

# RADICAL TEACHER

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

## Radicalizing the Liberal Arts: Race and Racism at Small Liberal Arts Colleges

by Sarah E. Chinn



GRAPHIC FROM JUSTSEEDS' 2014 LIBERATING LEARNING PORTFOLIO

The Leftist excess at small liberal arts colleges (SLACs) has long been a popular topic in conservative and “moderate” politics and journalism, from 1960s reactions against anti-war and various liberation movements to the recent pearl-clutching around “wokeness.” A quick survey of newspaper articles and blog posts toggling between outrage and ridicule, alerting their readers to the dangers of radical SLAC students in the past few decades, reveals a cavalcade of complaints about overreaching institutions and intolerant students.

The roots of current critiques of politics at SLACs is the sexual consent policy (officially known as the Sexual Offense Prevention Policy or SOPP) that Antioch College, in consultation with students, unveiled in 1991. According to this policy, students had to be sure that all sexual interactions were consensual and were expected to check with partners before initiating various kinds of sexual activity. The SOPP was widely ridiculed, from a sketch on *Saturday Night Live* that featured a game show called “Is It Date Rape?” to essays in the *New York Times*. (1) A policy that launched a thousand OpEds, the SOPP was characterized as a symptom of political correctness gone wild, puritanical, and infantilizing. In her 1998 book *Bitch: In Praise of Difficult Women*, Elizabeth Wurtzel argued that all women needed to negotiate sexual situations was self-respect because, after all, “one Antioch College is enough” (119). (2)

The deluge of alarmist think-pieces, scolding editorials, and belittling comedy routines that responded to the SOPP set the pattern for future reactions to debates over sexual violence, racism, and homophobia on college campuses, especially at SLACs. More recently, the focus has shifted primarily towards discussions of race and racism. Articles in right-wing and right-of-center publications like the *New York Post*, the *Washington Times*, and *The Economist* and online venues such as Quillette and *Discourse Magazine*, lament the deleterious effects of “woke” politics on college campuses, especially SLACs. In a 2020 article on the *MarketWatch* website, Howard Gold listed a number of colleges that “fail students and free speech,” all of which were SLACS and (not coincidentally?) three out of four of which were women’s colleges (the fourth, Sarah Lawrence, was a women’s college that went coed in 1968).

But to what extent do radical politics actually exist, let alone thrive, on SLAC campuses? Are SLACs really a juggernaut of wokeness, crushing all opponents in their path? My co-editor Heather Moore Roberson and I suspected that the reality was more complicated, more multilayered and multivocal than the establishment and right-wing media led their readers and viewers to believe. SLACs offer a unique learning and teaching environment. Undergraduate students (and even college faculty) often choose liberal arts settings for the intimate classroom settings, the collegiality between faculty and students, and even opportunities for collaborative faculty-student research. And we knew that inside small college classrooms, many faculty worked tirelessly to explore, question, and deconstruct racism and power in intimate, discursive settings. On the other hand, SLACs are still part of an elitist structure of higher education which are heavily populated by white, wealthy perspectives. Discourse about race, racism, and power are often framed

within college settings which have very little racial/ethnic diversity within the student body and even amongst the faculty/administrators/staff.

This mini-cluster explores the contradictions inherent in small college environments when it comes to radical politics, especially around race and racism. Written by a mix of faculty, students, and alumni, these five articles come from institutions quite different from each other, although there are fascinating overlaps. Three of the colleges featured are in some way religiously affiliated – Catholic, Lutheran, and Buddhist. In two of the essays, the writers ventured outside the walls of their institution to understand the dynamics of race in their college. And two actively engage with strategies for countering white-dominant practices either in the classroom or in the college as a whole.

Jolivette Mecnas and Yvonne Wilber describe their work in co-designing a First Year Writing (FYW) curriculum that centered anti-racist information literacy (IL) for students. Although their institution, California Lutheran University, was historically a denominational college from its founding in 1959, its decision to expand from a college to a university and from an explicitly religious to a non-denominational campus has allowed it to drift away from the progressive politics of its prior religious affiliation, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA). As the ELCA has increasingly embraced pro-LGBT and anti-racist principles, California Lutheran has seemed to achieve less around the same issues. In fact, despite a variety of mostly successful efforts to diversify California Lutheran’s faculty and student body (they increased Latinx student representation to such an extent that they were designated a Hispanic-Serving Institution by the federal government), students and faculty of color report feeling isolated and lonely, and that the culture of the college does not encourage cross-racial dialogue or meaningful analysis of white supremacy.

Mecnas, the coordinator of Cal Lutheran’s composition program, and Wilber, a librarian with expertise in anti-racist IL came together in 2020 to construct an FYW curriculum that would have critical IL, composition pedagogy, and anti-racism at its core. In their article they describe how establishing Ta-Nehisi Coates’s *Atlantic* essay “The Case for Reparations” as a shared text for all FYW students made space for students to think deeply about the legacy of slavery, Jim Crow, redlining, and other racist policies, while learning how to write well-researched and cogent essays. Students chose topics for their research papers that intersected with Coates’s essay, and instructors nominated the highest-achieving papers for Outstanding and Honorable Mention Essay awards. Through Mecnas’s and Wilber’s work, students engaged with a radical political idea – reparations – and had to form their own responses to it. If the winning essays for the essay award is any indication, students developed not just writing skills but a sharp political analysis of white-supremacist government policy and its ramifications for Black Americans.

Student radicalization is the central theme of “Mobilizing BIPOC Student Power against Liberalism at Soka University of America: A Collection of Voices.” Coauthored by students and faculty, the essay chronicles the attempts by students at Soka University, a Buddhist-affiliated college of only 400

students, to raise issues of racism in their institution and to establish a concentration in Critical Global Ethnic Studies (CGES). They faced an uphill battle despite – or perhaps because of – Soka University’s stated commitment to dialogue and consensus. From student efforts to create a Black Student Union to the fight for CGES to the demand to acknowledge the Black Lives Matter movement, the essay zeroes in on the struggle between radical students and a hierarchical liberal institution.

Strikingly, one side effect of student activism was increased connection between students and faculty. Moreover, in sharing an activist agenda, both groups worked to counter the power differential between them. As Aneil Rallin, a faculty contributor to this essay, observes, “as our BIPOC student leaders are teaching us, we have to completely reorganize the world, and that means reorganizing our university.” In the end, students were not able to establish a CGES concentration and their efforts were further undermined by an administrator-founded Center for Race, Ethnicity, and Human Rights, in which students and faculty had minimal input. But students, especially, gained the opportunity to link their own political work with larger national and international movements, and educate their peers about racial and imperialist inequities.

Student-faculty collaboration can be institution-wide, as it was at Soka University, or it can be more limited, but the close interactions that SLACs in particular make possible can generate insight for both students and instructors. Robin Chapdelaine’s and Megan Toomer’s essay, “Experiential Learning in Ghana: Decentering the White Voice,” provides readers with an analysis of a study-abroad trip to Ghana from both perspectives. In exploring student responses to this program, which combined coursework in pre-colonial African history with site visits, Chapdelaine and Toomer expose the shortcomings of an institution that focuses on “cultural competence” rather than meaningful anti-racist pedagogy. The primary disconnection between white students and students of color (especially Black students) was, as Chapdelaine and Toomer report, the inability of white students to understand Black students’ more visceral connection to the legacies of slavery and more personal reactions to visits to sites in which Africans were held before being shipped off to enslavement in the Americas.

Study abroad is a complicated phenomenon. On the one hand it can replicate the model of tourist imperialism that U.S. travelers bring with them to the global South. On the other, it can expand students’ understanding of global history and how the U.S. is intertwined with the histories of enslavement and imperialism in Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean. Chapdelaine’s design of the course was oriented towards the latter result, but, as she acknowledges, it’s hard to predict what will emerge from a study abroad experience. At the same time, for a participant “on the ground” (so to speak) as Toomer was, the ability of students to absorb an expanded world view that includes a consideration of the role of slavery in shaping both Ghana and the U.S. was more ambiguous.

Jaira Harrington’s essay also takes us outside the walls of the college, geographically closer but in many ways equally foreign to the experience of studying and teaching

at a SLAC. Harrington was especially conscious of the disjuncture between the claims of her employer, Villanova University, to support efforts towards diversity and equity and the results: an institution in which 75% of students and 80% of faculty are white, and the bulk of students come from the top 20% of the economic ladder. As one of the few Black women faculty members, Harrington was not able to forge the close mentoring relationships with students that SLACs so often boast of.

Ironically, she found those relationships teaching at the Pennsylvania State Correctional Institution (SCI)-Phoenix, as part of a Villanova program. Knowing she would be teaching a majority-Black student body, she offered a class in Race and Politics in Brazil, introducing her students to a fuller understanding of the African diaspora. Too often, prison education programs reproduce the racial dynamics of the outside world, in which white instructors teach mostly Black and Latinx students from a paternalistic perspective that they are heroically bringing a benefit to their students. In Harrington’s experience, however, the prison classroom was a liberatory space *for her*: it was her first time teaching in a predominantly Black environment.

We end the mini-cluster with a view from a distance: Richie Zweigenhaft’s essay on his experiences as the class notes editor for the alumni/ae magazine of his alma mater, Wesleyan University. In a breezy yet incisive style, Zweigenhaft reveals that the corporatization of higher education reaches beyond the classroom and into the image that SLACs want to convey to their graduates (and, let’s not forget, potential donors).

Of course, these five essays represent only a very small slice of the political work being done on the campuses of small liberal arts colleges. And we did not receive submissions from faculty or students at predominantly Black colleges, who would tell quite different stories about how their institutions deal with racial politics. But they do give us a richer, far more layered sense of how students and faculty are engaging with questions of racialization and racism than sensationalist headlines and stentorian OpEds provide. While SLACs quickly created or updated offices of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the wake of the murder of George Floyd, and often foreground their commitment to racial equity on their websites (see, for example, the websites of Amherst, Smith, Macalester, and Reed either prominently feature Diversity and Inclusion statements, or foreground events with BIPOC themes), these essays go beneath the surface. Through these articles we can see the difficult, not always successful, work of anti-racism in real time.

## Notes

1. Ironically, the SOPP was widely praised as prescient in the wake of #MeToo and raised consciousness about the prevalence of sexual harassment and assault in the workplace and on college campuses. For a list of articles engaging in this analysis, see “Antioch’s SOPP In the News” <https://antiochcollege.edu/campus-life/sexual-offense-prevention-policy-title-ix/antiochs-sopp-in-the-news/>

2. This was also in the context of the so-called Culture Wars around abortion, artistic representation, and “family values, and academic struggles over the racial, gendered, and other exclusions characteristic of literary canons and traditional scholarly inquiry.

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# RADICAL TEACHER

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## Experiential Learning in Ghana: Decentering the White Voice

by Robin P. Chapdelaine and Megan Toomer



"SAY HER NAME" BY DESIREE ASPIRAS VIA JUST SEEDS

This article is co-authored by an Afro-Latina Assistant Professor and a Black woman who is a former undergraduate student at Duquesne University and current Emory Law student. We examine how undergraduate students from Duquesne University, a predominantly white liberal arts institution, experienced a course on Precolonial Africa during a 2019 summer study abroad, "Maymester," in Ghana.<sup>1</sup> The outcomes provided and analyzed in this article are a comprisal of the co-author's personal narrative, formal university Student Evaluation Survey (SES) responses, and anonymous online reflection survey responses created by the faculty member and the former student co-author. The SES responses rendered a 7 out of 15 at a 46.67% response rate and a 12 out of 15 at a 80% response rate for the secondary survey. The student demographic included one South Asian student of color, one native of Spain who did not racially self-identify, ten white students, and three African American/Black students. (2)

The goals of this course included learning about Ghanaian history and understanding differences between precolonial indigenous modes of labor extraction and new forms of slavery that developed in Ghana and the United States as a result of the Transatlantic slave trade. White supremacy served as the foundation of the Transatlantic slave trade and the subsequent institution of chattel slavery in the U.S. (3) As such, it is not an exaggeration to say that U.S. history is rooted in the oppression of non-white populations who have experienced and continue to experience political, social, and economic disenfranchisement in addition to various forms of physical and emotional harm. This history has influenced that the way U.S. Americans view other non-white populations, especially those in the Global South.

The aim of study abroad programs often seeks to educate college students about the Global South. These programs, however, do not adequately prepare students from racially diverse backgrounds, particularly white, affluent students from the Global North, who comprise the overwhelming majority of participants, to negotiate the horrific terrors of imperialist histories with their student of color counterparts. We argue that an interracial dialogue on the terror of whiteness on Black bodies and in Black spaces, which is steeped in historical context, is challenging even when white student voices do not predominate in classroom discussions. By sharing and prioritizing Megan's account of the program, we show that when decentering white student voices, white students, while seemingly willing to listen and learn, have a limited ability to empathize with the emotional pain and raw grief felt by Black students.

This article stresses the limitations of cultural competence pedagogy as a learning outcome in light of some of the preconceived notions students held about Ghana and Africa. The limitations are also evident by virtue of particular incidents that occurred during site visits. In addition to promoting cultural competency practices, we argue that universities have a moral responsibility to introduce anti-racist pedagogy to student participants before the start of the study abroad program as a measure to discourage student behaviors that subordinate Black voices and as a way to fight white supremacist ideologies and behaviors. Students should learn about the historical

legacy of structural and institutional roots of white supremacy and anti-blackness. We believe that this article can serve as an example as to how study abroad classrooms can become sites of contestation where Black voices demand attention when expressing their personal relationship to the history that is taught and the emotional pain that it provokes.

## Individualism and the Limitations of Cultural Competency Pedagogy

It has been argued that U.S. American students tend to lack a global view or worldview that does not center their own temporal existence. For example, Ibram X. Kendi explains that when he and other students scored higher than poorer students on high school standardized tests, which he describes as "one of the most effective racist policies ever devised to degrade Black minds and legally exclude Black bodies," they took "personal credit for any success." (4) It did not occur to Kendi and his classmates that there existed structural reasons for their superior academic accomplishments — mainly access to economic resources, which afforded them additional learning opportunities and tutoring. Their view was limited to what they understood according to their temporal existence in that moment. In that way, an analysis of our study abroad program demonstrates that this is also the case for white student participants as it relates to understanding the violent history of racism, slavery, and continued racial trauma. Our assessment is not positioned to be a personal criticism of students; rather, it is an acknowledgement of the consequences resulting from the lack of broader education initiatives that speak to the deep and systematic history of racism in the U.S. and globally.

During the program, students engaged the course material, Ghana, and Black Ghanaians in a manner that was reflective of their personal identity. White students had the opportunity to learn about Ghanaian history in class through lectures, role play, and class discussions and through historical site visits through the lens of white supremacy according to the limited education they received about the slave trade and chattel slavery in K-12 schooling. Black students, however, engaged the course material, Ghana, and Black Ghanaians through a similar educational lens, but their perspectives reflected their lived experiences with white supremacy and racism rendering the histories learned in class as personal, familiar, and often painful. Their shared emotional experiences, often reflected in rage as well, reinforced what Angela Davis has acknowledged, that, "As black people, as brown people, as people of color...we know and we experience the agony of the struggle for existence each day. We are locked into that struggle." (5) It is this 'struggle' that students of color understood, reflecting upon their interpersonal challenges as they participated in each class. During roundtable classroom discussions, many students expressed that they understood that the roots of their current-day experiences were born from the legacy of racism and slavery in the U.S. In contrast, white students did not directly engage in their own complicity in white supremacy. In part, this was due to the course design, as students were not required to read material that addressed

anti-racist pedagogy or Critical Race Theory (CRT) material. However, the deep emotional responses that were expressed by Black students and surprisingly our Ghanaian tour guide, who wept with us when discussing the horror of the slave trade, compelled many white students, as demonstrated by their own emotions, to grieve alongside us. In this way, even if they did not directly address their complicity in white supremacy, multi-racial solidarity was achieved momentarily.

The classroom is a site where anti-racism and personal complicity in white supremacy can and should be taught. For example, when we as educators employ a pedagogical approach that teaches students about white privilege and the historical trauma spurred by white supremacy, it is essential that we provide an accurate historical account of how and why racism and white supremacy exist, i.e. political, economic, and legal contexts, often referred to as Critical Race Theory. (6) George J. Sefa Dei asserts that "critical anti-racism practice must root the understanding of racism in histories of colonial oppressions, colonialisms, imperialism, and xenophobia, while further placing such discussions in contemporary global/transnational contexts, including global capitalism, and internationalization of labor and markets." (7) This type of antiracist endeavor can highlight "blind spots and structural bias." (8) Just as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) members of the 1960s noted that, "racial discrimination was institutionalized" and that "racial animus against African Americans [was] social in origin," contemporary educators must also historicize the legacy of racial animus. (9)

Study abroad programs can begin to do some of this work. In part, the significance of students traveling abroad is that their presuppositions about particular groups can be destabilized; opening up their understanding of 'others' gives them the opportunity to re-think personally held stereotypes about other global societies. For example, one observant student noted that,

This course taught me the history behind a lot of modern-day social phenomena. Like the hyper-criminalization problem and how racism is an observation of difference taken further and developed into a very strong negative bias. It was just very eye-opening historically and socially. (10)

While this student's race is unknown, conclusions can still be drawn about their shift in racial consciousness. If this student is white, their experience in Ghana positioned them to contend with the ways in which their whiteness has shielded them from persecution by the carceral state and informal policing from other white people. If this student is Black, their experience in Ghana has broadened and complicated their existing framework for understanding their own criminalization and that of Black people in the Global South and, perhaps, their own internalized anti-blackness. (11)

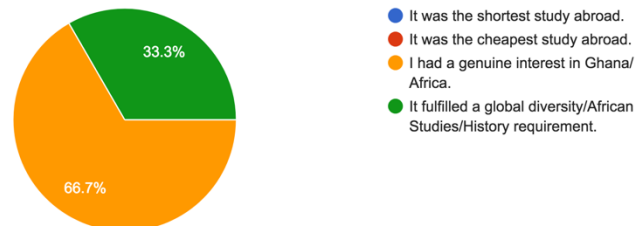
The student's statement is a significant example of how the history of anti-blackness, indigenous slavery in Ghana, and chattel slavery in the U.S. seems to be largely absent in U.S. predominantly white educational institutions. Thus, intersecting history with experiential learning opportunities provokes a deeper level of analysis, leading to broader understandings about the importance of history and increases the *potential* for cultural competency. The American Psychological Association's definition of cultural competence is, "the ability to understand, appreciate and interact with people from cultures or belief systems different from one's own," which is an extension of cultural awareness development. Cultural awareness means developing a "self-awareness" of, one's "own cultural background" against which other cultural backgrounds are compared and differences recognized. Awareness recognizes difference, while competence pushes the individual to appreciate and interact with people from diverse backgrounds. (12) However, appreciating and learning about different cultures does not provide any material benefit as it relates to historically institutionalized practices that subordinate certain groups. For instance, in his discussion about racism in the U.S., Eduardo Bonilla-Silva argues that "whites today rely more on cultural rather biological tropes to explain blacks' position in this country." (13) Thus, being exposed to and learning about one's culture does not always result in the dismantling of racism and racist structures.

## Challenging Stereotypes

When asked "Why did you choose to go on a study abroad to Ghana?" the majority of respondents indicated that their decision was based upon a previous interest in Ghana and/or the African continent.

Why did you choose to go on a study abroad to Ghana?

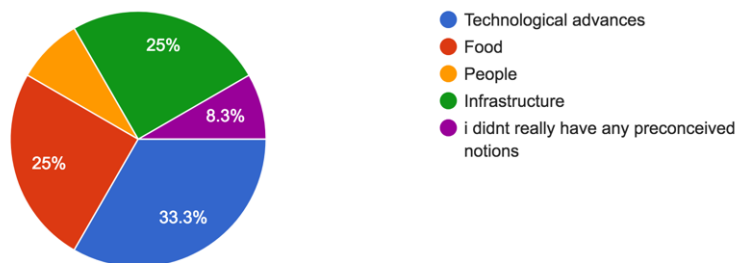
12 responses



While most students expressed enthusiasm about visiting Ghana, they brought with them a host of preconceived ideas of what that experience would be like. The largest held misconception was that Ghanaians did not have access to technology. This assumption reveals the media messaging students consume in the U.S. Mainstream media generally represents Africa and its people as poor, diseased, without educational or employment opportunities, as well as lacking access to information technology and other digital tools. (14)

## What preconceived notions about Ghanaians/Africans and/or Ghana/Africa were challenged MOST during your trip?

12 responses



Media shaped students' beliefs that Africans are technologically inept. Fifty-eight percent of students responded that existing technological advances and infrastructure challenged their preconceived notions about Ghana. The idea that African countries need to bridge the "digital divide" reinforces the ideology that the West is developed and Africa is underdeveloped. (15) While social and economic issues do exist on the continent, the chance for students to 'see for themselves' offered an opportunity to become more familiar with realities on the ground and perhaps change their view of Africa at large.

## Considering the Emotional Toll of Interracial Dialogues

It is impossible to predict the outcomes of any given study abroad experience. The emotional investment and responses presented in this course reflected the internal, often painful feelings that developed as the process of learning occurred. This is not surprising as emotions are an important building block to learning outcomes.<sup>16</sup> John Dewey, American psychologist and philosopher, asserted that education is a process of preparation and "is a continuous process of growth, having as its aim at every stage an added capacity of growth." (17) It is evident that many students experienced this study abroad as meaningful yet intense and increased their cultural knowledge along the way. While some students enjoyed the open discussion component of the course, highlighting that the course held "Socratic seminar like discussions, giving everyone a chance to participate," and that those discussions assisted in the learning process, others found it more emotionally challenging. (18) As one student noted, "a lot of stuff we talked about ... involved very hard subject matter, making it even harder to get words you wanted to say out, but weren't sure they were the right things to say. It was hard to process a lot and sit there and reflect while taking in so many other things." (19) These comments show that students were not passive learners; rather, even when silent, they actively consumed the information and tried to process the emotionally difficult material. Similarly, during a discussion about an incident during a class visit to a historical site (discussed later by Megan), it was apparent that some

students hesitated to speak. Yet, Black students felt painfully connected to the histories and expressed raw rage, loss, and sadness about white terror. Thus, the white students were uniquely situated to listen and *begin* to understand why decentering the white voice in the classroom was necessary to truly appreciate the historical legacy of white supremacy.

It seemed that, in part, students may have been fearful of saying 'the wrong thing' or perhaps they understood that the emotional unpacking the Black

students were engaged in was critical and important but did not necessarily know how to acknowledge it in an audible manner. For instance, students had the following responses after completing the course:

That just because you read about something doesn't mean you understand it. Some things have to be lived and felt to truly know what they mean. (20)

What I learned was very important. I had never had such an involved and in-depth teaching about slavery and this was so important for me to experience. (21)

Appreciation for what I have, a deeper understanding of history relating to slavery, wider world view. (22)

Moderating these discussions was challenging; however, engaging in this type of activity should be considered as one method by which anti-racist pedagogy can begin to be taught. Daniel Paracka argues that "Global issues of race and gender, power and privilege, social justice, and sustainable development remain critically important subjects in need of greater attention, mutual accountability, and shared understanding." (23) One activity, which required students to read Trevor Getz's *Abina and the Important Men* (2015), allowed all students to physically engage in the active story telling of an enslaved woman named Abina and consider some of the themes Paracka has outlined. The book is a graphic history that provides the account of a "wrongfully" enslaved woman according to 1876 court records. Students chose their parts, read, and acted out the scenes accordingly, often proclaiming surprise or anger at the unjust capture and maltreatment of Abina by African, British and mixed-race men.<sup>24</sup> Her determination to petition the court and her defiance of gendered expectations challenged student assumptions about women living in precolonial Africa—again dismantling previously held stereotypes.

## Benefits Outside of the Classroom

Students have the potential to develop into globally minded citizens when there is supportive curriculum and diversity within the classroom, but it is complicated. Yolanda Moses contends that "colleges and universities" should "be places where humanistic notions of democracy and inclusive



ways of knowing help all our graduates negotiate and thrive in an increasingly diverse society.” (25) Affording students the opportunity to participate in a study abroad experience provides them with new knowledge of a given subject matter, new perspectives about people different than them, and new understandings of self that they can apply to their lives outside of the classroom. When asked, “Do study abroad experiences prepare you for the workforce? Why or why not?” students stated:

Yes, because they teach you how to interact with people from different cultures and they also teach to how to adapt to different environments. (26)

Absolutely, it allows you to throw yourself into another culture and to appreciate the differences, and to learn that just because it is different than your own doesn't mean it is wrong. That is extremely important to apply to the work force. (27)

Yes, better cultural understandings. (28)

Yes, it taught me to have cultural competency not just cultural awareness. (29)

In hindsight, the question that prompted these responses was naïve. While it is encouraging to know that most students believe that their study abroad experience will enhance their workplace encounters, the curriculum offered could have and perhaps should have delved more readily into the historical injustices suffered by non-white populations in the U.S. and globally, and how those histories created prevailing racist institutions. In other words, a more interesting question would have been, “What have you learned that will help you address and eradicate racism in the workplace?” or something to that effect.

## Affective Investment and the Need to Connect

Jorge Cubillos and Thomas Ilvento argue that study abroad programs, “have the power to shape how we view ourselves, and the value we assign our own culture in relation to the culture” of those with whom students come into contact. “Moreover, they influence our disposition towards ... and our investment in” those in the destination country. (30) This is noteworthy because the process of having to physically and emotionally locate themselves in a foreign environment forces students to develop skills beyond those taught in a classroom at home. Arriving in a new place where the culture, environment, language, and even the food is different is difficult for anyone to a certain degree, but even more so for young adults, especially when they have limited experience travelling abroad. For some students, the affect they held for Ghana resulted from their personal identity and longing to understand their history as a descendant of the Africa diaspora. However, understanding their level of affect for a particular destination may shed light on the various responses. Cultural anthropologist Neriko Musha Doerr argues that “affective investment” determines the student’s experience in the host country. While some students have a “high degree of affective investment, highlighted by carefully observing and copying” the residents in the host country, others have a

“low degree of affective investment, instead connect[ing] with the people in the destination, playing down the difference.” (31)

The tendency of descendants of the African Diaspora to seek unity by creating affinities based on identity that expands beyond national borders is one born from disenfranchisement, displacement, and white supremacy. A. Doris Banks Henries (1913-1981), former American educator and Assistant Minister of Education in Liberia once, argued that, “Every living person needs the stimulation derived from a sense of belonging. He needs to know and appreciate his past history, culture and foundations in order to have self-esteem and hope.” (32) Efforts by historical figures such as Martin R. Delany, known as the “Father of Black Nationalism,” W.E.B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, Elijah Muhammad, Martin Luther King Jr., Booker T. Washington, Malcom X, and many others have worked to achieve this goal. (33) Likewise, Black students’ participation in the Ghana study abroad provoked new awareness and appreciation for their collective history. Therefore, it is crucial to center a Black student’s experience in this article in order to understand how being born from the African diaspora shaped Black students’ experiences during the program where they leaned on each other for emotional support. This article does so by incorporating the student co-author’s account.

## Student Co-Author Response

Studying abroad in Ghana was a highly anticipated moment for both myself and my classmates. We each chose to study overseas for varied reasons and participated in several significant learning experiences and challenges. As we read thought-provoking educational materials about the history of Ghana and acclimated to a new environment, we gained valuable knowledge about the pervasive impact of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and the effects of the slave trade presently. Furthermore, as students, our experiences allowed us to uniquely engage with the complexities of our identities. Traveling to Ghana further cultivated my relationship with the African diaspora and allowed my peers and me to physically experience prominent historical sites while meaningfully communicating with one another in our experiential learning class.

To further engage with the readings and academic material in our Pre-colonial African History course, we visited many historical sites. Our class first visited Elmina Dungeon and Cape Coast Dungeon. The Portuguese built Elmina Dungeon in 1482. The dungeon was initially under Portuguese rule and then transitioned to Dutch governance. (34) European actions during the Transatlantic Slave Trade littered Elmina Dungeon with violence, deprivation, and suffering. Although Elmina is no longer an active slave dungeon, stepping into the cells quickly reconnects visitors to an overwhelmingly gruesome and violent history. As I walked through the cells, I experienced a deep sense of sadness and shock due to the inhumane treatment that occurred at the site.

As a descendant of the African diaspora, I also realized that I would never receive the closure I was seeking, which fueled feelings of frustration and loss. My emotions

intensified during and following my visit to Cape Coast Dungeon. The dungeon is three stories high and took 50 years to construct. From the outside of the site, visitors can see cannons that point toward the Atlantic Ocean. The site also sits high above the town of Elmina. (35) The details and size of the site immediately struck me as daunting and, equipped with the historical facts of Elmina Dungeon, I attempted to mentally prepare myself to receive the history of Cape Coast Dungeon. Despite my mental preparation, I could not fully grapple with the immense loss experienced at the site. Our tour guide detailed the horrific acts and punishments that occurred in the dungeon. The concrete crumbling beneath my feet from years of human excrement, blood, vomit, and remains were a cruel reminder that death and suffering were inextricably woven into the foundation. As an African American, visiting both historical locations and concurrently absorbing the details of the Transatlantic Slave Trade was incredibly difficult. I felt overwhelmed by the painful history of both places.

The exposure to historical sites while reading related historical scholarship made evident my unfamiliarity of all of the atrocities embedded in the institution of slavery, despite my ancestry, due to intentional information suppression both historically and presently by academia. Studying abroad and, specifically, walking through the historical locations added nuance to my experience within the African diaspora and prompted me to further interrogate the white supremacist, patriarchal, and heteronormative lens from which I learned about slavery.

The site visits also complicated my classmates' beliefs. Each student approached their international experience with a slew of ideas and knowledge developed from academics, social interactions, inequities, politics, and the media. For example, when asked, "What did your reaction to leaving your friends and family reveal about yourself?" one student noted, "It revealed [sic] that I should not believe every stereotype out there, because in most cases they are incorrect. The stereotypes about Africa as a whole do not do a justice for each country in Africa." (36) Visiting the dungeons, and digesting the atrocities that occurred at the sites, offered an accurate historical basis to reconsider previously held beliefs about African countries' histories and European incursions in Africa. Furthermore, both slave dungeons served as a painful reminder that people of African ancestry are still socially, politically, and economically suffering following the slave trade.

The visits to both dungeons offered an emotionally significant way of beginning to understand the ramifications of the slave trade in current race-based tensions, and the racially-based trauma associated with the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Another student noted the complex link between current race relations and the European facilitation of the Transatlantic Slave Trade:

Having taken this course, it now comes straight to mind anytime I think or hear of racial relations in America. The biggest takeaway for me was how deeply American culture is influenced by pre-colonial Africa. (37)

As my peer stated, pre-colonial African history and American history are deeply intertwined. The visits to the

dungeons unearthed a range of emotions and responses from each student based on their identity, prior knowledge, and past experiences. For many white students, the historical site experiences were the first time they grappled with their privilege. However, very few white students interrogated their active role within present-day white supremacy. Few white students also acknowledged the violence in remaining unaware of the influence of pre-colonial African culture and the impact of the Transatlantic Slave Trade until being confronted by a slave dungeon. In contrast, for my Black peers and me, we carry the weight of the Transatlantic Slave Trade daily through the violence of intergenerational trauma. The dungeons complicated our understanding of our history and prompted us to reconnect deeply with our ancestry. My Black peers' and my visits to the dungeons were painful and visceral in a profoundly different way than those of our white counterparts, who viewed the dungeons from a historically and presently privileged position.

To further contextualize the topics addressed in the Pre-colonial African History course, our class visited Assin Manso. Assin Manso, commonly known as the home of the ancestral slave river, is where enslaved people took their last bath before their final voyage across the Atlantic Ocean and into permanent bondage. Our visit to Assin Manso, similarly to Cape Coast Dungeon and Elmina Dungeon, prompted a range of emotions, including loss and grief, but unlike the dungeons, concluded with a sense of spiritual reconnection. Arriving at Assin Manso moved me emotionally. As I entered Assin Manso, I felt the spirit of the area and the traumas, horrors, and resilience the site held. The repeated walking back and forth from the river resulted in a permanent trail created by enslaved people.<sup>38</sup> Our tour guide requested that visitors take off their shoes before walking on the sacred ground that enslaved people walked upon. Removing our shoes eliminated any physical barriers between the soles of our feet and the land, allowing Africans of the diaspora to spiritually reconnect with their lost ancestors.

For white students, removing their shoes demonstrated solidarity and respect for the deceased. Everyone in the group proceeded to take off their shoes, except for a few white students. Although their decision, as one student stated, was to avoid the discomfort of walking barefoot on the trail, prioritizing their comfort over standing in solidarity with their Black peers and the deceased, it revealed their lack of understanding of their white ancestors' violence and the violence in their present decision. Their white ancestors, who facilitated the transport of slaves through Assin Manso and to the slave ports, elevated their desires over the respect and humanity of African people. Similarly, the white students who refused to remove their shoes prioritized their wishes over their Black peers. Their behavior stemmed from ancestral violence and a current understanding, through constant messaging from white supremacist systems, that their comfort surpasses the humanity of Black people. Their actions were a cruel reminder that their current privilege and the historical violence of the Transatlantic Slave Trade are deeply intertwined, and made it incredibly difficult for my Black peers and me to share in the historical site experiences alongside our white peers.

Following my classmates' refusal to remove their shoes while walking the path, I chose to distance myself from my frustration toward their behavior and walked closer to my Black peers. By walking closely with my Black peers, I felt supported and validated. Although our experiences were different, we all situated ourselves within the African diaspora and, as a result, each deeply felt the pain and frustration stemming from our white peer's actions. There was unity in our closeness, which helped carry us through the path despite the emotional difficulty of being in Assin Manso while concurrently processing our white peers' actions.

As I walked behind my Black peers and looked down, I immediately noticed our feet stepping in unison along the trail, similar to our ancestors who walked Assin Manso's path decades before that moment. At the end of the path, I engaged in a ritual that allowed me to step into the river, speak with my ancestors, and feel their presence. For the first time in my life, I felt at peace with my position within the African diaspora. Assin Manso offered a safe harbor to transform my frustration and pursuits of a broken familial lineage into a step toward transformative healing and spiritual reconnection.

***The impact of slavery was a social, political, and economic inheritance passed through each of our families and the families of most people with African heritage.***

More than a brief insight into the horrors of slavery, for African Americans, visiting the locations offered reconnection, healing, and an unsettling awareness of the injurious and inhumane treatment of our family members. The visits also reminded us of our broken history and the continued mistreatment of people with African ancestry. My African American peers and I, before our experience in Ghana, traversed a multitude of racially-based traumas due to the Transatlantic Slave Trade. The impact of slavery was a social, political, and economic inheritance passed through each of our families and the families of most people with African heritage. For the aforementioned reasons, speaking with my white peers about our collective experience in the dungeons was difficult without considering their inability to personally and intimately understand the gravity of slavery, and the detrimental impact slavery continues to have in the lives of people with African heritage.

In between visits to Ghana's historical sites, I attended a class that contextualized the impact of the Transatlantic Slave Trade domestically and internationally, detailed the differences between indigenous Ghanaian slavery and chattel slavery, and offered a space for a diverse group of students to listen to each other's experiences. During the Pre-colonial African History course, each student could discuss their experiences at the historical sites and how the locations impacted them individually and collectively, given the intersections of the group's identities. We dissected the academic material and engaged in student-facilitated discussions about the topics addressed in our readings. The

classes were an integral component of my experience in Ghana because I, along with my peers, analyzed and critically reflected on our visits to the historical sites.

Our conversations concerning race relations and slavery offered students of color a space to express emotional vulnerability and white students an opportunity to critically reflect on their role within oppressive systems. However, some white students centered themselves within conversations about Black experiences or resisted the conversation altogether, thereby suppressing the voices, histories, and struggles of Black students.

During one of our class discussions about our experiences at Assin Manso, my Black peers and I addressed the white students in the room who had refused to remove their shoes as they walked along Assin Manso's path. In response to being asked about the offensive behavior, one student expressed that he did not intentionally offend anyone and likened his experience visiting Auschwitz to the experience of Black Americans visiting the slave dungeons. He explained that he treated Auschwitz as sacred ground and, similarly, treated Assin Manso as sacred. The other white student who refused to take off their shoes at the site echoed the sentiments of the student discussing his experience at Auschwitz. Although this student was attempting to rectify the situation, he did so by mistakenly likening his own experience at Auschwitz and the experience of Black Americans. He centered his whiteness in a conversation about Black experiences and, rather than immediately apologize for his actions, provided various justifications for his actions. He apologized after being provided with several reasons from many students in the class regarding why his actions were offensive regardless of his intention. The conversation left my Black peers and me experiencing familiar feelings of frustration toward the student's failure to take responsibility for his actions. His actions spoke to a larger pattern of white people routinely centering themselves within Black experiences and, through their behavior, disregarding the harm caused by historical injustices perpetrated by white people.

Some white students used the classroom discussions as an opportunity to listen to the struggles of their Black peers and develop new ways of understanding their histories and the history of the Transatlantic Slave Trade while acknowledging white supremacist systems. Other students used the classroom discussions to create space for Black students to process the difficult experiences at the historical sites.

My peers' comments demonstrate the critical role of diversity in any educational course, point to the demographic void commonly found in academic spaces, and reaffirm that simply reading from a textbook does not always suffice. The topic of slavery necessitates an open conversation about the effect of slavery, with the most impacted demographics present—descendants from the African diaspora. The experiential course offered a unique opportunity to physically engage with the academic material through historical sites and participate in dialogue about the institution of slavery, how it persists today, and the impact of white supremacy both in the classroom and at the historical sites.

The classroom discussions also allowed me and my African American peers to ask other students about any behavior regarded as offensive at the historical sites. For the first time, my opinion regarding the historical and present impact of racism in a predominately white classroom did not feel inconsequential. Furthermore, the professor's facilitation of inclusive conversations throughout the course prepared students for future intercultural interactions and prompted students to interrogate their role within hierarchical systems of oppression.

The classroom demographic fostered an environment conducive for nuanced discussions about racism, the enslavement methods employed by European colonial powers, the massive depopulating of Africa, and the altered development and political trajectory of various African countries. During class, students discussed their life experiences, the intersections of their identities, and the privilege they possess. The moments of self-reflection allowed many students to meaningfully interrogate their position within existing hierarchies. For some white students, their experience in Ghana was the first time their privilege was elucidated by minority students who are negatively and disproportionately impacted by white privilege.

The experiential learning course was also meaningful because a professor of color taught the students about the institution of slavery. The presence of a professor of color, of African American and Mexican American heritage, provided white students with a unique and important perspective regarding the plight of people with African heritage. White students studied the pervasive effects of racism today and the historical justifications for enslaving an entire population and witnessed a professor defying racial stereotypes as they read the literature. John King, the Secretary of Education, expressed that "white students. . . can benefit by viewing people of color in positions of power that they trust and respect and grow to love." (39) The white students developed a bond with the professor and, consequently, felt comfortable enough to speak about racial inequality and how they can work to deconstruct white supremacist systems.

The presence of a professor of color served a critical role in challenging and confronting baseless, racist notions informed by white supremacy that persist today. Our professor's presence also improved marginalized students', and specifically African American students', classroom experience. For students of color, the classroom discussions demonstrated moments of racial solidarity through the decentering of white voices. Additionally, witnessing our professor encourage mutual accountability, welcome emotional vulnerability, and emphasize a diversity of perspectives created a space for Black students to be emotionally transparent and open, which professors do not commonly facilitate in academic settings. Josh Moss claims that, "minority teachers. . . provide culturally relevant teaching, develop trusting relationships with students, confront issues of racism through teaching, and become advocates and cultural brokers." (40)

Professors of color become advocates for students, and particularly marginalized students, in the classroom. Our

professor was an advocate and liaison between Black, white, and other students of color to address racial and cultural differences while honoring intersectional and inclusive practices. Furthermore, the presence of a professor of color reminded students of color that their classroom contributions and dialogue were valued, uplifting, and understood. Although the discussions were emotionally trying, the conversations were integral in engaging with our readings and historical events. The students' and the professor's diverse backgrounds allowed students to participate in social responsibility, embrace their identities, and gain deeper access to their humanity. Furthermore, experience in Ghana reminded me that I am a part of the African diaspora and, consequently, will always be deeply connected to my African heritage despite the generational trauma and loss perpetuated by slavery.

## Conclusion

Educators have a moral obligation to not only decenter white dominant discourse in the classroom, but to ensure that pedagogical approaches highlight anti-racist discourse as a way to shed light on historical and current-day practices that uphold white supremacy. I argue that introducing anti-racist pedagogy to students prior to embarking on study abroad trips located in the Africa may eliminate intentional and unintentional microaggressions and disrespectful behaviors. In addition, offering courses on CRT that map how racist practices and racism developed in the U.S. and globally would serve to dismantle white supremacy ideologies. In this way, students can begin an educational trajectory that better prepares them for study abroad programs. Issac Carter argues that, "Higher education shares a colonial history with slavery, and despite a lack of scholarship or teaching on this position, the Academy is an equally peculiar institution ..." (41) Let us not allow the Academy to be a peculiar institution where white supremacy is left unchallenged and Black voices are silenced.

## Notes

1. The program was split into two courses; the four-week study program spent two weeks on each.
2. The study abroad course, entitled "Pre-colonial Africa," offers a history of pre-colonial Ghana, mainly with regard to various forms of slavery and the global development of Human Rights law. From indigenous slavery to the transatlantic slave trade, we will explore the various ways in which people inhabited subordinate statuses within African societies.
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4. Ibram X. Kendi, *How to be an Antiracist* (New York: Random House, 2019), 101.

5. Angela Davis, June 9, 1972, [http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/blacks\\_peech/adavis.html](http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/blacks_peech/adavis.html).
6. See Kimberlé Crenshaw, et al. *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1995); Khiara M. Bridges, *Critical Race Theory: A Primer* (St. Paul, MN: 2019)
7. George J. Sefa Dei, "Reframing Critical Anti-Racist Theory (CART) for Contemporary Times," *Contemporary Issues in the Sociology of Race and Ethnicity: A Critical Reader (Counterpoints)*, 445.
8. Miriyam Aouragh, "'White privilege' and shortcuts to anti-racism," *Race and Class*, 61, no. 4.
9. Benjamin P. Bowser, "Racism: Origin and Theory," *Journal of Black Studies*, 8, no. 6 (September 2017): 574.
10. Anonymous student comment, Ghana Study Abroad Reflection, November 2019.
11. A South Asian student of color might be contending with their internalized anti-Blackness, a budding or growing awareness of their criminalization as a real or perceived Muslim, and the ways in which the racist "model minority" myth shapes their lived experience.
12. Tori DeAngelis, "In search of cultural competence," *Monitor on Psychology*, 46, no. 3 (March 2015): 64; Miu Chung Yan, "How Cultural Awareness Works; An Empirical Examination of the Interaction between Social Workers and their Clients," *Canadian Social Work Review*, 22, no. 1 (2005): 6.
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14. See Curtis Kleim and Carolyn Somerville, *Mistaking Africa: Curiosities and Inventions of the American Mind* (Routledge, 2017).
15. Muhammed Musa, "Technology and the Democratic Space in Africa: A Re-examination of the Notion of the Digital Divide," *In Mapping the Digital Divide in Africa*, eds. Bruce Mutsvairo and Massimo Ragnedda (Amsterdam University Press, 2019), 66-67.
16. Henning Pözdold, *Learning and Teaching in Adult Education: Contemporary Theories* (Opladen and Farming Hills, MI: Barbara Budrich Publishers, 2011), 50.
17. John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1922), 63.
18. Anonymous student response, Student Evaluation Survey, Duquesne University, Summer 2019.
19. Anonymous student response, Student Evaluation Survey, Duquesne University, Summer 2019.
20. Anonymous student comment, Ghana Study Abroad Reflection, November 2019.
21. Anonymous student comment, Ghana Study Abroad Reflection, November 2019.
22. Anonymous student comment, Ghana Study Abroad Reflection, November 2019.
23. Daniel Paracka, "The Kalamazoo/Fourah Bay College Partnership: A Context for Understanding Study Abroad in Africa," in *Teaching Africa*, eds. Brandon Lundy and Solomon Negash (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 2013), 207.
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25. Moses, 63.
26. Anonymous student comment, Ghana Study Abroad Reflection, November 2019.
27. Anonymous student comment, Ghana Study Abroad Reflection, November 2019.
28. Anonymous student comment, Ghana Study Abroad Reflection, November 2019.
29. Anonymous student comment, Ghana Study Abroad Reflection, November 2019.
30. Jorge Cubillos and Thomas Ilvento, *Intercultural Contact in Short-term Study Abroad Programs, Hispania*, Vol. 101, no. 2 (June 2018): 251.
31. Neriko Musha Doerr, "Falling In/Out of Love with Place: Affective Investment, Perceptions of Difference, and Learning in Study Abroad," in *The Romance of Crossing Borders: Studying and Volunteering Abroad* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2017), 144..
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36. Anonymous student comment, Ghana Study Abroad Reflection, November 2019.
37. Anonymous student comment, Ghana Study Abroad Reflection, November 2019.

38. "Assin Manso Slave Market," Ghana Tourism Authority (Internet Archive), [https://web.archive.org/web/20140714181444/http://www.ghana.travel/touring\\_ghana/historic\\_sites/assin\\_manso\\_slave\\_market/](https://web.archive.org/web/20140714181444/http://www.ghana.travel/touring_ghana/historic_sites/assin_manso_slave_market/), 1, accessed date 13 May 2020.

39. Josh Moss, "Where Are All the Teachers of Color?," *Harvard Ed. Magazine* (Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2016), <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/ed/16/05/where-are-all-teachers-color>, 1, accessed date 13 May 2020.

40. Moss, "Where Are All the Teachers of Color?."

41. Issac Carter, "Counter-Narratives as Critical Invitations for Change: Race-Centered Policy-Making and Backlash at a Peculiar Institution," *Whiteness, Power, and Resisting Change in US Higher Education*, edited by Kenneth R. Roth and Zachary Ritter (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 54.



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# RADICAL TEACHER

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

## Antiracist and Faith-based: Critical Pedagogy-Informed Writing and Information Literacy Instruction at a Hispanic-Serving, Lutheran Liberal Arts University

by Jolivette Mecenas, Yvonne Wilber, and Meghan Kwast



"LIBERATING LEARNING", ALEC DUNN VIA JUST SEEDS

## Introduction

Christianity in the United States seems to be at a political crossroads, with some church go-ers wanting to travel the well-worn path of white supremacy, while others are committed to the path of social justice. How, then, might a small faith-based liberal arts university negotiate the competing narratives regarding systemic racism, especially considering its white Christian history? The answer lies in institutional change and anti-racist education. In this case, the authors' collaboration between the English department and the library advances racial equity and inclusion by integrating critical information literacy (IL) in a first-year writing (FYW) course, following the Lutheran educational tradition of valuing inquiry. Critical pedagogy in IL represents "a natural growth in understanding literacy as a contested social construction, rather than as a naturally occurring phenomenon" (Elmborg "Foreword" ix). It allows learners to identify power structures and privilege within the sources they consult. Critical pedagogy-informed writing and information literacy instruction provide opportunities for cross-racial dialogue on race and racism in the classroom, decenter whiteness in the curriculum, and move this small liberal arts university towards alignment with its founding denomination's social justice mission.

California Lutheran University is located on a 290-acre campus in the predominantly white, suburban community of Thousand Oaks, California, on unceded land of the indigenous Chumash people. The university began as California Lutheran College, a small liberal arts school founded in 1959 by the Evangelical Lutheran Church, one of three Lutheran bodies that merged in 1988 to become the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA). Unlike many American churches, the ELCA's social position is radical in its commitment to inclusion and diversity in the church and society, seeking equity and full participation for "women, people of color, minority ethnic groups, people with disabilities, people who are marginalized or living in poverty, and the LGBTQ community" ("Mission and Vision"). Soldberg observes that the historical Lutheran perspective on faith and learning includes a critical tradition "marked by an investigative spirit--a willingness to ask deep questions and to query accepted assumptions." (Solberg 52). In a similar way, Swanson and Wold state that the Lutheran tradition "prizes ambiguity, risk-taking, and controversy [and] calls for thoughtfulness and reflection rather than an affirmation of clear-cut absolutes and simple answers." It also encourages scholars to be prepared to "wrestle with complex and complicated questions without the assurance that they will ever come to uniform and harmonious conclusions" (Swanson and Wold 98).

This sort of questioning is definitive of the liberal arts tradition. A liberal arts education is meant to liberate the mind and equip its students to flourish as free citizens in society. When California Lutheran College became a university in 1986, there was concern that its focus on the liberal arts would be sacrificed, and the humanities in particular would only serve as general ed requirements for

the professional schools. Also of significance was the conviction that the school could no longer limit itself to serving Lutherans, but must serve a more diverse population (Swanson and Wold 114). Since that time, this conviction has been realized. Cal Lutheran has become non-sectarian, with Lutherans in the minority amongst both students and faculty. In fact, in 2020, only 11% of the traditional undergraduate students identified themselves as Lutheran, compared to 100% in the first class that began in 1961. Even so, the University's stated core values remain reflective of the Christian humanist values of the ELCA, including a commitment to embrace people of all faiths, as well as "value diversity and inclusiveness, practice tolerance and acceptance, and treat one another with respect, civility, and compassion" ("Identity").

Since 1990, the university has been awarded several grants aimed to increase diversity within the student body, faculty, and staff, including monies from the James Irvine foundation, which were to be used to "foster a campus climate that encourages inclusion, cross-cultural interaction, respect for and appreciation of diversity and global awareness" ("CLU Receives"). After several years of sustained investment in recruitment and retention of Latinx students, Cal Lutheran was designated a Hispanic-serving institution (HSI) in 2016. Additionally, in response to an accreditation recommendation in 2015, Cal Lutheran has sought to diversify its faculty. Since 2015, the university has increased its BIPOC faculty by 12% (Biasotti). These efforts, however, have not adequately addressed issues of race and racism on campus, especially from the BIPOC students' point of view. In a 2020 survey, nearly half of all BIPOC students responded that they had experienced feeling lonely, isolated, and excluded as a result of the campus racial climate (National). As reported in the student newspaper, students of color have often found themselves subject to microaggressions and discrimination (Salguero).

One of the misfortunes of Cal Lutheran's non-sectarian nature seems to be that it has not followed the lead of the ELCA, which has developed racial justice statements and resources since 1993. Cal Lutheran had not taken a hard and honest look at institutional racism prior to 2020. In contrast, the ELCA issued yet another social statement in 2019, in which the church apologized to people of African descent "for its historical complicity in slavery and its enduring legacy of racism in the United States and globally" (Caldwell). Cal Lutheran does not yet offer a culture where most students feel comfortable discussing race, and students have for the most part lacked opportunities for honest conversations about race and racism in the classroom. Five months after the racist incidents on campus, and two months after George Floyd's death, the president and cabinet issued a statement recognizing the need for "broad, systemic change," and promising to make "clear, measurable progress to end institutional and systemic racism" ("Anti-Racism"). Part of that commitment has been to pay heed to an external report that recommended Cal Lutheran faculty create more opportunities for cross-racial engagement in courses. This move serves to allow students to develop the language and critical thinking skills necessary to engage in meaningful dialogue on race and racism (National). In a previous



article, the authors explain the misalignment between institutional inclusion and diversity values and teaching practices in FYW and IL instruction as an impetus for curriculum change (Kwast et al.). Here, the authors describe the impact of that curriculum change, and how critical and culturally relevant FYW and IL instruction created more spaces for meaningful writing and conversations on racism that extended outside of individual classrooms. These multimodal conversations were published in the English Department's online journal, as part of the university's weeklong event celebrating student research and creative accomplishments, and involved students, faculty, writing center staff, and librarians.

## Critical Library Instruction

While critical pedagogy is well-established within the field of Library and Information Sciences (LIS), it is often marked as a form of 'radical librarianship' rather than as a necessary lens through which meaningful change can occur. LIS often addresses questions of racialized power through the lens of diversity. Diversity is lifted up and highlighted as a core value for most westernized library associations, with aspirational diversity standards and guidelines detailed for libraries to model (Hudson 3). While diversity should be a fundamental goal, it is often used to deflect meaningful criticism of racism in the field. As Tracie Hall writes, "If the education system has been reticent in its discussion of racism, the library and information science field has seemingly slapped itself with a gag order. While the discussion of diversity in libraries has proliferated over the past few decades, meaningful dialogue around race has been eviscerated or altogether evaded" (193). LIS is entrenched in whiteness, as is demonstrated through the ways in which information is organized and what information is deemed to be important, and through the very individuals who are often tasked with relaying guidance. The most recent survey conducted by the American Library Association found that roughly 88% of all credentialed librarians are white, a number that decreases only slightly to 86% when looking at librarians in higher education (American Library Association). This is not representative of BIPOC disinterest in the field. It instead represents a history of issues in recruiting, maintaining, and supporting librarians of color and other marginalized identities. Libraries have ultimately been complicit with "structuring and presenting a single, knowable reality" (Elmborg, "Critical Information Literacy" 198) by excluding alternate intelligences and voices.

Critical pedagogy was a radical concept when Yvonne first incorporated it into Cal Lutheran's IL instruction. Though information literacy is a required student learning outcome for undergraduate courses, there had never been a systematic program that ensured that library instruction is equitably distributed amongst all populations, or that took into account the students' different cultural experiences. For the most part, librarians were called into classes to teach students the bibliographic skills of finding information and avoiding plagiarism according to presently outmoded standards and outcomes. When Yvonne was hired in 2014, she recognized the necessity to disrupt the

university's cultural narrative, and that a reframing of IL was of paramount importance. While it is widely recognized that racial and social-class achievement gaps exist in higher education, there has been a lack of scholarship related to information literacy and student success amongst traditionally underrepresented students. Research does show, however, that students find their academic work more meaningful when they are able to incorporate their identities, experiences, and interests -- a learning practice can be transferred to other contexts (Folk 665). In order to ensure that all incoming first-year students received instruction that encouraged and amplified their own voices and experiences, Yvonne began collaborating with the Religion department to provide instruction in its first-year religion course. In this course--which is required of all first-year and transfer students--Yvonne jettisoned the outdated IL standards and learning outcomes consisting of bibliographic how-tos in favor of the threshold concepts, knowledge practices, and dispositions described in the Association of College and Research Libraries' Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education ("Framework"). While not explicitly anti-racist or promoting equity and inclusion, the Framework nonetheless recognizes that students come with knowledge and are information creators, providing an environment that better prepares students to think and act critically in a changing information landscape. The Religion department at Cal Lutheran teaches critical thinking skills in the context of culture and personal identity, and served as the perfect launchpad for systematically embedding critical IL into the curriculum.

Yvonne-- as head of undergraduate instruction at the library-- became convinced that librarians needed to be more intentional about bringing critical pedagogy into library IL sessions. In their joint quest to more deeply integrate critical IL in undergraduate programs, Yvonne and Meghan sought to collaborate with the English department to embed IL in all FYW courses, similar to what had been accomplished in the Religion department. This would require a transformation not only of how IL was perceived for English faculty, but also of Meghan's role as the library's liaison to the English department. Upon receiving requests for library instruction, Meghan asked faculty to collaborate by providing her with their class syllabus and assignment rubric, and then joining her in a conversation about the appropriate timing and content for the IL session. This collaboration with individual faculty allowed Meghan to create learning outcomes and scaffold instruction for IL sessions across FYW courses. This scaffolded content would become the template for the library's embedded IL modules soon to come.

This preliminary work toward developing IL equity also provided insight into how some faculty understood authority. Esteeming academic peer-review as the most legitimate source of authority, some faculty expected librarians to refer students to published scholars alone, framing all other sources as being less valuable. Because peer-reviewed scholarship is evaluated by others before publication, these sources require less rigorous evaluation by students to determine the source's reliability. Librarians could focus instruction on the mechanics of finding sources

as opposed to the evaluation of sources. While there is value to be found in this class of scholarship, this approach leaves out critical analyses of the peer-review process and the voices it traditionally excludes. Peer-review favors scholarship that replicates authorized knowledge and resists alternative thinking. This authorized knowledge is historically linked to white ideology, steeped in a legacy of racism and white supremacy. Excluding other sources discounts the authority that stems from marginalized communities and ultimately limits students' ability to see themselves as authorities. Through attempting to teach IL as a 'neutral' activity, librarians would again be reinforcing the status quo (Pashia 92). Despite this challenge, the librarians remained on course to incorporate critical IL by providing students with sample topics, search strategies, and activities that required them to engage a diversity of authorial voices. This critical IL tack provoked not only the students, but the faculty into a transformative dialogue with information sources.

Prior to the pandemic shutdown in 2020, Yvonne and Jolivette met briefly to discuss a collaboration, building upon Meghan's work with the English department. That summer, Yvonne worked with Jolivette to embed critical IL within the learning management system of all FYW courses. First semester FYW students would encounter the ACRL's threshold concepts of how authority is constructed and contextual, and how the information creation process ends in a variety of sources and formats that can be evaluated according to various criteria. Second semester students would build on those concepts as they learned about research being a project of inquiry, and how searching for information is a process of strategic exploration. Pre-tests and post-tests would be used to assess student learning. In addition to the embedded modules, Meghan developed a reading list to complement the common reading text in the first-year writing courses. When conducting in-person IL instruction, Meghan generally leads an activity where students physically handle a range of books and articles. Students are asked to categorize the pieces as popular or scholarly sources, and the class discusses why they do or don't agree with the assessment. The activity demonstrates to students not only that assessing authority isn't always straightforward, but also that authority can be found outside of peer-reviewed sources. The scholarly publishing landscape presents numerous formal and informal barriers for researchers of color. This includes barriers from reviewers who are skeptical of research that challenges dominant narratives and barriers from universities who pressure researchers to publish in top-tier journals, allowing these publishers to serve as gatekeepers of knowledge (Settles 10).

In asking students to discuss the authority found in popular sources, this activity helps to further decenter whiteness as authority. Meghan sought to reimagine this activity within the reading list. Using Ta-Nehisi Coates's essay "The Case for Reparations" as a starting point, she found a collection of additional sources to further expand upon the themes of redlining, the Great Migration, and reparations. This included primary sources, such as the 1962 Norris Vitcheck article "Confessions of a Block-Buster," current news sources, scholarly books and articles, and

popular sources like David Frum's response to Ta-Nehisi Coates's "The Impossibility of Reparations." A selection of videos, streaming and DVD, was also identified to provide multiple modalities through which students and instructors could engage with Coates's themes. Selections included Coleman Hughes's 2019 opening statement in opposition to reparations at a House committee hearing and Julie Dash's short film *Standing at the Scratch Line*. The list represented a shift toward incorporating diverse voices and centering the Black experience as a legitimate source of knowledge.

The reading list was created as a tool for students as they explored Coates's essay, but it proved to be a valuable tool in unexpected ways. While some students cited sources pulled directly from the reading guide, others used it instead as a launching point for finding their own unique sources. In Jolivette's class, for example, several students referenced sources from the reading guide, the most commonly-cited sources being Frum's response to Coates's essay, and the video of Hughes's statement at a House committee hearing. Students used these sources to demonstrate their understanding of a counterargument to Coates's proposals. Meanwhile, students in other classes cited a range of sources accessed from the library, including scholarly sources on reparations from the *University of Memphis Law Review* and the *Review of Black Political Economy*, and articles from popular sources such as *The Washington Post*, *The National Review*, and CBS News. The reading guide also proved to be an equally valuable tool to continue engaging FYW instructors with diverse examples of authorial authority. Instructors used the curated list as a starting point as they determined how best to structure their curriculum. Instructors were able to embed links to the reading list or, after consulting the guide, add direct links to selected readings within the learning management system, demonstrating that such a list engages both instructors and students in critical dialogues on race and authority.

## Culturally Relevant First-Year Writing Instruction

Like IL instruction, FYW instruction is also experiencing a disciplinary shift that demands a critical assessment of the teaching and administration of these large programs and the relationship to systemic power within the university. In their introduction to *Black Perspectives in Writing Program Administration*, Staci Perryman-Clark and Collin Lamont Craig call for allies to "position blackness at the center of the fight against oppressive and racist institutional practices" (24). The nationwide protests against anti-Black violence over the summer prompted Jolivette, as the writing program administrator at her university, to take up Perryman-Clark and Craig's call to action. Allyship within and across departments and academic units such as between the library and the English department are key to creating, sustaining, and institutionalizing antiracist curricular initiatives beyond individual courses, and at the program level. A culturally relevant instructional approach recognizes the intertwined components of setting high expectations for academic achievement and cultivating socio-political consciousness

for all students, so that they connect their academic writing to problem-solving and agency in their communities. Ladson-Billings describes cultural competence as “the ability to help students appreciate and celebrate their cultures of origin while gaining knowledge of and fluency in at least one other culture” (75). This is a different approach to how FYW had been taught at Cal Lutheran. Previously, FYW sections at Cal Lutheran shared a focus on grammar instruction in Standardized Edited American English (SEAS); most instructors taught writing about literature. As the writing program administrator, Jolivette initiated a program-wide curricular revision that equitizes learning outcomes and centers Black voices and experiences through a common text, toward more critical cultural competence for all students.

Jolivette sought to shift FYW instruction to a more inclusive framework for first-generation college students, and particularly for Black and Latinx students, so that first-year writing courses would be a space for all students to hone critical thinking strategies by investigating systemic racism. Culturally relevant pedagogy is valuable for a diverse student population, such as that at Cal Lutheran, because it is attentive to students who may have been previously disadvantaged in their education, while also teaching “those in the mainstream to develop the kinds of skills that will allow them to critique the very basis of their privilege and advantage” (Ladson-Billings 83). In other words, students of all backgrounds learn to examine structural power and its reproduction through culture, as a way to think through and find meaning from their everyday experiences. Towards this goal, Ta-Nehisi Coates’s 2014 essay “The Case for Reparations” was chosen as the common text for all sections of the first semester FYW course. Coates builds his argument for reparations to descendants of U.S. slavery by providing multiple narratives of Black experience through historical research, interviews, and data. The multimedia version online provides an even deeper dive into systemic racism from multiple perspectives of community activists interviewed by Coates for the essay.

Seven years after publication, “The Case for Reparations” has been taught in high school and college English and writing classes as a model of written argumentation; one can search for “The case for reparations ethos pathos logos” and find pre-written outlines for desperate students tasked with rhetorical analysis of Coates’s essay. For a more critically engaged use of Coates’s essay, there is John Conley’s “To Teach the University is to Teach Reparations: A Class Project” in the spring 2021 issue of this journal, which describes one writing professor’s place-based assignments in great detail. But at Cal Lutheran, FYW instructors had room to design their lesson on the essay, so rather than describe a specific assignment, Jolivette will describe campus-wide discussions based on assigning this common text to first-year students. The English Department, library, and campus writing center engaged with Coates’s essay throughout the academic year, creating classroom and co-curricular spaces for talking about race and writing. Creating a common assignment and text for all FYW sections was extremely challenging during COVID-19.

During the same semester that they had to shift to a fully-online teaching format, FYW instructors had to integrate a common text and assignment into their courses. Some instructors voiced unease at teaching a topic like reparations and systemic racism, especially during a highly polarized U.S. presidential election year. Jolivette tried to ease their concerns by focusing meetings on what instructors already knew: teaching critical reading and written argumentation. The argument essay is assigned as the last of the three formal essay assignments required for Critical Reading and Writing I. Instructors had the leeway to design their own prompts focused on “The Case for Reparations,” but were required to include specific criteria that reflected the typical outcomes of a FYW course, such as rhetorical awareness, genre-based organizational patterns, and attention to language and citation conventions. Students also had to demonstrate an understanding of information literacy, such as basing their argument on relevant and diverse perspectives related to Coates’s argument. In support of the IL outcomes, instructors were strongly encouraged to assign Pearson Library’s “The Case for Reparations” Reading Guide, and videos on critically evaluating sources in the library module, described earlier in this essay. Jolivette provided sample prompts to instructors to model moving away from binary, pro/con arguments, and emphasizing student-driven inquiry and communication. Some of the model prompts asked students to imagine the rhetorical situation as a conversation with one of their chosen communities, or with Coates himself. Overall, instructors were free to design the assignment to meet the learning outcomes, as long as students engaged in deep reading of Coates’s ideas and made connections to other sources.

**Possible Prompt for Coates’s “The Case for Reparations.”**

Assume that a specific community to which you belong (Cal Lutheran, family, neighborhood, church, workplace, sports team, etc.) does not know much about arguments for or against reparations for descendants of enslaved people in the U.S. What is a concept or term from Coates’s essay that is essential for community members to understand in order to join the discussion in an informed and ethical way? Why and how would you teach this concept/term to your community? Your thesis should answer both questions and explain why you selected this concept/term. Be sure to define the term, referencing Coates and additional sources discussed in class. Be sure you address any alternative definitions, or counter-arguments to your thesis. Write your essay with your community as your audience.

The culminating goal was to create spaces for conversations on race and writing in the larger university community by celebrating our FYW writers. The university holds its annual weeklong Festival of Scholars event in April, during which students and faculty share their research and creative works with the entire campus community through poster sessions, performances, capstone presentations, art exhibits, and so forth. Jolivette planned the inaugural Celebration of First-Year Writing and

Research as part of the Festival of Scholars program. She envisioned the celebration taking place in the library, gathering FYW classes, essay award winners, and their professors, and featuring brief conversations about their writing and teaching processes toward creating their winning essays. However, due to pandemic restrictions during spring 2021, plans shifted to an online journal, which would be edited, written, and designed by English and the library, furthering their collaboration. At the end of the fall semester, FYW instructors nominated thirteen essays for the Outstanding and Honorable Mention Essay awards. Selections were judged by a faculty member in English and by two staff members from the Writing Center, the assistant director and the writing across the curriculum coordinator, who is also a Spanish/English bilingual specialist. The "About" page of *Inquiry* explains that the journal "recognizes student writers who engaged with Coates's argument with curiosity and an open mind, while creating their own argument by voicing their perspective on the topic of reparations." Judges also considered the writer's use of sources from the Pearson Library reading guide and databases.

The Honorable Mention Essay was awarded to a business economics major, Noah Rigo, who focused his essay on the financial losses suffered by Black Americans due to the racist practices of contract loans and redlining, which he explains in his essay. He references the historian Eric Foner, who is quoted extensively by Coates. Noah argues for specific types of reparations, such as "low to no cost education and low to no interest loans to create fair housing." The web page highlighting Noah's winning essay also showcases a brief exchange between Noah and his writing professor, Linda Olson:

Professor Olson: How did you arrive at the solution of low- and no-interest loans?

Noah: African Americans were being cheated in the housing market with redlining and misleading contracts in buying a home. I arrived at this answer because it seemed like a viable solution that provides a way for people to have stable lives by investing in homes and helping to build a community. It allows someone to gain more equity in their home without having to make ridiculous payments to a mortgage company.

In reading Coates's lengthy ten-section essay, Noah found a way to investigate the economic impact of white supremacy on the Black community, which reflects his interests as a business economics major, but also demonstrates his growth in cultural competence and socio-political awareness. The judges also commended Noah for his focused argument for reparations. Noah's conversation with his professor, his essay, and "applause" from the judges are all published online, representing a space in which members of the Cal Lutheran community talked about writing and racism with each other, albeit virtually.

The Outstanding English 110 essay was awarded to [Charis Pulei](#), a theatre major. Charis and her professor, Dr. Scott Chiu, recorded their conversation about writing and teaching about racism in a meaningful way during a year of national protests and COVID-19. The video shows the split

screen of their Zoom videos, side by side, in conversation with each other:

Scott Chiu: In your paper, you make it very clear that reparations ... is not even a question to talk about in this paper. It's really about how we do that, and you have a very specific audience in mind, that is, the educated public, the government officials who might be making a decision on this particular process. What about your fellow CLU students? How would you approach this topic [with students] differently?

Charis: So if I were speaking to the average Cal Lu student, I would give a little bit more of a basic breakdown on certain topics. For example, systematic racism and the different types of systematic racism that Ta-Nehisi Coates covers in his paper, and really explain them. That way it could be more understood and taken in on a deeper level by students. I think though a lot of people have a very broad education on [racism], they don't have a very deep education. (Chiu and Pulei 2:30 - 3:58)

Charis adds that she would also explain to her peers at Cal Lutheran contemporary ideas about reparations, adding, "I think that's something that I can even clarify for myself (laughs) ... Because there's a lot of belief that 'Oh it's just handing people money.' But legally and realistically, that's not all it is" (Chiu and Pulei 4:16 - 4:32).

This exchange illustrates culturally relevant writing instruction: academic achievement, socio-political consciousness, and cultural competency. Scott's question prompts Charis to think about how she would communicate her argument to her fellow students at Cal Lutheran. Charis responds that she would use the rhetorical strategy of defining key concepts, so that her audience would have a clearer and deeper understanding of systemic racism - knowledge that she suspects her fellow students lack. She then adds that writing on reparations has also led her to gain a clearer understanding of the issue and of systemic racism overall. For Charis, writing her argument on the topic of reparations, drawing on Coates's essay and her other sources, is both communicative and epistemic, in that her writing leads her to new, meaningful knowledge that she wants to share with her peers. Her deeper understanding of systemic racism helps her refute misconceptions of reparations, thereby equipping her to create a more powerful argument, as she writes: "I write this essay being a woman of colour and part of Generation Z. ... I feel it is my generation's duty to do as much as they can to better the world. And in this case, I will explain why reparations are not only the ethical choice but why productive reparations will benefit America as a whole" (Pulei par. 3). In response, a judge comments that Charis "recognizes her unique position in the world and moves her thinking towards social change."

The 12-minute video (<https://sites.google.com/callutheran.edu/writing-rhetoric/charis-pulei?authuser=0>) is a friendly conversation between Charis and Scott on writing and teaching; one can see clearly how much they mutually respect each other as writers and thinkers. Charis asks Scott how he approaches

teaching “heavy topics like racism, especially in times like we’ve been going through recently,” and how he teaches new writers so that “students can understand and formulate their own ideas.” Scott responds that he would like to ask his English Department colleagues this question when they have a chance to talk, acknowledging that “It is not easy at all” but he tries to connect topics like racism to a local context, such as the recent racial conflict on the Cal Lutheran campus, in order to make the conversation more meaningful to students (Chiu and Pulei 6:33 – 8:07). Coates’s essay and the sources in the related library reading guide invite FYW students to read Black experiences and voices, and to investigate and write about systemic racism in ways that are meaningful to the student writers.

As pointed out in the introduction of this essay, one of the hallmarks of Lutheran education is to promote critical inquiry by evaluating one’s own and others’ assumptions on controversial issues, through forming complex questions without seeking definitive answers, and by reflecting on the process and on any discomfort or ambiguity it brings. This Lutheran goal of critical inquiry sets intellectual and social justice goals that require listening to Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and Asian American contributors to their respective fields. Carmen Kynard, a contributor to *Black Perspectives in Writing Program Administration*, explains: “Reconstructing white institutions (or simply accepting more students of color or hiring more faculty and [writing program administrators] of color) is not the same as dismantling racial violence” (47). Critical and culturally relevant FYW and IL instruction address the “pervasive ordinariness of white supremacy” in academia, no matter how uncomfortable it makes us (Kynard 47). This can be done in FYW and IL instruction by questioning what are deemed authoritative texts, authors, and ways of knowing when teaching critical reading, writing, and information literacy.

## Committing to Antiracist Teaching and a Faith-Based Social Justice Mission

Small faith-based liberal arts institutions face many of the same challenges that other small liberal arts colleges face, especially those that have long lacked racial diversity amongst its faculty and student populations, and that are located in wealthier, whiter communities, like California Lutheran’s location in suburban Thousand Oaks, CA. To address racial equity on their campuses, college presidents who also identify as people of color launched the Liberal Arts Colleges Racial Equity Alliance (LACRELA) in 2021 with 68 member institutions, including two ELCA-affiliated colleges. Under consultation with Dr. Shaun Harper and the USC Race & Equity Center, the goal of this alliance is “to address the unique racial challenges and circumstances the colleges are facing, such as the ‘cultural mismatch’ between their very socially liberal campuses and the surrounding communities where the colleges are located, which are sometimes more conservative” (Anderson). Although Harper has also consulted with Cal Lutheran about the racial climate of the university, issuing the 2019 report that recommended the university create more cross-racial

dialogue in courses (National), Cal Lutheran has yet to join LACRELA at the time of writing. The authors hope that campus leadership will enact its recently-issued anti-racist statement by joining other small liberal arts college leaders in uniting for racial equity.

In the meantime, the English Department and the library continue their commitment to antiracist information literacy and writing instruction by preparing for their second year of collaboration. For fall 2021, all FYW sections assigned an essay by the novelist and Pulitzer Prize-winning author Viet Thanh Nguyen, titled “Asian Americans are Still Caught in the Trap of the ‘Model Minority’ Stereotype. And it Creates Inequality for All,” originally published in *Time* in 2020. Nguyen begins his essay with his reflection on Tou Thao, the Hmong-American police officer who stood by as his colleague, Derek Chauvin, murdered George Floyd on the streets of Minneapolis. Nguyen offers this meditation: “The face of Tou Thao is like mine and not like mine, although the face of George Floyd is like mine and not like mine too” (par. 3). Nguyen asks the reader to consider what it means to find solidarity across the diverse ethnicities of “Asian American” and to also identify cross-racially with Black America, as a way to fight systemic racism. Related resources, including a reading guide curated by Meghan, are available once again for faculty and students. We will recognize outstanding essays and their authors at the second annual Celebration of First-Year Writing and Research, hopefully during a celebratory in-person gathering, but also by publishing student writing in the online journal. One difference this time around is that the FYW faculty selected the common text for this year, showing their ownership and commitment to integrating culturally relevant writing instruction in their courses.

Lutheranism’s faith tradition includes a historical call to critical and often radical questioning that challenges accepted assumptions and ways of being. Antiracist pedagogy aligns critical inquiry with social justice in ways that stimulate cross-racial dialogue about complex issues such as dismantling systemic racism. These outcomes align with both the liberal arts tradition and the faith-based liberal arts mission to educate global leaders who are committed to social justice.

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# RADICAL TEACHER

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

## Beyond the Gates: Teaching Race and Politics in Brazil in a Prison Education Program

by Jaira J. Harrington



IN THE IMAGE "THE WORLD WITHIN REACH/O MUNDO AO SEU ALCANCE," CARIOCA COMMUNITY ARTIST DAYSE GOMIS SHOWCASES A BLACK MALE INCARCERATED STUDENT READING IN THE PRISON LIBRARY STACKS. THE IMAGES DIRECTLY BEHIND HIM—A GLOBE, THE MAP OF BRAZIL WITH ITS FLAG, AND A RENDERING OF THE AFRICAN CONTINENT—REFLECT THE CONTENT OF THE "RACE AND POLITICS IN BRAZIL" CLASS. THE COURSE TAKES A GLOBAL, DECOLONIAL APPROACH TO LEARNING, IN WHICH HE STUDIES ABOUT THE AFRICAN DIASPORA IN BRAZIL. IMAGE BY DAYSE GOMIS



"...human beings in communion liberate each other."

- *Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Paulo Freire (133: 2014)*

The project of liberatory education is fraught with complications in a Small Liberal Arts College or SLAC environment. Authors bell hooks and Paulo Freire look to an ethics of care, love, and mutual restoration of humanity through teaching openly and freely. My initial teaching experiences as an assistant professor revealed that this liberatory aim could not be fulfilled at my traditional college campus setting, so I taught in a prison college education program. The goals of this article are: 1) to elucidate the complicated relationship that a Black woman faculty member at the intersections of multiple identities has in adjusting to the liberal arts college environment; 2) to expound upon my weekly exit from campus and entry into prison education as a vehicle to advance institutional goals for outreach and social justice; 3) to interrogate prison education epistemologies and describe the counternarratives and practical strategies developed in a course on Race and Politics in Brazil to decolonize the curriculum; and 4) to express the realities of teaching a Black-centered, intersectional course to SLAC students in a men's maximum security prison setting. It was through this practical prison teaching experience that I stretched the limits of my practice of education and found a temporary home in which to do so.

## The Quad Quandary: Conditionally Accepted

Villanova University is a Catholic liberal arts institution rooted in Augustinian traditions. It is also a predominately white and wealthy suburban university. Based upon the Villanova Office of Diversity and Inclusion Fall 2019 figures, three-quarters of the student body and 80 percent of the instructional faculty are white (Villanova University 2019). According to a *New York Times* investigation on student economic diversity and life outcomes, "The median family income of a student from Villanova is **\$195,800**, and **75%** come from the top 20 percent. About **1.3%** of students at Villanova came from a poor family but became a rich adult" (Aisch 2017). While students of low-income backgrounds are often encouraged to attend wealthy, private schools to leverage social networks, this evidence suggests that earning a college degree at a prominent liberal arts institution may not reduce class inequality. In fact, this institutional profile may reproduce inequity for the most economically disadvantaged students post-graduation (Hurst 2018). These results may stem from the pre-existing insularity of networks of wealth that are resistant to the integration of groups historically marginalized by class, race, gender, sexuality, ability, and national origin.

Nestled in timbered, tidy, and opulent predominately white suburbs of Philadelphia, Villanova University is a stately and reverent institution. The juxtaposition between my West Philadelphia neighborhood and the campus were so stark that my daily public transit commute felt like an

alien encounter. As a first-generation college graduate, Black woman, junior scholar from a working-class background, my visible and invisible blended identities were estranged from the dominant wealthy, elitist attitudes embedded in campus life. I was faculty in Global Interdisciplinary Studies—a department with noteworthy racial, ethnic, and gender diversity. Given the context, it was an exceptional department. Senior administrators and colleagues reassured me that I could easily fit in. However, there were daily reminders that diversity is not tantamount to inclusion. I was granted limited permission to enter a different world in which I was only conditionally accepted.

In this space, I was only able to connect meaningfully with a few students and some junior faculty. I quickly learned that some perspectives of the perceived minority groups aligned with the dominant wealthy and white norm. I could understand the pressures to do so. My global studies courses explicitly brought marginal experiences to center by featuring authors including Edward Said, Patricia Hill Collins, Ella Habiba Shohat, and Toni Morrison. However, students in the socioeconomic, racial, gender, and sexual minority had been hurt so deeply and so often by institutional hostility and neglect that it was especially difficult to earn their trust. While I empathize with these nuances, I could not quite find my footing as a faculty member who values mentoring students. Further, I gained the impression that both students and junior faculty peers navigate the hostile climate by masking their personal challenges. With assimilation as an optional tool, some sought to dig their heels in more deeply with the social climb. Some made their grievances known but were drowned out by what appeared to be a one-sided debate. Others divested completely. With no appealing strategy to which I could adapt, I felt isolated.

The growing scholarship on faculty of color in the academy reveal that these sentiments are commonplace. The trending summer 2020 Twitter hashtag #BlackInTheIvory created by Black women academic friends Dr. Shardé Davis and doctoral student Joy Melody Woods fueled an online reckoning with anti-Black racism in academia. Research on the specific aggressions experienced by Black women faculty is well-documented (Gutierrez y Muhs 2012, Hoff 2020, Neimann 2020). Troublingly, daily departmental interactions upheld and reproduced the racial, gender, and class hierarchies the global studies curriculum expressly critiques. On one hand, it was permissible to teach about oppression and injustice in the abstract. On the other, it was considered taboo to call attention to my personal workplace struggles with those same injustices. I wanted to be a part of the new vanguard for change, but I realized that I would be fighting alone. The repression I experienced was its own confinement. I needed a lifeline. In the most unlikely place, I found my intellectual and pedagogical freedom: the off-campus prison education Graterford Program.

## Teaching in the Graterford Program

In support of the institution's stated commitment to social justice, the Graterford Program was founded in 1972. Through competitive application, incarcerated men take

college-level courses and can earn a Villanova University liberal arts bachelor's degree at no cost to them. Pennsylvania State Correctional Institution (SCI)-Phoenix is the state's largest maximum-security prison. It starkly contrasts with the affluent, mostly white quaint suburb it inhabits: Collegeville—an ironic name. In Spring 2019, I visited the SCI-Phoenix campus to present a talk on the liberatory power of education using Paulo Friere's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* as a reference. My conversation with the men inspired me to embark on a pedagogical journey that became one of the most challenging and rewarding teaching experiences that I have had to date. In Fall 2019, I taught a course on Race and Politics in Brazil.

To directly confront racism, anti-Blackness, and gender oppression, I included pertinent material in the syllabus. Not surprisingly, some prison education programs mirror the Eurocentric and Western-focused curriculum that provides little affirmation for the lived realities and identities of the students we educate. This common curricular bent affirms that esteemed scholarship and knowledge is European, white, and male. It also signals to students with marginalized backgrounds that their lived experiences are of little value. Darder argues:

...we find ourselves more deeply mired in Western ethnocentric (universal) notions of humanity, in which individualism (object-based, future-focused), and materialism counter the legitimacy of subordinate cultural community values and traditions. Additionally, this leads to the negation of our worldviews—including the marginalization of communal life, ancestral knowledge, or spiritual traditions that might enhance the teaching and learning of all...[students] (2015: 43)

With calls to decolonize the curriculum in traditional colleges and universities, extension programs can also benefit from critical reflection. Incarcerated people should also have access to a rigorous educational program that does not reproduce the standards and notions of elite whiteness.

For my course, I embraced a global, Black-centered, and African-diasporic perspective geared toward a predominately Black classroom. The readings and themes were diverse and varied (see appendix). Most importantly,

my course offered a fresh take on Black identity by framing Blackness as global. For most of my students it was the first time that whiteness—implicitly or explicitly—was not the center of dialogue. I also introduced critiques of American hegemony using historical and contemporary frames of colonization, slavery, and imperialism. Founded in 1500, Brazil's historical specificity of indigenous genocide, African slavery and regional influence bears many family resemblances to that of the United States. There were ample opportunities for comparative analyses that I leveraged with my students.

The syllabus also upholds a strong commitment to interdisciplinarity. We read texts from the Humanities and Social Sciences with quantitative, qualitative, interpretive, and humanistic methodologies. Ambitious in my goals, I sought to provide a wide range of materials so that students of varying abilities, backgrounds, and interests could

connect. My approach was inspired by bell hooks:

Through the cultivation of awareness, through the decolonization of our minds, we have the tools to break with the dominator model of human social engagement and the will to imagine new and different ways that people might come together. (2013: 35)

Students were largely unfamiliar with the Brazilian context, so I had to creatively orchestrate methods to foster student connections with the material. I wrongly assumed that a class of predominately African American men with some college experience might have a working knowledge of United States slavery. With that background, I could have drawn comparisons between the United States and Brazil.

Absent that ideal scenario, I found an opportunity to innovatively meet their educational needs.

For an historical overview of trans-Atlantic slavery in Brazil, we read the chapter "Kalunga" from *Run for It: Stories of Slaves Who Fought for Their Freedom*. This graphic novel by Afro-Brazilian author Marcelo d'Saete was essential in that it not only provided material for an excellent framing lecture on the breadth and brutality of slavery, but also the illustrations brought our conversation to life. The nuanced storytelling of historical fiction also invited complex discussions on gender roles and masculinity, romantic love, religion and spirituality, intimate partner abuse, bondage, oppression, and freedom.



IN THE IMAGE "WRITING FREEDOM/LIBERDADE DE ESCRITA," CARIOCA COMMUNITY ARTIST DAYSE GOMIS DEPICTS A YOUNG, BLACK MALE INCARCERATED STUDENT WRITING AT A PRISON LIBRARY DESK. HE IS SURROUNDED BY BOOKS AND IMMERSSED IN A CURRICULUM ABOUT DIASPORIC AND GLOBAL TIES TO BLACKNESS. THE BLACK EMPOWERMENT FIST WITH BLACK MEN, WOMEN, AND PEOPLE REPRESENTS THE STUDENT'S CHANGING INNER THOUGHT PROCESS. THROUGH WRITING AND REFLECTION, HE DISCOVERS A DEEPENING PERSONAL UNDERSTANDING OF AND CONNECTION TO A GLOBAL BLACK LIBERATION STRUGGLE. IMAGE BY DAYSE GOMIS

Unlike rote repetition with which many of my students were familiar in their coursework and their living conditions as incarcerated people, they struggled with there being no singular answer. To that, I reminded them that life is complicated. I would not shortchange them on a deep, challenging intellectual experience because they were not physically on a college campus. Albeit remotely under subhuman conditions, when I teach them, I am teaching SLAC students.

They rose to the challenge. To bridge multilayered discussions on Indigeneity and Blackness, Afro-Brazilian Quilombo Communities' Struggle for Land Rights, housing, and lived environments' racial justice, I selected the anthropological text *Black Women against the Land Grab: The Fight for Racial Justice in Brazil* by Keisha-Khan Y. Perry. I attempted to push boundaries of racial scripts trapped within a U.S.-centered, and Eurocentric lens. The effects were dramatic and immediate. The students responded in class to CNN reports they viewed during their break time on the Amazon and current Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro's inflammatory rhetoric.

In another book, *The Anti-Black City* by Afro-Brazilian professor Jaime Amparo Alves, my students learned about prison conditions, carceral systems, and racial injustice in São Paulo, Brazil. Comparative analysis broadened their worldview to understand incarceration beyond their experience in the United States. They began to consider a solidarity with incarcerated communities abroad. In sum, my students become more aware of global systems of power, tools to question the social order, and finding their place within it.

During classroom instruction, I openly shared my own views. I maintained a strong position, yet I was careful to avoid forcing my views upon my students. Force and coercion permeate their lived experience as incarcerated people. Thus, I sought to give them something different: reduce the power dynamics where possible with dialogue. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire argues the following:

[D]ialogue is the encounter in which the united reflection and action of the dialoguers are addressed to the world which is to be transformed and humanized, this dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person's 'depositing' ideas in another nor can it become a simple exchange to be 'consumed' by the discussants. Nor yet is it a hostile, polemical argument between those who are committed neither to the naming of the world, nor to search for truth, but rather to the imposition of their own truth...It is an act of creation...[It] is conquest of the world for the liberation of humankind. (88-9)

I invited dialogue and open discussion with provocative texts. Each week the men were tasked with discussion leadership to take ownership of the conversation. This was my effort to integrate their situated knowledge and experience into the course. From my vantage point, I was able to ask questions and explore conversations that I did not feel free to explore at the main Villanova University campus. Though my SCI-Phoenix students were being exposed to these concepts and perspectives for the first

time in an academic setting, I discovered that the action of validating their lived experience activated an extraordinary depth of analysis. Freire offers the following perspective:

If true commitment to the people, involving the transformation of the reality by which they are oppressed, requires a theory of transforming action, this theory cannot fail to assign the people a fundamental role in the transformation process...Revolutionary praxis is a unity, and the leaders cannot treat the oppressed as their possession. (2014: 126).

In practice, it was incredibly challenging for students who were accustomed to being told what to do for their every move. However, they slowly became more comfortable challenging me and one another through thoughtful class discussions. I planned my lessons with the same level of care that I do in any classroom setting. Each lesson began with a written agenda on the whiteboard. At the beginning of class I collected the weekly reflection assignments. Each day before the students led discussion, I gave a framing lecture. Absent audio-visual equipment and Internet access and armed with only a whiteboard and marker to help contextualize Brazil, I had to use my framing lectures as an opportunity for creative imaginative storytelling. Each week the students wrote a reflection piece and after each unit they wrote a long-form response paper (see appendix). My class had not only high standards, but also clear rubrics with regular generous feedback for improvement. There was no wiggle room for nonsense and no time to waste in our 16-week course.

## Main Campus in Focus: Impact and Insights

The impact of teaching in the Graterford program was like a stream that extended well beyond the prison and seeped into my experience with main campus. The strides I made with my SCI-Phoenix students rendered the shortcomings of main campus more distant. Interactions with campus colleagues had similar effects. One day when asked about my experience with prison teaching, a colleague disparaged my work suggesting that my students' collective engagement was due to them being "a captive audience." My senior colleague proudly chuckled at his own shallow wit. I could not even muster a smile to entertain the mockery made of both my teaching and the suffering of men in prison as worthy of humoring the cheap pun and his ego. Experiences like these made me question the general sentiment of this SLAC's disjointed relationship to this extension program and the latent colonial logics of paternalism that may be at play, even in a seemingly cosmopolitan Global Interdisciplinary Studies department.

The waters of experience and wisdom on the main campus also flowed back to my prison teaching. The internal dialogue I had between my educator self on main campus and at the prison grew into productive tension. As an advisor of senior thesis projects, I saw that working directly with vulnerable communities was a hallmark of the many main campus students' educational journey. Some even volunteered in men's and women's prisons. The desire

to help vulnerable communities was laudable; however, my conversations with some students lay bare an uncomplicated and uncritical understanding of dynamics of power, class, race, socioeconomic standing, religion, etc. in the name of goodwill. Though I reminded myself and my incarcerated students about these oppressive systems, was I affirming and participating in the promotion of that culture on the main campus?

Some students were motivated by this culture, which reinforced notions of superiority and paternalism. With time, my main campus teaching felt uneven because students were most comfortable with pedestrian intellectual challenges that appeal to their inherent goodness. When I pushed some students to question their assumptions about the populations with whom they work—community organizations in Philadelphia, literacy programs in Haiti, or incarcerated men, women, and people—I could sense discomfort and resistance. If the mission is well-intentioned while doing “good work,” the potential for or impact of harm is negligible.

During this same time, SCI-Phoenix students welcomed reflection. Not only did they become students of themselves, they became increasingly open to learning with and from one another. In creating a space for my SCI-Phoenix students’ freedom, I released myself.

## Prison Education in Focus

Mass incarceration, criminal justice reform, police abolition, and prison abolition are predominant social justice causes of the moment. Taking cues from bell hooks and Paulo Friere, I sought to concentrate on the needs of a student population whose needs and desires are rarely centered. Some pedagogical efforts did not land as easily in the prison setting as they did in the traditional campus setting. The men were not surveyed about their educational experience and much of the feedback was verbal. I had asked the men to reflect upon where they wanted the semester to go to meet their needs. bell hooks reminds us:

Progressive professors working to transform the curriculum so that it does not reflect biases or reinforce systems of domination are most often the individuals willing to take the risks that engaged pedagogy requires and to make their teaching practices a site of resistance (2017: 21).

In the weekly reflections, some students called attention to their own heritage and backgrounds. Personal realizations stemmed from race as an analytical tool. This process was a step further than conversation around their theoretical oppression; my students of all backgrounds were able to grapple with the realities of identity and who they are.

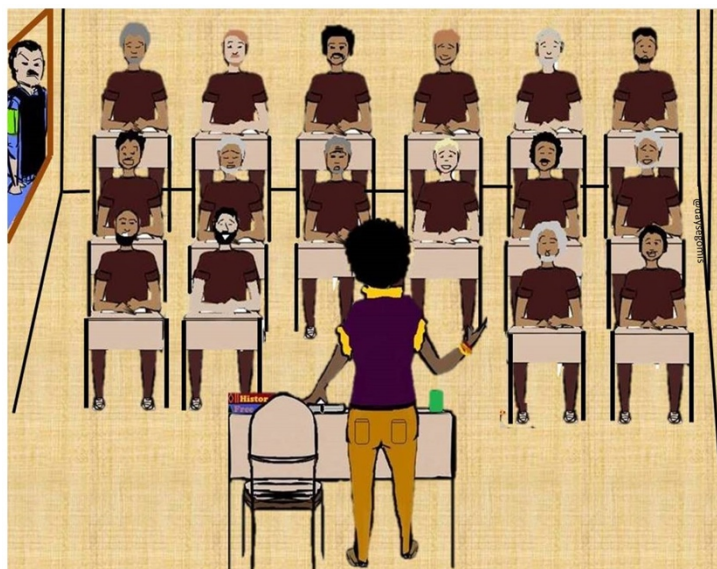
In my willingness to take risks, I also had to confidently face the possibility of failures and false starts. Sometimes there was the outright rejection of this intellectual autonomy through dialogue, but I did not take any of it personally. I was made aware of racial and gender sensibilities that were planted in their home communities that are also reconstituted within a strict men’s prison setting. For some of my students, the adage applied: “All Black people are men and all women are white.” At times the men parroted gender discussions, carefully selecting the “right” responses to appeal to a Black woman professor while diluted chauvinism seeped into classroom dynamics. There were also men who were genuinely curious about my experiences teaching and living abroad, and instead of roundly denying and minimizing the validity of my experience as a Black woman, they embraced the opportunity to learn another perspective. I created an environment to invite all perspectives without punishment or reward so that they might discover their own voice.

I also had the opportunity to learn. In the chapter “Love as the Practice of Freedom” in *Outlaw Culture* bell hooks reminds us that:

Whenever those of us who are members of exploited and oppressed groups dare to critically interrogate our locations, the identities and allegiances that inform how we live our lives, we begin the process of decolonization. If we discover in ourselves self-hatred, low self-esteem, or internalized white supremacist thinking and we face it, we can begin to heal. Acknowledging the truth of our reality, both individual and collective, is a necessary stage for personal and political growth (2015: 248).

As hooks describes, teaching in the prison offered a complicated

space for healing. I was able to reflect on the profoundly different contrasts between main campus life and prison conditions.



IN THE IMAGE, “TEACHING AND LEARNING UNDER WATCHFUL EYES/ENSINANDO E APRENDENDO SOB OLHOS VIGILANTES,” CARIÓCA COMMUNITY ARTIST DAYSE GOMIS ILLUSTRATES THE IN-CLASS EXPERIENCE OF INCARCERATED STUDENTS. THE CLASSROOM IS SHOWN TO HAVE STUDENTS OF VARYING RACE, AGE, AND EXPERIENCE. THE STUDENTS ARE DEPICTED AS CONTENTED, MOTIVATED, AND OPEN TO LEARNING. THE BLACK WOMAN PROFESSOR DIRECTLY ENGAGES THE STUDENTS. AN ONLOOKING CORRECTIONAL OFFICER IS SHOWN CAREFULLY MONITORING THE CLASSROOM THROUGH A SURVEILLANCE WINDOW. IMAGE BY DAYSE GOMIS

## Unforeseen Challenges to Teaching

Although my presence as an instructor was a benefit to the social justice outreach objectives of the institution, there were few resources for me to personally adjust as a Black woman professor in a prison setting. Law enforcement officials are hardly objective. Biases both implicit and explicit still intervened. Race, socioeconomic status, gender expression, ability, perceived national origin, perceived age, religion, and citizenship status all intersect in complicated ways for any instructor in this setting. Whether in a suit, cardigan, button up, or sweater, with either box braids or an afro, I am read as a Black woman and my immersion in an unknown culture was different than for my white colleagues.

Policing, screening, and surveillance were tight at a maximum-security prison, but I felt like an unwelcome guest. Like all who entered, I was screened regularly to enter the prison campus. However, power plays of race and gender crept up to provide additional barriers—I had to advocate for every aspect of my experience from check-in to exit. I was invited to come but not welcome to feel comfortable or at ease at any point in time. The implication by prison staff of all levels was that I was not worthy of dignity. After opening up, I was told by my students how I am perceived: “Dr. Harrington, you look like our visitors.”

In the classroom itself, there were lingering issues. I was teaching men with extreme life experiences, unresolved traumas, and sparsely supported life difficulties. One downside of the program is that I was thrown into the mix with little training or support to cope with my own experience. However, my experience with main campus dynamics of care were reproduced in this prison teaching arrangement: no follow through or follow up, just a pat on the back for participating and being resilient. Care was not a part of the agreement. Fortunately, that was not a deterrent.

## Conclusion

I experienced pride in what we achieved. From the final reflections and kind notes that some students shared, 16 weeks made an impact on them, but I know for sure, it certainly changed me. The takeaway that the students gave me was “less is more.” Looking back, I was very ambitious, and yet, I was at peace with my efforts. More than anything, I wanted to extend to them the humanity and grace that I was denied. Many students showed the same care in return. By comparison I could not fully understand or comprehend their plight and I likely never will. And still, the opportunity to present a new world, an analytical toolkit, and a perspective to the curious, intelligent, and deeply introspective group was one of the most rewarding teaching experiences of my life. The shortcomings that I experienced in a SLAC campus setting were offset by the challenging and beautiful experience of teaching with a prison education extension program. It was behind those gates that I found a reciprocal space for healing and freedom.

## Acknowledgements

**Dayse Gomis** (Dayse Ellen Gomes de Moura), creator of the images in this article, is a visual artist, activist and Black feminist. A proud resident of the Fallet Fogueteiro favela in Rio de Janeiro, Dayse is involved in her community as a member of the Aqualtune Black Women’s Collective, the State Forum of Black Women in Rio de Janeiro (FMENRJ) and the Protestant Cartoonists Collective of Brazil. <https://instagram.com/dayseqomis>

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## Appendix

### Weekly Reflection Example:

Weekly Reflection Assignment (75-100 words): We've discussed the importance of political representation for marginalized communities in Brazil. Are media and culture representations significant as well? What do the readings tell us? What are your thoughts?

### Response Paper Prompt Examples:

Word count: 1250-1500 (**not** including the source reference(s) at the end of your paper. Look to our article readings to see how you can cite in your paper.). Cite your sources, make certain that your work is legible and include a word count at the end.

Choose **one** of the following prompts to which you will respond:

#### The Law and the Land

The Amazon Rainforest and Quilombos are hotly contested territories with both domestic and international calls for specific protections. What is their value to Brazil? What is their value to the global community? Who are the stakeholders? Make reference to the readings in stating your claims. Both the Amazon and Quilombos are linked to indigenous and Black communities in Brazil. Both groups were slaughtered, enslaved, dispossessed, and robbed of dignity during the period of colonization and thereafter. Although we mentioned multiple methods of restitution from the state via reparations to these historically afflicted groups, we considered the right to land as an option. Make the case for **or** against land ownership rights and entitlements for the indigenous and Afro-Brazilian groups as a form of reparations. What are the limitations to both arguments?

#### A Seat at the Table: Intersectionality and Black Women in Brazil

Define intersectionality and apply the concept to any of our readings including *The Anti-Black City: Police Terror and Black Urban Life in Brazil*, *Black Women Against the Land Grab*, *Negras in Brazil*, *Health Equity in Brazil* and/or "A Place of Their Own: Black Feminist Leadership and Economic and Educational Justice in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil." How is it that understanding the interactions among categories such as race, gender, class, etc. inform a more equitable approach to criminal justice, economic policy, health policy, housing, and land rights or any other socio-political problem we have studied? Choose an issue, a reading, or a set of readings to deeply examine Black women's inclusion/exclusion and their experiences at the seat of socio-political issues in Brazilian politics.

#### Media, Culture and Representation

It has been argued that representation and visibility through media, culture, and arts is critical to democratic inclusion as well as the more traditional means of politics.

Using the articles "Encountering Exceptionalism: Afro-Brazilian Responses to the Rise of Obama in São Paulo Brazil," "Resistance Televised: The TV da Gente Television Network and Brazilian Racial Politics," and/or "Hip Hop and the Reconfiguration of Blackness in São Paulo and the Influence of African American Political and Musical Movements in the 20th Century," make your case. What do you observe? To what extent is visible representation of Afro-Brazilians in media, culture, and arts a political issue? Do you see any commonalities with the U.S.? What are the limits to its significance?

### Selected Course Texts

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# RADICAL TEACHER

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

## Mobilizing BIPOC Student Power against Liberalism at Soka University of America: A Collection of Voices

by Victoria M. Huynh, Kristen Michala Storms, Jordyn Solidum-Saito, Professor X, and Aneil Rallin



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**W**e write as a collective of BIPOC undergraduate student organizers and professors dedicated to Black, Third World, and Indigenous liberation through feminist analysis at Soka University of America (SUA). We contend that SUA prominently epitomizes liberalism in its most counterrevolutionary form today. We highlight through a brief chronology of our communal, epistemic, and physical struggles against hegemonic power exercised by our Small Liberal Arts College (SLAC) the ways in which liberalism acts as counterrevolutionary ideology. We offer critical reflections/interventions on our struggles against white supremacy at our SLAC, as well as on how our university administration utilizes liberalism as a technology of imperialism. We come together to resist the imperial university from where we stand. We believe in the pedagogical possibilities of resistance and in working toward liberation. We share our communion as a gesture of solidarity and in anticipation of forging solidarities.

## The SUA Masquerade or the Pristine Façade

SUA is a 20-year old private SLAC, uniquely founded on “the Buddhist principles of peace, human rights, and the sanctity of life.” Soka is “a Japanese term meaning to create value.” SUA’s mission is “to foster a steady stream of global citizens committed to living a contributive life.” SUA boasts an almost 2 billion dollar endowment for a small student body of around 400. “Its primary source of funding is Soka Gakkai, a member-supported lay Buddhist organization founded in Japan” (Soka). Students come from all over the US and world, many lured by what they perceive to be the promise of SUA, the chance to dream up and work toward liberatory futures, and/or its substantial financial aid program. Nearly 50% of SUA students come from outside the US, making it the liberal arts college with the most number of “international” students (“Most”). The overwhelming majority are traditional-age students. As a rule, all students are required to live on campus, a grand resort-like gated community overlooking canyons on three sides in suburban Orange County in California, in order to engage in dialogue with each other and learn how to get along. But on whose/what terms? Toward what ends?

Through a case study of sorts of the fight for Critical Global Ethnic Studies (CGES) at SUA, we note the specific ways liberalism as counterrevolutionary ideology plays out at our new but already very highly-ranked private SLAC that boasts a utopian mission premised on global citizenship. Global citizenship in SUA terms is achieved by its “diverse” multicultural almost 50 percent international student body and a marketed commitment to peace and human rights. In fact, there are few Black students (constituting less than three percent of the student body) and virtually no full-time Black faculty trained in critical Black studies on our campus or representation of African Studies in the curriculum. Incredibly, SUA’s almost two billion dollar endowment is the second largest endowment per student in the US (“Endowments”). Given its proclaimed commitments and mission and endowment, we ask why it is that when BIPOC working-class students ask for the fulfillment of their needs, interests, dreams, desires,

demands, well-being, our incredibly wealthy university is always unable to find resources for working-class and/or BIPOC students. Since its founding, there have been and continue to be no resources specific to working-class and/or BIPOC students, whose needs and demands are viewed as “special-interest,” with suspicion, as threatening, as too divisive, met with derision, and continually dismissed, ignored, rejected. Resources though are readily available for plays that supposedly have a bearing on advancing SUA’s standing in the *US News and World Report* education rankings, such as the stellar performing arts center that opened on campus in 2011 amid much fanfare at a cost of \$73 million.

We work at SUA in cluster areas called concentrations rather than conventional departments/programs. SUA recently spent an extraordinary amount of money erecting a new concentration in the Life Sciences with its own new multimillion dollar building. However, when students and professors came together to ask for an additional concentration in Critical Global Ethnic Studies (CGES), a modest proposal that didn’t involve the construction of an extravagant new building, to address/engage what consistently gets erased at SUA, our BIPOC lives, we were consistently rebuffed. Even though decisions at SUA are typically made hierarchically by the president and the dean often in disregard of faculty expertise or conviction, we were told the university’s hands are tied; it has limited resources; it can’t move forward without faculty support (despite considerable faculty support); it can’t move forward without expansive faculty approval (read: the same faculty who teach imperialist frameworks must approve of our pedagogies of resistance); Life Sciences is “a totally different beast”; concentrations must have broad appeal despite broad student support; etc., etc. Since its founding, there has been no concerted effort by our SLAC to question its reproduction of whiteness. Apparently, the university’s human rights mission does not extend to the lives and needs of BIPOC students.

A student petition for a proposed Critical Global Ethnic Studies concentration along with the establishing of a center dedicated to Critical Global Ethnic Studies yielding over 1000 signatories receives no response from university administrators. Then, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, after most students have been unceremoniously sent away from campus into the uncertainties of their own communities (if students are fortunate to have communities to return to), the university announces the founding of a Center for Race, Ethnicity, and Human Rights. Five months after students circulate a petition and present a detailed proposal to faculty and administrators for the creation on our campus of CGES, an administrators’ center is mysteriously born.

While SUA public relations campaigns have long maintained a pristine facade of no conflict at our university, there is a long history of important student movements swept under the rug (“We want”). The demand for Africana Studies dates back ten years at least. As recently as 2016, students mobilized around the plight of “undocumented students,” brought to light when applicants were routinely denied admission to our SLAC committed to human rights on the grounds that they would not be able to “study



abroad”—a requirement for graduation. These and other student movements were derailed and silenced or quickly co-opted, students and professors who invested time and energy in the advancement of student care as well as critical pedagogy attentive to the needs and dreams of BIPOC and/or working class students punished, as they/we have always been punished.

## Contexts/Discontents or A Chronology of the Movement for Critical Global Ethnic Studies at SUA

The “televised” struggle begins where much radical academic change has erupted: with the Black students. In spring 2018, the thirty-odd SUA Black students decided to do what so many before attempted to do: create a Black Student Union (BSU). The BSU would be a safe, exclusive space for Black students to build community and help each other survive the university. The proposed BSU is instantly rejected by the university on the grounds the group is too exclusive. Without institutional recognition, the BSU is consequently barred from receiving funding and other resources. Translation: The majority white and Japanese student population might view an all-Black student space as an affront to the centrally-held SUA belief of “dialogue” in order to “better understand” those from different backgrounds—solution to all problems. For the Black students, exclusivity is the only way to avoid becoming a racial zoo with free general admission.

Despite not receiving university recognition, the Black students move forward and establish the BSU to create networks and find resources for themselves. The founding of the BSU paves the way for other so-called exclusive, identity-based student groups. The sharp increase in identity groups and demands spearheaded by the formation of the BSU force the university's hand to create a new caste of student clubs known as “affinity” groups. This new status includes meager funding and limited support, revealing the obvious reluctance of SUA to support BIPOC student communities. A subsequent interest in Ethnic Studies (anti-imperialist) in opposition to Area Studies (imperialist) arises from Asian diasporic students as a scholar/professor arrives on campus, appointed in a one-year post-doctoral position to teach Ethnic Studies classes (likely the first classes expressly designated as such at our university) during the 2018-19 academic year. This culminates with the (re)formation of the Students of Color Coalition (SOCC) that, along with the BSU, begins actively organizing for African and Ethnic Studies and agitating for a number of other initiatives to address the white supremacist campus culture both in and outside the classroom at SUA (Inema).

In the fall of 2019, while the BSU and SOCC are vigorously continuing their efforts for critical pedagogy and transformation of our campus culture, a recently arrived in the US non-Black SUA student shares a post with the n-word on social media. This moment unearths yet again the hardly buried racist SUA student culture. It serves as trigger and catalyst for a series of public events on campus (Malabuyoc). In November, the BSU organize a month-long town hall series in an attempt to articulate their Black

humanity and traumas. Black students put their traumas on display via teach-ins on crucial topics such as microaggressions, tokenism, and cultural appropriation. The initial reaction among a number of students, faculty, and administrators is to frame BSU members as being angry, overly sensitive, as fear-mongers and terrorists. There is much work that needs to be done at our SLAC. BIPOC students organize protests at well-attended student-recruitment university events for potential students and their guardians (“Students protest”) and student festivals. This is the beginning of the BIPOC-crafted infrastructure intended to disassemble white supremacy. University administrators subsequently wake up, cancel classes, hire and fly out a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion specialist, and put Black and Brown students on the main stage in the performing arts center for a town hall meeting, including the student authors of this piece. Classes are canceled and all members of the campus community (students, staff, faculty) are encouraged to attend. The moderator, the DEI specialist, asks only one question: “What happened?” This question is all it takes for BIPOC students to fall apart. BIPOC students recount traumas and convey grievances that result from attending SUA. Upper-level administrators claim they are listening and learning, shake BIPOC students’ hands, apologize to BIPOC students’ faces, promise they will make changes.

In December 2019, Victoria M. Huynh and Kristen Michala Storms co-write and present the first proposal for Critical Global Ethnic Studies (CGES). It outlines three central tenets: student self-determination, lived experiences, and a critical global praxis. These tenets are meant to equip BIPOC students with the opportunity to learn about their erased histories and engage their material realities in order to ground themselves in the communities they hail from, as well as to center activism and praxis in academic spaces with the aim of dismantling global imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy (following bell hooks) and its long standing hegemonic impacts. Unabated, the BIPOC-student led movement continues to organize for BIPOC student needs actively outside of the university, most poignantly in the form of the February 2020 1st Annual Students of Color Conference: Building a World without Empires (“This is”) that brings together a gathering of community leaders, organizers, scholars, activists, student activists, professors to offer workshops, panel discussions, and keynote events for SUA and off-campus communities. The conference, with over 200 attendees at our university of 400 students, is a student-crafted, deinstitutionalized space for BIPOC students to reclaim their communities’ lived experiences as sources of learning, build community, disrupt institutional norms, and teach themselves to be critical of institutional power. Student power creates the means to learn from students’ lived experiences, for students to learn from each other and to speak in direct resistance to white supremacy at SUA.

For over a year at this point in time, BIPOC students have made significant intellectual and infrastructural contributions to campus. BIPOC students have created meaningful programs often working with off-campus communities; organized complex teach-ins far exceeding

the expectations of any DEI trainer; seen through a successful conference; created a working proposal for a new CGES concentration; successfully defended the necessity and rigor of the concentration. The impact this movement has on campus is undeniable and seeps into every aspect of student and overall campus life. Even SUA faculty who were initially not supportive of the BIPOC student demands alter or shift their curricula in response to the growing student desires for CGES. Students and faculty allies demand that university administrators respond to this pressing need by seriously working to implement the concentration via a cluster hire of six faculty members. This demand brings BIPOC students to present their ideas for a new CGES concentration at a meeting for all faculty, where BIPOC student presenters are simultaneously commended and attacked.

Finally, students take matters into their own hands on February 28th, 2020 by demanding actions from the SUA board of trustees ("1, 2, 3, 4"). BIPOC students communicate how serious SUA's neglect has been of BIPOC students and the dire necessity of a CGES concentration through a series of actions: "trespassing" in the boardroom during a meeting, making a presentation to the trustees, staging a die-in, blocking a road. Despite every effort from BIPOC students to convey the severity of the crisis at our SLAC, the board of trustees evade, cower, refuse to engage with students, treat the students with alarming disrespect, and, along with the university president, ridicule and ignore student demands for CGES and additional infrastructures/resources. University administrators go so far as to punish students by having students cited for actions students did not commit.

In the summer of 2020, amidst the prevalent COVID-19 (dis)handlings by the United States, ongoing anti-Black state violence, and the relentless repression of BIPOC student demands, the former SUA president retires from office and the then vice president is speedily promoted to the presidency. On the one hand publishing messages of solidarity with the national movement for Black Lives while on the other abandoning contact with BIPOC student leaders, the newly appointed president announces he has established a Center for Race, Ethnicity, and Human Rights and assembled a council on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion with no consultation with or guidance from the BIPOC student leaders.

This newly established Center for Race, Ethnicity, and Human Rights turns out to be a hollow emulation of the students' vision. It is established ostensibly to showcase our university's dedication to diversity, but without the involvement, let alone leadership, of the students and professors engaged in the struggle for CGES who understand that the push for Critical Global Ethnic Studies as concentration and center must not be a mere theoretical showcase but must be grounded in lived experience and community praxis, redistributing university resources to build sustainable and anti-imperialist presents/futures. It is divorced from long-standing commitments to working with and developing relationships with working-class Chicax and Southeast Asian community organizations to create support networks for undocumented people and students within and outside the university, mobilizing on multiple

issues and fronts, including the contribution of labor in support of the Acjachemen Nation, the Indigenous peoples whose land SUA sits on. The administrators' center does not seek to undertake this kind of work: developing solidarities, relationships, and networks of working-class communities of color in Orange County and beyond. The administrators' center functions in effect to undermine and derail BIPOC students' CGES initiative—self-determination for BIPOC student education and s liberatory objectives.

In short, the president has co-opted BIPOC student labors and ideas, appropriating and domesticating the notion of a center directly from the students' CGES proposal. This thus illegitimate center, born out of co-optation, not only denies student self-determination but also offers no tangible changes in meeting the concrete needs of working-class, first-generation BIPOC students. It forecloses any possibility of student-led roles in key decision-making processes (read: BIPOC student self-determination) at SUA. The president's maneuver (typical increasingly even at supposedly progressive SLACs in the US?) exposes the violence liberalism poses to students and academics committed to Black, Indigenous, and Third-World liberation. By making representational concessions on the outside and leaving out student voices behind closed doors, the maneuver cloaks its violence with optical progress.

Since BIPOC student leaders have rejected all of the president's unilateral initiatives taking over and reframing BIPOC students' work/ideas in service of the university's liberal agendas, university administrators have made no contact with student leaders and faculty allies as they host talks on race relations and meetings with its council—without the involvement of any of the student movement leaders, siloing and marginalizing the professors in support of the movement.

This is the point at which we find ourselves now, still in struggle, still in communion, still in solidarity, still in resistance, still, to invoke Gloria Anzaldúa, "making face, making soul." In the sections that follow, we offer our individual reflections on the struggles at SUA, emphasizing in these fractals of our communion our unwavering commitment to one another and/or the communities we hail from, to solidarity and liberation.

## I am Power

### Kristen Michala Storms

*I am not difficult. I'm exacting. Precise.*

—bell hooks

I hold to Angela Davis's definition of radicalism: "grasping things at the root." Radicalism serves as [one such] avenue to disrupt power and to create confrontational spaces for counter[ authors: is there something missing after "counter"? ] . As a young Black woman student activist at a SLAC, I have been positioned as a change agent by virtue of my existence, which I liken to a sort of latent power. My work has been the recognition, coaxing, and utilization of all that I am. SUA (and many other liberal arts

schools like it) are masters of domestication and “inclusion.” “Diversity,” “liberalism,” “multi-culturalism,” and other similarly coded rhetoric espoused by such institutions are a coalesced dog whistle politic that maneuvers BIPOC students into a passive, receiving status in the scheme of our education. Talks of “inclusion” amount to the disappearance of our [BIPOC student] radicalism into the dominant university power structure. This domestication renders us “safe” enough to be patched onto the university’s prized diversity quilt and restricts us to “food festivals” and “diversity fairs” in which “dialogue” can occur on our sanitized histories. If we are good Black and Brown children, the schools will add us to the campus culture but will do everything in their power to stop us from *changing* it. This has been my fight, my struggle for over half of my undergraduate career. Equipping myself with the knowledge of my people and peers to provide *myself* with the education that SUA would never give me: critical pedagogy.

Hence, I am the co-creator of CGES pedagogy. I have dedicated myself to such a radical academic pursuit in the face of the racist and powerful institutions instilled in liberal arts universities because *I* am powerful. My power cannot be conceptualized by the traditional language used to define “power.” Power is directional. It is not restricted to one direction (top-down) but comes from *all* directions. My directional power is comprised of the love and pain of my ancestors in me incarnate. It resides in the countless hours spent late at night organizing protests, demonstrations, and teach-ins to speak with the voices we were given at birth. It is imbued in the tears shed in hallways after verbal assaults from administrators and university presidents. I cobble my power because I believe all students should be able to hold their power with their own hands, uncompromised by the institution. CGES became an opportune project that is providing students with the language and frameworks that centralize and honor our BIPOC lived experiences as *knowledge* that has been simultaneously taken from and restricted to our communities. Such BIPOC student-dictated curriculum challenges the entire SUA community and most pointedly scared faculty, staff, and administrators. We did not wait to be given “approval” to implement and teach CGES. CGES strives to endow students with the self-means to confront and dismantle the structures which substantiate the reason why radical pedagogy is even needed. SUA believes itself to be a non-combatant in the inherent hegemonic university structures of power. SUA believes their flaccid notion of “peace” and “global citizenship” instead somehow absolves them of all responsibility to change the world. The *ideas* behind SUA are, is, and will only be a billion-dollar shoddy facade to direct attention away from what lies beneath the fringed peace without tangible, decolonial action. SUA’s values are used as a means to avoid *naming* the world in favor of romanticism and idealism that possess no praxis to lead this philosophy into reality. The single most pointed danger to SUA’s fringed peace is me. The students who mobilize their self-power to *name* and *name* over and over again. To grasp at the roots of our dreams and to *pull, pull, pull*

## Disciplining Diversity / Refusing Discipline

Aneil Rallin

*History shows us that the modern Western university was erected as an institution fundamentally antagonistic to every-day people in general and people of color in particular. In a way, then, you and I are the children of this institutional inheritance, the beneficiaries of a history that—as far as this place is concerned—has always presumed the inferiority of various constituencies of “the people,” constituencies based on differences of ability, class, race, gender, and sexuality. And so we find ourselves in institutions that—for the most part—have never cared to fully imagine us.*

—Roderick Ferguson

A world in despair, poor marginalized BIPOC communities disproportionately affected by the pandemic in this settler-colonial nation-state that I call “home,” a global vaccine apartheid unfolding, pervasive anti-Blackness on the rise even as the Black Lives Matter movement continues to galvanize, the resurgence of anti-Asian racisms and xenophobias, a university machinery that has never cared to fully imagine us and churns on. I am writing in the ruins of the grim futures before us to reflect on the ongoing student resistance and rebellion calling for the demolishing of imperialist capitalist white supremacist heteronormative patriarchy at our SLAC that prides itself on its “peace and human rights” mission and on “fostering a steady stream of global citizens committed to living a contributive life.” I find myself thinking of Roderick Ferguson’s *We Demand: The University and Student Protests*. In his introduction Ferguson notes: “I wrote this book because it is time we begin to see student protests not simply as disruptions to the normal order of things or as inconveniences to everyday life at universities. Student protests are intellectual and political moments in their own right, expanding our definitions of what issues are socially and politically relevant, broadening our appreciation of those questions and ideas that should capture our intellectual interests: issues concerning state violence, environmental devastation, racism, transphobia, rape, and settler colonialism” (10).

When students rise up to upend systems of oppression/disenfranchisement and decolonize education, we professors committed to liberation must rise up with students. We must unravel how universities function as institutions of imperial power and have adapted and continue to adapt “to the challenges of student activists with the discourse of diversity” and “promote the ideology of diversity as a way to construct student protests as the antithesis of diversity and tolerance rather than as calls for meaningful social transformation” (Ferguson 10). We must contest how discourses of diversity “have allowed the university to establish not only diversity initiatives designed to protect the campus against the ostensible disorders produced by activists but also police forces [‘public safety officers’ at our university] that will supposedly do the same” (Ferguson 10-11). We professors must refuse the lure of university schemes and banquets and felicitations and

rewards designed to control us, to constrain us from working in solidarity with engaged activist students against the university as imperial project and from allying with students striving to lead us into dismantling university structures that sustain global capitalist white supremacist heteronormative patriarchy and its yearnings.

My SLAC has a documented history of persevering anti-Black and other racisms and promoting white supremacy. BIPOC students at my SLAC finally catch our campus administrators' attention when they carry out a direct action in November 2019, a silent protest during a recruitment event for high school seniors and juniors, an anguished cry expressing the suffocation BIPOC students experience on our campus and calling for immediate revolution ("Students protest"). The university shuts down for an afternoon of soul-searching. My skepticism about such predictable gestures prevents me from attending the soul-searching. Upper-level administrators shed tears, vow to do better, pledge to listen to the students. These empty gestures turn out to mean asking BIPOC students to repeatedly explain/relive the causes of their anguish and justify their demands for curricular and other reforms. The students organize potent presentations and consciousness-raising sessions, direct actions and protests, an unforgettable students of color coalition conference, linking these particular struggles with the long history of liberation struggles across the world, inviting professors to join their struggles. A number of us professors join forces with the students only to have BIPOC student demands and labors categorically dismissed and/or co-opted by administrators and more than a few faculty colleagues.

Telltale signal of how our supposedly progressive SLAC seeks to maintain the liberal white supremacist imperial project comes courtesy of the announcement of a new Center for Race, Ethnicity, and Human Rights on our campus. This Center is established top-down quickly by the newly ordained president in response to the student uprising on our campus, but without consultation with (actually with hostile disregard of) the BIPOC students or professors working in solidarity with the students. The university conspires with some faculty to co-opt BIPOC students' demands/labors and domesticate BIPOC students' radical agendas under the pretext of promoting diversity through the form of this Center. The president appoints two co-chairs of the Center—a white male faculty member with a reputation for faithfully backing the president's wishes and the university's neoliberal mission (platitudes around human rights and global citizenship) and a newly hired (without an open search) Black male administrator (installed also as "vice president for mission integration") with as far as one can discern no prior work-related history on critical issues around race.

Statements issued by the co-chairs tell us everything we need to know about the Center's domesticated agendas: "race has been a problem in every single country, but people don't know about it...we have the opportunity to remind those who wouldn't have any idea...when you talk about things as entrenched as racism or sexism, the way to start to turn the tide the other way is to create institutions that live on and educate people regardless of their background" ("Soka's Center"). *Really?* Ah, yes, the benign

promotion of any and all education as liberation rather than liberation as political project—intellectual and material. The revolution that BIPOC students are demanding and deserve—that we all deserve—gets transformed into the palatable form of a Center that will, the university president proclaims, "carry out dialogue." It will function (like most such centers) largely as a programming body, a mechanism that conjures up change while keeping intact the university's white supremacist structural underpinnings.

The BIPOC student activism on our campus have laid bare the lies of liberalism and our SLAC—how it preserves the status quo through its embrace of global racial capitalist interests under the guise of global citizenship and via the white imagination of university stakeholders, including many of my shameful faculty colleagues. "The pressing task," Denise Ferreira da Silva reminds us, "is to engage the racial as a modern political strategy" (xxxv) that seeks to regulate BIPOC lives. As our BIPOC student leaders are teaching us, we have to completely reorganize the world, and that means reorganizing our university. We who are committed to this work may be beaten and weary but we will not succumb to the machinations of our SLAC that strives to discipline our BIPOC minds/bodies/lives into submission, sustain empire, regulate and defang our demands for transformative structural change.

## Anti-Imperialist Praxis through Communion

### Jordyn Solidum-Saito

*Despite the edge, there is still joy and laughing. There are always children running around—always laughing. Always talking. We are connecting and speaking as family. It is this which sustains us. Part of this occupation is the refusal to believe they will win, a refusal to let this place be anything, but joyful*

- From my journal dated July 17th 2018, at Pu'u'honua o Pu'u'huluhulu, Mauna Wākea, the day 17 kupuna, Native Hawaiian elders, were arrested by the State of Hawai'i for protecting Mauna A Wākea from desecration.

I return to SUA in the fall of 2018, feeling like a shell of a person. The prior school semester, the university space felt almost promising. I forged deep political bonds, something I had never known on campus, which gave way to a pulse. This new sense of possibility worked contradictory to the dominant feeling of alienation. Having spent the summer organizing in deep communion with the masses of where I come from—Hawai'i—I feel an acute rage for the university's stringent investment in imperialism, settler-colonialism, patriarchy, and white supremacy. This is a familiar feeling to most students who come to elite schools carrying the chasm of class difference between their shoulder blades.

*For a colonized people the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread and, above all, dignity.*

— Frantz Fanon

The summer of 2018 commanded me to view the world within its formulaic contexts. It was spent organizing, a labor that is deeply devalued in the academy as it contradicts the values of individualism and threatens the organization of power. My mentor and I immersed ourselves in the lives of the most marginalized women in our community. We visited prisons, remote domestic violence sanctuaries, and outer islands to learn and center their needs within the metropole. This work was heavy and intense, although it was only the beginning. On July 16th I found myself in a pickup truck on my way to Mauna A Wākea. I traveled out to deliver a dear friend of mine thermal clothing as she was one of the first to travel to the sovereign Pu'uhonua o Pu'uhuluhulu, where Native Hawaiians had set up a community to block the construction of a 30 meter telescope which would desecrate a sacred sight and destroy an entire ecosystem. The days I was present marked the largest police operation in the history of Hawai'i (Inouye). I was there to witness the mass arrest of beloved elders and present when an entire community was threatened with the use of an LRAD, a military grade weapon capable of breaking eardrums. Witnessing this violence solidified within me what I only knew intellectually: *that the interest of two classes will ultimately result in violent struggle, and that the ruling class will spare none in their quest to monopolize power.*

*The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways. The point, however, is to change it.*

—Karl Marx

My mentors from home always reminded me that while academics can “spit theory all day,” if they cannot use their theory to change the terrain of struggle, they are not revolutionaries. My work grounded in Hawai'i lay bare the truth of our movement at university: that nothing we wanted would be given to us and every point of contention would be met with conflict and standoff. The logics of liberalism will always obscure class relations. These logics tell us that if we ask politely, say the magic word, and beg the ruling class might spare us our lives. Liberalism both obscures and deeply entrenches us into social systems, convincing us that one day we will be granted freedom by our oppressors. If you speak to organizers in the community, those who are most marginalized, those who have little left to lose, they will tell you that these theatrics mean nothing.

Grounded in this reality, it is our responsibility as student organizers to create economies of care and intellectualism (grounded in those who came before us) as we ourselves would never be legitimized by the apparatus which wanted us lifeless. And that is what we did. Every available opportunity, including the majority of our meals and evenings, was spent in communion with one another. This sometimes meant planning, analyzing, and principled debate. Praxis demands we bring our people in. It is a laborious intelligence that requires trust in one another. We work to include every student and all of our people into this intelligence. Our tenacity was visible by the huge risks we took: occupying the board of trustees room,

blocking a room, and other forms of direct action. Yet the vast majority of our labor was unseen. Despite the further marginalization of this work, we knew that in the midst of an economic and ecological collapse, when the university sent students home back into communities ravaged by empire's necropolitics, the knowledge of how to build a resistance premised on an economy of care were the skills students needed. The reality of a bloodthirsty empire demands we be ruthless with our survival, and by extension our communion.

## Activism and Participatory Activism

### Professor X

The demands raised by our students targeted and exposed one of the sites of power of the university administration—decision making. Our university's mission and programs encourage students to voice their opinions, to “express themselves,” to become “global citizens,” but the administration has systematically kept students from key decision bodies. Such stonewalling reads as hypocrisy at best, and as a concerted effort to disempower students at worst. We have seen students heralded as agents of change until they question the foundations of our failing empire and its institutions. Faculty allies firmly believe that educational institutions should provide the necessary spaces for participatory decision-making in order to support each individual's right to political expression and/or their demands for change. The scholarship and documentation of the Civil Rights Movements (often celebrated on paper by neoliberal administrators) should serve as guiding principles in classrooms to craft strategies to fight against injustice and systemic racism. The writings of Black and Latinx activists have always given teachers the necessary historical grounding to advocate for social change, for economic justice, and for the end of white supremacy. By repressing this legacy, or by commodifying it, the neoliberal university hinders students who might strive to conceive of alternatives to the dire reality that condemns millions to poverty.

Students' activism has challenged, and continues to challenge, the positionality of faculty, who do not represent students' diverse histories in their classrooms, nor their aspirations and urgency to change the world. Students are often not treated as scholars, researchers, peers, or members of a collective, seeking to find urgent answers to the needs and demands of their communities. On the contrary, more than once during the protests on our campus, students were reminded in meetings with faculty and administration, of their “responsibility” to conform to often nebulous definitions of “appropriate behavior”: in other words, a student who listens and learns but does not question or challenge; a student who celebrates the institution's accomplishments but does not demand curricular changes nor question allocations of resources; a student who respects (uncritically) an instructor's “expertise” to the subordination of their own.

During the last two years, as a group of students worked tirelessly to build a Critical Global Ethnic Studies concentration, they were made painfully aware that

university programs are not shaped by the needs and desires of a new generation but by the structures of power which uphold a vision of the university according to financial interests and public reputation. As David Harvey reminded us, neoliberalism is only interested in granting rights or freedoms to those “whose income, leisure and security need no enhancing” (38). Neoliberalism represses solidarity movements by championing the fear-based discourse that there is no alternative, that there is no other way of doing things. The neoliberal university is committed to domesticating a new generation of scholars, many of whom come from communities who have experienced the violent occupation of their lands by colonial or imperial forces, who are angered by the strategic inaction (or cultural and material appropriation) of administrators and faculty who profit from backroom negotiations, corrupt promotion proceedings, and unilateral decision making.

The neoliberal university undermines its students’ academic and personal growth by not letting them devise new strategies for survival. As the university was beginning to plan the twenty-year celebration of its founding, students mobilized because they wanted to be part of a much-needed transformation, one that could prepare the institution to respond to an ongoing crisis of inequality, poverty, and racism facing all but the most wealthy in the US. Their demands and hope, voiced insistently and with all the weight of their historical precision, were given lip service but, ultimately, the response was received by student activists as timid, insufficient, and disingenuous.

What’s more, the marginalization of and disciplinary threats against activist students, when their activities intensified, were deployed on our campus. Administrators used hurtful and traumatizing language to discourage students from publicly restating their demands, attempting to break up the often frail solidarity that characterizes social movements. Ploys to recruit supporters to defend the “status quo” were also utilized, and those loyal were rewarded to the detriment of the university’s social justice mission. Students have stated that: “We know and have re(lived) the reality that our liberation will not be found with the neoliberal university.” They are right! The historical validity of this affirmation is undeniable. It appears that students will only be able to conceive of worlds in which large portions of the population have a voice only outside of the neoliberal university. Cornel West has sharply described the dangers of corporate management in all facets of life, including academia: “Corporate power—with its plutocratic, patriarchal, and pigmentocratic realities—lessens the abilities of citizens and workers to have a meaningful voice in shaping their destiny” (viii).

## Choosing to Inherit Our Foremothers' Internationalism through Third World Studies

Victoria M. Huynh

*To arrive at proletarian class positions, the class instinct of proletarians only needs to be educated; the class instinct of the petty bourgeoisie, and hence of intellectuals, has, on the contrary, to be revolutionized.*

—Louis Althusser

When daughters of Third-Worlded peoples enter higher education, they must confront their role in US academia, the largest think tank for manufacturing consent for US aggression on their people. On one hand, to be *given* (un)freedom at the university, they must disavow the revolutions their people fought for and assimilate. On the other hand, the daughter who chooses internationalist struggle as her teacher, inherits an (im)possible task (Boggs 148). Dubbed the “guerilla intellectual” by Walter Rodney or the “new intellectual” by Antonio Gramsci, they must face the contradiction that is education for liberation or liberal reformism.

I am one of those daughters, and in our time co-leading this movement, my peers and I chose education for liberation. A daughter of the US war in Viet Nam and Cambodia, I searched for the work of revolutionaries amongst my people, who taught me that “there can be no revolution without revolutionary theory.” That we should not allow US academia to antagonize us from theoretical study—which is not confined to the university setting but is inseparable from struggle amongst the people—which centralizes struggle for concrete transformation outside of the university. Instead, I learned about the ways internationalist women before me repurposed education to create classrooms in every pocket of society for struggle. In particular, Viet, Cambodian, and Lao women studied political economy through underground workers-led classrooms, literacy campaigns for the youth, and political agricultural programs, all as the safekeepers of revolution from the home, hidden from the US-backed compradors. The Viet victory, in alignment with China, Korea, Cuba, and the anti-imperialist Global South over the American imperialists is the (feminist) internationalist legacy I chose to inherit.

### **Lesson #1: Student Movements Must Confront US Imperialism.**

My quest for knowledge was not one for individualist class ascension as the university would have it; it was the study of how to get each other free. In an Asian American Studies course, our first (and only) Ethnic Studies professor asked us to interrogate our placehood as diaspora-settlers of the US *empire* (and not the US as a nation). I learned that when Black, brown, and indigenous students before me dealt with this same reality in the 1960s, they articulated an internationalist response, calling for students to fight for self-determination in the internal colonies of the US and abroad. Rather than study to reify our belongingness to US empire, to the US university, we should study to challenge US imperialism altogether. It was not enough to live these experiences; we had to actively organize against the conditions that forced Americanness onto us in the first place. As a result, together my peers and I created deinstitutionalized underground spaces, finding political haven in cross-campus conferences and

community organizing meetings. We spent time building community with imperialized, communities of color organizers in Orange County and more. So that when our own student leadership of Black and Third-Worlded women converged, we made explicit that the push for Africana and Ethnic Studies needed to yield self-determination. We heeded Okiihiro's call for Third World Studies, not for "identity politics, multiculturalism, or intellectual affirmative action. Third World studies is not a gift of white liberals to benighted colored folk to right past wrongs; Third World studies is not a minor note in a grand symphony of US history" (1). Our Third World Studies would seek to redistribute resources to the communities and utilize knowledge to grow the power of the people, rather than build up individuals for class ascension.

### **Lesson #2: Student Movements Must Confront US Liberalism.**

But coming face to face with an institution practiced in its ability to strategically resolve what they reduced to "conflict" between administration and students, we watched the liberal SLAC dilute and gradually **(dis)recognize** our demands for CGES, Critical Black Studies faculty, and material BIPOC resources. I borrow from what Elizabeth Rubio calls liberal (mis)recognition, which describes how liberalism cannot make sense of organizing that exposes the violence of itself as the foundational ideology of capitalism, in which it reifies racialized, gendered categorization of people to dominate them. As the US did post-World War II to preserve the image of the benevolent US empire, the shift towards multiculturalism domestically also defines SUA's relations. While the liberal SLAC may recognize student demands for inclusion, equity, and representation, anything that challenges the violence of liberalism in itself, particularly when they are embodied by racialized, gendered actors, is (dis)recognized and diffused. Hence, to delegitimize our demands for a self-determined CGES concentration and center, they employed the violent caricaturization of the Black women in our leadership. In meeting rooms and in public announcements, they obligated leadership to empathize and tend to the administration and their "shortcomings," to help them "understand." Staff, faculty, and administration reassured us that they "appreciated" our labor. But our "inability" to pacify and *liberalize* ourselves to predetermined, domesticated liberal subject-caricatures of the "nonviolent" Mammy; the assimilated, docile Model Minority; and more... in turn, reeled in criticisms of our leadership's "violence," "terrorism," "overdramaticism," "irrationality." It reached the point that when the president announced his "new" initiatives in the summer, those around us encouraged us to celebrate... the violent appropriation and exploitation of our racialized, feminized labor without question or protest.

### **Lesson #3: US Imperialism is Not Safe from Femme-led Student Movements**

As principled self-criticism requires, there are endless ways we could have done differently. We confronted liberalism and watched it visibilize us for its needs—until we had strayed too far away from their offer for paradigmatic liberal belonging. But because we approximated the rejection of the settler university—identifying it for its roots in stolen land, imperialist knowledge production to sanctify war, the militarization of our communities, and more—we positioned ourselves as new intellectuals, as guerilla intellectuals. We came to understand that our fight for people's liberation can never be won within the university. Because we chose our foremothers' struggle against imperialism and its manifestations in this space, we most importantly—and unforgivingly—chose love for our people. There is a stronger front that has yet to [dialectically] emerge, as we did from the anti-imperialist pre-consciousness we inherited.

And time and time again: we would still choose liberation.

### **Grounding Movement in Community, Generating Power**

The tranquil and placid publicities of Soka University of America obfuscate a terrain of revolutionary struggle against a reactionary hegemony. In the current world order, where liberal multiculturalism and "non-confrontational" notions of peace are hailed as the penultimate markers of progress, our struggle, the struggle against a capitalist-racist-imperialist-heteropatriarchal university/empire, is that of the world's people. Although the specificities of our material conditions (a newly-built 20-year old already highly-ranked private SLAC with the second largest endowment per student in the US and a uniquely almost 50% "international" student demographic) may be distinctive, our struggles and experiences may nonetheless stimulate pedagogies of resistance under any number of conditions.

Although our ultimate goal of creating the Critical Global Ethnic Studies concentration at our SLAC was not realized, we were able to accomplish a great deal with our pedagogies of resistance. Our revolutionary power can be concretely measured by the changes we made in our university and the ways in which we forced our university to respond to demands. Our coordinated efforts garnered broad-based student and faculty support. Our student-organized conference had a turnout of over half the SUA student population; students' direct action shut down classes for a week and caused broad anxiety, especially among administrators and faculty; students were presented as intellectual authorities in front of the campus/administration/faculty on multiple occasions; our work resulted in the reorganization of student affairs, the hiring of a "manager for diversity initiatives and community building," a change in hiring protocols, and mandatory

implicit bias training. Even the erection of the illegitimate administrators' Center for Race, Ethnicity, and Human Rights is evidence of the threat of our revolutionary power.

Our highest valued returns however are non-material. Reviewing our institution as a stable entity rather than dialectically, or in constant flux between liberatory and reactionary forces, might give the illusion of an unmovable subjugation. Yet this could not be further from the truth. While the administrators' center is an effort to divert liberatory praxis (as are the moves to mandate implicit bias training and hire a diversity manager, discredited increasingly as superficial tools that improve optics rather than effect necessary revolutionary change), our ability to generate power can never be surrendered. The exercise and generation of power is one that took practice but amalgamated over time. First, in the exercising of our self-determination and the expression of our subjectivity as colonized subjects. Second, in the intentional building of networks and coalitions which linked struggles amongst students of multiple oppressions and backgrounds as well as faculty of different standings. Third, in the grounded praxis inspired by the love for our people—within and without the university. At each level, we risked our standing with the university. For many of us who attach our livelihood to the university, retaliation meant pushing the boundaries of our disposability. Still, we students and faculty chose solidarity and liberation. We made choices rooted in our own dignity as colonized subjects and in honor of our peoples. We forged practices grounded in our political ethical commitments and the love of our peoples. Our generation of community is neither bound to the university that has never cared to fully imagine us, nor does it end here.

## Acknowledgment

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# RADICAL TEACHER

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

## The Corporatization of the Liberal Arts College: Even the Class Notes!

by Richie Zweigenhaft



"UNIVERSITY AS FACTORY? NO!" BY JOSH MACPHEE VIA JUST SEEDS

I've been writing the class notes (class of '67) for the alumni magazine at Wesleyan University (my alma mater) for the last two decades. The guy who was our class secretary from 1967 until 2002 was unable to attend our 35th reunion, and someone asked me to do the notes. I agreed to do it that one time and, surprise, I have been writing them ever since. I've enjoyed it more than I expected.

For whom am I writing? Well, I've mostly assumed that I write for my classmates. The notes serve to keep us informed about what we've been up to—jobs, promotions, marriages, divorces, various accomplishments, like books published or climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro, and bragging opportunities about children and grandchildren. More recently, I've had to write more often about retirements, and about deaths—of classmates, of spouses, and, at times, of children.

I also have used the notes as a chance to continue our liberal arts experience by sharing our ideas on various topics. At times, I have used the college Listserv system to ask my classmates questions like "what is your most vivid memory from our time at school (that you can share)?" and "what courses did you not take that you wish you had?" Their responses have made for some lively columns.

At some level, I'm sure I realized that the powers that be at the college saw my notes, and the magazine itself, as something else—a way to keep alumni connected and, ultimately, as a way to encourage them either sooner or later to donate money to the school. My goals for the notes, and such institutional goals to nurture potential donors, have for the most part not been in conflict—until recently. Either I have become more political in my notes, or the college has become more cautious, or both. And, more broadly, it seems to me that this little corner of academe reflects the larger, more troubling, corporatization of the liberal arts college.

For the most part, the notes I have written three or four times a year over the last two decades have gone without any editing other than spotting typos or calling for clarifications here and there. Once, when recounting a visit to the college for a reunion, I described sitting for an hour or so at a coffee shop on campus, just hanging out, talking to whichever old classmates wandered by. I wrote that it felt just like my undergraduate days when I would sit in what was then the only coffee house on campus (the memorable Downey House—my friends and I even had a song about it), drinking coffee and shooting the shit with whomever happened by. The editor changed "shooting the shit" to "shooting the breeze." This was a reminder to me that the editorial powers that be did not want to offend any readers. I was a bit surprised, but did not think much about it.

Then, a few years ago, in 2017, I ran into a bigger editorial conflict.

My notes were due in a few weeks, and the cupboard was bare. One morning three different friends emailed me an article that had appeared in *Slate* titled "The Liberal Arts Football Factory: Is Wesleyan University compromising its independent reputation and academic excellence to build an athletic cash cow?" (<https://slate.com/culture/2017/12/wesleyan-university-football-is-good->

[business.html](#)). The author spelled out, in rich detail, just how Wesleyan had turned around its traditionally dismal athletic program to become a dominant one, not only winning the Little Three (Amherst, Williams, Wesleyan) in football but with nationally ranked teams in many sports (the college is Division III) and even some national champions. The story, as he told it, entailed the hiring of a new football coach, who then became the athletic director, and the commitment from the institution to recruit athletes more vigorously. This included support from the school's president and the admissions department to accept athletes who were substantially weaker academically than the other students.

For example, the author claimed that admissions expectations had been lowered for about 70 student-athletes per year, and that athletes scored much lower on SATS than non-athletes (he reported that those who play the three "helmeted" sports of football, hockey, and lacrosse scored 300 points lower than other students—they averaged 1100 on the SATS as opposed to 1400). He concluded that "Wesleyan and its brethren [other schools doing the same thing] have built what is essentially an affirmative action program for athletes."

I taught at Guilford College, a small Quaker liberal arts college, for 45 years, and throughout that time I played basketball three days a week and I attended many sports events on campus. I consider myself very much a sports fan. Still, I was stunned when I read the article about Wesleyan. I live in North Carolina, where many of my friends and neighbors have come to expect, and are happy to see, Duke and the University of North Carolina do whatever is necessary to enroll the best basketball players in the country (at Duke, especially, which in recent years has specialized in basketball players who only play for one year before going pro; whether they are capable of completing the requirements for a bachelor's degree is for some players quite moot). But Wesleyan? I saw this as a chance for a healthy discussion among my classmates (and a way to resolve the paucity of information I had for the forthcoming class notes deadline). I had recently seen many of these guys (Wesleyan did not go co-ed until a year or two after I graduated) at our 50th reunion, and over the course of the reunion weekend we had numerous lively debates about whether the school was too progressive, or not progressive enough, why it wasn't ranked higher in the annual ratings of colleges, and whether it was allocating its resources wisely. Throughout that weekend, my classmates showed themselves to be articulate, opinionated, and in agreement on few issues.

So, I decided to send them a link to the *Slate* article, to ask them their thoughts, and to use their inevitable divergent views as the basis for my class notes. Many wrote back, with far more of them supportive than critical of the school having turned around its athletic program. A few, however, like me, were less than enthusiastic about the trade-offs that had been part of this transition. I wrote my notes, expressing my views, and summarizing their views. I thought it made for a thought-provoking column, one that showed the complexity of the issues involved, that my classmates cared deeply about the college, and that they took very different positions from each other (and from me) about the changes that had taken place. It

seemed to me to be a nice departure from the usual reporting of achievements and awards, retirements, and grandchildren. I promised in the column's conclusion to continue the discussion next time. . . .

However, after I submitted the notes electronically on a Sunday, the next morning I had a phone call from one of the editors. I was told that the class notes were not meant for controversy, or to share differences of opinion, but, rather, to share information about classmates. They would not run the notes in the magazine.

I acknowledged that it was their editorial decision, but said that I wanted to share these notes with my classmates, even if not in the magazine itself but only by email using the Listserv—after all, I had invited them to participate in a discussion about the article and they would be wondering what others had to say. The editor told me they would check and get back to me. A day later I was told that I could use the group email system to send out the notes.

I was encouraged to submit an alternate set of "traditional" notes to the magazine, and I did—a brief submission primarily about the death of one of my classmates. I also sent my classmates what I labeled in the email as "the notes from the alumni underground."

I heard back from many, some thanking me for informing them about the issue (and its apparent effects on campus), some addressing how the school does or should recruit athletes, and some expressing disappointment that the alumni magazine had not run the column. The latter comments ranged from bemused ("Hard to see why Wes would object to this discussion. Risk aversion rules.") to angry ("It struck me as sad and disappointing, as well as infuriating, that the one institution we (naively) thought was independent, goofy, 'out there', different from the Ivys and wanna-be Ivys, is falling by the wayside and joining the crowd, catering to athletics to boost revenue, dumbing-down the magazine to keep the troops asleep. Seriously. Censorship -- at WESLEYAN? Forcing you to send your content 'from the underground'?! That's worse than lowering academic standards for football players. Let my classmates go!").

It was a lesson for me. I was not surprised when the Interim President at Michigan State squelched "long-form essays" in that school's alumni magazine about how the Larry Nassar sexual abuse case had hurt the university, or that he rejected a cover image that showed a woman wearing teal lipstick, which the sexual abuse survivors were wearing as a show of solidarity ("Get that teal shit out of here" he allegedly said; <https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2018/06/21/sources-bad-news-cut-michigan-state-alumni-magazine>). What does one expect from a behemoth school like Michigan State that is under the thumb of state legislators? But good old liberal arts progressive Wesleyan, running scared of some reasoned discussion about decisions related to admissions?

More recently, on two occasions I have been asked to remove or change wording that was deemed as too political from my notes. In one case, in writing about my decision to retire, I noted that like many retired people, I had written a memoir about how I had belatedly realized that I might have been, back in 1974, the first Jewish faculty member

hired at Guilford College, a Quaker school (*Jews, Palestinians, and Friends: 45 Years at a Quaker College*). I informed my classmates that "writing this book helped to take my mind off the woes of my little Quaker college, which is struggling mightily to stay afloat, and also helped take my mind off the woes of our country as we try to avoid a government characterized by fascism and support for white supremacy." The nice young newly appointed editor told me that the last part, about fascism and support for white supremacy, had been cut. As she explained: "You'll notice that one line was cut by my bosses, in the interest of trying to keep class notes as apolitical as possible."

The other editorial correction was, again, based on a political comment that I slipped into my notes. This time, I described a visit from a classmate, and after noting that he and his wife live in Palm Springs, Florida, I parenthetically included "Yes, they are neighbors of Voldemort" (I wrote these notes before I learned that Neera Tanden, Biden's rejected cabinet-level nominee to direct the Office of Management and Budget, also had referred to our former President as Voldemort.) I was asked to revise or omit the reference. I proposed changing Voldemort to "whatshisname." That was not acceptable either.

Over time, I have come to think about what seem to be increased concerns by the editorial powers that be at the Wesleyan alumni magazine as part of a larger problem taking place in academe, not only at large universities but at small liberal arts colleges. Many have written about the corporatization of the academy. In one survey by *Inside Higher Education* that explored the most significant changes in higher education over the years, "corporatization of the university" was one of the most frequently cited, and definitely the response that elicited the most passionate responses (<https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/stratedgy/bemoaning-corporatization-higher-education>). Many decisions seem to be made using what have come to be corporate values. Even at the little Quaker college at which I taught, which prides itself on the many admirable values that have mostly been followed throughout the institution's long history, in recent years some administrators who have lost their jobs have been escorted off campus immediately upon learning of their termination. Some have been asked to sign nondisclosure agreements in order to receive severance pay, and they have been told that they would lose their severance pay if they subsequently set foot on campus. That is, some employees who worked at the college for many decades, much longer than any of the most current wave of senior administrators, have been treated as suspected corporate criminals.

Writing the class notes, then, generally an innocuous and noncontroversial task, has, like so many things, become part of a larger more polarized political process, one which seems to be driven by the desire to avoid anything that might offend those on the other side of the giant divide that permeates the culture. I know that colleges are in trouble financially, I understand that those making decisions want to avoid offending their many constituents (students, their parents, alumni, faculty, staff, members of the Board) who are, like the country itself, more and more divided in their views. Still, in the liberal

arts tradition I experienced as an undergraduate, differing points of view were assumed, and valued. I hate to see liberal arts colleges so nervous that when it comes to differing points of view risk aversion reaches all the way to the class notes.



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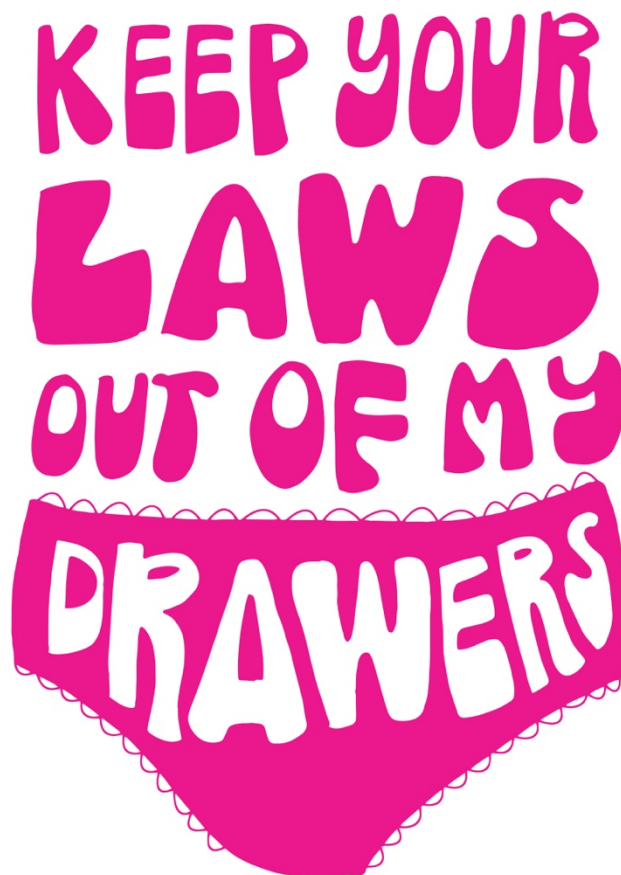
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# RADICAL TEACHER

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## All Power to All the People: WGS and Feminist Pedagogy in the Era of the Alt-Right

by Zakiya R. Adair



"KEEP YOUR LAWS OFF MY DRAWERS" BY LESLEY NUMBERS VIA JUST SEEDS

Poet, activist-scholar Audre Lorde (1984) asked, "What does it mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy?" Lorde first posed this question as part of a talk that she had been asked to give for New York University's Institute for the Humanities. Lorde was frustrated with the conference's lack of intersectional feminist participation, writing, "to read this program is to assume that lesbian and black women have nothing to say of existentialism, the erotic, women's culture and silence, developing feminist theory of heterosexuality and power" (25). Lorde answered her question with, "it means that only the most narrow perimeters of change are possible and allowable" (25). Over thirty years later Lorde's searing indictment against tokenism is relevant to the precarity of Women's and Gender Studies (WGS) and its place in higher education. WGS has been institutionalized in colleges and universities throughout the United States for over forty years. Emerging out of the 1960s Civil Rights and Women's Rights movements and activism, WGS was an answer to student demands for diverse faculty and for a curriculum that addressed systemic issues of racism, homophobia, sexism, and classism among others. But institutionalization has also made WGS invested in maintaining academic institutions that were never designed for their inclusion. Student activists wanted faculty who would incorporate feminist pedagogy to dismantle hierarchal learning models; they wanted WGS departments that would rid institutions of systemic inequities.

To do this, many WGS programs sought departmentalization as a primary goal to secure a more permanent place in colleges and universities. However this place was often contingent on how well WGS demonstrated its value to the institution. Because colleges and universities use neoliberal metrics to determine the economic value of departments, WGS -- usually one of the smallest departments -- can rarely demonstrate a large enough major pool to fulfill a positive economic impact so it must find other means to secure its place. The place, on the margins of the college or university, usually includes doing the bulk of the diversity work of the institution. This includes organizing yearly campus events on race, gender, and sexuality, putting on a full program of events for Women's History Month, and creating and facilitating workshops and or dialogues with other departments on issues related to sexism and diversity. If there is a violent local or national incident against women or LGBTQ+ persons then academic institutions call on their WGS departments to speak on the matter. To be clear, this work is a part of the ethos of WGS -- it is ingrained in our scholarship and teaching -- but when WGS is restrained in the narrow perimeters of doing the diversity work of the institution the possibility for radical change is limited and it is in this context that WGS has been tokenized.

To offset this vulnerability, many WGS departments pushed colleges and universities to make analysis of gender a part of the required general education curricula; this requirement ensured that nearly every student would have to take at least one WGS course to finish their degree objectives. Students usually fulfill this requirement by taking the Introduction to Women's Studies course. But

teaching the Introduction to Women's Studies course also exposed WGS faculty to resistant students who resented having to take the course. This put WGS in the awkward position of trying to balance its radical and interventionist roots within the limits of the neoliberal college/university.

WGS has experienced many challenges to its institutionalization, but this moment, in the era of the Alt-Right and in a context where neoliberal policies have reshaped higher education, feels particularly challenging. The presidential campaign and election of Donald Trump were one among several globally successful elections to office of right-wing, xenophobic candidates. In Brazil, England, and the United States, these elected officials have pushed through policies that impinge on the rights of marginalized people and that virtually criminalize non-white, non-cis-straight persons. In the United States, Trump declared his candidacy for President by focusing on Mexican immigration, and by calling Mexican immigrants in the U.S. rapists and criminals. He made frequent misogynistic comments and openly ridiculed women who came forward with allegations of sexual assault. His "bad hombre" and "nasty women" rhetoric found a welcome home among white supremacists. Throughout his time in office, Trump employed racist, draconian measures to police brown, black, and queer persons by constructing a border wall between the United States and Mexico, as well as numerous executive orders that undid decades of Civil Rights and LGBTQ rights. Colleges and universities have been a primary target of Trump's regime. Trump's false rhetoric that Xstudies (departments that are interdisciplinary and that have at their core critical analysis and engagement with institutional systems of inequalities) are a tool of the ultra-left to brainwash students has ignited the student base of the Alt-Right. His hyperbole played to the built-up frustrations and anger of white Americans, many of whom were young students who believed that they were losing their long held place of dominance in colleges and universities. My article examines the institutionalization of WGS and gender as a required general education course. This article also explores the potentials for radical feminist pedagogy amid the most recent rise of the Alt-Right, and how that rise has impacted the discipline. I situate my personal experience as a black feminist scholar alongside the institutionalization of WGS as a way to highlight some of the struggles of marginalized faculty working in WGS in a neoliberal context.

## Neoliberalism and WGS

One cannot understand the rise of the Alt-Right in the academy without understanding neoliberalism. Wendy Brown (2015) asserts that the premise of public higher education has been to provide citizens with language and skills to understand and interpret the world, but the corporatization of higher education has "given way to a formulation of education as primarily valuable to human capital development, where human capital is what the individual, the business world, and the state seek to enhance in order to maximize competitiveness" (176). Under the neoliberal regime, the distinction between the social, the economic, and the political is collapsing in what

constitutes the marketization of the state, meaning that no longer does the state regulate the markets but instead it subjects itself to their laws. Neoliberalism shifted the way colleges and universities were run. The neoliberal framework in institutions of higher learning occurs in three distinct phases—the market, hyper-individualism, and competition. In a neoliberal context, higher education is market-driven when colleges and universities are pressured to meet a business-type model where curriculum and intellectual production are shaped and contingent on student demand and government policy. Hyper-individualism occurs when faculty are pushed to conduct and produce research that can be quantified by citation counts, where publishing as a single author is seen as more prestigious or rigorous, and community engagement and activism are weighed only as service. Competition occurs when departments are required to vie for limited institutional resources. On a yearly basis colleges and universities count how many majors a department has, and these numbers determine faculty lines and a department's budget. The irony of WGS's strategy to require gender as a general education requirement and to house that requirement in the department is that many of those students do not declare WGS as a major. This means that while WGS has expanded its reach, the numbers do not count.

For WGS, the shift in public higher education toward a market-driven model has also presented challenges to the kinds of dialogues we engage in our classrooms and especially in our pedagogy. This ideological shift was a prelude to the current moment we find ourselves in regarding the rise of Alt-Right rhetoric and neoconservative student groups, many of whom try to use the classroom as a space to promote their hate-fueled discourse. I have taught the Introduction to WGS course many times and at different types of institutions. Throughout the years, I have dealt with numerous microaggressions and incidents of overt resistance from students. The intensity and frequency of these attacks have only increased since the election of Trump. Common resistance that I have had to negotiate has included students who engage in disruptive behavior that has involved rude and dismissive comments that challenged my authority in the class and derogatory opinion-based statements on the course materials.

Frequent end of the semester student evaluation comments have included: "the professor should allow students to present alternative sides to issues pertaining to police brutality and sexual assault"; "professor should smile"; "professor should not talk about race so much." Sometimes the resistance is less overt and appears in the continuous referral to me as Miss or Mrs. instead of Professor or Doctor. Often, the opposition is more subtle, such as a series of microaggressions cloaked as inquiry and fact-checking. Sometimes the resistance is a deafening silence projected from a wall of bodies in the back of the classroom that refuse to participate. So, what can be done about this? WGS should be careful about our relationship to the larger institution; we must carefully weigh our desire for institutional security with our innate challenge of systems of inequality. As a discipline that critically interrogates relationships of power between institutions

and individuals, WGS is now in a conundrum in terms of our institutional responsibilities and trappings. At times conflict arises between what WGS aims to do and what the college and larger institution will allow. The precarity of the current moment is increased by the steady appropriation of the language of social justice by the Alt-Right to firm up and increase their presence on college campuses.

To be clear, WGS is not the only discipline under attack. In the current neoliberal context, many humanities-based disciplines and all the Xstudies have been impacted. This has occurred alongside the neoliberal college's rebranding of itself as a bastion for interdisciplinary and intersectional diversity. In addition to the neoliberal marketization of colleges/universities, President Trump has sanctioned white supremacist discourse and provided a platform for dangerous conspiracy theories that colleges and universities impinge upon free speech. This has created a space for the appropriation by the Alt-Right to use neoliberal framing of intersectionality and inclusion to inject themselves and their hate as a part of a diverse intellectual community. Rembert Browne (2016) asserts that Trump won the presidency because he encouraged sexists also to be racist and racists to be homophobic. This is what Brown theorizes as the intersectionality of hate.

The impact of the Alt-Right on college campuses appears in several forms: as invited campus speakers and visiting fellows, as official student campus organizations, as individual students who surveil and stalk WGS faculty. This is done through recording lectures and posting the contents to anonymous racist online platforms. One popular claim by Alt-Right students is that their opinions, their white culture, and racist memorabilia and statues are being erased by a far-left collaboration between education, media, and government. Ironically, it is now people of color and non-binary, non-cis-straight persons who are accused of being snowflakes for demanding safe spaces, without recognizing that there are no so-called safe spaces for people of color. In fact it is the alt-right who have behaved like snowflakes in that any expression of progressive views in the classroom supposedly robs them of their rights to free speech. The language of political correctness, which was initially developed by people on the left to mock dogmatism amongst the ranks, is now used by conservatives on the right to claim victimization and persecution by the left for their views, particularly as they relate to race. As a result, WGS is in a paradoxical space: both more firmly established within academic institutions -- requiring us to be self-reflective about our disciplinary goals within the current neoliberal corporatization of higher education -- and struggling with the right-wing target this incorporation and visibility has engendered.

## Teaching WGS in the age of Trump and the rise of the Alt-Right

As market driven institutions colleges and universities must demonstrate for prospective parents and students the economic viability of a college degree. Most do this by making a direct association between certain majors and in-demand careers. The economic viability argument usually



favors STEM and business majors as the best bet for prospective students to ensure a high paying job upon graduation. This argument relies on an unstable and ever-changing job market. Another consequence of the market driven approach is that many colleges and universities use decreases in fiscal budgets to justify the merging or closing of departments. The pandemic caused by the novel Coronavirus has revealed the vulnerability and disparities in colleges and universities. Nationwide WGS and other liberal arts departments have been closed or merged, faculty have been fired, and hiring in these departments has been frozen. Now more than ever it is crucial that WGS departments function as a critique of the institution and push for equity. The WGS push for gender as a general education requirement has allowed WGS the opportunity to reach a lot of students but an unexpected outcome has also been less of an opportunity to remake the institution.

A significant change to WGS has been the steady depoliticization of its curriculum, in other words, the abandonment of an intersectional economic and political approach to WGS. Numerous factors have contributed to the current depoliticization of WGS, perhaps the most significant being the relationship between second-wave feminism and neoliberalism. Nancy Fraser (2009) argues that during the 1960s, second-wave feminism politicized the personal and "expanded the meaning of justice, reinterpreting as injustices social inequalities that had been overlooked, tolerated or rationalized since time immemorial" (103). Fraser asserts that the rise of second-wave feminism coincided with a shift in capitalism towards privatization; "what had begun as a radical countercultural movement was now en route to becoming a broad-based mass social phenomenon. Attracting adherents of every class, ethnicity, nationality, and political ideology, feminist ideas found their way into every nook and cranny of social life and transformed the self-understandings of all whom they touched" (107-108). This overdependence on individualism has created a space for Alt-Right students' demands for equal representation and inclusion of their ideas and personal experiences.

The Alt-Right has been highly active in identifying and targeting departments, classes, and faculty in areas that they deem anti-white. They utilize social media and political strategies to advocate the firing of faculty and defunding of WGS programs, institutes, and departments. In the neoliberal college, tuition is a contract wherein the student/parent is the consumer, and the faculty and administrator are the customer representative. They assert that their tuition dollars should ensure equal inclusion of their hate fueled ideas and rhetoric. For example, in 2019, the conservative group Campus Reform published on their website a full list of events planned for Women's History Month at The College of New Jersey. The list contained full details of the names of events and the speakers and the locations. Although there were no explicit threats, the very fact that the list was published as important information for concerned citizens who want to document "leftist abuse and bias" on college campuses was a mark of the market-driven neoliberal college that asserts that it is the tax-dollar of the community that goes into funding public colleges and universities and as such, they have a right to determine and

monitor events, classes, and organizations. In addition to WGS departments and faculty being under threat from corporatist neoliberalism, this model has generally coalesced with right-wing politics. This political arm has a pro-corporate, small government approach; these ideas are often used as a way of promoting fiscal and moral responsibility to public colleges and universities, who are dependent on state and federal funding.

## The Many Roles of the WGS Professor

I obtained my PhD. in Women's Studies at a time when only eleven universities across the United States offered the Ph.D. in the discipline. When I was on the job market, this created a significant hurdle for me in relation to my peers who graduated from more traditional fields like History or English. I was often tasked with emphasizing the relevance and adaptability of my field of inquiry to potential employers. Some of my graduate school mentors were not optimistic about my ability to get a tenure track job where my tenure was exclusively in a Women's Studies department. They cautioned me to focus on History, my second discipline. My entire graduate school training had been shaped to conform to the field of History, which, at that time, was how many WGS doctoral programs were organized. Since I had expressed an interest in pursuing a career in academia, I was told that I had to follow the scholarly expectations of History so that I could demonstrate for potential departments that my teaching and research would align with an established scholarly field. I was advised to do this because colleges and universities would be reluctant to hire a graduate in Women's Studies.

Being both outside but inside the History Department was a challenge, but I did what I needed to do to ensure the best opportunity to get a tenure track job in academia by shaping my pedagogy in accordance with the standard pedagogy of the History discipline. I struggled to merge feminist pedagogy with History pedagogy. The main issue revolved around feminist pedagogy that is student-centered and seeks to dismantle classroom hierarchies contrasting with History pedagogy that asserts the instructor as the head source of knowledge. Prior to Trump's campaign and election, I was able to merge these two approaches. I used in-class small group discussions and paired historical articles with feminist theory as an effective practice of this method. After Trump's election, I had to provide a lot more structure so as not to encourage Alt-Right aligned students with a method to incorporate their opinions. Masquerading as interested students they disrupt lectures and challenge course content making it difficult to maintain a feminist classroom where everyone gets a voice and where the knowledge that they bring to the class is acknowledged and respected. I have had to adapt my teaching style so that diversity and inclusion are not misinterpreted to include hate.

Feminist pedagogy calls for a democratic learning structure where the power of the professor is de-centered. This type of pedagogy breaks up teacher/learner hierarchies, but it also requires the instructor to occupy many different roles. The Introduction to WGS course requires the instructor to adapt quickly to students who

have vastly different experiences and interests in WGS curriculum. At my current institution, all undergraduate students must complete a set of liberal learning courses as part of their general education program, one of which is under civic responsibility. Students can fulfill the civic responsibility requirement by taking one class that is designated as either gender, global, or race and ethnicity. Students can take other WGS courses to fulfill the gender requirement, and some of these courses are offered as more advanced seminars, but as a rule at my college students usually take the Introduction to WGS course to fulfill this requirement. My department requires that all full-time faculty teach the Introduction course at least once. I am a recently tenured professor in Women's Gender and Sexuality Studies and African American Studies; I have taught the Introduction course twice at my current institution and a few times at my previous institution. The Introduction to WGS course is an overview of various feminist topics, themes, theories, and history of the women's movements, the Civil Rights movement, and the LGBTQ+ movement. Because of the differing types of students and the vast amount of content, the Introduction to WGS is an incredibly challenging course to teach.

Every semester I have taught I have had multiple students break down in my office over personal difficulties: one student expressed suicidal thoughts, another student asked for an incomplete for one of my courses because he was arrested and didn't have money for bail. I had multiple students explain to me in detail about their experience with domestic violence, sexual abuse, and poverty. One student told me they were homeless because their family didn't accept their sexual identity. Each time these confessionals happened, I happily and eagerly stepped up to provide emotional support and resources to help my students. In this sense I am a teacher, an advocate, a counselor, and a crisis negotiator. This is true for many instructors who come from marginalized backgrounds, but it is especially true for WGS instructors. My race and gender identity as a black cis gendered female inspire a trust that is racially familiar, and the content of my course provokes introspection and self-reflection; this made students feel comfortable with me and this dynamic in the classroom is a scenario that is rare in the academy. The emotional labor of occupying multiple roles in the classroom affected my role as a faculty member by increasing my workload. I am happy to do the extra work --caring for my students and being an advocate for them is a big part of why I became a professor -- but colleges and universities are ill equipped to handle the complex needs of students. In a neoliberal college/university emotional labor does not count towards tenure and promotion -- it does not even count as service -- and because this type of labor is usually left to women of color many are not able to complete or satisfy broader college tenure and promotion requirements. I was fortunate to have supportive colleagues and senior mentors that helped me but many do not. Neoliberal measures of progress in academic institutions only include metrics that can be quantified as a benefit to the institution. This makes it even more difficult to matriculate through tenure and provide an intellectually rigorous student-centered feminist course.

Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge (2016) argue that universities and colleges "became important venues for disseminating intersectionality" (32). In the neoliberal corporate model of higher education, colleges can engage and even promote programs that incorporate theories of intersectionality to suit their own aims. I have experienced the distinction between critical inquiry and critical praxis most in my teaching. For example, my pedagogy is informed by black feminist pedagogy that rests on three elements: democratic learning, active participatory learning, social justice epistemology. For me, feminist pedagogy means a constant examination and critique of standard pedagogical practices. I design all my courses as spaces of respect, engagement, and intellectual rigor. This classroom model and pedagogy are not always received well by students, especially in my courses that meet the general education liberal learning requirements. In these courses, where most students are non-majors, I have had to negotiate their resistance to critical reflection on systems of inequality and privilege with my desire to push them past their intellectual boundaries. Yet and still, students will vocalize their resistance to their values being fundamentally challenged in course evaluations.

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For junior and adjunct faculty, the end of semester course evaluation is a significant part of achieving tenure. Many women, people of color, and non-binary non-cis individuals frequently receive lower student evaluation marks than their peers, yet still many institutions continue to require these evaluations as a part of tenure and promotion or in the case of adjunct faculty to determine contract renewal. The fear of negative evaluations looms large, especially in colleges and universities that do not offer other means to evaluate teaching such as the peer review system. When I started teaching, course evaluations were conducted in class and facilitated by the professor. In my experience, the in-person format yielded a higher number of participants, and most importantly, the narrative feedback reflected a greater range of student experience with the course; however currently most institutions including my current one has switched the student evaluation to an online format, which has shifted control and facilitation of the evaluation away from the professor. As previously stated, frequent negative comments that I have received are that my courses focus too much on race; that I do not smile enough; that I do not teach alternative viewpoints on abortion or police brutality. The alternative viewpoint criticism is, once again, a manifestation of the market-driven neoliberal college/university: the student (consumer) has a right to receive an education from the institution (business) that reflects their interests; the professor (customer service agent) is obliged to deliver

these demands to increase student (consumer) satisfaction. This is not to say that courses should not be student-centered -- they should -- but the push to meet the market-driven demands that students enjoy their classes is particularly burdensome to faculty in the studies disciplines who primarily teach courses pertaining to power structures and privilege.

I have struggled to offer classes that adhere in content and form with my feminist beliefs despite my anxiety about the potential harm to my job that negative course evaluations may bring. An example of this struggle occurred when Donald Trump was elected President. In my African American Women's History course (WGS cross-listed with History), I devoted a small amount of time during class for students to discuss their reactions to the election and to also discuss the rhetoric of hate that was a common theme throughout the election process. Many of my students were eager to engage critically, but there were also students who spoke out about their support of Trump and their feelings that they had been largely silenced. I was struck by how easily these students used the language of social justice to defend the intersectionality of hate. These students had a very hard time seeing the contradictions of their defense and claims of censorship.

Alt-Right aligned students believe in the false rhetoric that colleges are liberal-leaning institutions that infringe on their right to free speech. In 2019 President Trump emboldened this when he signed the *Executive Order On Improving Free Inquiry, Transparency, and Accountability at Colleges and Universities* (Trump 2019). The executive order threatened loss of federal research grants to any college or university found to be not in compliance with the First Amendment. This is not new to WGS, but what is new is the election of a president that openly encouraged hate, who stoked racist, homophobic, and xenophobic fears, and who sanctions students' rights to monitor classes and surveil professors who they feel have violated their right to free speech. What this means, in part, is that the university as a place for critical thought, trying out ideas, innovation, social justice, and the vulnerability of embracing failure as a part of inquiry are compromised by the corporate model which involves the "logics of corporate management," wherein "the specific academic or academic practice is to be framed by, or tested against, the strategic objectives of the university" (Clarke 2017 137). In this context, the university as an institution becomes a self-protective entity that seeks to suppress or eliminate that which threatens state funding and or donor support.

A major contribution of WGS to academia and to the larger public comes from BIPOC feminist theory on identity. In the groundbreaking *Combahee River Collective* (CRC) statement (1977), black queer feminists asserted that, "the most profound and potentially most radical politics come from our own identity" (quoted in Taylor, 2017 15-27). The "personal is political" ethos of second wave feminism was a pillar of much of the early curriculum and pedagogy of WGS. This approach was useful but when stripped from its BIPOC queer origins it relied on ambiguous identities and personal experience. Fraser (108) identifies this as "feminist anti-economism resignified." Fraser argues that the language of social justice that is now ingrained in many

WGS departments is the result of neoliberalism's impact on second wave feminism. Fraser (108) writes, "neoliberalism's rise coincided with a major alteration in the political culture of capitalist societies. In this period claims for justice were increasingly couched as claims for the recognition of identity and difference." Fraser contends that this shift transformed second wave feminism "into a variant of identity politics" (108). This variant was devoid of the BIPOC work that black queer feminists did on identity politics to ground the personal in a specific anti-black racist context; without this institutions and alt-right students have been able to co-opt the language of identity politics, which is really a shell that protects their discourse of hate.

Thus, this current moment of neoliberal restructuring is very much connected to shifts in neo-conservatism that emerged post 9/11. Sarah Chinn and Joseph Entin's (2018) arguments about the impact of Trump are useful: "Trump's election does represent something new or at least a newly dramatic intensification: a heightening of the reactionary rhetoric and policies against vulnerable populations" (2).

When I first started teaching as a graduate student, I relied on Paulo Freire's (1968) groundbreaking and transformative *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire's book provided me with a template for how to change the structure of the classroom -- to break up the actual physical space in an effort to decenter the privilege of the professor. Freire's pedagogy did not conform to the standard military-like pedagogy that assumes the student is a blank slate, and the professor is the ultimate source of power and knowledge. Another incredibly influential text for me was bell hooks's (1994) *Teaching to Transgress*. hooks's book was another radical text that, for me, demonstrated how professors could use the content and structure of a course to radically transgress. *Teaching To Transgress* was the first text that I read that discussed the dynamics of teaching while black, and that explored the intimacy of teaching. hooks (1994) writes: "to teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can and must deeply and intimately begin." Feminist pedagogy has inspired many administrators and faculty to adopt a more inclusive and engaged pedagogy. Increasingly, the Alt-Right has used the language of diversity, free speech, open dialogue, and inclusivity as a cloak to hide their racist, homophobic, and sexist ideology. Take, for example, the white supremacist protest and rallies in Charlottesville, VA, in August 2017 (Lind Vox 2017). Organized under the banner "Unite the Right" large numbers of neo-nazi, KKK, white nationalists, and other racist organizations descended on the college town of Charlottesville, Virginia, to protest the planned removal of a statue of Confederate General Robert E. Lee (Lind Vox 2017). In response to the violent protest, where white nationalist James Alex Fields Jr. drove his car into a crowd of counter-protesters killing Heather Heyer and injuring more than a dozen, President Trump declared that there were bad guys on both sides. President Trump's false equivalency is indicative of the Alt-Right strategy to appropriate the language of social justice.

Another significant issue is the institutional co-optation of some of the radical concepts that were foundational to WGS. Concepts like interdisciplinary, engaged teaching,

and diversity are frequently used by many institutions of higher learning to promote the college or university as cutting edge or as an excellent space for undergraduate learning and training. Rarely do women's and gender studies scholars get credit for this contribution. We are told that we should be happy that we have a seat at the table. As a vehicle for discrediting WGS, in 2017, two scholars published a fake article in the journal *Cogent Social Sciences*. Titled "The Conceptual Penis as Social Construct," the article contained numerous jumbled sentences and fake sources. The authors' stated reason for publishing the fake article was a stereotypical representation of gender studies:

We intended to test the hypothesis that flattery of the academic left's moral architecture in general, and of the moral orthodoxy in gender studies in particular, is the overwhelming determiner of publication in an academic journal in the field. That is, we sought to demonstrate that a desire for a certain moral view of the world to be validated could overcome the critical assessment required for legitimate scholarship. Particularly, we suspected that gender studies is crippled academically by an overriding almost-religious belief that maleness is the root of all evil. On the evidence, our suspicion was justified. (Jaschik 2017).

It did not matter that the publication venue that the authors chose was not academic or that they actually paid to publish their article with *Cogent Social Sciences*. The publication of the article confirmed the beliefs of many who were already skeptical of the intellectual rigor of WGS scholarship. And, these attacks have not stopped. In the fall of 2018, three scholars -- James Lindsay, Helen Pluckrose, and Peter Boghossian -- wrote 20 fake papers over the course of a year. The attack on WGS scholarship coincided with Alt-Right attacks on WGS departments as an abuse of state monies allocated to public colleges and universities.

Another aspect of the impact of neoliberal corporatization on WGS is the economic politics of state funding that determine WGS budgetary and fiscal goals each year. For many public colleges and universities this means that it is up to the state to determine the programs that are on the cutting board, and the metrics used to make these decisions follow the neoliberal model that prioritizes a market-based approach over the intrinsic value of learning and creating global citizens. The power of conservative legislators' purse strings is threatening to departments and programs such as WGS. It is also stressful for students who fear department closure or class cancellations because many of them come to WGS looking for a safe haven on college campuses that can feel intimidating and unwelcoming. Following a market-based approach to institutional budgetary and fiscal goals means that WGS departments may find that their request for faculty line hires is scrutinized and denied, or that their annual speaker funds are cut or minimized; this can also mean that WGS does not get full-time administrative support. The implication being that an undergraduate degree in WGS does not lead to viable careers for students. The idea that these programs aren't practical and do not lead to jobs is a market-based approach to legitimize program cuts, but it also accomplishes the elimination of

ideas and pedagogy that conflict with conservative perspectives and values. It is a seemingly neutral method of curbing academic freedom through the lens of neoliberalism, which is anything but neutral.

While WGS faculty negotiate the demands of WGS students, we are also reminded that we have research and writing obligations to fulfill. Research output is a priority, but this fact is difficult to reconcile with an emphasis on the theoretical and praxis-based elements of what WGS stands for in terms of its social justice mission. When I was a junior pre-tenure WGS faculty member at a research-intensive university, I was encouraged to shift my energy from teaching and service towards research and academic publishing. This public/publish or perish model is particularly risky for scholars of color in Women's and Gender Studies, who are often told that in addition to an active research agenda and teaching and advising, they will also need to cultivate an online public identity. At a 2017 academic conference for scholars of African American intellectual history, I attended a panel that offered advice to junior scholars on how to get their first book contract, in which one editor from a well-respected academic press encouraged junior scholars to cultivate an intellectual brand by using blogs and social media to speak on current social and political issues. The editor stated that this was one of the things that her press looked for in identifying potential authors: another market-driven approach to academic publishing. The prioritization of branding creates a paradox for many scholars in WGS departments because, for many of us, the profession is also connected to our activist desire for a progressive and ever-evolving feminist space in the classroom and social justice but speaking out can also lead to job loss. When negative attention is brought to the university or college, the immediate reaction is often one of censure or rebuff because part of the job of college/university administrators is to protect the university from backlash and to ensure that the university continues to attract students whose "butts in seats" fulfills the neoliberal market-driven model.

Current attacks on WGS as a field have not only centered on delegitimizing its scholarship but also assert that its curriculum and scholarship do not encourage critical thinking but instead push a dangerous far-left political agenda. Faculty who are labeled by the Alt-right as dangerous get attacked and threatened through a variety of social media outlets. Turning Point USA (2016) published an online blog entitled "Professor Watchlist." The list was published online as a resource for ultra-far-right students and young professionals. In addition to department affiliations and exact addresses the list also contained pictures, full names, and university affiliations. As an example of white supremacy not being about specific bodies raced as white, a key person involved with Turning Point USA is a black American woman named Candace Owens. Owens is the director of communications and has gained prominence through her many online attacks of the liberal media. Owens frequently asserts that colleges and universities are nothing more than factories of liberal indoctrination. The Professor Watchlist is described as:

an aggregated list of pre-existing news stories that were published by a variety of news organizations. While we

accept tips for new additions on our website, we only publish profiles on incidents that have already been reported by a credible source. TPUSA will continue to fight for free speech and the right for professors to say whatever they wish; however, students, parents, and alumni deserve to know the specific incidents and names of professors that advance a radical agenda in lecture halls.

All of the professors identified are liberal academics, and all of the so-called evidence is taken from third-person accounts of statements made during class lectures or from material taken from course syllabi or online social media statements. Turning point USA asserts that it will "expose and document college professors who discriminate against conservative students and advance leftist propaganda in the classroom." By co-opting the language of progressive critical thoughts and using it as a means to "protect" students from those whom they identify as biased professors, the Watchlist report and its parent organizer Turning Point US have used the language of social justice as a cloak to promote hate and to attack liberal social justice scholars.

This mechanism of the Alt-Right contends that our curriculum is coercive to students and a danger to the larger public, and that our very presence in academia represents a threat to free speech and traditional moral values. In their article, "When Margins Become Centered: Black Queer Women in Front and Outside of the Classroom," authors Moya Bailey and Shannon J. Miller (2015) discuss the vulnerability that many feminists and people of color face on the tenure clock. Bailey and Miller reflect on their experiences as black queer women in the academy: "We assert that feminist classrooms are arenas for discovery, liberation and resistance of hegemonic structures, and attempt to construct these spaces both in and outside of women's studies departments" (Bailey and Miller 2015, 169). The attempt by feminist scholars to create classrooms and learning environments that resist hegemonic structures creates added emotional labor and moral imperative. It impacts how the students receive information and how they receive a professor. If we understand feminist pedagogy as a moral imperative as well, we cannot "just say no" to the emotional labor that our students require of us.

Part of the incentive for many Women's and Gender Studies faculty to join WGS departments is the feeling that these departments are often the only ones that will offer a refuge -- an intellectual space to do the work that is often criticized or met with hostility in other more traditional disciplines. This was a major factor in my decision to get my Ph.D. in WGS. Students who are not wealthy and those who are marginalized by various identities are told that they can not afford to "think for thinking's sake." The message is that college should be practical, but this line of thinking pushes these students away from disciplines like WGS that provide these same students with a much-needed language to understand who they are in the world and how they can fight back against systems that marginalize people.

## Conclusion

To return to Lorde, WGS has been using the space of higher education -- tools of a racist patriarchy -- to prepare students to critically engage and deconstruct the systems of a racist patriarchy. Now that we are firmly fixed within the institution, we must fight our way out of the quagmire of neoliberal feminism's imprint on WGS. A shift in focus away from neoliberal identity politics can return WGS to its radical interventionist roots -- an investment in the redistribution of wealth and a critique of capitalist systems to engage with faculty outside of the classroom. Students want courses that reflect their lives and that provide them with tools to navigate an ever-changing world with so much upheaval. The novel Coronavirus pandemic and protest over continued police brutality incidents has left many students hungry for more than a passive college learning experience. Students want engaged pedagogy, they want a language to use to discuss and understand larger systems of inequality, and WGS is the place to find it.

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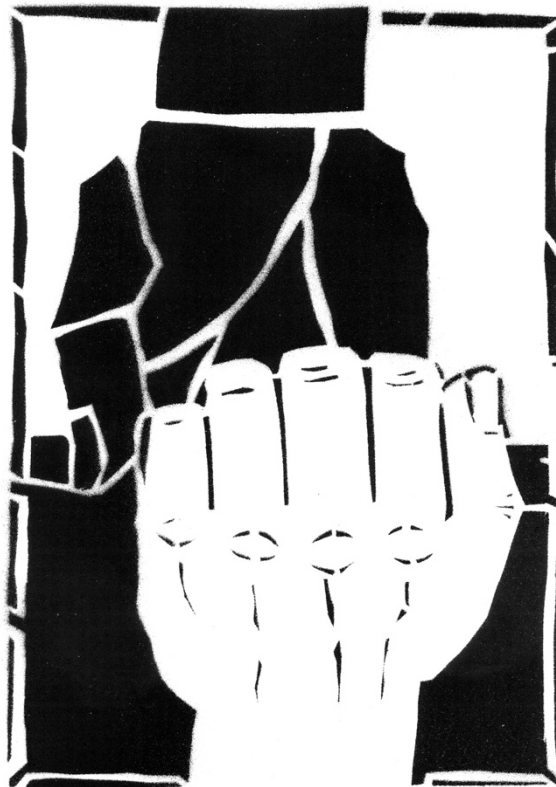
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# RADICAL TEACHER

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

## Ethical Considerations on Representing Slavery in Curriculum

by Bennett Brazelton



"UNITY" BY COLIN MATTHES VIA JUST SEEDS

*They burned all the documents, Ursa, but they didn't burn what they put in their minds. We got to burn out what they put in our minds, like you burn out a wound. Except we got to keep what we need to bear witness. That scar that's left to bear witness. We got to keep it as visible as our blood.*

- Gayl Jones, *Corregidora*

*Slavery here is a ghost, both the past and the living presence; and the problem of historical representation is how to represent the ghost.*

- Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*

*This is not a story to pass on.*

- Toni Morrison, *Beloved*

The circulation of media depicting anti-Black violence and murder have become something of a cultural fixture in recent years. On the one hand, this imagery has forced many to recognize the four-centuries-old fact of racial violence. Yet on the other, there seems to be an ease and comfort with which videos of police and extra-legal white supremacist violence are disseminated, digested, and forgotten. In this cultural context, many have begun to question the ways in which (racial) violence is represented, as well as the risk that representing violence may in fact (re)traumatize those surviving under the heel of an empire. From activist spaces to the classroom, the challenge is not just to resist racism, but to represent violence in ways that do not reinforce the same dehumanization as in the initial instance. In other words, one must balance the imperative for *truth* (however violent it may be) with an ethical question of representation; this is particularly true, I argue, in teaching Trans-Atlantic slavery.

The history of slavery bears heavily in its "afterlife" (Hartman, 2006); the question Trouillot (1995) raises of representing the ghost of slavery in spite of its living presence should be of deep concern for critical educators attempting to grapple with and diffuse this history. In other words, the legacy of slavery is by no means something that is past us but rather something that pervades our present social/political/economic reality. The maintenance of these ongoing structures of exploitation depends upon "a refusal to remember" (Graff, 2014, p. 181) the atrocities of slavery, and thus decontextualize contemporary oppression. Thus, slavery is so often addressed in terms of minimization, justification, or denial (Greenlee, 2019; Murray, 2018). This is evident in the landmark examinations of slavery, which set the tone for following historiographies: Ulrich Bonnell Phillips (1918) wrote the first and most widely received of these, which essentially took up Lost Cause propaganda of the former Confederacy and argued as an apologist paean of chattel slavery. Stanley Elkins (1959) revived and broadly popularized this myth of paternalism—that enslaved people functioned as child-like dependents.

The history classroom refracts and reflects dominant historiographical tendencies: consequently, the presence of paternalist mythology is not uncommon in classrooms today. Even if slavery is not discussed on apologist terms, the general tendency to totally dissociate the history of slavery from present conditions of oppression persists, thereby severing a crucial analytic for understanding contemporary racism. This kind of narration may also build triumphant narratives of how Abraham Lincoln (or even U.S. society) eradicated slavery and preserved liberty; or how racism is an unfortunate and anomalous artifact in the otherwise unblemished face of U.S. public life. This post-racial narration falls in the time-honored tradition of irresponsible (or even antagonistic) representations of race and Black people; this constitutes a kind of curricular violence—a reinscription of the same violent and racist ideology that underscores notions of Black inferiority. Throughout these narrations, the brutality of slavery is occluded and thus the historical context of contemporary oppression is concealed.

Many have responded to this historiography through calls for *truth* and *complexity* with verbiage like *face up to*, *confront*, and *reckon with*. This discourse includes valuable calls for reparations (Coates, 2014), truth and reconciliation commissions (Margarrell & Wesley, 2008; Reddock, 2017; Torpey, 2001), interrogating representation in museums and public spaces (Brooms, 2011; Levenson, 2014), memorializing the violence of slavery (Holpuch, 2019; Robertson, 2018), and—the subject of analysis here—reconfiguring the memory of slavery in public school curriculum (Anderson & Metzger, 2011; Araújo & Maeso, 2012; Sojoyner, 2016; Swartz, 1992). Yet inherent to this discourse are tragedy and violence—that is to say, one *reckons with* shame or injury. In many ways, the broader tendency to reclaim slavery as a site of brutality tends to produce (in schools) what Berry and Stovall (2013) describe as a "curriculum of tragedy"; that is to say, a particular narration in which Black suffering, pain, and trauma take the center stage. Calls for "truth" and narrations of brutality thus become interchangeable—photographs of lynchings, whippings, lurid descriptions of violence and rape, and graphic discussions of torture and control function as modes of capturing student interest.

Yet the focus on a hegemonic truth of Black suffering brings about a set of ethical questions: that is, what *truth* can or should be passed on? By ethics, I mean the responsibility of educators and historians to (1) the historical subjects represented in narratives of subjection and (2) the students to whom these narratives are diffused. These questions are particularly prescient given the increasing interest nationwide in Trauma-Informed education, and the potential for curriculum to aid or abet the social-emotional health of students (Cavanaugh, 2016; Crosby et Al., 2018; Morgan et Al., 2015). Thus, while these questions are broadly relevant and applicable in guiding historical research, policymaking, and activism, I focus explicitly on the history classroom.

Outside of educational scholarship, increasing attention has been paid, particularly following what Stephen Best (2011) calls "the archival turn", to the circulation of violent imagery and narrative for a variety of



reasons: the normalization and regularization of Black suffering (Sharpe, 2016); the spectacle of Black death (Brown, 2017; Hartman, 1997; Mirzoeff, 2017); the ethical ramifications for historical subjects (Hartman 2006, 2008); and the ontological consequences for Black people (past and present) in this unfolding history (Sharpe, 2016; Warren, 2018). The work of Saidiya Hartman and Christina Sharpe, in particular, offer insights into the historical and contemporary representation of slavery and race. As Hartman (2008) asks, "How does one revisit the scene of subjection without replicating the grammar of violence?" (p. 4). We might frame this question alternatively: how does one create a Trauma-Informed curriculum to teach about history that is, by its very nature, traumatic?

The ethical consideration which unfolds: how can a curriculum balance a commitment to truth without making Black suffering the normative and exclusive narration of Black life in the U.S.? The balance for critical educators: how can one describe, contextualize, and offer vocabulary for the lived conditions of oppression experienced by students, while recognizing their right to live as children, as unburdened as the world allows? The suggestions, questions, and considerations raised here are not limited to the history of slavery but apply generally to resonant histories of trauma; I take slavery as the focus due to its centrality in the foundation of U.S. society, the large role (however flawed) in social studies curriculum, its ongoing relevance to contemporary racialization, and the brilliant interventions already made within its study. I argue here that, while centering brutality in narrations of slavery is crucial to understanding contemporary oppression, incautious approaches reify and reproduce historical trauma upon students and historical subjects alike. In the final section, I outline a dialectical focus on slavery and violent struggles in opposition as a means of mediating this historical trauma. Rather than equating a totalizing brutality with objective truth, I argue that unearthing the subjectivity and agency of Black historical subjects produces a counterhistory to slavery—that is, an intersubjective knowledge out of the "scraps of the archive" (Hartman, 2008, p. 4). Such a pedagogical project is and must be radical: not only does it call focus to radical movements against capitalism, white supremacy, and domination, but it involves teaching in a way that both affirms Black life and every student's capacity for action.

## Trauma in History, Traumatizing History

Atlantic slavery constitutes a "historical trauma." Though historians generally disambiguate cultural and historical trauma from the somatic and psychological, I find this distinction somewhat superfluous in this context. The "historical trauma" of slavery is constituted by violence of all forms and of the greatest severity. This historical trauma endures in large part due to the ongoing reproduction of white supremacy, as was constructed under plantation slavery: the economic and material gains of slavery largely reside with whites, unreturned to the descendants of the workers to whom they are owed (Coates, 2014; Feagin, 2004); there remains profound economic exploitation of people of color (Desmond, 2019); Black people are still

subject to routine violence with apparent impunity (Marshall, 2012); carceral structures, violent punishment, torture, still affect a massive incarcerated population (Davis, 2003; Gilmore, 2007); all that is to say, race remains almost as prescient a structure of power in slavery's afterlife as it ever has been (Bell, 1992). Slavery as historical trauma thus comes to describe a kind of zero degree of exploitation from which racial oppression unfolds. In this way, the historical experience of racial violence entangles with that of the contemporary lives of students, who face different but interrelated trauma. I take historical trauma, here, to include two primary dimensions: first, the trauma experienced by Afro-diasporic subjects in the unfolding aftermath of slavery (the students); second, the trauma experienced by those enslaved people who become the objects of study/curriculum (the enslaved historical subjects). Different but intertwined ethical questions emerge when considering each.

### Students

If the objective of critical educators is to develop "the ability of students to engage in the shaping and making of decisions about our shared world" (López, 2020, p. 17), then offering context, history, and vocabulary so that students can better understand their lived experiences and thus become actional is of the utmost importance for educators working to dismantle oppression. Freire articulated this context as a fundamental aspect of critical pedagogy; "reading the world," as he called it, enables students to develop and deepen vocabulary describing their lived experiences (Macedo & Freire, 1987). From this point of knowledge, students are able to become efficiently actional in upending structures of oppression (Freire, 1970/2014). Freire thus articulated an existentialist pedagogy which places experience, agency, and becoming actional at the center of education. Consciousness and context are thus necessary requisites to action within racial struggles from Frantz Fanon (Burman, 2018) to W.E.B. Du Bois (Aptheker, 1973) to the Black Panther Party (Bloom & Martin, 2013).

Key to a Freirean method of "conscientization" is dialogue—a deconstructed, mutual, and consensual relationship between teacher and student; however, this is rarely the reality in schooling. As Ann Arnett Ferguson (2000) writes, "The work of school is compulsory labor: children must, by law, attend school. They have no control over the materials they work with, what they produce, the nature of the rewards for their exertions and performance" (p. 165). As many other scholars have demonstrated, schooling largely functions as "a system that rewards order and rote compliance with whatever authority delivers as instruction" (Stovall, 2016, p. 1). The violence exercised against children of color held captive in these spaces is coercive by nature, and it can constitute a form of trauma (Adams, 1995; Dumas, 2016; Kruegger-Henney, 2019; Sojoyner, 2016; Vaught, 2017). I do not argue that schooling is unredeemable or poses no possibility of rupture or resistance; however, the already coercive context can reproduce a traumatic history as trauma for children (very much in the present) (Brazelton & López, forthcoming).

When a dialogic process is neither encouraged, desired, nor allowed in curriculum development and pedagogy, abusive practices can still be justified through the rhetoric of truth, complexity, and context. Certain methods of social studies instruction--when used in the context of historical trauma--risk replicating these violent encounters. Despite arguments to the contrary (Kros, 2017), historical reenactment and simulation as a teaching strategy is particularly fraught. One should not need to recount the horror stories--teachers in blackface (Gutierrez, 2018; White, 2019), Black students treated as slaves (Lockhart, 2019; Mahubani, 2020), white students as masters (Holley, 2017), offensive school plays (Bery, 2014; Branigin, 2017)--to understand that the simulation of this violence does not develop consciousness and context so much as underscore the violability of Black youth. (1) In this way, even supposed attempts at developing "critical consciousness" (Freire, 1973) can risk reanimating and recreating historical instantiations of violence. The extent to which simulations of slavery are used in classrooms prompted a report from the Southern Poverty Law Center (2018) that cautioned against their use while lambasting teaching methods and state standards on the whole.

There is an inherent ethical issue, I would argue, in asking students of color to imagine themselves as slaves or masters; there is a related issue in asking white children to do the same thing. In each of these instances, slavery is necessarily reimagined and reinterpreted; the intention is to capture the affective dimension of slavery (i.e., what did it *feel like* to be a slave?); thus violence may be rematerialized as students are made to imagine themselves as victims or perpetrators of such profound violence. For white students, as Bery (2014) demonstrates, imagining oneself in this capacity does not always entail critical reflection or consciousness--in fact, asking a student to imagine *themselves* in slavery suggests that slavery is imaginable, and thus limits (rather than expands) the domain of knowledge and consciousness. (2)

Beyond reenactment, some teachers interpret the development of consciousness as the circulation of narratives of unfiltered obscenity and violence without regard for age or audience. This was the case of a student teacher in Tennessee who asked fourth-graders to recite graphic and violent descriptions of slave control from the famous and apocryphal William Lynch speech (Li, 2020). The intention, ironically, was to develop awareness of slavery as an historical atrocity; yet interviews with those involved showed that it only served to alienate and disturb Black students. The affective dimensions of this history are too great to ignore, and the manner in which this history is diffused (if it is to be taught at all) surely matters a great deal. This instance is merely an extreme example of daily practice visible in classrooms all across the country. Invocations of brutality, shocking photographs, disturbing anecdotes are all deployed to capture and hold student attention. In the teaching of traumatic histories, violence often becomes instructive and its reinstatement serves as curriculum. The example in Tennessee evidences an attempt at historical consciousness-building when dialogue and mutual understanding is absent--it is clear enough that in each instance of reenactment or circulating graphic

content, little attention is paid to the affective dimensions of student learning.

The mere recitation of slavery's brutal "truths" can constitute a traumatizing (or retraumatizing) experience for students living in slavery's afterlife. As Gordon Lewis (2013) explains, the integrity of the slave system in the Caribbean was maintained by a constant threat (or enactment) of "terror"--that is to say, the violence used to coerce enslaved people needed to constantly contain a dimension of surprise and shock. If this violence would startle those already attuned to the lived conditions of enslavement--one only needs to look at the archives of Caribbean slavery for descriptions of this brutality (Harris, 2017)--how is it to be understood by children? The recantation of brutal histories in classroom settings may remanifest the physical/psychological/sexual trauma of enslaved subjects as psychosomatic trauma for students in the present. My contention is not just that these methods of instruction are without merit, but that they may constitute a violent encounter (not equal but) related to the history itself, and that such an ethical dilemma must be taken seriously.

## Historical Subjects

To move beyond these violent instantiations in curriculum, to suppose a fully dialogic and consensual encounter between a teacher and student, a complicated encounter between the student and subject emerges. That is, as students identify with and as historical subjects, there is a kind of slippage between the two, whereby students may identify themselves in historical narratives. When the social studies curriculum is constrained solely to the discussion of Black suffering without an emphasis on agency (as discussed in the following section), the history of slavery comes to form something of an epistemological trap--that is, knowledge of slavery appears to only reveal a historical connection to suffering rather than freedom. We might then pose the question: how does one represent the fact of Black humanity working from an archive that denies its existence? The imperative then becomes writing history against or in spite of (rather than from) the historical archive.

Hartman (2008) puts this contradiction succinctly, asking "how does one rewrite the chronicle of a death foretold and anticipated, as a collective biography of dead subjects, as a counter-history of the human, as the practice of freedom?" (p. 3). "Rewrite" should not be taken to mean a totally subjective rendering of history, so much as a rejection of Euromodern subjectivity which has predominated the archive. The imperative to recover Black agency/humanity should be read instead as a move toward an *intersubjective* approach to history. Hartman's intervention deals with the interpretation of the facts as laid out in the archive, as well as how/if they are reproduced. To this latter point, the epigraphs--written by Gayl Jones and Toni Morrison, respectively--offer two apparently contradicting ethics regarding the circulation of the violence of slavery.

Jones's (1975) book, *Corregidora*, tells of a blues singer named Ursa who experiences and survives routine sexual and physical violence. Ursa's present is intimately linked with slavery, just as the sexual violence she experiences resonates with that of her grandmother and great-grandmother, both of whom faced rape and incest at the hands of the Brazilian plantation owner, Old Corregidora (from whom they take their surname). Ursa's matrilineal line holds that the only possible thing to be done in the wake of this violence is to "bear witness." While the official records may be erased, the memory of it cannot be, and it is necessary to hold and pass on as an act of justice to the women who survived.

Morrison (1987) offers an opposite ethic in the final chapter of *Beloved*. The novel focuses on Sethe, a fugitive from slavery who kills her baby daughter so as to prevent her reenslavement; Sethe's other children abandon her following this, and she is believed to have gone mad. Morrison's text, which focuses on Sethe's recollection, guilt, and survival, seems to suggest that some violence is too deep to heal from, some stories too terrible to hear. Édouard Glissant (1997) articulates this concept as a "right to opacity" (p. 194); that is, a right to privacy, ambiguity, and confidentiality that is owed to historical subjects. While the fact of publication makes clear Morrison's intention to share this narrative, her writing suggests an ethic of care and restraint. Much like Jones, the engagement with the past is cautious, careful, and powerfully aware of the depths of its misery: "we got to keep what we need to bear witness"; "this is not a story to pass on."

While the humanity of Afro-diasporic people should not be reduced by or defined in terms of death or suffering, encountering traumatic histories like slavery incurs a kind of emotional labor. Sharpe (2016) frames the affective dimension of (living in) this history as "the wake": that is, the wake of a (slave) ship and the keeping watch with the dead. A component of Sharpe's formulation of life "in the wake" is "wake work," an analytic of care that is distinct from but responsive to mourning and melancholia. "Wake work" heeds the call of M. NourbeSe Philip (2008): "defend the dead." These affective moves involve bearing witness as well as a refusal to pass on certain stories in certain ways. An example of this is Hartman's (1997) celebrated opening to *Scenes of Subjection*, in which she refuses to reproduce Frederick Douglass's account of the rape of Aunt Hester "in order to call attention to the ease with which such scenes are usually reiterated" (p. 3). In this way, wake work might be thought of as labor of (celebration, mourning, eulogizing, fact-finding) performed by the living on behalf of the dead.

If "wake work" constitutes a kind of labor, we might join this hermeneutic with the development of critical consciousness: what kind of "wake work" should be expected of children, and by whom? Who should be expected to bear witness and in what capacity? The question of age, maturity, and affect must certainly alter this equation. Though, following Hartman's analysis, I choose not to reproduce (even textual descriptions of) atrocities through and after slavery here, the violence of slavery generates another destructive encounter in its recitation. Should children learn about Derby's Dose?

Should they learn what happened to Nat Turner *after* the revolt? Aunt Hester? Hazel Turner? The *Zong*? At what age ought it become routine knowledge? At what point does the grotesquery of violence trespass into that which should not be circulated? At what point does one bear witness or refuse to pass on the story? And in what detail?

Sharpe makes clear that life in the wake is not constituted by a voluntary engagement with grief and mourning. This "wake work" or "black care" (Warren, 2016) is not something voluntary or "curricular"—it is not an assignment that agents of the state can distribute, collect, and evaluate. Rather, it is an affective labor that may accompany the process of discovering and bearing witness to traumatic histories. It is a necessary point of consideration for educators dedicated to critical consciousness and student wellbeing. These parallel (and perpendicular) ethics must be held at once: defending students from the violence of history; giving context so that they may become actional and defend themselves; the work of bearing witness and defending the dead; recognizing the right of opacity owed to victims of slavery. My intention is not to resolve these contradictions, so much as raise them—to complicate the ease with which we equate "slavery's truths" with "black suffering." In the following section, I offer affective interventions which may mediate some of these tensions as they emerge in the classroom.

## Retrospective Revenge, Becoming Actional

If the teaching of certain histories might best be described as traumatic, then a Trauma-Informed approach to curriculum is necessary. My argument is not that images or narratives depicting brutality or coercion should be silenced, but that educators must think deeply before choosing *how* traumatic histories ought to be represented. Thus the *modus operandi* for teaching these histories must involve affective dimensions of mediation and coping. There is broad consensus that control and safety are necessary preconditions to any kind of healing from trauma. Yet how can we provide control and safety when teaching about events that have already happened? Moreover, how can contemporary subjects claim control over historical trauma when violence is continually reproduced through contemporary racialization? Here I suggest affective interventions that do not rewrite traumatic histories but offer frameworks to reorient them such that agency and control can be recuperated.

Authors in visual studies, cultural studies, and Black Feminist Theory, particularly citing the work of Hartman and Hortense Spillers (1983), have made especially valuable contributions concerning to this end. Critical works regarding the role of sight and sound in the circulation and reproduction of racial violence include Simone Browne (2015), Fred Moten (2003), Alexander Weheliye (2005), Kimberly Juanita Brown (2015), and Tina Campt (2017), in addition to Hartman and Sharpe. While I do not go into great detail regarding these analytical interventions here, I include their work as a means of highlighting potential

directions for considering traumatic histories within curriculum studies.

These authors demonstrate methods of representing the past (and present) in more humanizing ways. Camp (2017), for instance, expands the boundaries of what can be considered 'curricular' through an incisive method of "listening to" everyday photographs of Afro-diasporic peoples. Sharpe (2018) discusses a method of "black redaction" and "black annotation" by which the optics of an archive can be reoriented through perspective shifts; she, for instance, crops coerced photographs of enslaved subjects to just the eyes, unearthing an entirely different affective register through which the pictures can be understood. Brown (2018) put "black redaction" into practice while discussing the ethics of reproducing photographs of lynchings--she suggested removing the mutilated body from the frame and focusing instead on the white onlookers. All of these intervening methods share two objectives: first, they attempt to deemphasize the zero degree narrative of Black suffering; second, they highlight Black people as agents--rather than objects--in history. This is accomplished by highlighting the interiority of Black life, or that which is not immediately visible within the archive as it is normatively constructed. Not only do these historical methods unearth previously invisible interpretive registers, but they also reflect a coping process of revisiting and attempting to restructure trauma to afford some measure of comfort or control for historical subjects and onlookers. The reclamation of Black interiority and humanity is one such intervention against the totalizing dehumanization of chattel slavery.(3)

This reclamation also deepens our understanding of historical truth. If the archive has centered the voices of white observers, if those archives were assembled by white people, and if histories were subsequently written by white historians, then to understand Black history requires a kind of epistemological resistance to the archive itself. Archival history has relied upon a self-conceived notion of 'objectivity'--that is, fidelity to the historical record. These authors confront the question of narrating a historical record which is created to dehumanize Black people. Much can be learned from the brutality, erasure, violence, and narcissism of slavery's archives--yet to access Black subjectivity requires deeply creative and interpretive methods of perception. The replacement of overdetermined and objective "History" with an intersubjective understanding of the past (as it relates to and unfolds into the present) demands centering Black life and actors in historical representation. Put another way, by abandoning a contractual relationship with the archive as an objective set of facts and focusing instead on the lives that are excluded or marginalized, historical consciousness may be deepened. This could be framed in the contrapositive as well: by seeking Black life, one encounters truth; by seeking truth, one encounters Black life.

The converse of fabulatory methods, reading history *accurately* thus centers Black agency; as Moten (2003) writes, "The history of blackness is testament to the fact that objects can and do resist" (p. 1). Beyond interiority, agency suggests the capacity to make decisions and act independently. Agency is a necessary aspect of healing

from or coping with trauma as it allows for the reclamation of one's own body and self. This is especially pertinent in the context of slavery, wherein enslaved people were fully alienated from possession of their own bodies, which became chattel. The philosopher, psychiatrist, and revolutionary Frantz Fanon (1963) wrote, however, that the colonial subject, "never stops achieving his freedom from nine in the evening until six in the morning" (p. 52). Historians have tended to erase this agency and resistance (Roberts, 2015; Trouillot, 1995), in spite of its ubiquity: fugitivity, marronage, revolts, sabotage, absconding, feigning illness, poisonings, insurrection, arson, and revolution were all present in varying degrees of frequency. The famous "general strike" thesis is one such intervention: W.E.B. Du Bois (1935) soundly demonstrated that it was not the North that freed enslaved people, but that they freed themselves through mass resistance and flight--what he termed "the general strike."

***If slavery as an object of curriculum can produce a psychological transference for students experiencing descendant conditions of oppression, then action on the part of the enslaved must similarly figure into the curriculum such that students may identify their own capacity to act.***

For Fanon, the capacity for action was central to liberation. He wrote, "To educate man to be actional, preserving in all his relations his respect for the basic values that constitute a human world, is the prime task of him who, having taken thought, prepares to act" (Fanon, 1952, p. 222). The dialectic of decolonial action and liberation in Fanon's work proceeds from this point of realizing what he calls "actionality" (Burman, 2018). If slavery as an object of curriculum can produce a psychological transference for students experiencing descendant conditions of oppression, then action on the part of the enslaved must similarly figure into the curriculum such that students may identify their own capacity to act. As Erica Burman (2018) writes, "An act transforms symbolic coordinates; it does not simply effect changed conditions, but also how we understand the limits to those conditions" (p. 30). Given the conceptual slippage between student and subject, an *historical* act transforms the interpretive limits of *contemporary* conditions.

Fanon was specific in disambiguating different forms of action. He argued that violence against colonialism was a psychological necessity for the colonial subject: "At the level of individuals, violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect" (Fanon, 1963, p. 94). For Fanon, any action that seeks to radically transform the world will be seen as inherently violent, thus his understanding of violence exceeds the iconography of armed militant struggle. However, in Fanon's anticolonial dialectic, *physical* violence occupied a central role in the reclamation of colonized humanity; put another way, Fanon understood a

prerequisite to liberation and decolonization as “the violent violation of the colonizer” (Roberts, 2004, p. 142).

Similarly, psychological researchers writing on healing from trauma have underscored the important dimension of “revenge fantasy” as an important method through which victims can start to reclaim agency: Gäbler and Maercker (2011) write, “In the context of coping and restoration of self-concept and self-worth, it seems that revenge emotions and cognitions can be regarded as useful reactions to trauma that positively impact the mental processes triggered by injury and suffering” (p. 45-46). Revenge, in the psychological sense, entails a dimension of retribution through which agency can be visualized and reclaimed. Following this, I suggest that special attention be given to anticolonial violence as a mediating dimension of trauma response.

I characterize revenge, here, as a psychological process whereby selfhood can be reclaimed through material/physical resistance; this includes, for the purposes of this discussion, actions that were not necessarily motivated primarily by a desire to pay back the violence of slavery, but still serve that affective purpose in their retrospective and symbolic reconstruction. Actions such as Nat Turner’s Revolution, Stono, the burning of Old Montreal, and the Haitian Revolution were primarily motivated by liberation (rather than a desire to ‘get even’), however they satisfy the generative demands of revenge in retrospective narration. Marilyn Ivy (1995) argues that “events” are only determined as such through their recollection: “The second event—when the originary moment emerges as an event to consciousness—is thus the first instance” (p. 22). In this way, revenge (in an affective and historiographical sense) involves those historical moments which are imbued with anticolonial retribution (in this case, violence against slaveholders); that which disrupted or resisted the violence of slavery may, in its recollection and reconstruction, serve as repayment. This serves an important role in mediating the instantiation of historical trauma; actions which claim agency clearly and violently offer an escape route to the closed loop of traumatic histories.

The immediate implications for curriculum studies would involve placing a greater emphasis on actions which involve an affective dimension of retrospective revenge against the slave system. What actions would qualify under this framework should be determined through its capacity to afford the catharsis of anticolonial vengeance. Shipboard insurrections like the *Amistad* and *Creole* should be alongside the Middle Passage (Rediker, 2013; Taylor, 2009); the arrival of enslaved Africans in 1619 should be preceded by the revolt at San Miguel de Gualdape in 1526 (Maura, 2011); statistics of sugar plantation death rates should be balanced with the *quilombos*, maroons, and *palenques* which harassed the slave system (Price, 1973); the profits of cotton plantations must be balanced with the daily sabotage and disruptions (Cartwright, 1851). By focusing on the actions of enslaved people which were felt and feared by slaveholders, a route for positive transference is opened such that students can understand their own capacity for action. That is to say, in reorienting

the *limits* of action during slavery, its wake becomes visibly susceptible to rupture and destruction. (4)

In my practice as a teacher, this involves very intentionally centering Black resistance and organization when teaching traumatic histories. When teaching the Red Summer of 1919, I encourage students to investigate articles in magazines like *The Messenger* and *The Crusader*. In the editorial, “How to Stop Lynching,” A. Philip Randolph (1919) argued for Black self-defense as an effective means of interdicting lynch mobs: “A mob of a thousand men knows it can beat down fifty Negroes, but when those fifty Negroes rain fire and shot and shell over the thousand, the whole group of cowards will be put to fight” (9). Not only does this wrest agency from white violators to Black communities, the student-driven inquiry (the actual process of investigation) gives students control and agency in their own learning.

The desire to retrospectively construct or emphasize retributive justice risks obscuring the social and political coordinates of enslaved people; that is to say, one might walk away thinking that ending slavery was well within the capacity of the enslaved, and therefore continuing conditions of oppression would become a choice. Afropessimists like Wilderson (2010), Sexton (2017), and Warren go so far as to disavow the agency of Black subjects in the present and past, opting to depict racism as an immutable and ontological death experienced by Black people. Warren (2018) suggests an indictment of action, opting instead for a nihilist critique. The Afropessimists draw important conclusions. However, the justification for a wholesale critique of actionality comes from selective and myopic citations of Fanon’s (1952) arguments in his chapter, “The Fact of Blackness.” Beyond confusing Fanon’s existential and relational claims for ontological and immutable ones, they interestingly choose to ignore the central role of action in Fanon’s philosophy. While educators emphasizing affective dimensions of action and revenge should be careful to discourage presentist and revisionist ideologies (i.e., “if I were there, I would have...”) or claims that racial violence is within the capacity of enslaved subjects to end (i.e., “slavery was a choice”), highlighting the capacity for action should still be a critical dimension of consciousness-building. In this way, the intersubjective truth and centrality of Black resistance to slavery is essential to developing actionality in the present.

## Toward Ethical Representation

The resonance of racial trauma in contemporary public life demands attention within social studies curriculum as these questions are continually refreshed by the ongoing spectacle of police and white supremacist violence. How the “the ghost” of slavery is portrayed matters greatly in surviving and resisting racial violence. Calls for “truth” and “complexity” which depict the true brutality of slavery are critical responses to the overwhelming silence of paternalist, Lost Cause, or apologist historiographies. Yet staking out “truth” as a curricular territory is implicitly preceded by another set of questions: whose truth? According to what sources? Who made the sources? What determines the “whole” truth? At what point does detail

become extraneous? More importantly, at what point does the recitation of history reproduce historical trauma in the present? How does the emotional maturity of a student determine what "truth" is appropriate? Who decides? How does one balance a student's right to remain unburdened by the past with the necessity of providing vocabulary to understand contemporary conditions of oppression? How does one balance the importance of understanding and bearing witness to historical atrocities with the "right to opacity"--that is, the privacy owed to historical subjects in their darkest moments?

The call, then, is for *ethical* representation of slavery's ghost and enduring afterlives within educational spaces; that is, a process of learning which recognizes and acts upon the mutual responsibility between educator, student, and historical subject. Without upholding these obligations, educators risk reproducing or triggering trauma for students who already live under conditions of unfreedom, violence, and oppression. A Trauma-Informed approach, then, demands special attention be given to the affective dimensions of student learning. In addition to only briefly highlighting affective interventions building from other fields of visual studies and Black Feminist Theory, I argue that "revenge" is a critical dimension of Trauma-Informed pedagogy. For students who live under conditions of ongoing racial violence and control, the seemingly immutable history of racial violence constitutes a kind of epistemological trap; offering routes of departure from these closed narratives involves highlighting the actional capacity of historical subjects, and historical instances where vengeance is realized. Following Fanon's dialectic of "actionality," this violence against oppression comes into focus as a critical dimension of student learning, whereby their own capacity for action can be seen in historical context. While overemphasizing the capacity for violent action risks obfuscating the social and political coordinates of enslaved subjects, I argue that this remains an important intervention in social studies curriculum.

## Notes

1. One student of mine shared with me that her fifth grade teacher, in order to teach about the slave trade, had all of the students lie under their desks. The teacher then turned off the lights and proceeded to spritz water on the kids from a spray bottle. My student told me that she repaid that lesson by trying (and at times succeeding) to make her teacher cry at every available opportunity.
2. I would like to clarify, here, what 'imagination' entails in this point. 'Imagining' the brutality of slavery (as to form a mental image) is something that all historians do as a necessary process of understanding the conditions, geographies, etc. of a particular subject. This might further entail empathetic approaches to history, such as attempting to imagine what one might have felt under certain historical conditions. This is distinct, as I see it, from imagining oneself as enslaved, thereby displacing the actual historical subject and learning from self-conceived 'experiential' knowledge. While conditions of unfreedom related to or even comparable to slavery persist in the United States, to claim experiential knowledge of slavery (as these simulations attempt to provide) by displacing historical subjects limits the potential for an empathetic relationship with historical subjects/the archive. Hartman (1997) makes this point clearly.
3. I argue (against many historians) that historical omission or redaction can be an important dimension in narrating more humanizing histories. While there is no set rule about when omission becomes necessary or even desirable, there is a simple litmus test that historians so often fail to use when representing Black life: does the reproduction/narration do justice to the victim of violence? This is just as true for victims of police brutality--is it ethical to circulate someone's dying moments? What does it do for them? Would they have wanted that? Oftentimes this question remains opaque and open to interpretation; other times it is more clear. Emmett Till's mother, for instance, wanted the world to see the reality of racial violence; this is the case for many graphic narratives of slavery and brutality, which are produced for a specific purpose. In other cases, the instance of fact collection (such as body camera footage) is nonconsensual; therefore the circulation of the imagery may further violate the right to privacy and opacity owed to diasporic subjects. Refusing to reproduce certain images, details, or aspects of narratives (such as Hartman's treatment of the rape of Aunt Hester) can better call attention to Black humanity by highlighting that very right to privacy.
4. Fiction presents another domain through which lines of revenge can be accessed. Dave Chappelle's skit, "The Time Haters," demonstrates an absurdist approach to depicting slavery; as the character "Silky Johnson," Chappelle travels back in time to visit a plantation, only to insult and shoot the slaveholder. The skit was cut as, according to Chappelle, "Apparently shooting a slave master isn't funny to anybody but [...] If I could I'd do it every episode." Other examples, more serious than Chappelle's, that represent this retrospective revenge include Colson Whitehead's (2016) *The Underground Railroad*, Octavia Butler's (1979) *Kindred*, Fred D'Aguiar's (1997) *Feeding the Ghosts*, Herman Melville's *Benito Cereno* (1855/2008), M. NourbeSe Philip's (2008) *Zong!*, John Keene's (2015) *Counternarratives*, and Dionne Brand's (1999) *At the Full and Change of the Moon*. Fiction cannot stand in for historical analysis, but it can supplement the archive in providing the affective release of revenge.

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# RADICAL TEACHER

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

## Towards A Pedagogy of Transnational Feminism When Teaching and Activism Go Online

by Cara K. Snyder and Sabrina González



FIG 1.1 "UNTITLED" BY DELANEY GUNSTER FOR LASC 348A "ONLINE AND IN THE STREETS: WOMEN'S STRUGGLES FOR JUSTICE IN LATIN AMERICA." TRANSLATIONS APPEAR IN THE APPENDIX.

“Untitled” is a digital illustration produced by Delaney Gunster<sup>1</sup> for “Online and in the Streets: Women’s Struggles for Justice in Latin America,” LASC348A, co-taught by the authors of this essay, Cara Snyder and Sabrina González. We developed LASC 348A as a three-week study abroad program to Buenos Aires, converted into an online course, offered between June 1 and 19, 2020. Gunster’s artwork illustrates the transnational connections students made between two contemporary struggles for justice in the Americas -- Ni Una Menos (NUM, Not One Woman Less) and Black Lives Matter (BLM) -- and highlights the synergies between online and street politics as forms of activist responses against state violence. Written on the palms of the hands are names of people from across the Americas murdered by state violence. Each finger parallels a message or activist tactic: the pinky, middle, and pointer fingers include slogans, messages written on protest signs, and text from the internet; the ring finger features hashtags; and the thumb identifies these murders as public health crises. At the tip of the fingers, the hands are joined by a demand for the state to stop killing women and Black people. We share this art to introduce our experiences teaching with a pedagogy of transnational feminism that links activism to the classroom and connects U.S. students with Latin American and Caribbean histories of organizing against neoliberal, sexist, misogynist, and racist regimes. A transnational feminist pedagogy opens the classroom to the world, teaches students to contemplate scales from the intimate to the global, exposes asymmetrical flows of power across borders, challenges the fixedness of the nation-state as a category, and builds transnational solidarities in order to take action both on and off line.

Inspired by the massification of feminist protest following NUM, the class was originally planned as a course taught on-site in Argentina (referred to by our Universities as a study abroad) during the summer of 2020. A main objective of the program we created was to build transnational solidarities between U.S. and Latin American students, scholars, and activists as U.S.-based students engaged with change-makers in and around Buenos Aires working to combat gendered violence. At the time of the program’s inception, few students at our institution had experienced a massive grassroots movement. The study abroad aimed to introduce a group of young people living and studying in the U.S. to the energy of a popular uprising. Ultimately, the goal of this immersive course was for students to feel and to witness a feminist revolution as they learned from and collaborated with feminists in Argentina.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced us to reconfigure our pedagogical space. We converted the study abroad program to an online class while asking ourselves what would be lost as the course moved from engaging Latin American activism in the streets of Buenos Aires to learning through the digital spaces of the classroom, social media, and art. Then, in June, during the first week of classes, uprisings against police brutality surged across the U.S. It turned out that the students did not have to be in Argentina to experience a massive protest. For instance, Gunster’s illustration reflects the extent to which the students perceived tactics and discourses of BLM and NUM to be

connected. By putting the hands together, Gunster articulates the workings of state violence and highlights anti-racist and feminist resistance against it.

We found ourselves teaching activism online at a time when change-makers throughout the world were fighting for justice in both physical and digital spaces. These include the mounting protests in Hong Kong, Ecuador, and Chile, all of which borrowed tactics from each other. In Latin America, feminists marked the fifth anniversary of the first massive protest against misogynist violence organized by #NUM, which took place on June 3, 2015. According to the website [niunamenos.org](http://niunamenos.org), the campaign began as a “collective scream against machista violence,” especially femicide (Fregoso and Bejarano 2010). In the U.S., uprisings for racial justice swelled under the banner of BLM, amidst the outbreak of COVID-19 and after the police killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and other precious Black lives named in Gunster’s art. #BLM is a transnational campaign that began in 2013, and whose stated mission on [blacklivesmatter.com](http://blacklivesmatter.com) is “to eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes.” Both uprisings localized issues of state violence for U.S.-based students. Although our course focused on struggles for justice in Latin America, when the BLM protests started in May, students made organic connections between our course material and the protests happening in their local contexts. Because students were going to protests, and our class emphasized relationships between theory and praxis, and between universities and social movements, they were able to make transnational connections between struggles in the U.S. and Latin America. Through virtual spaces, students could observe and connect with local movements throughout the Americas.

“Online and in the Streets” is a microcosm of larger-scale educational changes that are underway in K-12 school systems and universities. Educators are compelled to reinterpret the relationship between online teaching and activism. The novel coronavirus has forced activists and educators for social justice to rethink the ways to protest, demand, and teach social change. The need for protest remains urgent, as governments force poor people to make impossible decisions about whether to stay safe or to work so they can eat, as abusers terrorize femmes and children confined in unsafe homes, and as police continue to kill Black and brown people with impunity. Debates about the transition to online education have also exposed issues of access and especially the lack of digital infrastructure in the Global South and U.S.-Third World (Sandoval 2000), one aspect of the Digital Divide. While educators like Drabinsky, Clark, and Roberts (in issue number 90 of *Radical Teacher*, 2011) have considered the possibilities of transformative pedagogy online, instructors must now reimagine what teaching for justice means in a world of social distance and physical isolation.

What are the possibilities for transformative teaching in this educational context?

Based on our experiences teaching our advanced undergraduate seminar, we explore approaches to online instruction that honor feminist commitments to:

1. embodied knowledge;
2. transnational solidarity and collaboration;
3. education for liberation.

We explore these approaches through course material; interviews with feminist artists, activists, and scholars, and major course projects we refer to as “experience sets” that asked students to synthesize course material, discussions, and experiences outside the classroom. The following section summarizes the structure of LASC 348. Then, the essay investigates the successes and challenges we faced as we enacted each of the aforementioned commitments -- embodied knowledge, transnational solidarity and collaboration, and education for liberation -- and taught towards a pedagogy of transnational feminism.

## Situating the Class

As co-teachers, the content and method of our class was informed by our experiences and identities. Sabrina González (she/ella) is a feminist historian from Buenos Aires, a non-native English speaker, and a first-generation student from a working-class family. Her experience as an activist in community centers, student and teachers unions, alternative media, and non-traditional schools for adults shaped her research on the history of education and her approaches to popular and feminist pedagogies. Cara Snyder (she/they), a white, U.S.-born Professor of WGSS, has lived and taught in Guatemala, Argentina, and Brazil. Their research and organizing with women and LGBT+ athlete-activists, and their two decades of experience teaching in a variety of settings, including multiple study abroads, inform Snyder’s queer, feminist, anti-racist, anti-imperialist pedagogies.

The students’ positionalities influenced how they approached the class material and the type of final projects that they developed. For example, the students who identified as Latinx (4) were able to further research their parents’ home countries and the transnational connections between the U.S. and the region. Other students (three identified as white, U.S. born, and one student identified her own journey as part of the African diaspora in the U.S.) connected to the theory and praxis of Latin American feminisms via protests and street politics in the U.S. (see Fig 1.1). The students ranged in age between 18 and 22 years old, which meant that few had lived through a popular uprising. All but one identified as women, several identified as queer, and the majority of the class related intimately to gender-based violence. Some were first-generation students who worked and took care of their families at the time of the class, and these obligations made it difficult to keep up with the speed of a three-week course.

The content of a fifteen-week semester was covered at the equivalent of one week per day of class. Inspired by the digital pedagogy of Alexis Lothain (2021), each week comprised a unit, and an experience set that culminated with a weekly project: a feminist vlog (video blog), an oral history interview, and a creative response, in that order. Beyond the weekly project, students completed daily

discussion posts and quizzes to ensure their comprehension of course materials. They were required to attend at least one of the three Zoom sessions offered weekly. A small class of eight students and shared teaching responsibilities allowed for weekly 1:1 meetings with students, something that would have been prohibitive with a larger class size. The co-teaching model allowed us to work collectively on discussion plans, the design of weekly projects, and the mentorship of students. It also allowed us to divide labor when we considered that our expertise could better contribute to the success of the class. For example, Snyder, Ph.D. in Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, was responsible for the week 1 theme of “Feminist Foundations” -- assigning reading materials, creating quizzes and discussion questions, and grading -- while González, Ph.D. candidate in History, led week 2, “A Long History of Women’s Activism.”

The three-week duration of the class meant tough decisions about what to include and necessarily limited class goals. Week 1 equipped students with “Feminist Foundations.” In this interdisciplinary course, cross-listed in three units (Women’s Studies, Latin American Studies, and History), the material for this week -- which included readings, films, artworks, interviews, and digital explorations -- established a shared language for students from different majors to discuss gender, sexuality, social movements, and racial formations in a Latin American context. The second week focused on women’s histories of oppression and collective organization from the early twentieth century through the 1990s. The week’s materials introduced the arc of women’s movements during this time period. We studied interventions into the welfare state in the early 1900s, struggles for political and economic rights in the 1950s, and the resistance to the neoliberal dictatorships in the 1970s in the Southern Cone (the region today known as Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, and Brazil). Here, the class’s short duration meant that we decided to focus on one geographical region, since one week would not be enough time to comprehensively address complexities across Latin America and the Caribbean. The third week focused on contemporary movements building towards “Feminist Futures.” Students learned about contemporary feminist tactics to denounce femicides and advocate for reproductive rights. We focused on #NiUnaMenos and #AbortoLegalYa, the campaign for the legalization of the abortion in Argentina.

## Embodied Knowledge

When we envisioned the class as an on-site course in Argentina, set to take place during the fifth anniversary of #NiUnaMenos, we imagined students would be fully immersed: participating in marches and trainings, dialoguing with local leaders, and working on projects alongside Argentine student activists. Along with feminist activists, students would have to *poner sus cuerpos* by documenting the anniversary of #NUM, by dancing queer tango, by organizing a cultural activity with a local social movement, and by participating in *fútbol femenino* (women’s soccer). While this experience would be impossible to reproduce in an online course, we asked

ourselves how the online class could translate such embodied elements. Incorporating physicality mattered both pedagogically, in terms of active learning, and also topically, because of the centrality of the body in Latin American feminisms.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, “*poner el cuerpo/a*” (putting the body on the line) is a metaphor that feminists have used for decades to signal the embodied character of activism: perform a song, march in the streets, and sometimes put your body at risk in front of the police. According to an activist from the Argentine Movimiento de Trabajadores Desocupados (MTE - Movement of Unemployed Workers), “to question inequality is not exclusively a ‘mental’ activity . . . In order to make our voices heard, we have to feel [our demands], and have them come out of your whole body” (Colectiva Mala Junta 2019, 53). Since the 1980s Latin American and Caribbean “*encuentros*”(meetings) have provided physical spaces for thousands of women and dissidents to discuss gender inequality, build collective power, and strategize local, national, and transnational feminist agendas. Beyond the *encuentros*, feminists have participated in local organizations and intervened in everyday life “putting their bodies” into transforming popular neighborhoods, cultural centers, schools, unions, universities, and the workplace (Gago, 2019; Colectiva Mala Junta, 2019; Mason 2007; Flores, 2019).

Teaching transnational feminism in a digital environment devoid of personal contact and collective action with activists from the Global South presented serious limitations. However, the uprising in the U.S. transformed how the students experienced our course: for many, participating in local actions gave new meaning to Latin American and Caribbean mobilizing. For the group of young learners in LASC348 it was the first time they were witnessing a popular movement in the streets, observing police interact with activists, and debating with friends and family about racism and white privilege. Many of them were experiencing the tiredness of their bodies after a protest, the smell of tear gas, and the anger of racial inequality. For instance, one student (who identified as white Latinx) encountered police violence for the first time when they were tear gassed by the cops while peacefully protesting. The experience radicalized this student to join anti-policing ACAB actions and to share their experiences online via Instagram and Twitter. Not all of our students participated in physical demonstrations, but even the students who were not in the streets (for a variety of reasons) gained new perspectives by listening to the experiences of their friends and classmates and by seeing media depictions of protests, especially live streams. More research needs to be done in order to understand the multiple connections between the online classroom and the streets as well as the relationship between off- and on-line activism. Yet, we believe that the protests happening at the local level and the active participation of our students in them gave practical meaning to the class material so the students could reflect about activist tactics, empathize with social justice causes, and ultimately connect state violence and protests in the Americas.

The conceptualization of digital spaces as valuable sites for social change helped students to make sense of their online practices and to consider themselves as producers of discourses, and collaborators in translocal movements for justice. *Performance Constellations: Networks of Protest and Activism in Latin America*, by Marcela A. Fuentes, looks at how bodily performances in the streets (from Ciudad Juarez to Buenos Aires) and social media campaigns work together to create “insurgent collective actions” (2) that denounce state violence, patriarchal power, and neoliberal policies, which disproportionately affect women, travestis, trans, and non-binary persons. Fuentes’s text gave students the conceptual tools to understand digital and physical spaces as part of “co-created” activist networks where people are watching, commenting, joining, sharing, attending, documenting, replicating, recycling (Fuentes 2019, 3). In *Online and in the Streets*, students were engaging in social media, reading stories from alternative news sources, and looking at personal narratives expressed in words, songs, and images. In the class discussion board, students remarked on their ability to participate in movements even when they cannot leave their homes by “sharing poems, music, speeches, etc.” Many noted they were using social media to organize “but also to educate people on white privilege, racism and institutional discrimination.” Another student noted that translation functions built into social media platforms like Instagram -- which can be configured to automatically translate posts in any language into English -- have made it easy for them to participate in campaigns across the world, like those in Hong Kong. Every response on the discussion board about Fuentes’s text linked #NiUnaMenos with #BLM evincing the transnational connections that *Performance Constellations* elucidated. Some of the similarities students noted were: practices of mourning, *denuncia* or public denouncements, overlap in slogans (for example in FIG 1.1) that call out the state for its role in enacting violence (and negating protections) on vulnerable people, and demanding the right to exist and be visible in public spaces, both digital and physical.

While recognizing the networked protests that bridged local actions in Argentina and the U.S., online forms of engagement (in both protest and pedagogy) nevertheless remain, to an extent, disembodied. In our class, we created rituals that brought students back into their bodies such as meditation and free-writing activities. We started every synchronous meeting with free-writing that allowed the students to connect class materials with their experiential knowledge and to process these through their bodies. For example, one activity asked students to reflect on: “what does your body need, what does your mind need, what does your spirit need.” In their own words, students considered this activity “healing,” and an “opportunity to keep your mind at peace” in a moment when they felt exhausted, frustrated, and alone.

These activities, along with the class materials, exposed students to feminist epistemologies that recognize women’s experiences as legitimate sources of knowledge and as motors for political transformation. For example, Merle Collins’s (2010) film *Saracca and Nation: African Memory and ReCreacion in Grenada and Carriacou* traces

the African genealogies of *saracca* on the island of Carriacou where members of Collins's family are from. Collins links the intimate and the global, connecting her personal journey of self-discovery with the African diaspora in the Americas. The filmmaker documents the song, food, and dance of *saracca* to map exchanges between the Caribbean and Africa. For instance, at one point Collins asks a village elder to identify her nation, and she responds with a song that the filmmaker traces to a tribe from the Northwestern coast of Africa. One student noted that "instead of engaging with history passively, [the film examines] cultural traditions to embody a history that is told through language, song, dance and festival" (emphasis ours).

Indeed, if *saracca* illustrates how history exists in our bodies, Collins's own embodied experiences of anti-Blackness were part of her motivation for making the film. During an interview with CK Snyder, Collins modeled a process of self-reflection, and how personal experiences can become sites of knowledge. The filmmaker shared that reclaiming and celebrating African heritage challenges the veneration of all things European that she learned in school. Drawing inspiration from how Collins's life influenced her approach to knowledge making, and from her self-reflexivity about her journey, students created a feminist vlog. In the vlogs, the students were asked to connect their own corporeal and situated understandings of feminism with debates in Latin American feminisms they were encountering in the class.

In the online classroom, we could not give the students the opportunities for embodied knowledge that they would have enjoyed in Buenos Aires. Yet, a feminist pedagogy that centers the body made it possible for the students to connect the class material with their personal experiences, to understand that the personal is political, and furthermore to grasp that the meaning of personal and political must always be situated within a historical context that is also geographic -- situated in physical and virtual space. Moreover, a feminist pedagogy that pays attention to students' experiences must also open the classroom to the world; making reading materials, assignments, and discussions relevant and meaningful by allowing the students to talk, discuss, and learn how and about what their bodies experience. In a context of uprising in the U.S., the protests localized transnational debates about police brutality, oppression, and state violence against women and Black people.

## Transnational Solidarity and Collaboration

We conceived of the on-site class in Buenos Aires as a way to create long-lasting relationships and exchanges between students, activists, artists, and scholars in Argentina and the United States. Transnational collaborations in this context signified a two way flow, from the U.S. to Argentina and vice versa. Through a process of negotiation with local actors, the study abroad would have paid women leaders for their time and expertise and allocated material and human resources to organizations

and public institutions for their time and space. Moreover, the collaborations between U.S. institutions and local entities -- like the *Red Interdisciplinaria de Genero* (Interdisciplinary Network of Gender Studies) at the Universidad Tres de Febrero and the *Prosecretaria de Géneros y Políticas Feministas* (the Office of Gender and Feminist Politics) at the School of Humanities and Education Science in the Universidad Nacional de La Plata -- would lend clout to local feminists building gender studies in the Argentine academy as well as visibilize their intellectual and organizational work. Conversely, as the first on-site course at our U.S. based university that centered feminist movements in Latin America, it would have presented an institutional paradigm where academia and activism exist in closer proximity (Ortiz-Riaga and Morales-Rubiano, 2011; Cedeño Ferrín and Machado Ramírez, 2012). The course aimed to introduce this paradigm to a U.S. institution that aspires (but often fails) to serve the community where it resides. Indeed, the fact that the on-site course was so popular (with over 30 applications submitted in the first year it was offered) put it on the radar for other professors and administrators. *Women's Movements in Latin America* (the original name of the on-site course, later changed when we moved online) made feminist movements a legitimate study abroad course at our University, with social organizers as producers of knowledge.

*Online and In the Streets* did not allow for the type of lasting, meaningful, and reciprocal collaborations that we envisioned in the study abroad in Buenos Aires. Nonetheless, the online class was able to incorporate transnational approaches. We did this via course materials that highlighted (dis)connections across borders, analyzed asymmetrical flows of power, traced movements of goods, people, and ideas, examined questions of scale, and fostered thinking that challenges and goes beyond the nation. Moreover, we used oral history methodologies that asked students to connect global issues to their intimate lives and personal genealogies. Finally, students took part in transnational conversations with invited speakers: feminist scholars, activists, and artists working on and from Latin America and the Caribbean.

Through course materials students understood the (dis)connections across borders (for instance Falcón 2015, Cowan 2017, Santana 2019, Moraga and Anzaldúa 2015). For example, so that students could link the BLM movements happening in their streets with those in Brazil, we included material about Marielle Franco, "a black queer woman, mother, sociologist, socialist, human rights defender, councilwoman from the favela of Maré," who was assassinated on March 14, 2018 ("On the Imperative of Transnational Solidarity: A U.S. Black Feminist Statement on the Assassination of Marielle Franco" 2018). The murder of councilwoman Franco took place amidst the rise of the right in Brazil and in many countries around the world, fueling the need for activists and scholars to look beyond the narrow confines of their own national borders. Following her assassination, the hashtags #MariellePresente (#MariellePresent) and #QuemMatouMarielleFranco (#WhoKilledMarielleFranco) have kept her alive, mobilizing protests and demanding accountability for her murder.

Through their introduction to Franco, students were able to compare and contrast movements for economic, racial, and gender justice throughout the Americas, challenging their U.S.-centric view of the world. In addition to the collective statement of solidarity written by a group of U.S. Black Feminist scholars, Brazilian Director Fabio Erdos's (2018) documentary "Marielle and Monica" helped students identify transnational trends in state violence, such as the increasing militarization of the police and their targeting of Black activists. At the same time, students situated Franco's murder within a long history of Latin American military dictators who "disappeared" political dissidents.

Another way students learned transnational methods was through oral history projects (Portelli 1998, Leavy 2007, Borland 1992, Townsend 2019, James 1996). The second experience set asked students to explore feminist approaches to oral history in order to connect personal stories with global processes of migration, labor, and motherhood. In the context of a three-week class during a pandemic, most students conducted interviews with family members since it was more accessible. Many students, first- or second-generation immigrants, took the interview as an opportunity to get to know their families' stories of migration. These students wanted to understand how their *madres* and *abuelas* experienced gendered norms in their home countries and how migration to the U.S. affected their choices. Oral history methodologies functioned as a tool to engage questions of scale by drawing connections between the self, the community, the nation, and beyond: in this case, a knowledge about what is proximate opened into knowing of others' experiences.

Although family histories were not part of our original expectations for the interviews, we realized that each student had personal histories that they wanted to unpack. In the process, students were tracing a genealogy that Mexican anthropologist Marcela Largarde (2018) conceptualized in her book *Claves feministas para mis socias de la vida (Feminist Keys for My Partners in Life)*. Largarde suggests that in order to build feminist leadership, we must understand where we come from. We must know the women who came before us, identify the conflicts they faced, and recognize how they navigated them (2018). Even within the limited time of our accelerated course, the discussions that arose from the second project led some students to proudly claim their genealogies and to acknowledge women's roles as transnational actors, workers, migrants, professionals, educators, and mothers. Oral history proved to be a powerful feminist method to foster dialogues between grandmothers, mothers, and daughters. It helped students to humanize and empathize with older generations, rather than judge them. Moreover, they learned how to situate contemporary feminist agendas while acknowledging past struggles.

In addition to course materials and oral history projects, our class enacted transnational collaborations through recorded interviews with instructors and Latin American and Caribbean thinkers. Despite physical distance, digital technologies facilitated collaborations with scholars who work in Latin America or who are Latin Americanists. Invited speakers included Marcela Fuentes (Argentina-USA), Associate Professor of Performance

Studies at Northwestern University, USA; Carolina Flores (Argentina), an activist and instructor at the Universidad Nacional Tres de Febrero, Argentina; Brandi Townsend (USA-Chile), a professor of History at the Universidad Catolica in Santiago, Chile; Josefina Vallejos (Argentina), a feminist activist, and Merle Collins (Grenada and Carriacou-Jamaica-Mexico-UK-USA), artist, activist, Professor and Director of Latin American and Caribbean Studies at UMD. Interviews were an alternative to the lecture, a genre that privileges the professor's point of view. They were made possible, in part, due to the labor of translation (Spanish to English) from instructors as well as the diverse networks of women the co-instructors brought into conversation. Yet, language was a factor that alienated many possible participants, especially activists from the working class. By and large, working-class people in Latin America do not have access to private instruction in English and do not have exposure to the language through international travel. Again, given the short duration of the class and limited resources, we were able to translate two interviews for our non-Spanish speaking students; but the simultaneous translation was labor intensive and doubled the interview time. Still, as a tactic for transnational teaching, the interviews functioned as opportunities to conceptualize *with* and not only *about* Latin American actors.

The interviews facilitated dialogues and promoted connections across nations but ultimately transnational feminist collaboration requires resources, long-term projects, and more horizontal exchanges between university and social movements. In the online course, the transnational collaborations we aspired to were more ephemeral, lacking the teaching and learning alliances that in-person interchanges would have made possible. Transnational feminist scholars Ashwini Tambe and Millie Thayer have conceptualized these shifts as a movement from *embodied* to *spectral transnationalism*, in their book *Transnational Feminist Itineraries* (2021). The authors describe how transnational feminist activism is increasingly forced to move online in light of neoliberal policies that defund social movements and prevent activists from physically gathering in order to make long-term alliances. In the 2000s transnational feminism shifted into spectral forms, as "traveling feminists" returned home to confront rightwing surges and diminished funding, forcing feminist organizations to either close or transition to cheaper, online forms of activism (Tambe and Thayer 2021, 19). Youth movements emerged in ephemeral surges as activists debated how to sustain such movements in order to confront enduring forms of domination. In this context, Tambe and Thayer assert, "transnationalism persists but becomes spectral, still present but in out-of-body form," cross border campaigns meet in person less and less, and local politics take center stage (2021, 19). With a project that aimed to build connections between the U.S. and Latin America, the limits that we found in the transition online is constitutive of the shifts happening in transnational feminist activism, writ large. We suggest that spectral forms of transnational feminism are also present in pedagogy, as evidenced in our experiences with *Online and In the Streets*.

## Education for Liberation

Just as we struggled to convert a class that emphasized embodied knowledge and facilitated transnational solidarity and collaboration, we were also presented with the limits and possibilities of online spaces for teaching that is liberatory. In moving from an on-site to an on-line setting, what elements of transformative pedagogy remain relevant? Latin America has a long tradition of liberatory education popularized by Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2013, 1986). Freire, who developed his method in face to face settings in the Brazilian *Nordeste* (North East), advocated forms of teaching that value students' experiences and make student-teacher relations inside the classroom more horizontal. As feminine-presenting women, one of whom is a non-native English speaker from the Global South, we appreciate feminist critiques of horizontality that acknowledge the challenges women face in being recognized as authorities and knowledge producers. Furthermore, formal educational structures, such as grading, limit possibilities for democratizing the classroom. Within the multiple structural limitations of teaching at neoliberal institutions, in general, and teaching online, in particular, what might constitute a transformative digital education?

"Online and in the Streets" aspired to liberatory methods through assignment structure, self-assessment, and collective input on the syllabus. First, we designed our class around three experience sets -- a feminist vlog, an oral history project, and a creative response -- that recognized students' experiences as sites of knowledge. This structure required students to draw critically from events outside the classroom and connect these to course materials and discussions. The experience sets also allowed students freedom and creativity since the direction of the assignments were largely self-determined. When students struggled with what to focus on, we asked them to prioritize projects that sparked their curiosity and that gave them pleasure. Second, self assessments (students grading their own assignments) made students experts on their personal growth. Self-assessment de-escalated the pressure to produce work deemed worthy by professors and kept the emphasis on the joy of learning. This proved particularly important during the third experience set that asked students to either create or analyze a work of art, which was a vulnerable process for many of our non-artist-identified students. Because the set emphasized the process rather than the outcome, students found the exercise of making art liberatory. Third, a mid-semester survey asked students to reflect on their process of learning and provide formative feedback including suggestions for topics they wished to incorporate during the third week. The practice of asking students about their interests gave them ownership over the syllabus and challenged a one-way flow of knowledge from teachers to students.

Responding to students' desires to learn more about childhood, art, and education, during the last week Sabrina González interviewed her cousin, Josefina Vallejos, a nine year old girl who defines herself as feminist. The interview explored Vallejos's definition of feminism, her sources of inspiration, her artwork, and her process of feminist

education. Vallejos was able to signal the main elements of a feminist agenda: reproductive rights, resistance to gendered forms of violence, and equality. According to her, feminism is "to have the same social rights as men. We have the right to be paid equally and to not be touched against our will. We also have freedom of expression. We have the right to kiss who we want and not be called a slut ... when men do this they are called *machos*" (4:20). Vallejos recalled the emergence of #NiUnaMenos in 2015 and the debate for the legalization of abortion in Argentina's National Congress in 2018 as two key moments in her political awakening. She was 4 years old when, inspired by the #NiUnaMenos protests, she created a sign that said "*paren de matarnos*" (stop killing us), hung it on the front door of her home, and has continued to make feminist-themed art since. It is perhaps because the interview with Vallejos responded to students' interests that it generated the most meaningful class discussion about the construction of childhood, national policy, sex education, and the power of feminist art to educate the new generations.

Vallejos's interview also spoke to the potential of liberatory education. As a young artist, Vallejos learned from the transformative agendas that feminist movements are imagining and enacting in the present. She referenced her family members, friends with an older sister, and YouTubers as people who have influenced her ideas. Notably, her sources of knowledge about feminism come from her intimate circles and digital spaces rather than formal education state-sponsored initiatives like comprehensive sexual education. In other words, Vallejos developed a feminist consciousness in part due to the messaging that movements like #NiUnaMenos inspired. However, these social movements are advocating that the state incorporate their demands for sexual education in public education and in so doing translate the changes happening in civil society into lasting policies that educate children from a liberatory perspective. Students valued Vallejos's interview not only for her political clarity, but for the symbolic role children play as harbingers of the future. For many students and for the instructors of this class, Josefina demonstrates that feminist utopias are possible and that new generations might be more aware and willing to speak out than previous generations.

Students created art that drew from what we were learning in class about #NiUnaMenos and what they were learning in the streets from #BlackLivesMatter. Gunther's artwork (Fig 1.1) is one example. Other works included a zine on Black lesbian love, a drawing about indigenous women confronting gender stereotypes, and a digital storytelling of racialized beauty standards in Latin America. As a part of our concluding reflections, students collectively composed a poem (Vooris 2019), inspired by movements for justice across the Americas. According to students, in a feminist utopia:

*bonds are formed through communities of care  
the idea of family is far beyond the constraints of  
blood relation  
child care is a community activity  
children and girls are allowed to live*



*we look at one another  
there is no discrimination  
nobody is afraid to be who they are*

*there is peace and acceptance of all people  
there is no fear of being who you are destined to be,  
everyone can be who they are*

*we engage with love freely and vastly  
consent is constantly practiced*

*women are at the same level as men  
women can go outside without being targeted  
women are intellectually strong to combat and change  
the system*

*those who identify as women:  
can love who they want,  
are not afraid to be by themselves at night,  
are the sole decision makers of their own bodies,  
their lands are protected,  
their Human Rights are recognized*

*there is freedom  
there is no war  
people learn history properly in order to not repeat  
mistakes*

*we move from a space of social isolation to a space of  
togetherness*

Feminist, antiracist, and queer pedagogies insist that the classroom's transformations of ways of thinking, through critical processes of knowledge production and exchange, can and should open onto larger transformations in the social and political world. Digital environments shift what such transformations might look like. For instance, a physical class might require an activist assignment where students work together to stage an intervention on campus. The students' interventions in our class were smaller in scale, aimed at self-reflexivity and mediations between intimate circles of family and friends. In small ways, through the content and structure of our course, we aspired to transformative teaching as a cornerstone of transnational feminist pedagogy.

## Conclusions

This moment calls for a transnational feminist pedagogy that incorporates embodied knowledge, transnational collaborations, and liberatory learning practices for students. We are operating in a context in which neoliberal policies reduce the budget for education at the same time that conservative governments in the Americas focus on profit over life, evinced in the ongoing exploitation of human and natural resources. The danger of commodification of education via online teaching is present. Furthermore, while schools struggle and while universities hunker down in anticipation of deeper budget cuts, apparently there is always money for the police. While writing this article, the police continued killing Black people

in the U.S. In Argentina, the police disappeared Facundo Astudillo Castro, a young, working-class, activist from Buenos Aires. Activists throughout the Americas continue to make state violence visible in its multiple forms: feminicides, deforestation, police brutality. Radical educators must similarly make visible these forms of oppression, exacerbated by the pandemic.

As aspiring transnational feminist pedagogs, and in the long tradition of marginalized people struggling for justice, we sought to meet the moment with the available resources. Our pedagogy required that we understand our students (primarily queer, first gen, POC) as part of those populations historically marginalized by an increasingly privatized higher education. While acknowledging these limitations, we also celebrate what we were able to accomplish, thanks to networks of support within Argentina, and activists and artists throughout the Americas. The course was also the result of a long-term partnership between co-teachers CK Snyder and Sabrina González that enacts transnational collaborations across the Americas. In the students' words, the class was successful because it gave them the opportunity to engage ideas and to encounter authors from Latin America and the Caribbean, to know their family histories of migration and labor, and to value their creative process. At the end of the course, some students even mentioned that they started thinking about themselves as activists.

Inspired by Fuentes's work we wanted to reconsider the possibilities of online teaching and activism as important in challenging the status quo in a digitally connected world. Throughout the sections of this paper, we have shown that we do not have to lose our pedagogical principles because our media changes. Online teaching can be a tool that facilitates transnational dialogues and honors students' different abilities and desires in learning. Because our students were mostly digital natives, they were open to this environment, perhaps more so than their instructors.

However, each section showed that online teaching, as part of *spectral transnationalism*, presents serious limitations when compared with in-person instruction, especially for classes teaching about social movements and protest. Regarding embodied knowledge, Latin American and Caribbean activists teach us that social change and structural transformations in the law, family, school, and media occur primarily through collective action, through *poner los/las/lxs cuerpos/cuerpas/cuerpxs* in the streets and local communities. The internet offers new possibilities for reverberations, echoes, and enunciations that amplify what happens in the streets, but it can never replace it. The course gestured towards a transnational feminist pedagogy by centering materials and scholars from the Global South. Through assignments like the oral history interview we also encouraged students to reflect and strengthen their own transnational connections. Yet, the inadequate amount of resources and planning time that went into this three-week class limited our ability to realize meaningful, lasting transnational exchanges: namely, we were unable to redistribute resources, pay for translation, and think with our collaborators in Latin America about shared goals and outcomes. Liberation is also a collective process, and digital

spaces pale in comparison to the sense of community that often happens in the space of a physical classroom.

In an online environment, teachers faced serious challenges to make their classrooms radical spaces for transnational activism. What would it look like, for instance, to work in solidarity with teachers in Latin America who are organizing campaigns to collect cell phones since online instruction remains impossible for poor students with limited access to the internet and digital devices? What might happen if teachers in the U.S. -- facing budget cuts and *poniendo sus cuerpos* on the front lines of unsafe classrooms -- understood our struggles for justice are inextricably linked? This article described how one might incorporate Latin American and Caribbean practices of resistance to neoliberal policies in the classroom in order to open the class to local protests happening in the streets, to give students the possibilities to reflect about social change, and to recognize embodied knowledge as legitimate sources of personal and collective liberation. We would like to suggest that a transnational feminist pedagogy, one that is adequately resourced and therefore able to build transnational networks of scholars, activists, artists, and students, is a pedagogy with the potential to open to the world and enact change.

## Note

1. We have summarized student responses and not used names to maintain privacy. We used Gunster's name and art with explicit permission to do so.

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## Appendix

English Translation of "Untitled" by Delayney Gunst

Left Hand: NUM		
Appendage	Spanish	English
Pinky	-No aparecemos muertas, nos matan -Te parecemos muchas? Nos faltan miles	-We are not "appearing" dead, they are killing us -Do you think we are too many? We are missing thousands
Ring Finger	#NiUnaMenos #AbortoLegalYa #AisladasNoSolos #NiUnaMas #Seraley	#NotOneWomanLess #LegalizeAbortionNow #IsolatedNotAlone #NotOneMore #ItWillBeLaw
Middle Finger	Estos ojos son míos. Este cuerpo es mío. Esta vida es mía. (Lyrics from Rebeca Lane)  No estas sola Mi cuerpo = mi decisión America Latina va a ser toda feminista  Molesta más una mujer liberada que mil asesinadas Soy feminista	These eyes are mine This body is mine. This life is mine.  You are not alone My body = my choice Latin America will be feminist  One liberated woman bothers you more than a thousand women murdered I'm a feminist
Pointer Finger	-La maternidad será deseada o no será -Predicar la abstinencia no es educación sexual -Aborto legal para no morir -Por nuestro derecho a decidir	-Maternity will be a choice or it will not happen -Preaching abstinence is not sexual education -Legal abortion to not die -Pro-choice
Thumb	El virus más ancestral es el patriarcado	The oldest virus is patriarchy



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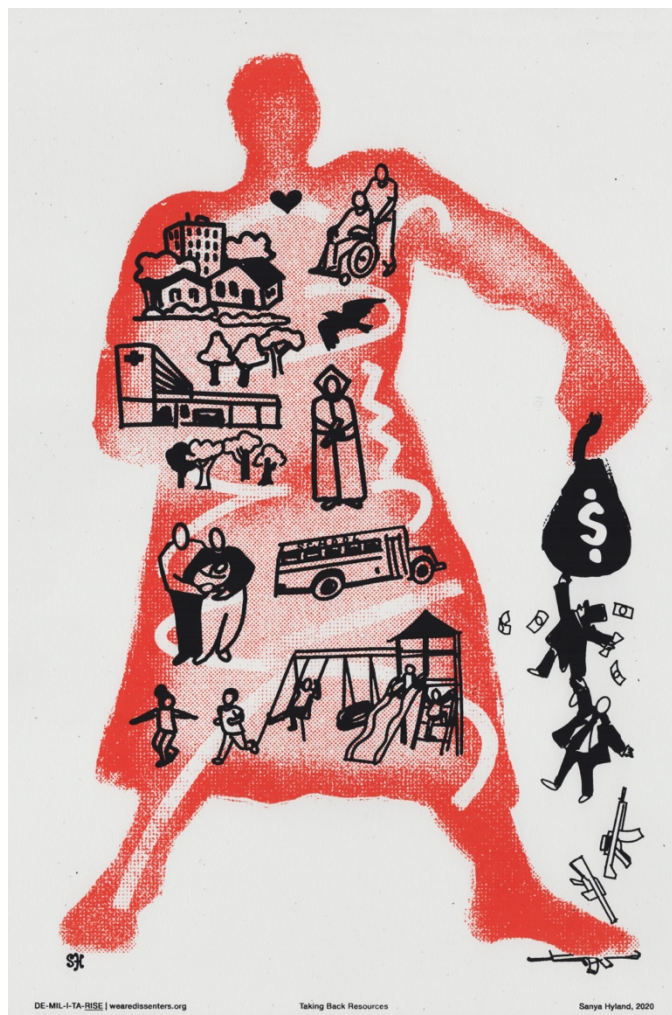
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# RADICAL TEACHER

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

## Education Reform: What Is Really Achieved by Trying to Close Achievement Gaps?

by John Schlueter



"TAKING-BACK-RESOURCES " BY SANYA-HYLAND VIA JUST SEEDS

LeBron James, in a recent commercial, criticizes the well-worn narrative in which the black professional athlete is praised for their success despite their “humble beginnings” (<https://lebronwire.usatoday.com/2019/12/19/lebron-james-hopes-for-no-more-humble-beginnings-in-new-nike-ad/>). At the commercial’s climax James looks into the camera and asks, “what if there were no more humble beginnings?” However, this does not mean James is going to disperse his vast wealth to as many needy families as he can, nor does it mean he will launch some tax reform initiative that basically puts an end to millionaires or billionaires like himself. Instead, the commercial ends with him watching a fictional news story about his “I Promise” school on his phone, which shows an African-American girl standing in a classroom with a headline about “extraordinary test scores”. The implicit message is that education is the agent of increased economic opportunity and greater equality. The fact that this does not even need to be spoken means that we now take for granted that better education, or an equalization of educational opportunity, is the agent of greater socio-economic achievement or how we eliminate “humble beginnings” (a phrase that itself is a euphemism for poverty and economic injustice).

In essence, James’s commercial substitutes education reform for economic reform. This substitution is a fantasy—a fantasy so compelling that it has driven education reform for the last several decades. Why education reformers continue to expect education—and increasingly higher education—to be the site where we can achieve equality is the story I want to tell here, and it is a story epitomized in the obsession with the achievement gap. By calling attention to gaps in educational outcomes along class, race, and ethnicity, we admit that achievement itself is structural, or that disparities in outcomes don’t exist because of a group’s natural abilities, but because of deep inequalities. However, at the very same time, those deep inequalities are relocated within institutional spaces (classrooms) that can be “reformed.” Therefore, by working to reform those spaces, we can tell ourselves that we are addressing inequality. In reality, though, by re-making achievement gaps into a cause of inequality rather than its effect, education reformers address structural inequality while helping to ensure its continuation. In what follows, I will not only outline a long history of how education reformers mistake effects of inequality for causes; I will also show how doing so results in an extremely effective disciplinary practice that compels teachers, administrators, and students to do more and more with less and less. Finally, I will argue that, in order to value both equality and learning for what they are, we need to think about them completely independent of metrics of achievement.

## The Coleman Report and the Illogic of Reform

In the wake of the police killing of George Floyd, we can only expect the achievement gap in education to get even more emphasis and attention. However, the story of how education became the agent of equality begins with a

decades-old study that disproved that very hypothesis. The 1964 Civil Rights Act called for a study of inequality of opportunity in education along racial and ethnic lines. Known as the “Coleman Report,” this landmark sociological study, led by the University of Chicago’s James S. Coleman, involved 600,000 children in 4,000 schools and sought to find the source of achievement gaps between white and black students. The results were surprising. Most assumed that school inputs—particularly the amount of funding schools received and teacher quality—were the biggest factors responsible for different educational outcomes. However, what the Coleman Report found was that such factors mattered least, and what mattered most was who the children went to school with. In the report’s words:

Taking all these results together, one implication stands out above all: That schools bring little influence to bear on a child’s achievement that is independent of his background and general social context; and that this very lack of an independent effect means that the inequalities imposed on children by their home, neighborhood, and peer environment are carried along to become the inequalities with which they confront adult life at the end of school. For equality of educational opportunity through the schools must imply a strong effect of schools that is independent of the child’s immediate social environment, and that strong independent effect is not present in American schools (325).

These “imposed inequalities” boil down to class differences, differences that overlap with, and are exacerbated by, racial/ethnic differences. The fundamentally classed-based root of achievement gaps revealed by Coleman’s report is what Richard D. Kahlenberg highlights in “Learning from James Coleman”:

The Coleman Report had suggested that the economic status of students in a school, rather than its racial makeup, was the key factor driving school quality. It concluded that the “beneficial effect of a student body with a high proportion of white students comes not from racial composition per se but from the better educational background and higher educational aspirations that are, on the average, found among whites.” The implication, Coleman noted, was that poor blacks and whites would benefit from attending middle-class white or black schools, and that poor blacks would not benefit academically from attending low-income white schools. This finding was replicated in subsequent studies...(62)

Again, the fact that poor black students would not fare better in low-income white schools underscores the class-based nature of academic performance. However, as translated into public policy, the Coleman Report did not lead to economic reform, but to the forced integration of schools through busing, which Coleman later argued led to “white flight” and even greater segregation.

The direct influence of socio-economic class on achievement was brought to the foreground by another landmark sociological study that built upon the data

collected in the Coleman report. *Inequality: A Reassessment of the Effect of Family and Schooling in America* (1972), by Christopher Jencks et al., concluded that educational reform does not result in a more equitable distribution of income. In Jencks's words, "As long as egalitarians assume that public policy cannot contribute to economic equality directly but must proceed by ingenious manipulations of marginal institutions like the schools, progress will remain glacial" (265). More about these "ingenious manipulations of marginal institutions" later. For now, what's important is that Jencks's study highlights what the Coleman Report showed but perhaps didn't say directly: income inequality—or "humble beginnings"—cannot be "solved" by educational reform. Many sociologists and others have taken issue with parts of the methodology and interpretation of the data in both the Coleman Report and *Inequality*; I am not a trained sociologist so I am not going to dive into those weeds. However, it is worth noting that [Coleman himself reviewed \*Inequality\*](#), and although he had major critiques of the work, he ended his review by underscoring its most important truth:

There is, however, an important point made. The point could have been made very simply, in a short paper. It is this: that equality of opportunity is distinct from equality of results (as measured by income), and attention given by governments to equality of opportunity must not distract attention from inequality of income, nor from trends in inequality of income (1526).

The story of education reform since the 60's is the story of how we have been "distracted" in exactly the way Coleman warned: educational policy has been driven by the belief that educational reform (what Coleman means by "equality of opportunity") is the agent of economic opportunity and greater economic equality for all citizens.

Coleman's report essentially lays out two paths forward. One path is to deal with inequality directly, which is the path we have not taken, and to which I will return later. The second is to keep searching for the "strong effect of schools that is independent of the child's immediate social environment." The search for such "independent effects" is the path we have always chosen, and it has compelled a seemingly never-ending process of reform, which puts enormous pressure on teachers, institutions, and students themselves. Twenty years after the Coleman Report, Ronald Reagan's 1983 Report "[A Nation at Risk](#)" brings us to the same crossroads. First it calls out, correctly, the overwhelming expectations we place on schools:

Our society and its educational institutions seem to have lost sight of the basic purposes of schooling, and of the high expectations and disciplined effort needed to attain them...That we have compromised this commitment is, upon reflection, hardly surprising, given the multitude of often conflicting demands we have placed on our Nation's schools and colleges. They are routinely called on to provide solutions to personal, social, and political problems that the home and other institutions either will not or cannot resolve. We must

understand that these demands on our schools and colleges often exact an educational cost as well as a financial one.

However, instead of directly addressing these problems we have tasked education with solving, the report again resolves that educational institutions provide students with Coleman's "independent effect":

All, regardless of race or class or economic status, are entitled to a fair chance and to the tools for developing their individual powers of mind and spirit to the utmost. This promise means that all children by virtue of their own efforts, competently guided, can hope to attain the mature and informed judgement needed to secure gainful employment, and to manage their own lives, thereby serving not only their own interests but also the progress of society itself.

Two decades later, George W. Bush's administration comes to the same crossroads, and once again chooses the same path with the "[No Child Left Behind](#)" act, which resolves "to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so that no child is left behind."

In the meantime, neoliberal economic policies are driving what Janet Yellen called "[the most sustained rise in economic equality since the 19<sup>th</sup> century.](#)" But don't take my word for it; even the IMF itself has come to the same conclusion. [An IMF report](#) addressing the failure of neoliberalism to deliver on its promises puts it this way: "since both openness and austerity are associated with increasing income inequality, this distributional effect sets up an adverse feedback loop. The increase in inequality engendered by financial openness and austerity might itself undercut growth, the very thing that the neoliberal agenda is intent on boosting. There is now strong evidence that inequality can significantly lower both the level and the durability of growth." Although neoliberalism has been a global failure, in the U.S., the role that education reform has played to buttress these failed economic policies cannot be understated. For example, a much-lauded study written by Harvard economists Claudia Goldin and Lawrence F. Katz called *The Race Between Education and Technology* (2008) completely ignores neoliberal economics and lays the blame for increased inequality on the failure of educational attainment to keep pace with technological innovation. Goldin and Katz marshal an enormous amount of data to argue for an ideal relationship between education and technology, which keeps income inequality in check. They argue that this relationship was maintained for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, in the late 70's, there was a period in which subsequent generations failed to maintain the pace of educational attainment of previous generations. In other words, "education lost the race to technology." (1) Goldin and Katz thus concluded that if the "supply of college workers increased from 1980 to 2005" at the same rate it had in previous decades, "the college premium, rather than rising, would have fallen" (321). By "college premium" they mean the amount a college degree is worth in dollars, and because there were fewer workers with that credential, the ones who had it were paid more and drove income inequality in the wrong direction.

Goldin and Katz's work is the logical outcome of studies of education since Coleman as it pertains to the history I'm tracing here. I say that because it is the complete inverse of the Coleman-Jencks understanding that educational attainment has little to do with "results," or income inequality. *The Race Between Education and Technology*, then, with all the force and publicity of a major Harvard study, removes neoliberal economic policy from the equation and re-creates educational achievement—and achievement gaps—as the reason for inequality. (2) According to one [report](#), the book significantly influenced many of the advisors who helped President Obama craft his education policy, which again stressed educational achievement as a primary path towards great equality.

This illogic of reform is so ingrained that, in a [recent special article in \*The Chronicle of Higher Education\*](#), the lack of social mobility is re-cast as the "failed promise" of higher education, and Danette Howard, senior vice president at the Lumina Foundation, can say, in complete earnestness, that "The *only thing* that mitigates intergenerational poverty is higher education" (italics mine). Really? Howard's statement only makes sense if we forget that income inequality reproduces itself and we remake one of the effects of that inequality—unequal educational outcomes—into a remedy of it.

The illogic of this reformist position is bolstered by correlation between education and income. One cannot dispute the data that shows that the more education one receives, the more money one makes. So, the reformer might say, this is why we need to close achievement gaps, because if a greater diversity of students attains more quality education and higher academic achievement, they too will make more money. However, the correlation between education and income does not prove that education is an agent of equality; it only proves that education can buttress existing economic inequality as much as it can mitigate it. Again, research like that of Goldin and Katz takes enormous pains to lay the blame for *the most sustained rise in inequality since the 19th century* on dips in educational attainment in certain years in the 70's or 80's. But the structures of inequality are too comprehensive to be remedied by "more education" (not to mention the fact that the [wealth advantage of having a college degree](#) has been steadily shrinking since the 1930's and 40's). However, instead, policy makers and education reformers have simply doubled, and tripled, down on the belief that what must be fixed is education—and we've done this by believing it's not just access to education that matters, but *how* we educate underserved populations. We don't need economic reform, in other words, we need more and more "ingenious manipulations of marginal institutions."

## Productivity: The Actual Outcome of Reform

In our present moment, education reformers, like LeBron James and Bill and Melinda Gates, are turning to nonpublic models, like charter schools, after coming again to the same crossroads that Coleman brought us to, and,

again, choosing the path of searching for "independent effects." This has not worked out. However, in this section, I will argue that, in practice, the real outcome of the reform model of closing achievement gaps is increased pressure on teachers and institutions to do more and more, and to do it with less.

Coleman himself gives legitimacy to the search for a magical "independent effect" of schooling. [In 1966 he writes](#): "Schools are successful only insofar as they reduce the dependence of a child's opportunities upon his social origins .... Thus equality of educational opportunity implies, not merely 'equal' schools, but equally effective schools, whose influences will overcome the differences in starting point of children from different social groups"(72). In Coleman's estimation, equality is a kind of "after effect" of a certain type of schooling that releases the student from her socio-economic background. [His rhetoric becomes even more heightened a year later](#): "This is a task far more ambitious than has ever been attempted by any society: not just to offer, in a passive way, equal access to educational resources, but to provide an educational environment that will free a child's potentialities for learning from the inequalities imposed upon him by the accident of birth into one or another home and social environment" (21). The task of education and educational reform is now clear: instead of being an argument for a more direct solution to inequality, the former "ineffectiveness" of schools to make up for said inequality now becomes the bar by which schools shall be judged.

The closing of achievement gaps is evidence for a school's ability to exert this supposed "independent effect." However, such initiatives are founded on an unspoken contradiction. In education, the last decades have marked a turn towards neoliberal policies and practices as post-secondary schools have been re-valued as economic engines and producers of late twentieth-/early twenty-first-century workers. Any educator or administrator is by now very familiar with such policies and practices: the de-professionalization of faculty, the exponential growth of contingent faculty, the growth of the managerial class, public disinvestment, standardized course learning outcomes, accreditation processes focused on assessments of student learning, and seeing students as "consumers," just to name a few of them. As neoliberal managerial practices have taken hold of higher education, neoliberal economic policies have created vast wealth disparity—the very inequalities that drive achievement gaps. So, herein lies the contradiction: somehow education reformers expect the neoliberal college or university to correct the inequality created by neoliberal economic policies. This simply cannot be done—but that's the point. As long as this contradiction remains unspoken, closing achievement gaps seems like an achievable, and even progressive, goal, rather than a chimerical one—and so we all work harder and harder chasing it.

This contradiction—wherein neoliberal educational management practices are used to correct inequalities created by neoliberal economics—means that closing achievement gaps has become the main metric for judging schools and teachers. In other words, achievement gaps are a school-centric problem, rather than evidence of the



insidious, corrosive, and far-reaching effects of inequality. For example, Robert Evans, in "Reframing the Achievement Gap" explains how education reformers see education as both the solution and the problem:

Reduced to its core, their logic is: all children are created equal, but all children are not performing equally in school; the gap typically worsens as children advance through the grades; the fault must therefore be the schools', so the solution must lie in school; the necessary knowledge and tools are available, and schools must be pressed to apply them (583).

So, in other words, reformers become so invested in closing achievement gaps that doing so becomes a goal that loses its reference to the socio-economic causalities "outside" of school.

When the achievement gap becomes this "school-centric," self-referential problem, enormous pressure is put on teachers. For example, in a particularly potent moment in his essay, Evans describes speaking with teachers, whom he greatly respects, and who have devoted their careers to equity and social justice for all students, and hearing them "reject as a cop-out any hesitation about schooling's potential to reduce the achievement gap." Many of these educators believe that "differentiated instruction," or tailoring teaching to the needs of students, with a focus on equity, is a "real key to closing the achievement gap." Evans admits that this methodology has great potential, but to expect it to close the achievement gap is wishful thinking. However, and this is the point I want to make now, instituting such a methodology, with the goal of closing achievement gaps rather than simply increasing student learning, does discipline the teacher. By discipline I don't mean reprimand; I mean it "motivates" the teacher to do more, and more, and more:

Differentiated instruction greatly increases the scope and complexity of teachers' work—the planning and the actual instruction—and thus demands extra sophistication, time, and energy. And it becomes more challenging as class size grows, as heterogeneity increases, and especially as students move to the upper grades, by which time the cumulative gaps in their performance have widened considerably and the curriculum is innately more content-driven and less amenable to individualization (588).

When teachers are made to chase the closing of achievement gaps like a carrot on a stick, they become susceptible to the constant reform initiatives that have become the air we breathe as educators. [Lilia Bartolome has called this](#) "the methods fetish," in which "the solution to the current underachievement of students from subordinated cultures is often reduced to finding the 'right' teaching methods, strategies, or prepackaged curricula that will work with students who do not respond to so-called 'regular' or 'normal' instruction" (1). For his part, Jencks warned us of these constant "ingenious manipulations of marginal institutions" years ago. But what makes this disciplinary practice so effective is that it seems so right: what teacher worth their salt wouldn't want to do everything in their power to help each and every student

succeed? However, the root of this effort must be acknowledged along with the practice, and that root is the fantasy that education—if done just right—can do what it cannot: create equality.

As reformers make the closing of achievement gaps a self-referential problem, the educational institution itself is then cut off from its socio-economic context. For example, take the case of Georgia State University, which has recently garnered national headlines for "[eliminating](#)" the [achievement gap](#) in its graduation rate between white and black students, and between students who are eligible for Pell grants those who are not. However, in order to be Pell eligible, your household income cannot exceed \$50,000, and much Pell money goes to students whose household income is much lower. In other words, being non-eligible for Pell does not mean you are not suffering from economic inequality. So, whereas the overall GSU graduation rate is around the national average, it is still far below top public research universities where students have much higher household incomes on average. Again, here is a case where, in isolating structural inequity within a single institution, we make relatively small differences in income (Pell-eligible vs. non-Pell eligible) stand in for deep inequalities.

GSU has seemingly achieved the "independent effect" Coleman was looking for, except, even when achieved, that independent effect only serves to mask inequality not just outside the institution, but inside of it as well. The latter is exemplified in how GSU turned [300 students into supplemental instructors](#), who do work that looks a lot like teaching, but for less than what an adjunct would make—further blurring the lines between higher learning and the economic mandate to be more educated in order to do more for less. Starting in the 1990's, GSU began using SI's to aid students in certain classes with high fail rates. [According to the application packet](#), SI's devote approximately 10 hours a week to various duties: attending the class itself, running/preparing materials for 2-3 study sessions a week, tracking attendance, meeting with coordinators, etc. As an article in the *Atlantic* states, "It would have cost the university millions of dollars to hire professional tutors to do this work...but recruiting and training 300 student leaders...costs almost nothing." Actually, SI's get a stipend of \$1500 a semester. Divide that by 10hr/week for 16 weeks and you get about \$9/hr. At this point, are we closing achievement gaps or are we preparing students to enter an economy in which productivity is high and pay is low?

Demographic data on student success is important, and focusing on underserved populations is crucial. But data without critique results in progress without purpose. The achievement gap asks us only to close it; it does not ask us to interrogate how we prepare graduates to accept a world in which: 1) [the U.S. populace is more educated than ever before](#); 2) [worker productivity has increased steadily since the 70's](#); BUT 3) [income inequality, exacerbated along racial/ethnic lines, has steadily increased since the 70's](#). In other words, if closing achievement gaps is the goal, education reformers must not ask what the purpose of higher ed is in a world where students need more education to get jobs in which they

produce more for less. GSU is often touted for eliminating achievement gaps despite significant cuts in funding; however, doing more for less is the logic of an economy that produces achievement gaps in the first place. GSU's outcomes are not an anomaly, they are the logical product of an economy obsessed with squeezing every ounce of productivity out of its workers and institutions.

Once we buy into the closing of achievement gaps as a metric of institutional effectiveness, we immediately find ourselves complicit in reproducing inequality. Because if we buy into this, we buy into Coleman's "independent effect," which posits that educational institutions can somehow stand outside their socio-economic reality and correct it in some way. Once we buy into the romance that educational achievement can be a corrective for inequality, we buy into a founding myth of neoliberalism: that one's equality with others is a product of one's ability to achieve.

## Achievement: A Progressive Take and a Radical Response

Despite the illogic of reform—or the practice of seeing educational achievement as a corrective for inequality—research continues to tell us that achievement is structural. Kevin Welner, a professor at the University of Colorado Boulder's School of Education who specializes in educational policy and law, makes this point again in a recent [Washington Post article](#):

Opportunity gaps drive achievement gaps. Yet U.S. policies proceed as if achievement can be boosted without corresponding investments in opportunities. These gaps arise from inequities inside of schools as well as outside of schools. In fact, outside-school factors appear to account for [most of the measured variance](#) in achievement among different groups. Yet U.S. policies proceed as if these gaps mainly arise from schools and should be closed by school-centric policies.

Welner, who is also the director of the [National Education Policy Center](#) at UC Boulder, is calling attention to the persistent error—now at least 60 years in the making—of asking schools to not only solve a problem not of their own making, but to treat it as a problem that they created! Again, this is the logic of reform: re-placing a societal problem within an institutional space (classroom) and imagining that by reforming that space we are dealing with a larger systemic problem, and so elide that very problem.

Welner's more "progressive" take re-replaces socio-economic inequality as the main cause of disparities in academic achievement. This progressive stance is also espoused by Lawrence Mishel, president of the Economic Policy Institute. [In the most succinct way that I have found](#), Mishel explains why school effectiveness cannot be measured by an achievement gap metric, but must be measured *in the context* of rising economic inequality:

while adequate skills are an essential component of productivity growth, workforce skills cannot determine how the wealth created by national productivity is distributed. That decision is made by policies over which

schools have no influence -- tax, regulatory, trade, monetary, technology, and labor-market policies that modify the market forces affecting how much workers will be paid. Continually upgrading skills and education is essential for sustaining growth as well as for closing historic race and ethnic gaps. It does not, however, guarantee economic success without policies that also reconnect pay with productivity growth.

The link that is forced between education and income, or between more education for diverse populations and greater economic equality, serves to obscure the real link—or lack thereof—between productivity and pay, which can only be treated via economic policy, not education reform.

Once we confront achievement gaps we arrive at a crossroads—and what I've tried to show here is that we keep arriving at this crossroads over and over again. There are two paths to be taken, and these paths are embedded in the findings Coleman made years ago: "schools bring little influence to bear on a child's achievement that is independent of his background and general social context; and that this very lack of an independent effect means that the inequalities imposed on children by their home, neighborhood, and peer environment are carried along to become the inequalities with which they confront adult life at the end of school." Coleman assumes the first path (the one we always have taken), wherein we must keep searching for that "independent effect," putting greater and greater pressure on teachers, schools, and (as is the case with GSU) students themselves to produce it. This path has not worked well in the sense of ameliorating inequality; however, as I've argued, it has worked extremely well as an institutional disciplinary practice.

The second path, and the one down which we have not ventured, means we must see what has always been before us: equality as completely separate from achievement—academic or economic. This, to me, is the most exciting and "radical" option. Right now, equality is tethered to achievement through education. This means that, for the reformer, greater equality can be reached through schooling that closes achievement gaps. And for the more progressive critic, this means that *equalizing* socio-economic conditions is justified in order to close *achievement* gaps. In either formulation, equality is legitimated by its relation to achievement, and because of that, I don't believe that we value it enough to create it. As long as equality is tethered to achievement, we remain in the neoliberal ideology—and ideology that tells us if we are free to achieve then it is fair to let the chips fall where they may.

However, if equality is completely independent of achievement, then we are forced to either abandon its having any value, or we are forced to value it in and of itself. I would argue that we do the latter: equality is, and must be, a value a just society holds as a good in and of itself, simply based on the belief, as stated in the Constitution, that we are all created equal. Equality is the ultimate tautology, but it also doesn't stop at the moment of "creation." The effort to close achievement gaps over the last 70 years does show us that we care, to some extent, about equality. But it also makes sense that children

are usually the focus of those efforts, as supposed victims of “accidents” of birth and background. What we have been far less capable of, though, is continuing to value equality as those children become adults. Here, the Constitution cannot help us. We simply have to decide to continue to value equality in and of itself. For example, consider the following thought experiment: let’s say every student in America, no matter their class, race, or ethnicity, achieves a college degree. Let’s also say that, despite this, “results” are still very unevenly distributed. Do we interpret inequality as “meritocracy” because everyone has achieved a college degree? Or, do we embrace equality as a value in and of itself regardless of equalized achievement? I would argue that only by choosing the latter, do we show ourselves that we care enough about equality to work to create more of it. It may seem naïve to suggest that we value equality in and of itself, but the alternative is to embrace the insidious contradiction that the effects of inequality can be made into remedies for it, and then to maintain that belief despite living in a world that shows us otherwise.

And what happens to learning when it, too, is separated from achievement? Again I go back to Coleman’s “ambitious” project to “provide an educational environment that will free a child’s potentialities for learning from the inequalities imposed upon him by the accident of birth into one or another home and social environment.” I think that a child’s—or any student’s—potentialities for learning will be unleashed precisely by embracing their “accidents of birth into one or another home and social environment,” but within schools that no longer attach learning to achievement.

Ironically, we may see such freed potential in the least likely of places—prison. Whereas education reformers relocate structural inequities within the institutional space of the classroom, and try to remedy them there, prison is an institutional space that replicates a kind of “equality,” that should exist in a greater degree outside of its walls. (3) Consequently, for those prisoners serving life sentences who are also taking classes, we can see what learning becomes when it is disconnected from achievement outcomes and supposed economic opportunity.

In a paper for the *Harvard Educational Review* entitled “Complex Sentences: Searching for the Purpose of Education inside a Massachusetts State Prison,” Clint Smith deals with precisely this population and this question. Because education in prisons is usually justified in that it reduces recidivism by increasing the former inmate’s possibility of securing gainful employment, Smith must ask: “Do those serving life sentences . . . deserve access to educational opportunities behind bars.” Like the thought experiment outlined above, which “tests” our commitment to equality, Smith’s question asks us to test our commitment to learning itself. Smith goes on to write, “If we answer this question affirmatively, then it seems we must find a different means by which to assess whether or not these programs are working . . . we must understand how these programs facilitate community building, identity development, and cognitive liberation.” In other words, by considering what learning means for those for whom no

metrics of achievement matter, we discover what learning is.

This is echoed by prisoners themselves. When education is separated from achievement, it becomes connected to self-repair, self-creation, earnest intellectual endeavor, and belonging. Or, in the words of [Edward Ramirez](#), who is serving a life sentence for murder at Graterford Prison and taking college classes there, “the incentive at Graterford is to build yourself.” As it turns out, this incentive is highly motivating. As Felix Rosado, who is also serving a life sentence, explains, “In high school I used to sit in the back of the classroom and sleep, but here I was always at the front row, eyes wide open.” If learning is really connected to achievement, academic or economic, then we would expect the opposite of what Rosado has explained. And here’s the ironic twist: the connection between learning and becoming produces better outcomes. In college prison programs in California, [more prisoners are completing their classes](#) and with better grades than their college counterparts.

Of course, one might object, what option is there for a person serving life in prison other than to embrace learning for itself? However, I would argue that the young Felix Rosado falling asleep in class already knew that learning is not measured by achievement, and achievement does not overcome inequality. In other words, we cannot expect achievement to inspire learning any more than we can expect closing achievement gaps to create greater equality. This is exactly what learners serving life sentences show us, and by removing achievement’s attachment to either equality or learning, we free ourselves up to understand how to value learning and equality in and of themselves.

## Notes

1. However, this is only true for men. For women, the rate of educational achievement increased during this period (Goldin and Katz, p.249).
2. Overall, however, “since 1973 the share of the workforce with college degrees has more than doubled; over 40 percent of native-born workers now have degrees beyond high school. Additionally, the proportion of native-born workers that has not completed high school or its equivalent has decreased by half to just 7 percent.” ([prospect.org/features/schools-scapegoats/](http://prospect.org/features/schools-scapegoats/))
3. Incarceration itself is driven by inequality. However, life in prison, as dehumanizing as it may be, is one in which the prison population is basically equal, and in which economic inequality doesn’t factor.

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# RADICAL TEACHER

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

## LGBTQ+ Ally Education for Adults with Disabilities

by Alice Rutkowski, robbie, and Vanessa Cepeda



GRAPHIC FROM THE CENTER FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING

There is a dearth of resources designed to present sex education and/or LGBTQ+ ally education to an audience of developmentally disabled adults. This is a lessons-learned essay in which we describe how we facilitated a Safe Zone workshop to just this audience. SUNY Geneseo's (1) Safe Zone program, the program highlighted in this article, provides on-demand educational workshops that introduce participants to the basics of LGBTQ+ identities. Our campus also partners with a county-run organization, the LIVES program, (2) that brings adults with intellectual and/or other developmental disabilities to our college to develop educational, social and career skills. When the LIVES program made a request for a Safe Zone workshop it revealed a range of challenges and opportunities; we hope other institutions, especially those committed to equity, inclusion, and accessibility in their co-curricular programming will find this account helpful because of the insights we offer around institutional support, inter-unit collaboration, and our commitment to make ally training available to everyone in our community.

Our experience suggests several key insights. First, it revealed both the obstacles and the payoffs of collaboration across academic units and roles; at a relatively small institution like ours, we believe these kinds of alliances are critical to successful diversity and inclusion work. Accomplishing our goal of offering a Safe Zone workshop to the LIVES program required us all to step outside our areas of expertise. Second, we came to more fully embrace the principles behind universal design. As suggested by UDL on Campus, we started with small steps and tight learning goals, involved students in helping drive change, and provided multiple ways for our participants to access the information ("Getting Started" para 3). These ideas encouraged us to create spaces that are innately accessible as opposed to remediating spaces that have already been created. In fact, many of the tools and strategies we ultimately selected in order to adapt the workshop to a new audience not only laid bare our assumption that our usual Safe Zone participant is neurotypical but also demonstrated that even neurotypical folks can benefit from pedagogies that slow down, break things up into smaller pieces, and require more frequent, focused engagement.

What follows is an explanation of the planning process during which we fielded this request, reworked our standard workshop for an audience of developmentally disabled adults, and ultimately facilitated the workshop. The authors include the faculty member whose disciplinary home is an English department and who also coordinates Safe Zone on our campus (Alice - she/her/hers); the Chief Diversity Officer at our institution, who also served as one of the co-facilitators of the workshop (robbie - they/them/theirs); and the other co-facilitator of the workshop, an undergraduate student at the time (Vanessa - she/her/hers), who has since graduated with her B.A. in Psychology.

The choice of the co-authors both to use first names (rather than surnames and honorifics) and to write about our experiences in the first person (both the individual "I" and the collective "we") in the sections that follow are intentional and at the heart of what we see as the key contributions of this article. As to the former choice, both

Alice and robbie have (relatively speaking) consciously-honed, informal personal communication styles that actively welcome collaboration and aim to set aside traditional academic hierarchies. (3) As to the latter point, the social sciences (robbie and Vanessa's disciplinary home) have structures built into teaching and research that encourage and sometimes even expect collaborative scholarship; but the Humanities broadly and - even more precisely - literary studies, Alice's home discipline, "has the most entrenched model of academic authorship - the sole author - yet the discipline rarely reflects critically on the implications of this model" (Leane, Fletcher and Garg 786). By contrast, the discipline that has perhaps theorized and practiced multivocal scholarship most thoroughly is feminist ethnographic writing and we took inspiration from those scholars. For example, anthropologists Mounia El Kotni, Lydia Z. Dixon, and Veronica Miranda write: "co-authorship can be seen as a form of feminist writing and methodology because it challenges entrenched power dynamics, promotes multiple perspectives and experiences, and emphasizes reflexivity. In advancing these claims, [our work aims to] probe what it means to write meaningfully with others" (para 3). In other words, we would like to practice the radical politics of writing collectively while maintaining the specificity of our individual voices.

The article has four parts. The first section offers some context within which to consider education about gender and sexuality that is directed at adults with disabilities. The second section describes the institutional home of our Safe Zone program and the initial handling of the request for the workshop. The third section details the adaptation and facilitation of the workshop itself. The final section offers some thoughts on best practices and lessons learned.

## Context: gender and sexuality education for adults with disabilities (robbie)

Commonly, identity-based workshops on college campuses are designed for a broad range of constituents and do not reflect the particular needs of intellectually or developmentally disabled populations. Instead, such programs are often founded on assumptions such as: a shared awareness of social appropriateness, moderate to advanced literacy skills, and the ability to focus one's own attention for significant periods of time. The traditional Safe Zone program curriculum at Geneseo is no different, assuming: participant comfort navigating the social nuances of a conversation about gender and sexuality, relatively high level of participant literacy, and participant ability to meaningfully consider multi-faceted concepts for extended periods of time. When approached with the opportunity to provide a Safe Zone training for students in the LIVES program, we were unsure how to challenge these assumptions and thoughtfully redesign a curriculum that would allow for effective learning opportunities

Our process of navigating this request from LIVES mirrors some of the well-known barriers to sexuality education for people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities. Boehning asserts that sexual education programs for individuals with developmental disabilities are

grossly inadequate, most notably in instances where the curriculum utilizes vague language and euphemisms to broach the subject. The educational needs of participants with developmental disabilities necessitates a more nuanced approach and requires the use of direct and easily accessible language to address concepts. Boehning concludes that individuals with developmental disabilities are “often excluded in the discussion and rarely receive any sex education at all” (60). Our anecdotal understanding that this type of learning opportunity is not readily made available to individuals with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities was what motivated us to accept the request.

There are many societal and institutional barriers to providing education about sexuality and gender to adolescents and adults with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities. These barriers lead many institutions either to not attempt to deliver this education or to not do it well, greatly limiting educational access and the opportunity to further one’s personal understanding and social acceptance (Boehning 60). Here, we have identified three distinct barriers.

1. The first barrier is the long-standing stereotype that people with developmental disabilities are “asexual, childlike and naive” (Wilkenfeld and Ballan 3) and therefore do not have a need to learn about sexuality or sexual orientation (also see Gomez).
2. The influence of parents/caregivers (whose attitudes are shaped by societal norms) in determining what sexuality education individuals with developmental disabilities are afforded (Wilkenfeld and Ballan). There also exists a societal fear that learning about sexuality will *cause* a person with a developmental disability to be abused or become a sex offender (Gomez). The pervasiveness of this fear both societally and in the minds of parents/caregivers can prove to greatly limit access to sexuality education.
3. Finally there is the lack of appropriate curriculum and training resources, trained educators, and institutional support (see Wilkenfeld & Ballan; Boehning; Bazzo et al). In addition, the lack of programming correlates to limited program evaluation data that would be used to inform best practice (Swango-Wilson).

Research concludes that educators’ attitudes towards sexuality education for this community are generally positive but still mixed. They continue to assert that even educators with a positive inclination towards this kind of education often have little experience in tailoring the subject matter to this population and conclude that they are either too unskilled or it would be inappropriate for them in their role (see Aunos & Feldman; Howard-Barr et al). Wilkenfeld & Ballan suggest policy development as a useful method for minimizing the barriers produced by ill-equipped educators and educational systems.

## Safe Zone at Geneseo and the LIVES request (Alice)

In order to make a case for the importance of ally training around LGBTQ+ issues -- and also why we were determined to make these benefits available to LIVES students -- it’s helpful to begin by describing the genesis and aims of Safe Zone programs in higher education. The history of Safe Zone programs generally is a bit murky: a number of scholars maintain that the first reference to such a program was in 1992 at Ball State University. Since then, hundreds of colleges and universities have instituted ally programs of different sorts. There is no national organization or certification required to have such a program; however, most Safe Zone programs have a number of elements in common. As described by Kerry Poynter:

The core of Safe Zone programs is a series of educational and self-reflective workshops on various LGBTQIA+ themes and issues. Upon successful completion of the Safe Zone curriculum, participants become members of the Safe Zone program and are able to display a sign outside their office indicating they are allies to the campus LGBTQIA+ community. Public identification of allies encourages dialogue about LGBTQIA+ people (who may not be readily visible) and allows LGBTQIA+ students and others to identify supportive staff and faculty without fear of bullying, retribution, and harassment. (1)

Our program shares these goals. For our standard, three-hour workshop, we inherited the *structure* from the local LGBTQ+ advocacy organization that first trained facilitators on our campus, but all the curriculum has been built in-house by the student trainers and is reviewed at annual facilitator retreats.

There is a growing body of research to suggest that Safe Zone programs have a measurable effect on climate and even student persistence. For example, one study “indicated that those who were both aware of the ally training program and those who had participated in it had more supportive attitudes toward LGBT individuals compared to those who were unfamiliar with the ally training program” (Worthen 363). GLSEN’s (the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, a non-profit policy, research and advocacy group focused on LGBTQ+ inclusion in K-12 education) annual school climate survey even asks students as a measure of climate if they’d seen Safe Zone stickers in the past year and concludes, “students who had seen a Safe Space sticker or post in their school were more likely to identify school staff who were supportive of LGBTQ students and more likely to feel comfortable talking to school staff about LGBTQ issues” (Kosciw xxiii).

SUNY Geneseo has a Safe Zone program that developed out of a need to build a community of experts on campus and offer allies a visible way to demonstrate their support of LGBTQ+ community members. Our program has over 25 trained facilitators who are pulled not only from faculty and staff ranks but also from the student population. In addition to a range of regularly scheduled workshops

open to the campus community, our program also offers a mechanism by which anyone on campus can request a training for their group of six or more individuals. For example, Geneseo Safe Zone regularly receives requests from sports teams, academic departments, sororities and fraternities, campus offices, standing committees, etc. This mechanism was the way in which we were contacted by the LIVES program. During the 2018-19 academic year, we had 577 unique participants from across all sectors of the college community.

Despite the research that supports the idea that ally education workshops like Safe Zone have an appreciable impact on climate for LGBTQ+ people, there is certainly a critique to be made wherein Safe Zone is inadequate -- in and of itself -- to both anticipate and combat the institutional, structural, and personal challenges that this same community faces, especially at our own institution. For example, the Consortium of Higher Education for LGBT Resource Professionals has a ten-item list of best practices for supporting transgender students. Many of the supports listed we already offer: a clear name-change policy (that does not require legal name change); trans-supportive housing; clear policies for trans students to participate in sports; all-gender restrooms in more than half of campus buildings; and a college nondiscrimination policy that includes "gender identity" as a protected category. We have not met their final two recommendations, however: we do not provide a regular transgender health clinic, nor is there is clear way for trans students to report problems with accessing healthcare. And finally, we do not have any mechanism at all to "create a fair equitable process for hiring, training, and maintaining trans\*-identified and trans\*-knowledgeable staff in all areas." (4)

Most concerning -- and unrelated to the Consortium's best-practices list -- our administration has consistently refused to support a full-time professional staff position in Student Life to support LGBTQ+ students; since 2015, we have had one such half-time position, but given the position's lack of a living wage, there is constant turnover and there is often not enough support for the individuals who have served in that position. To connect back to Safe Zone, there is certainly a way in which seeing the hallways blanketed in rainbow Safe Zone stickers has offered cover to our institution's refusal to offer substantive, consistent, and ongoing attention and financial support to these issues.

I (Alice) am a faculty member in the English department, so both an initial and continuing challenge is the fact that to do this work (and to describe it in published research) I must work not only outside my specialization but outside my discipline. I designed and now teach, annually, a credit-bearing, academic course under the Women's and Gender Studies prefix that trains students to be facilitators in the program. I coordinate the Safe Zone program on top of my full-time teaching load. In recent years I have begun involving students in the administration of the program in a concrete way. This happens through the "Safe Zone Leadership Program," which I also devised, wherein students who have successfully completed the class can sign up for an internship for academic credit that gives students ownership of various parts of the program. There are a number of reasons for this: most crucially, to

ensure the content and values of the program will actually serve LGBTQ students (and a majority of our student trainers identify in some queer category) so they can shape the direction and curriculum of the program. But the students' level of involvement also provides a high-impact learning experience with an unusually high level of coherence between the curricular and co-curricular aspects of their learning. Finally, it also takes a core component of our program - student leaders acting as facilitators -- and wraps the training of those students into my teaching obligation.

I have a student leader who serves as assistant coordinator of the program; this person does much of the labor of attending to requests when they come in; the requests arrive via a simple web form that is submitted to us electronically. In our weekly meetings, this student leader checks in with me about which facilitators to assign to which training sessions to ensure the best fit both between co-facilitators and between the facilitators and the group being trained. But -- to bring us back to the subject of this essay -- neither the student assistant nor I knew much about the LIVES program and -- though I now realize I should have -- didn't investigate further on receiving their request. The request from the LIVES program did specify, however, that one of the participants in the program was part of the LGBTQ+ community and was hoping for more education for their peers without being singled out. My student coordinator assigned two student facilitators (one of these facilitators was Vanessa, precisely because we knew she had expertise in thinking about accessibility) to the training and let them know they needed to meet with the two graduate students that coordinated the LIVES program. There I thought our role in planning the workshop had ended.

But the student facilitators who had been assigned to the workshop returned upset from the meeting with the LIVES coordinators. First, they were told that not all the participants in the LIVES program could read; in the most basic way, this meant we'd need to modify the standard workshop which literally opens with a written worksheet. Second, they were told by the LIVES coordinators that they were not allowed to use the word "sex" in the training. Our basic workshop includes very little explicit information about sex acts (occasionally it comes up in Q&A but it's not a focus) but in order to comprehensively explain transgender identities we must carefully cover the differences between sex, gender, gender expression, and sexual orientation. (5) Some of these requests, at first glance, seemed like deal-breakers and we weren't sure what to do. I told the students I'd investigate further and get back to them.

Simultaneous to this request I was also teaching the academic course that prepares undergraduates to become facilitators in this program. I described the situation to that group of students and they were outraged; many were concerned for the autonomy of the participants in the program and their access to accurate information about sexuality and sexual health -- these folks were, after all, they pointed out, adults. One student went so far as to say we should refuse to work with LIVES given the conditions that were put on the content. This extreme response, I saw,



was coming from a good place -- the student was idealistic and passionate -- but it also revealed her inexperience: taking that kind of stand would mean the LIVES students would not get the benefit of Safe Zone at all. Her response helped me realize that this group deserved access to the information our program provides; also, I came to see that I simply didn't have all the information needed to understand the modifications they requested. Another student in my class strongly advocated for including the student from the LIVES program (the one who had spurred the request) as part of the planning process; this latter suggestion was both wise and helpful.

So I did what I should have done from the beginning: I gathered together all the stakeholders -- myself, my two undergraduate facilitators, the two LIVES graduate coordinators and the faculty member who advised the LIVES program. And we started over. I asked them to explain their program, its goals, its values, and its participants, to us. Then the student facilitators and I explained the Safe Zone program to them. And it became immediately clear we had plenty of shared goals and that we'd have to compromise very little to design a session that would achieve them. To give just one example (I'd like to leave the rest of the story to Vanessa), I asked explicitly, "I know we cannot use the word 'sex.' Can we say something like 'some people have penises and some people have vaginas?'" And I was told "absolutely."

This was also the point in the process where I reached out to robbie. Not only is robbie a facilitator in our Safe Zone program, they have more experience with teaching group facilitation than anyone I know. They also relish complex conundrums like the one this request posed to us; luckily for everyone involved, they graciously took over as the second facilitator when one of the two students -- in a canny recognition of her own abilities and limits -- stepped aside. We now had not only shared goals and a shared understanding, but we had our dream team of facilitators who could take the project to completion.

## Developing and Facilitating the Safe Zone Workshop for LIVES (Vanessa and robbie)

Participation and leadership in the Safe Zone program was a crucial part of my (Vanessa's) academic and personal identity in the second half of my college career. As someone whose first encounter with Safe Zone was as a participant, I was excited to see an announcement that the Safe Zone Train-the-Trainer course was going to be offered -- for the first time -- during the fall of my junior year. I was eager to interview for a slot in the class and even more enthusiastic to be a part of the first cohort of students to receive this kind of training. The announcement of this course came at a perfect time for me. Before the beginning of my sophomore year at Geneseo, I had come out to my parents, which significantly changed the way in which I viewed myself as an activist. At the time I felt as if I had given them news that is considered disappointing in our family and culture overall, which led me to feel bothered and conflicted about my own identities. I love my parents

and felt driven to educate them and others close to me about LGBTQ+ identities. Since I was already aware of the effect the Safe Zone program at Geneseo had in educating allies, I felt compelled to be a part of the network that was improving campus climate for the queer community at the college. After completing the course, Alice offered the opportunity of an internship for the following Spring semester after the course concluded, for which I eagerly signed up. My work as a Safe Zone trainer gradually became more practical and less theoretical in the following months. The Safe Zone Leadership Program gave me, and other trainers who had also become interns, the opportunity to take a closer look at the Safe Zone program and suggest concrete changes to ensure it was accurately representing the needs of students.

Even before we were approached by the LIVES program, I already had a deep interest in issues around supporting and including individuals with disabilities. I met a number of peers with disabilities during my undergraduate career; I was lucky these friends were willing to talk frankly about the challenges posed by inaccessible spaces and policies on our campus. As an able-bodied person, I simply hadn't been aware of the extent to which structures themselves -- whether physical or curricular -- could affect how someone was able to participate and feel welcome. So, as someone who was involved in a range of activist endeavors around other issues, I found myself often reflecting on what I could do within my own sphere of influence. It took understanding these barriers on a painfully practical level to move me forward. For example, before getting started on editing content on our website, I was required to watch a web accessibility training video. The training was highly informative and brought things to my attention that I had not thought about before, such as text and file placement on a page. I started to wonder about the extent to which we'd thought about these issues when in offering Safe Zone workshops. When brainstorming how Safe Zone could be more intentionally intersectional in preparation for a conference presentation, I concluded that accessibility in the context of the program was ensuring that every participant, regardless of ability or identity, could attend a Safe Zone training in a way that was comprehensive and not limited by someone's identity.

For all these reasons, I was thrilled when I was asked to be part of the team that would offer the workshop to the LIVES program. Before this training, I had facilitated a number of our standard workshops: we all follow the 3-hour workshop outline, though within that structure there are opportunities for facilitators to choose the activities with which they feel the most comfortable. However, with the LIVES program, we understood that rather than the *facilitators* generating the plan, it was critical to sit down and discuss the needs of the *program*.

Initially, another veteran trainer and I met with the two graduate students who coordinated LIVES, and had submitted the request form on behalf of their program to discuss what their goals were in having the training administered to them and their students. First, we simply asked about the reason for the request. They described the student in their program who was hoping for more

education for their peers around these issues. In offering a Safe Zone training to the students in their program, they explained, as leaders of the program they hoped to become more knowledgeable and learn how to be a better ally to the student and the LGBTQ+ community overall. They also felt this was a way to offer support to the LGBTQ student without singling them out, since all the students would participate in the workshop in the same way. Out of this discussion arose some conflicts about how certain content would be presented in the workshop. This is when we discovered that talking about sex was prohibited, which raised some concerns for us. After feeling conflicted, we contacted Alice for help, who then planned a meeting with all the relevant stakeholders.

Some of what transpired at this meeting has already been covered by Alice. But at this larger meeting we also specifically asked if we might be able to talk directly to the student who had precipitated the request to begin with. The LIVES coordinators were immediately responsive to this idea, and were optimistic that the student would consent to help. At the meeting with that student, I was extraordinarily concerned and anxious: I didn't want them to feel singled out or that they had to represent the views of all disabled trans people. I relied heavily on robbie to guide the conversation, since their job often entails facilitating difficult conversations. Funnily enough, in discussing it with robbie later, robbie said they relied heavily on the LIVES program coordinators for guidance and assistance given that they were the people who knew the student best. The meeting was a collaborative effort in the best sense of the word and the student was thrilled to be consulted.

Next we got down to planning the nuts-and-bolts of the training, which included accommodating varying literacy levels, breaking complex or theoretical sections into smaller chunks, and making sure we made room for the tangible concerns of the participants. The first thing we (robbie and Vanessa) realized right away is that the labor-intensive part of this training was going to be in the planning. While Alice always requires facilitators to meet in person to plan before any given training, the two of us met more often and for longer than is typical. Our overall ethos was about taking things more slowly and doing even more checking in with participants over the course of the workshop than is usual. Most often these workshops are one three-hour session; for scheduling reasons, the workshop for LIVES was two 90-minute sessions that were scheduled a week apart, and we think that format was especially helpful for this audience, giving them more time to think and process between parts one and two.

The planning of every workshop must begin in the relationship between co-facilitators. While our intention is always to have each co-facilitator play an equal role, we understand that different amounts of power, privilege, and authority can affect how individuals are seen in this situation. Our college's Safe Zone program is configured to emphasize student expertise and leadership and requires that every workshop have at least one student co-facilitator. Faculty and staff who co-facilitate with students are encouraged to mentor and offer support to a student co-facilitator but also to consciously take a step back and let the student take the lead. Research on co-teaching,

however, has shown that imbalances in power don't simply take care of themselves, even with the good will of everyone involved. A.D. Montebalanco reminds us that "co-teaching cannot alter the circumstances of a power imbalance" and that "[u]nless these differences are explicitly discussed and intentionally addressed, the less powerful member of the co-teaching team might encounter obstacles" (65, 64).

This ideal, though, is challenging to achieve. I (robbie) would describe myself as a white senior administrator who grew up in a well-resourced family and has a graduate degree. I have extensive experience with social justice education, intergroup dialogue facilitation training, and navigating complex power dynamics where identity is salient. For these reasons I agree with Montebalanco when she writes: "It is the responsibility of the higher-status teacher to breach and normalize these discussions early on; with higher-status comes added responsibility" (65). There are a number of strategies I use to balance the power while facilitating: one of these is multipartiality, which is a facilitation strategy for balancing the weight of dominant and counter narratives in facilitative setting. (6) Practically speaking, when I co-facilitate with a student, then, I often make sure that student co-facilitator has more opportunities to speak than I do (acknowledging this can place a burden, I also make sure we talk about fairness). The reason for this is that, anecdotally speaking, I've noticed that if a student and I speak equal amounts, listeners still perceive me to have had a more significant role. I also think carefully about how often to jump into the discussion, keeping in mind the primacy/recency effect.(7)

I (Vanessa) would describe myself as an Afro-Latinx first-generation college student (I graduated with my B.A. in Psychology in 2019). As the first person in my family to attain a bachelor's degree, I found myself highly involved in student leadership and activism. As a result, I pursued many opportunities during my undergraduate career to be a facilitator in multiple spaces for the first time. But all this also means, in the context of the situation described in this essay, I had the least amount of privilege relative to the other organizers and facilitators. In some of my past experiences co-facilitating with faculty or professional staff, I sometimes felt my co-facilitator's job title overshadowed me, making participants eager to hear from them and less interested in what I had to say. On the other hand, to the extent that imbalances in power and privilege can be adjusted for by careful planning, I feel robbie did just that. We spoke frankly about these issues and the way they would affect the division of labor from the very beginning. They (robbie) also had a way of checking in with me once they had made a point, often asking if I had anything to add, that had a real tone of humility in it; I felt they genuinely wanted my input as a fellow expert.

Having given careful consideration to our relationship as co-facilitators and the imbalance in power, we were able to proceed to plan content and delivery. Even basic assumptions about how we begin a workshop were rethought. After the participants are seated in the space, the facilitators generally introduce themselves and then share their pronouns; we then ask the participants to do the same. For even a general-audience Safe Zone, this is meant

to establish asking for and providing pronouns as a new interactional norm. We felt it was important to keep this moment in our introductions, but for this audience we included extra context and explained carefully what pronouns were, so the participants could understand their value. So, for example, robbie said, "I use they/them/theirs pronouns. This means that when you talk about me, or something that's mine, I hope you can use those pronouns. For example, 'They wore their favorite hat'. 'The hat is theirs'."

The first structured activity in our program's workshops is always vocabulary related to human sexual and gender diversity. The learning outcome of this activity is actually *not* what most people would assume: it's great if participants leave the workshop knowing a new word or term, but that's absolutely not the main goal. Instead, it is intended to model that LGBTQ+ issues are topics that can be spoken about openly, both with curiosity and with good intentions. It's also meant to signal right up front that the workshop is structured to be interactive and not a lecture; the interactivity, again, is more important than the content. A participant new to this material, ideally, will emerge with a sense of how to approach this material frankly and respectfully so they can continue learning after the workshop ends.

There are two ways we teach vocabulary in a typical Safe Zone workshop: there is a standard worksheet on which participants match terms with definitions (we ask them to do this in groups and discuss); we also have the same terms and definitions printed on large cards -- then we distribute the terms and definitions around the room and ask people to walk around the room and match them. Any given team of facilitators can choose which is best for their assigned group and there is always the option to add or delete terms. But both versions of this exercise can include up to thirteen different words with definitions that are a sentence or longer. Because we knew a number of our participants couldn't read, and because we wanted to emphasize discussion over "coverage," we had to re-envision the whole exercise. First, we chose to talk about only six terms: "transgender," "gay," "lesbian," "bisexual," "heterosexual," and "ally." We still decided to use the placards version of the activity, because we thought it was more participatory and immediately would get the LIVES students involved. We gave out just the words to different people in the workshop; I (Vanessa) then read the definitions out loud and we asked them to try and match. (When asked, we reminded them verbally about which words they were holding.) It turns out that the LIVES program regularly does a "word of the week" activity, so this pedagogical choice fit well with a structure with which they were already familiar.

Another key feature of the typical Safe Zone workshop is a short video (about eight minutes long) that introduces participants to transgender and nonbinary identities and helps them to learn to distinguish between the categories of sex, gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation. The video we use, (8) frankly, even for our usual participants, moves pretty quickly and introduces a wide range of concepts all at once. We suspected that showing the whole video without pausing would be

overwhelming for our participants. So instead we found different sections and topics within that video where we planned to pause the video and actively invite discussion. The way we revised this exercise is a good example of using the principles of universal design. After the LIVES training was completed, we decided participants in our usual trainings would benefit from this strategy as well. Another student trainer developed a detailed script for using the video with instructions about stopping the video up to six times at different points in the video to allow for both the absorption of new information and for discussion.

As a final example, a typical Safe Zone always includes some problems or scenarios that are given to small groups of participants to puzzle out how to respond and put into practice what they've learned. For example, in a training for faculty we might give out a scenario that says "you overhear a student after class say 'that's so gay' in an insulting and dismissive way. What might you do or say in response?" For the LIVES participants we still included this section but planned fewer scenarios to present and we introduced them as role-plays. One of us (robbie or Vanessa) would act out the language or behavior and we asked the students to respond directly to us. The response to this activity amongst the participants was extraordinary, whereas in a typical Safe Zone, participants are generally nervous about how they'll be perceived, reluctant to make themselves vulnerable and anxious about saying the wrong word. Although not every student at the LIVES training participated verbally, those that did were much more willing to express their thoughts and feelings and take risks as compared to the usual participant. We also perceived an incredibly high level of engagement on the faces of those participants who did not contribute verbally. Both of us felt there was *more* conversation and the discussion was *more* wide-ranging than in a typical workshop.

Overall, the workshop for the LIVES program was enormously successful in terms of the participants' high level of engagement and enthusiasm. One element we did not anticipate is how quickly and clearly they would make connections between the treatment LGBTQ+ individuals are often subject to -- hurtful assumptions, harassment, violence -- and the treatment experienced by individuals with disabilities. The participants became particularly fired up when talking about similarities and differences between these two groups and they immediately began thinking out loud about how the two groups could support one another. This was a really long conversation -- longer than we'd planned for that section of the workshop -- and that would probably be our final insight. In a typical Safe Zone training, Alice has it drilled into us that each pair of facilitators needs to agree ahead of time on what to cut if time runs short: again, the goal of the training is modeling and practicing conversation about these difficult issues. This was one of those moments with the LIVES participants: the connections they were making between their own identities and those of other people were profound and moving.

## Best Practices/Further Considerations

The first lesson we would emphasize is that when programming for participants with varied accessibility

needs, we had to identify and reconfigure our assumptions repeatedly. While on paper we do serve the entire campus community, in terms of numbers most of our participants are traditionally-aged undergraduate students at our residential, four-year, liberal arts college. That leaves out an enormous number of individuals from the community we live in, and thinking broadly about accessibility has the potential to increase not only how many people we can educate but whether the program itself thoroughly demonstrates our declared value of inclusion.

Second, although the large “intake” meeting was held only to deal with unanticipated misunderstandings about content, it’s clear to us that, ideally, this kind of meeting would *always* take place regardless of who has requested the training. It’s true that our google form asks requestors what, if anything, they would like covered in their workshop; but if the requestor isn’t sure exactly what to expect with the program, and we don’t have a sense of their group’s previous experience with LGBTQ+ issues, it’s difficult to customize trainings effectively. Our program’s current structure, where Alice coordinates the program on top of a full teaching load, and the fact that no facilitators in any category are paid, make this an ideal practice rather than a practical one that is achievable under current circumstances.

This brings up a structural barrier relevant to both equity and labor: while our institutional discourse supports diversity and inclusion generally and Safe Zone explicitly, the program garners little actual support for the faculty member who coordinates the program (she receives neither compensation nor a course release). There is some truth to the idea of the “Ivory Ceiling of Service Work,” in which women faculty spend much longer at the associate professor level because they perform a disproportionate amount of their institution’s service. As Misra, et al. write:

A variety of studies show that men focus more on research than do women. While men are not necessarily more productive than women, they are more protective of their research time. Tenured women, on the other hand, devote more time to teaching, mentoring, and service, and particularly to activities that may be seen as building bridges around the university. Yet, these pursuits hold less value in promotion cases in many institutions (para 5).

Everyone involved in Safe Zone at Geneseo has found that building bridges is the only effective and ethical way to operate. The trainings are opt-in only and the time spent customizing the program to our particular campus is one of its great strengths. But most institutions of higher education have similar siloed financial structures which make collaborations between individuals in Academic Affairs and Student Affairs complex and difficult to accomplish.

While a more logical place to house the program would be somewhere in Student Affairs, current levels of staffing at our institution won’t allow this. In addition, there are some real benefits from the program’s place under the umbrella of Academic Affairs and Alice’s status as a full-time member of the faculty. At our institution there is enormous faculty buy-in to the value of participating in a

Safe Zone workshop and sporting the sticker on one’s office door, and we believe much of that trust comes from the fact that the program is administered by a colleague. Put another way, we came to understand that in order to actually put into practice the principles of access and universal design, you must first learn about your community.

## Acknowledgements

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## Notes

1. The State University of New York (SUNY) College at Geneseo (also known as SUNY Geneseo and Geneseo) is part of the SUNY system of 64 public higher education institutions. Geneseo is a liberal arts primarily undergraduate college with approximately 5000 students, approximately half of which are residential.
2. The LIVES Program (Learning Independence, Vocational, and Educational Skills) is a four-year transition program located on the campus of the State University of New York College at Geneseo. The LIVES Program supports students with intellectual and/or other developmental disabilities in developing independence by focusing on vocational, social, and educational skills-building within an inclusive community. Each LIVES student participates in an individualized assessment annually, including career interests, learning styles, social and independent living skills, and academic skills. An individualized plan of study is derived from those assessments as well as other information regarding a student’s goals and needs. Students receive a certificate of completion once they complete their plan of study and their individually designed capstone project. See <https://www.geneseo.edu/lives>
3. We realize this “choice” of informality is a mark of our (Alice and robbie’s) relative privilege at the institution and in the world more generally: we are both white and able-bodied and have titles (tenured faculty member and Chief Diversity Officer, respectively) that confer certain kinds of authority.
4. See <https://www.lgbtcampus.org/suggested-best-practices-for-supporting-trans--students>
5. “Sex” refers to a range of biological components, including but not limited to: genitalia and their functioning, chromosomes, and hormones. It’s important to note there is no medical test for sex. “Gender” refers to an internal sense of one’s

gender which might be binary (“man” or “woman”) or fall outside the binary (e.g. “gender non-conforming”). “Gender expression” refers to how an individual expresses their gender using commonly understood cultural and social cues, like clothing, body language and pronouns. “Sexual orientation” is about whom someone desires erotically.

6. For more information about multipartiality as a framework for co-facilitation, see robbie routenberg, Elizabeth Thompson, and Rhian Waterberg, “When Neutrality is Not Enough: Wrestling with the Challenges of Multipartiality,” in *The Art of Effective Facilitation: Reflections from Social Justice Educators*. Stylus Publishing, 2013. 173-197.
7. This is the idea that when presented with a large amount of information, we tend to best remember those events that happened first (primacy) and those that happened most recently (recency).
8. The video we use was produced by a terrific nonprofit organization in Australia, YGender. We show the “basics” video, but the other videos in the series are also excellent. See <https://www.trans101.org.au/>

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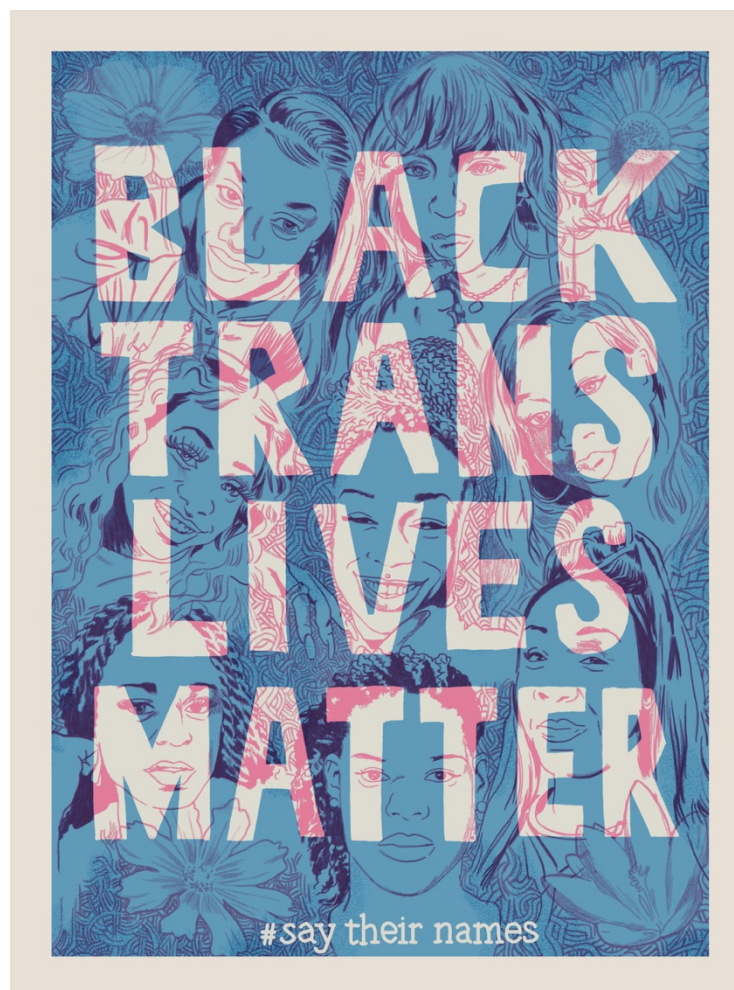
# RADICAL TEACHER

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

*Teaching Note*

## Teaching Gender as Social Structure: “Walking While Trans” as Illustration

by Jillian Crocker



"BLACK TRANS LIVES MATTER - SAY THEIR NAME" BY JOSÉ 'PRIMO' HERNÁNDEZ FOR AGITARTE

**I**n classroom contexts where a binary sex/gender system remains largely taken for granted, how do we encourage students to think critically about the origins and impacts of gendered ideologies and institutions? How do we demonstrate that the normative enforcement of gendered conventions isn't just academically interesting, but that it shapes experiences in ways that can cost people their livelihoods, and sometimes their lives? My institution, SUNY Old Westbury, is a public liberal arts college on Long Island, NY. Approximately 40% of incoming first years are first-generation college students, and nearly 60% of our students identify as members of under-represented racial and ethnic groups. Two courses in my regular rotation take gender as their explicit analytical focus, both through a sociological lens. In each, I am consistently searching for improved strategies and resources to help students recognize the value of "making the familiar strange" and to better understand the world and their place in it.

Like many instructors, I occasionally draw on current events and political issues to illustrate course concepts. And, like many instructors, I am consistently working to integrate the experiences of trans and gender non-conforming folks throughout my courses. (See Spade 2011 for advice on making classrooms more inclusive of trans students and voices.) At the same time, I am hesitant to incorporate current events or political issues into courses in ways that risk spectacularizing them, or in ways that don't move the course forward. In what follows I offer a brief description of a classroom analysis of the experiences of police harassment of trans and gender non-conforming individuals as an illustration of gender as a social structure (Risman 2004) and related course concepts, with a focus on how the use of this illustration enhances student understanding of key course ideas.

The phenomenon, widely referred to as "Walking While Trans," has been the subject of increasing media and political attention in recent years. The story of Layleen Polanco, which received widespread media attention when she died on Rikers Island in New York City in June of 2019, offers just one recent example of numerous similar incidents. Polanco had been incarcerated due to her inability to make the \$500 cash bail associated with prior misdemeanor sex work and drug charges, and was in solitary confinement at least in part due to a policy against placing trans and cisgender women together. She died when corrections workers failed to provide appropriate medical care following an epileptic seizure while in solitary confinement. Her case, death, and subsequent investigation highlighted key aspects of systemic transphobia, classism, and racism built into the criminal-legal system, and was readily offered as an illustration of the dangers of "walking while trans."

As a cis-gendered white woman I am cautious about sensationalizing stories of the murder, marginalization, or exploitation of trans women of color like Layleen Polanco. At the same time, there is pedagogical value in humanizing and contextualizing statistics-based arguments for structural change – perhaps especially in cases where data collection presents challenges, as it does here (Carpenter and Marshall 2017). There is also value in encouraging

students to situate cases such as Polanco's, which receive significant local and sometimes national media coverage, in terms of their socio-political significance.

My students' understandings of at least three ideas central to my courses have been strengthened by the analysis of issues related to Polanco's story and others like it (e.g., CeCe MacDonald, see Pasulka 2012), and from the consideration of their social, political, and historical context. First, gender is more than an individual identity: it is a social structure with interactional and institutional components. Second, the analysis of gender difference and inequality must account for race and class as primary organizing principles of society. And finally, but crucially, marginalized subjects and their allies have capacity as agents of social transformation. I have found an examination of key features of the phenomenon termed "Walking While Trans," including the recent history of sumptuary laws, proliferation of quality of life policing, and the work of activists to achieve legal reforms to be useful for underscoring these points. I address each in turn.

## Gender is a social structure, not just an individual identity.

The analysis of gender in Sociology relies on an understanding of the concept as a social construction – an idea whose meaning and significance is shaped by social context. (See Jones 2017 for an approach to teaching the social construction of gender.) But what does this social construction look like in daily life? How is gender constructed (or de-/re-constructed)? While students can often recognize and relate to the ways in which gender is (re)produced in individual experiences and interactions, the recognition of gender within institutions, the ways it is built into the cultures or structures of a society, can be more difficult to observe.

Illustrations from institutions like work, family, medicine, or the criminal-legal system offer numerous opportunities to highlight the ways in which gendered norms and assumptions are woven into social systems – or the ways in which even seemingly gender-neutral policies and practices can have disparate impacts. There are a wide range of examples of the ways in which gender conformity can be written into policy, sometimes in explicit ways. In the context of the criminal-legal system, I have found the topic of sumptuary laws that banned "cross-dressing" to be a useful starting point and source of engaging class discussion. Widely enforced until the 1980s, such laws require that individuals wear at least three articles of clothing conventionally associated with their birth sex. Drawing on Mogul and colleagues' (2012) well-documented and accessible discussion of such practices, class discussion typically considers the origins of such laws, the assumptions underpinning such policing, and the ways in which such policing contributes "to the development of archetypes of gender transgressive people as inherently criminal" (Mogul et al 2012: 65).

Students are typically surprised to learn about the existence of such laws, although occasionally one or two has previously learned of their Stonewall era enforcement.

The example provides a useful starting point to consider the legal enforcement of gender conformity, with a mix of disbelief that it could be legally permissible to enforce gendered dress norms and a recognition of parallels to the non-legal, informal, and sometimes violent regulation of attire that we observe in other contexts (e.g. school/work dress codes, hoodies). Shifting focus away from the actions of individuals, the consideration of this legal regulation of dress provides a useful starting point for the analysis of normative social control more generally. Such laws are just one clear example of the ways in which the criminal-legal system can be used to enforce gender norms, and their consideration provides a foundation for more difficult conversations as the course progresses.

## Analysis of gender inequality must account for systems of race and class inequality.

The idea of policing sex/gender, or the idea that some bodies are more policed than others, is one that resonates with popular understandings of practices and policies like racial profiling or Stop & Frisk. We know that policing is not experienced the same by all communities, but even within targeted communities police harassment and violence are not uniformly distributed. An examination of the practice of “quality of life” policing offers a useful illustration of the ways in which systems of race and class inequality intersect with systems of inequality organized around gender and sexuality.

Not unlike the broader scope of the criminal-legal system (Alexander 2010; Spade 2013, 2014; Pemberton 2013), quality of life policing is a widely recognized site of both racial/ethnic and gender disparity. Developed in the 1990s, quality of life policing draws on the (now problematized) theory that minor indications of community degradation create fertile ground for more significant criminal activity. But attempting to maintain social order through the enforcement of quality of life regulations, which include a range of common activities that occur in public spaces and are generally minor non-violent offenses, relies on considerable discretion among police officers. Social constructions of deviance, and by extension criminality, shape “whom to stop, question, search, and arrest, and whom to subject to brutal force” (Mogul et al 2012: 49). And while such crimes are often low-level misdemeanors, they can accumulate to significant consequences, particularly within the context of a cash-bail system.

Street-based prostitution is a common target of quality of life policing, often charged as “loitering with intent to prostitute.” But how does a police officer identify a loiterer’s intent when it comes to sex work? According to Mogul et al (2012: 62):

Gender nonconformity is perceived to be enough to signal “intent to prostitute,” regardless of whether any evidence exists to support such an inference. When combined with hailing a cab or carrying more than one condom, it’s an open and shut case.

The term “Walking While Trans” – intended to parallel the phrase “Driving While Black” – developed to capture such experiences among trans women, and especially trans women of color, who are routinely stopped and harassed by police officers under the pretense of likely prostitution (Carpenter and Marshall 2017; Mogul et al 2012). Such experiences illustrate how gender nonconformity intersects with systems of race and class inequality to create a particular vulnerability to perceived criminality for trans women of color, and to inequities in criminal-legal encounters.

While students may sometimes struggle with the concept of gender nonconformity or transgender identity in abstract terms, or parrot political rhetoric against the creation of gender inclusive spaces (e.g. bathrooms), when presenting this as an issue of police harassment I have yet to encounter the same transphobia. The idea that police interactions are shaped by assumptions about race, immigration status, and social class are familiar to my students, many of whom aspire to careers as police or corrections officers, and many of whom are themselves Black and brown young adults from working class communities. That gender conformity is an intersecting dimension shaping such interactions resonates with familiar critiques of urban policing, and again facilitates a shift in focus away from individual gender performance and toward the analysis of how an institution responds to (and compels) such performances at the intersection of multiple social locations. While I am cautious of implying a false equivalence between systems of racial and gender oppression, the familiar framework gives students practice with the tools necessary to critically analyze assumptions about gendered conventions.

## Marginalized subjects are agents of social transformation.

According to hooks (1986:127), “unless we can show that barriers separating women can be eliminated, that solidarity can exist, we cannot hope to change and transform society as a whole.” While her assertion somewhat predates the language of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989; Collins 1990; Baca Zinn and Thornton Dill 1994), and could not have predicted changes in society or the criminal-legal system, it is nonetheless instructive. The experiences of trans women of color, and particularly Black trans women, bring into stark relief the ways in which racialized, gendered, and classed systems of oppression are interlocking. They also demonstrate the capacity of marginalized subjects and their allies as agents of social transformation. Following her death, Layleen Polanco’s case was widely cited by advocates and activists as yet further evidence of the need for cash bail reform, and has propelled movements to end solitary confinement and to decriminalize sex work. Effective January 2020 (with minor revisions a few months later), cash bail is now prohibited for most misdemeanors and nonviolent offenses in New York State (Merki 2020). In February of 2021 New York State repealed the law commonly referred to as the “Walking While Trans” ban (McKinley and Ferré-Sardurní 2021), the nebulous anti-loitering law that for decades was



used by police to harass and arrest trans people, many have said, simply for existing in public spaces. Its repeal is the product of years of advocacy by transgender activists and their allies on issues of criminal justice reform. Systems of gender inequality are fundamentally tied to systems of race and class inequality, and woven into the structures of society in covert, overt, and sometimes violent ways. And despite these systems of domination, marginalized actors resist and effect meaningful social change. (1)

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The practice of animating academic concepts with current events and individual accounts is far from novel, but in the case of marginalized subjects calls for intentionality and reflexivity. My hope is that when I incorporate such issues and accounts into my courses, students develop both deeper understandings of the real-life importance of our work and clearer understandings of course concepts, and overall I have found this strategy to be successful. Class discussions building toward and considering the phenomenon of "Walking While Trans" are productive, with students engaging critically with key ideas and drawing connections across systems of inequality. As one student shared in a reflection: (2)

I kept drawing parallels between the police brutality inflicted upon the [LGBTQ+] community to that of the black and brown community and #Black Lives Matter.

Another described discussing the course material with a family member, sharing an interaction in which she could draw on evidence from the assigned reading to support an intersectional analysis of police encounters:

He said "Yeah, but gays can't have it too bad when it comes to police, right?" (probably comparatively to the experience of black people in regards to police brutality) to which I replied, "on the contrary, being black AND gay mixes the two experiences" and then I fed him some snippets of the article that depicted violence formed through both racism and homophobia/toxic masculinity.

Students routinely make explicit connections between the formal and informal regulation of gender norms and interlocking systems of oppression in their written and class reflections. As the course progresses, students continue to refer back to these examples and in some cases indicate an interest in pursuing such issues further through research or activism. Even students who may have struggled with the idea that gender is a social construction, or with challenges to the binary sex/gender system, often make considerable progress toward understanding these ideas and their implications through their understandings of the police harassment of trans and gender non-conforming folks. While I continue to develop my courses in ways that integrate a diversity of trans and non-binary/gender non-conforming perspectives, I expect that the analysis of "Walking While Trans" will continue to be a useful illustration as long as it remains a social issue.

## Notes

1. As an alternative course resource, "Free CeCe!" (2016) provides a documentary account of activism surrounding the arrest and imprisonment of CeCe MacDonald.  
<https://www.freececedocumentary.com/>
2. These passages are drawn from informal reflections and have been edited for typographical errors and clarity.

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# RADICAL TEACHER

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

## Teaching Note Writing, History, and Power in the Classroom

by Lance C. Thurner



"TOGETHER WE GROW A NEW PATH" BY ANDREA NARNO, DE-MIL-I-TA-RISE DISSIDENTS PORTFOLIO VIA JUST SEEDS

**I**t was the pandemic and we were on Zoom, but otherwise it was a common situation. Following up a student's self-critique, I asked: "How many of you think of yourselves as good at writing?" Two or three thumbs-ups appeared on the screen. "And how many of you would think of yourselves as bad at writing?" Thirty-some thumbs-ups and a few thumbs-down. I was unsurprised: that's the typical breakdown in History of Colonial Latin America.

My students write better than they give themselves credit for (see *From Obstacles to Resources*). Nonetheless, their low self-estimation is understandable: many, perhaps most, of them speak a language other than English in their home, come to college with a vernacular tongue quite distinct from standard hegemonic English, and/or were poorly served by their underfunded K-thru-12 school districts. They are at a disadvantage in the world of letters and they know it. It is significant part of their struggle in college. As a gen-ed course, my (virtual) classroom was filled to capacity with a representative cross-section of the student population. After Supply Chain Management, the most popular majors are pre-med and Criminal Justice. The students mostly hail from within an hour of our Rutgers Newark campus and are overwhelmingly the first in their families to attend college. They tend to live at home, work more than 25 hours a week, and help their families. They are thrilled to be in college, but there is a lot else going on in their lives at the same time.

For years I've worked against their internalized disadvantages regarding writing. I've opened my standards to different modes of expression. I champion their efforts. I let my dauntless faith in them shine. But, admittedly, for small gains.

Then last fall I tried something new. The course focuses on the development of racial ideas and structures in the Spanish and Portuguese empires -- fertile territory for critiquing the entanglements of language and power. Therefore, in week three, I began, "For the next few weeks, we are going to examine the role of language in the governing structures of the Spanish empire. While this may seem esoteric and remote, the challenges you face in mastering the writing standards of college and professional life directly derive from this imperial history."

Interest at first was mild, suspicion high. I pressed on: "Writing and literacy was an essential technology of imperialism, without which it is likely Spain and Portugal would have never conquered the Americas." We spent the day examining numerous examples of how standardized writing was imperative to imperial statecraft. The nerve centers of empire, the Council of the Indies and the House of Trade, knew the colonies through the letters, reports, manifests, surveys, inquiries, and registers arriving through the port of Seville. In the other direction, the monarchs' orders reached their subjects through printed decrees, which were collected into voluminous tomes called "Laws of the Indies" for functionaries to reference. Literacy supported the imagined possibility of a global, connected, uniform empire. "Language was always the companion of empire... language and empire began, increased, and flourished together." So quipped (apocryphally) the

preeminent grammarian Antonio de Nebrija to Queen Isabella of Castile and Aragon in 1492, just as she was defeating Muslim Europe, exiling the Jews from Spain, and commissioning Columbus's first voyage westward.

That part was all rather academic and abstract, but I had a plan and interest was growing. "Literacy was a technology of power," I continued. "It was also a metric and mode of oppression." We then read about how early missionaries burned precolonial codices (books) with puritanical zeal, painstakingly learned indigenous languages to facilitate evangelism, codified living languages into grammars and dictionaries, and used these to render native tongues to alphabetic script to enable the printing of confessional manuals. In class, we discussed how early colonists did not recognize indigenous forms of recorded knowledge as literacy, and how the perceived deficit of indigenous language became a foundation of racial ideation. I passed around (metaphorically, virtually) a few pages by José de Acosta, a sixteenth-century Jesuit missionary and natural historian who succinctly captured the colonial common sense: "Because [the Indians'] figures and characters were not as adequate as those of our writing and letters, this meant that they could not make the words conform exactly but could only express the essential parts of ideas."

The students were on fire as they picked Acosta apart. They had no trouble identifying many parallels in their own lives of linguistic discrimination. Several spoke of high-school teachers denigrating their familiar dialects, some mentioned being berated to "speak English in America," and many reflected on the disjuncture between the way they most effectively communicate and the way they are expected to. Together, we dissected the ways their experience with language and writing was deeply inflected by class status, race, migration, and other social factors. One student summed it up: "This shit's been going on for 500 years."

He was right: the history of English is, of course, not that different than that of Spanish. Among other abuses, standardized English served as a weapon against enslaved Africans, a tool for forcefully assimilating Native American children, and a bludgeon against immigrants. As bell hooks writes, "it is difficult not to hear in standardized English always the sound of slaughter and conquest."

The next week it was time for the lesson's riskier consummation: the violence of language education and where that leaves us. Again, we started with colonial history. We read and discussed how higher ed served the empire by grooming Spanish functionaries. We examined how mission schools suppressed native tongues and inculcated Spanish and Latin in an effort to root out pagan religions, diffuse and dissolve native customs and culture, and implant a supposedly Hispanic way of living, thinking, and believing. A student in the back row remarked, "It's like it wasn't really about education at all. It was all about power."

"Well, yes. Sort of. Maybe education is always about power," I replied. "Certainly, language education was a tool of cultural violence and functioned to enforce and reproduce

imperial social hierarchies. Many critics say something similar about higher education in the United States today." Drawing on Ibrim X. Kendi, bell hooks, and others, I outlined some of the critiques that colleges reproduce the hegemonic cultural norms of white, middle-class, heterosexual America, including, among other things, by judging and enforcing standardized English. I briefly covered how the institutions and standards of elite education functioned historically to reproduce white supremacy and class hegemony and opened the question of whether they still do today. "What about in your experience? Based on what we covered, in this regard, how is higher education today different or the same as it was 300 years ago?"

The ensuing conversation was stimulating, impassioned, and much more than can be summarized here. Most importantly, the students took it away and made it their own, more so than any other class discussion. With impressive sophistication, they earnestly debated the nature and state of the university and its social functions. Even the shier students spoke up. I, the teacher, stood alone before their energetic multitude. Their power was manifest.

"And what about us, here, in this course? After all, here I am, the white male judge of your writing skills. People in my job have been responsible for reproducing the social hierarchies of American society for generations. With that in mind, what should writing instruction mean to us over the next ten or eleven weeks? What do we want it to be?" The ideas were many, and there was no consensus. There didn't need to be any: what was important is that we opened the conversation. Some students wanted more opportunities to express their ideas in ways that felt fluent and supported intellectual creativity. Others stressed the importance of the skills they would someday need to land a job. Most weighed these poles and considered other possibilities. And they heard from me, and my hopes and concerns as their teacher. It was a moment of mutual recognition and solidarity – a shared acknowledgement that college is not a refuge, but a predicament.

Though we talked about it, we did not reinvent the classroom that day – that would be more than we could accomplish before the bell. But we did bring to the surface some of the pressures, unspoken tensions, and educational

baggage weighing upon our classroom dynamics. And we developed a sociological understanding of the writing challenges the students face. Asao Inoue writes that this self-awareness about students' "existential writing assessment situation" is critical to anti-racist pedagogy, for only with this knowledge can students decide how and what they want to learn. Or, in Paulo Freire's words, this awareness is necessary for "learners to live a critically conscious presence in the pedagogical and historical process." In other words, it is about empowering students to take charge of their own education. Without a doubt, many students, especially those of disadvantaged backgrounds, had already considered the fraught discrepancy between, for instance, their home vernacular and standardized English. I didn't introduce them to the analysis of language and power. But I brought it to surface and by acknowledging the situatedness of our pedagogical predicament before them, to them, with them, I could be an ally and mentor in their empowered decisions.

We returned to these conversations many times over the remainder of the semester. Several students mentioned it as the most important lesson of the course. It marked a permanent change in our relations. It wasn't just that I was a likable, chummy professor. It was that I allowed them (and helped them) to blow away much of the haze and mirrors surrounding higher education and in so doing joined them on a more even plain. They still struggled with diction, grammar, and the like, but they understood I was there to work with them all the way. They cared more, tried more, and did great.

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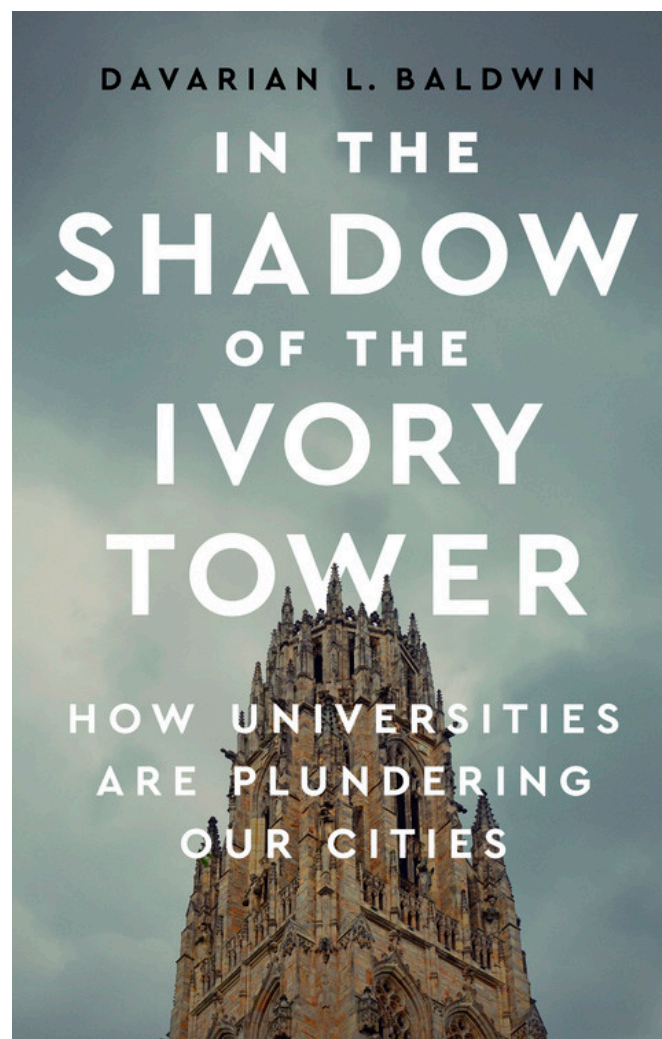
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# RADICAL TEACHER

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

In the Shadow of the Ivory Tower: How Universities are Plundering our Cities: by Davarian L. Baldwin

by Betsy J. Banner



IN THE SHADOW OF THE IVORY TOWER: HOW UNIVERSITIES ARE PLUNDERING OUR CITIES. NEW YORK: BOLD TYPE BOOKS, 2021.

**Davarian L. Baldwin (2021). In the Shadow of the Ivory Tower: How Universities Are Plundering Our Cities. New York: Bold Type Books, 2021.**

*Higher education has made way for a massive contingent of low-wage labor, increased racial profiling, and the elimination of affordable housing, retail, and health care in campus neighborhoods. But that's not the only story. Activists, residents, and students have fought hard against these changes and pulled progressive university administrators along to model alternative ways of relating to their cities.*

- Baldwin, 2021, p. 16

**M**any readers who have themselves spent years matriculating on the campus of a major American higher education institution will likely relate to the description of a campus as a UniverCity, offering space and amenities not only for learning but also for housing, dining, cultural experiences, athletic opportunities, and retail needs. Many may also nod their heads in agreement that rental rates of properties surrounding universities are higher (often much higher) than in other areas of the community. Davarian Baldwin's *In the Shadow of the Ivory Tower* forces the reader to go beyond head nodding and consider the intentionality of these trends, such as the practice at some universities of offering housing subsidies to already highly paid employees with the consequence of driving rental rates even higher. Readers are forced to consider the implications of many university policies for neighbors trying to coexist in communities dominated by these institutions. The implications are often harsh.

It would be easy to assume that educational institutions have always dominated urban landscapes, but that isn't entirely true. "How did colleges and universities come to significantly dictate the terms of urban living, from a city's housing costs and wage ceilings to its health-care standards and even policing practices" is an excellent question (pp. 22-23). The answer connects back to higher education institutions and medical complexes, or "Eds and Meds," being classified as 501(c)(3) tax-exempt nonprofit entities with the Internal Revenue Service. On the surface this is great, as universities have enormous potential to serve as intellectual resources for their greater communities. Sometimes that potential is realized. Other times, universities have used this classification to enhance their coffers while simultaneously pushing back and down upon surrounding communities, drawing resources out of neighborhoods and onto campuses with the lure of tax-free rent and the power of eminent domain. Whether achieved by carrot or by stick, the effect – isolation of wealthy white students from less affluent neighbors of color – is the same.

In Chapter 1, "When Universities Swallow Cities," Baldwin describes several of the current and historic community-affecting initiatives driven by several powerful institutions, including Carnegie Mellon, Yale, University of Chicago, and the somewhat lesser known Trinity College.

Some were complex, multi-layered, and long lasting, such as the University of Chicago's manipulation of the Hyde Park neighborhood. Some were brief but openly egregious, such as Trinity College's "Student Movement for Americanization at Trinity," implemented in the 1920s. On the surface this resolution implemented an undergraduate residency requirement. The impact of the residency requirement was two-fold. First, it elevated the cost of attendance beyond the means of many local families, including many Jewish immigrants. Second, for those working-class and immigrant students still managing to enroll, it instituted a cultural barrier. Newcomers would be surrounded by a student body that was mostly wealthy, mostly white, and mostly non-Jewish, which was intended to help "Americanize the country's foreign-born population" (p. 27). If this were not direct enough, Trinity College also limited the number of students from the local Hartford area to 20% of the total student body. While short-lived and a century past, these initiatives were brutally effective in deliberately isolating privileged students from the wider community. Even today, while not directly linked to bald policy, enrollment at higher education institutions is disproportionately wealthy and disproportionately white (Le et al., 2020). Baldwin's research into these historical events is important work, especially as some educators are experiencing increasing pressure not to delve too deeply into matters of race and privilege lest they be accused of teaching Critical Race Theory and "indoctrinating" students (Sawchuk, 2021; Pettit, 2021).

Baldwin offers a deeper examination of current segregation of privileged students from working-class neighborhoods in Chapter 2, "Rural College in a Capital City." In presenting myriad ways Trinity College has more recently managed to isolate and insulate itself, he paints a picture of what several authors refer to as the "amenities arms race" among high-tuition institutions (Corsino, 2017; McClure, 2019). Included in his description of the extraordinary amenities elite colleges and universities make available to their students is a photo of Trinity's Crescent Street Townhouses, built after the forced eviction of neighborhood residents and offering "stainless steel appliances, central air, and lawn care" (p. 72).

Chapters 3 ("The Schools that Ate New York") and 5 ("A 'Phoenix Rising'?") highlight Baldwin's journalistic skills as he unearths and shares the multifaceted stories of political and economic giants such as Columbia University, New York University, and Arizona State University. Readers weave through complicated relationships between Columbia and surrounding community advocates, exploring issues of expansion and eminent domain in a community where local residents cannot even use the campus library. The ways in which both Columbia and NYU have disregarded their own community task forces and even (at NYU) their own faculty are discussed. Shifting his focus Southwest, Baldwin describes the unpopular suburban design of a downtown ASU campus, along with the insulting assertion of ASU officials that there was "nothing" downtown previously. In "A 'Phoenix Rising'?" we read how reduced State funding led ASU to seek funding elsewhere, finding it in complex commercial development agreements. These agreements, which pulled for-profit businesses onto

tax-free ASU land, have the effect of shifting local tax burdens to existing residents, creating a situation described as “reverse condemnation” (p. 187). Capitalism would have us believe that private business benefits communities, but when communities are left holding the tax burden while businesses reap profits from tax sheltered locations, the opposite is ironically true.

In between these largely economic discussions Baldwin situates Chapter 4, “The ‘800-Pound Gargoyle’.” Pulling together data largely from the University of Chicago and the University of Cincinnati, Baldwin describes the often contentious and sometimes tragic relationships between university police forces and the neighborhoods surrounding those universities. The data is clear that granting private, armed police forces the authority to arrest on public city blocks does little to strengthen campus-community relationships. Instead, racially disparate police stops and, in at least one instance, a senseless fatal shooting, contribute to strained campus-community ties. Chapter 4 feels slightly out of place in a text emphasizing political relationships and economic connections, and provokes enough questions to serve as the foundation of a book of its own. Are two layers of policing really necessary? Why or why not? What are the jurisdictions of these separate entities? What is the relationship, both historic and present, between citywide police departments and campus police? Where do campus communities fit in this dynamic?

Baldwin ends on a cautiously optimistic note, describing policies and infrastructure which have helped to create excellent campus-community relationships at the University of Winnipeg in Canada. Progressive infrastructure developments such as affordable, LEED-certified housing for students, families, and community members, as well as a Downtown Commons designed for the greater community – specifically including immigrants and refugees – as well as for university students are described. A similarly accessible RecPlex *truly* available to neighborhood residents, locally sourced and environmentally sustainable food service providing nutrition for campus residents and an influx of business dollars into the surrounding community, and a documented commitment to hiring previously marginalized neighbors as living wage employees are all discussed.

After sharing several best practices in action, Baldwin leaves the reader with six concrete recommendations involving the redesign of current university tax structures,

community benefits agreements (CBAs), planning and zoning, and athletic revenues. Recommendations also call for rethinking public safety measures and fair labor practices. While reading *In the Shadow of the Ivory Tower*, I found myself continually wondering how the policies and practices of the urban university nearest my neighborhood stacked up. Baldwin instilled in this reader both a curiosity and a roadmap for learning the ways in which my local university is or is not a beneficial neighbor, and to whom. Readers picking up that roadmap is how the conversation, and the work, continues.

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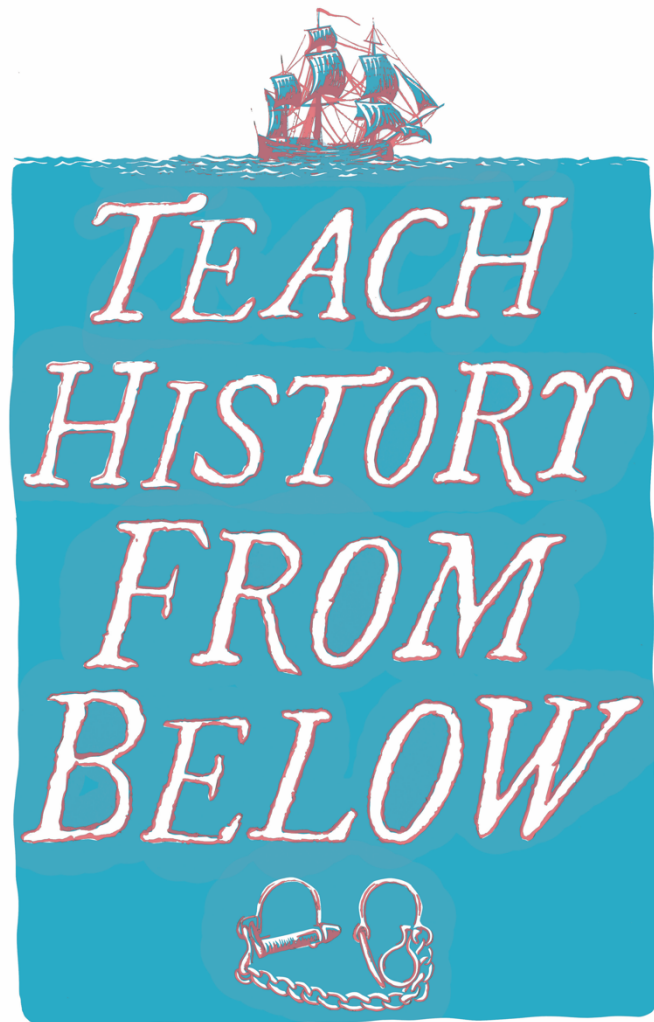


# RADICAL TEACHER

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

*Poetry*  
Sensory Details

by Todd Friedman



TEACH HISTORY FROM BELOW BY SHAUN SLIFER VIA JUST SEEDS

## Sensory Details

I saw you in the anthology, Walt  
"Rude, unbending, lusty"  
And there you were  
A live-oak growing  
Right there in the middle  
Of the high school classroom  
And I imagined the person  
Who picked your poem  
Laughing into his hand  
And slapping his thigh  
But the best part was in the instructions  
On the side of the page  
"Write about something in nature that  
Reminds you of yourself and your friends  
Use sensory details"  
A year later they put out a new edition  
And the poem was gone  
Use sensory details



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*Poetry*

## For Whom The Bell Does Not Ring

by Bruce Gorden



BIG READER BY ALEC DUNN VIA JUST SEEDS

## For Whom The Bell Does Not Ring

4<sup>th</sup> Period English: 24601

I was dying of hunger,  
my future was waving good-bye.

I felt like I was in criminal court waiting  
the gavel to fall  
the Bailiff to approach me, cuff me  
escort me to a dungeon  
hewn from cold stone  
where darkness would consume me  
and I would be forgotten forever.

I was actually sitting in Mr. Cooper's English class  
reading Les Miserable and having fantasies  
of guilt and cold pursuit  
by some authority like Javert.

I kept hearing: Look down, look down, don't look him in the eye.  
Look down, look down, you're here until you die.

Then the bell rang. Javert had fallen,  
and I had a future and a hope  
because Javert does not follow me  
like he would in Ferguson  
if I was young  
and black.



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*Poetry*

## "Early Childhood Education" and "Black History Month"

by Ernie Brill



SUSTAIN OUR LIBRARIES BY MARY TREMONTE

## Early Childhood Education

They arrive brimming with wonder,  
Entering like young thunder.  
Years later, why do so moping many  
Complain of constant boredom, listlessly  
Fret and shrug around the room sigh-searching  
For the memory of inner lightning?

## Black History Month

Ok Kids, I'll need your help today  
To take down the Black Inventor Posters  
And put them away for next year's class.  
Please go through your folders and choose  
Your writings and pictures of Dr. King  
And other special people we've studied  
To take home and show your parents.  
What's that, Jane? Why did Dr. King have to die?  
Why did nobody stop the murderer?  
Now those are excellent questions, Janie!  
And I'm sure your fourth grade teacher next year  
Will be happy to explore that but for now  
We need to get ready for our new Math Unit --  
A neat one on Subtraction! You're gonna love it!



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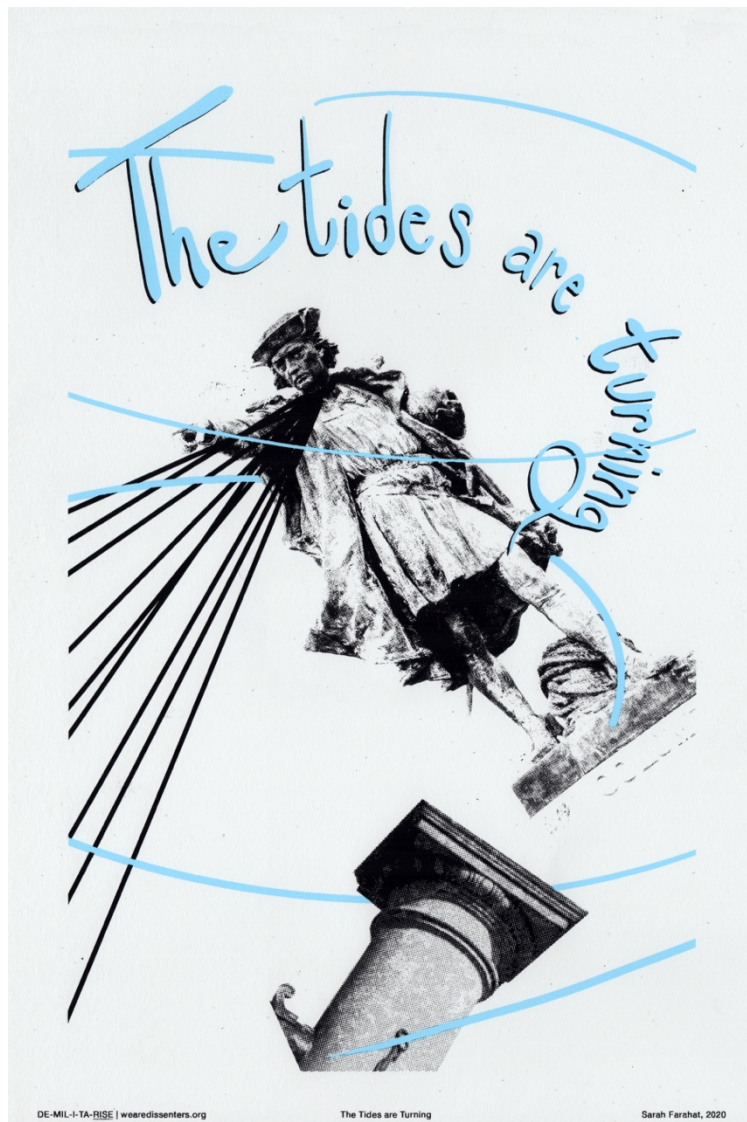


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## *Contributors' Notes* Radicalizing the Liberal Arts



DE-MIL-I-TA-RISE | wearedissenters.org

The Tides are Turning

Sarah Farahat, 2020

THE TIDES ARE TURNING BY SARAH FARAHAT



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**Bennett Brazelton** is a history teacher and independent writer in Boston. His research focuses on education, Black studies, and anticolonial thought and history. His work is accepted, forthcoming, or published in *Philosophy and Global Affairs*, *cultural geographies*, *Fire!!!*, and *Radical Americas*.

**Ernie Brill** writes fiction and poetry about everyday people. His collection *I Looked Over Jordan and Other Stories* explores race and class among hospital workers. Mr. Brill received his BA and MA in English from San Francisco State University.

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**Sarah E. Chinn** teaches English at Hunter College, CUNY. A member of the Radical Teacher editorial collective, she's the author of three books, *Technology and the Logic of American Racism: A Cultural History of the Body as Evidence* (2000), *Inventing Modern Adolescence: The Children of Immigrants in Turn-of-the-Century America* (2009), and *Spectacular Men: Race, Gender, and Nation on the Early American Stage* (2017), as well as articles in *Signs*, *GLQ*, *Prospects*, *American Quarterly*, and *WSQ*.

**Jillian Crocker** is Assistant Professor of Sociology at SUNY Old Westbury, a public liberal arts college on Long Island, NY guided by long-standing commitments to expanding access to liberal education and to building a more just and sustainable world.

In his 31 years as a NYC high school English teacher, **Todd Friedman** fought three major battles against the Department of Education. Todd's poems have been published in *English Journal*, *The Brooklyn Eagle*, *Haight Ashbury Literary Journal*, *Jewish Currents*, and *Tikkun*.

**Sabrina González** (she/her) is a PhD candidate in the Department of History at University of Maryland. She graduated from Universidad Nacional de La Matanza, Buenos

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**Bruce Gorden** is a native San Diegan and life-long surfer. He is a veteran, having served in the USAF. He began writing poetry as a way of coping with war and graduate school. He recently won a chap book contest and the book, *The Long Good-bye*, is available at ProlificPress.com.

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**Victoria M. Huynh** is a diasporic writer and aspiring educator. She recently finished her undergraduate studies at Soka University of America, where she was a student organizer for Critical Global Ethnic Studies. She studies Marxism and feminism in the Third World and wants to see the end of U.S. imperialism, its femicide(s), and its wars.

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**Cara K. Snyder** (she/they) is Assistant Professor of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at the University of Louisville. They have also taught courses at Federal and State Universities in Bahía and Pernambuco, Brazil. Snyder earned a Ph.D. from the Harriet Tubman Department of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, with certificates in Teaching and Learning and Digital Studies, at the University of Maryland, College Park. Their research interests include transnational feminism, Latin American/Brazilian Studies, physical cultural/sport studies, and digital studies.

**Kristen Michala Storms** is a radical Black feminist scholar and co-creator/former organizer of Critical Global Ethnic Studies at her undergraduate institution Soka University of America. Currently, she is a J.D. candidate at Loyola Law School in Los Angeles to pursue grass-roots, community-based legal justice advocacy for BIPOC communities domestically and abroad.

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**Lance C. Thurner** is Adjunct Professor of History at Rutgers University, Newark and is a historian of science and medicine in Latin America and the US/Mexican borderlands. He is committed to pushing the boundaries of the digital humanities to achieving anti-racist, feminist, and decolonial pedagogical goals. His pedagogical projects and students' work can be found at [www.empireprogeny.org](http://www.empireprogeny.org) and [www.statesofbelonging.org](http://www.statesofbelonging.org).

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