



THE LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL INTERACTION WORKING GROUP  
VIRTUAL LECTURE SERIES

# The Individualization of Racism

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One of the impediments to achieving racial justice in US society is the way much of our public discourse fails to recognize the systemic and institutional dimensions of racism. After events of racial significance, public discourse often gravitates toward responses that work to individualize racism. The process of individualizing racism relies on a narrow and incomplete understanding of racism, reducing the concept to individual acts of bigotry or racial animus that should, according to the logic of what Jane Hill (2008) has termed the "folk theory of racism," be easily recognizable in overt and visible acts (e.g., racist slurs, epithets). The discursive routines that are premised on this narrow understanding of racism focus attention on individual "racists," positioning such individuals as societal outcasts in a society otherwise supposedly unhindered by racism. This minimizes or erases the patterns and policies that perpetuate racial inequities. In this talk, I illustrate how the individualization of racism is achieved in US public discourse, drawing examples from prior work I have done on this topic in addition to considering how the revival of the "law and order" trope last summer after the killing of George Floyd helped Trump minimize concerns over the widespread pattern of state-sanctioned violence against African Americans.

**FRIDAY, MAY 14, 2021**  
**11:00 - 12:15 PM (EST)**

**Adam Hodges** is a sociocultural linguist and an adjunct professor of linguistics at the University of Colorado Boulder. His interests focus on how language impacts contemporary social and political issues, such as the collective enactment of racism or the role language plays in politics. His recent book, *When Words Trump Politics: Resisting a Hostile Regime of Language* (2019, Stanford University Press), explores political discourse during the Trump era. His articles have appeared in *American Anthropologist*, *Discourse & Society*, *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, *Language & Communication*, and *Language in Society*; and he has contributed chapters to *Language and Social Justice in Practice*, *The Handbook of Language and Politics*, *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, and *The International Encyclopedia of Language and Social Interaction*.



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