**Chapter Eleven Introduction Video Transcript**

Rhetoric in the 21st century.

Rhetorical theory today can be thought about as a response to intense social turmoil, domestic political polarization, global conflict, ecological catastrophe, and massive technological revolution. So the communication and English departments rhetorical theory can be thought of as a response to those challenges and also the challenges to rhetoric's canon and norms and tradition we've been working on throughout the previous 10 chapters. A lot of these challenges are motivated by efforts to decenter white masculinity and amplify the experiences of non-white, non-Western, and non-US people in projects like #CommunicationSoWhite and #RhetoricSoWhite. Going forward, the vitality of rhetorical theory will depend on how the discipline responds to these dynamic conditions.

In Chapter 11, as we light up the pathway forward, we divide the chapter into two different sections. In this short video, I'm going to talk for a second about the first section, and that's specifically related to visual rhetoric and digital rhetoric. We'll look closely at how social and cultural conditions are affecting rhetorical practices, specifically visual rhetoric and digital rhetoric. The essential development in the 21st century rhetorical practice, and of course, you know this based on your own rhetorical practice, is the rise of visual, representational, and material rhetorics. And again, something that you're probably familiar with in your own life. So consider the impact that visual technologies have had on how you might experience a music concert, an athletic event, or even just your experience in the classroom. But also consider how new media innovations and shifts in technologies have affected larger social and political conditions. So as always, we kind of want to take your own personal experience.

If you go to a baseball game, for example, if you're sitting in your classroom before the professor gets there, if you're at a concert, I'm young enough to remember when we used to go to concerts and actually just watch the performance. Now, a lot of our everyday experiences are mediated by at least the prospect of visual technologies, and so it's having a profound impact on our daily practices. If we're interested in how we theorize those daily practices, you can imagine that the emergence, the rise of visual technologies and digital rhetoric would have a profound impact on our ability to systematize rhetorical efficacy. And so we use the phrase in Chapter 11, a contest for attention. So one of the most important subheadings in Chapter 11 describes a contest for attention. What we mean by that is rhetorical efficacy today depends on the ability to attract attention. So attention can be thought of like a commodity. Now, of course, attention isn't an idea. It's something that's immaterial. It's not like wheat or pigs or sweet Texas crude oil or something like that. At the same time, it has become something that can be packaged and sold. And there's no better example of that than the internet and then more specifically social media. So you might think about some of the ways that you use social media. If you're on Snapchat, if you're on TikTok, if you're on Instagram, those products generally are free, free to use. But of course, they're not actually free. They're really, really expensive. So who's paying for that? Kind of goes back to the old adage that if you're getting something for free on the internet, you are the product. So you are being kind of bought and sold and probably more accurately, your attention is being bought and sold, based on or kind of on these social media platforms. So rhetorical theorists that are interested in symbolic influence in the 21st century have to factor in the changed way that attention and this contest for attention mediates rhetorical efficacy or rhetorical effectiveness in our day and age. We use one example in chapter 11 that I think is fitting. It may be outdated by the time you read it, but it was fitting kind of in my own classroom as I was thinking about this contest for attention. And that involves Beyonce's 2016 song Formation. And in the song, she references Red Lobster and she talks about when her man has pleased her, she'll reward him by taking him to Red Lobster. And so it was just a wonderful kind of marketing opportunity for the Red Lobster restaurant chain, especially because they have kind of been losing out on younger customers to restaurants like Olive Garden and Denny's. So to be name checked by Beyoncé in this song presented, you know, Red Lobster, a wonderful opportunity, but they blew it. They were totally unprepared. And we describe in the chapter how they delayed eight hours before tweeting out something that was kind of cheesy and left the internet unimpressed.

So what does Beyoncé and Red Lobster have to do with rhetorical theory in the 21st century? Well, they failed. Red Lobster's rhetorical failure reflects how the medium lights up different criteria for theorizing rhetorical effects. It took them eight hours. Which Aristotle would think is not a lot of time. It is a long time now. So things like timeliness and the ability to kind of shape, attract attention and shape public conversations, these things are demanded by digital rhetoric. And therefore, they're important when we think about how we evaluate potency, how we evaluate kind of rhetorical effectiveness.

And of course, in May of 2024, Red Lobster filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy. So what does this have to do with you? As a digital native, as someone that is familiar with the kind of urgency and timeliness and just kind of the structure of how one communicates on digital platforms, you will have the ability when you enter the job market to use your now deft experience with rhetorical theory and your personal experience with digital rhetorics and visual rhetoric to kind of thrive in this new environment.