Participants:
Trevor Parry-Giles
Thomas Nakayama

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Trevor Parry-Giles:
Welcome to *Communication Matters, the NCA podcast*. I'm Trevor Parry-Giles, the Executive Director of the National Communication Association. The National Communication Association is the preeminent scholarly association devoted to the study and teaching of communication. Founded in 1914, NCA is a thriving group of thousands from across the nation and around the world who are committed to a collective mission to advance communication as an academic discipline. In keeping with NCA's mission to advance the discipline of communication, NCA has developed this podcast series to expand the reach of our member scholars' work and perspectives.

Introduction:
This is *Communication Matters, the NCA podcast*.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
In this episode of *Communication Matters*, I'll be speaking with Thomas K. Nakayama, professor of communication studies at Northeastern University. Dr. Nakayama was named an NCA distinguished scholar at the 105th NCA annual convention last November in Baltimore and the NCA Distinguished Scholar Award was created in 1991 to recognize NCA members for a lifetime of scholarly achievement in the study of human communication. Recipients are selected to showcase the communication discipline. Dr. Nakayama researches in the area of critical race studies and intercultural communication Dr. Nakayama introduced intersectionality to the discipline of communication and co-authored what is deemed the definitive essay about whiteness and rhetoric entitled *Whiteness: A Strategic Rhetoric* which won NCA's Charles H. Woolbert research award for its influence in the discipline. Dr. Nakayama has also authored or co-authored a dozen books including three widely used textbooks published now in multiple editions: *Human Communication in Society, Experiencing Intercultural Communication* and *Intercultural Communication in Contexts* and has also authored more than 50 book chapters

and journal articles. Dr. Nakayama served as the founding editor of NCA's Journal of International and Intercultural Communication and currently serves as co-editor of QED, a journal of GLBTQ world making. In this episode, I'll be speaking with Dr. Nakayama about research on whiteness, about international and intercultural communication and so many other things. Before we get started, Tom, I want to congratulate you again on being honored an NCA distinguished scholar and it's really a privilege to have you here with us today.

Thomas Nakayama:
Thank You, Trevor. It's really an honor to be named distinguished scholar.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
I want to start with a concept that you've written a lot about which is whiteness. How do you define whiteness and how is it related to institutions and structures of power and power dynamics and all of that?

Thomas Nakayama:
In my mind, whiteness is the key to understanding the ways that race functions in society which means that it's all about power in various different ways. Whiteness is a rhetorical construction that we've constructed to serve different purposes in different ways in different places at different times. And so, whiteness isn't really something that's there and fixed. It's something that's very dynamic and always changing to serve different ends at different points in time.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
What does it mean then to construct race as a rhetorical construct? I mean I think I know what it means but I'm interested to hear what you think because so much of that is percolating throughout our society today when people talk about race and seeing it as a rhetorical construct is really an interesting angle.

Thomas Nakayama:
It is and I think this is where some of the work that we do in communication is important because it really reveals the dynamic nature of rhetoric and the ends that race and whiteness can serve. And so, in that article that won the Woolbert award, we try to make a distinction between strategic rhetoric and tactical rhetoric and we laid out the ways that whiteness is strategic because it emanates from a position of power in the ways that it expresses itself. And so, how it gets constructed is not neutral or natural. There's nothing neutral or natural about it. It's something that's constantly changing and I think that this is revealed quite clearly in many of the historical studies that have been done about who gets included in whiteness and who gets excluded out of whiteness. Many people are familiar with the work that's been done on how the Irish became white but other groups have also been pushed out of the Caucasian category such as people from South Asia. They used to be included with Caucasians, people from India and

Pakistan and Bangladesh and then they're not considered part of that. Recently, there was a discussion about including MENA as a separate category, Middle East North African. There was a discussion about that for the 2020 census. A decision wasn't made and so, I think it won't happen for the 2020 census but maybe in a future census that category will emerge as separate from the white category.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
Is this categorization dynamic that happens an important reason do you think to study the rhetorical construction of race and/or whiteness? I mean is that just one way or can you think of other ways maybe that the rhetorical construction of whiteness contributes to a broader understanding of how we all live together?

Thomas Nakayama:
Well, it does except that I mean we do have all these categories but all of these categories are not flat, they're not even. There's a hierarchy within the categories and this is why I focus a lot of my work on whiteness because I think that whiteness is different from other categories in that it's much more powerful and sets the agenda for everybody else in terms of what it claims to be and how it functions and what it does. And so, I think I'd listen to some of these conversations differently than other people. I can give you an example. Recently, I was watching the primaries and the discussions about how careful the voters in Iowa and New Hampshire are in vetting all the candidates and carefully listening to all of the policy issues and so on. And it just reminded me of a previous rhetoric that white people are the ones who are careful about being good voters. And so, you may know that historically many states had white only primaries and to me, it was sort of a flashback to that earlier era. But I'm sure that the Democratic Party don't want to hear that.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
Well, but it's an interesting contrast to the way that they describe how voters for instance in South Carolina are making decisions in the South Carolina primary and I was struck by that the other day when CNN featured a full panel of mostly African-American voters in South Carolina talking about the primary and there was one white guy up in the corner. And it was interesting the way the dynamics played out and the way they talked and it illustrates I think what you're trying to demonstrate. Now your whiteness article was published a while ago, right?

Thomas Nakayama:
Yes. I think it was ’95.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
Right. And I'm wondering we live in such a different media environment these days and the social media dynamics and I see in my Facebook feed a fair amount of discussion about

whiteness and about privilege and about those things. I'm wondering if you considered how maybe the strategic rhetoric of whiteness is changing as a result of social media and thus, changing media dynamics.

Thomas Nakayama:
Oh, it's definitely changed. I think that that article feels in some ways very dated to me because that whole environment has completely shifted since then and some of the strategies that emerge out of that '95 article I don't think are so relevant anymore such as the invisibility of whiteness. I think whiteness is much less invisible today especially online and elsewhere. When this U.S. Census Bureau came out with their projections of when whites would be a minority in the United States, I think that that really changed the discussion about whiteness and about the future of America and I think some people became very uneasy and there was a very different discussion about the future and what we need to do about the future that you see being pushed by different interests that have really shifted that conversation. But the online environment has completely shifted the discussion as well because I think that people think that they're anonymous and feel free to say things that they would never say face-to-face to someone. It's really shocking to me to be honest.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
Yeah. No, I agree. Related to that, you co-wrote an article in JIIC a few years ago with David Cisneros about the reactions on Twitter to Nina Davuluri who won the Miss America Pageant in 2014 and was the first Indian-American winner of that pageant. I'm wondering if you had any blowback again on social media from Twitter users or what the whole reaction to that article tells us about the social media environment.

Thomas Nakayama:
I think one of the things that interested David and I in that article wasn't so much the Miss America Pageant. It was really the online reaction to her winning the Miss America Pageant. She was Miss Syracuse and then she became Miss New York and then obviously became Miss America. In 2013, the winner of the pageant was Miss New York so nobody thought Miss New York would get picked twice in a row but she was chosen in in 2014. And a lot of people on Twitter went crazy and there were a number of themes that emerged out of that that we sort of coded. One was that she wasn't an American and so, how can a foreigner win Miss America. And so, these definitions about who's an American and who isn't become evident in that line of thinking on Twitter and that for some reason she's not an American. She was born in Syracuse but she's not an American according to these people. Another theme that ran through there was that she was a Muslim and I don't know where this came from because I don't typically think of people from India—it'd be easier to think of them as Hindus at least the stereotype. So, I don't know where that came from but it was related to another thread that she was a terrorist and that Miss America Pageant was shortly after 9/11. And so, how could a terrorist get the Miss

America crown shortly after it? So, a lot of the reaction was just vitriol that's connected to these ideologies but not connected to Nina Davuluri in any way. But she was a trigger for larger discussions about who's an American, how we decide who's an American and those kinds of questions that have always been a part of the discussion about American identity.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
Speaking of social media, just the other day I was reading in my feed somebody talking about intersectionality and it was a speech by somebody who apparently introduced intersectionality. Okay? And I thought well, Tom introduced intersectionality to the discipline of communication. What does that mean to you? I mean what does intersectionality mean and why is it important that we talk about it?

Thomas Nakayama:
Was I the first person? I think that—well, one of the early pieces that dealt with intersectionality in a very explicit way was the *Show/Down Time* piece that was in CSMC. But in that particular piece, intersectionality to me meant that it's not just that we have multiple identities, not personally but in the world that we live in, race, gender, sexuality, all of these things matter. We need to think about how these different identities work together and work against each other at the same time. And so, it's not always an easy fit in the ways that this hierarchy keeps getting worked together in different situations. And so, in that particular case, I was looking at a specific movie and looking at how race, gender and sexuality work together and didn't work together in the ways that that movie played out. And so, intersectionality is not simply oh, I'm this and this and this. It's really how they come together and reinforce each other as well as contradict each other.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
Do you think sometimes that intersectionality is influenced by the different cultural contexts? I mean I'm envisioning I grew up in the American Southwest and the dynamics in New Mexico between race, ethnicity, sexuality to some degree, gender and that were very different than they are for instance in the mid-Atlantic region where I live now. I'm wondering how that intersectionality shifts by virtue of cultural context.

Thomas Nakayama:
Oh, I think it's very much influenced by cultural context and what the dynamics are and the different histories that we have in different parts of our country which is one of the reasons I think that even though a lot of the work that's done on culture shock really is on international, I think a lot of Americans have culture shock when they move from one part of our country to another because we do have very different histories and cultures in different parts of our country.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
Right, right. And which gets us to some discussion of the role and place of intercultural communication and I agree most people think of that as cross-cultural or trans-national kind of communication. I'm wondering if you might talk about based in your experiences as editor of JIIC and as a longtime scholar of international and intercultural communication, how has that sort of sub-discipline changed do you think over the last few years and how has it grown? Is it growing? Is it shifting? I mean how do we think about intercultural communication?

Thomas Nakayama:
The field is changing rapidly and it's addressing very different questions today than it did at the time that I was editing the journal. When I was editing the journal, it was just beginning to open up to a range of methodologies and paradigms and theories and approaches. Seems like that has completely flourished now but it's moved away from answering other questions that might also be interesting to think about. Some of the questions that are more applied I think have receded in the background in some ways.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
Like what?

Thomas Nakayama:
Well, at the university I work at, it's a co-op university and a lot of students are working on these six-month rotations and a lot of the questions they have come from more applied situations in tourism or more specific applied business context, that kind of stuff.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
Well, I'm thinking back in the day when we were in graduate school, intercultural communication was always about how Americans could adapt to quirky or unusual things happening abroad, right? And so, there was this kind of intercultural training dynamic and I'm thinking that—I'm hoping anyway that the discipline or the sub-discipline has sort of moved since then, right?

Thomas Nakayama:
Definitely. I think that the notion that you equate a culture and a nation has completely been—

Trevor Parry-Giles:
Right.

Thomas Nakayama:
We've clearly moved beyond that in that we recognize the multiplicity and hybridity of a number of cultures within any culture. So, there is no unitary French culture or Italian culture.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
Or American culture.

Thomas Nakayama:
Or American culture. That there's a lot of movement of peoples in and out that bring all kinds of changes.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
Okay. So, we have decades now of disciplinary knowledge and understanding and that's kind of what you need to be a distinguished scholar. I'm wondering how you think the discipline and the sub-disciplines of rhetoric and communication more broadly has changed.

Thomas Nakayama:
A lot's changed and a lot hasn't changed but when I first took what was called back then speech criticism as an undergrad—I know it's an old course now—but we were taught Neo Aristotelianism and obviously, the study of rhetoric has moved well past that. I think the class that I took was behind its time but the study of rhetoric today has moved well beyond all of that stuff and we use a range of theories and approaches now. There isn't any agreed-upon Neo Aristotelianism in the same kind of dominant way. And so, I'm hoping that as rhetoric looks out toward the future, they begin to think about things in a different way. I remember there were a lot of classes that were oriented around great speakers and great speeches and I wonder how Donald Trump has changed all of that. I mean when we study presidential rhetoric, where is he going to fit in and how is he going to change how we think about what rhetoric means and about presidential rhetoric? I think that technology is changing a lot of these discussions and social media, Twitter, all of this stuff is really rapidly changing the ways that we're interacting with each other and interact with the world we're in. Even going back, I mean I looked at I think it was 2012 and 2014, the Boston Bruins, the national league hockey team, in 2012 Joel Ward scored the winning goal for Washington that knocked the Bruins out and Twitter just went wild because he's black using the n-word.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
Oh, wow.

Thomas Nakayama:
And in 2014, P.K. Subban from Montreal who's also black knocked the Bruins out of the playoffs and Twitter just went wild and there were different estimates about how many thousands of tweets there were. But you'd really have to scrape it and then go through and figure out because some of them were telling people not to use the n-word. So, it wasn't that they were all but the initial thing was somewhere in 20,000 range. And that just changes it the entire racial climate and environment in a way that if we didn't have Twitter, it would be a different—I mean I

think people might still be thinking some of those things but it didn't have that public arena for it. And so, I don't know what technologies are going to be available down the road. I mean TikTok and some of these things are new but we'll see. But I'm not super optimistic because the sentiments aren't going to go away. Technology just gives a different form for these people to express these sentiments.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
Right. More quickly to a larger number of people. I agree. That's interesting. Well, thank you very much, Tom, for joining us today and congratulations again on the distinguished scholar award. And as I said in Baltimore, it's more than overdue and very well deserved. And thank you to everybody for listening to another episode of *Communication Matters, the NCA podcast*.

In NCA news, NCA's Communication and Critical Cultural Studies Journal recently published a forum on the future of communication and critical cultural studies. The lead article in the forum is by NCA President and University of Utah professor of communication, Kent Ono. In the article, Professor Ono reflects on how the discipline of communication and the sub-discipline of critical cultural studies have changed over the past 15 years. Ono's essay and the other forum essays offer numerous possibilities for what might await the discipline and the sub-discipline in the next 15 years. This article is available currently to access from Rutledge Taylor & Francis and it's free. A link to the article is available on the podcast page at natcom.org/podcast. Also, in NCA news, *Black Panther and the Alt-Right: Networks of Racial Ideology* by Baylor University associate professors of communication, Scott J Varda and Leslie A. Hahner was recently published in Critical Studies in Media Communication. In the article, the authors examine how alt-right media publications interpreted Black Panther as a film that supports Donald Trump's nationalistic policies. NCA members can read both of these essays by logging in at natcom.org/journals. Remember, all of NCA's journal content from 1915 to the present is available to NCA members at natcom.org/journals.

Listeners, I hope you'll tune in for the next episode of *Communication Matters* when we'll hear from our spring public program panelists on political communication in battleground states. Joining us will be Sumana Chattopadhyay who is an associate professor at Marquette University; Young Mie Kim, a professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison; Robert Kraig, executive director of Citizen Action of Wisconsin; Thomas A. Salek, assistant professor of communication at Concordia University in Chicago; and Shawn Turner, professor of practice strategic communication at Michigan State University. To view our participants' bios and learn more about this special podcast episode, please visit natcom.org/PublicPrograms, all one word, natcom.org/PublicPrograms. We hope you'll tune in to this exciting next episode of *Communication Matters, the NCA podcast*.

Be sure to engage with us on social media by liking us on Facebook, following NCA on Twitter and Instagram and watching us on YouTube. And before you go, hit subscribe wherever you get your podcasts to listen in as we discuss emerging scholarship, establish theory and new applications, all exploring just how much communication matters in our classrooms, in our communities and in our world. See you next time.

Conclusion:
Communication Matters is hosted by NCA Executive Director Trevor Parry-Giles and is recorded in our national office in downtown Washington DC. The podcast is recorded and produced by Assistant Director for Digital Strategies Chelsea Bowes with writing support from Director of External Affairs and Publications Wendy Fernando and Content Development Specialist Grace Hébert. Thank you for listening.

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