiming Pocho Pop* looks at issues of citizenship, education, and politics, related to Latinx in the U.S. Welcome, Cruz.

CRUZ MEDINA: Thanks Theresa. I'm really excited to be here with you all today. What I research tends to fall along these seemingly unconnected areas of cultural rhetoric and digital writing. Some of the things I look at are how Latinx students use Twitter in writing classes and how they create community by going back and forth between Spanish and English, sharing experiences and building knowledge specific to their social network. I've also looked at how Latino researchers use blog posts to address the spectrum of Latino experiences and address obstacles and barriers associated with these different identities.

The project I'll be talking about is a forthcoming digital collection of academic essays that I co-edited with Octavio Pimentel, a professor at Texas State University-San Marcos, called *Racial Shorthand: Coded Discrimination Contested in Social Media*. In a nutshell, the collection includes chapters that look critically at how racial discourses have misrepresented people of color in social media and online platforms, and—more generatively—what kinds of digital writing practices are communities of color already enacting that contributes to the knowledge of these different cultural traditions and digital writing practices in general.

This project came about a few years ago. This project came about a few years ago. On February 2, 2014, like a lot of people, I was watching Super Bowl at a party in Oakland, and I think I was surprised at how bad the Broncos were losing to the Seahawks, but we paid attention to the game, if only for the commercials that supposedly cost millions to air.

There was a Coke commercial where people sang "America the Beautiful," first in English, and then Spanish, and then some other languages, while different people in the commercial seemed to signify the different demographics that make up the U.S. I thought it was cool, although I wasn't sure if everyone appreciated it because it didn't have a celebrity saying or doing something outrageous. And then, the next day there were stories on my social media timeline about the "controversy" that the Coke ad had somehow created. What surprised me, and I think a lot of people, was how this representation of multiculturalism had elicited posts on Twitter that many viewed as racist. From the Huffington Post's article "Coca-Cola 'America the Beautiful' Super Bowl Ad Celebrates Diversity, Twitter Explodes," some of the tweets that were quoted included:

TWEET: Coke having a commercial with an American song in other languages... not cool. Coke. GTFO with that. (@USABlackout)

TWEET: Still confused as to why they were singing about America in all those foreign languages in the Coke commercial. We speak English…

TWEET: Anybody else hate that they just sang the song of America, half in Spanish and there were about 2 Americans in the commercial? #Coke

CRUZ MEDINA: There were others about the song being in "terrorist's language" that was quoted in a Buzzfeed article:

TWEET: @CocaCola What's with the Superbowl commercial? Do you all support Terrorists or what, bad choice in taste. I love America personally.

TWEET: Well.. I won't be drinking #Coke anymore. We speak English in the #USA. Get over it.

CRUZ MEDINA: When I was at a conference later that year, I actually used this commercial and the responses to show why my earlier research on Twitter with Latina students was timely, because the response to the commercial on Twitter shows how writers on information communication technology and social media often assume that their audiences are white and share the same linguistic practices and cultural beliefs.

So the book *Racial Shorthand: Coded Discrimination Contested in Social Media* resonates a lot with what is happening right now. The chapters and contributors who call attention to racist responses highlight how racist discourse arises in response to non-white representations of America.

My own contribution to the collection extends the work of Latino Critical Race Theorists who advocate that the Latino storytelling tradition of *testimonio* can be incorporated to the digital storytelling genre for the purpose of exposing us to a broader range of semiotic and communicative resources. It also brings in the social justice ethos of the genre of *testimonio*.

Testimonio can literally be translated into testimony and has similar religious and legal implications, although it became more well known as a genre when the indigenous Guatemalan woman Rigoberta Menchú used the genre to speak out on behalf of the experience of indigenous people being pushed from their lands by their government in the 1970s and 80s. Although the exact dates and events of Menchu's *testimonio* were called into question, the purpose of *testimonio i*s to communicate the feeling of an experience that many have felt, which cannot be discounted by metrics.

In classes, I teach at Santa Clara University, I have incorporated the genre of digital *testimonio*, asking students to write from a perspective where they experience a misunderstanding about their identity and speak from an individual perspective to a collective experience. Since we're in Silicon Valley, teaching the digital storytelling aspect to students can be something that they're familiar with because of the pressure they feel to develop their digital literacies. However, I think it's really important to write about their experiences in the genre of *testimonio* because it validates experiences of having been stereotyped or discriminated against, and this helps make us empathetic to experiences of discrimination that others experience.

Why this is particularly important for students is that it situates them in the place of the expert and they can draw from research to further substantiate and complicate what they know from lived experience. Even when teaching this as a project with a predominantly white class at a private university that does not feel impacted by race or class, students are still able to recognize how there are existing stereotypes associated with a group with
which they self-identify.

Recognizing these experiences can be a vulnerable process, and I hope that it helps them develop empathy and become allies for others who may be even more vulnerable and targeted for discrimination. Introducing empathy into our interactions with technology is extremely important to avoid isolating ourselves from achieving the common goods for our communities.

When teaching students to write, I want them to think of their audience and how the choices, regarding the information they include or the style they use, can impact how the reader receives their writing.

I turn now to some of the contributors in the forthcoming collection. I begin with my co-editor Octavio Pimentel, professor of English at Texas State University, San Marcos. Octavio looks at the tweets that followed Sebastian de la Cruz's performance of the national anthem in a mariachi attire at the 2013 NBA finals in San Antonio.

OCTAVIO PIMENTEL: It really deals with this little eleven-year-old boy named Sebastian de la Cruz, who was asked to sing the national anthem during Game 3 of the 2013 NBA finals. In his case, on July 11 2013, he sang the national anthem and it was perfect, it was flawless. It was, basically people said it was perfect. And, the only reason he got criticized was because he was Mexican and he actually sang it wearing a *traje de charro*, which was really unfortunate. Some

of the Twitter comments that he received were "Can't believe they had the nerve to have a beaner sing the national anthem of America." Another one was "9/10 chances the kid singing the national anthem isn't legal"

What's incredible to think about here is this, just, the idea that people have the audacity to criticize people without even knowing them. I mean, this kid was an American with Mexican descent, but because simply he looked, oh, "He has brown skin" and spoke Spanish, people automatically think that he was an undocumented person. And it's kind of the rhetoric that still exists presently, you know, we look at people like, you know, even our current President-elect Donald Trump. It's the same rhetoric he's pushing, the anti-Mexican rhetoric that he consistently talks about. And it's really amazing, because you know, if we look at the census, the Hispanic population is actually growing at a pretty high rate.

But, it's not stopping the rhetoric. If anything, it's actually getting a little bit worse. And it might be a response to that. Maybe because the numbers are getting higher within Hispanics, that it's causing a little bit of a panic attack, and therefore the rhetoric exists.

CRUZ MEDINA: Returning to the examination of Twitter posts, associate professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Texas State University, San Marcos, Charise Pimentel brings attention to responses on Twitter to the crowning of the first Indian-American Miss America.

CHARISE PIMENTEL: The first several decades of the pageant were entirely white, including all participants, winners, and judges. In the 1940's, the pageant stipulated specific qualifications contestants must meet, including a particular racial profile for the contestants. The racial profile rules stated that "contestants must be in good health and of the white race." The crowning of Miss Nina Davuluri, the first Indian-American contestant to ever win the pageant, resulted in a spewing of public racist commentary that was both immediate and open to public viewing, as people used Twitter to post their racist responses.

Some Tweets include:
"And the Arab wins Miss America. Classic."
"ummm. wtf?! Have we forgotten 9/11?"
"She is Arab. And more like, Miss Terrorist."

This racist commentary on social media serves as a reflection of the deeply embedded white supremacist discourses that continue to surround concepts such as citizenship, patriotism, and beauty in our country.

CRUZ MEDINA: As an editor of this collection, I really appreciate the social justice aspect that is at the core of these contributions, and which is in line with Santa Clara University's mission to educate the whole student, so that issues of inequality are addressed because they are part of shared value.

Part of what this podcast asks me and you, the listener, to consider, is how my criticism and advocacy of social media, for and by communities of color, can contribute to this question of the common good.

In thinking about this question, it's helpful to think of the common goods rather than a singular common good, on the same way we think about terms like culture and community. These terms should always be plural: *communities* and *cultures*, because within each group there are individuals with a wide range of experiences, desires, and purposes.

It seems like a lot to ask of social media such as Twitter, or composing digital video genres for social justice, but these information communication technologies share the same purpose, which is to communicate experience.

So when we compose 140 character messages, composing responses to what our beliefs, values, and worldviews feel at the very core of our nervous systems, we should be asking ourselves questions beyond, "Will the audience I know agree with me?" We should be asking what change we can aspire to create through our Tweets or our videos. Are we thinking about what is beneficial for the communities we discuss as a subject of our Tweets? Are we thinking beyond definitions of ideas, like "American culture", that limit the communities that we can express our concern about?

Contemplating common good is more than a philosophical, hypothetical question, but rather a question we should be considering when we act and share our experiences with others. Are we contributing to the many communities we are part of? Or, are we simply contributing to discourse of discrimination and oppression of individuals, who similarly want the right to pursue their American Dream?

I started off my saying that my research places me in a unique position to see these types of these traditions of stereotypes, misrepresentation and racist discourse. Since the recent election, we have seen a rise in xenophobia, homophobia, ableism. The Southern Poverty Law Center has reported significant increases on attacks of people of color, many times with Trump's name mentioned as license to do so.

Supporters of the President-elect argue that they do not like being called racist, and their vote for Trump was not racist. But these advocating against racism and discrimination like Tim Wise have asked anti-racist Trump supporters to condemn the white supremacist contingent emboldened by the election.

Those who feel they voted for economic reasons should not feel conflicted about speaking up against anti-Muslim, anti-gay, anti-Latino, anti-black, anti-Asian, anti-woman and anti-disabled actions. Because silence around violence and hate crime implies compliance and acceptance.

When we cut out people from our lives or attempt to silence them, we further isolate ourselves from opinions different from our own. What has made America strong and places like Silicon Valley successful is the difference of perspectives that have envalued the pursuit of the common good for all our communities and cultures.

THERESA LADRIGAN-WHELPLEY: Thanks for listening to INTEGRAL, a Bannan Institute podcast of the Ignatian Center for Jesuit Education at Santa Clara University. Special thanks to Professor Cruz Medina for his contribution today. Explore more of Cruz's work on academiadecruz.com or follow him on Twitter, @academiadecruz.

Coming up in our next episode this season, is Hsin-I Cheng, Associate Professor in the Communications Department at Santa Clara, who explored the issue of immigration, looking at movements of assimilation and difference within the production of national identity and the pursuit of a common good.

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- Charise Pimentel, Assistant Professor, Curriculum & Instruction, Texas State University San Marcos