About the Cover

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... one thing I do know is, black women, we got us; we're continuing to organize our own communities, we're continuing to hold folks accountable across genders, across race. I would actually say to white women, if you want to be a part of a powerful movement that's going to get

something done, you need to get behind and trust black women, trust black femmes, trust black trans women. Because we are making this way out of no way. If you're a white woman thinking, "What's next? Everything seems insurmountable," welcome to the fucking party. Listen to a black woman.

Angela Peoples (quoted in Obie, 2017)

Our cover for this issue is actually a collage artwork, *My Medieval Studies Will Be Intersectional or It Will Be Bullshit*, designed by Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei, my co-director at Punctum Books, which cadges design elements from the well-known feminist artwork of Barbara Kruger¹ and is also built around a now-viral photograph by Kevin Banatte of the activist Angela Peoples, taken during the Women's March on Washington, DC in 2017 that, in the words of one commentator in *The New York Times Magazine*, "captures the fracturing view of America, seen through the lens of civil rights and feminism, that was crystallized after Nov. 8, 2016" (Wortham, 2017). And the photograph, which depicts Peoples "casually sucking on a lollipop with a jaded look in her eyes that suggests her familiarity with the ritual of protest, of demonstrating for civil liberties," captures this "fracturing view of America" because as the sign held at the protest by actor Amir Talai put it, "I'll See You Nice White Ladies at the Next #BlackLivesMatter March, Right?" (quoted in Wortham, 2017), not to mention that the marchers in 2017, across the entire country, were overwhelmingly white. van Gerven Oei's piece is also intended to center this special issue of *postmedieval* around medievalist and activist Dorothy Kim's statement that "my medieval studies will be intersectional or it will be bullshit" (Kim, 2016), which purposefully echoes the title of Falvia Dzodan's widely-cited 2011 essay, "My Feminism Will Be Intersectional or It Will Be Bullshit!"

The editors of this special issue write in their Introduction that "[i]ntersectionality may be an essential paradigm for medieval studies, but it is one to which the field – majority white and still dominated by white men – has reacted with disproportionate hostility," and further, "[m]edievalist feminism has a spotty record of aligning its passions for gender equality with antiracist, anti-elitist critique." In other words, medieval studies still has a very long way to go, even among scholars who identify as "feminists" (and we might add, as theorists of any sort with so-called political commitments), toward addressing, working through, and repairing the deeply-embedded structural racism of the field and its intellectual history, never mind becoming "intersectional," which means that, when analyzing issues of gender, sexuality, class, disability (etc.) in medieval texts, if one is not also looking at race and its always tightly-imbricated relation with everything else, but especially gender (and preferably through the lenses of

1 See "Barbara Kruger," [Wikipedia.org, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barbara_Kruger](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barbara_Kruger).

Critical Race Theory²), then the analysis is not only deeply flawed and inadequate, it's also racist. White persons who study and teach the so-called "Middle Ages" need to drop their stances of "white fragility"³ (which currently appear almost ubiquitous!) in which they are always defending themselves and their actions against the label of "racism" while also minimizing the very real damage being inflicted on scholars of color who have been brave enough to call their white colleagues' attention to the long-standing and ongoing (and deeply entrenched) racism of medieval studies, and of the university, more largely, which is, historically, an important arm of racial state capitalism even while its researchers offer up critique after critique of that very same state of affairs. "Structural racism" (which cannot be fully understood apart from "intersectional" critique) means that certain groups of people (such as African Americans) are blocked, in advance, from thriving (socially, economically, culturally, physically, legally, and otherwise) because the societal, cultural, and institutional structures are designed in advance to advantage the most privileged groups – i.e., whites⁴ – and in some cases, to outright harm and kill persons of color (as with, in the US, the prison-industrial complex or the water pollution crisis in Flint, Michigan and many other environmental disasters that have impacted communities of color at rates obscenely higher than has been the case with white communities impacted by similar disasters). If we think these issues are far removed from university life, and more particularly, from medieval studies, where progressively liberal ideas relative to diversity and inclusivity are supposedly cherished and acted upon, we need look no further than the Organizing Committee of the International Congress on Medieval Studies (at Western Michigan University) rejecting all four conference sessions proposed by the Medievalists of Color group for the 2019 Congress, while accepting session proposals addressing race proposed by white scholars, which is discussed by the editors here in their Introduction.⁵ Medieval studies, as an intellectual discipline, has deeply racist foundations and even now is having a difficult time addressing this fact because so many white scholars, who dominate the field, not only do not want to accept this historical fact, but also do not want to acknowledge the myriad ways in which they have benefited from structural racism and therefore are also responsible for undertaking the work to dismantle their own privilege and the structures that support it.⁶

Whether or not this issue lives up to the editors' hopes for a more intersectional-feminist medieval studies, I will leave to the readers of this issue to decide, but at the very least at least we can agree with the editors of this volume, Nicole Sidhu and Samantha Katz Seal, that to "fail to be intersectional is to fail to be just, but, even more importantly, it is to fail to be accurate. It is an intellectual, as well as an ethical, error." Let us also remind ourselves that being "intersectional" does not just mean that we've employed critical analyses that interrogate multiple modes of identification and subordination as they "intersect" with each other (such as, say, the gendered body alongside the disabled

2 Which means, just for starters, if you're not reading and citing the legal scholar Kimberlè Crenshaw (1989, 1991, 2012, among other works by her), you're not doing it right. For all of the ways in which primarily white feminists have (mis)appropriated intersectional critical thought, see Alexander-Floyd (2012), Bilge (2012, 2014), Carbado (2013), and Tomlinson (2018).

3 See DiAngelo (2018).

4 See James (1996).

5 See also Joy and van Gerven Oei (2018).

6 See Natanson (2019), Lomuto (2019), Miyashiro (2017), and Rambaran-Olm (2018) for signature chapters in the annals of what scholars of color have had to contend with, for too long now, in medieval studies, especially from their clueless and supposedly "well-meaning" white colleagues.

body, or the human alongside the nonhuman, etc.): if you are not always looking at your subject matter with both Critical Race Theory and gender-centered feminist frames of thought as prominent co-actors in your analysis, you are simply not “intersectional,” and white feminist scholars, especially, need to be mindful of this. And that is why, more than ever, we need to trust and listen to black women, especially, whether they signify as “medievalist” or “scholar” or not. And we need to cite them. Otherwise, our intersectionality is not only bullshit, it is also a lie.

About the Author

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