

# RADICAL TEACHER

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



MATTHEW "LEVEE" CHAVEZ, "SUBWAY THERAPY," 2016  
UNION SQUARE STATION, NEW YORK CITY (PHOTO: LENORE BEAKY)

## Issue 107: Miscellany



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## Introduction: Miscellany

by Michael Bennett and Sarah Chinn



MATTHEW "LEVEE" CHAVEZ, "SUBWAY THERAPY," 2016. UNION SQUARE STATION, NEW YORK CITY

(PHOTO: LENORE BEAKY)

Most issues of *Radical Teacher* are defined by a predetermined theme, and are overseen from conception to completion by a group of editors (one or more from the *RT* Editorial Collective, occasionally with an outside editor or two) who are ultimately responsible for the issue's content (with feedback from blind reviewers who are drawn from the collective). At the same time, *RT* accepts "over-the-transom" submissions on a rolling basis that are not targeted for a themed issue. These essays are overseen by us (the Manuscript Editors), and when enough of them emerge from the blind review process with positive feedback, we group them together in a non-themed issue such as the current one.

In a sense, however, even these non-themed issues have a theme that is articulated by the subtitle of *Radical Teacher*, which explains that we are a "socialist, feminist, and anti-racist journal on the theory and practice of teaching." To that extent, the articles in these issues share a commitment to liberatory politics and a belief that teaching and scholarship can help define and implement those politics. Sometimes the essays published in these "miscellanies" are more directly connected to past themes because authors send us essays that were inspired by their reading from past issues or that were in fact submitted for past issues but not revised in time to be included with other essays on that theme. And surprisingly often we receive essays that anticipate future themes because there is a groundswell of interest in a particular topic among radical teachers in general. The essays in this current issue fit all of these categories, and one other: a reprint of an essay spotted by a member of the Editorial Collective who felt that it fits with our interests, with an introduction by one of us (Michael) explaining why we thought it would be of interest to readers of *Radical Teacher*.

The last time we two Manuscript Editors worked together on a themed issue, it was on "Environmental Education" (Vol. #78), an aspect of which was revisited in a more recent issue on "Teaching about Climate Change" (Vol. #102). We were struck by how Nancy Dawn Wadsworth's "Awakening the "Walking Dead": Zombie Pedagogy for Millennials" would have been a welcome addition to either issue. Wadsworth's essays lays out the pedagogical benefits of using popular zombie productions, particularly AMC's *The Walking Dead*, to teach a critical introduction to modern political theory focused on climate change. Based on Wadsworth's undergraduate course "Political Theory, Climate Change, and the Zombie Apocalypse," the article outlines how *The Walking Dead* can be used to critique the mythic assumptions built into modern social contract theory; to introduce other political ideologies, including conservatism, anarchism, fascism, and communism; and to consider the political challenges raised by a global problem such as climate change in an increasingly neoliberal environment. Zombie productions are offered as a particularly salient pedagogical tool that can help awaken critical political analysis for the Millennial Generation.

Cara E. Jones's "Transforming Classroom Norms as Social Change: Pairing Embodied Exercises with Collaborative Participation in the WGS Classroom" is reminiscent of a series of issues *RT* has published since its

very beginning on feminism, Women's Studies, and gender (trans and otherwise). Jones's essay explores tensions between critical feminist pedagogy and the neoliberal corporate university, asking how engaging the body and redistributing student agency highlights larger questions of power that haunt the academy as a whole. Including specific embodied exercises used in Women's and Gender Studies (WGS) classrooms, this essay argues that as students and professors engage within an increasingly corporate university system, activities that incorporate the body as a site of learning and critical analysis can access situated knowledges while projects that de-center power and responsibility are viewed with skepticism. Jones attributes this discrepancy to the neoliberal structure in which we teach and learn, arguing that we need to value and make visible the labor that goes into critical pedagogy.

Jeanne Scheper's "Mortgaged Minds: Redlining Public Higher Education" could easily be slotted in *RT*'s next issue on Critical University Studies (CUS). CUS asks teachers and students to not just think about what they are studying but about the contexts in which they are studying it. CUS is about making the means of academic production the subject of academic investigation. Scheper argues that while undergraduate student loan debt continues to be "hard to register," there are other conditions and effects of the student loan debt spiral that remain relatively invisible, unexamined, and certainly receive less attention in news headlines or on the op-ed pages about the fiscal cliff of education debt. These are the effects of this debt spiral on graduate education, faculty composition, and knowledge production itself. This article asks students, teachers, and other readers of *RT* to think about how the debt load of faculty is part of the current student loan debt spiral, yet its effects on the working conditions of faculty, the learning conditions of students, and, importantly, the production of knowledge in the university remain underexamined.

The final essay published for the first time in this issue, Robert Cowan's "ACDC Agency: Food and Politics with Community-College Students at Vassar" was initially submitted for our themed issue on the Food Justice Movement (Vol. #98). We are pleased to publish another contribution on this urgent issue. Cowan taught a course entitled "Feast or Famine: Food, Society, Environment" as part of a program at Vassar College that is a sort of academic boot camp for community college students who hope to transfer to an elite liberal arts college, a Research I university, or an Ivy League school. It's a full scholarship program during which they take two courses in five weeks, each team-taught by a community college professor and a Vassar professor.

The course that Cowan co-taught for two summers with the Chair of Environmental Studies at Vassar provided a survey of issues concerning food systems, such as industrial farming, the role of agricultural lobbyists in Washington, overfishing, food sovereignty in developing countries, food stamps, food deserts, the USDA, FDA, WTO, IMF, etc. Cowan's essay describes the course and analyzes the irony that with all of the knowledge the students were gleaming from authors like Marion Nestle, Michael Pollan, Wendell Berry, and myriad others, they were fed some of the worst corporately outsourced food

imaginable. Cowan argues that this odd juxtaposition raised important questions for the students about how they develop a sense of personal agency—a question that is important both for the food justice movement and for the students’ transition from community colleges to schools like Vassar.

Last but not least is the essay we are reprinting by Sohaila Abdulali entitled “Why Toilets are About Class and Gender Wars.” Most of the essay is drawn from an interview that Abdulali conducted with Professor Ghazal Zulfiqar concerning a class she taught on “Women and Policy in Pakistan” at Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS). Zulfiqar and her students focused in part on “the toilet as a political sphere,” which became the topic of a presentation that they made to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. The introduction Michael wrote to this essay explains why we felt that the issues Abdulali raises about this unit of Zulfiqar’s course provide important models of radical teaching in action.

While all these articles could comfortably find a home in various other issues of *Radical Teacher*, we think they also speak to each other. All of them consider what happens when a teacher helps students reframe and reimagine social and economic conditions they assumed were fixed and permanent, and outside of politics: student debt, the production and consumption of the food we eat, how students are embodied or disembodied in the classroom and in their everyday lives. They share the assumption that undergirds a radical political practice, that the classroom is always engaging with ideology and culture, and it is our responsibility to make that engagement explicit and show how power operates.

This issue is the twelfth since *Radical Teacher* became an online open access journal in 2013. There were many reasons we changed from a print journal to an online one, but among them was our hope that this format would allow for greater transparency and interaction with our readers. We hope that you will join us in this effort by sharing your thoughts with us on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/radicalteachers>) and/or via

the blog that is attached to our new webpage (<http://www.radicalteacher.net>). Please join us on these platforms (and stay tuned for a possible relaunch of our Twitter feed) and spread the word to help us expand our media presence. We are heartened by the fact that we have heard from more of you and received more “over the transom” essays since switching formats; we foresee more “miscellany” issues in the future. Please feel free to share your thoughts and work with us as we continue to expand *Radical Teacher’s* reach during a time when our mission is more urgent than ever.

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## Awakening the “Walking Dead”: Zombie Pedagogy for Millennials

by Nancy Dawn Wadsworth



ALL STILLS FROM THE FILM *THE WALKING DEAD*

COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR



**W**hat if zombies infiltrated a course on political theory, infecting half-dazed undergraduates with a hunger to understand what constitutes a just political community? What if the dead-eyed, shuffling, animated corpses of film and fiction could be used to consummate an awakening to how political theory matters for our future and indeed the future of the planet?

This essay reviews a political theory course I recently redesigned to incorporate zombie genres as a learning tool. *Power and Justice: Introduction to Political Thought* is an entry-level, core curriculum introduction to theoretical inquiry in the social sciences, which provides a broad overview of major political ideologies that emerged from and competed for dominance within the modern European tradition: liberalism, conservatism, fascism, anarchism, and communism, with attention to feminism, environmentalism, and globalization along the way. While students have demonstrated consistent interest in past versions of the course, the dense historical texts and abstractions of political theory can be disorienting, especially to early undergraduates. I've also found that Millennial students seek ways to render theory more concrete and pertinent to their sense of themselves and their agency in the contemporary world. In response, the modification *Political Theory, Climate Change, and the Zombie Apocalypse* was born. This new pedagogical approach offers fertile provocations and a sustained mode of creative critical inquiry that can render political theory more resonant for the Millennial generation.<sup>1</sup>

***I find that most Millennial college students, regardless of background, suspect there is something deeply wrong with the reality they've inherited. It shows in the literature that attracts them, the serials and movies they watch, the games they play.***

American Millennials confront enormous challenges, in the face of which they seem to be alternately incredibly savvy and rightfully despairing—which sometimes (from my Generation X perspective, at least) takes the form of a kind of numbness about political life. On one hand, today's high school graduates grew up in a post-9/11 era of neoliberal triumphalism, in which global capitalism has been rendered the definitive and only "realistic" option. So-called democracy is guarded domestically by a militarized state apparatus, and abroad by soft empire and perpetual war(s) against terrorism. Embedded in what Benjamin Barber (1992) called the "McWorld" of global capitalism, Millennials have grown up learning that the power to buy things is a greater expression of agency than direct political engagement, and that economic growth is what keeps a nation strong. They inherit political institutions tranquilized by the effects of money, extreme polarization, corporate influence, popular disillusionment, and apathy (Gottfried and Barthel 2015). On top of that, this generation has been the most sonogrammed, scoped, quantified, monitored, medicated, and assessed in history,

with school serving as the fulcrum of micromanagement orchestrated to groom youth (of the privileged classes, at least) for success in a capitalist material culture to which no meaningful alternatives seem possible. It would be hard to blame them for feeling cynical.

On the other hand, American Millennials have been represented in or led creative and technologically agile political initiatives such as Occupy, Black Lives Matter, fossil fuel divestment, and most recently the Bernie Sanders campaign. They are astute observers of the world, and interact in a social milieu more networked and tech-literate than any previous generation. They are avid civic volunteers (partly but not only because that helps them reach other goals, like college), and they express a great deal of concern about the state of the world (Strauss and Howe 2000). But they register deep disillusionment with both mainstream political institutions and grassroots actions characterized as "extreme" (Miller 2014; Harvard Institute of Politics 2015). They have also recently surprised researchers with their widespread criticism of capitalism (Ehrenfreund 2016).

I find that most Millennial college students, regardless of background, suspect there is something deeply wrong with the reality they've inherited. It shows in the literature that attracts them, the serials and movies they watch, the games they play. At the same time, much of their conceptual vocabulary is still generated from within American neoliberalism, the system from which they so obviously stand to benefit, at least in the short-term. The improbable combination of zombies, political theory, and climate change provides a set of tools unusual enough to foster engagement in critical political inquiry while remaining culturally conversant.<sup>2</sup> Zombie stories provide metaphors that can enable students to analyze contemporary neoliberalism from different vantage points in search of more just and sustainable democratic alternatives.

## Course Design and Objectives

This course serves as one of four gateway course options to the political science major, though it is also interdisciplinary, drawing from sociology, cultural theory, economics, environmental studies, and film/media studies. The version described here is designed for an 80-student lecture class, about one-quarter political science majors. Few students, whether taking it for the political science major or as a core curriculum requirement, enter with more than a rudimentary exposure to theory or philosophy from any field.

The course has three conceptual sections: an introduction to the philosophical foundations of modern liberalism; a survey of liberalism's major ideological challengers in the West; and in the final third an exploration of how different schools of political theory might be applied to address a global collective problem like the climate change crisis. Zombie genres are layered onto these topics in three ways. First, zombie apocalypse motifs are used to illustrate core concepts in political theory, such as the state of nature, the social contract, and different

modes of constructing political community, especially in the face of crisis. Second, zombies as a unique kind of monster provide potent metaphors for *human* behavior in some of its most destructive forms. Students are enlisted in the project of contemplating why so many people—and so many Americans in particular—are attracted to zombie genres at this particular sociopolitical moment. The final section of the class is designed for students to leverage their growing familiarity with both political theory and the zombie metaphor to puzzle through the theoretical and political challenges presented by climate change crisis.

Woven throughout are texts, film clips, and other materials examining the history, symbolism, and cultural relevance of zombie genres. Though I draw on a range of zombie productions, my main pedagogical source is the popular AMC cable series *The Walking Dead*. This six-season runaway hit based on Robert Kirkman's comics series works especially well because most students are familiar with it, and because its unanticipated popularity—it is the most popular cable television series of all time—enables us to consider what the show offers that seems to capture the attention of so many Americans (and others) at this particular cultural moment (Wallenstein 2014).

Due to the size of the class (and the fact that I don't have TAs), students' learning is measured through three exams consisting of a combination of multiple-choice, matching, and analytical essay questions; and an analytical paper in which they work in pairs to use two different political theory frameworks to analyze a zombie production (film, television, comic, or literature). Here I will focus on students' responses to the conceptual organization of the course, and what their essays revealed about the effectiveness of zombie genres as a tool for understanding political theory.

## Theory, Contract, and Zombies

The class begins with an overview of the distinction between ideology, a meaning-making system that explains the way things are, and political theory, the *study* of the concepts and principles that people use to describe, explain, and evaluate political events, paradigms, and institutions—including different ideologies (Love 2011). We then preview a series of texts that suggest the potential relevance of zombies to class themes (Drezner 2010, Platts 2013). Students then view the first episode of *The Walking Dead* (TWD), to familiarize themselves with the series' premise. From there we can wade into the political thought of the early modern liberals.

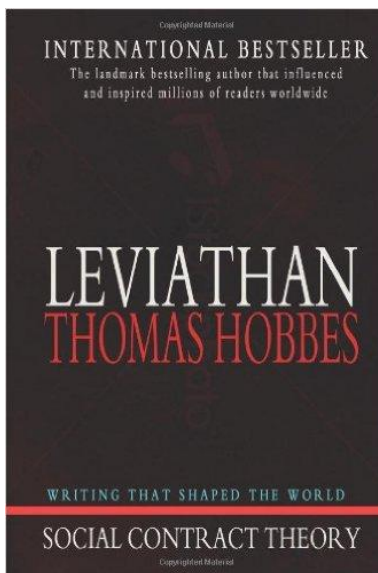
Seventeenth century political philosopher Thomas Hobbes famously wrote that life in a state of nature is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." Most apocalyptic fiction portrays human survival in the wake of destruction as some version of a Hobbesian struggle. To this,

contemporary zombie genres add what Carl Jung (1957) would surely recognize as one of our dark, collective fantasies: apocalyptic social breakdown at the hands of an "other." Whether through animated corpses that destroy, either in the form of a relentless, slow motion herd-force (what we might call the Romero-school zombies, resurrected even more graphically in *The Walking Dead*) or as viral, cyber-speed millennial death vipers (as in British Director Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later* series), zombie apocalypse stories are propelled by fantasies of a political and economic near-*tabula rasa*. In this world, the former, ordered reality has been stripped bare and humans must reinvent small-sale economics, political community, and ethics from the ground up, under violent conditions that invite moral ambiguity. The previously functioning system may be retained as memory, as template, or as evidence of failure, but under crisis conditions it is not easily reproduced. This is fertile theoretical ground.

In *The Walking Dead*, a diverse band of survivors, led by former city sheriff, Rick Grimes, navigate the woods and abandoned farms of Georgia, not knowing whether any federal infrastructure has survived the contagion that has zombified their countrymen. As they attempt or confront different modes of authority and cooperation, Rick's band seems to represent the beleaguered hopes for moral community, democracy, and civilization against the threat of the zombie horde, on one hand, and corrupted human experiments, on the other. The unnatural former-humans perpetually stalking the living serve as hostile "natural" forces ravaging the tatters of culture, but culture itself turns out to produce nearly as many threats to the lives and sanity of the "good guys." Under such conditions it is a strain to remain good—at least in the sense of being rational, morally accountable, and restrained in violence. Many fail.

In *Leviathan*, Hobbes imagines humans as, at base, without ties to others—as if without a stated contract, human family and kinship systems don't exist. Isolated and without the protection of mutually compelling law and a powerful sovereign endorsed to enforce it, the theory holds, humans *by nature* will quickly veer toward aggressive competition and eventual war. For Hobbes, a state of nature involves "a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death" (*Leviathan*, chapter 13).

John Locke's Puritanism-inspired state of nature revises Hobbes to envision a world surveyed by an omnipotent God who gifts man with perfect freedom and equality "within the bounds of the law of nature" (1690, 21). The first such law is the "obligation to mutual love amongst men"; it holds that because humans are all children of the same Master, they are morally compelled not to harm others except in self-defense (whereas Hobbes sees men as inherently belligerent). However, because personal property claims are the primary source of human



conflict, the First Law of Nature is insufficient to create a lasting peace. Without an impartial judicant of agreements—which in Locke becomes the socially contracted law that subjects agree to obey for the protection of themselves and their property—the state of nature will inevitably devolve into a state of war.

The concept of the socially unencumbered, self-interested, masculine individual in inherent tension with others and nature itself is at the heart of classical liberal political philosophy. Its premises infuse the ideologies liberalism produces regarding power, natural entitlements, community, material resources, and security. Humans—being alone, fearful, and aggressive—need a social contract to get along and engage in fair exchanges, and that contract is conceived of as ineffective without a strong state able to enforce law with a monopoly on violence. Most American Millennials have inherited these ideas as a kind of second nature. Such theories frame self-centeredness as natural, cooperation as, at best, a product of socialization, and state violence as a necessary concession to self-governance. It's a ruthless world, students concur, and always has been.

But is it true? Are human beings *really* isolated from one another in "nature"? Is community something we cannot imagine without a governing state to enforce it? Is concern for others unnatural to humans? As students are introduced to the state-of-nature heuristic in the liberal social contract theory of Hobbes and John Locke, I pose these challenges by way of a segment from TWD.

In "Vatos," the fourth episode of Season 1, a group of protagonists ventures into Atlanta, now overrun by zombies. Formerly strangers from different racial and class backgrounds, the group members exist in an uneasy collaboration marked by mutual distrust, except when the fight requires unity against a shared adversary, zombie or human. The group seeks to retrieve a member and a bag of guns lost in a previous expedition when some young Latino men, apparently gangsters, attack. The *vatos* want the weapons, and take a member of Rick's group hostage, and Rick's men in turn capture a young *vato*. The two groups face off for what looks to be a violent showdown, until a tiny grandmother intervenes. It turns out that the "thugs" are actually a community of former nursing home staffers, clients, and relatives who have stayed in Atlanta to care for the surviving elderly inhabitants. After the misunderstanding is corrected, Rick's men tour the orderly premises. The young men are working at great risk to protect the weak and disabled; like Rick's group, they have created an unlikely community amidst an ongoing disaster. In a gesture of recognition and solidarity, Rick donates a share of the recovered weapons before moving on.

This clip generates a great deal of engagement from students, and has been one of the more effective tools I have found for breaking through an entrenched notion that human nature is inherently competitive, especially under crisis conditions. Given this visual illustration, it makes sense to them that appearances can deceive, and that people can (and daily do) often take great risks to care for others, even when they don't "have to." It is obvious to students that both groups in the "Vatos" scenario have

assumed responsibilities toward strangers, and demonstrate not just competition but also cooperation in the wake of societal infrastructure collapse. I use other clips and anecdotes to demonstrate how TWD portrays the development of social bonds unlikely under the previous social order. Rick's group, for example, includes members who in the former world were categorized as "white trash" of the most denigrated sort, but who become highly valued members for the special skills they bring, like hunting and tracking. Also, without the old, sedimented expectations governing behavior, groups enter a more active, engaged mode of decision-making; they have to figure out the rules as they go, in a cooperative way. Group members also take care of one another beyond the boundaries of the modern nuclear family: in Rick's group, every adult takes responsibility for the surviving children.

Such scenes from *The Walking Dead* compel students to consider the notion of human "natural mutual hostility" at the heart of early social contract theory as an ahistorical myth. The class is also invited to consider whether TWD's dynamic picture of human behavior under apocalyptic conditions might suggest something about



how, at the level of the collective unconscious, we (Americans, and others in neoliberal societies) might be trying to re-think our assumptions about human nature and the social contract at this particular moment; to imagine more meaningful connections and forms of membership. Might zombie productions be expressing a kind of dissatisfaction with how we relate to one another under current conditions, and a hope for alternatives?

## Individualism, Authority, and Myth

Even Hobbes and Locke acknowledged that the state of nature idea was an apparatus built for theoretical purposes. But why this particular myth, and what are the political implications of it? We explore these inquiries by reviewing evolutionary patterns in human behavior, then considering how the social contract theorists' picture may look different if we bring women and children back into view, where social contract theorists have ignored them.

A chapter from an anthropology textbook helps students consider what scholars know about human beings' *actual* organizational tendencies across time. In "The



Evolution of Complex Societies," archaeologists Robert Wenke and Deborah Olszewski (2007) review the variables that produce diverse forms of human societies under different conditions. What becomes clear is that whether organized into relatively simple and egalitarian bands and tribes or complex, stratified societies such as chiefdoms and states, human beings have never been isolated or inherently discordant in the way that Hobbes and Locke portrayed. Rather, individuals are embedded within a web of social relationships. Even without centralized states, communities pivot around agreements and power structures involving socially coordinated elements. To the degree that humans adapt over time, they do so as social units, not as individuals, whether power is shared or monopolized according to some hierarchical authority schema.

Russian scientist-philosopher Peter Kropotkin is helpful for developing these reflections while introducing students to anarchism's theoretical challenge to liberalism's foundational precepts. In his 1902 treatise, *Mutual Aid*, Kropotkin drew on his studies of animal life in Siberia to rebut ascendant Darwinist conclusions about animal nature being extended to explain human behavior. Kropotkin rejected the prioritizing of competition as a first "law of Nature," arguing that there is as much empirical evidence for "sociable habits" as for "self assertion of the individual" in the struggle for existence (Kropotkin 1902, 381). Animals can be singular and competitive, he found, but such traits are balanced by the equally evolutionary tendencies toward sociability and cooperation. In Kropotkin's Siberia studies, in cases where animals did have to struggle against scarcity and compete, they tended to become impoverished and not to evolve. Within human history, Kropotkin argues, mutual aid principles were central to adaptation and the development of new institutions and religions—indeed, to the ethical progress of the human race. Kropotkin sees the state, not "natural" competitive instincts, as the greatest threat to human cooperation, because the state is threatened by human associations that might threaten its monopoly on authority.

***Once Millennials are invited to interrogate the incomplete Hobbes-Lockean myth of human nature, their enculturated understandings of human nature as inherently only or mainly competitive and individualistic begin to lift.***

Building on Kropotkin's early anarchist challenge to the individualist assumptions embedded in early social contract theory, we then (re)insert culture and gender into liberal theorists' abstracted, masculinist images of "human nature," in which whole segments of human beings are effectively erased under the auspices of (European) universalism. While depicting pre-colonial America as an example of a real-time state of nature, Locke deliberately overlooked the existing kinship systems of indigenous North Americans. Because, he believed, Native peoples did not cultivate land according to his definitions of private

property and agriculture, he read their cultures as "primitive," conjugal, pre-social contract societies, rather than as evidence of communities that *already* demonstrated peaceful self-government. This allowed Locke and other Europeans to label Native lands as "*terra nullius*," justifying Europeans' right to colonize those lands and remove inhabitants (Pateman 2007). In universalizing the [European] autonomous male adult as the "natural" individual, Locke, Hobbes, and others removed women, infants, children, the handicapped and the elderly—in short, human kinship systems altogether—from the frame of consensual political community.

Again, TWD is useful for interrogating the gendered aspects of the theoretical erasure that produces an individualist social contract. A number of scenes in which female characters not only care for others but also lead, illustrate how humans' ascent to adulthood is inconceivable without the labor of women. As Carol Pateman and other feminist theorists have argued, with women historically charged in most cultures with the labor of child-rearing, household management, agriculture, many aspects of social education, nursing, and the lion's share of reproduction, it is not possible to define humans as inherently non-cooperative—though away from families, men might be. Whatever characteristics humans bring to a state of nature, they do not survive long without cooperative social systems. At the same time, TWD creates scenes in which women challenge cultural fallback assumptions about women's role expectations in the post-apocalypse division of labor. Here we consider that the liberal social contract is not just a contract about property, law, citizenship and the state; it is also, at its root, a patriarchal contract, which writes women out of the picture by banishing them to the conjugal or private realm, as derivatives of male heads of household. I use readings from Mary Wollstonecraft (1792), John Stuart Mill (1869), and Susan Moller Okin (1999) to guide a gender critique of social contract theory.

In sum, within Western social contract theory, individual rights (chief among them individual liberty under a consensual, theoretically shared authority) are conceived as inalienable, but community and mutual aid are de-emphasized, as social ties are imagined to exist in a politically invisible "private" realm. A masculine vision of human nature produces a profoundly myopic political contract grounded in a false logic. Deconstructing the gendered state-of-nature fantasy on which early social contract theory pivots challenges the notion that without a state apparatus humans are mutually hostile, competitive units, incapable of creating moral community. In portraying many variants of community in the new apocalyptic reality, zombie shows seem to suggest that social contract and moral community are perhaps being (re)imagined in popular culture at this political moment.

Once Millennials are invited to interrogate the incomplete Hobbes-Lockean myth of human nature, their enculturated understandings of human nature as inherently *only or mainly competitive and individualistic* begin to lift. On the first midterm, short essay items ask students to use scenes from TWD to demonstrate their understanding of cultural and gender critiques of the Hobbes-

Lockean conception of human nature. I have seen a much greater understanding than in previous years of why “forgetting” women or other cultural approaches to social organization and the natural world in social contract theory matters for the way we conceive of the foundations for political community, and of our orientation to nature itself, today. Imagining how modern humans might create or recreate a social contract under apocalyptic conditions renders these concepts much more concrete.

## Liberalism’s Challengers

The second section of the course builds from the introduction to liberal theory to consider some of its late-modern iterations and ideological challengers. As a radical set of assertions, early Enlightenment liberalism disrupted older reigning ideologies in Western political culture, and was answered by competing schools of thought, including anarchism, conservatism, communism, and fascism, which rejected some of its central contentions. Contemporary zombie genres have plenty on offer when sifting through these paradigms. Below is a condensed sampling.

In *The Walking Dead*, as in the comic series, the protagonists encounter a range of experiments in the organization of power. Rick and his former co-sheriff, dominant males who have acquired the guns and ammo to back their decisions, lead the group under a version (albeit a fragile one) of the old law of the liberal state. As the benevolent lawman figure, Rick upholds honor and order and, when necessary, a kind of Wild West conquest of threats from the anarchic new world, while also trying to protect his pregnant wife and young son, Carl, who symbolize the American nuclear family. Following an injury to Carl, desperation requires Rick’s group to seek help from another small community hiding out on the remains of a family farm. Their patriarch is a religious farmer and veterinarian—conservative, community-oriented, and competent in the ways of rural existence. Eventually the groups merge, though not without conflicts over strategy, leadership, and intimate relationships.

After a massive zombie horde forces the community to flee, the group seeks refuge in a large prison complex, where a few convicts still reside. (In a telling panel in Kirkman’s series, the Foucaultian prison architecture is determined to provide the best chance at survival, as “freedom” outside has become too dangerous [Kirkman 2009, Issue 12].) Psychologically strained by the effects of the brutal decisions he’s been forced to make over the previous months and the group’s mounting losses, Rick resorts for a time to a dictatorial, hyper-masculine leadership style. But concerned for his sanity and the violent model he is providing Carl, he later abandons central authority to a democratic council form. In a fleeting

period of stability, the group settles into a Rousseauian collective sovereignty, planting crops, sharing decision-making, and defending the complex effectively, but this relative idyll is broken by territorial threats from a community called Woodbury, led by The Governor, a ruthless tyrant.

Several characters on the show analogize nicely to competing ideological frameworks. We read Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* alongside the character of the farmer-patriarch to illustrate the old European conservative reverence for lineage, generational knowledge, obligation, and the glue of tradition. Michonne a katana-wielding survivalist, is useful for elaborating anti-authoritarian critiques of liberalism’s attachments to order, law, security, and periodic displays of central authority (as evidenced by Rick’s unilateral decisions in conditions of crisis) (Love 2011). Similar to anarchists like Henry David Thoreau and Emma Goldman, Michonne distrusts the temptations of state security. Anarchists argue that state order can never compensate for the loss of freedom or the mind control all hierarchically ordered institutions seem to require. The Governor’s Woodbury community sets up easily as a template for authoritarianism, which we interpret alongside Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* and Mussolini’s “Fascism: Doctrine and Institutions” (1932). Students often don’t realize that fascism is not just an epithet for an unappealing power structure, but rather a twentieth-

century political ideology in which “the nation” (in Hitler’s case “the race,” and in the Governor’s “the community”) is made predominant over the individual and associations—which are effectively enslaved to serve the state.

Compared against these competing systems, we can see how Rick’s group anchors a proto-Lockean liberal center, as it were, positioned between three ideological poles. These are (1) the anarchism of either loosely-bounded groups or all-out moral lawlessness, represented in the negative extreme by the cannibalistic community the group encounters in Season 6; (2) a traditionalist conservatism that is useful in some respects (e.g. remembering how to grow food and care for others) but unable to adapt to the horror of zombie plague and brutal human competition for survival; and (3) a ruthless authoritarian model that quashes rights and collective input. Within Rick’s proto-liberal group members provide input, but consensually “nominated” leaders like Rick sometimes render snap judgments without democratic approval. There are guidelines around behavior and punishments for breaking the rules, indicating that vestiges of the old law under the American state remain—as when one valued member is banished for secretly killing an infected member to avert further contagion. And the group has constructed a military apparatus, a mode of small state or militia security, by training every member, including children, to use guns and daggers. However, we also



identify ways in which, by functioning without a formal state apparatus or formal government, Rick's group realizes some of the radically democratic ideals that anarchism values.

Once oriented to these divergent political theory schools, students are able to proceed to a deeper analytical step: weighing different variants of liberal political and *economic* thinking. Excerpts from Adam Smith, Milton Friedman, and the others (all in Love 2011) demonstrate some of the ways in which Lockean notions of property and "free" markets are bounded to liberal conceptions of government non-interference or "negative liberty." This strain of American thought emphasizes restraints on government to protect individual or corporate freedom. Other thinkers see negative liberty as inadequate to the pursuit of meaningful freedom and political equality (Roosevelt, Green, and Kramnic in Love 2011). Positive liberty theorists seek a more egalitarian version of liberal representative democracy, recognizing that most citizens do not begin from an equal material starting place. Modern neoconservatives such as Irving Kristol combine strong government in some areas (military force, ideological dissemination across the globe), and thin state power in others (social welfare services).

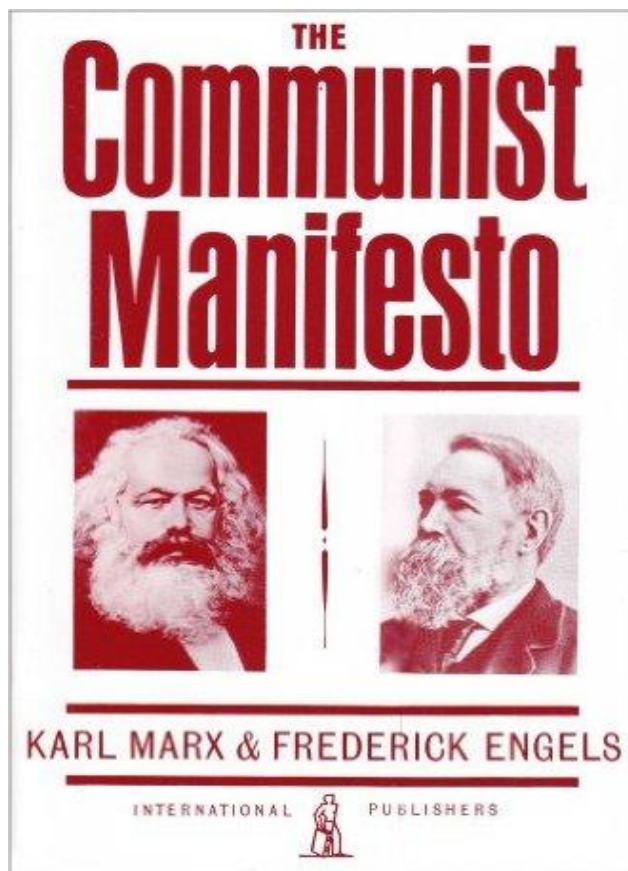
By the two-thirds point of the class, students have become invested in answers to a set of core questions we have been using zombie productions to ask: Is freedom under the liberal social contract really free? Is a greater equality under liberalism possible, or is a different system required? What makes political community meaningful, and what power structures render it just or unjust? As besieged as they are by constant stressors, why do characters in apocalyptic shows seem freer in some ways than we do in an ordered society with a functioning government and infrastructure?

## The Walking Dead Awaken—Or Do We?

In contrast to the liberal social contract thinkers, Karl Marx rejects the need to invent some "fictitious primordial system" to explain human conditions, when we can start with "the fact of the present" (279). I assign "Estranged Labor" from the 1844 Manuscripts, and *The Communist Manifesto* (Love 2011) for a sense of the Marxian approach.

The Marx readings facilitate a conceptual change of frame within the course. To this point, we have interpreted the current proliferation of zombie products as metaphors for collective anxieties circulating at the current moment. Within these fantasies audiences identify, as they have for decades, with the human "we" fighting off the external threat of the "other," whether it represents fears of disease, foreigners, nature, or some other threat (Platts 2013). The Marxian critique allows us to consider whether zombie stories might be compelling for a different reason: zombies metaphorically embody our fear that *we have become like zombies*.

Students quickly see how alienated workers whose otherwise creative, life-enhancing labor is commodified under capitalism become, according to Marx, a kind of



*walking dead*: biologically alive but spiritually deadened and politically unconscious. As capitalism expands, the fetishization of markets and commodities channels peoples at all levels of the system into a mindless, destructive consumerism that spreads across the globe, much like a zombie horde. The *Communist Manifesto* was essentially a manual for how a psychologically and materially enslaved populace might awaken from an unconscious state to fight its way to a new, liberatory reality. This vision bears similarities with the original Haitian notion of the revolutionary zombi—the enslaved body that rises en masse from the grave to overturn the slavery system (Rushton & Moreman 2011). An article by humanities scholars Sarah Juliet Lauro and Karen Embry, "A Zombie Manifesto: The Nonhuman Condition in the Era of Advanced Capitalism," (2008) takes the zombification question a step further, into contemporary life. In midterm essay assignments, students demonstrate deft engagement with Marxian critiques to consider how zombie narratives might be compelling to contemporary audiences precisely for the way zombies remind us of *something about ourselves* in a neoliberal era.

## Zombies and the Climate Crisis

How is it that humans could be doing systematic damage to a planetary ecology upon which we (and every other species) depend for our own survival? What in our way of thinking, in our way of approaching the natural world, allows the developed world to continue to profit from destructive behavior, even in the face of clear evidence of unprecedented anthropogenic impact? The final third of the course works to synthesize students' growing



understanding of political theory with one of the major problems we now face.

Selections from the volume *Political Theory and Global Climate Change* raise critical considerations about the benefits and limitations of liberalism as a political philosophy, with regard to addressing a global climate crisis (Vanderheiden 2008). On one hand, premises lodged deep within the liberal social contract have justified the practically unrestricted exploitation of the natural world. These include the “natural right” of private property, the value of self-interested behavior, fear of state restriction, tolerance for deep inequality, weak community obligations, and rational actor theory, by which people are assumed to make rational means-ends decisions under most circumstances. Such ideas have given humans in liberal political economies *carte blanche* to consume “like zombies”—mindlessly, with no aptitude for considering consequences—for four centuries. On the other hand, equally central to liberal philosophy are the core concepts of basic universal rights (including the rights of people to the fundamental requirements of survival, and of communities to develop), the notions of procedural fairness and legal equality, and, at least in theory, the Lockean proviso of limits on appropriation in order to protect the rights of all. Liberalism’s perpetual conundrum is that its rights universalism exists in tension if not direct contradiction with the behaviors it endorses under the rubric of “liberty.”

***As the obstacles to meaningful political action and the ramifications of inaction on climate change become clearer to students who are generally not accustomed to pondering these issues, I find that they begin to express legitimate anger at the problem they have been handed.***

Several aspects of climate pollution make it especially difficult for liberal political systems to address effectively. Political theorist Steven Gardiner describes the conundrum as a “perfect moral storm” (2008, 2013). First, like the viruses that propel the plague of the undead in zombie fiction, the impacts of anthropogenic climate pollution are spatially unbounded, so while individual states may choose to self-regulate, such efforts in isolation cannot solve the problem. Second, greenhouse gases (GHGs) and other environmental pollutants often disproportionately impact populations that have contributed the least to their production, namely the developing world and the poor (Vanderheiden 2008). Climate impacts are also temporally “backloaded,” in that the conditions we experience today are a result of carbon pollution generated a century ago, and, in turn today’s pollution is substantially deferred to future generations—affects which will be exponentially multiplied as each generations’ pollution builds on the last (Gardiner 2008, 32). Third, as negative climate impacts are “not caused by a single agent but a vast number of individuals not unified by a comprehensive structure of

agency” the collective willingness and ability to act is fragmented (Gardiner 32).

This creates a prisoner’s dilemma, in which it is “perfectly convenient” and perfectly rational for the current generation to act selfishly, while costs accrue to action that would benefit all, illustrating the famous tragedy of the commons in planetary terms (Gardiner, 33). Given that there is a fixed limit on the amount of greenhouse gases the planet can tolerate without widespread, irreversible destruction, meaningful regulations require cooperation between states and some form of mutually enforceable mechanisms and institutions. Unfortunately, such scenarios are anathema to a neoliberalism in which state sovereignty and capitalism remain sacralized, and corporations’ ability to either sidestep regulatory controls or rig them in their favor is endemic (Adamian 2008). For those reasons, the United States never signed onto an international carbon emissions agreement until 2015 in Paris—and that agreement, which many see as inadequate, is unbinding. Because “the source of climate change is located deep in the infrastructure of current civilizations” we are, in effect, primed to render increasingly morally corrupt decisions, either continuing a mindless, herd-mentality consumption like zombies, despite the known damage to people already living subsistence-level lives and to future generations, and/or retreating into paralysis (becoming politically zombieified) (Adamian, 29). We enact a real zombie apocalypse while watching fictional ones from our living room couches.

As the obstacles to meaningful political action and the ramifications of inaction on climate change become clearer to students who are generally not accustomed to pondering these issues, I find that they begin to express legitimate anger at the problem they have been handed. At this point, the zombie metaphor no longer feels like a novelty or class gimmick, so I seek out opportunities in the final sessions to teach about collective modes of political agency that have had an impact in other contexts (abolition, woman suffrage, civil rights, WTC-IMF protests), and consider creative approaches currently being initiated across the globe (Vandana Shiva in Love 2011). We also consider how new media and other factors might be conducive to change-oriented engagement within or beyond neoliberal political-economic structures.

## Conclusion

I have been struck by the enthusiasm the overwhelming majority of students have expressed across the course, and in their evaluations, for the use of zombies and *The Walking Dead* in particular to understand what political theory is and why it is relevant to their lives. In a final exam essay, I ask students to evaluate the value of using zombies as a metaphorical tool for thinking about the climate change conundrum, and what might be productive ways of shifting our fundamental thinking and action in order to address the problem. The range and passion of the answers I’ve received have eliminated any suspicion I had that Millennials do not care about what is happening to their world. Some excerpts:

In the face of one of the most daunting challenges that humans have ever faced, one could make a strong argument that instead of acting like heroes and pioneers society so passionately reveres, humans are acting more like zombies . . . [Z]ombies are creatures that are focused entirely on consuming and on living to satisfy immediate desires. As Vanderheiden notes, at the last several important conferences on climate change, industrialized nations like the U.S. have refused to agree to plans that demand they lower their GHG in missions because they do not believe it is fair for them to have to [do so], even though they have been far more responsible for the problem and developing nations have. Stubborn refusals at conferences like these demonstrate an intense desire to consume as much as possible and to worry about the consequences later.

For me, what is the most analogous aspect of zombies to our current social order is the lawlessness: zombies exist outside of the realm of the law, no rules apply, and in their wake they leave destruction. For some people in power this is their reality; to be outside of social contract, moral obligations to strangers, and disregard anything other than profit . . . Human beings are still marching towards the ability to produce and consume, not because we must (the amount of byproduct and waste tells us that) but because it's the only purpose we have given life.

With the theme of the zombie also comes the iconic imagery of decay that not only inhabits the body of the zombie, but also the world in which they [operate]. In the popular depiction of zombies, the body of an infected individual is often times wrong with decay, exposed bones, shredded skin, etc. Yet despite these factors they march onwards. Beyond their individual bodies the world around them has fallen into decay . . . , yet they are oblivious. [T]he zombie will stop at nothing to consume. I find this to be a particularly effective part of the analogy with climate change, as humanity consumes, unaware of how it is destroying itself as an individual and as a whole. Seeing our actions, purchases, and ways of life destroying the livelihood and passions of others is a . . . reality check that may result in more individuals understanding the repercussions of their actions.

Even those with no previous interest in either zombies or climate change testify that the combination “woke them up” intellectually, raising their political ire and, in many cases, inspiring them to get involved in change initiatives. Given sufficiently effective and interesting tools, this generation is eager to help us all break out of the zombie fog. I will let this student’s hopeful note conclude the essay:

I think that one of the ways to change our fundamental thinking is to redefine what is valuable to us as humankind. I feel that the contemporary schools of thought we have read, specifically those regarding climate change and justice, are built on a new kind of consciousness. Where older schools of thought could not see the power of interconnectedness (example: in reference to a question on the first midterm where women and slaves’ liberties were not taken into account within the definition of individual and universal rights), these newer schools do . . . [T]hey take into consideration not only our right to expand, develop and produce, but also to protect and strengthen. Zombies may represent the fact that we are damaged or damaging beyond repair, but there are tools we have learned in this class that can counteract that damage, and pave the way for a better future.

**I have been struck by the enthusiasm the overwhelming majority of students have expressed across the course, and in their evaluations, for the use of zombies and The Walking Dead in particular to understand what political theory is and why it is relevant to their lives. In a final exam essay, I ask students to evaluate the value of using zombies as a metaphorical tool for thinking about the climate change conundrum, and what might be productive ways of shifting our fundamental thinking and action in order to address the problem. The range and passion of the answers I’ve received have eliminated any suspicion I had that Millennials do not care about what is happening to their world.**

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## Notes

- 1 Millennials are defined as the demographic cohort following Generation X, born between roughly (depending on researchers' parameters) 1982-2004 (Strauss and Howe 2000).
- 2 I see this approach as consistent with what psychiatrist Albert Rothenberg (1971) called Janusian thinking, "the capacity to conceive and utilize two or more opposites or contradictory ideas, concepts, or images simultaneously" in order to facilitate the creative process. It is applicable to any field, though Rothenberg focused on the arts and sciences.



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# RADICAL TEACHER

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

## Transforming Classroom Norms as Social Change: Pairing Embodied Exercises with Collaborative Participation in the WGS Classroom (with Syllabus)

by Cara E. Jones



TRADITIONAL HOUSEHOLD DUTIES ROLES  
COURTESY OF PIXABAY

Despite teaching topics in introductory Women's and Gender Studies (WGS) classes such as transgender theory, gender violence, and menstrual politics, I am nonetheless surprised by the post-feminist position students often take about housework. Housework, it seems, is an issue of the past, something too trivial to examine in the university classroom, too lacking in political implications. Those raised by single parents bristle at the suggestion that household labor is gendered: "My mom did everything herself. She never had a man around to fix things!" Other families are exceptions to the rule: "My dad does all the cooking because my mom is a terrible cook." Students from affluent backgrounds defend their families' reliance on domestic labor by insisting that they treat their maid as "part of the family" or reject an analysis of race in domestic work because "our maids are white."

During a summer class on Gender, Race, and Nation that I taught as a graduate student at a land-grant university in the Deep South, a student told this story:

*"My mom and dad both go to work at 6:30, but my mom gets up an hour earlier to make breakfast, do the dishes, and get dinner started. She gets home at 5, cleans the house, and cooks dinner. As soon as my dad gets home, we [his kids] take his shoes off and rub his feet while my mom serves him dinner as he watches TV." His parents, a janitor and a housekeeper, occupied similar roles outside the house; however, for his mother, the work didn't stop at home. The entire family collaborated to make sure that "when he's at home, my dad's the king of the castle. He doesn't wait on nobody."*

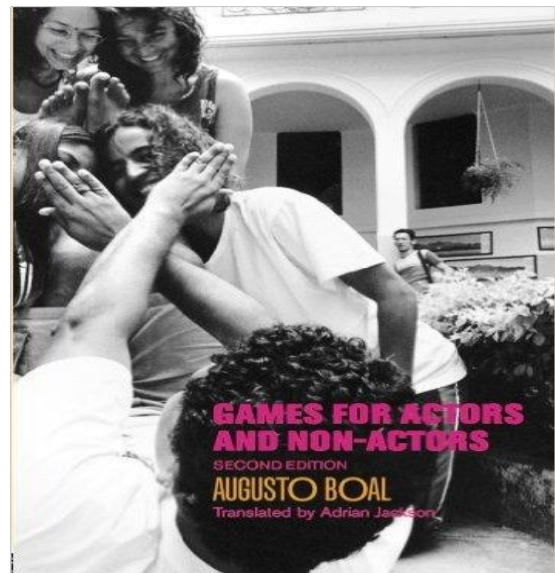
After telling his story, the student crossed his arms in front of his chest and leaned back in his seat, legs spread wide, defensively denying vulnerability. Even if his black working-class background would funnel him, like his father, into the often invisible, denigrated, and feminized labor of cleaning up after other people, he could claim male privilege within his home. Meanwhile, my queer-identified white femme body, which had resisted the lessons of a religious, working-class patriarchal upbringing in the art of homemaking, got the better of me. My already crossed legs wove even more tightly around each other as I leaned forward in my seat, physically contesting his claim to male privilege.

I want to push beyond easy analyses of this story as being about the gendered and racial nature of housework and instead reframe it as a starting point to think through how the *labor* of teaching and learning is done with and through bodies. In this scene, my student's and my respective body languages sharply accentuated our positions, which highlighted the racial, gender, educational, class, and sexual power differences between us. For my student's family, gender hierarchy within the home could reinstate his father's male privilege. My physicality spoke volumes about my refusal to accept housework as the dues of femininity. The politics of this embodied interaction made me question the work being done through and with

bodies in classrooms. I wonder: how does *classroom labor* operate invisibly? How do bodies *work* in the classroom?

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We teach and learn with and through our bodies, and our bodies operate as sites for accessing and expressing both dominant and subjugated knowledges. This essay examines two types of activities I use to access this knowledge in introductory Women's and Gender Studies (WGS) courses. The first are a series of embodied pedagogical exercises based on methods described in Brazilian theatre practitioner Augusto Boal's 1992 *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*. These "gamesercises" known as *Theatre of the Oppressed* (48) involve movement, role-playing, and making living "statues."<sup>1</sup> The second are collaborative methods I use to open up new avenues for class participation, including some portions of classroom management such as creating study guides, defining vocabulary terms, and designing surveys. These tasks, like housework, are often done invisibly by the professor but are crucial to the running of the classroom community.



While very different on the surface, both activities bring to the forefront embodied relationships between labor and power in the classroom. Students typically embrace embodied methods enthusiastically, while expressing skepticism or even disdain towards Collaborative Participation (CP). I argue that by redistributing the work that is done with and through bodies during and outside of class time, these methods can challenge the top-down power dynamic that often characterizes student-teacher interactions. I posit that these methods can shift status quo power dynamics and create local change in the classroom, thereby providing a model for large-scale social change. I situate these teaching methods within the neoliberal corporate university (NCU) because my status as a full-time, yet contingent faculty member brings up larger questions of power and labor. In addition to teaching as a graduate student at a state university in the Deep South, for one year, I was employed as a lecturer of Women's & Gender Studies at another state university on the east coast. There, I taught a 4-4 teaching load ranging from intro-level to graduate seminars. This is currently my third

year as a Visiting Assistant Professor of Women's & Gender Studies at a private liberal arts college, where I also teach classes at all levels. I base the following observations largely on introductory Women's & Gender Studies classes taught in all three institutions with enrollments between 15 and 40; students at these institutions were primarily white, middle or upper-middle class, and of traditional college age. However, I also taught a sizeable proportion of students of color as well as first-generation, immigrant, and returning students, particularly at the state schools. All direct quotations from students are taken from in-class writings, institution-administered end-of-term evaluations, or personal communication with students.

## Embodied Critical Feminist Pedagogy

Feminist pedagogical praxis emerged from a tradition of progressive, emancipatory education called critical pedagogy (see Luke and Gore, and Weiler) which "interrogate[s] the pedagogical interrelationships between culture, economics, ideology, and power" and "nurtures the development of critical consciousness" (Darder *et al.* 23) in order to effect social change. A central figure in critical pedagogical thought is Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, whose *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* questions how educational systems reflect and reproduce social inequalities. One of Freire's most utilized concepts is his critique of the banking model of education, in which teachers act as deliverers of knowledge, and students operate as empty vessels who learn by absorbing specialized knowledge from an authoritative expert (72). In this familiar educational arrangement, the teacher is the active participant, the students acted upon; teachers set the goals, outcomes, topics, and schedule to which students must adapt. These entrenched power differentials, Freire argues, mirror inequitable social relations from which the oppressed can only break free if they see their oppression "not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform" (49).

Critical feminist instructors teach students how to harness their potential as active agents of social change who are also attuned to how gender, race, and other embodied markers of identity intersect to shape this emancipation (Cohee *et al.*, viii). As Bernice Fisher shows, even emancipatory methods can reproduce oppression if students don't already have critical consciousness (190), and instructors need to approach embodied methods with caution when a class includes students from different social locations. Furthermore, because gender intersects with other embodied identities such as race, class, sexuality, disability, and nationality, power discrepancies between teachers and students are often amplified rather than remedied: a teacher's power is not simply institutional because the intersections of "race, sexuality, and geopolitics . . . function in some cases to widen the power gap between the teacher and students, yet shrink it in other cases" (Ergun 88).

Feminist critiques of the "neoliberal, corporate university" (Coogan-Gehr 2) offer valuable insight into the institutionalization of students' and teachers' embodied

identities. In operating as a "well-oiled corporate machine" (Weber 128), the NCU applies business models to education, relying on an increasing contingent body of academic laborers to prioritize profits by prizing "competition, self-sufficiency, and strict individualism" (Feigenbaum 337). Scholars of feminist pedagogy have expressed concern about the effects of the increasingly corporatized university (Brulé, Byrd, Feigenbaum, Ginsberg, Mohanty, Sudbury and Okazawa-Rey, TuSmith and Reddy, Weber), often positioning emancipatory feminist goals as at odds with the hierarchical academic establishment (Ginsberg 46). This body of literature emphasizes the ways in which neoliberalism domesticates radical goals: "neoliberal intellectual culture may well constitute a threshold of disappearance for feminist, antiracist thought anchored in the radical social movements of the twentieth century" (Mohanty 970-971). By prioritizing a banking model of education that "de-historicizes and depoliticizes difference" (Bell *et. al* 26), the NCU can thwart critical pedagogical goals. Because neoliberalism's insistence upon free-market values of individual merit and effort operates to make "systemic injustices (like racism or sexism)" (Weber 127) invisible, pedagogical practices that reallocate institutionalized hierarchies may become suspect.

***Critical feminist instructors teach students how to harness their potential as active agents of social change who are also attuned to how gender, race, and other embodied markers of identity intersect to shape this emancipation.***

Nonetheless, feminist teachers continue to balance a commitment to social justice with content knowledge while appeasing an increasingly diverse body of students-as-consumers who approach education from an economic market-driven perspective (Brulé). Students who resist emancipatory methods often identify with neoliberal values such as individual achievement, competition, and other tools of domination. Yet, if we frame student resistance to critical feminist methods as a reflection of the demands of an educational system devoted to a consumer approach to education (Bondestam), feminist instructors who wish to construct classroom communities that link the theoretical to the experiential and the personal to the political, directly working with bodies, power, and labor in the classroom can teach students how to act in response to lived experiences of oppression (Thomson 211).

Several recent edited collections, (see, for example, Byrd *et. al.*, Mayberry and Rose, Murphy and Ribarsky) offer examples of embodied classroom activities for teaching key concepts in WGS; however, few attend to the implications of utilizing these exercises within the NCU. Despite the range of innovative learning opportunities detailed in these texts, they pay little attention to how embodied activities work within and against tensions between corporate academia and emancipatory education. This paper intervenes at the juncture between critical feminist



pedagogy about embodiment and feminist critiques of the NCU, as it maps how students are both shaped by and resistant to neoliberalism. I argue that fashioning both embodied pedagogical methods as well as methods that refigure the laborpolitics of classroom management with a spirit of “serious play” (Weber 136)<sup>2</sup> allows us to work with tensions between neoliberal and critical, feminist pedagogical goals. While market forces shape student-teacher interactions, using methods such as those described below can nonetheless give students an experience of social change within the classroom.

## Power and Bodies in the Classroom

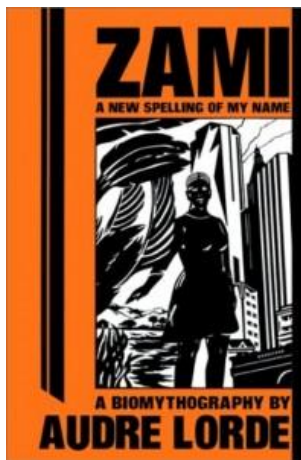
In order to resist reproducing traditional power dynamics within the classroom, feminist pedagogy reframes power as “energy, capacity, and potential,” rather than domination (Shrewsbury 8). In this environment, social identities and personal experiences become legitimate sites of knowledge production. One way to help students learn this is through harnessing the power of the body in the classroom. Power works through bodies, and feminist pedagogy can use embodied methods to reframe classroom power dynamics. Practitioners writing about embodied feminist pedagogy generally utilize one of two different approaches. The first approach uses embodied practices such as self-defense (Cermele), *qi gong* (Gustafson), mindfulness (Berila), or yoga practices (Musial) within the classroom by asking students to use their bodies differently in an academic setting. The second conceptualizes embodied pedagogy as teaching about embodied subjectivities such as fat (Boling) or black queer femme (Lewis) identities. I draw on both approaches in my understanding of embodied feminist pedagogy as a process that utilizes bodies to teach about power, privilege, and difference.

Because students have different learning styles as well as diverse educational, social, and cultural backgrounds, multiple modes of instruction, including kinesthetic methods, can best reach students with various academic needs. As Berila notes, it is crucial to reclaim the body in social justice classrooms because “oppression is held in our bodies, our hearts, our psyches, our spirits, *and* our minds” (34). Embodied methods common in introductory WGS classes include “privilege walks,” role-playing, and standing on a continuum to measure beliefs and values. These types of activities allow students to critically think about their positions on topics without necessarily discussing their thoughts vocally, fostering critical thinking about “the basis for or origin of their attitudes/beliefs” (Rozema 4). Kinesthetic activities “[energize] and [involve] students. Since all students are now required to get on their feet . . . it changes the energy in the room,” even engaging reluctant participators (Rozema 4). I utilize a range of embodied activities in introductory WGS classes and preface them with Boalian techniques of bodily demechanization such as “silly walks” to shake everyone out of routine habits of “classroom” embodiment.

### Example 1: Bodies and Power in the Classroom

I often use a performance-based activity early in the semester to (1) get students used to using their bodies in the classroom and (2) open discussion about how power works in the classroom. The “Miss Teacher” exercise pairs Boal’s “Image of Transition” exercise that generates “an argument by visual means alone” (85) with a short scene from Audre Lorde’s *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* that narrates an experience at a sight-conversion kindergarten for legally blind poor black children. I have used this exercise with groups who were reading the text for class as well as with groups that only had a photocopy of the scene; thus, the exercise could enrich textual analysis, or it could be used as a standalone lesson on critical pedagogy.

In Lorde’s scene, students must write the first letter of their first name in a special wide-ruled notebook with a crayon. Well ahead of her peers and accustomed to writing with standard paper and pencil, Lorde scrawls her entire name, “half-showing off, half-eager to please” (24). The teacher’s shaming reprimand, “I see we have a young lady who does not want to do as she is told. We will have to tell her mother about that” (24), is familiar to anyone brought up in an educational system that prizes obedience above learning. Paying close attention to this short scene offers a rich study of the power dynamics embedded in teacher-student relationships, including how gender, race, class, and disability shape classroom labor expectations. While Lorde cannot recall “Miss Teacher’s” race, Lorde’s references to her as “miss” and “lady” encourages reading her as white, and Lorde’s immigrant family’s poverty underscores her ambition.



After reading the scene aloud, I begin Boal’s “Image of Transition” by asking participants to construct an image of oppression that highlights the relationship between Audre and Miss Teacher. The “real” image students construct is usually an exaggerated model of dominance and submission: the student playing Audre cowers, often on knees with head in hands, and the student playing Miss Teacher towers above while others playing “classmates” turn their attention toward the scene and giggle, point, gasp in shock at Audre’s “misbehavior,” or look away lest Miss Teacher’s anger come their way. “Students” can dismiss, ignore, challenge, or engage with the “teacher” in various ways, but their power is responsive to the embodied performance of “teacher.”

Students then “freeze,” holding their positions, discussing what they note about everyone’s positions. Then, students create an “ideal” version in which each actor moves in a way “in which the oppression will have been eliminated and everyone in the model will have come to a plausible equilibrium” (Boal185-186). Classes often depict characters holding hands or reading together, embarking on a shared learning experience. Finally, participants make static images of transition: on handclaps, they move from the “real” scene to the “ideal” scene and note who moves, how much, and how much

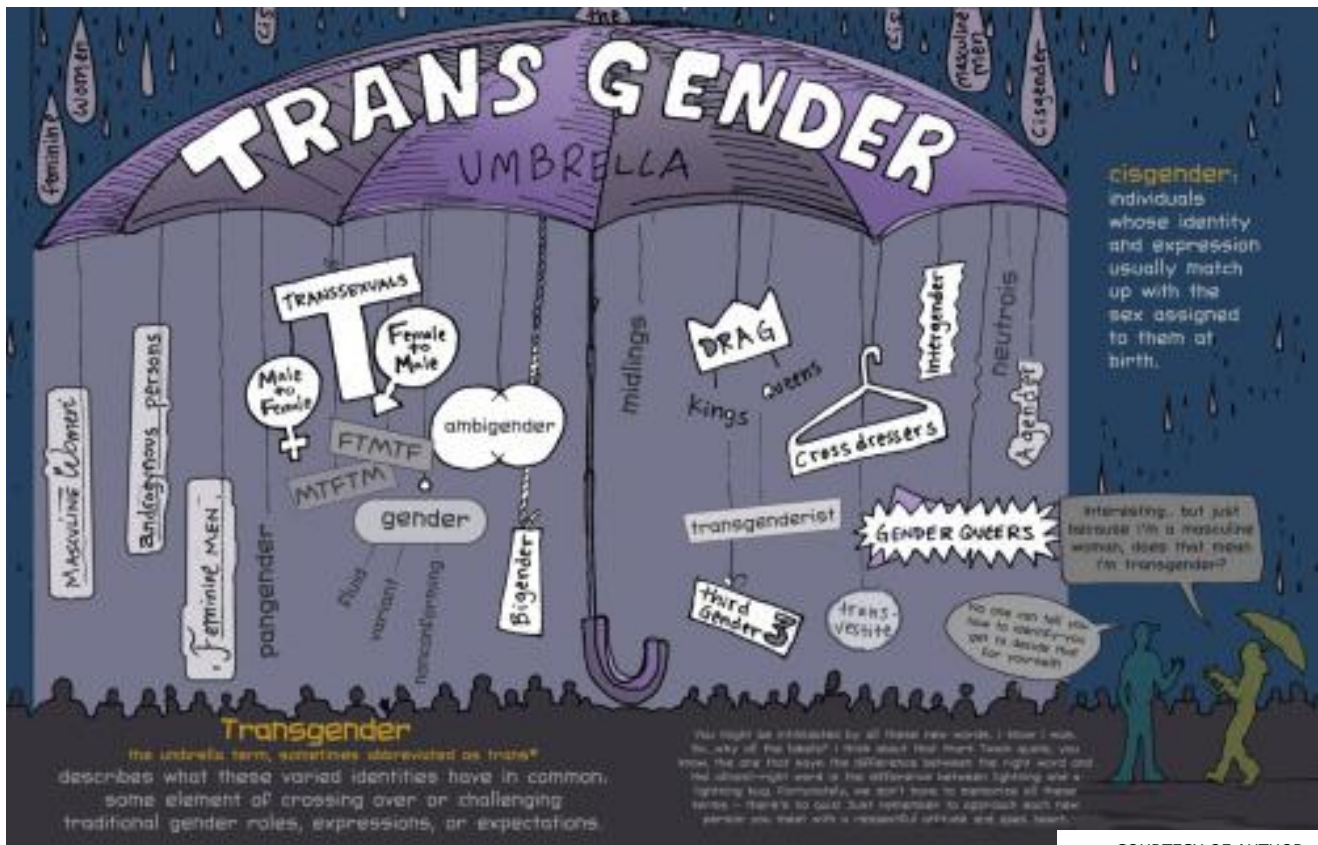
effort each participant must exert to shift. Usually “Miss Teacher” moves the most, suggesting that serious effort is needed to dismantle power by those already in positions of power. The point of the exercise, according to Boal, is to spark actual change to move from fantasy to realized ideals (186). A class that’s reading the text can discuss how “Miss Teacher” embodies a white masculinized authoritarian position, regardless of her actual racial and gender identities, to socialize poor, disabled, and/or black children as docile, whereas a class that’s not reading the text can gain an entry point for dismantling oppressive power dynamics within the classroom.

**Example 2: Embodying the Social Construction of Gender**

After introducing students to the fundamentals of WGS such as feminism, social location, and identity from a critical feminist point-of-view, the second, three-week unit of my introductory Women’s & Gender Studies courses is on the social construction of gender. I use the recently-published *Threshold Concepts in Women’s and Gender*

biological and social models of gender, excerpts from Michael Kimmel’s *Guyland* to show how masculinity is socially constructed, and the recently-released documentary *Three to Infinity* to expose students to the spectrum model of gender.

During the first week of instruction in this unit, when students are new to the concept, I utilize a simple embodied exercise to teach at least three interrelated concepts: (1) gender cannot be reduced to physical bodies, yet we read gender through bodies, (2) we “do” gender constantly (Lorber), and (3) there are important differences between sex, gender identity, and gender expression. It is crucial to preface this activity by telling students that they do not have to participate in the activity if it makes them uncomfortable and by clearly articulating that I’m deliberately utilizing cultural stereotypes to deconstruct the “truth” of them. The exercise asks students to instruct me to first sit and then walk “like a lady” and then “like a man.” As I perform the different motions, students report what they notice, and I ask whether they



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*Studies* as a backbone to the course; the text is broken into four “threshold concepts” that are crucial to doing advanced work in the discipline: the social construction of gender, privilege and oppression, intersectionality, and feminist praxis. In addition to reading the textbook chapter on the social construction of gender, I also assign Judith Lorber’s “The Social Construction of Gender,” selections from Julia Serano’s *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity* to present a model of gender construction she calls “intrinsic inclinations,” selections from Anne Fausto-Sterling’s *Sex/Gender: Biology in a Social World* to further probe at

think these habits are inborn or learned. I am also clear about my own embodied habits as a cisgender, somewhat femme woman who is currently embodying the role of professor. Afterwards, students join me in sitting and walking both “like a man” and a “like a woman,” then discuss how they felt in each.

This activity serves as the starting point for a rich discussion about how gender is done in myriad ways through routine, mundane actions such as sitting, standing, or walking and how we are taught to read gender in ways that reinforce cissexist and sexist myths about

gender and physical bodies, probing students to question whether these bodily habits are inborn or learned. We discuss cultural location; for example, in U.S. culture, men are discouraged from sitting with their legs crossed (which students often argue is anatomical), while elsewhere—such as France—men routinely sit with crossed legs. This can open space for critical reflection about how *others* enforce gendered ways of moving throughout the world. Interestingly, most students, regardless of institutional context or gender, racial, sexual, or class identity, find traditionally “male” ways of sitting and walking more comfortable, casual, confident, and relaxed. The assigned readings challenge students to ask how gender expression is read differently on differently raced bodies, how gender expression is often conflated with sexuality, how power and confidence is associated with butch or “masculine” embodiments, and how femme ways of sitting/standing are disparaged. This exercise deepens engagement with theories of gender essentialism from trans and gender-nonconforming perspectives.

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Performing “gamesercises” such as the two described above allows for the simultaneous emotional and cognitive processing Iverson calls “imagination-intellect” that “disrupt[s] the mind/body dichotomy that situates that which is embodied in opposition (and subordinate) to that which is rational, and to trouble conceptions of power and authority and of knowledge production and transmission” (190-191). Throughout the semester, students may also embody other concepts such as *intersectionality*, *lesbian baiting*, or *compulsory heterosexuality*. This embodied work helps students understand the complex interactions between the individual and the social. Instead of using class time to lecture so that students absorb the lessons cognitively, embodied exercises can open space “to empower individuals to see themselves as agents of social change” (Iverson, 181). These activities can broaden student awareness of corporeal difference, make knowledge accessible to a wider range of learners, and ground abstract, theoretical concepts. Embodied activities can also highlight the expected docility of student embodiment to enable discussions of how labor expectations within the classroom rely on ableist assumptions of being able to sit still for long periods of time; climb stairs; push heavy doors open; and carry heavy books, notebooks, or laptops that can push the limits of bodily ability for many.<sup>3</sup>

***While most students report enjoying and learning from embodied activities, the entertainment aspect can nonetheless reinforce the student-as-consumer model.***

These exercises suggest how power framed as subordination and domination works through bodies in mundane, everyday situations. But, what does it mean if students (and teachers) have different abilities to

dramatize power or the lack of it? These exercises work best in classrooms in which students are similarly able-bodied. For example, how would a Deaf student respond to spoken cues? How would a Blind student see various actors’ positions at the end of the activity? How might wheelchair users or students using crutches move in response to each statement? In discussing the “arsenal of theatre of the oppressed,” Boal notes that, “No one should undertake or continue any exercise or game if they have some injury or condition which might be exacerbated by taking part – a back problem, for instance. In Theatre of the Oppressed no one is compelled to do anything they don’t wish to do” (49). Boalian activities often utilize participants as observers or notetakers so that anyone can opt out of the physical exercises. Each exercise can also work well with a range of abled bodies; for example, those with mobility limitations can participate as they are, Blind students can engage through touch, or Deaf students can respond to visual cues. Furthermore, this exercise is illuminating: different power dynamics can become salient, depending on the embodied identities of the participants. For example, when a white male student played “Miss Teacher,” “students” in the scene did not rebel much, and the class read “Audre,” played by a white woman, as victimized (where, perhaps, a student of color would have been read as defiant). However, when a woman of color played “Miss Teacher,” “students” were more disobedient, and the “solution” at the end involved hand-holding, while the “solution” for the male “Miss Teacher” required him helping “Audre” one-on-one. The exercise changes depending on the demographics, and it’s useful to do it more than once with different actors to imagine different outcomes.

While most students report enjoying and learning from embodied activities, the entertainment aspect can nonetheless reinforce the student-as-consumer model. Mohanty warns that the emancipatory theory that underlies critical praxis can “become a commodity to be consumed; no longer seen as a product of activist scholarship or connected to emancipatory knowledge, it can circulate as a sign of prestige in an elitist, neoliberal landscape” (970). Students’ enthusiasm about embodied activities can serve neoliberal ends by helping them consume course concepts with engagement. Student understanding of embodied learning as “not academic” can be grounded in neoliberal goals that prioritize breadth rather than depth of knowledge. Without “feminist pedagogical emphasis on social action,” the embodied work described above “will not necessarily translate into a different way of being and acting civically” (Iverson, 191). Thus, I balance kinesthetic activities with another kind of embodied labor: a semester-long reconfiguration of participation I’ve developed called Collaborative Participation.

## Collaborative Participation as Shared Labor

De-centralizing teachers’ authority is key to critical feminist pedagogy, re-fashioning professors as models of “the kind of redistribution of expertise” they want students to emulate (Byrd *et al*, 9). Below, I discuss two examples

of methods I've developed to share labor and power where appropriate through collaboration.

### **Example 1: Collaboration on Classroom Policies**

I prioritize collaboration during the first day of class by developing a contract that establishes guidelines and policies such as in-class technology use and discussion norms. This is often the first time students' attention is drawn explicitly to the labor involved in classroom design. Participating in the formation of classroom policies, guidelines, and ground rules allows students to think critically about the learning process as well as share in the labor and responsibility as co-creators of the classroom environment.

Typically, students collaborate well on establishing communication guidelines or technology policies. However, some experience this as "a waste of time" because, as one student at a public state university put it, "a good discussion either happens or it doesn't. There's nothing we as a class can do about it," or, as another student notes, "If the professor is doing their job, things should just flow naturally." In contrast, a student at a private liberal arts college states, "The professor was someone who would not step up as a professor and create structure. . . . It felt as if she was making us do her job to decide what she is doing." Both groups maintain a general position that designing and maintaining the classroom environment is primarily the result of a teacher's talent as well as the conviction that this labor should happen without explicitly discussing it during (admittedly limited) class time. The private liberal arts student's indignation at being asked to collaborate, however, may suggest a stronger consumer mentality.

While collaboratively establishing shared ground rules and expectations can take considerable time, space, and labor, they are crucial to increase student agency because, as James Slevin argues, "Critical inquiry and exchange are supported by a pedagogy that levels the playing field not just by bringing academic norms and expectations into the open but through classroom practices explicit in their interrogation and critique of those norms" (53).

### **Example 2: Collaborative Participation**

Collaborative Participation [CP] is a model of participation I've developed over several years. I developed the concept from "class jobs," which I heard about through word-of-mouth, when a colleague returned from a talk by Chris Emdin, a scholar known for his innovative "Hip-Hop" approach to education. The key point of Emdin's "jobs" is to build a sense of community and shared responsibility in predominately Black high school classrooms. Emdin, a Black man teaching students of color in an urban setting, did not design his "jobs" as a feminist pedagogical practice, but rather as a way to participate in shared community. After talking with my colleague, I adapted them for WGS classrooms. However, I quickly modified the "job" model because of strong student resistance. With CP, the logistics vary every semester depending on the number of students in a course and student interest. I divide participation into three categories: online, in-class, and outside-of-class. Students sign up on an open document on Blackboard, and they

must complete up to four options over the course of the semester. I designed CP to offer a clear-cut means to earn participation points while also distributing agency within the classroom: by encouraging regular communication and collaboration between students and their peers (as well as between students and me), creating a sense of community, and offering a model of feminist praxis. Because CP is more hands-on than most participation, it takes time to discuss, implement, and adjust each semester.

In the first category, students can engage with the class online in one of three ways: (1) post to the class "Coffee Shop" forum by continuing class discussions or sharing relevant media items several times throughout the semester, (2) post a list of defined key terms from a reading assignment, or (3) post an outline to guide students through a difficult reading. Online participation is especially beneficial for students who find it difficult to speak up in class.

The second type of participation happens in class. Examples include: re-cap the previous class, prepare an opening question, report on a campus event, report on recommended reading, or facilitate a portion of class discussion. Two end-of-class options mark the end of class, providing a sense of closure: "Listener" or "Reflective Activity." For example, the "Listener" takes five minutes at the end of class to report on what they heard in class, emphasizing that active listening is a key skill for quality discussions. Students have modified these options over time, adding some and eliminating others. For example, I used to have an "Attendance Taker" option; however, students strongly opposed it, though some did report appreciating the extra motivation to get to class early, attend consistently, and learn their classmates' names.

***Typically, students collaborate well on establishing communication guidelines or technology policies.***

The final category, outside-of-class, includes group work such as Professor Feedback Panel, Study Guide Team, Assignment Consulting Board, Film Screening Organizers, or Satisfaction Surveyors, among others. In general, students collaborate in groups of two to four to work with me throughout the semester on one aspect of classroom design, management, or student experience. For example, the Professor Feedback Panel discusses with me what's going well, areas of student concern, and helps brainstorm solutions to problems, opening possibility for changes to the class. These options are more time-intensive and as such are weighted more heavily, but they benefit students directly while also giving me a better understanding of student experience in the course. I have found that students are often eager to discuss any frustrations or uncertainties about the course and to work toward a solution that upholds the learning goals. There must be, of course, an environment of trust for students to be willing to communicate about struggles without fear of punishment via grades. While there is potential for students to approach these from a consumer-driven perspective by, for example, attempting to influence



grading policies, emphasizing collaboration-as-process alleviates those temptations for the most part.

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What I like about CP is that it can counter competitiveness. Fostering collaboration runs counter to neoliberal goals of competition and individualization—for example, one student argued that I shouldn't "force" students to write Study Guides for everyone because other students can utilize them without doing the work. However, I believe that there are benefits to offering participation credit for creating open and accessible study guides for the class: it can broaden students' understanding of participation, accommodate more students' learning styles, highlight the collaborative nature of knowledge, give students a clear means to earn credit for their participation, and make the classroom a more welcoming and inclusive space.

Student responses, however, are mixed. Some students drop the course immediately. Others shift their thoughts throughout the semester. One student writes, "At first, I didn't like it. Near midterm I realized how power in our classroom was equally distributed . . . I like how we had the power to determine our rules and could lead our discussions." Of course, it is neither possible nor desirable for professors and students to equally share power, as professors' training, content knowledge, and responsibility to evaluate student work allows them certain forms of earned privilege that do not necessarily need remedying. Other students appreciated having participation options and built-in communication, which made them feel comfortable with each other as well as approaching me. In addition to redistributing power in the classroom, another student found that CP could "teach us skills that are beneficial to have as students such as organization, communication and team work." Importantly, many who reported positive experiences with this aspect of the course aligned themselves with the social justice goals of feminism.

Students who resisted Collaborative Participation most often addressed particular issues such as a perceived increased work burden, fairness, the "trivial" nature of the work, and appropriate division of labor. For example, some students interpret CP as intending to reduce my workload: "I thought the fact that the students had jobs to help the professor out and 'to give us participation and a say in the class' very unprofessional on her part and made me feel like we were in elementary school." Another found CP effective "as a theoretical concept [in which] everybody was supposed to have a say in how things are done," yet he also articulated a struggle with authority in ways that suggest that careful framing is necessary when implementing the CP model of participation: "assigning class jobs is only giving the illusion of empowerment. What I mean is, if you have a child and you tell him/her that he/she can get his/her shower before dinner or after dinner, he/she feels like he/she has the choice. In reality, however, whichever option the child chooses, he/she is getting a shower and dinner. There's really no choice in the matter."

Infantilization is a theme in both responses; the first, by drawing parallels to elementary school, suggests that while shared power might be productive with small children, the "professional" (read: masculine) world operates on a system of power-over. The second student's use of the verb "assigning" rather than "designing" or "utilizing," reminds us that pedagogical methods are implemented and understood within neoliberal power dynamics that are also gendered and racialized, even when we attempt to remedy this. While this student could have used military or workplace analogies to describe a top-down command to labor, he nonetheless framed them in terms of domestic, often feminized labor. Relegating professorial authority to that of a parent offering a child the illusion of choice frames the reallocation of power as domestic rather than an impetus to social change. In other words, this student struggled to conceptualize how CP could foster true change within neoliberal institutions. Perhaps my own embodiment, as white, relatively young, and femme-presenting, influences students to think of me in terms of an elementary-school teacher or parent of a young child.



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CP could reproduce gendered and racial power dynamics. Having students choose how they will participate alleviates concern about teachers assigning inappropriate tasks. However, power dynamics among students can be reproduced. For example, one student noted that caretaking labor was gendered—only women signed up for options that involved caretaking. Other more problematic situations could go undetected by faculty. For example, a Black woman explained to me after a course that when she collaborated with a white, gay male student, she ended up doing the majority of the work and felt she had little say in challenging him, holding him accountable, or speaking to me during the course because of gendered and racial power dynamics.

Despite some challenges in implementing Collaborative Participation, I offer it here as a model for others to adapt to suit their needs. I argue that students who directly contribute to the often-feminized labor of classroom management and community-building must become active learners and knowledge creators rather than mere

consumers. I postulate that students prefer embodied methods because they can be aligned with neoliberal goals of individualized “edutainment,” while CP can challenge the student-as-consumer model. However, power re-allocation contrasts with students’ increasing lack of political efficacy within the NCU. While the student-as-customer may be always right, students have little, if any say, in university policies, such as tuition rates that impact them for decades after graduation. Thus, having a component of class process-oriented rather than product-oriented can threaten students who take a consumer approach to education, but it nonetheless offers a deeper engagement with key concepts, experience working with the theories presented, and a more egalitarian model of shared responsibility that is necessary for serious social change.

## Conclusion: Enacting Embodiment and Collaboration While Contingent

To recall the anecdote with which I opened, teaching and learning are embodied practices that can express, challenge, uphold, and subvert power dynamics. Overall, WGS courses teach students how to understand the impact of intersected, embodied identities such as gender, race, class, sexuality, nationality, and disability from individual to institutional levels. However, this work happens within a neoliberal context that frames education largely as a product for consumption rather than process so that “teaching about and against oppression [are not] valued by those holding power within [academic institutions]” (Byrd *et al.* 2010, 1). The two learning strategies I’ve discussed—embodied performative activities and Collaborative Participation—work together to engender student agency, yet doing this work is risky because it disrupts traditional classroom norms. As discussions about “flipped” classrooms in Robert Talbert’s blog post on *The Chronicle of Higher Education* suggest, professors still hotly debate what kind of labor should be done during “contact hours” and by whom (2014). If the classroom is the prime observable location of faculty labor, then, what does this analysis of embodied classroom labor highlight about larger questions of power that haunt the academy as a whole?

***Employing feminist pedagogical methods can be risky for professors who are unsecure in their employment, but it can also be very risky for students who expect to operate efficiently within the neoliberal academy, where power, and thus responsibility, is not expected to be shared.***

My answer is that academic power devalues collaborative and participatory labor by making it invisible. Thus, we need to (1) make labor visible by honoring the behind-the-scenes work that leads to successful classes and (2) acknowledge that effective classes require student-teacher collaboration, working together or working

*withrather than working for.* The student-as-consumer model necessitates that certain types of labor ought to be invisible. For example, the methods described above take considerable time and effort to implement. In an academic culture in which disciplinary scholarship is the primary measure for employment, promotion, reappointment, and tenure, teaching introductory courses is often relegated to those lowest on the academic pecking order, and the work of researching pedagogical methods “is often viewed by deans and department heads as frivolous and not valid scholarship” (TuSmith and Reddy 2002, 316). Nonetheless, this labor is important and must be made visible.

The contingent nature of much academic employment drives this analysis of classroom labor within the NCU because the power of the market to influence the classroom particularly impacts contingent professors. The student-as-consumer model necessitates that certain types of labor ought to be invisible, and meeting with students and ensuring consensus among the class takes considerable time and effort. Given the fierce competition for academic positions, as a Visiting Assistant Professor, I am highly aware of my own disposability within the academic marketplace, which makes me especially attuned to student evaluations and anxious to end each semester with a group of students who are happy consumers of the product offered (Lewontin). In this way, attention to student satisfaction is an often invisible but nonetheless crucial part of the labor of academics, especially those whose ability to secure employment hinges upon high student ratings.

Employing feminist pedagogical methods can be risky for professors who are unsecure in their employment, but it can also be very risky for students who expect to operate efficiently within the neoliberal academy, where power, and thus responsibility, is not expected to be shared. As Brulé shows, students who position themselves as educational consumers operate to maximize their options within a hostile labor market often resist the goals of social change because this critique threatens their means to success within the neoliberal institution. Students face very real pressure to stand out from classmates to secure employment in a dwindling market, which encourages competition. With corporatization comes expectations of similarity (*i.e.*, chain restaurants), and egalitarian pedagogy challenges this homogeneity. As David Perry notes in a 2015 article in *Chronicle Vitae*, students have little real power, and they position themselves as consumers to claim what power is available to them. Strong identification and alignment with traditional models of education can create tension, even hostility, if feminist methods challenge expected structures and classroom norms that students have learned to navigate with success. Thus, student rejection of the methods described in this essay can be framed as anxieties about their own insecurity within the NCU.

Given this context, then, should we understand the embodied work described above as empowering or a relinquishment of faculty responsibility to prepare students for their future? The work of making power visible and remedying unjust uses and abuses of power lies at the root of WGS as a discipline, and feminist teachers continually

interrogate the function of critical feminist pedagogical methods within a neoliberal context that frames education largely as a product for consumption. While students may challenge nonstandard teaching methods, a growing proportion of students does not flourish under traditional teaching methods and is excited about the possibilities for change critical feminist methods can offer. I argue that using both embodied activities and collaborative participatory practices can help meet the needs of diverse groups of students. As one student notes, "The classroom has a power structure where the teacher has power over the students, and there are unspoken rules that students know to live by. [CP] facilitate[s] education by practice—starting in the classroom." Thus, even though utilizing embodied, collaborative methods runs the risk of negative evaluations, because they can give students the experience of enacting change at the classroom level, I see merit in continuing to collaborate with students to shape these methods so that radical teachers live up to their goal of empowering students to understand themselves as autonomous, responsible, and whole subjects capable of enacting change. This, I believe, is the goal of WGS as a discipline and thus well worth the risk for both feminist teachers and our students.

## Notes

1. Boal's embodied theatrical methods ask participants to become attuned to the mechanization of the body, moving students from a position of passive spectators who are recipients of an instructor's performed discourses to active constructors of their own knowledge. Boal designed his methods to help oppressed populations access the body's potential for expression to help imagine and bring about social justice.

2. Weber advocates using active, engaged feminist pedagogical methods she calls "serious play" that "expose neoliberal and postfeminist 'politically neutral' logics" (131) by "acknowledg[ing] embodied epistemologies" (136). Keeping bodies central in teaching, she argues, "give[s] credence to the messiness that is endemic to the 'sense of struggle' always a part of the power relations feminism seeks to expose" (136).

3. While outside the scope of this paper, in a class committed to social justice for people with marginalized identities, care must be taken to avoid reinforcing compulsory able-bodiedness during kinesthetic exercises; however, participating in these activities can serve as an opening point for exploring how (dis)ability shapes knowledge production.

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# Intro to Women's & Gender Studies

Dr. Cara E. Jones  
Hamilton College  
Fall 2016

Welcome to Intro to Women's Studies! Right now, you might be wondering: what *is* Women's Studies, anyway? As a field, Women's Studies encompasses many disciplines and points of view. In this introductory class, you will be primarily learning how to take a gender studies scholar's perspective, a way of seeing the world that is focused on how power works in, on, and through people, communities, and institutions. This interdisciplinary course explores the basic concepts and perspectives of Women's & Gender Studies from an intersectional angle, that is, examining the ways in which gender intersects with race, ethnicity, nationality, class, sexuality, sexual identity, disability, and other categories. The concepts of gender—the roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a society considers appropriate for men and women—privilege and oppression, intersectionality, and feminist praxis will be at the core of this course. Throughout the semester, we will consider the following questions asked by feminist scholar Estelle Freedman: "What difference does gender make? For which women does it make a difference?"

Like most of the gender studies courses taught in the United States, this course is grounded in feminism(s). Feminism has always been a controversial and dangerous term. While its definition and practices continue to shift, put simply, feminism is a belief system and activist practice aimed at transforming women's experiences of themselves in families, in the workplace, in relationships, and in the educational and political arenas. Feminism is not a monolithic term: different types of feminisms advocate for different aspects of women's lives to be changed, but historically, feminists fought to create courses centered on women's experiences. It is a tribute to the past and continuing work of feminist scholars and activists that I teach this course from a feminist perspective.

## Goals:

After taking this course, you will:

1. Understand the definition of feminism and the relationship between feminism, as a social movement, and the discipline of Women's & Gender Studies
1. Know the history behind feminist activism, social movements, and field of study
2. Understand debates about theories of gender construction, including: biological essentialism, social constructionism, and intrinsic inclinations
3. Be able to define "privilege" and "oppression" from a WGS perspective and apply this knowledge to your own life and experiences as well as the experiences of people who are different from you based on gender, race, class, size, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, or ability
4. Define "intersectionality" and use it as a theoretical lens to ground feminist debates, discussions, and activism
5. Draw on models and examples of feminist activism to design an activist project

I have designed this course with all of Hamilton's educational goals in mind, and while this course touches upon all of them, I draw your attention in particular to these five:

- **Intellectual Curiosity and Flexibility**
- **Communication and Expression**
- **Understanding of Cultural Diversity**
- **Disciplinary Practice**

- **Ethical, Informed and Engaged Citizenship**

**Required Texts:**

Launius, Christie and Holly Hassel. *Threshold Concepts in Women's and Gender Studies: Ways of Seeing, Thinking, and*

*Knowing*. New York: Routledge, 2015. ISBN: 978-1138788800

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *We Should All Be Feminists*. New York: Anchor Books, 2014. ISBN: 978-1-101-91176-1

You will also be following these blogs. Please bookmark them or add them within the first week of class:

*Bitch* Magazine, Weekly Reader, Blog, or Facebook

Black Girl Dangerous, Blog, Facebook, or Twitter

Colorlines, Blog, Facebook, or Twitter

"Everyday Feminism," Web Subscription or Facebook

"Gender & Society," Web Subscription, Facebook, or Twitter

"Guerrilla Feminism," Web Subscription or Facebook

Finally, you will be accessing a significant number of readings through Blackboard. Please factor the cost of printing and ink into your book budget for the semester.

Your grade will be calculated according to Hamilton College Regulations, as follows:\*

**Excellent Good Satisfactory Poor Failure**

98-100: A+ 88-89: B+ 78-79: C+ 68-69: D+ 55-60: F

94-97: A 84-87: B 74-77: C 64-67: D 0-55: FF

90-93: A- 80-83: B- 70-73: C- 60-63: D

**Assignments:**

Please save all returned work with feedback

**Participation: 20%**

It is important to create a supportive, safe, open, and inclusive classroom atmosphere that values the educational process and learning goals. Our class structure will mirror the values and practices of the discipline of Women's & Gender Studies by centering on guided, student-driven discussions that take place in a classroom space arranged to promote an engaged, egalitarian, collaborative, and participatory environment. Your participation will be graded on:

**Collaborative Participation: 100 points, 20%**

Because this is a discussion-based course, you will be graded on your contribution to the classroom community through collaboration and reflection. As a group, we will come to a consensus about what we need in our class during class discussions and expand our understanding of what counts as participation.

*Please see separate sheet for more information on your options for earning participation credit.*

**\*Attendance** is calculated as part of your participation score. Because this is a discussion-based class, your attendance is necessary in every class period. This number is calculated from the number of times you've attended class divided by the total number of times we've met as a class.

**You are permitted a total of two absences without penalty – there is no need to communicate these to me; you may take them as needed.** In the event of an emergency that will keep you from attending class for more than two class periods, please contact me ASAP. Because it is disruptive to the learning process, you will lose ½ a participation point for each time you arrive late or leave early.

**Writing Assignments, 75% total:** This course is Writing-Intensive (WI). Because learning to write well is an ongoing process, the faculty has committed to a WI Program that will assist you in

learning to write well in multiple disciplines throughout your time at Hamilton. This course provides you with the opportunity to write frequently; learn how to write in different genres; and receive feedback on your writing from me, tutors at the Writing /ESOL Center, and each other. We will also devote some course time to addressing common problems I observe in written assignments as well as concerns students might raise in class. Expect to engage in a significant amount of critical thinking, synthesis, and analysis through writing. The process of re-reading, of seeing your work with new eyes and rethinking your approach to assignments, constitutes the bulk of what scholars and professional writers do and will be built-in as part of your writing during this course. This course requires 4 short mini-blogs as well as two response papers, a take-home midterm, written participation evaluations, and a final project with a written component. These are spaced over the course of the semester and constitute the majority of your course grade (75%). You are required to have a writing conference with the Writing /ESOL Center for each Response Paper and are strongly encouraged to confer with the Writing/ESOL Center on all of your assignments, even when it is not required.

**Late Policy:** Late assignments will be accepted only in emergency situations. If requesting an extension, please email me in advance, and limit your requests to one per semester. I am committed to returning papers that were submitted on time within two class meetings if possible, three at most. If you submit your work late, I will grade it at my convenience.

**Revision Policy:** You may revise one paper (choose wisely!) if you earn less than a B, but you must notify me via email after 48 hours but within two weeks of receiving graded comments to schedule a meeting to discuss your revision strategy. I will average the two grades. I am also happy to meet with you prior to a due date to discuss a paper draft. Please arrange an appointment at least 1 week in advance of the due date and email me the whole draft.

**A note about Arguments:** The most important skill you can master during your time at college is writing succinct, clear, and persuasive arguments that are well structured and supported by evidence. Our in-classwork is designed to ensure understanding, synthesis, and application of the skills and concepts learned, and your writing assignments are designed to help you develop analysis and argument. Think about it: what's more powerful than shaping the way that people think about an issue?

#### **Mini-Blogs: 4 @ 5% each (20%)**

In order to connect course material with current events, you will follow several feminist blogs either on the Internet or on Facebook/Twitter. You will write your own 2-3 paragraph-long blog post 4 times this semester and post it to the Mini-Blog forum on Blackboard. To start each blog, first choose a recent post that interests you. To write your post, explain your own position on the topic raised by the blog. Utilize specific course concepts, relevant key terms, and at least one direct quotation from the reading and one from your chosen blog.

Make sure that you do not simply summarize, but rather synthesize multiple viewpoints and put forward your own position on the topic. Finally, be creative and have fun with this project: engage your readers by posing questions or including a video, image, audio, or link to another piece. Remember to include a link to the article you're responding to!

The goal of this assignment is to develop specific writing skills, receive feedback about your writing from me, and apply course concepts. The blogs are due at 10:00pm on Thursday evenings, and you must also respond substantially to at least two of your peers' posts by midnight. Feedback and final grades will be based on the rubric posted on Blackboard, which assesses the clarity and strength of your writing, critical thinking skills, and overall engagement with this assignment. Each post is worth **50** points (40 points for the post, 10 for your comments on others' posts)

#### **Response Papers: 2 @ 10% each (20%)**

Twice this semester, you will write a 750-1000 word response paper to develop specific writing skills, receive feedback from me, and synthesize and apply course concepts. Each paper explores a concept central to learning how to think like a gender studies scholar. Your paper will offer a close reading of material we've read for class, including at least **2 properly cited direct quotations** and **2 key terms from course texts**. Your paper should demonstrate not only that you've read the

text(s) and concepts, but also that you understand its context and argument, and that you can articulate and substantiate your reactions to it. Your response is a formal essay and, as such, should have a carefully constructed argument, including clear thesis, use MLA style headings, formatting, in-text citations, and Works Cited, and include a Word Count at the end.

**You are required to go to the Writing Center or ESOL Center for each response paper no more than 48 hours before the deadline**

Please submit proof of attendance. See individual assignments for more information:

- Topic 1: The Social Construction of Gender (current cultural artifact) **Due Th 9/29 by 11:59pm**
- Topic 2: Personal Identity Narrative **Due Th 11/3 by 11:59pm**

**Midterm Exam, 15%:** Your midterm will be a take-home, written examination, comprised of several short answer questions. I designed this examination to test content knowledge and skill at analysis, synthesis, application, and writing. **Due Tuesday, October 11<sup>th</sup> by 11:59pm**

**Final: 3 components totaling 25%.** Working in groups of 2-4 (or alone), you will choose one of the four

options below to pursue a final project related to this semester's work that interests, intrigues, perplexes, or even upsets you.

- *Option 1:* You may choose a **traditional 6-8 page research paper**, through which you may pursue: (1) a scholarly question, (2) a campus-based issue, or (3) a larger social problem.
- *Option 2:* is an **Activist/Scholar project** that is either based on campus or locally.
- *Option 3, Art as Activism* allows you to develop an artistic piece and accompanying artist statement.
- *Option 4* is a **Pedagogical Project** that investigates an educational issue; including (1) researching texts *not* used in this class and making an argument for substitution, (2) designing an alternate or specific version of this course, (3) designing a larger unit of at least four weeks that was not taught in this course, or (4) developing an assignment that would assess skill and knowledge on a key concept in the course. This project develops and assesses your ability to collaborate as well as synthesize, apply, and write about course concepts.

To develop these skills, each group will complete and receive feedback from me on:

- **1). Proposal & Annotated Bibliography, 5%, due 11/15 @ 11:59pm**
- **2) Mini-lesson, 5%, due Thursday 12/15 @ 9am (final exam period for the course)**
- **3) Research project, 15%, Thursday 12/15 @ 11:59pm**

Feedback and final grades will be based on the rubric posted on Blackboard.

\*In order to pass the class, students must complete all assigned work and engage with the class on a regular and meaningful basis. I strongly encourage you to work with the Writing Center or ESOL Center for each major writing assignment. In keeping with community standards, I expect that all work submitted adheres to the Hamilton College Honor Code. For this course, it means that all work is solely yours, and anything that is not your own is properly cited.

**Women's Studies Research Guide** - <http://libguides.hamilton.edu/WomensStudies>

## **Course Schedule:**

### **UNIT 1: What is WGS?**

#### **Week 1: What is This Thing Called Women's Studies?**

*Recommended:* Kirk and Okazawa-Rey, Ch. 1, "Untangling the 'F'-Word & Paula Gunn Allen, "Who is Your Mother?"

Red Roots of White Feminism"



Th 8/25: Welcome to class!

## **Week 2: Identities, Feminism, & Women's and Gender Studies**

*Recommended:* Jennifer Baumgardner & Amy Richards, "A Day Without Feminism"

T 8/30: *Threshold*, Intro & Becky Thompson, "Multiracial Feminism: Recasting the Chronology of Second Wave Feminism"

Th 9/1: Kirk & Okazawa-Rey, Ch. 3, "Identities and Social Relations: Who am I? Who Are My People?," Ijeoma

A., "Because You're a Girl," & Susan Muaddi Darraj, "It's Not an Oxymoron: The Search for Arab Feminism"

Blog 1 due by 10:00 pm; responses due by midnight

## **UNIT 2: Constructing Gender**

### **Week 3: The Social Construction of Gender**

*Recommended:* Judith Lorber, "The Social Construction of Gender"

T 9/6: Ch. 2 *Threshold* "The Social Construction of Gender"

Th 9/8: Julia Serano, "Blind Spots: On Subconscious Sex and Gender Entitlement" & "Intrinsic Inclinations:

Explaining Gender and Sexual Diversity" from *Whipping Girl*

Blog 2 Due by 10:00 pm; 2 responses by midnight

### **Week 4: The Social Construction of Masculinity**

*Recommended:* Anne Fausto-Sterling, "The Five Sexes, Revisited"

T 9/13: Michael Kimmel, Ch. 3 of *Guyland*, "Bros Before Hos: The Guy Code"

Th 9/15: Jackson Katz, "Violence Against Women: It's a Men's Issue," Tony Porter, "A Call to Men," & "I'm aMan" Draft Paper 1: make Writing /ESOL Center appointment

### **Week 5: Breaking Down the Gender Binary**

*Recommended:* Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sex/Gender: Biology in a Social World*, 99-123

T 9/20: Watch & discuss *Three to Infinity* Be prepared to discuss your cultural artifact for Paper 1 in class

Th 9/22: Watch & discuss *Three to Infinity*

## **UNIT 3: Privilege & Oppression**

### **Week 6: Understanding Privilege & Oppression**

*Recommended:* Allan Johnson, "Privilege, Power, Difference, and Us"

T 9/27: Ch. 3 *Threshold* Bring your thesis statement for Paper 1 to class!

Last day for Writing /ESOL Center appointments!

Th 9/29: Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege and Male Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" & Lisa Weiner-Mahfuz, "Organizing 101: A Mixed-Race Feminist in Movements for Social Justice"

Response Paper 1 Due by 11:59 pm

### **Week 7: Classism & Heterosexism**

*Recommended:* Vivyan C. Adair, "The Missing Story of Ourselves: Poor Women, Power, and the Politics of Feminist Representation"

T 10/4: Felice Yeskel, "Adding Classism to the Agenda" & Dorothy Allison, "A Question of Class"

Th 10/6: Suzanne Pharr, "Homophobia: A Weapon of Sexism"

Blog 3 due by 10:00 pm; 2 responses by midnight

### **Week 8: Midterms!**

*Recommended:* Kimmel, "Introduction: Toward a Sociology of the Superordinate"

T 10/11: No class. Work on midterms. Due @ 11:59pm

Th 10/13: No class. Fall Break!

## **Unit 4: Intersectionality**

### **Week 9: Intersectionality**

*Recommended:* Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color"

T 10/18: *Threshold* Ch. 4 & Audre Lorde, "There is no Hierarchy of Oppressions"

Th 10/20: Patricia Hill Collins, "Toward a New Vision: Gender, Race, and Class as Categories of Analysis and

Connection" & Kimberly Springer, "Queering Black Female Heterosexuality"

Blog 4 due by 10:00 pm; 2 responses by midnight

### **Week 10: Women of Color and Feminism**

*Recommended:* Lynn Weber, "A Conceptual Framework for Understanding Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality"

T 10/25: Combahee River Collective Statement & Jewel Woods, "The Black Male Privilege Checklist" Be prepared to discuss your story for Paper 2 in class.

Th 10/27: May-lee Chai, "Dreaming of Oz: A Literacy Narrative" & Rebecca Hurdis, "Heartbroken: Women of Color Feminism and the Third Wave"

Draft Paper 2: make Writing /ESOL Center appointment

### **Week 11: Thinking Intersectionally: Different Ways of Knowing**

*Recommended:* Vivian M. May, "The Case for Intersectionality and the Question of Intersectionality Backlash"

T 11/1: Gloria Anzaldúa, "La Conciencia de la Mestiza" in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*

Last day for Writing /ESOL Center appointments! Bring thesis to class

Th 11/3: Susan Wendell, "The Social Construction of Disability"

Response Paper 2 Due by 11:59 pm

### **Week 12: Current Events Application: Election**

*Recommended:* Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House"

T 11/8: Election Day: Reading TBA on gender, race, power, & privilege in Presidential election

Th 11/10: In-class work on Project Proposal & Annotated Bibliography

### **Unit 5: Feminist Praxis**

#### **Week 13: What Next? Feminist Models of Social Change**

*Recommended:* Michael Kimmel, "Why Men Should Support Gender Equality"

T 11/15: Ch. 5 *Threshold* Annotated Bibliography & Project Proposal due @ 11:59pm

Th 11/17: Byron Hurt, "Why I am a Black Male Feminist"

#### **Week 14: Engaging Feminist Praxis**

T 11/29: bell hooks, "Sisterhood: Political Solidarity Among Women"

Th 12/1: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "We Should All Be Feminists."

#### **Week 15: Final Feminist Praxis Projects**

T 12/6: In-class work on final projects

Th 12/8: In-class work on final presentations

**Final project presentations:** Thursday, December 15 9-12

*\*Note: This syllabus is a contract between you and me. Please make sure you download and print a copy for your records. I reserve the right to make changes in the course schedule and will document any changes on*

*Blackboard. It is your responsibility to keep up to date by visiting the Blackboard page for this course daily.*

#### **Recommended Further Reading:**

Freedman, Estelle B. *No Turning Back: The History of Feminism and the Future of Women*. New York: Ballantine, 2002. Print. ISBN: 978-0345450531

hooks, bell. *Feminism is for Everyone & Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*

Hernández, Daisy and Bushra Rehman, eds. *Colonize This!: Young Women of Color on Today's Feminism*. Berkeley: Seal Press, 2002. Print. ISBN: 978-1-58005-067-8  
Kimmel, Michael & Abby Ferber, eds. *Privilege: A Reader*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Boulder: Westview Press, 2013. Print. ISBN: 978-0813348711  
Tarrant Shira. *Men and Feminism*. Berkeley: Seal Press, 2009. Print. ISBN: 978-1-58005-258-0



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# RADICAL TEACHER

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

## Mortgaged Minds: Faculty-in-Debt and Redlining Higher Education

by Jeanne Scheper



MONEY CHATTER: TAKE STUDENT LOANS (IMAGE: FILENE RESEARCH)



"Redlining" was an historic and legal practice of racial housing discrimination that operated through racial preferences and was accompanied by systemic disinvestment in communities of color. In this essay, I extend the term redlining to describe the larger function and impact of student loan debt in the context of the contemporary neoliberal university, thinking of debt's impact as a critical aspect of larger systemic processes of "redlining higher education." Further, I suggest, there needs to be a fuller accounting within that of the impact that producing "mortgaged minds" has on the contours of knowledge production in the academy.

Historically, "redlining" was a practice in which appraisers, realtors, and banks took maps and literally drew red lines around designated neighborhoods and areas of a city imagined as "high risk." Banks would refuse to invest in those areas and lenders would refuse to make loans or offered borrowers less favorable terms. The status of "risk" assigned to such areas therefore marked them for disinvestment and that status, "risk," was in practice a status determined by the neighborhood's racial or ethnic composition—without regard to residents' qualifications or creditworthiness. "Redlining" real estate calculatedly demarcated access to low-interest federal loans, and in combination with legal discriminatory practices such as restrictive covenants, which wrote racial preferences into deeds of sale, regulated housing and home ownership by racial preference. These sanctioned practices contributed to a lasting condition of racial wealth inequality in the United States up to the present day. Income- and tax-based funding of public schools effectively meant that redlined neighborhoods were guaranteed lack of access to a quality education, producing a system of educational apartheid. Today the effects of those practices continue to impact the K-12 public education system, and they are felt at the college and university level, which can correspondingly be thought of as "redlined" educational environments.

***Educational debt not only affects access to and attrition from four-year schools, but subsequently impacts the pipeline to graduate education. Graduate school debt load in turn impacts pathways to the professoriate.***

The sanctioned practices of redlining and restrictive covenants were underscored by myriad forms of economic and housing discrimination, such as the selective use of local zoning ordinances or systemic poor rental conditions. Redlined urban areas, like the predominantly black and poor neighborhood of Reservoir Hill in Baltimore where I grew up (as the child of one of a handful of white families that purchased homes there in the 1970s in opposition to white flight and as a political choice in the wake of the 1968 urban uprisings), lacked access to food and basic services (no immediate grocery stores, inadequate trash removal), were considered less desirable to commercial investment, and were subject to militarized policing

(occupied by army national guard tanks during a snow storm; giant spotlights run throughout the night in response to open air drug markets), all of which contributed to poverty, ill-health, stress, and under-resourced schools. Reservoir Hill, having experienced myriad forms of systemic disinvestment from which it has yet to "recover," is emblematic of the overall conditions of "social death" which mark black and poor communities across the United States as disposable.

Peddling education debt is a national practice that, like redlining, produces a discriminatory demarcation of who is in and who is out of the "neighborhood," in this case, of the university. Although low-interest student loans continue to be touted as creating "opportunity for all" and thus contributing to an American Dream of class mobility, the accumulation and distribution of student loan debt continues to not only mirror, but to reinforce the ongoing structures of racial wealth inequality, and conditions of de facto racial and class stratification of education in the United States.

Student loan practices not only borrow from the housing discrimination toolkit of "redlining," but also borrow from the more recent subprime crisis, with its reliance on a practice known as "reverse redlining," which refers to marketing the most expensive and onerous loan products to minority consumers. Groundbreaking research on the disproportionate default rates among borrowers attending for-profit schools and two-year colleges confirm this trend, and that these borrowers are also disproportionately low-income borrowers and students of color.<sup>1</sup> Even when these students leave college with what may appear to be smaller levels of debt, they have failed, this research suggests, to either gain the educational capital they need in return or are funneled into job markets that do not offer any opportunity to pay off the accumulated debt, thereby perpetuating race and gender segregation in educational opportunity and by extension, by occupation. These conditions are just now drawing public attention as student activists pushed for the use of the long dormant "borrower defense" law to cancel loans taken out by former students of Corinthian Colleges Inc., a for-profit venture that went bankrupt. "Federal regulators accused [Corinthian Colleges] of running advertisements that cited false statistics on the employment status and earnings of graduates."<sup>2</sup> The possibility of Federal debt forgiveness and now the potential for class-action suits by borrowers are just beginning to emerge as viable responses to the student loan crisis.

Educational debt not only affects access to and attrition from four-year schools, but subsequently impacts the pipeline to graduate education. Graduate school debt load in turn impacts pathways to the professoriate. These processes of what I call "trickle up" debt in the United States mean that it is important to pay closer attention to and analyze the effects of this trickle up, not only on the demographics of undergraduate and graduate school (who is in and who is out; and who ends up in which fields) but further, to ask ourselves what is the impact of education debt on a new generation of faculty (both contingent and tenure-track) carrying these new higher education debt-loads into the workplace. I see this essay as a provocation

to further inquiry, attending to certain clues as “canaries in the mine” that point to the need to ask an expanded set of questions around education debt, including: What is the impact of education debt on faculty-in-debt as well as students? And, how is the shape of knowledge production itself impacted by these overall conditions of debt in higher education?

While it is outside the scope of this essay to generate new empirical data, I do want to take up and amplify the demands urgently put forth by my students and by recent social movements that the impact of debt be made visible and that we begin to “register” its effects. I then point to a constellation of signs in recent quantitative and survey data that, taken together, suggest we should attend more seriously to debt’s impact on knowledge production in the university. The purpose of this essay, then, is to register “faculty-in-debt” as an important category for analysis along with student debt, and one that is growing in significance. Recent empirical research has shown that the professoriate does “not associate their colleague’s debt with structural factors,” and therefore has failed to register the conditions of debt, instead attributing debt and “financial inequalities to personal troubles.”<sup>3</sup>

As noted, student loan debt shapes the demographics of the undergraduate classroom, and it remains an urgent crisis in our classrooms. At my current institution, the University of California, Irvine, student loan debt and rising tuition costs contribute to empty seats (those who never made it), fewer in-state students (reflecting increasing institutional reliance on out-of-state dollars), overwork (I regularly ask students for an accounting of how many hours they work in addition to school), and anxiety (over uncertain job prospects and how to pay this debt back). Student loan debt also marks a site of failure of the UC system and the state of California to meet the basic needs of students, some who are homeless (every quarter I have taught, I have had students living in cars or couch surfing), many of whom work exorbitant hours and take longer than four years to complete degrees, or never finish.

These are facets of the student debt crisis that have garnered the most press: The media has asked: How does student loan debt impact who gets a seat at the table of a four-year degree? Who is able to leverage student loan debt into degree attainment? And, who is able to convert that degree access into employment, and more specifically into employment that is sufficient to avoid default and make repayments on student loans? However, there are additional aspects of this crisis that are in need of further inquiry, attention, and study. One important area of silence is this “trickle up effect” of student loan debt accumulation: How does student loan debt impact who is able to go on to graduate study, the choices of what they study, and subsequently who is able to then go onto the academic job market and for which type of jobs? How does student loan debt impact those who enter the tenure-track? How might debt impact the actual attainment of tenure? In other words, by placing our attention on the “redlining” of higher education, I am not only referring to the problem of who has access to which types of loan products, and student loan debt as a problem for undergraduates that is centered around cost/affordability of a college education, although

those remain critical questions. I want to draw attention to an additional penalty, a potentially significant aspect that has been ignored and represents a lasting impact of this trickle-up crisis. A new question to start asking is: *What, then, is the effect of this debt load on faculty and how does it impact knowledge production in the academy?* And this is why I extend my metaphor of redlining by calling attention to the production of “mortgaged minds.”

*“Why are the conditions of debt so hard to register?” —The Committee for Radical Diplomacy on student debt (UK)<sup>4</sup>*

On November 9, 2011, one of the largest protests (up to that point) against tuition increases took place at University of California, Irvine [UCI]. The University of California Regents were voting to increase tuition by 10-15% yearly over 4 years. Previously, the regents had to hold public meetings for each proposed tuition increase, but as these meetings were consistently met with larger and larger public student actions, they moved to a less visible system of automatic increases. Apparently, it was the implementation of what students called the new automatic “trigger” tuition increases that mobilized large actions across the state in 2011, with a strong turnout at UCI.<sup>5</sup>

One of my students, Cameron Joe, was an Economics major at the time with a Queer Studies minor. As a member of a burgeoning campus activist community that worked on gender, sexuality, and social justice issues, Joe was involved in the queer and Asian/Asian American communities at UCI. He was a member of QUAC, an acronym that variously stood for Queer United Artist Collective and Queer Under All Circumstances. In 2011, he created two performance art pieces aimed at garnering attention to the issue of student loan debt and aimed at increasing participation for campus protest actions. For the November 9th day of action, he staged a 6 hour “die-in” at the flagpoles, the central campus location for public protest because it is designated, in oxymoronic UC parlance, as a “free speech zone,” meaning amplified sound can be used between the hours of 12-1pm. Lying facedown near this site and writing “Death of Public Education” in large letters near his prone body, Joe left boxes of chalk around to invite viewer participation in the action while also encouraging other organizers to bring fliers in hand to pass out. The rest of the action developed spontaneously as passers-by and student activists, of their own volition, drew crime scene outlines around his body or joined in by lying down and tracing their own ghostly contours.<sup>6</sup> This piece translated the death of public education literally into the shape of students marked as the collateral damage of debt. In this era of public de-funding of education, and the growth of the neo-liberal or corporatized university, austerity measures have moved from institutional cost-cutting proposals to higher tuition and greater debt burden for students. More recently, a humorously morbid image gained traction on social media this year, making this point

in a vein similar to Joe's action. Meredith College senior and theater major Maigan Kennedy wryly depicted herself figuratively "drowning in debt" as a part of a more obligatory portfolio of graduation headshots—in this case her smiling face was surrounded by a sea of loan papers, bills, and financial debt records.<sup>7</sup>

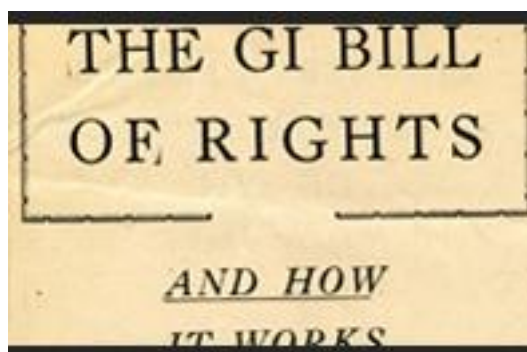
Cameron Joe conducted a second performance-based public protest in Fall 2011 aimed at making visible the impact of education debt on the larger campus community. As a crowd gathered on the steps by the flagpoles for the official noon protest, speakers from across campus constituencies took part: we heard from leaders in the Teaching Assistant's union, member of the lecturer's union, undergraduate students, faculty, and campus grounds maintenance staff. This action served a pedagogical function for both participants as well as observers. First, Cameron Joe gave a brief speech about education costs and student loan debt. He then asked people to stand up en masse and only to sit down once he called out the numerical value of the total level of their current education debt. He explains, "*I thought it was essential to make debt visible.*" As one of the faculty who were among the last people still standing as the debt figures rose exponentially, I was able to signal Cameron about just how high he was going to need these figures to rise. He recalls, "I do remember you standing up and yelling at me to increase the debt categories. I was going by \$5,000, \$10,000."<sup>8</sup> Cameron continued to increase the numerical value and, as I remember it, surpassed the \$100,000s before the last participant sat down. It became starkly apparent that day that one dream (a college education), was easily supplanted by another (getting out of debt). And, further, this action made visible to all present that the face of debt was changing the composition of our college campuses, not just because of who was there or not there (debt as a deterrent to college attendance) but the way that debt was also disproportionately impacting our most vulnerable populations: first generation, low-income, students of color, LGBTQ students, both undergraduate and graduate students. And, finally, that there was a newly visible shift at work: debt was impacting all levels of the institution from undergraduates to a new growing cohort of junior "faculty-in-debt."<sup>9</sup>

*"The American dream now is basically getting out of debt."<sup>10</sup> —Ed Needham of Occupy Wall Street*

The 2011 protests echoed what is now a familiar story from news headlines: that since 2010, for the first time in the history of the post-World War II expansion of higher education, people in the United States have incurred more student loan debt than credit card debt or auto loans. The average debt of seniors graduating in 2016 who borrowed to get undergraduate degrees will be \$37,172.<sup>11</sup> At public institutions that figure grew from \$20,900 in 2001 to \$25,600 in 2016, while the percentage of students who borrowed increased from 52% to 61% in 2016.<sup>12</sup> \$61,000 is

now the average owed by student loan borrowers with advanced degrees.<sup>13</sup> With federal student loan balances surpassing \$1.2 trillion, loan default rates remain concerning, even as the new rate of 11.8% is an improvement over 2014's rate of 13.7%.<sup>14</sup> However, for more than 40 million people, these figures are not just alarming statistics cited by news outlets, but indicative of a more intimate and personal experience of the violence of debt.

Post-World War II expansion of higher education was heralded as opening up educational opportunities to many who previously would not have been able to attend college—by creating new enrollment spaces, by distributing cash payments for tuition and living expenses through the GI Bill, by expanding outreach programs, and by implementing massive increases in financial aid, including the introduction of need-based aid in many states.<sup>15</sup> However, for the past 25 years, there has been a rollback in state funding for higher education, which continues to diminish, while tuitions and indebtedness increase.<sup>16</sup> In this unprecedented era of public disinvestment in higher education, trends away from need-based financial aid combined with high unemployment futures and a lack of refinancing rights, are such that many students now live in what the media calls a "debt spiral."



Undergraduate debt burden and the business of student loan servicers have received the bulk of the national attention to this issue, notably with the recent headlines focusing on the idea that loan debt is a more nuanced "selective crisis." This new assessment and way of looking at the problem of student loan debt gained momentum from Adam Looney and Constantine Yannelis' whitepaper for the Brookings Institute that looked at data showing a concentration of defaults among what they call "non-traditional" borrowers, by which they mean those attending for-profit schools rather than four-year colleges.<sup>17</sup> This research importantly directed significant media attention toward the new changing "face of borrowing"<sup>18</sup> and the "grim" situation faced by those with relatively small (\$10,000) amounts of debt, yet with no four-year degree, and facing higher unemployment rates, as mentioned earlier.

Racial disparities are clearly present in education debt burden among low- and moderate-income households. The momentum of that debt spiral builds on already existing and persistent structures of wealth inequality in the United States, which is why it is meaningful to extend the term "redlining" to the impact of debt on the composition of

higher education. The debt spiral particularly impacts low-income families of color and first generation college-bound students, effectively denying them access to education or leaving them unable to complete degrees or headed for default. The results of this specter of debt are ever increasing racial and socioeconomic stratification in society at large.<sup>19</sup>

Education debt has most recently garnered the attention of mainstream media through the spectacle of the presidential primaries. The 2016 election cycle provided a chance to articulate a variety of proposals for alleviating this debt spiral or for structuring the costs of education, from Bernie Sanders sweeping proposals for free education encapsulated in the title, "It's Time to Make College Tuition Free and Debt Free"<sup>20</sup> to Hillary Clinton's "New College Compact," which included proposals for free community college tuition and a plan for public colleges to allow students to attend with a minimal, wage-based contribution and no debt.<sup>21</sup> And while Trump agreed that the federal government should not be profiting on federal student loans, Trump is the now famous face of for-profit educational ventures, such as his so-called "Trump University," which is accused of sweeping fraudulent practices. This June, he bragged to Norah O'Donnell in an interview on *CBS This Morning*: "I called myself the 'King of Debt.' I'm the King of Debt. I'm great with debt. Nobody knows debt better than me. I've made a fortune using debt" (aired 6/22/2016). His approach to debt reveals how debt has a built-in requirement of capital accumulation and profit. In order for some to make a fortune, others must ontologically "become" debt.

Several congressional representatives have been aggressively trying to change the course of debt and American education, with Senator Elizabeth Warren leading as a fierce voice demanding accountability from for-profit accreditors and introducing ideas such as The Graduate Student Savings Act of 2016, which would allow grad students to contribute earning towards retirement IRAs.<sup>22</sup> The Obama administration does have in place The Public Service *Loan Forgiveness* (PSLF) Program which forgives the remaining balance on Direct Loans after borrowers have made 120 qualifying monthly payments under a qualifying repayment plan while working full-time for a qualifying employer.<sup>23</sup> But many qualifying faculty and staff remain unaware or confused by how to access this program. Faculty unions such as the California Faculty Association (CFA) are working to educate their faculty about who can qualify to apply for forgiveness. However, as pointed out by congressional representatives like Illinois Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL), we still need to ensure that contingent faculty can also be included in these remedies. He has proposed the Adjunct Faculty Loan Fairness Act to address this inequity. Lillian Taiz, president of CFA explains, "We believe this program can serve as a critical life preserver for faculty, many of whom are still drowning in student debt."<sup>24</sup>

The growth in public outcry on campuses and in congress about the debt spiral resonated and was coextensive with the larger public economic critiques made by the Occupy movement. Those protests began to receive national media attention with the widely-covered



SEE RADICAL TEACHER'S RT 96 ( OCCUPY AND EDUCATION ) FOR PHOTO CREDIT.

occupation of New York City's Zuccotti Park, which began on 17 September 2011. These protests emboldened and inspired significant public outcry on college campuses and in youth culture more broadly, nationally and internationally against rising student debt and education costs. The example of the November 2011 protests at UCI is just one local example of this. Aligned with Occupy's outcry against the 1%, protests against spiraling education debt inspired significant social movement organizing and public protests among college-age young people, both in the United States and abroad. The Occupy movement's Strike Debt or debt-resister's movement is one visible expression of this resistance in the United States.

Within this larger constellation of movement politics, one particular project stands out for its attempt to make visible the inner workings of education debt: the "Rolling Jubilee." Rolling Jubilee is an example of how public performance protest practices can draw attention to the scope and nature of the condition of debt that is otherwise "so hard to register," as the epigraph from the UK-based Committee for Radical Diplomacy on student debt put it. Rolling Jubilee looked at debt registries, which are public records of individual insolvency and bankruptcy. In other words, these records "register" [or account for] debt in the public sphere. These registries exist because they are intended to be like a roll call of "risk," echoing the "risk" that redlining was intending to register in housing markets. However, The Rolling Jubilee, which is now a Non-Profit 501(c)(4) used these registers instead to seek out and purchase debt on the speculative market. Unlike debt profiteers, they intended to turn around and forgive borrowers that debt.<sup>25</sup> Even if it did not offer a practical solution towards forgiving all debtors, this economically performative tactic shed light on the nuances of the for-profit practices embedded in the student loan industry, of which most people with student loans were and are completely unaware.



As activist groups such as The Rolling Jubilee and the Committee for Radical Diplomacy make visible, the larger public has not fully "registered" the scope and effect of

debt, or fully considered the meaning of that debt, what academically we might call its ontology. Among the many ways that undergraduate student loan debt continues to be “hard to register,” or recognize or make visible, include the ways that students of color are disproportionately impacted by predatory lending of for-profit industries. This has been the important working of “accounting” that Adam Looney and Constantine Yannelis have recently brought into the public conversation about debt as a “selective crisis.” Another way that the discussion of education debt often fails to account for the impact of educational debt is by failing to record consumer credit card debt as part of the overall debt accrued towards students’ education.

It is in this vein of hoping to broaden the conversation and for a more full accounting of the impact of “mortgaged minds” and the “redlining of higher education” that I hope this essay is a provocation for further research and conversation about debt’s impacts. Graduate debt, while among the highest compared to undergraduate debt, is often dismissed in the media as simply acceptable because it will be “offset by increased earnings.”<sup>26</sup> Yet, faculty earnings don’t account for generational shifts in debt burden, or gendered and raced disparities, or disciplinary differences. Therefore the debt burden is not and cannot simply be offset by earnings. These are the further conditions and effects of debt that continue to remain relatively invisible or underexamined. Perhaps we can think of them as the aftershocks of the student debt spiral. These aftershocks certainly receive less attention in news headlines or on the op-ed pages about the fiscal cliff of education debt than do the conditions of undergraduate student loan accumulation. These aftershocks, I suggest, include the effects of the debt spiral on graduate education and, by extension, on faculty hiring, composition, and disciplinary distribution. And they include the material conditions of precarious labor, for instance, of adjuncts-in-debt who do not qualify for the federal loan forgiveness program. These aftershocks are felt by a tenure-track professoriate-in-debt.

Studies have found that undergraduate indebtedness of as little as \$5,000 is an effective deterrent to application to graduate or first professional school for 41% of doctoral degree aspirants.<sup>27</sup> And even after graduation, debt becomes a hindrance to quality of life and job performance. This is one of the clues that debt is having a significant impact on the shape of knowledge production. If we step back to consider how debt permeates the culture of graduate school and the professoriate, it is inevitable that debt must have a variety of possible impacts on the shape of knowledge production itself in the university. For instance, financial disincentives are having a marked effect on the contours of graduate education in the United States. And undergraduate loan indebtedness itself subsequently impacts application and enrollment in graduate and professional school.<sup>28</sup>

Interestingly medical schools and independent K-12 schools are among the few fields where professional literature recognizes this negative impact of debt on their own constituencies and suggests ways to implement changes and remedies. Some private independent schools, for instance, are recognizing the impact of debt on

teachers by responding with innovative recruitment strategies that include plans to repay loans during time of employment. While for doctors numerous service-based *loan repayment programs* exist, including the government’s The National Health Service Corps.<sup>29</sup>

Research further finds that not only is undergraduate indebtedness of as little as \$5,000 an effective deterrent, but “lower socioeconomic students who aspire to doctoral degree programs are choosing not to make the transition to graduate or first professional school.”<sup>30</sup> For example, “African Americans were more likely to apply than Whites, but they were less likely to enroll in their first choice graduate or first professional school than Whites.”<sup>31</sup> Hormel and McAlister also note, “Some doctoral students accrue more debt than others. ... Black and Hispanic PhD students borrow student loans at higher rates than white and Asian doctoral students. Women, too, are found to collect more in student loan debts than men in doctoral programs across all disciplinary tracks.”<sup>32</sup> The significance of such facts alone warrants more serious attention, as it is starkly illustrative of how and when debt operates as a roadblock in the education pipeline; a cross-roads where institutions and whole fields of study are not only failing to incorporate underrepresented students, but where there is documentation of a high degree of motivation towards graduate education that is diverted by the burden and specter of debt. Yet, this pipeline aspect of debt receives relatively little attention in the public conversation.

***Even when under-represented students do enroll in graduate education, they often also begin from a place of disproportionate individual and family indebtedness.***

Even when under-represented students do enroll in graduate education, they often also begin from a place of disproportionate individual and family indebtedness. The Mellon Minority Undergraduate Fellowship noted this beginning in 1993, when they saw that their fellows who enrolled in qualifying PhD programs had an average undergraduate debt burden of \$9,261—which was 61 percent higher than the national average at that time for all graduate students. The Mellon Minority Undergrad Fellowship responded to this disproportionate burden by offering, as a “basic” form of support, the repayment of undergraduate student loans up to \$10,000 as students pursue doctoral degrees. Currently, if students have less than \$10,000 in undergraduate debt they can use the remainder towards graduate debt repayment.<sup>33</sup> Their stated long-term goal was to “increase the diversity of faculties at colleges and universities throughout the country in order to bring a wider range of experiences and perspectives to teaching and scholarly discussion.”<sup>34</sup> In other words, they continue to try to off-set or repair the debt effects of red-lining not only with the idea of creating a more survivable graduate experience, but with the foresight to understand that these degrees are also the pipeline towards creating more diverse faculties.



There are multiple factors contributing to the dearth of faculty of color in higher education that are beyond the scope of this essay. But one important factor, that does not garner enough attention, is the disproportionate burden of undergraduate and graduate student loan debt on faculty of color and other under-represented groups, whether they find themselves a part of the larger precariat of adjunct labor, or in a tenure-track line. The impacts of debt should be included and understood alongside other structural and institutional disincentives that impact diversity or in the parlance of my institution “inclusive excellence,” including a lack of investment in mechanisms for diversity recruitment and retention and the many other institutional entrenchments in the status quo.<sup>35</sup> As many have noted, it is important to challenge the notion that the diversity problem in higher education is simply a pipeline issue. Rather, this lack of representation of faculty of color is about the racial bias and animus that face graduate students of color and faculty of color during their education and hiring processes and on the tenure track.<sup>36</sup> One way to choose to “register” debt as a contributing factor is to bring home the metaphor of redlining and take a look at how education debt is managed and distributed as a set of practices akin to redlining, which demarcates the neighborhoods of higher education. Debt is an exacerbating force of defacto segregation and racial wealth inequality in the academy that can be measured in terms of both capital and cultural capital.

Many factors create disproportionate tenure rates and rates of pre-tenure departure for faculty of color, including racial perceptions of individuals on an institutional and individual level; the devaluation of the qualifications of minority PhDs who are not trained in the most elite, historically white ivy institutions; the difficulties of surviving in a predominantly white academy, which include poor mentoring, disproportionate advising and service loads, isolating work environments; and lack of attention to the value of scholarship on minority populations. Several recent collections draw attention to these poor working conditions and larger structures of oppression that shape the university including *Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia* and *The Imperial University: Academic Repression and Scholarly Dissent*.<sup>37</sup> Educational debt, I argue, should be more strongly registered as belonging in this long list of negative impacts on working conditions.

The stress and stigma of debt compounds these factors, which then contribute to restricting access and impeding the professional progress of faculty of color and faculty from first-generation and underrepresented minorities. Just as the conditions of graduate education debt have been overshadowed by the burden of undergraduate debt, it follows that there is another class of debtors that headlines have ignored, but who are impacted in this story of debt: that is this emerging

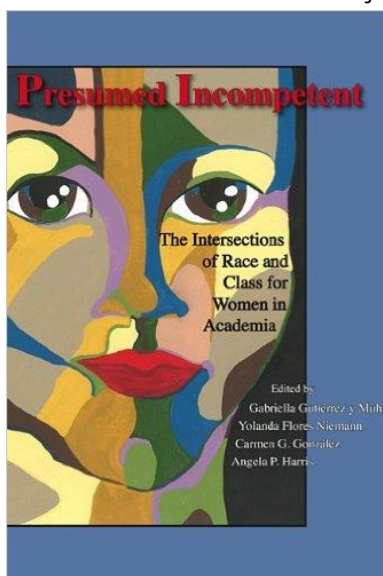
generational cohort of faculty-in-debt. By drawing attention to this category of debtors, I hope to not merely register they exist, but also hope to provoke us to think about how the landscape of education debt distribution may also impact the possibilities of knowledge production in higher education.

***There are multiple factors contributing to the dearth of faculty of color in higher education that are beyond the scope of this essay. But one important factor, that does not garner enough attention, is the disproportionate burden of undergraduate and graduate student loan debt on faculty of color and other under-represented groups, whether they find themselves a part of the larger precariat of adjunct labor, or in a tenure-track line.***

Leontina Hormel and Lynn M. McAllister just released the findings of their survey and in-depth interviews of faculty at a large public university, which tellingly revealed that “professors minimized the seriousness and breadth of student loan burdens among their colleagues”<sup>38</sup> even while debt produces “a system of indentured servitude.”<sup>39</sup> Their data reinforce a central provocation of this piece, which hopes to garner attention to this issue and see more work done in this area, that faculty-in-debt is one of the conditions of debt that has been “so hard to register” and that it needs to be factored in as a key component of debt’s overall stranglehold on public education.<sup>40</sup> If institutions are committed to equity and diversity in the professoriate, to the hiring and retention of faculty of color and women, and/or are concerned about the working conditions of junior faculty and the precarious positions of

contingent and adjunct faculty—who now make up more than 75 percent of the instructional corps—then it is imperative to take into consideration the considerable impact of cumulative undergraduate and graduate loan and overall education debt on all of these teachers. Although additional research is required in this area, that research can begin with the recognition that the student debt crisis has “trickled up” in a generation, and that senior faculty often carry a significantly lighter debt-load than many of their junior counterparts. These are facts strongly corroborated by Hormel and McAllister’s study.

“Faculty-in-debt,” as a category needs to be included as part of the conversation about how academic labor



is structured around making particular people and particular sets of knowledge more precarious, while buttressing the status quo. While the “face of debt” in the academy is best known through the face of undergraduates burdened by debt and more recently by students of color exploited by for-profit institutions, and sometimes has been seen through the broader categories of wage-insecurity experienced by adjunct labor and those in the precarious status of lecturers, debt is also a condition shared by faculty on the tenure-track whose combined undergraduate and graduate debt has created a generation gap that is marked by debt and contributes to wealth inequality within the academy. “Grad students comprise about 14% of the nation’s college and university matriculants but account for about 40% of all student debt.”<sup>41</sup>

Wealth inequality within the academy has a real impact on the day-to-day culture of academic employment. Because the condition of debt is often registered as personal irresponsibility, it potentially adds to the “culture of shame” and the “imposter syndrome” that are the hallmarks of graduate education and the faculty experience. These are two of the reasons that a conversation about debt has been suppressed. Further, current conditions are symptomatic of another gap—a gaping absence in the university of individuals who are themselves marked ontologically as society’s “debtors,” the originary bad risks in whom we refuse to invest and thereby “redline” out of the neighborhood and institution altogether: that is people of color and poor people.

***It is not a new narrative that in times of university budget crisis, institutional sites such as interdisciplinary programs on gender, race, and ethnicity are on the frontline of hiring freezes, budget reductions, and closure and absorption, often facing uncertain futures or at least operating in a state of perpetual uncertainty and heightened scrutiny.***

In addition to noticing the changing “the face of debt” and the impact of debt on the demographics of higher education, it is time to think about the effects of increasing debt load as it becomes disproportionately distributed across disciplinary sites of knowledge production. How can we begin to elaborate a decades-long conversation about the “crisis in the humanities and social sciences” alongside this other crisis, of “faculty-in-debt”? One place to begin is by asking: what are the effects of increasing debt on the kinds of areas of study that are being taken up and by whom? How is debt, for instance, implicated in or contributing to the widely decried diminished status of the humanities and social sciences? What impact does this debt have on how specific disciplines and units are perceived and (de)valued? For example, we know that if the

humanities and social sciences generate less competitive external funding, it has a negative impact on how specific disciplines and units are perceived and formally evaluated. Certain disciplinary neighborhoods and their inhabitants come to be seen as risky or bad investments.

We now know that faculty student loan debt load varies across race, class, gender, and disciplinary training. For instance, the percentages of borrowers and average loan amounts are substantially different by field of study and by race/ethnicity.<sup>42</sup> While close to a third of doctoral students borrow and 24 percent of them has previously borrowed for undergrad,<sup>43</sup> The shares of doctoral students with education-related debt burdens over \$30,000 were greatest in the social sciences (32%), education (29%), humanities (26%), and other non-S&E fields (26%).<sup>44</sup> Among doctorate recipients in 2005, graduates in engineering and physical sciences were the least likely to borrow, while graduates in social sciences and humanities were the most likely to have loans.<sup>45</sup> Black, Hispanic, and American Indian doctorate recipients had substantially higher education-related debts than Whites and Asians.<sup>46</sup> More than one-half of African American Ph.D.s in particular are concentrated in education, a field in the humanities with low levels of university funding, which heavily affects statistics on African Americans.<sup>47</sup> What do these statistics then mean for the shape of the job market, and practices of hiring, retention, and again actual knowledge production? “PhD fields that minorities more often pursue (humanities and social sciences) consistently offer lower salaries than faculty in the sciences and engineering ... disparities that are further amplified when considering race and gender effects.”<sup>48</sup> Hormel and McAlister’s work demonstrates that “faculty members’ attitudes may assist in justifying” the unequal distribution of “debt across disciplinary tracks.”<sup>49</sup>

How, then, does the relationship between debt and the demographics of graduate students enrolling, debt and the choice of field of study create another kind of debt spiral, one where the effects of debt “trickle up” impacting the kinds of knowledge actually produced, published, taught? Individual student loan debt and overall structures of university indebtedness (and perceived indebtedness) are contributing to the diminished status of knowledge production about underrepresented populations and community-based, non-quantitative approaches to such knowledge. “Those in the higher-paying disciplines are also in fields where time to degree for Ph.D.s is considerably shorter than those in the low-paying fields. So those being paid the least have taken the longest to be able to apply for full-time jobs, and on average have more debt.”<sup>50</sup>

It is not a new narrative that in times of university budget crisis, institutional sites such as interdisciplinary programs on gender, race, and ethnicity are on the frontline of hiring freezes, budget reductions, and closure and absorption, often facing uncertain futures or at least operating in a state of perpetual uncertainty and heightened scrutiny. For instance, at my own institution, the University of California, Irvine, such units were classified in 2012 under the shaming label of “needs attention,” a status that was accompanied by punitive hiring freezes. Although a WASC Accreditation report later

repudiated the many false claims associated with this slanderous designation of “needs attention,” it nonetheless did its work, and as external evaluators noted the label had a morale-dampening effect on students and faculty. Ironically, what may appear to be merely a campus-based “tempest in a teapot” is recognizable by scholars of ethnic and gender studies as the latest incarnation of a longstanding national propaganda war against these disciplines. From newspaper articles,<sup>51</sup> to university trustees,<sup>52</sup> to faculty mentors in the traditional disciplines, to legislative action against ethnic studies,<sup>53</sup> to public criticisms of doctoral and advanced training in ethnic studies in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*,<sup>54</sup> there is an entrenched conservative perception that such disciplines are somehow undermining American culture.

Faculty members in such units are comprised disproportionately of women and underrepresented minorities, as are many of our students. Collectively, we could be said to disproportionately bear the material burden of increasing debt even as we signify the ontological meaning of debt (vs. profit) for the university. In this respect, the university follows the familiar neoliberal patterns of displacement and dislocation, where one population set is marked as value-making/laden, while another is marked as de-valuing, leading to the under-developing of the latter.

The communities and families whose collective affective and material labor went into making first-generation college graduates who might continue on to graduate degrees—despite lacking income, credit ratings, or assets to pay the increasing costs of college—borrowed against the future in a complicated negotiation with forms of precarity. As we now know, those that chose community college, or for-profit universities, find themselves with small amounts of debt that are yet insurmountable in the face of unemployment and other precarities.<sup>55</sup> And for those that sought to earn the so-called traditional four-year degree? The U.S. Department of Education continues to make taking on government educational debt harder. For parents, changes in PLUS loans credit-history eligibility mean alternatively applying private-sector underwriting standards instead of looking at actual repayment ability. Despite these increasing barriers, for all borrowers, educational debt is singled out as the only form of debt that cannot be discharged through bankruptcy, making it, as some have argued, “more like indenture.”<sup>56</sup>

Data show that undergraduates finishing in 2016 have an average of \$37,172 in student loan debt.<sup>57</sup> And, according to TransUnion, more than half of student loan accounts are in deferment.<sup>58</sup> For graduate students, payment of student loan interest now begins while in school. Graduate students currently leave school with student debt loads ranging from \$30,000 to \$120,000, according to FinAid.org, whereas “acceptable debt” is often considered equal to your annual income. “Latina/os and African Americans, and Native Americans—the last of which is the most under-represented of all ethnic groups in graduate education—are also the most likely to incur more than \$30,000 in debt in the process of earning their Ph.D.s”<sup>59</sup>

While the student debt conversation has focused (rightfully) on undergraduate access to education and opportunity, it is also true that graduate students rely almost twice as much on loans as undergraduates: that the average master’s student graduates with more than \$50,000 in student loan debt, and for those with doctoral degrees the figure is \$77,000. Yet, the government recently stopped subsidizing graduate-student loans, a change that was framed as a last-ditch effort to save undergraduate PELL grants, but in essence pitted undergraduate against graduate education with the added potential of disrupting collective student organizing against debt.

I want to add to this litany the debt load of faculty as part of the current conditions of the student loan debt spiral. Yet, debt’s effects on the working conditions of faculty and the learning conditions of students, and, importantly, the production of knowledge in the university remains underexamined. Related research suggests that debt is having a material impact on the kinds of knowledge we are producing, although that impact has yet to be fully brought to light.

***Data show that undergraduates finishing in 2016 have an average of \$37,172 in student loan debt.***

What happens when we register that debt is not just an obligatory burden for any college degree, but in fact impacts what fields and degrees debt-laden students pursue? How can we further account for how debt burden may impact hiring processes? How might we recognize the ways in which the working conditions of debt-laden faculty are impacted? How does debt register regarding the likelihood of retention and promotion? All of these questions are aspects of debt’s impact on faculty welfare, and speak to the need to account for how faculty continue to be impacted by disproportionate debt loads and how this might shape the academy and its current map of knowledge production, which devalues and makes precarious those fields of study that are most likely to be inhabited by under-represented students and faculty of color, women, and the poor—and which take up as their sites of inquiry those same populations.

One way to approach this pressing problem of education debt might be to think along the lines of specific policy goals. For instance, The American Federation of Teachers reports have included practical recommendations such as 1) relieving the student debt burden for current borrowers; 2) promoting debt-free higher education; 3) enhancing state funding for public higher education; 4) prioritizing academic needs in college and university budgets; and 5) eliminating the fraud and abuse that entrap borrowers in debt.<sup>60</sup> Recent proposals such as Elizabeth Warren’s seek to fix student-loan interest rates at 0.75 percent while Hilary Clinton’s plans were to attempt to lessen the debt burden. However, the young people galvanized by Occupy and more recently by Bernie Sanders’ bid for president will continue to demand free and

certainly debt-free public education and believe that is a reasonable and possible demand.

***Faculty at two and four-year colleges and at the nation's research universities have been called on to take a political stand on the conditions of debt that their students inhabit and are increasingly being sold into.***

In addition to such policy course-corrections, debt could be approached from the vantage point of social movement politics such as the Occupy movement and utilize tools such as debt strikes. Public performances such as Cameron Joe's at UCI help students and the public to visualize the conditions of debt and reframe the burden of debt from the moral failing of the individual to society's moral obligations. Pedagogically, tools such as The Rolling Jubilee promote concepts of debt forgiveness, in their case signaled by their initial random acts of kindness. All of these actions bring to light the abusive practices and profiteering of the student loan industry and galvanize public awareness of the logics of debt. More importantly, movements like Strike Debt seek to disseminate the decolonizing lesson that "You are not a loan."<sup>61</sup>

Faculty at two and four-year colleges and at the nation's research universities have been called on to take a political stand on the conditions of debt that their students inhabit and are increasingly being sold into. A recent forum held at Occidental College and hosted by public radio KPCC, was given the title: "The indentured class: The social costs of student debt (#AffordableCA)."<sup>62</sup> For some educators, the crisis yields a call for a more ethical stance towards educational debt and the condition of debt being produced in our students. "For university faculty, student debt should become a moral issue. . . . Universities should explicate their commitment to student solvency . . . first doing no financial harm."<sup>63</sup> This "do no harm" principal should also be a principal incorporated not only into the awarding of financial aid packages, but also into state budgets and into K-12 education: it must become a larger public outcry that accounts for social and wealth inequalities that are multi-generational.

In 2006 Gloria Ladson-Billings's Presidential address to the American Educational Research Association articulated this public outcry, but did so in a way that made an important intervention in the pedagogy of debt. In talking about achievement "disparities" versus achievement "gaps," she reframed the idea of debt that we are being schooled in (which teaches us who deserves debt, what level of indebtedness are ours to bear, and which fields of study are debt-worthy) in order to reimagine debt as "moral debt" or that which we have accumulated as a society relative to those we have systematically and historically disenfranchised. "We do not

merely have an achievement gap—we have an education debt."<sup>64</sup>

It's not simply debt—the state or condition of owing something monetarily—that has its stranglehold on students. Those of us who are increasingly in debt, those of us who are ontologically marked as "society's debt," and even those of us not in debt, must interrogate all the ways in which we are being taught to inhabit and to habituate to the current debt spiral. How we are being taught to feel about this condition of debt? And it is no longer only "traditional" college students who are in debt and for amounts that their degrees and economic prospects appeared to make recuperable. Rather, it's vulnerable students—mothers, poor students, students of color—in the for-profit sector whose prospects don't warrant the levels of debt (pace Looney and Yannelis), and it's contingent faculty whose debt is not recognized as "forgivable," (pace Sen. Durbin) and its tenure-track faculty whose ranks of indebtedness are increasing (Hormel and McAllister) and whose debt may be less likely to default, but may have registered its effects through gatekeeping who gets which degrees, choice of degree or area of research, and whose effects continue to impact labor conditions. Placing the U.S. so-called debt spiral in the larger context of global capital forces of austerity politics, and putting austerity politics in the historical context of the long arc of apartheid schooling practices, I suggest a continued expansion of the conversation about registering the effects of debt, who is impacted, and how we are taught to feel about and inhabit an education debt deeply entwined within this landscape of moral debt.



## STUDENT DEBT CRISIS

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Adam Looney and Constantine Yannelis, "A crisis in student loans? How changes in the characteristics of borrowers and in the institutions they attended contributed to rising loan defaults," Brookings Papers on Economic Activity Conference, Fall 2015. See <http://www.brookings.edu/about/projects/bpea/papers/2015/looney-yannelis-student-loan-defaults>.

<sup>2</sup> Josh Mitchell, "Surge in Americans Applying to Have Student Debt Canceled," *Wall Street Journal*, 26 May 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Leontina Hormel and Lynn M. McAlister, "These Are the Choices We've Made": How Professors Turn the Public Issue of Rising Student Loan Debt into a Private Trouble," *Humanity and Society*, 5 April 2016: 11.

<sup>4</sup> The Committee for Radical Diplomacy, "Speculating on Student Debt," 18 June 2007. See <http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/speculating-student-debt>.

<sup>5</sup> Cameron Joe, correspondence with the author, 23 May 2016.

<sup>6</sup> A time-compressed video of the event can be seen on YouTube as part of the ever-expanding ephemeral archive of public activism: See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m2tdC8BkIIM>.

<sup>7</sup> Kelly Diamond, "Theater major takes dramatic, debt-themed graduation photos," 20 April 2016. See [http://mashable.com/2016/04/20/debt-graduation-photos/#urnxZ\\_mHC5qJ](http://mashable.com/2016/04/20/debt-graduation-photos/#urnxZ_mHC5qJ).

<sup>8</sup> Cameron Joe, correspondence with the author, 23 May 2016.

<sup>9</sup> Research shows that "student loans are more prevalent the more junior the faculty rank is." See Hormel and McAlister, 9.

<sup>10</sup> Adam Gabbatt, "Occupy Launches 'Rolling Jubilee' Debt Forgiveness Programme," *The Guardian*, 15 November 2012. See <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/nov/15/occupy-rolling-jubilee-debt-forgiveness>.

<sup>11</sup> Josh Mitchell, "Student Debt Is About to Set Another Record, But the Picture Isn't All Bad," *Wall Street Journal*, 2 May 2016. See <http://blogs.wsj.com/economics/2016/05/02/student-debt-is-about-to-set-another-record-but-the-picture-isnt-all-bad/>.

<sup>12</sup> The Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU), "Fast Facts on Public University Graduates' College Debt" 24 May 2016. See <http://www.aplu.org/news-and-media/blog/fast-facts-on-public-university-graduates-college-debt>.

<sup>13</sup> Mary Ellen Flannery, "Helping Adjuncts with Student Debt, 19 October 2015, *Education Votes*. See <http://educationvotes.nea.org/2015/10/19/helping-adjuncts-with-student-debt/>.

<sup>14</sup> Betsy Mayotte, "Falling Student Loan Default Rates Still Challenge Borrowers," *U.S. News & World Report*, 7 October 2015. See <http://www.usnews.com/education/blogs/student-loan-ranger/2015/10/07/falling-student-loan-default-rates-still-challenge-borrowers>.

<sup>15</sup> Alexander W. Astin and Leticia Oseguera, "The Declining 'Equity' of American Higher Education," *The Review of Higher Education* 27. 3 (Spring 2004): 321-322.

<sup>16</sup> At my own institution, the University of California, tuition rates have increased over 800 percent in 30 years.

<sup>17</sup> Looney and Yannelis, "A crisis in student loans?" 2015. See <http://www.brookings.edu/about/projects/bpea/papers/2015/looney-yannelis-student-loan-defaults>.

<sup>18</sup> Susan Dynarski, "Degrees of Debt: New Data Gives Clearer Picture of Student Debt," *The New York Times*, 10 September 2015. See [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/11/upshot/new-data-gives-clearer-picture-of-student-debt.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/11/upshot/new-data-gives-clearer-picture-of-student-debt.html?_r=0).

<sup>19</sup> This increase is measurable when researchers compare widening gaps in parental income, parents' education, and other factors. See Alexander W. Astin and Leticia Oseguera, "Working-class students shun top universities, says study" *The Guardian*, 12 November 2013. See <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2013/nov/13/working-class-students-shun-top-universities>.

<sup>20</sup> Bernie 2016 Campaign, "It's Time to Make College Tuition Free," See <https://berniesanders.com/issues/its-time-to-make-college-tuition-free-and-debt-free/>.

<sup>21</sup> Betsy Mayotte, "Explore How Presidential Candidates Stand on Student Loan Debt," *U.S. News & World Report*, 28 October 2015. <http://www.usnews.com/education/blogs/student-loan-ranger/2015/10/28/explore-how-presidential-candidates-stand-on-student-loan-debt>.

<sup>22</sup> Introduced by Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) and Sen. Mike Lee (R-Utah). John Sandman, "Warren Senate Bill Would Make Grad School Fellowships Retirement Account-Ready," *The Street*. See: <https://www.thestreet.com/story/13601246/1/warren-senate-bill-would-make-grad-school-fellowships-retirement-account-ready.html>.

<sup>23</sup> U.S. Department of Education, Federal Student Aid. "If you are employed by a government of not-for-profit organization, you may be able to receive loan forgiveness under the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program." See <https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/repay-loans/forgiveness-cancellation/public-service>.

<sup>24</sup> California Faculty Association, "CSU to help faculty with loan forgiveness certification requirements." See <http://www.calfac.org/headline/csu-help-faculty-loan-forgiveness-certification-requirements>.

<sup>25</sup> Gabbatt, "Occupy launches 'Rolling Jubilee.'"



<sup>26</sup> Catherine M. Millett, "How Undergraduate Loan Debt Affects Application and Enrollment in Graduate or First Professional School." *The Journal of Higher Education* 74.4 (2003), 419.

<sup>27</sup> Millett, "How Undergraduate Loan Debt Affects Application and Enrollment," 419.

<sup>28</sup> Millett, "How Undergraduate Loan Debt Affects Application and Enrollment," 386-427.

<sup>29</sup> Scott Harrah, "Student Debt Relief: Programs That Pay Off Some Med School Loans," *Financing Medical School UMHS News*, 27 October 2014. See <https://www.umhs-sk.org/blog/student-debt-relief-programs-pay-med-school-loans/Caribbean-Medical-Schools>.

<sup>30</sup> Millett, "Undergraduate Loan Debt," 419.

<sup>31</sup> Millett, "Undergraduate Loan Debt," 419.

<sup>32</sup> Hormel and McAlister, 3.

<sup>33</sup> Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship Program. See <http://www.mmuf.org/graduate-students>

<sup>34</sup> President's Annual Report, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, 1993: 22.

<sup>35</sup> See R. H. Atwell, "The long road ahead: barriers to minority participation persist in twenty years of minorities in higher education," in American Council on Education Reflection on 20 Years of Minorities in Higher Education and the ACE Annual Status Report.

<sup>36</sup> See Anthony Lising Antonio, "Faculty of Color Reconsidered: Reassessing Contributions to Scholarship," *The Journal of Higher Education* 73.5 (September/October), 2002. Detailing the literature, Antonio writes: "Stifling efforts for increasing minority representation. These factors include: a small and decreasing pool of minority PhDs (Jackson, 1991; Mickelson & Oliver, 1991; Solmon & Wingard, 1991; Turner, Myers, Jr., & Creswell, 1999; Washington & Harvey, 1989); disproportionate tenure rates and rates of pretenure departure (Finkelstein, 1984; Menges & Exum, 1983); the persistence of racist perceptions on institutional and individual levels that restrict access and impede the professional progress of faculty of color (de la Luz Reyes & Halcón, 1991; Harvey & Scott-Jones, 1985; Jackson, 1991; Turner & Myers, Jr., 2000); the devaluation of the qualifications of minority PhDs not trained in the most elite, prestigious colleges (Mickelson & Oliver, 1991); and the difficulties of surviving in a predominantly white academy due to poor mentoring, disproportionate advising and service loads stemming from frequently being the only faculty of color in a department, an isolating work environment, and the lack of scholarly recognition given to research focusing on ethnic minority populations (de la Luz Reyes & Halcón, 1991; Frierson, 1990; Garza, 1988; Tack & Patitu, 1992; Turner & Myers, Jr., 2000; Turner, Myers, Jr., & Creswell, 1999; Washington & Harvey, 1989)."

<sup>37</sup> Gabriella Gutiérrez y Muhs, Yolanda Flores Niemann, Carmen G. González, and Angela P. Harris, eds., *Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for*

*Women in Academia* (Salt Lake City: Utah State University Press, 2012); Piya Chatterjee and Sunaina Maira, eds., *The Imperial University: Academic Repression and Scholarly Dissent* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

<sup>38</sup> Hormel and McAlister, 16.

<sup>39</sup> Hormel and McAlister, 2.

<sup>40</sup> As this piece was going under revision, Hormel and McAlister's important research results were published, which are a step in the direction I am calling for here. They echo this need, explaining "little research exists examining the patterns and effects of doctoral student debt, despite the consequences this may have on inclusive employment on campuses and in research" Hormel and McAlister, 3.

<sup>41</sup> Sandman, "Warren Senate Bill." See <https://www.thestreet.com/story/13601246/1/warren-senate-bill-would-make-grad-school-fellowships-retirement-account-ready.html>.

<sup>42</sup> Hoffer, T. B., Welch, V., Webber, K., Williams, K., Lisek, B., Hess, M., Loew, D., & Guzman-Barron, I. (2006). Doctorate Recipients from United States Universities: Summary Report 2005. Chicago, IL: National Opinion Research Center, cited in Dongbin Kim and Cindy Otts, "The Effect of Loans on Time to Doctorate Degree: Differences by Race/Ethnicity, Field of Study, and Institutional Characteristics," *The Journal of Higher Education*, Vol. 81, No. 1 (January/February 2010): 3.

<sup>43</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, cited in Hormel and McAlister, "These Are the Choices We've Made," 3.

<sup>44</sup> National Science Foundation, "How do graduates pay for doctoral education? Graduate education-related debt, by field of study: 2011." See <http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/sed/digest/2011/theme4.cfm#4>.

<sup>45</sup> Hoffer et al (2006). Doctorate Recipients, cited in Kim and Otts, "The Effect of Loans," 3.

<sup>46</sup> Hoffer et al (2006). Doctorate Recipients, cited in Kim and Otts, "The Effect of Loans," 3.

<sup>47</sup> Andrew Martin and Andrew Lehren, "A Generation Hobbled by the Soaring Cost of College," *New York Times*, 12 May 2012. See <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/13/business/student-loans-weighing-down-a-generation-with-heavy-debt.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>.

<sup>48</sup> Hormel and McAlister, 3.

<sup>49</sup> Hormel and McAlister, 2.

<sup>50</sup> Scott Jaschik, "What You Teach Is What You Earn" *Inside Higher Ed*, 18 March 2016.

<sup>51</sup> Carla Rivera, "Cal State's ethnic studies programs falter in changing times," *LA Times*, 30 October 2013. See <http://www.latimes.com/local/la-me-college-ethnic-20131031,0,6817908.story#axzz2juRz0Djo>.

# RADICAL TEACHER

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

## ACDC Agency: Food Politics with Community College Students at Vassar

by Robert Cowan



VASSAR COLLEGE (PHOTO COURTESY OF AUTHOR)

## Gastronomically Slumming It

The food at ACDC, Vassar's All-College Dining Commons, stinks. At least it does during the summer. Not that it literally smells foul; it just doesn't taste very good and lacks nutritional value. The students in the Exploring Transfer (ET) program eat breakfast and dinner at ACDC during their stay on campus, and lunch in another dining area called "The Retreat," which has fewer options. ET is a sort of academic boot camp for high-achieving community college students who hope to transfer to an elite liberal arts college or a Research I university. The oldest program of its kind—serving over 1,000 students in its thirty-one-year history, over 80% of whom have gone on to four-year colleges, including many Ivies—ET is a full-scholarship program in which about 35 students take two three-credit courses over five weeks, each co-designed and co-taught by one community college professor and one from Vassar (Kosmacher).

The course I had the privilege to co-teach in Exploring Transfer during the summers of 2012 and 2013 was entitled *Feast or Famine: Food, Society, Environment*. I had taught an *Orientalism/Occidentalism* course in ET in 2010, but my Vassar partner hadn't continued in the program, so I was asked whether I would be interested in teaching a course on food politics with Pinar Batur, professor of sociology and chair of Environmental Studies. Though a literature professor, I had taught a lot of texts on food issues in composition classes and jumped at the chance to explore such a pressing constellation of issues with such a rarified group of students. So Pinar and I began working on a middle ground between sociology and literary study. This course became a survey of issues concerning food systems, such as industrial farming, the role of agricultural lobbyists, food sovereignty in developing countries, food stamps, food deserts, overfishing, the roles of the USDA, FDA, WTO, IMF. We explored writers who occupy those overlapping genre spaces of environmental literature—journalism, personal essay, poetry, fiction—such as George Perkins Marsh, Rachel Carson, Wendell Berry, and Rebecca Solnit; purely nonfiction writers like Marion Nestle and Michael Pollan; as well as some not generally thought of as environmental writers but who hit on relevant issues like exploitation and imperialism, such as Joseph Mitchell and Ray Bradbury. And yet, with all of the insights the students were gleaning from these authors, they had to eat the crappy food at ACDC, prepared by a large corporation. We wondered what we could do about this ironic discrepancy.

In the two sections of this course Pinar and I taught over those two summers, we had students from Argentina, Bosnia, Bourkina Faso, China, El Salvador, Ghana, Guyana, Haiti, Italy, Mexico, Pakistan, Poland, the Philippines, Sweden, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam. They came from community colleges mostly in the New York area, but also from as far away as Boston, Maine, Los Angeles, and Diné Community College, which is on a Navajo reservation in Northern Arizona. Quite apart from anything having to do with food, "AC/DC" seemed an apt metaphor for the ET

program, not for its pop-metal music connotations or sexual innuendo, but in its original electrical meaning, for ET demands that students who are accustomed to operating in one current suddenly adjust to quite another. That is to say, these primarily low-income, urban, first-generation college students are suddenly studying on a bucolic campus with huge old trees of many exotic species and beautiful nineteenth-century buildings outfitted with all the latest high-tech gear. Community college students are used to code-switching when it comes to language and culture, but when placed in the context of Vassar—recently listed as the second most expensive college in the country at almost \$48,000 a year for tuition and fees (Sheehey)—these students are class-switching. But for all the hallowed splendor of the campus, the regular students at Vassar<sup>1</sup> are not able to escape the reach of industrial food giants on their campus either. Food inequality has generally been thought of as a class issue—for many very good and logical reasons, such as the fact that the least healthy foods are often the least expensive; however, as our globalized economic system has expanded, such forms of inequality now affect all classes. We are all subject to the dictates of larger and larger companies that benefit from the contradictory roles of government agencies like the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which as both nutrition-policy maker and agribusiness advocate helps corporations use high volume and cheaper ingredients to undersell smaller competitors and thus increase market share. Acknowledging such inequalities can make us all feel like we are gastronomically slumming it.

## Critiques from Minamata to Mars

The course description on the syllabus asked two questions: "How do environmental thinkers approach the construction of the future?" and "How has this construction informed present debates on the impact of industrialization, urbanization, state-building, and collective movements on food production and distribution, societal challenges, and the environment?" These guiding questions were followed by our plan of attack: "We will examine how environmental thought informs different articulations of policy, the limits of praxis, and its contemporary construction of alternative futures," for "the class will work to define and practice civic responsibility and engagement as a way to combine knowledge, skills, values, and motivations to make a difference." Among the various ways that we addressed the constellation of issues around food was with Twinkies. The lesson with which we opened the course unfolds like this:

1. We read the madeleine excerpt from Proust's *Du côté de chez Swann*, in which eating a small cake dipped in tea prompts the narrator's flood of childhood memories; watch a clip of a similar Proustian moment from the animated Pixar film *Ratatouille*<sup>2</sup>; and discuss relationships between food and memory.
2. Students free-write about a significant food memory and share what they have written. Barb, from Diné, wrote about her grandmother making *Nitsidigo'i'*,

"kneeldownbread" or "Navajo tamales," in which a mush made by grinding corn in a kneeling position and wrapped in layers of cornhusks is steamed in the ashes of a wood fire. Issouf explained his nostalgia for eating *foufou* when he returns to West Africa—small balls of cassava and green plantain flour dipped in groundnut soup. And Lauren, a baker from Boston, wrote of the personal importance of various kinds of pie.<sup>3</sup>

3. I then pass out Twinkies, we eat them, and we discuss what that experience was like as compared to our food memories. Those from other countries have usually never eaten Twinkies and are often enthralled and/or appalled by their texture. Similarly, the U.S.-born students who are familiar with them either decline to partake or greedily ask for seconds.

6. Students then free-write again about why they think Twinkies have become so complicated and what they think about the shift to a more industrialized food system. Some advocate a "back to basics" approach, but aren't sure how we would feed seven billion people with smaller-scale farming. Others feel that technology can still solve the problems we've created if only "politicians did their jobs."

This lesson brings up several different issues for students—about our senses, our memories, history, progress, convenience. But they are often struck by the fact that Hostess proselytizes the Twinkie, which it calls "The Snack Cake Golden Child" that has been "enchanted the masses for generations" ("Products"), almost as a Christian civilizing mission. Those students who are from countries that were once part of colonial empires, in particular, are struck by the apparent imperialist tone of



TWINKIE COURTESY OF AUTHOR

4. We read the ad copy on the website for Hostess, the company that makes Twinkies; write on the board the ingredients we think Twinkies were probably originally made with (eggs, milk, flour...); and discuss developments in food science that made foods safer, but also presented other difficulties, such as flour being bleached and then having to be enriched with nutrients.
5. Then we read aloud the 41 ingredients on the Twinkies label along with the introduction to *Twinkie, Deconstructed*, in which author Steve Ettlinger tracks those ingredients, from Idaho phosphate mines and Chinese oil fields, to their primarily industrial uses, such as cellulose gum, which is "perfect for lending viscosity to the filling in snack cakes—or rocket fuel" (Ettlinger 115).

this message. Students love the unfolding of the Twinkie assignment and begin to see broadly the connections between the conquering attitudes that drove imperialism and colonialism and the marketing practices that drive expansion of food product markets. This issue of the civilizing mission resurfaces later in the course when we discuss a piece by South Asian scholar and climate activist Vandana Shiva on the donation of non-renewable Monsanto and Syngenta seeds to Haitian farmers after the earthquake of 2010 (Greenhalgh). Or the fact that American pork producer Smithfield has brought its products to Eastern Europe and, with its government subsidies, has been able to undersell and thus put out of business 40-60% of the small and medium-sized pig farmers in Poland and Romania (Magdoff and Tokar 22). Such examples throw into high relief the magnitude and interconnectedness of industrial food systems and underscore the difficulty in attempting to change them.



Our class was pitched at a high level for undergraduates, since part of the idea of the Exploring Transfer program is to see if students can actually cut it at a school like Vassar. But since it only met over five weeks, we assigned just four projects beyond daily homework. (The first year, we assigned five projects—one per week—but we found that these A students were mortified when they inevitably got a C on their first project because they misunderstood where the bar was. And so we made revision of the first project mandatory the second time we taught the course, which raised both their grades and the standard of acceptable work.) Our first project asked “What’s America’s Corniest Food?,” in which students choose either tortillas, steak, Smucker’s jam, or Coca Cola and explained how their food product came to be in their present form(s) and what the health and environmental implications of this transformation might be. The second assignment, “Bloomberg’s Big Gulp,” was an argument paper on the then-current decision by New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg to limit soda sizes. And the third was, “No money? Oh, SNAP!,” a quantitative reasoning assignment in which students had to invent a family and determine how they would shop for that family for a week using only food stamps, providing a financial breakdown and justifying their decisions. Each of these assignments had to draw on specific course materials, the final project requiring outside research, although most students brought in outside sources for all assignments.

Just as the Twinkie lesson blends fiction (Proust) with nonfiction (Ettlinger), evidence from nonfiction sources—like Nestle’s *Food Politics*, Pollan’s *Omnivore’s Dilemma*, and Tracie McMillan’s *The American Way of Eating*—are blended throughout the course with works of literature that help us think about the larger contexts of ethical responsibility and agency—from Marsh’s mid-nineteenth-century *Man and Nature* to Berry’s *Bringing It to the Table*. In the section on food sovereignty, essays by Eric Hold-Giménez, Miguel A. Altieri, and Jules Pretty, from Fred Magdoff and Brian Tokar’s excellent anthology *Agriculture and Food in Crisis* (2010), are given a gripping colonialist backdrop by “June 2001—And the Moon Be Still as Bright,” a short story from Ray Bradbury’s 1950 collection *The Martian Chronicles*. This story, the focal point in a collection of connected speculative fiction pieces, addresses the problem of American corporate imperialism. The fourth human expedition to Mars lands on the planet only to find that the beautiful, culturally rich, and by all appearances peaceful Martian civilization has been wiped out by chicken pox, introduced by a previous human expedition. The archeologist in the group, Jeff Spender, imagines humans renaming geographical features after companies like DuPont and snaps. He disappears for several days, then returns, having “gone native” by learning to read ancient Martian texts, and then starts killing off the other astronauts so that no more harm can be done to the indigenous population. Giacomo from Italy and Lucija from Bosnia began a passionate debate about what forms of agency are useful, appropriate, or necessary in combating invasion by outside forces, connecting Spender’s actions to Holt-Giménez’s survey of the impact that social movements have had on food politics.

We juxtaposed Spender’s violent form of protest with a quieter form of critique in veteran *New Yorker* writer Joseph Mitchell’s 1959 investigative journalism piece “Bottom of the Harbor” from a collection of the same name. Mitchell was contextualized by presentations by author Robert Sullivan on Mitchell’s influence on naturalist writers like himself, and by Vassar chemistry professor Stuart Belli on mercury and the bio-magnification of pollutants in seafood. “Bottom of the Harbor” addresses the health of New York harbor in the late 1950s, at a time when pollution and over-catch of its marine species had destroyed its health. Mitchell chronicles some of what has been lost in the three hundred years since the Dutch first arrived and took over the land from the Lenni- Lenape Indians—primarily the enormous oyster beds that stretched from Sandy Hook, NJ, all the way up the Hudson as far as Ossining, NY. Students are amazed to learn that Ellis Island was once called Oyster Island and that “Prince’s Bay Oysters” from Staten Island were sold at one time in the fanciest restaurants in London (Mitchell 469-470). Mitchell documents the ways in which mismanagement, corruption, and outright criminal activity on the part of Europeans, early Americans, and his own contemporaries decimated the marine resources of the harbor that the Indians had enjoyed for centuries.



PHOTO COURTESY OF AUTHOR

We then built on Mitchell’s observations and Belli’s presentation by turning to the advent of “Minamata Disease” in 1950s Japan, in which another bay was polluted by mercury dumping and produced extreme poisoning of thousands of local inhabitants, resulting in neurological disorders, horrible disfigurement, and death. In looking at instances such as the Minamata Bay disaster, students begin to see the ties among disrespect, exploitation, and lack of foresight and are able to connect them to contemporary issues like overfishing. Among these issues is the conflict of interest in our present American food system, as has been highlighted by Nestle, and by journalists such as Michael Moss in his Pulitzer-prize-winning exposé *Salt Sugar Fat*. Moss and Nestle explain the “revolving door” by which American regulatory agencies are routinely run by executives from the very companies that these agencies are meant to regulate. But this observation, combined with Nestle’s compelling statistical history of the growing power of agribusiness lobbies in Washington, causes these students to fear that the problems in our food system—rooted as they are in the



power of Western financial oligarchies—may be too big for individuals to combat (Nestle 95-110 and Moss 73, 212-235, 314).

## Acting with Our Minds Full

These issues, along with discussions about who was smart enough to bring a fan to cool off their dorm room in the hot months of June and July, were much of what we discussed over our mediocre meals in the All-College Dining Commons. Like most colleges, Vassar's food service is supplied by a big corporation: Aramark, not only one of the largest food service companies in the nation, but operating in twenty-one countries worldwide. Nestle, in *Food Politics*, provided students with a sense of scale: Aramark Global's 2001 earnings were \$4.1 billion, she writes, more than twice that of Marriott and Hilton combined and not far behind international fast-food giant Kentucky Fried Chicken's \$4.4 billion for that same year (Nestle 15). Since 2001, the company has expanded over two hundred percent, with 2015 earnings posted at \$14.3 billion (PR Newswire). Aramark also provides Yale University's food, which like many large institutions, eventually switched from a smaller service provider who used primarily local producers to a larger one, presumably to save money. A *Yale Daily News* article noted, however, that Aramark has spent less and less on food in the last fifteen years because the company is hamstrung by expensive agreements with giant agricultural producers like Sysco, so even the giant companies can become trapped in this food system (Sorel). The net import of this development is that consumers at places like ACDC are offered less nutritious food that has a larger negative environmental impact because it is produced in ways that are primarily inorganic and unsustainable.

When we discussed the ACDC food in class, some ET students felt like the small number of students in summer programs at Vassar were being discriminated against. They assumed that, since Vassar students don't take classes in the summer, the college would spend less money on students who "weren't really theirs." Others, though, did not feel they were being singled out, for they were pretty sure that Aramark was exploiting everyone. When I asked them to reflect on their experiences with ACDC after the course was over, there were a variety of responses. Geraldine felt slighted: "Even students from Vassar agreed that there were more choices during the [school] year than during the summer—why not provide the same? That to me is food Inequality; limiting our food choices by providing us with essentially fast food options." Sarfinoz was thankful: "There are people out there who struggle with necessities, with no luxuries whatsoever. If we take that into consideration, we have no reason to complain. Other top tier institutions, including the IVY, have similar food options." Sean was concerned about the beverages available: "They did away with bottled water because of the associated environmental problems (which I think is perfectly valid), but if that pushes people to just buy sugary drinks rather than use their own bottles/filters then that's creating a whole other issue." Cindy, the oldest in the group and the mother of grown children, wrote:

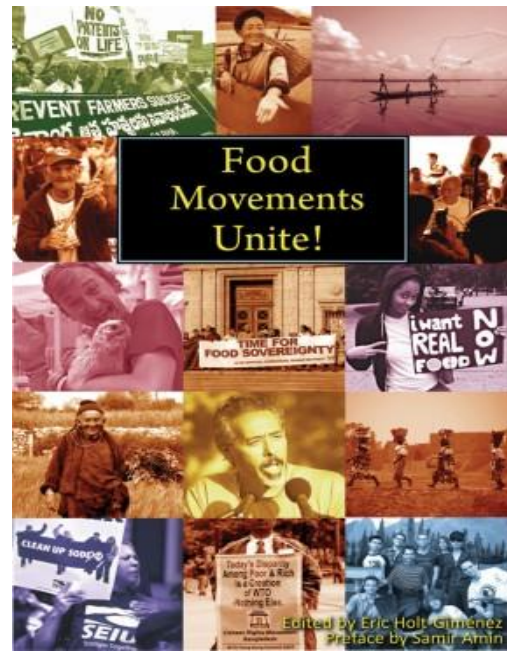
*The food at the ACDC was . . . not fresh . . . . Most of the vegetables were canned. I was especially put off by the fresh fruit because they refrigerated it. . . . Truthfully, the food made me sick—not enough fresh, nutritious, fiber full food was served. . . . It seemed a shame that although they are located in farm country that the food was pre-packaged/boil in a bag type food. The food served was in complete opposition to what we learned in class—the detriments of HFCS [high fructose corn syrup], cattle feedlots, and big agribusiness sucking all the nutrients from food so that it can be mass-produced. Vassar obviously pays some outside company for their dining facilities, and it is surprising that students, faculty and staff haven't risen in protest!*

Indeed, the fact that the students, faculty, and staff of Vassar haven't risen in protest is indicative of the extent to which even people with certain privileges feel that changing our food system presents insurmountable challenges. This is why our course ended by looking at movements that are trying to confront these challenges, in Eric Holt-Giménez's anthology *Food Movements Unite!: Strategies to Transform Our Food System*, focusing primarily on the 2008 food riots that swept the global South and the relationship between food sovereignty and climate justice.

For our final assignment, "Dear Mr. President," each student wrote a letter to President Obama with a policy proposal related to a pressing food issue, and some of the students actually chose to mail their letters to him. As agency was a central theme of the course, students were excited about taking ideas and information to which they were being exposed—much of it disturbing in its environmental and socio-political implications—and putting them into practice. One student called for the breaking up of the USDA into separate agencies in an effort to eliminate conflict of interest in that quarter. Another proposed a system of limitations on how far food can be distributed, centering her seasonality argument around the idea that being able to eat bananas in New York all year round is unreasonable and unsustainable. Still another argued for the donation of U.S. surplus corn to developing nations, the costs of transportation and distribution defrayed by the Corn Refiners Association. Some proposals were more realistic than others, but this culminating project encouraged students to not just diagnose and lament, but actually try to ameliorate.

To be fair, Vassar has a strong sustainability culture on campus, as is evinced by their biodegradable flatware and solar-powered garbage cans that begin to break down organic matter. The college has a farm, but, paradoxically, none of that food is available at ACDC, supposedly because, at least at that time, the college wasn't willing to take on the potential liability issues. In the end, though, everyone eating at ACDC was subject to the food that was lacking in nutritional value and had a large carbon footprint. Thus, this situation begs the question, "What is to be done?" My partner, Pinar, had a mantra throughout the course: "Agency, agency, agency!" That is to say, she

felt that it was very important for these bright and promising community college students to not only see that they could cut it at a school like Vassar, but that they could be agents of change in the world. The adaptability of these students, their ability to switch currents, would serve them well once they realized that they did have choices and could work toward positive change, even if issues around class, race, gender, or country of origin put obstacles in their ways. That is participatory democracy; that is civic engagement. Whether they will chronicle what has been lost, like Joseph Mitchell did, or take more active steps like the Haitian farmers who rejected Monsanto's donated seeds (Greenhalgh), my hope is that analyzing what they were eating in the cafeteria took them a step closer to developing their own agency. So thank you, ACDC, for providing such a neatly packaged example of the problems raised in our reading right outside our classroom.



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## Notes

1. Vassar has worked hard to become more diverse than other similar colleges. Its incoming class includes students from thirty countries, 13% of whom are first-generation college students; however, it remains over two-thirds white  
<https://admissions.vassar.edu/about/statistics/> 14 Sept. 2016.
2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3YG4h5GbTqU/> 6 Sept. 2014.
3. Note that, although I do not use student surnames, I've still changed their first names for privacy's sake.



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# RADICAL TEACHER

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

## Why Toilets are About Class and Gender Wars with Introduction

by Sohaila Abdulali



PROFESSOR GHAZAL ZULFIQAR (SECOND FROM THE RIGHT) WITH HER STUDENTS OUTSIDE THE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION OF PAKISTAN AFTER THEY MADE THEIR PRESENTATION TO THE COMMISSION. AT THE EXTREME RIGHT IS RUBINA, ZULFIQAR'S OWN DOMESTIC WORKER, TOILET CLEANER, AND CLOSE FRIEND.

# Introduction<sup>1</sup>

by Michael Bennett

We are republishing the following article by Sohaila Abdulali, with the author's permission. The article was brought to our attention by *Radical Teacher* founding board member Louis Kampf who ran across it on [livemint.com](http://www.livemint.com), where it was first published (<http://www.livemint.com/Leisure/38Jqn3MImrOPK04C1Uw5hN/How-toilets-are-a-flashpoint-for-gender-wars.html>). Thank you to Louis for spotting the article, Livemint.com for publishing it in the first place, Professor Ghazal Zulfiqar for sharing her experiences and the accompanying images, and especially to Sohaila Abdulali and Livemint.com for allowing us to republish it.

By way of introduction, we wanted to explain what it was that appealed to us about "Why Toilets are About Class and Gender Wars." There are several reasons we thought that the essay was well-suited for *Radical Teacher*, from the engaging narrative about a course taught at a Pakistani university to the larger issues that the essay raises for teachers and students in any and all educational institutions, and beyond.

Most of the essay is drawn from an interview that Sohaila Abdulali conducted with Professor Ghazal Zulfiqar concerning a class she taught on "Women and Policy in Pakistan" at Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS). Zulfiqar and her students focused in part on "the toilet as a political sphere," which became the topic of a presentation that they made to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. Based on the description provided by Abdulali, this unit of Zulfiqar's course sounds like an ideal model of radical teaching in action.

First, Zulfiqar asked her students to consider an aspect of academic labor that is often overlooked: the poorly paid service-level jobs that are crucial to the functioning of any school. In particular, students were asked to focus on the undercompensated labor of toilet cleaners at their university. Next, Zulfiqar asked her students to unpack their own unexamined relationship to the toilet cleaners at home and in school, causing them to have the "disconcerting experience" of recognizing their own participation in exploitation. She asked the students to think about the role of gender, class, and race in their relationships with toilet cleaners. Students then engaged with toilet cleaners, interviewing them about themselves and their work. Finally, the professor and her students presented the results of their research to an audience beyond the university (a Human Rights organization), in hopes of bringing about changes to curb the exploitation of toilet cleaners.

The ways in which Zulfiqar had her students engage the topic of "toilet wars" is a model of radical teaching in terms of both the content and the form of the lesson. In terms of content, the course asks students to think about the socioeconomics of higher education through the same lenses we describe on the masthead of *Radical Teacher* as

a "socialist, feminist, and anti-racist journal on the theory and practice of teaching." In terms of form, Zulfiqar engages her students to think critically, including self-criticism of their own position in an exploitative system. Students were asked to not just passively read about and discuss an issue in the abstract, but to engage the issue directly through writing about their experiences, interviewing toilet workers about their experiences, and ultimately presenting the results of their research to a larger political entity, making an active intervention in civil society. This class would have been decidedly less radical had it not asked students to examine their own subject positions within the university, while encouraging them to make political interventions in the institutions of which they are a part.

In a subsequent email communication on 7 January 2017, Professor Zulfiqar reported that many of her students are still actively pursuing the projects they began in her class. Some of them continued working with Zulfiqar on her research as part of their senior projects. She added that even "those that have graduated continue to knock on my office door from time to time to ask if they can participate in some way for they know that I am still working on this issue." Zulfiqar continued to teach a version of the same course, which also encourages students to participate in policymaking. In fact, she adds that she and her students may be able to extend the reach of their project "since the provincial government is considering a domestic worker bill and has expressed interest in learning about the findings of our small study." This is another encouraging example of a radical teacher continuing to fight the good fight.

In addition to presenting an interesting and important narrative about Zulfiqar's class at LUMS, Abdulali points out that toilets are "flashpoints for culture and gender wars everywhere, from transgender bathrooms in the US to some public toilets in India where women have to pay but men don't." Abdulali notes that the disproportionately greater number of cellphones than public toilets in Pakistan and India means that it's easier to have "private chats than it is to have private shits" throughout most of South Asia. Thus toilets are symbols of larger culture wars over gender and class.

In extending Abdulali's analysis to the contexts with which I am most familiar, it's interesting to consider why toilets are also about class and gender wars in the United States. Bathrooms were, of course, a major site of racial segregation in the Jim Crow South and in apartheid-era South Africa. In both instances, photographs of "white" and "colored" signs for restrooms are iconic representations of racial oppression. More recently, the furor around the North Carolina "bathroom bill" showed that gender wars over toilets are ongoing in the U.S. Interestingly, propaganda for the North Carolina bill portrayed trans people (specifically trans women) as perpetrators of violence rather than, as they almost always are, victims of it. It seems that toilets are still flashpoints for struggles against, racism, classism, homophobia, and misogyny.



Focusing on a more recent example from the teaching environment I know best, the university where I taught for twenty-two years before my retirement last year, let's consider labor relations at Long Island University's Brooklyn campus. The University's lockout of all faculty in anticipation of a possible strike, brought national and even international media attention to LIU's application of a classic management tool for factory owners (the lockout) to the business of higher education. Many commentators focused on this unprecedented move by the administration as the latest evidence of the thoroughgoing corporatization of higher education in the U.S. Which it surely was.

However, what didn't get as much media attention was that the LIU Faculty Federation (LIUFF of the AFT/AFL-CIO) was but one of five unions under fire by management at the Brooklyn campus. In addition to the teacher's union (representing adjunct and tenure-stream faculty), the unions representing clerical workers, campus security, campus engineering, and janitorial staff (whose work includes toilet cleaning) were also under assault. Two of these unions are working without contracts (clerical workers and campus engineering), as are the faculty after a contract stalemate led to ongoing arbitration; two of the unions have been replaced by outsourcing (though some of the same workers have been hired back at lower salaries and with lesser benefits). In short, unionbusting is alive and well at LIU's Brooklyn Campus, and it is not the only place in the U.S. where such practices are increasingly common and in need of contestation and resistance.

Abdulali's essay also does a nice job of showing that race, class, and gender are best studied not as independent variables but as intersectional vectors of analysis. In critically assessing the socio-economics of higher education, or for that matter any discursive practices or political systems, radical teachers employ critical analysis that blends feminism, socialism, and anti-racism. In the case of toilet cleaners in Pakistan, Prof. Zulfiqar commented that "You think of feminism as a male-female binary. But if you ask a maid, her biggest fear is not a man, but her *begum* [woman of high rank,

mistress], who can do anything to her." In this particular instance, by factoring race and class into the equation, we find that women are being exploited moreso by women than by men. Upper-class women from privileged racial and caste categories are exploiting working-class women from other racial and caste categories, so this individual mistreatment is best understood as part of a larger exploitative system. A clear example of why *Radical Teacher* is interested in essays that come from the perspective of anti-racist socialist feminism and not classic liberal feminism.

In the U.S., one need only turn to the recent presidential election to see evidence of the need for the intersectional analysis employed by Abdulali and Zulfiqar. Many commentators were sure that Trump could not overcome the gender gap to have any shot of winning. What these commentators failed to account for was how gender is imbricated with class and race. Though women of color resoundingly rejected Trump, he received slightly over half of the votes cast by white women. White privilege continues to "trump" other factors for many European Americans who seem to vote against their gender and class interests to hold on to a supposedly kinder, gentler form of White Power (a specter raised none-too-subtly by the slogan "Make America Great Again"). For me, one of the most telling images of the election was a photo of a white woman at a Trump rally wearing a t-shirt proclaiming "Trump can grab me by the ↓."

Returning to the immediate concerns of Abdulali's essay, she does a wonderful job in relatively few words of applying such intersectional analysis to classroom teaching and the contexts within which we all teach. We were struck by how Abdulali's essay on toilet cleaners at a Pakistani university fits with the specific and larger concerns that will be the focus of *Radical Teacher's* next issue on "Critical University Studies." The essay republished below, and the upcoming issue of *RT*, remind us that it's not sufficient for radical teachers to do innovative work in the classroom without considering the contexts within which that teaching occurs.



LAHORE UNIVERSITY OF MANAGEMENT SCIENCES LOGO

## Why Toilets are About Class and Gender Wars<sup>2</sup>

The Lahore University of Management Sciences is pricey and selective. Set in the heart of feudal Punjab, it educates the daughters and sons of Pakistan's most privileged citizens, getting them ready to move on to Harvard, Princeton and the like, and take their rightful places on the thrones of power. This semester, students in Ghazal Zulfiqar's Women and Policy in Pakistan course are concentrating on a different kind of throne—the porcelain one in the bathroom—and the women who clean it.

Zulfiqar and her students presented their research on "(De)composing The Toilet As A Political Sphere" at the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan a few days ago. The students catalogued dismal conditions and advocated policy guidelines for toilet cleaners, both domestic and those who work in institutional and public spaces. They don't know if their presentation will have any impact on policy. It certainly had an impact on their own lives and thoughts. Here is some of what they wrote:

*"... made me realize my own privilege regarding bathrooms in a way that I haven't reckoned with before and it is a disconcerting experience."*

*"... to my family the whole village is like the servant quarters."*

*"I've never even cleaned my own bathroom and I wouldn't know where to begin."*

Zulfiqar, originally from Karachi, moved to the United States in 2000 and returned 14 years later for her teaching job in Lahore. "I got a huge culture shock," she told me. She saw "a huge disconnect with the population of the country" in both students and professors. "I live on campus, watching professors' wives deal with their *ayahs* [maids]. Lahore has a distinct feudal culture—many women think nothing about slapping and hitting their servants. Newspapers often report stories of under-age servants being tortured and killed. You think of feminism as a male-female binary. But if you ask a maid, her biggest fear is not a man, but her *begum* [woman of high rank, mistress], who can do anything to her."

Her course prospectus stated: "The toilet represents the dirtiest of domestic work, the type of work that is beneath the dignity of any self-respecting Pakistani, whether man or woman. Most of us have never cleaned a toilet, not our own and certainly not someone else's. But our toilets get cleaned several times a week, by people whose job it is to clean out our most despicable mess. This makes for a very interesting political space—a space with

two sets of actors: the makers of the mess, who are not prepared to clean it, and the cleaners of the space, who are not usually allowed to use it. The toilet then is a site where class, income and racial inequalities are made dramatically clear. Gender, of course, is a key feature of this high drama because the job is segregated according to the rules of private and public space as well as the cultural norms of decorum."

"I've become really obsessed with toilets," Zulfiqar told me. "In airports and restaurants, I spend a lot of time talking to the women who clean. These women spend their entire working lives in the toilets. Sometimes my husband will text me: 'The food is here, when are you coming out?'"

She asked her students: "What are the bathrooms like in the spaces that you own or use? Do you know where the people that clean your bathrooms relieve themselves?" The students found themselves, sometimes for the first time, talking to the women who cleaned their bathrooms, learning about their lives and facing up to their own discomforts and blindspots.

"A couple of female students came to me privately and said they sometimes clean their own bathrooms, but are embarrassed to tell anyone. Toilets are a huge stigma across class," she told me.

Of course, we Indians know this very well. Toilets are flashpoints for culture and gender wars everywhere, from transgender bathrooms in the US to some public toilets in



PUBLIC TOILET IN PAKISTAN

India where women have to pay but men don't. Neither India nor Pakistan have ratified the ILO (International Labour Organization) Convention 189 setting labour standards for domestic workers. Both countries share the shame of not enough toilets: 53% of Indians and 21% of Pakistanis have no access to a toilet. You've probably seen the dramatic numbers showing that South Asians have more mobile phones than bathrooms. It's easier to have private chats than it is to have private shits.

Zulfiqar's students soon shared her fascination with toilet culture. "They were shocked by the lives and stories

and suffering and everything they never knew," she told me. They interviewed 42 women. The majority was Muslim, but a sizeable percentage was Christian. Fifty-seven percent of them were from rural areas. At least 38% were the main breadwinners in their families. Most had children to support. One student's family employed girls of 8 and 9 and paid them no wages at all—just a promise to pay their dowry one day.

They found that women who work in private households are much more vulnerable to harassment and exploitation than those who work in hotels, restaurants, and airports. They found that their mothers replace the soap if a servant touches it. Or they simply replace the servant. They found that across the board, toilet cleaners are considered cunning and untrustworthy (a quarter of the interviewees had been accused of theft), deserving only of scorn and stale *chapatis* [bread]. They found humanity where they had not seen it before and began to question their own roles in a cruel class system.

"The students are waking up," Zulfiqar said.

Dear lucky *Mint Lounge* reader, do you know your maid's story? Would the world end if you and she sat on the same toilet? Or if you deployed the brush and cleaned it yourself?

## Notes:

1. Sohaila Abdulali's article, "Why Toilets are About Class and Gender Wars" has been reprinted with permission from the publisher, HT Media Ltd and can be found in its original format at <http://www.livemint.com/Leisure/38Jqn3MImrOPK04C1Uw5hN/How-toilets-are-a-flashpoint-for-gender-wars.html>. The reprinted article on pages 55-56 is copyrighted to HT Media Ltd and they reserve all rights. The introduction to this article by Michael Bennett is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.
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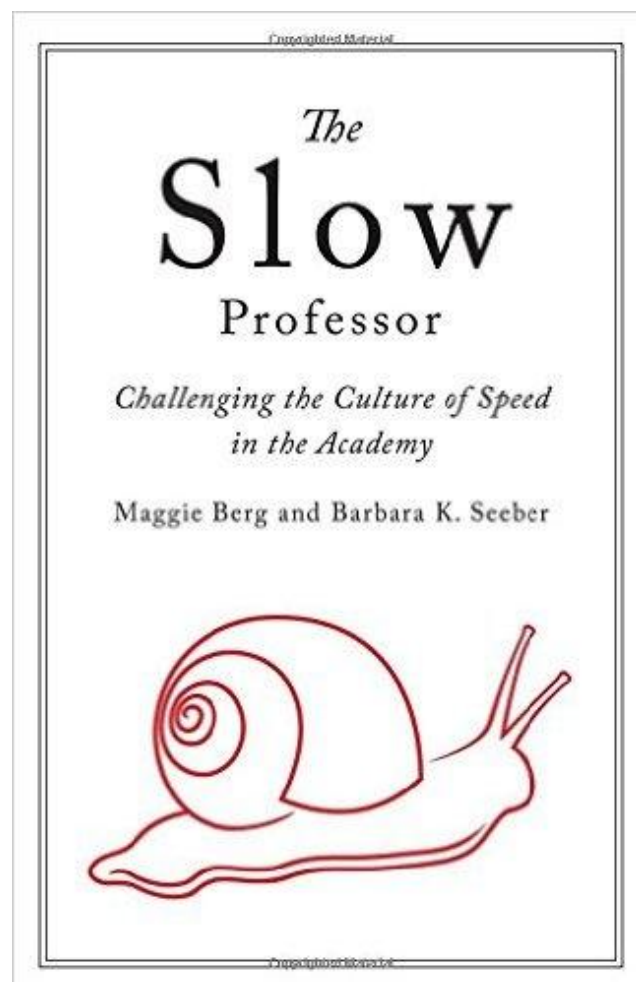
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# RADICAL TEACHER

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

Review  
The Slow Professor:  
Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy  
By Maggie Berg and Barbara K. Seeber

Reviewed by Jackie Brady



## The Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy Maggie Berg and Barbara K. Seeber (University of Toronto Press, 2016)

Reviewed by Jackie Brady

Just a few weeks ago, as the Fall Semester at the community college where I work was wrapping up, I ran into an especially exhausted seeming colleague in the copy room. When I asked her how she was doing, she explained, between coughing spasms, that she had pneumonia. "Walking pneumonia?" I inquired, concerned that she was at work in spite of her diagnosis and obvious discomfort. "No," she replied, "regular pneumonia. I really should be at home in bed, but I was afraid of getting too far behind on everything at this point in the semester." I nodded my understanding. What teacher does not know the pressure to get work done even when it means ignoring our own wellbeing? To this colleague and all "beleaguered, managed, frantic, stressed, and demoralized professor[s] who [are] the product of the corporatization of higher education" (ix) (that covers most of us), Maggie Berg and Barbara K. Seeber offer a form of a remedy in their little book, *The Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy*.

Berg and Seeber draw their framework and inspiration from the Slow Food Movement begun in Italy in 1986. This movement, as many *Radical Teacher* readers will know, opposes big agribusiness, industrialized food production, and globalization by promoting local products, sustainable methods, and small businesses with fair labor practices. Like the Slow Food Movement, the Slow Professor Movement suggested by the authors, takes aim at the central capitalist concepts that *faster and more output are better* and that *workplaces should operate with machine-like efficiency*. School administrators began to adopt the principle of workplace efficiency already back in the Progressive Era. And by now, over one hundred years later, it has taken firm hold in the neoliberal corporate university. According to the authors, it has created a debilitating "culture of speed," made even worse by "the rise in contractual positions, expanding class sizes, increased use of technologies, downloading of clerical tasks onto faculty, and the shift to managerialism"(3). Such systemic changes to academic culture conspire to, in the authors' word, "balloon" our workloads, making faculty busier and busier, ever more responsible to their students, departments, and above all administrators. It is no surprise then that, as Berg and Seeber describe, they stress us out, wear us down, and render our workplaces lonely as ghost towns (75).

In their introduction and first chapter on "Time Management and Timelessness," Berg and Seeber marshal compelling evidence to show us just how bad it has gotten for faculty in higher education today: "Stress in academia exceeds that of the general population" (2); professors report feeling more pressured about accomplishing work

tasks and more tired than CEOs (16); and the professorial disease of time pressure has spread internationally. (Both authors teach at universities in Canada, and they cite studies of professors in Europe, Australia and the United States). We also learn that there are some dreadfully misguided advice manuals out there touting time management skills for faculty. Feel your heart race when you read Philip C. Wankat's advice from *The Effective Efficient Professor* (2002) that we should be getting everything done in 55 hours per week (quoted on 19); or your eyes roll when you read tips such as stand when students and colleagues come by your office so they don't linger (18); or your blood boil when you read the suggestion to use your graduate students to do your work, just as long as you buy them pizza or a round of drinks to make them feel better (18).

***Berg and Seeber draw their framework and inspiration from the Slow Food Movement begun in Italy in 1986. This movement, as many Radical Teacher readers will know, opposes big agribusiness, industrialized food production, and globalization by promoting local products, sustainable methods, and small businesses with fair labor practices.***

Written in accessible prose, Berg and Seeber's intentionally short book is meant to provide an "intervention" against the harmful culture of the corporatized academy, so that professors can "take back the intellectual life of the university"(x). The authors offer up this work as "part self help", to reduce our stress, and "part manifesto", to call us to action. In just over 100 pages, they include chapters on how all parts of professorial work—teaching, research, and collegiality—have been hurt by the culture of speed, and can be helped by resisting it. Along the way, the authors drive home their points that 1) thoughtful work in places of higher education takes time and 2) that the labor of faculty must not be degraded by instrumentalist approaches, which frame professors as machine-like neo liberal subjects (59). Although the authors thoroughly dismantle the popular "perception of professors as a leisured class"(2) by painting a picture of a contemporary professoriate that is widely suffering from too much work and too little free time, they purposely avoid the rhetoric of crisis that we at *Radical Teacher* so often adopt. According to the authors such rhetoric may accurately diagnose the problem, but it also creates "a sense of urgency" that overwhelms and ultimately paralyzes us because we "feel even more powerless"(11). We should pay attention to this point that the discourse of impending cataclysm, however much we believe it, may not be good for individual agency and so not the most effective tool for inspiring us to social action.

Instead, Berg and Seeber want their book to motivate us to change our selves and, in so doing, our academic



culture. As part of this aim, and in keeping with the spirit of the manifesto, they suggest ways of resistance for all three areas of our academic work. Their suggestions are generally useful tips that would make any individual professor's work life feel better, and for that they are sufficiently valuable. For examples: in order to reclaim the joy in teaching ("Pedagogy and Pleasure"), the authors suggest that in our classrooms we laugh (44) and tell more stories (47); to accomplish meaningful research ("Research and Understanding"), they recommend that we wait the necessary amount of time it takes for any given project to reach its organic completion (64); and to build our collegial relationships into supportive networks that lift us up ("Collegiality and Community"), they propose that we "risk candor," yet more importantly, not give up hope that our department culture can change (84). These ideas, albeit helpful, are neither groundbreaking nor radical. More unfortunately, when proposed as individual behavioral changes, they are more compatible with neoliberalism than hostile to it. Here, as the title of their book hints, the authors catch themselves up in a common trap of third wave feminism, mistakenly trusting that changing the self will change the world, or in this case that by changing from a fast professor into *The Slow Professor* one can resist the system of the corporatization of the university. In other words, the authors offer individual interventions that cannot defend against structural problems.

In order to fully appreciate the contribution that Berg and Seeber make with *Slow Professor*, some of us may need to suppress our inner curmudgeon, who believes that the authors place too much trust in "individual practice as a site of resistance"(6), and that the systemic problem of neoliberalism and its corporatization of the university is much too huge to be combated by individual changes within the academy. But taken altogether, Berg and Seeber's suggestions for resistance can be appreciated as an important reminder that insidious patriarchal values, particularly those that derive from what Susan Bordo identified in her essay "The Cartesian Masculinization of Thought" (*Signs*, 1986), still pervade the academy, contributing to its instrumentalism. In this sense, *The Slow Professor* carries on the work that came out in the late 1980s and early 1990s by feminists calling for a new feminist epistemology that integrates the wisdom of the body, including emotions and pleasure, and embraces caring and collective ways of learning.

***In order to fully appreciate the contribution that Berg and Seeber make with *Slow Professor*, some of us may need to suppress our inner curmudgeon, who believes that the authors place too much trust in "individual practice as a site of resistance"***

There is no question that, in first diagnosing the epidemic of the overworked professoriate and then in recommending a cocktail of remedies to help us each fight the disease of speed in academic culture, the authors have created a feel good book with many helpful insights. Academic work got you feeling sick and tired? Rest up and read *The Slow Professor*. Doing so will likely make you feel better, particularly if you accept, as the authors do, that by taking this time for reflection (x) you are also helping to challenge the detrimental culture that made you sick in the first place. Just remember: once you have regained your strength, to fully take back the neoliberal corporate university, you will need more than just yourself.



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# RADICAL TEACHER

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

## 'A Practice of Freedom': Self-grading for Liberatory Learning

by Vicki L. Reitenauer



ADRIENNE RICH AND AUDRE LORDE

From my earliest days as a university instructor, I have been troubled by the grading system and its demands on both students as producers of knowledge and instructors as arbiters of the value of that production. It is a personal, professional, and pedagogical necessity for me as an instructor in gender studies to be preoccupied with issues of power, and a great part of my distress as a person interested in serving as a catalyst for students' breakthroughs in thinking, feeling, and acting in the interest of social justice stemmed from my discomfort wielding the institutional power that has been vested in me through my assigning of grades to their work.

If ever there was a time when we need mechanisms through which students may be activated to "claim an education" (Rich) and to operationalize "education as the practice of freedom" (Freire; hooks), that time is now, given the social, political, and economic injustice and instability that shape our students' lives. I work to catalyze this claiming through a comprehensive self-grading model. With this strategy, I mean to disrupt the ways that students "get" a grade and, instead, to inspire them to claim every aspect of their learning—their thinking, their feeling, their doing, and their reflecting on doing—through grading themselves for their efforts and the results of their efforts within our learning community.

***My role will be to provide in-depth learner-centered feedback on every aspect of their work in the course.***

What follows is an articulation of the current form of this self-grading process. I make no claim here as to "best practices" but, rather, offer this snapshot as a jumping-off point for the reader's reflection on their own "best practices" in grading. As to the particular context within which my teaching practice is situated, I serve the students at Portland State University (PSU) through the faculty of both the Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies department (part of a just-formed School of Gender, Race, and Nations) and University Studies, PSU's general education program. PSU is a large urban-serving access institution with many students who are the first in their family to attend college. Students of color, particularly Latino/a/x students, contribute to a continuing diversification of PSU's student body relative to race and ethnicity, and both my departmental and general education courses welcome PSU's many students who are queer- and trans\*-identified.

In the earliest days of my courses, we begin with introductory activities highlighting the philosophical, political, and pedagogical foundation for the class: that this is a co-created space in which all of us will be actively learning from and teaching each other. This includes sharing power over the choosing of course content (with students directly bringing content into the course in a variety of ways) and the facilitation of class time (with students individually and/or collectively leading sessions). I then introduce students to the concept of self-grading. We talk about how most, if not all, of us in the room have been thoroughly socialized to appeal to the purported expert in

the room to prove the worth of our academic output. Dislocating that dynamic requires each of us individually to assume a different set of responsibilities and a strategy for becoming accountable to ourselves and each other. Far from being an "easy" way to complete a class, self-grading and the processes associated with it will challenge them to assume an active role in their learning that they may have experienced rarely, if ever, before. What's exciting about self-grading is also what is terrifying about it: to truly engage in it with integrity, we've each got to reflect deeply and honestly on who and how we are, what we've brought to bear on our learning, and what the meaning and value of that effort has been for us.

***If ever there was a time when we need mechanisms through which students may be activated to "claim an education" (Rich) and to operationalize "education as the practice of freedom" (Freire; hooks), that time is now, given the social, political, and economic injustice and instability that shape our students' lives.***

My role, I say, will be to provide in-depth learner-centered feedback on every aspect of their work in the course. Self-grading does not mean that I take a vacation from the effort of building and holding the space within which we will engage, nor that I remove myself from the responsibility to respond to their work. Rather, it means I, as their instructor, will experience the freedom to respond authentically and directly to the efforts they put forward precisely because I am not reducing that response to a letter grade. Self-grading means that I can and will focus my efforts where I believe I may bring the most value to them: in getting to know each of them individually, so that I might illuminate what I see going on in their work and identify possibilities for taking it further.

Through my writing about self-grading in the syllabus and our talking about it in class, I outline the processes we'll engage in throughout the term to support their final determination of their grade. Students begin the term by reading Adrienne Rich's essay "Claiming an Education" and Audre Lorde's "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action" and completing an introductory reflective essay that requires them to name, among other things, their personal learning goals, linked to the course learning objectives; the grade they intend to earn in the course; the criteria through which they will determine what grade they have earned; the actions they will take to meet their goals; how others in the class, including me, can best support their learning; and how they will actively support the learning of others. I respond to these assignments with what I think of as a "noticing" feedback, in which I reflect back to students what I perceive through this reflective essay, their perceiving of themselves.

Throughout the term, I offer more of the "noticing" feedback on student work products. This feedback follows

the direction they offer in a note to me as their reader, in which they identify what I should focus on to assist them in moving their work forward. My feedback reflects my critical engagement with their work, viewed through my understanding of the field, and framed to address their genuine questions about the impact of their work on a reader/viewer.

A required 1:1 meeting happens at the midpoint of the term. For many of my students, who have come to expect that their instructor's interest in them is predicated solely upon telling them what they're doing wrong, this meeting can be a revelation, as it serves to build a genuine relationship between each student and me, through and beyond our course. I call these *no-agenda* meetings, meaning that we can talk about anything at all, including but not limited to their coursework. To signal the importance of these meetings (and to make meetings accessible for students who are unable to come to campus early or stay late), I preserve a week's worth of class time for this activity, with students cycling through 10-minute meetings with me during individual or group work time. I schedule additional appointment slots outside of class, beyond office hours, for students who would like a longer meeting.

These 1:1s are enormously valuable for me. There is a decided shift after these meetings occur, on both the interpersonal and group level. The ways we can engage in the second half of our term on the basis of the student-instructor relationships that have been built—and the fact that these relationships have been enhanced throughout the course at essentially the same moment in the term—deepen profoundly the quality of our interactions and the integrity of the work students continue to make.

A rigorous reflective self-evaluation is students' final assignment, in which they respond to a judgment-free report-out of their efforts and a set of prompts requiring them to consider the work they produced, the impacts they made (or failed to make) in our learning community, what they learned through both their individual and their collaborative work, and how they will take and apply that learning in new settings. Within this essay, students claim their grade for the course within the context of the aspirational writing from their orienting reflection. The one caveat to this self-grading practice—the way that I may choose to exert the power with which I've been vested by the institution, made repeatedly transparent to them from our first class forward—is that I may require students to discuss their grade with me if I find that their determination doesn't align with my own experiences of them in the course and, more importantly, with their own self-reporting in this reflection about their engagement throughout the term. I will not demand that students change their self-determined grade, I tell them, but I may choose to require a conversation with them about the disconnects I perceive between their activity within the course, their reflective writing in this final assignment, and the grade they have claimed.

Having come to the very end of our time together, I again share with students the foundation for self-grading and how I understand this foundation to be connected to both course content and to the dynamic processes we've engaged in together throughout the term. I tell students that I don't care at all about their grades (and I mean this wholeheartedly), but that I do care deeply about the integrity with which they reflect on their work and determine their grade. I suggest that this process is not about guessing what grade I think they have earned and then writing a reflection to make the case for it. I encourage them, in fact, not to start with the grade at all, but to write their way into the reflection first. In another reversal of the advice they usually receive about completing assignments, I urge them to sit with the prompts for a good long while, waiting as long as they possibly can before writing. I suggest that they start with the work of deep reflection, with the prompts echoing in their heads and hearts and bodies—and only then, after the words have formed themselves around their experience, the meaning of that experience, and where it's pointing them next, to settle down into their claiming of a grade.

This conversation brings us full circle to the start of the term, when we first discussed self-grading. We revisit our term-long conversation about power, and I again expose the fact (and the paradox) that, while this self-grading process does require them to empower themselves to name their own grade, I retain access to power that they do not have simply by virtue of my position relative to theirs within this institution. What I *can* and do choose to do with that power, however, is to use it negotiate this terrain with them in ways that are fundamentally relational, rather than bureaucratic and transactional. Because we've been talking, directly and indirectly, formally and informally, about power all term long, this conversation often serves to tether our considerations of the uses and abuses of power to this micro-act of grading, reminding us that in most situations (save, perhaps, the most oppressive ones), we all have access to some form of power, and we can choose intentionally to operate from an agency that grounds our use of it.

The responsibility I bear in our classroom has not diminished through this practice. Rather, it has shifted away from my using power to issue a summative statement of value to situating myself as mentor, guide, and sharer of my particular knowledges in a learning community that expects students to share theirs, too. Self-grading allows me to experience "education as the practice of freedom" from the position of instructor, as it allows students to claim their educations and to shoulder the responsibilities to self and others that the exercising of such a right demands.

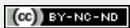
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# RADICAL TEACHER

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## News for Educational Workers

by Leonard Vogt

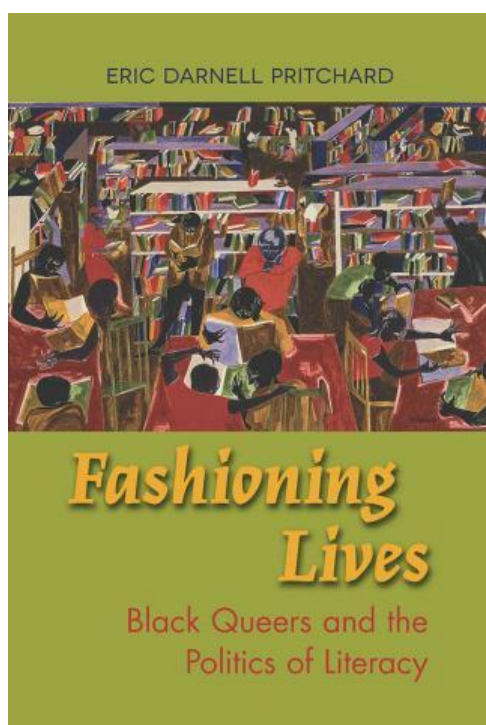


ANTI-TRUMP POST-ITS SUBWAY ART BY MATTHEW CHAVEZ  
UNION SQUARE STATION, NEW YORK CITY (PHOTO: LENORE BEAKY)

News for Educational Workers has been a featured column of *Radical Teacher* almost since the journal's conception. With this issue of the journal, however, news items of interest to progressive and radical educators will be posted on the new *Radical Teacher* blog at <http://www.radicalteacher.net/>

Other less timely resources, such as books, film, magazines, and journal will continue to be featured in our newer, abbreviated News for Educational Workers column which will continue to be published with each of our forthcoming online issues.

## Books



*Fashioning Lives* analyzes the life stories of sixty Black lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) people along with archival documents, literature, and film. Doing so, the book provides a theoretical framework for studying the literacy work of Black LGBTQ people, who do not fit into the traditional categories imposed on their language practices and identities. Examining the myriad ways literacy is used to inflict harm, the book discusses how these harmful events prompt Black LGBTQ people to ensure their own survival by repurposing literacy through literacy performances fueled by accountability to self and communal love towards social and political change, a process I call "restorative literacies." The chapters highlight restorative literacies in literacy institutions (e.g., libraries, schools), historical records repositories, religious and spiritual spaces, parties, community events, activist organizations, and digital spheres.

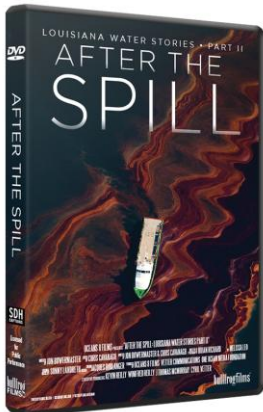
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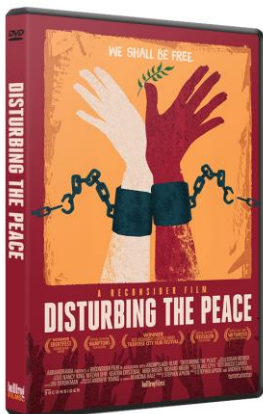
## Film

### Bullfrog films presents three new videos:

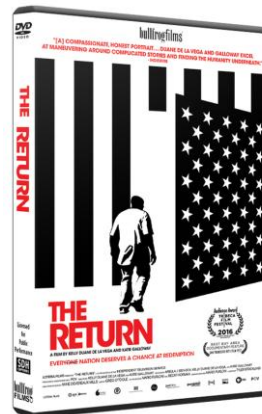
The Louisiana Gulf Coast has been battered by the worst of oil-and-gas industry activity and climate change: Hurricane Katrina, Deepwater Horizon, and now a rapidly eroding coastline. Yet the people, including those most affected, are standing up and fighting back to protect their wetlands, coastline and livelihoods, while looking to develop systems to address rising waters in *After the Spill*.



*Disturbing the Peace* is story of the human potential unleashed when we stop participating in a story that no longer serves us and, with the power of our convictions, take action to create new possibilities. The film follows former enemy combatants — Israeli soldiers and Palestinian fighters — who have joined together to challenge the status quo and say “enough.” When someone is willing to disturb the status quo and stand for the dream of a free and secure world, who will stand with them?



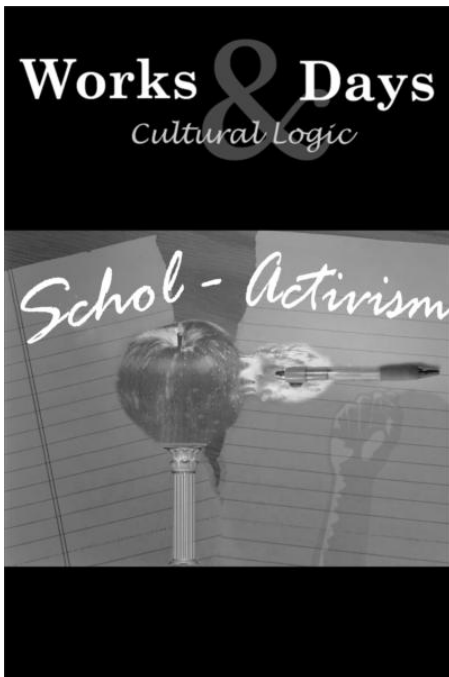
In 2012, California amended its “Three Strikes” law — one of the harshest criminal sentencing policies in the country. *The Return* examines this through the eyes of prisoners suddenly freed, families turned upside down, reentry providers helping navigate complex transitions, and attorneys and judges wrestling with an untested law. The film gets to the heart of the current issue of mass incarceration in our nation and highlights the need for attention to equality in justice.



See <http://www.bullfrogcommunities.com> for a complete list of all Bullfrog titles. If you have any questions, feel free to contact [info@bullfrogcommunities.com](mailto:info@bullfrogcommunities.com).

## Journals and Magazines

*Works & Days* and *Cultural Logic* proudly announce the publication of their special issue called *Scholasticism: Reflections on Transforming Praxis in and Beyond the Classroom* (edited by Joseph Ramsey), a 500-page volume representing the work of 43 contributors, 21 essays, 3 interviews, poetry, and topics ranging from classroom pedagogies, labor struggles, the contradictions of online education and internet activism, to critiques of the neoliberal university. To order a copy, send your email address to David Downing at [downing@iup.edu](mailto:downing@iup.edu). The cost is \$10 for this 500 page issue.



The Institute for Critical Education Studies announces that *Workplace: A Journal for Academic Labor* published its latest issue on the theme of "Marx, Engels and the Critique of Academic Labor" (edited by Karen Lynn Gregory and Joss Winn), which can be accessed at <http://ices.library.ubc.ca/index.php/workplace>.



**workplace**  
the journal for academic labor



The current issue of *Rethinking Schools* (Winter 2016-17 Vol. 31. No. 2) has a cover story about creating student identity on the walls of Philadelphia, feature articles on language as a human right and teaching the Tuskegee syphilis experiments, and editorials on teaching about solidarity with Standing Rock and critiquing Betsy DeVos, Donald Trump's nominee for U. S. secretary of education. To call or email, see below:

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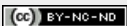
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## Contributors' Notes



ANTI-TRUMP POST-ITS SUBWAY ART BY MATTHEW CHAVEZ, UNION SQUARE STATION, NEW YORK CITY (PHOTO: LENORE BEAKY)



**Sohaila Abdulali** is a freelance writer based in New York. She has published two novels, three children's books, short stories, and writes regularly for newspapers in the US and India.

**Michael Bennett** is Manuscript Co-Editor of *Radical Teacher*. He recently retired as Professor of English at Long Island University, Brooklyn. He is now pursuing various creative and political projects.

**Jackie Brady** is Associate Professor of English and Associate Director of Composition at Kingsborough Community College (CUNY). Her research interests include progressive education and the cultural history of fitness and yoga in the U.S. She is also a board member and book review editor of *Radical Teacher*.

**Sarah E. Chinn** teaches in and is chair of the English department at Hunter College, CUNY. Her work focuses on the literatures and cultures of 19th century US literature, as well as issues of gender, race, class, sexuality, (dis)ability, and childhood.

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