

# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

## The Challenges of Teaching About the Black Lives Matter Movement: A Dialogue

by Donna Troka and Dorcas Adedoja



RESISTING RACISM: FROM CIVIL RIGHTS TO BLACK LIVES MATTER STUDENT EXHIBIT AS EXHIBITED IN THE TEACHING AND LEARNING STUDIO IN THE STUART A. ROSE MANUSCRIPT, ARCHIVES, AND RARE BOOK LIBRARY, EMORY UNIVERSITY. ATLANTA, GEORGIA APRIL 2016. IMAGE: DONNA TROKA

*Racism is a visceral experience, that is, it dislodges brains, blocks airways, rips muscle, extracts organs, cracks bones, breaks teeth. Ta-Nehisi Coates<sup>1</sup>*

*So the project that we are building is a love note to our folks. It's also, hopefully, shifting the narrative from a help narrative: it's not about black communities needing help, right? It's about investing in and resourcing black communities to be able to do for ourselves. Part of the dialogue that we want to be having is around investment, around resourcing, around intersections, around how state violence looks in a multitude of ways and how it impacts us in many aspects of our lives. Alicia Garza<sup>2</sup>*

In spring 2016, I (Donna) taught a 300-level undergraduate American Studies/Interdisciplinary Studies course entitled "Resisting Racism: From Black is Beautiful to Black Lives Matter" at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. Emory University was founded in 1836 in Oxford, Georgia about forty miles east of Atlanta. It was founded as an all-white, all-male, small liberal arts university that catered mostly to local families. The campus was moved to its present day Atlanta location in 1915, nestled in the upscale Druid Hills neighborhood. The university officially became co-educational in 1953 and ten years later racially integrated when African American students Allie Saxon and Verdell Bellamy entered Emory's School of Nursing. In the one hundred and eighty years since its founding, Emory has changed a great deal. Not only have the demographics of students and faculty changed radically (the class of 2020 is 49% white and 51% students of color, and 16% of students on the Atlanta campus are international), but Emory is now understood as a research one institution that, along with the ever-growing Emory Healthcare, is the second largest employer in the metro Atlanta area. Therefore, while it started out as a small liberal arts university that primarily served white families in the region, Emory has now become a global player in research, healthcare, and teaching.

Like that of many universities and colleges in the United States, Emory's history also uncovers the ways in which the school was entangled with the institution of slavery. In 2011, Emory released a formal statement of regret for its involvement in slavery. The declaration acknowledges that Emory was founded in 1836 by the Episcopal Methodist Church in Oxford, Georgia and named after John Emory, a Methodist bishop who was a slave owner. It also notes that Emory's founders overwhelmingly supported slavery and it states that people who were enslaved helped build and support the institution in its early days.

Since the release of the proclamation, a number of incidents that have heightened racial tensions have occurred on campus. In 2013, former president James Wagner praised the "three-fifths compromise" as a good example of compromise in the Emory alumni magazine.<sup>3</sup> Last spring, pro-Trump chalkings on campus that among

other things included the messages "Build the Wall" and "Accept the Inevitable: Trump 2016" provoked student protests that led to the release of a statement from President Wagner that incited further student outrage.<sup>4</sup> Despite the turmoil, change could be on Emory's horizon as Dr. Claire E. Sterk, Emory's first female president, assumed the presidency on September 1, 2016. Trained in sociology and anthropology, President Sterk has faculty appointments in those areas as well as Public Health and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and has discussed publically her dedication to working more deeply with the communities that surround Emory's campus.

It was amidst this rise of anti-racist activism on Emory's campus and across the nation that I developed my Resisting Racism course. The idea for this course came from a couple of different places. As I watched demonstrations and protests unfold as part of the Black Lives Matter movement I was struck by all the different ways that Black people and their allies were putting their bodies on the line to demand recognition of Black humanity. Whether they were protestors stopping traffic on Atlanta's highways, or Black women going topless to stop traffic on Market Street in San Francisco, or Emory's Theology students staging a "die in" on campus after grand juries ruled to not indict white police officers in the murders of Michael Brown and Eric Garner, these courageous people were demanding change. These contemporary disruptions reminded me of marches, sit-ins, and strikes of the past in Selma, Memphis, and Atlanta. I began to think about what we could learn if we were able to think about those historical moments and juxtapose them with our present political moment. How are the strategies and approaches similar? What has changed? What has remained the same?

***These students were demanding new approaches to anti-racist movements and were working on unlearning the mainstream narratives of past movements.***

This class was also motivated by my experiences with another class in fall 2015. Along with being adjunct faculty, I am also staff in a center that sponsored a university course on Ferguson.<sup>5</sup> As someone who helped to develop the course, I attended about half of the classes and what I heard from students were critiques of the sexism, homophobia, and patriarchal nature of the Civil Rights Movement. Students were frustrated by the continued focus only on male leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. and John Lewis while rarely did they hear about the work of women like Diane Nash and Ella Baker. They also questioned a movement that would leave behind or diminish the work of Bayard Rustin because he was gay. These students were demanding new approaches to anti-racist movements and were working on unlearning the mainstream narratives of past movements. While I was thrilled that students were critically engaging history (and calling out sexism and homophobia when they saw it), I was worried that the gains the Civil Rights Movement

achieved (integration, voting rights, increase in Black leadership, exposure of red-lining in housing, the building of multi-racial coalitional politics for example) would be lost in a full scale dismissal of it and the approaches employed. I wondered if they would think differently if they actually "held history in their hands" in Emory's archives of the Civil Rights Movement (Adedjoja 2016).

And so my course was born. I knew I wanted to ask students to compare what they were seeing transpire in

the current moment (mostly in connection to the Black Lives Matter movement) to what they would learn about (or already knew about) the Civil Rights Movement. I also knew I wanted them to work with primary documents from the Civil Rights Movement (at least those that were part of Emory's collections) and ask them to develop some type of public scholarship from what they learned (in the form of blog posts and an exhibit).

While there is much room for improvement, I think the first attempt at the class was a good start. Students were able to really delve in the historical documents and learn new things and/or revise their understandings of the Civil Rights Movement. Several students (white and of color) told me they didn't really know the origins of the Black Lives Matter movement, especially that it was started by three Black **women**. I think this class helped some students to better understand the activism that was happening on our own campus, and to begin to understand how the patriarchal and male-centered mainstream media chose to focus mostly on Black cisgendered men who were being killed by police.<sup>6</sup>

At the same time, as is true with trying any new innovation in the classroom, asking students to do archival research and then turn that research into a physical exhibit in one semester proved to be challenging for both the students and myself. The logistics were a lot to manage and there was a lot of confusion, so that part of the class has been revised significantly for the fall. This semester I incorporated a more explicit discussion of my positionality as a white woman teaching a class on resisting racism into my first day class introduction. I talked about how hopeless and helpless I felt as I watched (often white) police officers assault and murder Black men, women, and children in cities across the United States and not be held accountable. At the same time I felt inspired and hopeful as I saw (mostly) young people of color (and some white people) stand up against that violence in the streets, on Emory's campus, and on social media and *not back down*. I explained to my students that I believe a strategy for working to dismantle inequality is for powerful and disempowered groups to work together across difference. Dominant groups need to work with subordinated groups in order to effect real structural change. For instance, white people must work in tandem with people of color to eradicate racism and white supremacy, men must fight alongside women to eliminate patriarchy, and straight and cisgender people need to join LGBTQ people to eradicate homophobia and transphobia. Of course, identities are intersectional and complex so no one of these efforts will exist in isolation. Rather, the fight against racism will undoubtedly include parallel efforts to dismantle sexism and transphobia as all of us occupy multiple identity categories that work in conjunction to structure our lives in drastically different ways. Therefore, I see my classroom as an activist/activating space where together we can investigate history and our present political moment and figure out how we can make change where we are right now. Lastly, I explained this is hard work that may cause discomfort but that I believe it is work worth doing and that I felt honored to be able to do this work alongside them.

HEALTH PANEL FOR RESISTING RACISM: FROM CIVIL RIGHTS TO BLACK LIVES MATTER STUDENT EXHIBIT AT EMORY UNIVERSITY, ATLANTA, GEORGIA APRIL 2016.

Before I started teaching my class in spring 2016, a student at Emory named Dorcas came to talk to me about raising money for an undergraduate “Blacktivism” conference that was happening on campus. In the course of that conversation, I told her about the class I was going to teach on Black Lives Matter and the Civil Rights Movement. She asked me what it was like to teach such a course as a white woman. I tried to be as direct and honest as I could and explained that I think it is important for white people to recognize their white privilege while also doing work to eradicate racism and white supremacy. I hoped that my course would do some of that work. I was struck both in that conversation and in the Ferguson class by how frank she was about power and inequality and secretly hoped she would take my course. She did. And not only did she bring a level of frankness but she also brought a level of critical analysis that is rare in such a young student (she was a sophomore). When I saw the call for articles for a special issue of *Radical Teacher*, I knew I wanted to ask her to co-write an article with me.

After some discussion, we decided to address four questions in our article. The first two come directly from the *Radical Teacher* call for papers. I chose them because they were the two questions that most directly connected with my course objectives for the Resisting Racism course. The last two questions came from Dorcas and were in response to our class last spring.

Before we get to our exchange, a few words from Dorcas on what inspired the last two questions she created.

**Dorcas:** A comparison of my experience as a student in the Resisting Racism course as opposed to other racial courses I have taken at Emory sparked the creation of the last two questions. I have taken numerous courses relating to racism in the past and present at this university over a two year span and have only been given an infinitesimal amount time to brainstorm ways to stop anti-black racism in one, which was the special topics course on Ferguson. Contemplating effective tactics that can be initiated to end anti-black oppressive violence should be the norm in every class, especially at institutions that claim to produce agents of change. I did, however, enjoy Resisting Racism as a class because it dissected race effectively while simultaneously creating a space that offered some protection to black students. It was evident that Dr. Troka had engaged with work concerning the issues black students face at predominantly white institutions, and she did her best to ensure that no one fell victim to any social pressures that may come with being black in a class about race. Nonetheless, I was left wondering if everyone walked away feeling that they benefitted as much as the next person, as I often hear students of black experience note that predominately white institutions structure their courses on racial matters in a way that caters to white comfort.

Considering this, the four questions we will discuss are as follows:

- How did our course link the present crisis to a long historical arc of racial justice and resistance in the United States and beyond?
- How were student voices and experiences centered in discussions of Black Lives Matter?
- How can we teach in a racially diverse classroom about racism and white privilege in such a way that all students benefit from the discourse?
- How do we develop a framework that moves beyond simply naming and highlighting Black pain (historically and currently) to requiring all students to think of innovative solutions to stop racism?

*Disclaimer from Dorcas: I am black and can only speak on my own experience in class as a black person. I do not speak for all black people, people of color, or everyone who was enrolled in this course. I am aware that many of the things discussed may apply to other people of color, but I use black to emphasize that this is about my personal experience as a black student. I additionally use black to honor the fact that this course was designed to compare and contrast the Civil Rights Movement to Black Lives Matter, both of which are movements that center black people.*

### **How did the course link the present crisis to a long historical arc of racial justice and resistance in the U.S. and beyond?**

**Donna:** Throughout our course I had hoped to make a number of different connections. The first was *historic*. I wanted students to get a broader understanding of the Civil Rights Movement. Most (if not all) of the students in the class knew of the work Martin Luther King did but few understood how the movement maintained itself and who else was doing important work. I also asked the students to think about how that leadership structure of one charismatic religiously affiliated leader compared to the “leaderful” (or what some see as “leaderless”) Black Lives Matter movement. Additionally, I wanted to talk specifically about the tactics the Civil Rights Movement used (nonviolent and violent) and see how they compared to various tactics used in the Black Lives Matter movement. Lastly, I was interested in the impact of social media on movement making. How have Twitter, Facebook, and blogs helped to shape contemporary movements and what were the corollaries to these technologies in earlier movements?

The second was *theoretical*. I thought it was important that students have some understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of social movements, critical race theory/feminist theory (with a focus on intersectionality) as well as respectability politics. Here I hoped this theoretical basis would help students to make connections between the past and present and highlight the long history of agitation and community work that paved the way for the Black Lives Matter movement. While the beginnings of

Black Lives Matter may have been more serendipitous— founder Patrisse Cullors putting the “#” before the “Black Lives Matter” that other founder Alicia Garza had just Facebooked about— their collaborative, coalitional, and intersectional approach was no coincidence and it was why the movement has been so successful and inclusive. This message was very important to me so I made sure that we engaged scholarship that clearly articulated this.

The third was *pedagogical*. Foundational to this class was both archival research and the development of public scholarship. This was carried out not only in the structure of the class— discussions of scholarship in the classroom on Tuesdays and archival research in the library on Thursdays— but also in the assignments. Instead of having them write responses that only I would read, I asked students to post to our class blog so that our discussions could continue outside the class. I also asked students to develop a physical exhibit based on their archival findings (with comparisons to the contemporary moment) and to start contributions to a digital exhibit on Omeka (which will go public once copyright to all the archival materials is sorted out). My goal with the exhibits was to not only draw attention to the holdings in the library and to share them with a larger audience but also to begin a discussion about the ways in which the historical and contemporary moments do and do not look different when it comes to issues of race and racism in the United States.

**Dorcas:** The course connected the present crisis to the past by using a wide array of tactics in a short time span. A timeline of historical events in the fight for racial equity was outlined at the very beginning of the course. Scholarly works by past organizers were released to us as well, through various forms of media for our expedited, but effective consumption. There were clear leitmotifs in the works of the past that were evident in present issues. Connections between both realms of time were naturally made as we read and discussed the content.

The most effective tactic in linking the past to the present, however, was the process of curating our class exhibit. This required us to essentially learn how to sift through history and draw conclusions from it. Learning these skills proved to be invaluable as my peers and I stumbled upon artifacts that unquestionably provided insights concerning the influence of past events on the current racial unrest we were seeing unfold outside of the classroom. Common artifacts discovered included protest flyers with missions, pictures of demonstrations, and newspaper articles that detailed events that were eerily similar to the headlines we were seeing happen right in front of us.

#### **How were student voices and experiences centered in discussions of Black Lives Matter?**

**Donna:** Students’ voices and experiences were centered in three places in the class but in very different ways. First of all, as in any discussion-based seminar, students discussed the readings we did in class. For most of our Tuesday afternoon sessions, that was a free form discussion that I facilitated by asking framing questions, getting clarification, and, oftentimes, writing things on the board as a record of what we talked about and a map of how the

topics we were addressing connected to one another. Because this class took place during a presidential primary and during a time when there was an active anti-racist movement on campus (and across the country) students sometimes brought these issues into class and related them to their own lives, to our class, or to other classes they were taking.

The second place that students’ voices and experiences were centered was in our class blog. We used Scholablogs, a blogging system that is a university version of Wordpress. This blog was closed and required university credentials to log in as well as an invitation to participate from me. Students were asked to post five blogs over the fifteen-week semester as well as comment five times (at least) on their classmates’ posts. Pedagogically, the goal of these posts was to encourage students to continue thinking (and talking) about the issues we addressed in class asynchronously. In the past I have used one to two page essays (critical responses) to encourage students to dive deeper into the material we are reading and discussing in class. Five years ago I started using a class blog instead because it allowed for a multi-directional conversation among my students rather than a closed discussion between just one student and me. Much like our classroom discussion, the class blog became a place where students discussed their own viewpoints and, in some cases, personal histories. Students talked about how they came to understand what intersectionality or respectability politics mean. Others addressed the power of music both in the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Lives Matter movement. The blog became a snapshot of students’ engagement with the scholarship they were assigned to read as well as the political moments they existed in individually and as a group.

The third place students’ voices were centered was our end of the semester exhibit based on the archival research students had conducted during our Thursday sessions of the semester. Here students took the disparate artifacts they found as a group and crafted a narrative about the topic they had signed up for. There were six topics: Protest Tactics; Education; Policing; White Supremacy & White Privilege; Health; and Sex & Gender. Each group had three students except the Sex & Gender group which had four. This part of the class was collaborative in a lot of ways. The students within each group did their own research but had to share their finds with their group mates. Every week or so I would try and check in with each group to learn about what they were finding and how that was shaping the narrative of their final exhibit panel. Each group not only gave input on which artifacts made the final cut and how they would work together to tell a story to the exhibit viewer, they also gave input on how they would like their final panel to be laid out. The actual graphic design of the panel was done by a designer on the production team, but up until the very end students gave their opinions and ideas to the production team, sometimes directly and sometimes through me. Though I had to make some “executive decisions” because of space restrictions or missing artifacts, we tried to stay as true as possible to each group’s vision for their final panel.

One final note about student's voices: when I saw the call for submissions for this special issue of *Radical Teacher*, I knew I wanted to write something but I also knew I wanted to write it with a student. For me, the only way forward with this work is collaboratively with students. I think the only way I can continue to grow pedagogically and personally is to remain in conversation with the students I am working with. If my goal is to use teaching at the university level as a way to make change in the world, I need to continue to check in with my students and find out if I am meeting that objective. And if I am not (which, often, I am not) I need to find ways to revise my approaches and practices so that I am working toward change. Based on many of the suggestions that students made during the class and that Dorcas made in the process of working on this article I have changed things for this semester's iteration of the course. I have included an assignment where students reflect on their own experiences of race on Emory's campus (on film) and suggest ways to dismantle inequality on campus. I have also invited a local activist from Southerners on New Ground (SONG) to come and talk about resisting racism in Atlanta and how they work with a local chapter of Black Lives Matter.

**Dorcas:** My peers and I were pushed to center ourselves in a variety of ways as this course demanded a lot of personal reflection. The five blog posts and discussions undoubtedly provide physical "evidence" of centering student experience. It is important to note, however, that the experiences of my peers were also highlighted in ways that were intangible. Delving into black history on our campus and beyond via the archives revealed people who went through many of the same social ills we were facing as students now. While it may seem obvious that there were people before us who endured much of the same, putting names and faces to the past allowed us to center ourselves in the present. In short, investigating the dynamic between black and white bodies in history prompted us to interrogate the ways we currently exist.

**How can we teach a racially diverse classroom about racism and white privilege in such a way that all students benefit from the discourse?**

**Donna:** Dorcas suggested we discuss this question as I think it forces us to think about how this course material impacts students of color (especially Black students) and white students differently. I knew this to be true (that is, theoretically and probably intellectually I had a sense that each student's positionality would inform the way they received the materials we engaged with) but it didn't really hit home until the last blog assignment. For this last blog post, I prompted students to reflect back on what they had learned about the Black Lives Matter movement throughout the course. Many took the opportunity to reflect back on the class as a whole and this uncovered some very interesting findings. Dorcas began her blog post saying:

*Most of the material in the class did not change my perception of the Black Lives Matter movement because I had reviewed it before due to other classes, my social media feed because I have a lot of friends who are deeply invested in*

*black liberation work, and because I live a lot of the topics we discuss in class every day. For instance, reading Our Demand Is Simple: Stop Killing Us by Joseph Kang did not teach me anything new because I had been following Johnetta Elzie and DeRay Mckesson for 2 years and some change. Higginbotham's Politics of Respectability was not all that new to me because the ideology of respectability is something I grapple with daily because I grew up in the church and fail almost every requirement of what it means to be a respectable black woman (and do*

**SCHOOL DESEGREGATION: the first six years**

"School Desegregation: The First Six Years," 1966. This publication was written by members of the Southern Regional Council in an effort to remedy an earlier historical report that had expressed fear and uncertainty about desegregation. The pamphlet includes a list of 100 names of individuals who were instrumental in the desegregation process, as well as a list of 100 names of individuals who were instrumental in the desegregation process, and the racial capabilities of affected areas.

Francis Pickens-Peake papers

**EDUCATION**

**The brave children were met with rampant hate and fear of racial mixing**

Often our memory of school desegregation honors the brave children in primary and secondary public schools who were met with rampant hate and fear of racial mixing from white parents. While this legacy remains impactful, the integration progress in higher education is often forgotten in our historical narrative. How did colleges and universities (including Emory) take on this challenge? How can we remember the legacy of higher education integration alongside primary and secondary education integration?

**Separate Schools: "Letson's Brainwash" 1961.** "Letson's Brainwash" is an article written by Broad Taylor for anti-desegregation pamphlet, Separate Schools, detailing the negative consequences that white students and faculty would face under the desegregation policy. Suzanne Handman, John Letson prepared to address for Atlanta's public schools.

Francis Pickens-Peake papers

**Statement of 131 Emory theology students to the board of trustees, 1961. Meeting students in class, 1963.**

Contemporary histories of desegregation often focus on K-12 education. But, how was Emory involved? This letter from Calabar School of Theology students, as well as an image of a socially integrated group of young students, illustrates a turning point for the Emory community. Although the push for desegregation began in the late 1950s, the first African American students were not admitted until 1963.

Emory University desegregation collection. Ada Fort papers

**a first step toward school integration**

**A First Step toward School Integration, 1966.** This pamphlet was published by the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) to provide a summary of school desegregation prior to 1966. It is meant to be intended for CORE affiliates to help implement desegregation, as it also serves a list of "specific lines" for anti-segregationists to take.

Francis Pickens-Peake papers

**Steps of interest include:**

- "Organize parents ahead of time so they do not feel they are alone."
- "Let schools and public officials know you are interested and active and what your goals are."
- "Protest immediately and police leniency or softness towards agitators who are breaking the law."
- "Take your place in trouble areas to give positive witness to your stand."
- "Do not underestimate your own power and the power of your group."

**INTEGRATION RESOURCE**

EDUCATION PANEL FOR RESISTING RACISM: FROM CIVIL RIGHTS TO BLACK LIVES MATTER STUDENT EXHIBIT AT EMORY UNIVERSITY. ATLANTA, GEORGIA APRIL 2016.

not at all feel bad about it). Every reading we reviewed in class was applicable to my life in one way or another. Therefore, the terminology may have been new, but not the concept. (DA)

Another Black student added, "The readings/the class in general have not completely changed my view of the movement necessarily, but they have opened up my eyes a little more" (KM). White students, on the other hand, admitted "I had no understanding about the originators of the hashtag nor that they had an organization with various chapters sprung up around it" (KD) and "I learned so much

more about the emotional side and individual stories through the readings in this class. To bring it all the way back to the beginning, [Ta-Nehisi] Coates taught me a tremendous amount about the day-to-day of being Black in America" (SF). Lastly, one white student reflected, saying,

*Previous to our class, I viewed the Black Lives Matter movement as an attempt to highlight police brutality through various forms of social media and news outlets. I viewed the hashtag as a clever marketing tactic to expand the social revolution. In reflecting on this view, I definitely think my opinion has evolved. After hearing our classroom discussions, and reading the numerous articles, I believe Black Lives Matter is meant not only to highlight police brutality and racial profiling of Black Americans, but also to encompass ideas of systematic oppression. (EM)*

These very different reflections on our course and its content then beg the question: how does one teach about race, racism, and inequality generally and the Black Lives Matter movement specifically, to an interdisciplinarily trained and racially heterogeneous group of students? In most of my teaching I often "aim for the middle," that is, chose material that is not too introductory and not too difficult. That way, some material will be obvious or at least review to some students but will be novel to others. At the same time, I often hope that some of the learning will be "horizontal," that is, that students will learn from one another: in discussion, in group work, or in the case of our class, in public scholarship like our blog. What I think I need to consider more for this class is what are the **costs** of that horizontal learning for the Black students who are doing the "teaching" (intentionally, say in discussion of the readings, or unintentionally, in telling their own stories of experiences of microaggressions on campus)?

Is it possible to get students who come from such different places racially, socioeconomically, regionally, disciplinarily, and even in level of life experiences all "up to speed" before we dive into the deep waters of systemic and institutionalized inequality and the ways in which the Black Lives Matter movement is trying to dismantle these systems?

My quick answer is "no." There is no way in one semester you can get a seminar of twenty students "up to speed" so to speak. What I think teachers can do is talk about this challenge on day one of your class. Some folks are going to know a lot about the material; some folks will know almost nothing about it. It is not the job of those who know to educate those that don't; instead we are all responsible for our own education. Nor is it anyone's job to speak for all \_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank). At the same time, the stories we tell during discussion or in our blog posts may be educative to other students in the class. If something a classmate says sparks an interest for another classmate, encourage them to create a reading list on that topic. This was a task I took on in the Ferguson course. It became clear early on that some students had not really thought about racism or white privilege before entering the course (because they didn't have to) so I pulled together a

**PROTEST TACTICS**

**Emory's journey through racial justice movements, from Civil Rights to Black Lives Matter**

exemplifies the evolution of students' push for equality nationally. Using nonviolence, students raise their voices and demand change from Emory's administration. One might ask, has nonviolence worked as a tactic in creating change? How has Emory's administration evolved its response to student protests for racial justice on campus? What can we learn from college students about nonviolent movements?

**THE EMORY WHEEL** SPECIAL EDITION  
**Black Students Present Demands**  
 SGA Legislature Convenes Special Session  
 Monday Quad Rally Draws Over 500

**EMORY STUDENT PROTESTS**

Emory students contribute to the national conversation by leading bottom-up nonviolent protests on campus and demanding institutional change.

Demands like the creation of an African American Studies program were met, but students today still demand better institutional and psychological care for Black students, faculty, and staff. While the 1960s protests resulted in a restraining order, we see hope as the Emory administration proudly announces a more comprehensive plan to address such institutional change this year. This progress, while unfinished, comes from the constant strength of students' voices throughout its history.

PROTEST PANEL FOR RESISTING RACISM: FROM CIVIL RIGHTS TO BLACK LIVES MATTER STUDENT EXHIBIT AT EMORY UNIVERSITY, ATLANTA, GEORGIA APRIL 2016.

bibliography via google docs entitled "Resources for people who want to educate themselves about racism & inequality." One of the white students in the class then went through and made it an annotated bibliography so that it would be easier to use.

I think it also makes sense to create opportunities (like co-authoring an article or TA-ing a subsequent course) for those students who are more experienced with the course content. Ask them to help revise the class, to incorporate more material and assignments that challenge them, and that take them to places they want to go intellectually. And perhaps I don't need to say this in this forum, but be humble and listen to (and believe) your students.

**Dorcas:**When discussing white privilege in a racially diverse setting, there will always be people who are more cognizant of it because of personal experience. An educator clearly has no control over that. Stopping at this conclusion, however, often puts marginalized students in an unfair situation. College classrooms should be a place where students have the opportunity to just be students, but that is often not the case when coursework is centered on racism and white privilege.

Claiming black students do not learn anything in racially diverse classes relating to racism and white privilege would be a lie, but there seem to be more costs than benefits that come with placing oneself there. There are hundreds of think pieces that have been written on being black at a predominantly white school in a conversation about race. Danielle's *One Black Girl, Many Words* blog post entitled "Black Tokenism & the PWI Experience" is one that does a fantastic job summarizing experiences that seem all too familiar for black students. Danielle writes:

*So now it is you who must speak on behalf of your race. It is you who must know everything about Black issues and hold all of the answers. Your classmates and even your professors will be looking to you.*<sup>7</sup>

The key to ensuring that all students benefit from a course about racism and white privilege is a professor that does his/her best to eliminate the common downsides for present marginalized students. This requires listening to student experiences in order to guarantee that situations that have caused discomfort in the past do not recur. The good news is one does not have to wait to meet a marginalized student to find narratives because we live in the fantastic era of technology. A google search of "(insert marginalized identifier here) at (insert type of school here)" will usually bring about at least three blog posts similar to Danielle's by students writing away their grievances.

Striving to establish a course on racism or white privilege as one that is beneficial for all also consists of making a commitment to avoid the utilization of teaching methods that thrust students in a position to defend their existence or the validity of the trauma they may have dealt with before the class began. This can be done by presenting the facts before having a debate or discussion

to avoid uninformed beliefs that may erase or belittle the experiences of others in the room. Our class was wonderful because the sources of information we were given did not question the legitimacy of racism. The coursework simply showcased the methods of exclusion America enacted against blacks by pulling various forms of media from history. It was what it was, and there was little room for misinterpretation.

**How do we develop a framework that moves beyond simply naming and highlighting Black pain (historically and currently) to requiring all students to think of innovative solutions to stop racism?**

**Donna:**I began my class with Ta-Nehisi Coates's book *Between the World and Me* and excerpts of Claudine Rankine's book *Citizen: An American Lyric* for a couple of reasons. Pedagogically, I started with something less overtly theoretical because I wanted to ease students into the material. Politically, I found these two readings helpful in framing the class with their reflections on the positionality of the Black body in America. This foregrounding of Black bodies was important to me both historically and contemporarily. When talking about the Civil Rights Movement we talked about Black male sanitation workers wearing placards that asserted "I Am a Man" on their bodies as they picketed. In the archives we read statements and saw images of Black protesters' bodies being beaten by white police officers and attacked by police dogs. And in the sit-ins at lunch counters and occupation of jail cells (when people purposefully did not pay bail so the movement would stay in the news) Black (and sometimes white) bodies stayed in spite of physical and verbal abuse or neglect.

And in the present moment, as part of the Black Lives Matter movement, we see the importance of bodies (mostly of color but sometimes also white) as part of the resistance: bodies stopping traffic, bodies disrupting brunch, bodies "dying in" in malls and on campuses. We also see Black bodies shot, choked, and pulled over, left to die on the street, the sidewalk, and in a jail cell. But how can we move beyond the pain that Black bodies have and continue to endure because of systemic racism? And how can we "encourage" (read: require) our students to develop ways to resist/deconstruct/eradicate these systems of inequality?

***Striving to establish a course on racism or white privilege as one that is beneficial for all also consists of making a commitment to avoid the utilization of teaching methods that thrust students in a position to defend their existence or the validity of the trauma they may have dealt with before the class began.***

The first step, I think, is exposure -- exposing students to the long history of the Civil Rights Movement and to the much shorter history of the Black Lives Matter movement

to racism, and to the ways that folks have resisted racism over the years. In our class, that exposure came through the readings we read, the videos we watched, and the archival research we did. The second step was to ask students to think, talk, and write critically about these histories and how they come together and come apart. This happened in our class blogs and discussions, and ultimately in the creation of a class exhibit. What conversations with Dorcas and some of her classmates made clear to me was that this was not enough. In an effort to radicalize my pedagogy more, I suggest two projects: a side-car course on the power of Black self-love and a creative project about race on campus.

This fall I will be teaching this course again and in addition to that, I will be teaching what is called a "side car" course. Side-car courses are funded through the Institute for the Liberal Arts (ILA) and are one credit courses that focus on a topic that is an overlap between two different courses. In my case, I will be teaching a side car course entitled "The Power of Black Self Love" with Dr. Dianne Stewart, Associate Professor in the Department of Religion and African American Studies. Here is the description of the side car course:

The side car course we are proposing is located at the overlap of our two courses. While Dr. Stewart's course speaks directly to the theory and practice of Black Love, Dr. Troka's course looks at how Black people have celebrated Blackness (Black is Beautiful, Black Power) and demanded recognition of Black humanity (I am a Man, #BlackLivesMatter) over the last sixty years. We will ask students to consider not only theories of Black Love and histories of Black social movements, but also to interrogate contemporary cultural products of these areas. More specifically we are interested in the power and force of Black Twitter over the last decade, the impact of social media on Black Lives (#BlackLivesMatter and #SayHerName), an interest in Black futurism or Afrofuturism, the creation and continued support of Black Girl Magic (both generally but also looking at the success of ShondaRhimes, Kerry Washington, Viola Davis, and Ava DuVernay). With this focus, we hope to raise awareness and bring attention to the power of Black (Self) Love amidst continued efforts at Black destruction through individual and structural anti- Black racism.

***Classes often seem like infinite highlight reels of black suffering, and the consequences of teaching racial discourse this way are extremely damaging. The main downfall of this practice is the normalization of society's dehumanization of black people in the eyes of the students in the classroom.***

Our hope is that students can research and develop projects that make explicit the power of Black self-love not only in its celebration of blackness but also its overt

deconstruction of white supremacy. Students can then present these projects around campus as a way to begin (or in some cases continue) discussions of the generative power of Black self-love and hopefully inspire continued work in this area at the curricular level (academic and residential).

My second idea made its way into the next iteration of my class as an assignment. This idea is based on a project at American University in Washington DC. I first saw a presentation about it at the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AACU) Diversity conference. Faculty and staff there interviewed students about the microaggressions they endure day in and day out in American's classrooms. This was used as a faculty development tool to help faculty think more critically about how they might be perpetuating inequality in their classrooms and how they can stop. My version of the assignment asks students to talk about two things while they are being filmed: 1) how they experience their race on campus (at a primarily white institution); and 2) what they have done or what they can do to challenge and dismantle white supremacy on campus. We will include these short videos in our digital exhibit on Omeka. This is a useful assignment in a number of ways. It encourages students to put into words what they are dealing with, it shows students of color that they are not alone in dealing with a racist institution/society, and, lastly, it forces white students to think about how they can help dismantle white supremacy *from the inside*.

**Dorcas:** University courses on race relations in the United States can be overwhelming for black students. Classes often seem like infinite highlight reels of black suffering, and the consequences of teaching racial discourse this way are extremely damaging. The main downfall of this practice is the normalization of society's dehumanization of black people in the eyes of the students in the classroom. This has consequences for the privileged, but more importantly, the underprivileged.

It seems as if white students walk away from courses like ours with some memory of the concepts covered along with historical facts, but knowing little to nothing about what privilege is and how to use the privilege they have to stop the vicious cycle of racism. This is exemplified by the many white students in my college experience who have asked black students what they can or should do to stop racism both inside and outside of class. While their hearts may be in the right place, it is not the job of marginalized students to teach them or be anything more than what they agreed to be when they found a way to pay their tuition: students. It is the burden of institutions that claim to be progressive and inclusive to move beyond dialogue, and into action.

While black resilience in the face of racist violence is a beautiful thing, it is important to remember that extreme brutality took place prior to it. Black people are oppressed by the monster of racism and all who perpetuate it actively or inactively every minute of every day. Thus, telling stories of the past without bothering to think of solutions for those in the present is another form of the commodification of the black body. Black trauma is not

commercial or something to be used by white people as a stepping stone into the graduate schools of their dreams because they cared enough to launch an initiative. The trauma is real and black people need to be humanized and liberated as soon as possible.

Moving beyond the highlight reel necessitates suggesting survival tactics to marginalized students to preserve their mental/physical health. Some may argue that educators who lack experience facing racism cannot ethically advise how marginalized groups should cope, but there are solutions. One way this can be overcome is by the practice of inviting local black and brown liberation organizers to speak about how they manage. Many are not appreciated in real time and are systematically forced into lives of extreme poverty. Inviting them to the table and paying them to further their life's work per their agreement is a small gesture that goes a long way.

There are various black You Tubers that discuss racial topics in free videos that are typically under seven minutes. Two renowned ones are Franchesca Ramsey and Kat Blaque, both of whom typically get paid for each view at no monetary cost to the viewer. If showing a video or inserting a talk may take too much time, educators can link them in a syllabus along with a "Coping with Racism & Discrimination" page like the one that belongs to the Monterey Bay campus of California State University<sup>8</sup>. Additionally, educators must confront and dismantle common reasoning that is used in attempts to derail or thwart progressive measures that aim to eliminate racism. This will help black students further their innate ability to advocate for themselves and aid white students in effectively campaigning to stop racism.

An additional action that must be taken in order to move away from classrooms that only emphasize black suffering is allowing black students to dream of and work towards their liberation on their own terms. This requires viewing them as individuals and showing up when you are asked to, not undermining their agency by infiltrating their spaces. It entails acknowledging that black people are diverse, and celebrating their differences. Nonetheless, institutions and those within them must listen to black students and act genuinely in order to construct an approach to dismantling racism that is legitimate.

## Conclusion

In its simplest form, I had hoped the Resisting Racism course would encourage students to think critically about the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Lives Matter

movement. I wanted students to compare the two and develop narratives that articulated where they converged and where they diverged. At the same time, I hoped that students would begin to (or continue to) think critically about how they fit into the contemporary movement and how they can (and do) resist racism in their everyday lives. What is clearer now through my conversation with Dorcas is that I need to work more on the second part. I need to make more explicit assignments that help students to move beyond critically analyzing white supremacy to operationalizing efforts to eliminate it. Analyzing how one resists racism is important, but we must recognize how we perpetuate it along with other forms of violence. Finally, I need to help students of color move more quickly toward liberation through active listening and active mentoring, and by moving from being an "ally" to becoming an "accomplice." As an accomplice I stand side by side with my students, taking risks and making change.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Coates, Ta-Nehisi. *Between the World and Me*. Spiegel & Grau. 2015. Pg. 10.

<sup>2</sup> <https://nplusonemag.com/online-only/online-only/a-love-note-to-our-folks/>.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2013/02/18/emory-president-sets-uproar-statements-three-fifths-compromise-and-then-apologizes>.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/grade-point/wp/2016/03/24/someone-wrote-trump-2016-on-emorys-campus-in-chalk-some-students-said-they-no-longer-feel-safe/>.

<sup>5</sup> <http://cfde.emory.edu/programs/teaching/universitycourses/past-university-courses/fall-15-ferguson.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Here I am thinking most specifically of the need for the #SAYHERNAME campaign that highlights the impact of state violence on cis and transgendered women of color. For more information see: (<http://www.aapf.org/sayhername/>).

<sup>7</sup> <http://oneblackgirlmanywords.blogspot.com/>.

<sup>8</sup><https://csumb.edu/pgcc/coping-racism-discrimination>



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